

Limen (Threshold): Crossing Over

Can landscapes look for justice? Sceneries need a memory and a moral, as it is true of any attribution of meaning, and that is why these pictures by Lauren Bon and the Optics Division Team of her Metabolic Studio call for the retrieval of narration, of memories and visual beliefs: for without memory there is no longer mystery, since mystery is related to the unknown, but this is defined as what is not known and remembered. When the contour of memory blurs, as with the American flag in the troubling *11/11/11—11:11AM* gelatin silver print, when the change of values within the known goes unchallenged, the possibility and charm of mystery disappears - the pietas for the ruins of the past gets lost. These prints offer mysterious landscapes to your eye, though.

In these photographs, landscapes and meanings find themselves walked upon with liminal steps. Limen: threshold. These sceneries want you to cross over. Do cross the border to their court of justice. Look for Mimesis and Mnemosyne. Look for Metamorphosis, for the metabolic gaze that humanizes these landscapes, and makes them into a cosmos of beliefs. Do obey their visual summons, and you will be rewarded: this way, *Evening Bubbles* will become a meaningful map of submerged memories of injustice, which your inshore eye can now behold anew. You are on a mission and in motion, in these landscapes of change - metabolic landscapes, in fact - and your goal is the critical discovery of the rescued grammar and sources of what is beyond their threshold, because once you realize you are walking on the bed of a lake that was dried up by treachery, you'll be compelled to acknowledge that you may not be just a beholder: you must cross the threshold and take part, you must explore those bubbling horizontal layers of memory challenged by twilight, and reorganize their light from a different perspective, questioning the infertile destination of that vertical line of irrigating sentries – oblique to your gaze - and their military deployment in parataxis, looking instead for the hypotaxis of history, listening to the inaccurate tale of success of Los Angeles, to her story of rape, silver and water, and apprehend that those ruthless angels were born one hundred years ago, when water was pumped lavishly from a far valley into the future metropolis. Hence you are visually made to reinstate the chain of spatial and temporal resemblances between the geometries and patterns of the dry lakebed and of its civic cause.

Hello! Those organized rural shades remind you of the arranged urban scene that benefited from their conversion into arid land: the lake was all water once, brine shrimps and alkali flies, and waterfowl galore; and now it is all dust and salty shores, dry relics of skulduggery. Hello! Those evening bubbles are the offspring of the desertification of the distant basin that today allows for the showers, swimming pools, car washes and widespread gardens of the megalopolis. Hello! In the cold cruelty of freshwater, the first Hollywood directors were able to shoot all the hues of drowning grey, while the motion picture industry fed on sensitized silver to capture its images on film. Hello! That silver and that water made LA grow: they come from the same valley, which was raped twice, in its riverbed and in its mines. Hello again! That double sacrifice is the deep basis of the present amnesia of LA, the removed reason for her ceaseless compulsion to entertainment, the buried motive of her belief in a time without history, now defied by these gelatin *silver* prints.

Transience does not help memory, but crisis is a transition, and a threshold here must be crossed over to the future, because beyond the limen every function of the visual sentence will question itself and return to you as a metabolism charged with the critique of a reinstated memory but also with hope. In fact, as your eyes will tell you, here we are on a mission to happiness, on a boat floating to the uninhabited grids of the skyscrapers of *Governors Island—09.11.11—8:36*; we are on a mission to recolonize the island with the history and values of the American Revolution, and that is why reflected on this water “our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption” (Benjamin [1940]). The captivating surface of the picture – with its alluring grain and understated gloss - wants to keep you out of the critical combats of the Revolution, but you may not savour the scenery just for its ocular qualities, since past and future are liminal obligations for the landscape that is happening before you, but also metabolic freedoms: in fact, what you are propounded in the distance is the pleasure of liberating towers of impending justice, elicited by the resourceful volumes of remembrance and history.

“‘No one,’ Pascal once said, ‘dies so poor that he does not leave something behind.’ Surely it is the same with memories too - although they do not always find an heir” (Benjamin [1936]). What these landscapes suggest is that you may be the heir to the memory of the stolen lake of Owens; even more, you may be the heir to the memory of the American Revolution (whose flag today fails to anchor your eye, regrettably blurring with remoteness against the exactness of *11/11/11—11:11AM*), but also the redemptive hero of both memories. Do cross the threshold and drown in

this metabolic water to Governors Island, for if you keep to the surface of Bon's photographs you will deny yourself the possibility of meditating in the past tense of commemoration but also in the tense future of America.

Once you have crossed the limen, the right of the landscape to an ethical cosmos is reinstated. Thus, you will be able to reclaim her sense of loss and your right to mourning, and you will be allowed to regain – although within nomadic borders that respond to the itinerant critique of the Liminal Camera – your sense of guilt, with its moral distinctions and political chronologies. Veterans. In *Silver Screen and Old Soldiers Home Demolition* restored semantemes can now express themselves for what they are: irreducible units of meaning. The grid of the Old Soldiers building still resists in the distance, initially rejecting history and any sequential reading on your part, but while you walk and map the landscape with the chronology of past bravery and acts of honor, the building becomes Home, the organism of the landscape displays its reproductive aim: beyond the surface, the nomad is now allowed to look for the offspring of significance. It is a visual summons for the purposive exploration of the scenery and its material ethics provided by memory, having treaded beyond the silver screen.

While walking, try and remember antiquated moral tensions, since the retreat into a fragmented tongue is the utterance of political disinterest; or, perhaps, of philistine privilege. For you are not moving in still abstractions, and these are not landscapes without time but sensory requests for you to cross the physical limen and stride into them, as it is true in *Mulh[olland] Orig[inal] Pipeline Jawbone—6:32—06/11/2011*, where the recorded instant (6:32) combines prospect with immediacy, verticality with depth, and is made into a story. What is usually clearly defined – the viewpoint of the camera – is here expanded into an ethic panorama, into a roaming critique of the monocacy of the single-point perspective of William Mulholland's water project. The landscape becomes liminal, and is now shaped by your nomadic spectacles that finally meet the nomadism of the Liminal Camera on its exploring truck, and no more through the fixity of the camera lens: what makes you roam in the space of this beyond-the-threshold story is the desire to do the beleaguered ancestors and their memory justice, but also the ascending verticality and profundity of a liberated future to build for the LA generations to come. Now you are climbing from the viewpoint of reminiscence and revolution, on a new trail to critical recollections and just futures, and at the apex of your path marked by that aqueduct whose sight deepens till the border of your

horizon and by inference beyond, your eye may be caught by other vertical volumes and memories, for instance those of *Syracuse Soldiers & Sailors Monument 10/21/11—6:30pm*, with the hopes of present veterans to rescue.

So, do cross over, forget the safety of the shore and jump into the water beyond the rails of *Storm King* to reach for the big rock, beyond the balustrade of *Rochester Erie Canal—0/22/11—12:32* to reach for the other bridge, leap over the barbed wire fence of *Palmdale Water Treatment—Plant #2—06/11/2011* to reach for a new language with metabolic registers and a grammar of justice, and a renewed vocabulary that will offer you afresh lost etyma and roots. Hello! Society “has become incapable of dealing with time and history.” This is a crime that the Metabolic Studio has not committed. Hello! That former faculty of conceiving temporality is allowed by language: “It is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time[;] . . . schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up in a coherent sequence” (Jameson [1982]). Hello! You will find no schizophrenia in these landscapes that will make you feel the pathos of a past informed by hope of integrity, and sympathy for the unjustly forgotten, for these sceneries are the children of sociability and narration: they are the labor of a liminal team, and of even more than a team, since the Metabolic Studio is a community, as you will recognize when you cross the threshold of these tokens of a mindful poetry, of these first and last words of pages of a chronicle whose text was purposefully washed away and now you are restoring, of these tales of an art that is brave enough to re-photograph a Kodak factory with new hues of silver and water. And you will understand that memory is costly, but anything without memory is gratuitous.

Do cross over, but bear in mind that before crossing, once you arrive at the threshold of the landscape, you will be met by her “Hello”. This is the moment when the Other reveals itself, while exposing your presence. In *Mojave Airport*, this Hello metonymically urges you to walk the distance from “railroad” to “airport”, so that now in the tongue you share with the scenery “railroad” means a part of “airport” and even further becomes the very part that synecdochically signifies “airport”, forcing you to jump beyond the stratified iron cylinders in the foreground, and then trespass on the oblique line of the train and yonder, looking for redemptive flights. And you understand all of a sudden that any attempt to communicate is never just a stratagem to attain

pragmatic goals. In effect, hope has an inexplicable, unpractical quality: after polite preliminaries, after the hellos, the phatic aspect of language remains, affecting aims and targets of any communicative project, even in the Mojave desert. Thus in your landscape this first phatic hello will endure, and any other feature of its land will relate to it, so that the primacy of preliminaries will inform of itself not only your present steps but even their later memory, and the moral to be learned from them. Hello! Significance is inevitable: a greeting is never an isolated event - the Other - but it is always accompanied by meanings and moral attributes, and that is the reason why that oblique train that appears to speak an absolutely foreign suspension of time is to be decoded and translated into the less alien language of history and justice. And yet, the foreignness of the phatic (the strangeness of the Other Landscape; the mystery and pietas in the first paragraph of this text) will remain, and you'll accept at last "train" as a metonymy for "airport" without entirely solving the enigma, and yet with an enriched awareness of how layered with trespassed thresholds is memory beheld through the Liminal Camera.

References

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