

Richard James Allen | A Party in Small Moments | Three Spires | It's
Saturday night in almost any city around the world and



Photo Credit: Alessandra Capodacqua

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Every moment a birth, a death, a failure, a success,
a murder, a creation, a theft, an offering,
an irreparable loss and an inestimable gain,
a banality and a masterpiece,
a revelation and a disappointment -
every moment absolutely complete and the definition of void.
Every moment the thought of the cup of tea,
the going to the kitchen, the boiling of the water,

the selection of the teacup, the interruption of the phone call,
the deciding on which teabag, the and so on and so on and so on
until the teacup has been through the washing machine
and is back on the shelf and that whole chain
of almost unconscious activity
has subsided to the perimeters of consciousness.

Every moment the each and the all and the so many more and the so many less
and the so much of everything and the so little of anything.
No wonder we want to live, we want to die,
we want to remember, we want to...
we want to rub out remembrance,
all those tentacles of grabbing-at-us emotions,
the whirlpools, the quicksands, those rock pools
filled with unseen venomous malignant creatures,
and the what should be private spaces of contemplation and self-reflection,
the temples of the mind, becoming like crowded public bazaars in countries
we have unwittingly participated in the corruption of and yet whose problems
reach back before carbon dating because they exist in the endless now
of the dis-ease of the human mind itself, which even in its inner sanctum
is constantly being besieged by swarms of merchants and whores triggering
our greed and desire, beggars and pickpockets tearing at our attention and happiness,
and holy men reminding us of the inescapability of our responsibility, our culpability,
our accountability, our answerability and our guilt.

And through all of this - and through all of this - and through all of this,
we still desperately wanting to keep wanting
and still utterly desperate to let it all go.
The tinkle of the spoon has finally stopped,
replaced by the square-jawed murmur
of the certainties of daytime tv,
which inconveniently fail to dampen
the pre-articulate life questions of a fulminating baby;
the earnest efforts of a dog, endlessly trying
to learn to speak a language we humans can understand;

the ceaseless churning of the wheels of the trucks
on the highway outside, as if they are hoping to beat
the lead-laden air to the delicacy of whipped cream;
the emphatic punctuation of the plumbing,
in the deeper registers of the voice of this building,
to sentences no one ever seems take responsibility for beginning
and which have no apparent end; the crumpled muffle of lovers
at first making every effort not to be heard but eventually
becoming unable to care, unscrumpling into alleluia joy trajectories,
hosannas reaching like personal fireworks up towards the firmaments
of their own private skies; and last but not least - my special favourite,
and surely sparked off at least in some way by the kerfuffle
of all the goings on below - the sound of one hand finally thunderclapping.

THREE SPIRES

I

Sonnet on the steps of the moment
(San Miniato al Monte, Florence)

When that which is gone is around the corner of memory,
when that which is to come is beyond the range of clairvoyance,
when we that are here are only here because we think we are,
what shall become of the secret flower of happiness? That each of us
believes in our eternity as much as we are certain of its uncertainty,
that these are the steps we must climb to reach the cathedral of the
moment, that time is a question not of how many lateres or before
or nows exist, but how may we exist in all simultaneously,
how then shall we come to learn when is the time to begin this journey,
how long it will take and what it means to arrive? And what hope
shall we have - when we have left the cloister on the mountain,
when we can no longer hear with our ears the music that is unbroken -

of a rebirth of the magnanimity of each moment, its gentle
bending down to us with its fruits like the giant hands of a tree?

II

Echoes in the graveyard of the Luzern Hofkirche
(St. Leodegar im Hof, Lucerne)

Why bother with a burial ground when so many gravestones fade?
Yet where else should people lie, even if their names are now as if
they had never been written down at all? And why be anywhere else
other than with those who are at nothing but peace? But am I not
always with the dead? How could I be elsewhere? Do we not belong
with the dead and the dead with us? Yet is one then ever nowhere
but with the sadness? Locked outside the door of the tomb but unable
to leave the graveyard, trapped in the limbo of those who want to be haunted?
There are the regrets that come later and the regrets that come sooner,
and a thousand misunderstandings in between, but I must choose a brief,
hovering wakefulness in the melancholy, almost complete, mental silence before
the names are no more, the aching surrender as the language of identity fades
with the last light of day in a rose window, the magic hour when anything
appears possible and the final audible word with the power to charm is yonder.

III

Adagio for Forgotten Moments
(St. Vitus, St. Wenceslas and St. Adalbert Cathedral, Prague)

About beginning. About ending. About what we put between these frames.
About how we believe it is real. About how it is real but only for us.
About how we are riders on the fair weather of our illusions.
About how we try to maintain the micro-climates on the rotational axes
of our dizzying worlds. About not much really, just everything we hang onto
and take for granted. About how our illusions orbit but never fully land,
just leave behind their burdens. About how, for all that, we are such terrible,
terrifying, tenuous, tumultuous creatures, worthy at least of laughter and regret.
Sadness is a cup whose elixir once drunk passes through us like a poisonous joy,
a mysterious quicksilver that convoluted the circulations of those who came

before and before that - rivers of life that run into rivers of death, caught in a
grail that holds both indistinguishable. Nothing is holy but the quietus.
In the silence of what is left behind we hear our calling. In the gestures
of the angels that beckon us there is no choice. Ultimately, we follow.

It's Saturday night in almost any city around the world and

mostly I find myself
regarding with compassion
the fragility of what
other people think they need

strange jonquils waiting in lines
outside underworlds
for the glimpse of a midnight sun

until casually one of these
spectacularly constructed blooms
wafts its pollen towards me
and suddenly I am awash

in the nectar of all the same needs
and who now will cast an arched eye
of compassion upon me?