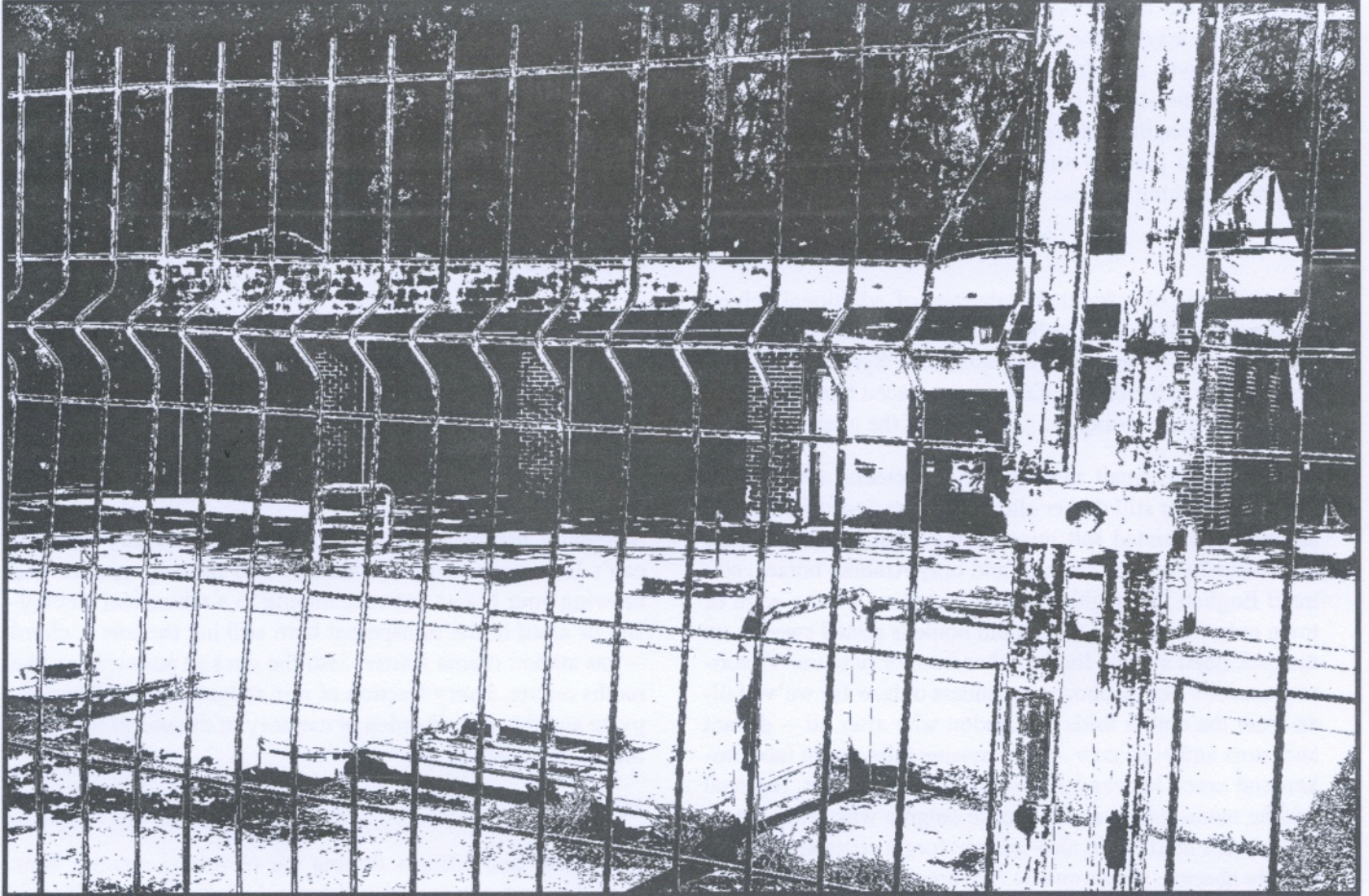


FEAR + LOATHING IN UPSTATE, NY. PART 2: A GEOGRAPHICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF SORROW

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1.

There's something old and sinister among the frontier of the East. We wander and maybe you wander too. Time is a circle, a swan, a numerical vibration of earth rot and hauntings. Unregarded hiccup. The miscarriage of history. You whisper townships to which no cement born behold hinterland.

(sign past fortune is was hinterland-forgetting is memory is an unknown shape too-- Marx is on YouTube talking to Nietzsche dressed as a horse, but every year is the so-called end of my adventures)

2.

The first time I had seen the northeast, drunk, from the windows of a greyhound mired soft defeat, its swollen highways arched old stone and seemingly dead, struck me like the cold hurt of realizing the eternal return is nothing but the kiss of a curse. What landscape are you doomed to return? *Of loss and*

the rocky aching of Tel Aviv. Back then, I couldn't tell if I felt the landscape as sad because I was too, but ten years later I know, as a bone truth, this is a landscape of symbiotic failure. Only the proud and ignoble could ever populate such a strangely inhospitable desert of hope. I remember seeing a sign for New Lebanon on the side of the road, drinking vodka with a man who had recently lost his son, and thinking about the inevitability of life during war. The desire to rebuild a future in the illusion of past is, as we all have come to be aware, the shallow currency to which we buy the small monuments to earth's slow death. Nameless named and lost, the night is moonless stars and wounded.

3.

What aesthetic of science riddles the ancient highways dead brick pre-dawn gasping at rubble strewn refuge and vowels. First the French were shown the salt brines by Lake Onondaga.

And soon after, like a terrible story from the Bible, rivers became graveyards of pollution, dead fish and human shit sealed the shroud. The Haudenosaunee whose nation formed on its very banks have long been denied but continue to fight for their ancient rite to the stewardship of the now poisoned lake. The Northeast is an asylum of sadness, of loss, of this sky still bleeding; the faint chemical pink shadowing the deserted smokestacks crumbling the border between the emptiness of the parking lots whole lavender song coats the dandelion isolation, and obvious memory, white flight leaving the city pockmark and grieving. Like the oceans will rise blood bargains and feuds across the land. Only the stench of liquor lost lives and the tinge of industrial strength dredges the water ways or whatever little remains. This place is strange, and the weary atmosphere covers everything endless.

4.

Your life sort of refracts the absence of additional selves, what more will or less applied to experience x will become, you sit in the sullen morning mist of a Syracuse gas station with an exhausted mother, frown traced bone and not a whisk of a smile facing the dull abyss of the overnight shift.

In another life small miracles of movement and poverty traded for other still darker clusters of loss and strife nestled among the deserted salt mines. Like what if I had been a salt barren? Cadillac carriage and only Arabian horses, soft tread English thoroughbreds and a chateau on the edge of town only for hunting. (My main home is rested sweetly on the park lined avenue for the other frontier rich, our Victorian mansions like clapboard reminders of how far we've fallen from the cotton lords of London who after all -- distant ancestors and even now -- *park avenue* falls cradle face broken and crack heaven.) Still farther into the past, regional middle management and lethargic enigma what little magic the suburbs hold we're also told but forget cities are cousins built in absence anachronistic. We are the Crimea bare negative of all our past lives.

5.

I get extremely high and watch the 2023 film, *Flash*. It's fucking terrible, of an almost irredeemable value (long, boring, no laughter despite the ounce sitting next to me) but at the center of its rather incoherent plot is a story about insane time. Of memory and time and destiny and its mathematical impossibility, of how through our exhausted curse to remember and conjure; we create worlds. That more like nightmares, the labyrinth we dream is a synonym for a ghost we once were, and perhaps we have yet to explore its consequences on material reality.

6.

You become a piece of anywhere after a while.

I start drinking in the local Irish bar where most of the geriatric patrons treat me with disdain. They talk about neighborhoods unchanged but dying, of grandchildren gone bad

Soprano longings of power in a different life my friend's grandfather was a bootlegger. The roads suffer endless delays in the most absurd places, we surmise the final strivings of a de-urbanized mafia.

I suffer insomnia and spend my nights smoking on the steps of my friend's apartment building watching the same teenage mother walk the deserted streets pushing her baby carriage (sometimes empty) and scream into her phone.

7.

Later I get a job working overnights at a gas station down the street. Most of the customers are assholes, occasionally a couple of homeless guys will steal a few cases of Corona. When I ask why Corona specifically my co-worker tells me that a bodega down the street buys the cases at a discount. I laugh and my co-workers frown. Later I quit when I realize they assault shoplifters.

8.

One night I see the same teenage mother by the gas station but instead of a baby carriage she pushes a black trash can and cries.

9.

Suicidally depressed at the Syracuse Bryne Dairy but you can't live other people's shadow, like moving upstate and blowing your brains out succumbing to a whimsical alcoholism or aloof in the transparent hum striking the minor chord -- gas station drama spitters into the choked atmosphere like moths on fire. Every fraction of ruin reflects a small Thermopylae and this is the burden of memory of dreams of teeth and breath, but death.

10.

The towns and villages dotting the mercurial country were named as beacons to past and future belief in historical unity, where place and ontology sever their ties only being born in the metaphysical torment of failure. Most of the towns hold the name of other cities or, as is the case of Mexico, NY, countries, but as in the case of Pompei, of horror en Memoria. Monuments to those familiar feelings, if I leave, maybe things will change for the better. Rome, Ithaca, Cicero, Troy, New Lebanon, Syracuse. Like tiny poems, stones could never witness the blood. Breadcrumbs to an imaginary self we dream, a past we long to lea(d)ve. What little magic these settlements still hold is in this deliverance of place, this whimsical pastiche of names removed from anything save the illusion of memory. A Syracuse with eyes over the hills we wish to see, rising from the mist of northeast Avalon, triumvirate sorrow, to which I owe a part of myself. A prayer for its overgrowth kingdom.

☞ Mohammed Zenia's most recent book of poems is:
James Baldwin's Lungs In The 80's
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