

EXCERPT, NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Confluence: Stream Science, Handwriting, and Urban Curbs

a poem for Reno, Nevada © Todd Gilens, 2023

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RVR1, from the corner of Booth Street and River Drive to the Keystone overpass

Patience waits in the pores of places, a mist in moods that vary, saturate, a river flowing cold and bright, or paused, with water quiet and cobbles warmed by the sun, dry mats of algae and willow roots burrowed deep in gravel underground. Or maybe snow and ice thicken the edge, flow frozen as snowflakes pile and, in heaps, compress with each new storm. Dressed-up white, the mountains mock the clouds, clouds grounded in their passing paused, till temperatures rise and seasons speed them on their way, charged by sun and rain and gravity, worn to soggy mounds, water making for the soil's dark uncanny crevices underground – those sponge-like reservoirs of cold and constant chemistry that hide below the seasons and soften weather's resolute uncertainty. As snowing turns to rain and mountains shed their coats, what quantity of water is too much, too quick, and what is just enough to share, for soil to absorb, to hold within its folds. But how are we to know how much water really is in snow, and how much air between – how much will make its way to rivers, aquifers, and streams. Drips form on leaves and glide down rumpled trunks, broad wiggles of light arc across meadows, murmur, tinkle, and cascade. In longer days of brighter light, the melting snow and storms carry what's upstream down, and leaves that winter decomposed are rearranged in spring's profound commotion. Or months of heat and little rain, the haste of spring is changed to ease; freshets dry and water settles quietly at dams and lakes while sunlight warms the glides and braids, temperatures rise, and leaves unfold to cool and shade the pools. And pools warm as water slows, shrink and shallow the less it flows, till pools dry, or lie as refuges in dusty stretches of rock, and life may wait between, below, sheltered in gravel, silt, and darkness: Aestivation, the name for a vacation from summer desiccation. Or it's concrete sidewalks, gutters, taking rain to pipes and out to streams again, while dams hold water's weight for gravity and turbines to add energy to the day – our own delay of where and how, and when, water is to play. Year on year, varying through seasons and elevation, everything about a stream shape-shifts through expressions. Movement and pause, like waking and rest, streams evaporate, or flood, or ebb across the boundaries of the rest, persist through decades of land creep, fires, and shifting crustal plates – or dry and flow no more, a fossil of their flow preserved in rock. Such layered patterns in silver, beige, embroidery and change, whose length and moving cycles must remain essential to the whole, are with us here in ways we barely guess but even still may know.