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Steven  
Seidenberg

# plain sight

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The text of *plain sight* relentlessly questions notions of thinking and being, setting out various propositions about life, thought, and perception in a way that persuades not merely with argument, but with music. The resulting experience is a thrilling “excavation of the nous,” drawing us into a realm where point of view, connotation, misdirection, and other rhetorical and prestidigitational devices are deployed in a tender but unyielding attack on the illusions we share. It also manages to be a really useful advice book where “[p]rophetic murmurs sough from every roadside gulch.” And then, again, there is the music—the sound of words taking off into an infinite perspective of thought. That the reader gets to fly along is the pleasure and triumph of *plain sight*. —*Laura Moriarty*

*plain sight's* paragraphs—philosophical and musical—presume the dominance of sight as evasive conceptual weapon and uncode its powers, opening to pinnacles of concept and negation, of ventriloquy and linguistic imagination. These extremes gather in the middle, the text suspended in radical, elliptical resistance. If there is a narrative of this work, it is an epic recasting of philosophical language. It falls into noise, “a throng of wounds” possessed by a subject, a nearly criminal “I” unmoored from expectation and its obligations to “tow-lines.” It stumbles into commonplaces and platitudes that clomp over its elevated distances to bring one closer to what is near, the immanent concern of this exhilarating and scary text. —*Carla Harryman*



Writer and artist Steven Seidenberg is the author of *plain sight*, *Situ*, *Null Set*, *Itch* and numerous chapbooks of poetry and aphorism. His collections of photographs include *Pipevalve: Berlin* and *Imaging Failure: Abandoned Lives of the Italian South*. He has exhibited his visual work in Japan, Italy, Germany, Mexico, and the United States. From 2012-2017 he co-edited the poetry journal *pallaksch*. Based in San Francisco, Seidenberg travels broadly to give talks and readings focused on his own work as writer and photographer in collaboration with anthropologists, philosophers, and artists from around the world.



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Shining rancor, the gall of the sky. From this moment forward—  
forsaken, delivered. Concede every breach but dissemble the void.  
From this moment forward...

φ

To live with the vanity and idleness of a scavenger, stirring the  
warm ashes of encampments just departed for that scrap of with-  
ered gristle that survives the dying flame. Such is my delictum, if I  
have no room for other sins, such the scourge that shackles this  
excursus to its foundered frame, a mustering of fragments against  
the sovereign gambit of each livid orb, each modal scheme...

To live—to ruin everything. There is comfort in appearance, but in appearing, only torment. Suddenly, it's over. It begins by being over...

φ

The appetite for novelty—the penchant for *derangement*—is empowered by stagnation, by the fear of being fixed within a posture of decline. That other straw men burn before the altar of the idem is not cause enough to join them, to loiter in the comfort of some *transcendental* plan. In time, one takes no succor in the bearing of the witness, in being forced to smut the lens that trains upon the page, so much as in prostration to the pleasures of prostration; the refuge of some harborage between...

Unpledged and indifferent tabernacle, to whom...to what dis-  
port...A tale, it was, not of triumph or advancement, but of piti-  
less degeneracy, of an *immanent* debouch. It is best to hope for  
silence, as a bearing out...

φ

Degeneracy; never an imprecation. In the variance of molder—in  
the root that sets its limit—there is progress, there is *aspect*; in the  
rending of the cerement, the promise of plain sight...

One remains in thrall to one's own singular dispersion of first causes as long as one is mindful of desire, in thrall to hope as long as one believes that there is something else, that someday something more than what has happened...than what's happened into *happening right now* will cleave the darkness with the taint of new arrivals and so *save the coming day*...

∅

That you are such a one—that there is either you or one or one more you—needs neither proof of expectation nor the testament of signs. I have already spoken, so this paramour of indices reminds the passing gawker—soon a *confidant*—to mind. And so I yield an opening to other applications of this affable mathesis any more or less ingenuous precursor would agree can hardly justify the regress—hardly discharge the digression—without the always subsequent rebuke of manumissions that the voicing of the practicum can't help but guarantee. The same contrived preamble—that the plural is apostrophe—is reared as both remittance and imperious remand, the surest *ad absurdum* one can use to keep the promissory canticle of languor from abandoning its cohort to an endless brink, a final...

If one could disunite the world reflected in this mirror of hypostases from credence—could warrant every idol the completion of its form—then perhaps some *future* sacrifice would serve to cleanse the spoil of its odium, its pretext; would lead me from the figure of a unity assembled to a wholeness *beyond* difference—an exile which is no less *in the fold*...

φ

Necessity without release, a vestige of what never was, the tracery of ruptured seams joins shallows to their sundered depths, as glints upon the verge. Insanable sleep, a tedious poise...

One shouldn't bother saying one needs nothing, or one shouldn't *need* to say it, whether one bothers or no. That I have paid such heed because the order is an affect of its needful contravention is apparent, though that is not precisely my position or concern. What is, I'll tell you now, is not established or forthcoming, for the precedent of something less imagined than proleptic—the genial surrender of diminishing horizons, as a vanishing in aggregate that nears despite the pride of its dispersal, its persistence...

φ

Take my hand; this world forgives. Yours may be quite ruthless and I can't say the correction will exceed the subtle pleasures of this sluggish liberality, or likewise fail to unconceal the other paths—the other *tongues*—by which your mouth discerns the bitter mulct of its own savor, but that seems quite enough to bind you over for a little while, beyond the nearing lookout of this missive affectation, when something else will happen, something still more like a promise—like, but as the image of an absent friend. I can't say that I'd blame you if you took your leave directly, without second glance—or first—to match your own in its discretion; that you'd be less inclined to sanction such droll marginalia if I cursed the ground you scour on your chafing knees, but that is neither here nor there to one whose vim has managed to begin its *volte-face*, the craven weal of one whose back has turned...

Neither here nor there inscribes this incidental onset, this indentured spree; the path towards dissolution is made stable by deferment, by offering the transit as a standing in its own right, thus an end achieved. One imagines the predicament of those who failed to see the deluge coming—no time to draw a last breath...

φ

A clearing—a departure—and so the case is closed. The vacancy is tempting—every interval is filled. This, then, is the gist, although the point avers another matter. This is what it comes to—what it *will*, when it comes due. The chief thing is to be seen...

To manifest—to *measure out*—the suffering velleities that inundate each novel excavation of the nous. No flight from isolation is a search for common calumny, either proffered as a warning or a fungible abuse. All tidings, no matter how glad, are made abject by transmission. What we long for is a freedom that's *continuous* with quietus; what we search for is an infinite...a *limitless* abyss...

∅

When I exhaust my powers of description, I'll consider myself disguised. If there were something to be done, if there were some way to *not do it*, I'd return this vain demurral to the portent of surrender. When there's no one left to see you, there's nowhere left...

One must learn to hate one's enemies, but the character to rouse them can't be learned, must be innate...

φ

The secret labor of instinctual decadence, the faculty of looking around every corner—this is what it comes to, what my mastery amounts to, as those disgruntled hierarchs who've gained the right to sacrifice their undiscovered sectaries by having long since sacrificed themselves. Have I said it already? There is no other practice; what is possible for others is not possible for me. What is possible for others...the chief thing is to be seen...

Have I said it already? But when I say already I already grow...have already grown distracted. Already distracted, by having been already made to vanish in diathesis, passing from the servitude of passage to the stasis of this billet in the always in-between. The present is already...the presence of the present is the ready-made already that, contrived as the submission of what has been to what will be, bequeaths the fleeting suppliance of sense to every passing...every passage...

φ

Weary. And distracted. Wearily distracted is the way of all requital. Weary ambushade portends the triumph of retreating. Impassive brume recoils into substance—into *matter*—where all other formal archetypes advance such change of state as though a symbol and a symptom of our stumble into regress, the *method* of our aimless lurching towards...

All the nothing you see, all the vanishing you phrase—an exultant prostitution to the future...

φ

To find one's place in history one must linger past its limit, one must step aside. To take the role of doyen one must fill the position—the *position*, I say—of prophetic obsolescence; one must make oneself the bulwark of subjection without conquest, without even the *prospect* of advantage, or remise...

These thoughts become too savage to return me to the hope that every similar assignment of opprobrium prefers as an admission, an escape. But perhaps this is enough. But perhaps this is enough. To be regarded. Become at once already once confused. Become distracted. Would like to end. Would like to end. I. A mere moment of clutter initiates our slump into catharsis, if not sacrament. I am learning to have been seen, to have already seen by having been seen. By being seen. Everything else that passes passes over...

φ

Seeing every side precludes the seer from engagement, from the subtle disarray of seeing anything at all. One is first made master of this roiling persistence by submission to the exigence and camouflage of stasis—a *deliverance* from praxis—which is equal to an infinite delay...

To imagine oneself virtuous one must first conceive of virtue as a rhapsody of action, regardless of one's subsequent discernment of effects. That there has been forewarning of the difficulties waiting just beyond the next horizon is no reason to change courses; such pain adduces progress, makes of history the semblance of a reasoned voice. The look back is illumined by the mirror of futurity; no one is a hero to one's debtors, or a scoundrel in one's zeal for second chances...

φ

Of what's been said already, if not by me then by some other, I neither stand as witness nor believe that such crude testament would serve to ground the reverie by which the claim to witness is betokened, thus confessed. Anyone who might conceive this forfeiture of reasonable affect as a means and not a measure...not a measure to be sure of...To be sure it is no matter to the seity whose prescience understands such vacant canon as a *universal* voice. And this, too—this mattering alone—is of no consequence to those who are as useless in the judgment of their rivals as confined within their reservoirs of longings and intents. Only mattering *together* matters...

The marshaling of one's affiliates into an amalgam of instantaneous reflexes requires the proscription of everything else. Exclusion is not merely the effect of common orders of kinship—the feint of consanguinity, both compulsive and by choice—but is equally intrinsic to the nature of discernment; to the indolence of being in a world...

φ

There has to be someone—*anyone*—otherwise nothing. The truth of the matter and the mattering alike is made coherent by the augur of the fragment, the disruption; by the trick of some caesura put upon each ersatz plexus—each perimeter of middles—as a nascent void...

The truth of the eye is its blinking, its lid, of the hand is the fist in its socket, the whimpering snout. The truth of the thumbs and the fingers reflexive, the prints of caresses, the grease of the lips...is the truth of the missive, the tongue in its socket, the truth of the palpating fist in its mouth...

φ

Resignation may appear the pinnacle of temperance, as some discrete surrender to compulsory decay, but only insofar as cause—as *any* sort of purpose—takes the form of its denial, the orderless residuum of vision absent eye. Sovereignty is the price one pays for any *free* reflection; rare is the catastrophe come off *without a hitch*...

Wanting to know what one actually *is*, one sights some wan pulsation of repulsive physiognomy and runs from the assemblage, from the aggregate of seconds that one's indigence dislimns. Then one suddenly perceives it, one discerns the prime of privilege—only those who one has just exalted will surrender, whose nature is to cower from their nature *will proceed*...

φ

Of having said already what I will say, of knowing what I will say will have been said—I think it fair to think this a quotidian epiphany, which anyone who's failed to say it once has done so... has not done so...has *settled on* for fear of its receipt *as though* repeated; for having had the confidence to not say what requires no such confidence in saying to be known. Eschewal of redundancy is the need by which invention finds its valency—its *parlance*. Otherwise nothing...

The hideous opprobrium of the ontic; that one must find a place—  
must *take a stand*—within its compass...

φ

Condemned to grieve this deficit of deficits unchallenged, a peon  
to the victory of entr'acte over missive—over voice. I face you now  
as fabulist and proof of desecration, that while I have propounded  
no such posture—no such *transect*—to speak of or have spoken of  
already in my time, I'm no more likely to retreat from the remon-  
strance than I am to supervene this venal portent with a message,  
to begin the *next* divergence with some prolix mise-en-scene...

To claim one holds the truth is first to postulate its access, to wallow in the culvert of perceivable effects. To repudiate the commonplace and still remain a party to the commons of awareness takes a courage more than cognizant or mastered by osmosis, the courage of an innate agitation against sense...

φ

Transcription is the sepulcher of all perturbed specifics—the annealed chiaroscuro of defensible *noesis*—and so does one’s detachment from the core of such antipathy impel one’s languor forward from its sump of phlegm. One cannot drink from both the source and the mouth of the Nile at once, after all...

After all that has been said is furtively recanted, all that goes unnoticed turns from prospect into trace; after every last awakening to feign the novel pleasures of a new world and a new light of attractions and surmises, and after the abuse of truth—satiety, release...

φ

Dissimulation trumps the vain supremacy of oversight. The brightest star made subject to the seignory of clouds...

Others grope for meaning in a world without consequence, but we wait at the entrance to an infinite compendium, assembled to provision its blockade. It is easy enough to advance future reprisals as the vindication of present importunities, but such affect only satisfies as long as one believes that there is something to be gained by the surrender of the value of all values to the promise of debasement, then dissemblance—*then dissolve...*

φ

And who has thought to whisper such crude persiflage to me? For one whose vim is spent in the procurement of an absolute isolation, what use the dribbled sanction of this callous reportage? What life could reave the tender scourge of such coarse dialectic by defiling the firmament with manufactured wings? This rigid hash of wax and twine, a sputtered benediction gliding over tidal scree—so would pass my portents into histrionic chaffer, so would all celestial mouths have tongues hewn out of rubber, and the tractable grandiloquence of artificial things...