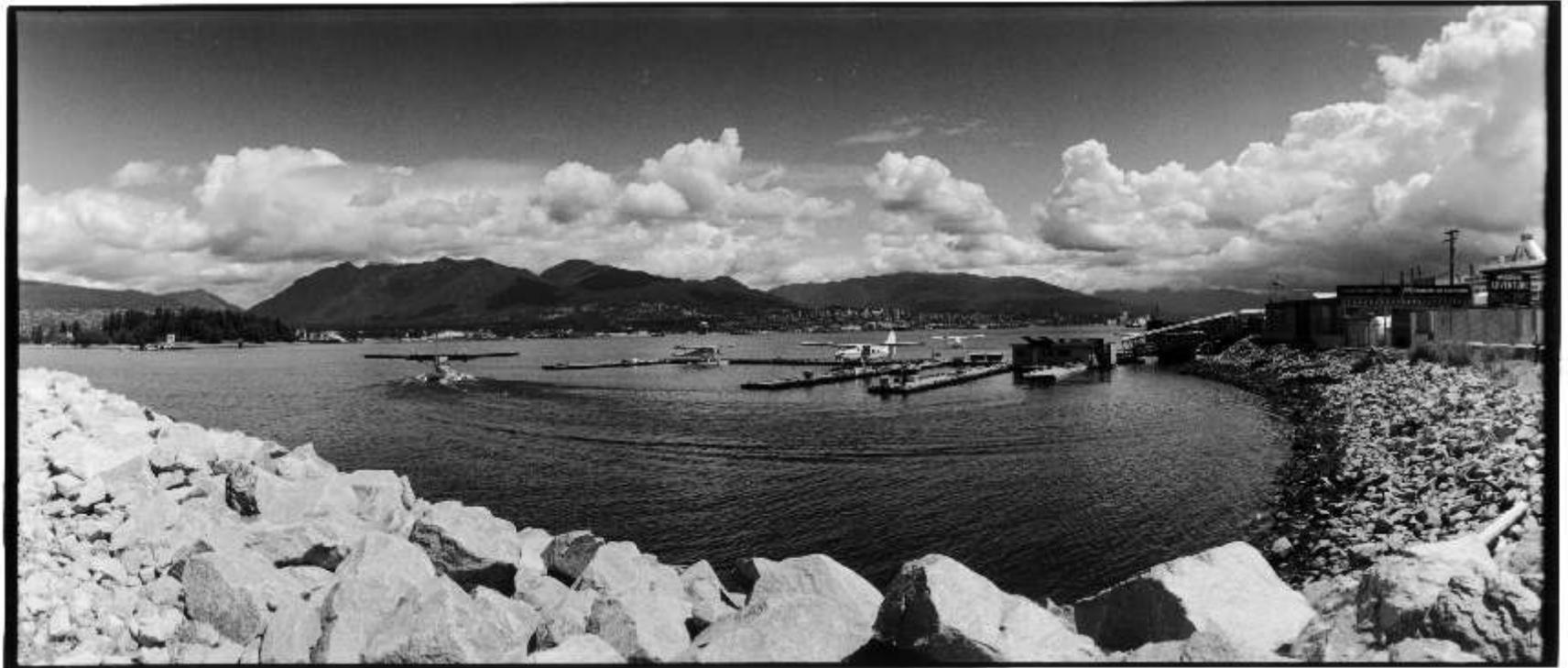


CITY PASTORAL

The Public Photography
of Goran Basaric





When Goran Basaric first encountered the public spaces of Vancouver (in 1978, when he emigrated from Yugoslavia with his wife), he remembered the pictures he used to look at on the trains that took him to the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia when he was a child, and every year his parents would send him with other skinny kids (as he tells it) to summer camp, where his health would be improved by the salubrious coastal air. The train left Belgrade in the evening, so it was dark outside, and the photographs on the walls of the coaches were the only thing to look at. They were black-and-white scenic views of resorts and tourist destinations: seascapes, castles, monuments and forts, and they had deep skies filled with billowing white clouds; in the morning he would awaken to the smell of the seaside and the coastal vegetation and the low warm sun burning in from the east. It was a magical time, and he was recalled to it by a certain extravagance of the scene in

Vancouver when he went with his infant son to walk in the parks in the late afternoon; he could feel the nearness of the ocean of that time long ago, and a sense of a slightly ludicrous juxtaposition of the two coastal places. He was a photographer, and so it was natural for him to consider the appearances that put him in such a mindful state: the wide-angle spread of foliage and low sky, the great embrace of late-day shadows in the northern light (an embrace in which his own silhouette was to be found, outlined in light), and the autonomous demeanour of the people who inhabit or rather are to be seen passing through those spaces: wedding couples, skateboarders, cyclists, runners, strollers, teenagers and children: all more or less oblivious to each other, acting out their leisure scripts in worlds of their own. This apparent unconcern that people displayed toward each other seemed to him to be particularly Canadian. He began to see the world in these rather grand public





spaces, themselves only half-seen, as a staging ground for private lives, coloured by a distant note of the ludicrous. Everything was connected by juxtaposition and perhaps little else.

He had brought with him from Yugoslavia a Russian panoramic camera with a moving lens that embraced an angle of view close to that of normal vision; a friend gave him four hundred feet of stale-dated movie film and he set out with the camera to encounter these spaces as he went walking with his son in the afternoons after work (he had a job in a portrait studio). As he tells the story now, the wide angle of the camera tended to reduce things in the distance that might be felt to be looming in reality, and it tended to overstate things nearby. This interaction between foreground and background became the subject of a formal study that eventually led him to a photography that combines the bucolic and the urban, the private and the public; a

photography imbued with the dreamlike quality of worlds of leisure, of fleecy clouds and long shadows informed by memories of childhoods in distant places, exuberant juxtapositions and the promise of serendipity at every glance.

Early writers on photography made the claim that the camera enabled Nature not only to imitate Art, but to imitate the Artist, a claim that was largely abandoned in the late twentieth century. These photographs by Goran Basaric, which seem as much to be given as to be taken or made, remind us of that early claim: in these images the world itself seems to render its own appearance.

—Mandelbrot

