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The View from U.S. 131

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I.
At first glance
zipping past at seventy
the sight is ludicrous:
below the bank of the freeway
a gouged space
scraped grassless
as the Sahara
treeless as the Dakotas
crisscrossed by lanes
plotted out in oblong lots
as geometric and puzzling
under a staring sun
as Stonehenge.

II.
First sidelong glance reveals
site of an ancient vanished race:
city picked up brick and board
by fastidious finger and thumb
of curious archeologist
leaving no pimple of compost heap
or rusting machines
or burial mounds
or scattered bones.

III.
In a week
second glance discloses
no ruins of the past
but city on the make:
a dozen mobile homes
tugged and wrestled in
lie helpless as beached whales
staring glassy up at traffic
dreaming of mobility
flow and flux
blinking up white and silver
from grassless plots.

IV.
In months
they fill the valley
and spread along
the freeway bank
like any river town
that grows and thrives
on what washes and feeds it.

V.
And now
zipping past at seventy:
metropolis of shining rooftops
braving treeless still a cruel noon sun
quick glance is full of wonder now:
what current feeds this city
sustains this steel and flesh?

VI.
A little cloud of blue exhaust
prophesies rain by day:
by night the tires on wet concrete
sing to a dreamless
mobile sleepless tossing
unreal city
awaiting the ultimate tossing
rumbling reverberating
of steel on steel
to rumble into reality
this transient rootless flesh
with shock and pain and loss
of inexorable last exits.
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