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OFF THE TRACKS

TEJU COLE: BLIND SPOT

By Simon Sweetman, February 26, 2018



Award-winning novelist, essayist and journalist Teju Cole here provides an innovative, masterful meditation on the way we see things; the relationship/s between words and images. *Blind Spot* is all at once a set of micro-essays, a photography book, a travel diary and yet it transcends all – stands on its own, is something altogether different by being the sum of those separate vestiges and experiences.

It's also the development of existing themes in Cole's writing. His novel *Open City* hinges on a psychiatric resident taking long walks around New York, thinking, listening, observing...

Some of *Blind Spot*'s photos and text-extracts come directly from ideas he's already explored, at other times he's extrapolating on the down-time photo-essays, shots taken to fill the void when travelling as a writer, candid snaps out hotel windows or close up studies of people, monuments.

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Blind Spot is a riddle. It's a magic box.

One worthy reading of this would be simply to write down all of the places you'd never previously heard of and look them up.

Another fascinating aspect is that the eye alternates between the text and image, the brain wondering which is the informer – Cole's text hard is sometimes the springboard, we return to the image to look at it again after considering the words. Oftentimes it would seem the image was the springboard, the precis-sketch of writing, sometimes just a couple of lines, usually just a paragraph (or two), takes the photograph as a starting point then runs off to see how far it can get on a limited word-count.

Blind Spot is a celebration of photography, a celebration of words. And yet, beautifully, no attempt has been made to explain the magic. It hangs there. Powerful, glorious, resplendent.