

“To look at these pictures is to glimpse the work of the recording angel on the day of judgment, knowing that the whole vast tide of humanity is composed of myriad individual destinies each of which terminates in such a scene, a body sprawled on a bed or a floor or the dirt, eyes staring or shut, no more to be written, the last card played. The unimportance of these subjects matches out own unimportance, which should help us to recognize our affinity with them, although fear prevents us from full identification.” (pg 98)

“As we look at them the clocks have all stopped, the air is going out of the world, the great glass bell is descending on the circumference. There is no place for us outside the frame, nothing to breathe, nowhere to stand. We cannot be the viewer of such a scene. We must have forgotten: We are the subject.” (p.99)

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“In addition, these photographs lack the functions that are usually attached to images of death. They do not memorialize, or ennoble, or declare triumph, or cry for vengeance. As evidence, they are mere affectless records, concerned with details, as they themselves became details in the wider scope of the police philosophy, which is far less concerned with the value of life than with the value of order. They are bookkeeping entries, with no transfiguring mission, and so serve death up raw and unmediated.” (p. 60)

“The uninhabited pictures are pregnant with implication...there are incidental factors that influence the viewer but may not be germane to the deed associated with the site: shadows, stains, footprints in the snow. The stains may indeed be blood, the footprints may be those of the escaped murderer, or they may not.” (p. 61)

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The more empty the photograph, the more it will imply horror. There are several reasons for this. Cities of course in thought as well as in deed and this can extend to any site that bears the trace of human occupation (and Benjamin as we shall see was more literally correct than he intended in writing that the photographs as pertaining to tragedy or at least to legal evidence the kind that show up reproduced in newsmagazines after a crime empty or blurred badly framed or wrenchingly banal. They are the pictures of the vacant house after the massacre of the field in which the body was found or the snapshots that constitute the only likeness of the victim or that prove that the murder once passed for normal just like any neighbor. Empty photograph have no reason to be except to show, that which cannot be shown. (p. 62)