

Santa Monica

Photo by Bruce Davison

Taken from the top:

Sky hazy, like resting on a canopy bed
inside a mosquito net, hazy as a good dream.

Ocean sly in the afternoon breeze, sailboats
skipping in the swells and whitecaps, windy sheen
salting everything.

A wide sandy beach rendered narrow and clean.
Rows and rows of umbrellas, people, shady people,
sunny people.

Parking lot.
Rows and rows and rows of cars,
sun glare in each and every windshield.

At Sunset,
going home toward the oceanic city
in those cars, in the jam jar packed traffic.

Those cars, all windows rolled down, yet
glass enclosed, set up like swift tall ships
tonight performing like rowboats.

Ghost Bike

Painted white.
Locked to a lamppost.
Marks the accident site,
or where most
of the body landed.

More like a mauling.
The car overtakes the bike
and bites, delighting
oncoming traffic.
The city's nature demanded

it.

A pedestrian,
or anyone out in the open
moving slow, so pedestrian,
a servant out of the pen.
The city planners planned

it.

Painted white.
Takes flight,
minds the city,
gets the broken body
where it needed

to go.

Bedside/Pier Jump

At the end of the lifeguard pub crawl we gave in and gave in again to the pier stretching like an exclamation point over a lurid evening of beers, friends and joints, content in our taking leave of the continent, the dark water everywhere we knew would be like concrete giving in.

All night long we told lifeguard war stories, lightly horrible stories of working on the sand: of huge, hysterical bee stings slightly soothed and lost kids, forgotten all afternoon, whom we sang surf songs with, tiny in the high, saggy chairs top of the tower ramp, rings around the moon

when finally their stoic parents got there, empty of all wandering stories. He was asleep so I didn't say anything right away. He was pitch white: his hair, his face, then the sheets. His breathing labored, like he was going under waves, wave after wave of old age washing over him, with shits

underneath, crooked ribs from the fall right away. He frail white arms about to fail, like his sea legs. Mediocre rescuers told tales of epic rescues while the good ones smirked, it was about guarding, preventing some inevitability from happening, shepherding people to safety, lifeguards

were the good lords of boredom, making precise little moves, heroism hidden in polite smiles at the close of monotonous days, under unseen sunsets, while the heroic sprinted in mistaken dreams, they slept smitten, lively dead weights sinking. The diving and simple disappearing started

just after midnight. Some leapt wide like eagles, some found the curl of swans off the top, the can-do of pelicans striking like lightning through a crack in the dark concrete. I stood watching him open mouthed like an empty oyster; him the pearl. I was about to pencil jump, my arms

tucked in, my shoes still on to stifle the concrete; he didn't have to leap, just fall asleep, as the dark water covered him it would be a hard peace. His breathing went as I went after a good talking down. After a good talking down, he ceased.

Jif

lunchtime 1979

They were happy downing Jif on white.
All around me an archipelago of easy.

Me: turkey bologna, lettuce, organic cheese
on holy wheat, two fat tomato slices dripping,
the whole thing bushy with alfalfa sprouts.
My sandwich was a complete and tedious run-on,
but I was bred to endure the taunts, nicknames,
to stand dead center of the bull's eye, in a pink
health food store on Wilshire boulevard at eight,

waiting for someone big to see me, between
a machine full of oranges, squeezing, one by one,
the slightly sweet juice out of them, pure
terror, and another, brown, smeared somehow,
all over, separating the peanuts from their butter.

Slide Show

Hours before the show, the host, the show-off, was sliding slim slides into their narrow bunks, into the round holder that looked like the carnival ride that spun us in our chairs as we smiled, and then struggled to smile, sort of smiling.

Each slide was a face, a young thin body, but also a memory, the fullest open moment, a focused instant of shutter and lens. Our out-takes, sometimes forced, were at times at the end of a mean parental streak. As we gathered, the show-off plopped the alien ship

projector onto the table and we'd stare at the square of hip white light and feel the heat of the occasion, the buzz of the fan attempting to cool our anticipation. The first photo bends, adjusts, clarifies. This is it. This is where they had been; destiny

was ours, now we would dissolve into that waterfall of travel, seep like the bratwurst pieces between their teeth, become them, sink under a blue wave, fade into a tropical sun, the navel on a tropical horizon, fall like snow off their mountain chalet.

Yes, we were whisked away by that alien ship projector. We were poor, and we projected; it whisked our local yokes with our worldly whites, mixed us up into earth citizens, denizens of otherness, it was a life-force fuel injector,

whether we were light-headed on Haleakala, or feeling like heavy-handed Germans. We saw life, death, pain and grace in every land, and we wanted to go again as soon as it was over, as soon as the show-off was sliding

slides back into their bunks, in boxes, cellblocks covering shelves and shelves, whole walls waiting for light. My days now are passersby: solitary, workmanlike. I miss the mess of oohing and awing, deep in the hot, cold swaths of gathering.