

Is There Intelligent Life on Earth

Slime molds, for example, “don’t like
light” but “do like” oat flakes. If you map,

therefore, as people have, the urban
hubs near Tokyo with the latter, on a petri dish,

and shine the former (how is quite
beyond me) at the sites of geo-impediment,

lo, a likeness of the city’s major rail
connections, suburbs too. A dollop of slime mold

to start with, I forgot to say.
Which tells us much about our question, how

we love to watch the world confirm
our own bright nominations. In the time lapse,

you can see in day-glo yellow how
the slime puts forth its fretwork, as

though blossoming, as though
a flower could ask a question, which it can,

and find the answer too. Lucky us, to be
so little in a world so large.

The baby woolly mammoth found by minders
in the Yukon, summer solstice, while they dug

for gold, was one month old some 30,000
years ago. Have you seen how the older ones

care for their young? I'm thinking
of elephants now, of course, we weren't there
sharing the earth with the others. How
patiently they, the grown ones, shelter the
little ones while they roam. A sort of mobile
playpen, four of them, facing outward lest
some hungry enemy should target
easy prey. The young ones exploring
their ever-more-interesting world. We
watched one once, unsteady legs, a not-yet-
trained-to-be-useful trunk, attempting to drink
like her elders. No luck.

Much better, for the moment, to venture
a full-faced river dip, her guardians
ever vigilant. So think what it was —
I'm back to woolly mammoths now — the
baby among them sinking in the tar-like stuff
the melting permafrost forms
at its perimeters. In springtime, in
the melt we weren't yet guilty of.