

The main work consisted in tearing fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they illustrated one another and were able to prove their *raison d'être* in a free floating state....of surrealistic montage. – Hannah Arendt on Benjamin's *Illuminations*

Gleam[a way] – a photographer's Philadelphia

By Mara Adamitz Strupe

To be the traveler:

* highway boulevard street & sidewalk *
to no known destination. To be the drifter
* the curb is harbor the bus bench
a transitory tightrope stretched taught
in elevation of sacred slumber.*

To be

* for me as memory – image-by-image*
the recantation of exposure captured as the camera's eye lives
* episodically in a single picture. *

To return as itinerant in full anamnesis

* I am remembrance am I not *
or at the very least container or sack
vase (aureate/ baroque as a full sleeve tat) or vessel.

To be captured

* blithesomely on the stage *
as transcendence the trapeze swung moment-
by-moment as muscle hour-by-hour in eternal ache.

To be the dog

* leashed attention caught *
exposed in a shimmery black sheen. (These streets are calling
for rain.)

To be the sideways glance. The recognition. Not angry
exactly. Not an invitation either. Something
in the brow hitched up. A hindrance? Maybe.

To be illumination as the mechanism takes the light. To be the battle
& not the war. To see the beginnings or endings & never live
through them. Still. To know them not as the stranger

but the consort the player the star in the night sky.

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....at a watershed moment in American culture. – Jeff L. Rosenheim, Photography and the American Civil War

I lived in a city once. A man cried – again – in the dun. Over & over
louder & louder bitch bitch *bitch*.
It was nighttime but never dark. Someone pissed on a wall.
Stubbed a cigarette flicked the butt in the street.

I once lived in a city of filthy delights I still miss. There was
no shining on that hill. But there was gleam *gleaming*
everywhere. A parapet & coruscate statues. Glint.
& history that school children learned & mostly forgot. At first
I got lost. Wound up south of the main drag. & I never thought then
of momentousness. I didn't consider catchment or context
the way a photograph builds & overlays * without & within *
But no blush or tincture. No pigment. No wash.
Black & white. Luminous. A brilliance of shade & shadow.

I could make a case for today. This time. A wink
& dash. Everything counts every one of us contributes
we are all *all*. In a watershed moment. Glowing.

& still we return to the battleground. The fountain
of forgetfulness. & how to remember when memory fails & we
come back to the present. As though in periphery & not
at the center. As pictograph or tintype gelatin silver print
or digitized: we ask ourselves who are we?

—

I live in the country. Now. In an altogether other
province. And yet. And still. I relocate my harsher
sentiments. My emollients. The way skin shines. Breathes. Glistens.
No pictures. Please. Hand held. Hands up.

A treeless pasture. Or a field of weeds. My state my common-
wealth. A fox with a small mammal in its mouth. Coyote chorus
coming: come *come*. A black bear under the pear trees. Armor-
less. An intrusion in a landscape (that invention).
A solitary animal.

Treed concrete: in the aftermath. Penumbra.
An obscurantist of destination. Keeping clear. Covert as a stone
house. No welcome. Shuttered to the brink. & I ask myself
what went on? I ask myself for an accounting:
a report: * word & image *

...in an attempt to define the cold-eyed view of the world that was symptomatic....'tender cruelty'
was useful....[in d]etecting a balance between engagement and estrangement.... analytical yet interested,
but not romantic, redemptive, or solipsistic. – Emma Dexter and Thomas Weski, Curators,
Cruel and Tender: the Real in Twentieth-Century Photograph, Tate Modern, 2003

There are ways approaches entrances. There are
avenues & passages. Draw near. I have on my thinnest three-
quarter length lambskin dress gloves. I touch. & retreat. The woman in the park.
Every early morning. Dressed to kill. Look close & she's missing patches
of sequins. Soiled hemline. Belly a hillock an ambush.

This is the opposite of cold-eyed. This is not cruelty
nor splendor. But yes. Tender. Something of condolence.
But also angry. Yes. The kind that tells from intimacy. Speaks
from seasoning. The kind that knows good & well.

I remember my experience as a café sitter in Europe. There is staring that startles Americans.
I tried to analyze it and came out with the realization that the European *interested* is really
interested in just ordinary people and makes a study of man with his eyes in public. What a
pleasure and an art it was to study back.... – Walker Evans, from unpublished writings, 1962

To locate the way the stratagem or be it.

There is a city unsurpassed. A seamless fray
in ceaseless counterpoint. Fragmented/ purged of shame in paucity
of fettle. There is a city that mutinies in its own
revolution. That quickens in admiration of its own
* flash & glitter twinkle & shake *
& in moments ever after loves you back.