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Flâneuse and Flâneur. Observations on the Art of Eva Rosenstiel.

*»Not to find one's way in a city doesn't mean much,
but to get lost in a city, as one gets lost in a forest,
requires schooling.« Walter Benjamin.*

»An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts, until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air.« The Flâneur [M1, 3] p. 417¹

Roaming the city. Giving into the encounter en passant. Drifting along until fatigue sets in. Perhaps it was a bit for Eva Rosenstiel, as it once was for Walter Benjamin, as she roamed the streets of Paris. Indeed, it was, as she—the flâneuse—strolled the streets with an analog small-format camera. She herself speaks of feelings of irritation and transitoriness accompanying her on her walks, the groping and searching movement, the physical perception of space molded by the overabundance of detail, of reflections, disruption and distraction. Dirk Teuber calls this, the flâneur's laissez-faire attitude, a 'sweeping consciousness'. Yet within the flânerie, there are indeed moments of decelerated movement, of halting, stopping short to pause for a moment elicited by the things that draw upon our attention. Arising out of such instants, the photographs of Eva Rosenstiel are something like snap shots—spontaneous, intuitive, fleeting glimpses out of the corner of one's eye. Her Paris photos show excerpts of an urbane world: façades and interiors. Grilles and galleries, markets and museums, window displays and streets, corners, doorways, stairwells . . . On her artistic tours—of which there have been many—it might just as well be grass, waves, gravel or trees, which she captures on film. In equal measure, she trawls through nature and the world of culture, thence picking out motifs over which most people would pass without a sideways glance. Many of the places that occupy the artist's gaze are non-places. They do not really exist, but are result from reflections. »The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a

¹ Benjamin, Walter. *Das Passagenwerk*. The Arcades Project. Trans. Eiland, Howard. McLaughlin, Kevin. ed. Tiedemann, Rolf. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Belknap Press. London. 1999. p. 417

placeless place«, so according to the philosopher Michel Foucault,² and on the other hand, »a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.«³ In Paris, this aspect of the amplification of space, determined by reflections, is to be especially found within the arcades: canopied, interlocking spaces—at once interior and exterior spaces, transitory places, zones of flux.

»A look at the ambiguity of the arcades: their abundance of mirrors, which fabulously amplifies the spaces and makes orientation more difficult. For although this mirror world may have many aspects, indeed infinitely many, it remains ambiguous—double-edged. It blinks: it is always this one—and never nothing—out of which another immediately arises. The space that transforms itself does so in the bosom of nothingness.«

Mirrors [R2a,3], p. 542,⁴

Interstices. No man's land. The spaces-in-between, so indistinct and ambiguous. Reflections have an effect in places other than just passages. The glass façades of buildings can also become fluid, swept up in a fata-morgana-like dissolution. The artist's gaze, ever-seeking extraterritoriality, transition points and thresholds. In this sense, Eva Rosenstiel is not just a flâneuse, but also a collector of sorts. And as with every true collector, what is enticing is not necessarily what is close at hand, but precisely the far-flung, fragmentary, the singular, that which stands out as once removed, collecting at the margins. Her images are troves, lucky finds, which uncoupled from an earlier context, show a different side of things and elicit unexpected ways of looking at them. According to Walter Benjamin, Collecting is a form of practical remembrance.

Similarly, the act of remembrance is an interpretation of what has past—a sort of superscription, which at once veils and unveils the underlying facts. Eva Rosenstiel is decided in her approach to superscriptions. According to a principal of seriality, she has worked for years on a constellation of topics where two intersection points are pivotal: that between photography and painting; that between representation and abstraction. Taken on her walking tours, the photographs printed in a 10 x 15 cm format form the foundation—while actually finding the images ties in to the open process. With ink, acrylic or gouache, the artist accents certain aspects by covering each photograph with a unique pattern of dots, brushstrokes, lines or circles, the inspiration for which comes from within the image itself. Latticework, a car tire, a turret, a lamp, even a flower might initially trigger the impulse. These

² Michel Foucault. Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias.

³ Foucault, Michel. »Des Espaces Autres.« »Of Other Spaces« Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité . Oct. 1984. Trans. Miskowiec, Jay. Initially from a lecture held Mar. 1967. This text is within the public domain: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>

⁴ Benjamin, Walter. Das Passagenwerk. The Arcades Project. Trans. Eiland, Howard. McLaughlin, Kevin. ed. Tiedemann, Rolf. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Belknap Press. London. 1999, p. 542

details are then invariably reproduced in the form of painting; they develop their own life by covering the entire surface of the image in pattern. Thus forms a new and secondary layer: a web inscribed by the artist's hand and in her unique autography. This amplifies the viewer's emotional investment in the images, as a way of steering our gaze and bundling our attention. Cultivating the pure joy of seeing. The surprise of discovering remote connections and only seemingly inconspicuous details. The playful delight of observing patterning and fretwork. Striving to get somewhat of a grips on the little irritations and unending variations.

However, to get a grips on this world of images is an almost impossible undertaking: a daunting archive has accumulated in the meanwhile. A sort of kaleidoscope of infinitely many facets. Heterogeneous material to be recombined like a montage in ever-different ways, which brings together individual perspectives into new volatile relationships. Eva Rosenstiel's art speaks to the senses. And if one so chooses, she invites us to philosophize. She alludes to how reality is something that cannot be measured, that is necessarily elusive, and can only ever be grasped from a perspective bias. One can never really have a firm hold on reality. However, with the aid of classification systems and markers, we can grapple with it in ever-new ways.