

PEOPLE IN THE NIGHT

I wake up, suddenly,
and look into the absent light,
where the ceiling should have been.
I feel my way towards the table
where my experiment is resting.

I am peering at the surface
and the glass that shines
in the evening's breath.
Then I record
an impulsive, scattered firing.
What is it that I see? My cornea,
the city's lights reflected?
The neurons started firing.
An unimaginable spectacle
before my stammering body.

This shows that we've been able
to create a tiny bit of consciousness
in a Petri dish.
In disbelief I am staring at
a network-burst.

Then, the sparks are dying down.

I long for newer moments
when the many cells
start talking to each other.
Something deep inside of me
is terribly awake.
The signalling continues for a while.

Far away a lamp is lit.
A few moments only,
then it's out again.
People in the night,
like me,
and just like you,
in your little dish.

Annemarie Estor, Project 'Versing the Brain', Netherlands Institute for Brain Research,
2005. Translated by Alexander van der Wagt, 2006.