



Lights of the City

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Commentary

Just for fun, let's count. This portfolio is titled *Lights of the City* — how many sources of light can be identified in this photograph? Secondly, how many different kinds of light can be identified?

Unsaid in these questions is an even more fundamental query — What is the structure? I suspect a goodly number of you immediately identified it as the Eiffel Tower in Paris. I would also suspect there would be a number of you who failed to identify it. Why? Quite simply, this is not the iconic image of the famous structure we are used to seeing. Without its spire and peak, it no doubt fails to meet the criteria of any good tourist shot. Regardless, a marvelous photograph this is — in spite of its breaking the tourist rules.

There are four things that particularly strike me about this image that I'd like to point out. First, the beautiful illumination of these backlit trees with such a wonderful sprinkling of light around the base of the tower! We immediately know this is dusk. Without that knowledge, the rest of the image might not make sense. However, with that knowledge, the dark tones of the tower read perfectly normal. If you didn't know this was dusk you might be tempted to think this image is simply printed to dark, or erroneously underexposed. Then there are those angular search lights that crisscross the sky like the structural beams of the tower itself. And finally, the not-quite-black of the shadows — again

giving us the mood of dusk rather than the black of night.

And there is one other thing that comes to mind — where are the people? As a photographer, I might expect them to be missing if the exposure were a long one, but the search lights would seem to lead us into believing it was a short shutter speed. Perhaps everyone is in the café drinking fine wine and smoking French cigarettes, who knows? It's always odd to me when a street scene is vacant because I simply cannot believe the emptiness of the normally crowded city. In this case, however, there is an air of mystery about this that leads me to a most unexpected thought: it's those search lights again that spark the mood of a WWII, desolate street during an air raid. Perhaps this is just me, but I do get that sense from the photograph whether or not the photographer intended it. I can almost hear a melancholy 1940s ballad sung by some sultry French ingénue in the basement of the shelter. But then again, that's probably just me. It is the mood of the image that is compelling, not its architectural details or the fame of the tower itself. When a photograph had *mood*, it tends to impart *emotions* — and that is one of the highest accomplishments a monochromatic, two-dimensional art medium can accomplish.