

Crossing paths.

High above the grocery store, the skyline of the city is sonorous with memory. Its iconic high-rises, relative low-rises and church steeples frame a sky of infinite shareability for those who grew up beneath it. The memory is so loud and so stern you can hardly hear the undertones of drilling, fusing, demolition and construction.

Closer, and poised more quietly in our gaze are the telegraph wires that criss-cross each other so intrinsically. These wires give the skyline a natural outer skirting, like papel picado at the day of the dead memorial that is this city view.

Here, in the east of the city, the horizon is ebbed away gradually over time - along with its shareability - by dense postmodern structures. Every few years the grocery store's proprietor raises her head higher and yet higher to find the sky of her youth, her memories and her previous situation - and photograph it. She has photographed this vista every day for forty years, from the exact same spot outside the grocery store, directing her hefty camera toward the exact same trajectory each time. The dance she orchestrates between the sky, the city and the light has for all of her life - and death - transfixed her, ever while the city protrudes itself upwards and obscures her view and her memories at once.

She died twenty-five years ago, but it doesn't feel that long for her. She still walks as briskly through the streets as she did as a young adult, and still pursues her intellectual interests - namely photography and archaeology - perennially. First thing in the morning she pulls up the store shutters as fiercely as was required as a younger lady, and closes them as gently and precisely as is required at closing time, so as to not disturb her neighbours. Her innermost grocery store shutters are shifting as regularly between these two states, opened and closed, locked and unlocked,

as ours are on this indistinct November afternoon.

On her bedside cabinet the photographs are divided between three foolscap-sized docket that lie stacked upon one another. Each docket is unarranged and with corners of the photographs spilling out on to the cabinet, corners of photographs giving glimpses of the same bit of pavement on the same cross-street as the other. Their haphazard neighbouring is a chaos of her design rather than neglect, and they are archived as meticulously and steadily as in the nearby museum of photography.

The relationship between the sky and art, archaeology or construction is a curiously neglected thing. Through it we can attempt to reveal the ontologies of past societies that time and its corrosion have concealed, archaeologically opening the doors that our predecessors have closed, or have had closed.

The skyscape is a stage that was never of our design. Perhaps this is partially why we gaze both admirably and with disdain on its ever evolving state. Onto this stage we pour our collective and individual memories and let the two infiltrate each other like good and evil characters do, both backstage and on stage, pulling, pushing, dancing. The unending drama in which these characters unify will be someone's lasting posterity - a work from which their obituary will be quoted, and will be sat beside a vista as long as the eye can see of books, manuscripts and shelved soliloquys. As we find any slight gap that our fingers or thumbs can get through to lever each story from the shelf, our thumbs seem to get bigger and more arduous a tool, while the gaps smaller and increasingly indiscernible.

In turn, our descendants will become part of this archive of subterfuge and unclear stories of the past, and their descendants too, but they also belong to, and occupy, the dead.

Looking west, the grocery store's proprietor sits idly at the ledge of the lower-tier of the skyscape, her legs

dangling and occasionally bumping against the tier. She recalls a clamour of stories, some are true and some semi-fictitious, some out-right lies. The units of measurements she uses to calculate the distance between these states are abstract and hazy. With these fumbled calculations she meditates on the stories almost as regularly as she takes photographs from the street below her. Where the photograph, or the photographic process, tells her how she feels things really are, about her street, its inhabitants or its light at any given time of year, the meditations on the skyline only confuse and ambiguate.

These are not our stories but somehow we are becoming part of them. An elderly auntie of seven, often sat directly across the street - either crocheting or playing an endless game of Solitaire, it's hard to discern - would echo this sentiment if she ever flicked through the foolscap docketts lying beside the bed. She is portrayed in the bottom left corner of most of the photographs, especially those taken on weekdays. The grocery store's proprietor continues her internal sermon, with her counterpart on the north side of the street in her meandering mind.

*Everything begins sour, she said, then goes sweet and is afterwards bitter**

This supposed soliloquy in which she indulges at this moment is in fact a circular dialogue, like crochet, an oblique, fragmented conversation between us and them that, as a contingent community and with the encouragement of our imagination, circulates from a sour sentiment to a sweet one, later bitter and then sour again, then sweet, and so on and so on.

We meet with them, when we are born and when everything - including them - is abstract, but saying goodbye - as they say - is never easy.

It's never easy because it rarely happens. Let us meditate on or profuse about this. A binary transition takes place from alive

to dead, just as from northern to southern, from closed to open. Like a grocery store's shutters, attesting a change in its temporary state of existence, we act like a city haunted by its past, and say 'dead'.

There is a moment when we disprove this though, a moment in which we have the solitary and long-due conversation with them through the media of memory, objects and a dance performed between the two. A remaining cenotaph to this dance is the archive of artefacts placed on the shelves in which we search for the gaps between books with our fumbling fingers and growing thumbs.

*And you may find yourself
Living in a shotgun shack
And you may find yourself
In another part of the world
And you may find yourself***

Sam Perry, 2017

* *Once in a Lifetime*, Talking Heads, 1981

** *here is where we meet*, John Berger, 2005

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