

EXTRACT: KIRSTY HENDRY

The cover? It is indistinct, untitled, the image faded. On closer inspection, it looks like a badly managed copy of a de Chirico, or a Carlo Carrà with all the quasi-metaphysical constructions taken out, leaving only a street of penumbrae, corners sharply defined by their shadows. The first pages would turn, like in the old films of classic books: *Little Women* or *A Tale of Two Cities*. There is no visible title, only an engraving, the same painting on the front cover only in black and white and this time inhabited by the figure of a large man, apparently declaiming to an empty street, his white, wide open shirt blowing in the breeze as we read the first lines: ‘The view or perspective sends the eye down a long column of classical or neoclassical architecture. A man appears from behind one of the columns and begins to amble slowly along the middle of an empty street. He is a man of a certain stature. He continues on through the city, appears amid certain vistas, scenes that he passes from, into and across. Perhaps this is Florence or perhaps Rome. The man’s paunch and his hulking frame are dwarfed by towering slabs of marble; like flanks of glossy muscle marked with the patina of swirling pinks and creams, abrasions and spidery veins. Now, lying across a luxurious bed, the lustre of rose red satin sheet clings lightly to him, eagerly encircling his gut like a tongue. A shaft of almost translucent flesh surges through silken fabric. Gauze billows at a gilded window revealing a spiralling cityscape of gaping plazas, vast rotundas and corpulent domes. Concentric circles of pallid agate draw the eye to a central slab, further extruded by a stone pedestal. The pedestal holds an immense cake, monstrous, the gelatinous edifice moulded in the shape of an unrealised spherical tomb for Isaac Newton, a cenotaph, so they say. The entire building is conceived along the same precise measurements of a nose to a navel – a building suffering from excess fat, clogged arteries, marbled cholesterol. The man levels his gaze onto the perfect cake, thinking that both he and it have been miraculously conceived with perfect, enviable centres of gravity. He stares down at the cake, from it to his paunch. The coordinates of the central belly are vital metrics at the centre of engorged buildings, the same bloated architecture. The man is utterly consumed

by his own stomach. His own distended abdomen has him hunkered in pain amongst cheap Xeroxed prints still warm with the feverishness in which they were produced. He is the clown who wobbles back upright when he topples. He surrounds himself with chalky replicas of the taut torsos of antiquity. He finds comfort in the monuments consecrated to great men, by great men. He receives a visit from a doctor. A sharp, lithe man - marked by economy of structure and detail who muses to himself on the bald heroism of the man's abdomen, surveys the man himself and the Xeroxed torsos - bodies of evidence. He would suggest that the man is suffering from dyspepsia, fatigue, over excitement, excess and unfamiliar food, lack of exercise, too much coffee and maybe also too much egotism. The man receives this in silence. Flashes of synthetic green light clutch at languid flesh and eagerly reproduce a hewn torso. Fumbling in circadian fog, stubby fingers graft stomach to belly as if constructing a new dermal layer, a proxy transplant, or a cure for gluttonous ails. Consumed by a source of nourishment, the man's legacy is a crumpled linen suit amongst lumps of swollen alabaster. The city seems to puff out its cheeks, to swell before the eyes that stare out upon it, from over the top of his belly...' We pass over the rest and out through the grid of the confessional. There is a single glove on the floor, a long ladies silk glove and no-one on the other side of the confessional from where we have just come so the voice we hear, when it begins, must be speaking to itself alone, a self-confession. Disembodied. Several times the voice breaks down, not in tears but in confusion.