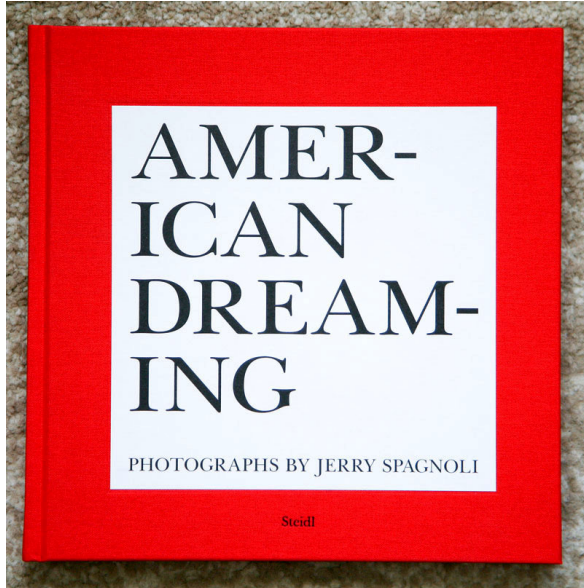


August 5, 2013

Jerry Spagnoli - American Dreaming



Jerry Spagnoli's second photobook "American Dreaming" is a cryptic, layered and complex book, which in the wake of the recent NSA operational leaks from Edward Snowden, this book now appears almost prophetic. The subject of Spagnoli's book is the years of the Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm), although not focused on the events of the war occurring in the Gulf but to the subtle changes to the social fabric within the United States.

The images within the book are literally layered, with one, two or more photographs juxtaposed on top of a background photograph. The resulting layout and design

make for an interesting read as the foreground and background photographs create a complex tension, pushing and pulling the narrative. The grainy black and white photographs are themselves metaphors, representing the grains of sand on which the Gulf war was being waged (the back story). The tight cropping of his subjects is reminiscent of the earlier photographic work of Ralph Gibson who also investigated allegorical and emotionally symbolic concepts.

Intertwined through his book, sometimes subtle, perhaps at times a little more explicit, is a narrative of surveillance; unknown individuals on the edges who are observing and watching. These individuals appear as indistinct and faceless individuals who lurk in the gray midst and fog, a metaphor for the ghosts or spooks of the government spies and their shadow organizations. The grainy photographs can also visual represent white noise, a form of background static made by electronic instruments. It is said that lurking in the white noise is where the electronic eavesdropping, another form of surveillance, which Snowden has recently brought to light, may occur.

The flip side of Spagnoli's surveillance narrative is a critical viewpoint of society, which seems to be in a dream land state, seemingly unaware of the changes unfolding about them. Like the birds of the air, the culture flocks from one point and place to another, seemingly free, but by their own actions, limited in their perception of reality.

In my initial pre-Snowden revelation read of this book, I thought it to have an overly dark and pessimistic viewpoint, but now I am not so sure any more.

As a book object, it is cloth bound with tipped in image and with the sewn binding, it lays relatively flat for an enjoyable read. The book design is by Jerry Spagnoli and does not contain an essay, captions or pagination.

