

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You're on your own, and you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go. — Dr. Seuss

I moved to Hamburg for a friend.
But she's nowhere.

1. Arrival

River walk in the morning, pavement for hope, Uniform for power and confidence,
fischbrötchen for breakfast.
All the way to Teufelsbrück,
With the ships crossing opposite, the only pictures I send home:
Impersonal,
Grand,
And novelty.
But forget that.
Forget *all* that.
Because she is in the place across from me.
My friend is in the place across from me.
And, Ich habe ein stiffer dabei.

2. Order

While obeying a traffic light,
My friend shows me a little button (it's beneath them all on the ampel).
And like the big slap-operated plastic face,
It also works the lights.

But no one knows it.
And she jokes that the button is a magic button.
Like a clitoris.
Touch it.
The light turns green and you can cross.

3. Hamburgian

We're outside a kneipe to smoke, and a man points to the drinkers on the street and says:
Look, St. Pauli,

The left-wing brand,
That seeps down into the root,
That seeps down into the rot,
And brands it

With a common badge,
Like a team.
There they are,
The underclass.

Shared, aimless and agitating,
And sat on the street and waiting.
But St. Pauli is *already* a team.
See, look, over there! There they are:
St. Pauli.

My friend is from the Osten and she says:

Hamburgian.
It's all in the uniform.
The work dress of those who are filling the ugly necessity at the bottom of our tree.

4. Londonian

I tell her:
I hated gentrification there, but hadn't realised how much it taught me.
Now I'm a connoisseur—but here—and I'm soon to turn forty.

5. Personal

And you go to the doctor with a long thin swelling heading down, creeping towards your arschloch, and your glands are all up in your groin. And it's amazing here in Hamburg: you can literally make a doctor's appointment for the same day (even with only an EU medical card), unlike the three week wait in England. And the doctor is handsome and old and aloof and tall, and he says that he will ignore the growth (and so should I), that it is nothing; but that the swelling of the glands is *unusual*. And so, he does a blood test for HIV. And for cancer and for the signs of a damaged liver. And you have to wait a whole three days for the results (naja, the NHS, National Health Service, would take at least three weeks). When you tell your friend, you omit the details of the test (HIV) because you don't want to worry her unnecessarily (she could have it too). And then the results finally come: you're clear on all three counts. And now you can really drink because in some beautiful gift of fortune you've found your liver is *one hundred percent functioning*. And then in a gasp of relief you tell your friend the truth of it. Not appreciating the lie, she doesn't speak to you for a week.
Sometime later and the swelling is *actually popping out next to my arse hole*. And leaking a fluid that drips down the crack of my arse and onto the top of my legs, wetting my boxer shorts. So, I go back to the doctor for the third time (same day appointment) and I pull my trousers down. And he takes a look, and says *go immediately to the hospital* (same day appointment). I want to wait till the next day, but my friend makes me go *that* day. And it's good she did because once there, they tell me that in a couple more days the growth would have penetrated the tissue of my rectum, and then they would have had to remove my arse hole. The hospital is beautiful and clean—and quick (same day operation)—and I have my own room. I'm excited about telling everyone in England about it, especially my sisters, both of whom work for the NHS (one is a nurse, the other a physiotherapist). And then they put me to sleep and cut it out. The wound is left open, a black gaping hole that takes three months to heal, and must be showered five times a day. Five daily blasts of pain water paired with five grates with the pain towel (until I develop the *hairdryer technique*...).
And my friend is put in a position where she must nurse me and allow me to lie around in her small flat recovering while my arse slowly closes behind me, invisible to me but not to her.

6.

London is massive, majestic and beautiful.
Hamburg is a town.
“A lovely ugly town.”
Said Dylan Thomas about Cardiff.
Hamburg isn't that.
It's a vacuum.

But I couldn't give a flying fuck.

And as I get older, I think older people look better than younger people.
Perhaps *better* is the wrong word:
They look like they have weathered something.
They have weathered and overcome the experience of losing absolute optimism
And this ideal is symbolized in the ageing of their face.

They appear to have proved a little (like bread).
And even if it's just an illusion,
Then it's an illusion of something fundamental.
Even if they have proved nothing (no bread).

I love my friend.