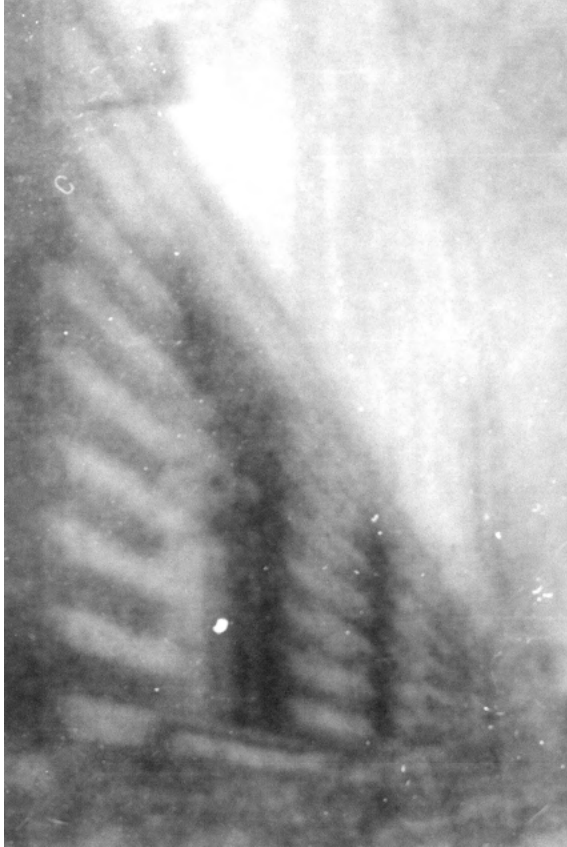


Clint Enns

Fragments from the Streets of Berlin



Clint Enns

Fragments from the Streets of Berlin

Pictures and Stories

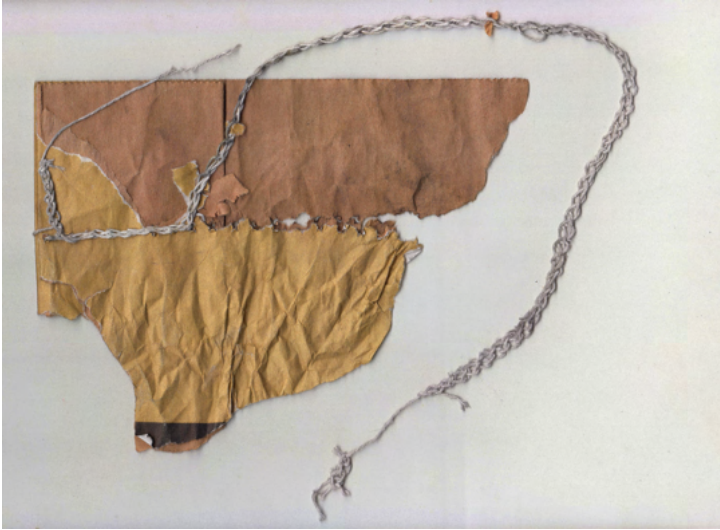
for Julia

Introduction

This short artist book is constructed from a series of fragmented ideas and thoughts that were developed while studying in Berlin. This book contains personal reflections, observations, found photographs, real photo postcards, snapshots, and even a few images of debris found on the streets of Berlin. Inspired by Walter Benjamin, the writing in this book is intended to be personal but not necessarily autobiographical. As Benjamin states in *A Berlin Chronicle*, “autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities.” To this end, this book embraces discontinuities, the fragmented moment, the art of straying.



Berlin Fragment No. 1



Berlin Fragment No. 2

Reflections on the Authentic Tourist Experience

After three weeks in Berlin, I found myself sitting in Vrchlický Garden, a small park in Prague, midday after a morning of aimless wandering. Once I sat down, I began scanning the park and noticed that many of the people around me were homeless, either hanging out in small groups leisurely chatting, smoking, drinking, shooting up or sleeping (after all, sleeping in a park during the day is far safer than in the streets at night). Looking around I saw a family having a picnic and a little kid running about with the parents keeping a close eye on him (a strange place for a picnic...watch your feet for needles). Staring at this abject poverty, I quickly realized that I was an outsider in a city that wasn't mine, a tourist in a culture to which I didn't belong.

Two reviews of Vrchlický Garden on *TripAdvisor*:

“landmark ,yes tourisit attaction no!”

It is a small park outside the main train station, not the most pleasant of places but safe enough, you might see a few vagrants hanging about or sleeping on the benches, a bit unsavoury but they really won't bother you.

“Not a tourist attraction”

I find it amusing that this is listed as a tourist attraction, It is a small park outside the main railway station, neither pretty not functional, used more by the vagrants of the city than anything else (Don't worry they won't bother you). Lots of benches to rest your weary feet.

While in Berlin, I was a tourist and had neither delusions nor pretensions that I was anything else. I was temporarily immersed in the city as a cultural consumer, attempting to understand and learn about that culture as an outsider. Like every other tourist, I was looking for an authentic experience of the city. Like the authentic flâneur, the connoisseur of the street, I felt I was more receptive to this experience than the average rubbernecker. In Berlin I was attempting to perform the delicate tightrope act of allowing myself to be totally saturated with the experience, while at the same time, maintaining a state of hyper-awareness. Of course, no matter how many overpriced coffee shops, nightclubs, museums, artist-run galleries, brothels, microcinemas, and dive bars I visited, my engagement with Berlin could only be superficial. I do not speak the language and I was only in the city for three weeks. Once I realized the authentic experience was unobtainable, I gave myself over to the superficial. As I learned from the writings of Siegfried Kracauer, lived experience is a surface phenomenon, and although it may seem initially obvious to us, there is much to be learned by engaging, reflecting and embracing the superficial.

Despite the fact that the distinction between the flâneur and the rubbernecker seems merely to be a matter of pretension, the major difference is that the flâneur is a cultural producer and not merely a cultural consumer. As David Frisby argues in *The City Observed: the Flâneur in Social Theory*, “the flâneur can also be a producer, a producer of literary texts (including lyrical and prose poetry as in the case of Baudelaire), a producer of illustrative texts (including drawings and painting), a producer of narratives and reports, a producer of journalistic texts, a producer of sociological texts.” In other words, the flâneur can be seen as an artist or poet who treats the streets as one of his/her muses.

The photographs in the following series were taken by an authentic tourist in Berlin.



Tourist Snapshot



View from the Sanssouci Palace



Statue Wearing Make-Up



Fake Building No.1



Fake Building No. 2



Building as Canvas



Hidden Door at Hallesches Tor



God Bless Burger, Beer & Pugs



Sony Centre



For Sennah



Babelsberg Studio



Props Room in Babelsberg Studio



Plaster at Babelsberg Studio



Thorsten's Wall

Unfulfilled Desires

A une passante

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet ;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair... puis la nuit ! - Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité ?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici ! trop tard ! jamais peut-être !
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais !

- Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*

The deafening street was screaming all around me.
Tall, slender, in deep mourning – majestic grief –
A woman made her way, with fastidious hand
Raising and swaying festoon and hem;

Agile and noble, with her statue's limbs.
And there was I, who drank, contorted like a madman,
Within her eyes – that livid sky where hurricane is born –
Gentleness that fascinates, pleasure that kills.

A lightning flash . . . the night! – O fleeting beauty
Whose glance all of a sudden gave me new birth,
Shall I see you again only in eternity?

Far, far from here! Too late! Or maybe, never?
For I know not where you flee, you know not where I go,
O you I would have loved (o you who knew it too!)

In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin observes:

In the widow's veil, mysteriously and mutely borne along by the crowd, an unknown woman crosses the poet's field of vision. What this sonnet conveys is simply this: Far from experiencing the crowd as an opposed, antagonistic element, this very crowd brings to the city dweller the figure that fascinates. The delight of the urban poet is love – *not at first sight, but at last sight*.

In the modern city, a love affair can occur in the crowd between two city dwellers through a fleeting glance. In fact, love at last sight is the purest form of love. It is uncompromised love. Love at first sight can only deteriorate. Love at last sight is love at the first and last moment. Desires left unfulfilled are unable to transform into unfulfilled intimacy. The only thing better than love at last sight might be unconditional love; however, we all know how long that usually lasts.

Review of *Curry 36* [Mehringdamm 36, Kreuzberg] on
TripAdvisor:

“Falling in love with Currywurst”

I'm not sure if everyone is in for Currywurst and many would prefer eating at a local restaurant instead of a chainstore while on travel. But *Currywurst 36* is irresistible for me. I just can't forget the sausage, pommies, mayo and ketchup although it's only a cheap snack. Superb!

Through photography, the fleeting moment can be preserved, shared and lived over and over again. A snapshot can even capture a fleeting glance. The way a photograph functions, literally capturing a moment of time in the past, is closely associated with Proust's concept of *mémoire volontaire*, however, the photograph can be used as a stimulus to invoke *mémoire involuntaire*. Consider Barthes' concept of the *studium* and *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*, with *studium* denoting the cultural and historical interpretation of a photograph and the *punctum* denoting the detail that pricks the viewer, establishing a personal relationship between the photograph and the viewer. With this being said, in *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin argues "The crisis of artistic reproduction that emerges in this way can be seen as an integral part of a crisis in perception itself. [...] Insofar as art aims at the beautiful and, on however modest a scale, 'reproduces' it, it retrieves it (as Faust does Helen) out of the depths of time. This does not happen in the case of technological reproduction. (The beautiful has no place in it.)" The photograph captures a specific moment in time; but contrast an unpoetic photograph with an inspired snapshot...an inspired snapshot has the ability to capture a beautiful fleeting moment, in essence, retrieving that moment out of the depths of time.

The photographs in the following series were found in flea markets around Berlin and share some affinities with the New Objectivity movement.



People on Sunday



Father in Hospital (RLPC, Front)

Vater in
Lasset

Graz, d. 16. 5. 18.

Mein lieber Sohnemann!
Hier steht in der
deut. Schrift die Bitte
gefallt dir nicht, wenn ich
die Sache aufgeben soll. Ich
habe ja nur nicht geglaubt, daß
ich nicht etwas besser, es würde
dann nicht sein, wenn ich
alle Tage so viel stam?

Father in Hospital (RLPC, Back)



Yoga at Party



Fire in Grass



Light Study



Man Sweeping, with Woman in Doorway



After the Flood

Passing Time in Berlin

Waiting for a bus from Berlin to Prague at Zentraler Omnibusbahnhof Berlin (ZOB, Central Bus Station Berlin), which is, by the way, nowhere near the centre of Berlin, I sit in a cafe reading to pass the time. Ironically, no time actually passes in the ZOB since the main clock has been broken for months, the barista informs me. In the cafe, I see an old man sitting and staring out the window, watching people arriving and departing. As I am reading W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (speaking of fragmented time and of travelling to Prague), out of the corner of my eye I witness the older man crying and realize he is watching a young couple embrace each other, either before one of them departs by bus or after one of them has arrived home. I can only imagine he is waiting for an arrival that will never come or has recently experienced a departure of another kind.

While in Vancouver a year or so ago, I was hanging out with my good friend Larissa at a dive bar overlooking the English Bay (believe it or not, there is still a dive bar that exists in that now up-scale neighbourhood). Anyways, we began to discuss our high school reunion, which she attended; despite not ever wanting to attend one of those events, I was still interested in the gossip. We went through our list of mutual friends and I asked her about my ex-girlfriend, my first girlfriend and lover. She said, "didn't you hear? She passed away almost a year ago." I asked, "Of what?" to which she responded "Leukemia." The word cut me, I could feel its prick...the word inflicted a wound.

A few days later, the smallest things would trigger long forgotten memories of our time spent together, summers between school semesters spent at her parent's cottage alone together. I still don't know or understand why her death affected me so much. I hadn't seen her in fifteen years and people that I had known for much longer have passed away in that time. Small details trigger these memories, times I had forgotten existed, moments only shared by the two of us and now these moments are only remembered by one.