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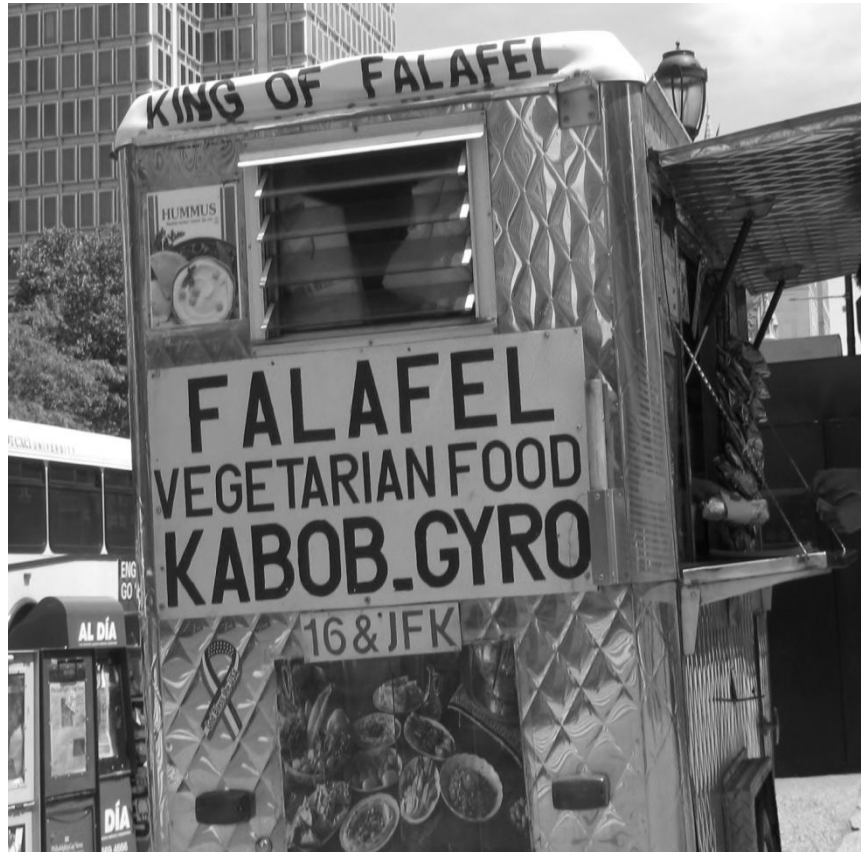
PhiladelphiAmble

Daniel Schall

Abstract

These poems are inspired by Baudelaire's original poetic image of the flâneur, the poet ambling through the Latin Quarter in Paris, absorbing the city's increasingly rapid modernization. A crucial difference, however, is that these poems also play into the words of Michel de Certeau, who reminds us that there are (at least) two ways to "see" the city: through the minimizing and totalizing lens of aggregation, or as part of it, moving and swimming through the arteries of the city and letting the poignant smells and personalities stick to one's skin. The photographs and collage elements of this piece attempt to marry these two views of the city in their interactions with and supplements to the text. Baudelaire had the keen sense to stay removed from his own poems; his speaker was imbued in the works, but rarely did he make a cameo appearance. I find that to do that in the city today would be impossible.

West



Surrounded:
behind

the masonry spire
whitewashed stone carved
flat and round—

giants dwarf
either side,
16th and Market Streets,
blue glass and gray steel

so high that clouds slip
from the sky,
slink onto the polished mirrors

Business people—
not artsy folks
or rag-tag teenage crowds
but real PEOPLE,
messenger bag,
briefcase flail,
lapel flap
in the gusting
mildew-scented air

nothing
One Liberty Place
the massive, iconic spire
stepped like a glass terrace,
angled steep over a thousand feet of
makes Billy Penn turn his
bronze back and burn
in shame below.

Is this Philadelphia?

where, above the earth,
NASA satellites capture it
a bleak, pallid scar
carved from hunter green land
blistered at the mouth
of the ink black bay

The Penn Centers
stand as sentinels,
before the sun

The clouds pass
and everyone
moves!
in a solid
throng at the green
an amoeba of people
sloshes its way across the street
to find the shade again

Comcast Center
the axis mundi
abrasive as it shouts
over the rest of the antennae

“C’mon, let’s watch the big screen.”

clop clop
of too-big red heels
behind

passes the street vendors
avoids their eyes
behind
shades

The vendors on 20th
draped in steel
boxes

tug-of-war on street corners
for well-dressed customers

a man in flotsam slacks
worn to shredded khaki,
floats between the busybodies
strolls up to the window
the real cultural treasure trove:
hotdogs
shish kebabs
cheesesteaks
soft pretzels
cheddar jack quesadillas
beef and bean burritos
falafel
baba ganoush

a smell like smoked flannel
issues from the box—
no chimney
no ventilation—
the man inside wipes a grease
tattoo from his sooty forehead

the man outside slaps
his bills on the vendor counter

“Yo, man, what can I get for this?”

Outside the IBX tower—
another glass monument—
Temple red
and white T
flaps on flags
hung from the light posts
holes punched in their middles
to let wind gusts slip through.

in the rough
flutter in
chaos—
beating
gray skin beneath
feathers
pumps fervently,
wild
march
of shiny dress shoes

Flock of pigeons
ballistic
bluster,
waves of
the muscular
of taut bird wings
leathery
thick clay
red eyes
to escape the

They reconvene at 22nd
outside Murano Condos
(1 and 2 BEDROOM
APARTMENTS AVAILABLE!)

Thick-necked man
with a BlueTooth
earpiece
blinks
blue
blinks
blue
walks towards the Hoagie City
by The Forum
("NUDES NUDES NUDES
YOUR CENTER CITY
XXX SOURCE!")

Acrid scent
of rich tobacco
shakes from his
round body
he stares under the curved
shadowed tongue
of his Official NBA cap—
the back covers

what looks to be
a bullet hole.

Digital news ticker
above the fresh new
black newsstand
says

3:13 PM Partly Cloudy 64F SEPTA northbound trains halted due to engineer killed on
tracks CBS CBS CBS White House Advisor claims that Obama has "a weakness" for apple
pie CSB CBS CBS

both delivered and dusted away
so quickly

Past 23rd,
muddied Schuylkill,
two concrete and steel
balustrades keep

the bridge aloft

Across the river
the Cira Centre
strikes the sky
with its blotch
of mirrored glass
lonely

30th St. Station
tan square stoic
Art Deco Ionic columns
at its vanguard
disrupt the taxi line
and rushing commuters

the tangle of tracks,
looks complicated
but in fact is well planned
and simple
a Rubik's cube of steel
laid out on dirt and chipped stone

pigeon lands on
suspended traffic signal
turns its body
and white

gobs

pour from its cloaca

spatter

on the sidewalk
a lactic starburst
Beyond the station
past the painted
train track overpass
endorsed
in blue and gold
DREXEL UNIVERSITY

looms a beige building
always quiet—
the sign says “Bennett S. Lebow
Engineering Center”
but I’ve never seen
anyone enter or leave.

On 32nd Street
an apartment strip

SUVs and sports cars
scattered—parked
across double yellow lines
and solid whites, crooked
up on sidewalks and lawns,
traffic rolls around the mess—

two police cars behind,
plus the poignant smell of pot
escapes the wide
open apartment door
and it starts to make sense

Three officers,
dark blue windbreaker
"STRIKE FORCE" jackets,
stand guard while a fourth
frisks his victim.
 "Do you have any weapons?
 Knives? Firearms?"

The man, bald by razorblade,
stubble on cheeks and skull
shakes his head—
 looks as though
 he just woke up.

 "Are you in possession of
 any illegal substances?"

The question seems moot:
 "Marijuana? Cocaine?"

 Another man
led out from an open
apartment door
cuffed—
 muscle-T tinged yellow and
 skin sunburned to a deep red—
 flashes against afternoon glare
 like hazard lights.



South



South Street!
5th and South
where people go to
WAKE UP at night

where Johnny Rockets, in all its malt shop glory,
is always open
(the Original Hamburger!)

and tourists rumble through the
hazard cone lined streets

traffic is too scared
to dare cross

people rush
behind the constant
bump bump bump bumpa
bump bump
dance beats
that rush from the storefronts
and nightclubs—

flowery women
share their astonishment
for the world.

“Oh my God!”
“Right?”
“Who does that kind of thing?”

restaurants lined with
hungry shoppers, who
eat Baja meals and
drink Piña Coladas by Tiki torch light

T-Mobiles, GameStops
and a buzzing Dairy Queen
an empire of packaged products:

cell phones video cards cookies and cream
soft serve running shoes fancy hats designer
shirts designer jewelry designer hosiery
designer condoms

Condom Kingdom looms
between 4th and 5th:
only the bravest souls enter
guided by the rainbow colored
painted sperm cells on the ground

Head south on 5th;
yes, south,
no tourists walk here-
off the safe path

past the sideshow stores
and alternative foods:

Ernesto's Clothier
and Golden Empress Garden—CLOSED
Too late for a Saturday?

5th and Bainbridge—
the din fades.

Soft shoe step behind?

Outside the Coquette
Bistro and Raw Bar
in the candlelit sidewalk seats,
an old, flaccid couple—
 sharp tailored,
 dainty table manners,
faces a warm
yellow glow—
think on life and
cut quietly,
just the light scrape
stainless steel on porcelain,
into thick, double-butterflied
chops of pork

(maybe harvested in Cloverfield,
where Philadelphia siphons off its
meats and cheeses—

the captive pigs and cows
seem happy as they roll
through dirt and soil baths
to cleanse their itches,
like belly-up fish)

Here the burden of 5th Street
becomes clear:

 down the road
from the Bistro
a ragged man
 thick with grime
 yellowed teeth and eyes
 steeped in his own urine
 rests on the bench
 across the Y-intersection—

the couple sees him,
the worlds meet

and sift between
like collided galaxies

Passyunk	Old
Bainbridge	Rich
5th Street	Poor

Should I stare?
Why do they let him linger?
Take action: Either feed him
or shoo him away.

I pass on.

5th and Fitz,
tree-lined,
street light sheds
a modest orange on the leaves,
would be quaint,
if only it weren't for the

dumpsters
recycling bins—banana reek wafts from them
air conditioner pocked facility
housed in a brown brick
and wrought iron shell:
Meredith Elementary School

decked out kid— half-goth half-gansta,
chains dangled from thick vinyl pants
with neon green stitches
and a sideways Phillies cap,
round gold 59Fifty sticker still fresh on the bill—

shuffles down 5th like his leg is broken
He walks in the street
methodically between the cars

bobs his head
dark frizzy curls pressed against
the plastic headphones divider:
his phones
blast a thick
beat that drops along to his sway a

beat that drops along to his sway

black and gray metallic
garage doors attach to
stoop-less houses
they pour their light
right onto the sidewalk

(beat that drops along to his sway)

the neighborhood so cramped
that even the alleys have become
their own streets,
doors unlatch into tight darkness—
paved corridors—
Do people squirm by undetected here?

Old lady in dingy sundress
waters the tropical weeds
that infest the cracks in her
plaster wall,

the side of her home,

How is she not chilly?
She sings softly in Spanish.

Adios, o Virgen de Guadalupe.
Adios, o Madre del Salvador.

Past Catherine and Queen,
barred up houses and shops,
no visitors welcome in this place.

By the "NO Thru Trucks"
sign at 4th and Christian
I wait to catch a Rte. 57.

Shadowy man in heavy jacket
stands by iron bar gate that warps
around empty parking lot—
long draped fabric covers his hands.

Mister Softee ice cream truck
turns corner, disregards the signs,
headlight glare

the tires roll slow
predatory

Above power lines criss-cross
in space at the intersection,
blueblack ink clouds skirt
across stars, light specks
washed dim from the
rusted street lamp glow

Christian
Religion?

Catherine

Queen

The hard Cs and Qs and
Rose Garden Chinese Food place—
Have I been here before?—
and long jacket man
melt away into the white noise
of the bus as it brakes before me

Inside, heavy gansta rap,
a gray boombox nestled
in the corner behind a seat
and the back wheel

(boom boom)
(boom boom)

its red-eyed owner twists the knobs

The nighttime bus crowd
has their own language,
a series of grunts
for the weary,
laughs for the high—

some combine them
for more variety

There's always more variety

"I'm allergic mold and pollen
and when I get round
them things, man—!"

North



Three-day? Maybe three-day-old

dogshits
hardened in smooth, textured shells
liked cooled Pāhoehoe on the damp sidewalk

these splotches of rainwater,
expressions of an April swell

ease away into the
rough scent of
mold and asphalt

An unknown complex, boxy,
rigid, square, cubed—
did the architect struggle
with the normalcy?—
outburst of plate glass
from the 12th street side
flushes with the corner

across the street a brown building
hunches, more chunked in design
with modern angles and gray plaque
“College of Engineering:
Temple Architectural Program.”

Breezy would not be the word—
throttle—
yes, throttled by the wind
I edge with caution down
12th street past Norris.

In the chain-link
fence bound
parking lot

a little girl
plays hopscotch
hair wound tight
thick braids
branched out
in all directions

bright colored
butterflies
snapped closed
on the dark frizz
keep the braids bound

throws her stone—
a shard of rock
from the North Broad
train tracks:

One

12th and Diamond
bright red paint facades
mask the struggling structure’s
faulty sway

Two

Three

left side collapsed—
postmortem of sand
powdered rock stone
wood dust plastic debris
from the gash
in the buildings

Four

Rte. 23 pulls up
against my
right of way—

Five

Six

I barely hear
the mechanized voice
greet in the open air
the people that depart

“Welcome to
Route
Twenty-Three
Service To
South Philadelphia
via Germantown
Avenue
and
Twelfth Street”—

Eight

Nine

Mother and son escape the sweat
of the machine that growls away
behind us

he squirms
resists against the pull of her arm—

Ten

settles and stares at me:
deep, vacant eyes
almond
an intense, knowing stare

Eight

Nine

amidst thick curls of hair

and dirty scabs he's picked—
his mother slaps him

Seven

his teeth part
he whines, loud—
no crying
(he's been hit before,
so much so he's immune)

mustard stain
on his chin
on his dark blue shirt

Five

Six

12th and Susquehanna
corner convenience store lingers,
roof propped up with center pillar—
dull blue gray paint chipped
and soured away by rain and termites—

bright red and white sign looks new:
FOOD Base
Right Where You Live
feels like the store is spying on you

Four

Abandoned pool,
filled but unused,
waits barricaded inside
a tall rusted chain fence
(a sunny enough day, but so much wind!)
poolhouse windows shattered
and bricks spray painted in colorful
gang symbols,
a mural of feuds.

Two

Three

12th and Colona.
The mechanical hubbub of the bus and
chattering of people,
long gone.
Distant sounds reach me,
far off motorcycles,
sparrows that pop out
their calls over the quiet.

One

the homes are stumped,
squarebottom brick teepees
drawn back from the road
by brown patches of lawn

wrought iron bars surround the patios—
even protection can be beautiful

Out of a low project
house tumbles an
androgynous elder,
hair in loose gray
curls,
 dusts off a blue fleece
 sweater to its zip-up
 collar—

How can I feel for you
when you look so smug?
Squinted eyes against
the high midday glare,
he holds up something
to me as I pass,

 A bottle. Glass. Whiskey. Tips. Pours.
Wipes mouth with sleeve. Walks inside.

It's only then I realize—
 no pants.

I turn down Dauphin St.,
escape other eyes from the patios.

Dauphin, past empty grass lots
where condom wrappers
and razorblades meet,
past the boarded up pharmacy
POSTED – KEEP OUT
past Torres' Mini Mart
where people pick up
in throngs—they limp
from place to place.

Crazed ladies step out of the store,
flip through plastic bags, rifle through
smushed bread and soured milk

Notably segregated—
there are four degrees:

1. Chalked up to chance.

“Don’t buy any more pocka-books!”

2. Others force it.

“I’m a pocka-booka-holic!”

3. By choice (retain the last shreds of faith).

“You bringin’ Kristie n’ Karen?”

4. Reality is so strong, it is no longer questioned.

A fleet of kids
speeds by on bikes
not watching
where they’re going
 quick pulse and click
 of spun bike chains
 against steel sprockets
Extra-Large T-Shirts flap
behind them like flags
in the wind they create

they turn on Broad;
I’m close now.
13th and Cumberland—

By the steel rails,
at North Broad
where Ruby—
the hopscotch girl
who may be named
something else, but
I have named her Ruby—
perhaps picked up
her shard of rock,

East



Wait on the solid amber hand

the boxy yellow
traffic signal

does it obstruct the traffic?

Here, Center,
a masonry tower

City Hall
whitewashed stone carved
flat and round—

now sleek pillared stone
once rough native rock—
circles
fans out
pumices the cross streets into right angles

Penn Square
Juniper Street
swallows cars
buses, bikes,
pedestrians
the hundred daily thousands
into Borders Quizznos
the Happy Jeweler
green newspaper machines
glass and concrete office facades

a man in deep slick black
suit flares by
“Excuse me, excuse me”
clap clap clap clap
of his dress shoes
sporadic as he dodges
between the stationary throng
at the corner

Bronze Billy Penn
at the stone summit,
alloyed eyes
watch
he grasps his treaty,
signed in Lenape love,
hand extends

over Philadelphia,
Shackamaxon,
anoints

bless you
bless you

Juniper and Market
KYW
News Radio
1060
partly cloudy, 34 degrees
thru blasted speakers
of a scratched blue Ford Focus

in the gray traffic box
on the gray pole
a sound like coins
slipping into a vending machine

Solid amber hand gone
Solid white fellow appears

Walk

people

spring

engulf and pass
flow and bend

brush me away

as a river to rocks

knowing

it will outlast

any impediment

a pressure change
at my feet between asphalt
and thick iron manhole cover

Booted feet follow on sidewalk,
pressing thru
just a few layers
where snow
accumulates

the top half
of a boot print
forms in a patch of snow

little hexagons
imprint into valleys and plateaus
from cold rubber molding

Slushing thru
unkempt sidewalk:
two kinds of people:
those who create filth
those who avoid it—

They rarely meet but when they do BOOM

No one on this street
holds a sign that says
THE END IS NEAR

they all seem to know
the end is near

It doesn't win them any money

Below the sidewalk grates the EI runs
with the comfortable smells of home:
electric smoke urine steam sandwich

below ground
Suburban Station
by the hallway
to the EI tracks
seven men:

glass eye, with paper cups, three sizes
missing arm, toothless bongo drummer
greasy sneak, oily throwaway work clothes
solemn, legless vet, blues guitar
harmonica player, bandaged always on crutches
ringleader in thick Phillies jacket, lays by the coins—

shares the pocket change
of their talents
(it's not my problem)

sometimes
they sit, fermenting
on wide sheets
of cheesecloth
hats upturned
soft fabric clinking

occasionally
in floats a \$1
and a scramble
ensues—
they stare down
Suburban Station marble corridors

at my beat up briefcase
handle starting to feel sticky
from my sweat

Mount
the damp lime
stairs
I must exhume
and catch up
to my material body
blocks ahead

round Walnut stage exit
where fancy people gather
waiting for a leading lady
feather boas and scarves
thick suede
cashmere coats
sartorial perfection
ladies mapped in thick
creased makeup
“Yes, her performance
hardly makes up for the rest—”
“True, a bit jejune.”
strangling the nearby patient, parked limousine.

The doors fly open and yes!
the polite claps begin
Ms. Actress walking easy outside
dressed in a light coat and tights
the glass door behind clamps shut
she strolls to the clapping crowd
takes a pen from her cleavage
and signs slips of paper

Down the sidewalk,
pressed into a gap
between modern
boxy marble columns
a sleek office building
Jefferson Hospital for Neuroscience
an old man,
sooty and ashy skin shining
dirt and grease
pale whiskers stained yellow,
buried in fluffy, army green

bomber jacket and plaid cap,
jangles paper coffee cup of change
deep yellow mucus in his eyes,

“Baby” he sings, bluesy, “Baby, baby!”
“she kissed me once. But now she hurts me so!”

I must watch my signals
watch where I’m going
almost slammed into
Washington Square
Old City
concrete paths plow thru
to the central fountain
 pigeons and sparrows
 diving between cooper and concrete
 for an unknown morsel
 at a lurching woman’s feet

children play along the stone circle
 plastic wheels from toy cars
 grinding the edge
 army men plunge
 into the fantastic empty lake

two college girls
bundled in coats
read quietly on wooden benches
quotidian

high above the fountain
if I could see it
 like I hope some aliens down south
 retouching the Nazca lines
 can see it

the X-marks-the-spot crossroads
from the paths
saying “Dig Here!”

beneath the concrete
and mounds of grass:

beetles
apple cores
crumpled paper

soggy earth
clay
wing bones
old pennies
broken glass
empty bags of feed
tupperware
rings
veiny roots
shards of styrofoam
dogshit
cracked lantern boxes
horseshoes
nightcrawlers
plastic bags
hundreds of bodies
(yellow fever victims)
used needles
fingernail clippings
credit cards
water bottles
feathers
cigarette butts
flattened ointment tubes
ID cards
bullets
silt

the list rolls thru
my mind past

I have forgotten
what I am doing

classy wrought iron
table and chairs
 hazarding the sidewalk

the restaurant district
brief global compass
where Red Sky and Mizu
meet Mediterranean and Pizzicato
Jim's and Pat's like the poles

Lights on
Ben Franklin Bridge
boats beneath
splintering rose and gold
sunset
meshed among the concrete
Camden towers



About the author

Daniel Schall is the Director of the Writing Center at Arcadia University near Philadelphia, PA. He has had poems published in *Parody*, *Moria Poetry Journal*, *Cactus Heart Press* and *Right Hand Pointing*.