

# EDGE INTEGRITY

edge.integrity fall/winter 2011



## PAST FRAMES

by HORATIO E. GEIST

Dead letters. Piled. Dusty. Dated. Unopened. They sit atop a vacant wooden table. A woman sits in a solitary chair. Her hands hold three new letters to be dropped onto the mass grave of forgotten correspondence, overdue bills and junk ads. She holds them to her mouth in prayer.

She looks up from the paper mound and focuses on a wall of uniformly framed faces in various incarnations of clarity and blur. She traces the portraits - left to right - in a path that her eyes have travelled infinite times. The

forensically visible blood blots and tear traces keep her focus. Her blood. Her tears. Her daily death sentences.

The faces will never speak. But she hears them.

*Her lascivious voice.*

*Her wonton thoughts.*

Though she's never spoken to them.

She can not.

She counts in her head. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. She stops. The face is shadowed but the eyes are piercing; navigating darkness that only the camera captures. It's a still, spontaneous shot. The frozen movement appropriated forever. The last shot of innocence, burned.

Her eyes follow an ethereal horizon to the right edge of the photo. She forces herself not to gaze on the white matte border and redirects her focus to the upper right corner of the shot. Background noise. But it is the only echo that is still. Frozen.

A snatch of a broad stairway to an invisible and imagined upper storey. She has never walked those stairs but she pictures a room with a window view away from the city. A room on nature.

Her eyes are less inventive. They touch each step with a houndish pragmatism, feeling every creak and shifting nail and smelling the sweat and grime of every foot to the edge of visibility where the stairs disappear into a blurry blackness. Her eyes stop at the white matte and reverse, retracing till she is staring into those piercing eyes.

*Her lascivious voice.*

*Her wonton thoughts.*

She knows those eyes are staring into a concrete abyss through a lens held by a cloudy beast.

She counts in her head. Six. Seven. Eight. She stops. The face is clearer. No shadows, just a porcelain jaw and closed eyes. She concentrates on the eyes. The same thoughts refry her mind.

*The last shot of a face. The last shot of a breath. The last shot of a thought.*

The corner of the shot has not aged, withered or shifted. The background noise, still; the stairway, permanent.

She counts in her head.

Ten. She stops.

The frame is empty of a human figure. Just background noise. A snatch of a stairway, a broad stairway to an invisible and imagined upper storey.

She counts in her head. Eleven. Twelve....

She stops at fifty. An empty frame. White matte. Humanless. Noiseless. Her eyes fix on the blank space. Nothing. Her insertion is exhausting. Her eyes weighted and destitute from the repetition. She retraces and redistances. Her brain needs

perspective. She examines the wall. The empty frames. The past faces.

She tightens her hold on the letters and kisses each individually and delicately. She waits and counts the beats of her heart. One beat. Two beats. Three beats. The rhythm intensifies. Forty-nine beats. Fifty beats. She stops at fifty.

She releases the letters into the sooty grave.

The story, unfinished, rests in a dusty pile.

The following lines from David Peace's novel, *Occupied City*, were "mixed" into the original narrative.

"The blood-blots, the tear-traces, the dead letters and the death sentences. You look up from your papers, you snatch sight of a stairway, a broad stairway to an upper storey, an upper storey away from the city."

"Her lascivious voice, her wanton thoughts."

