

We stare at ocean waves, get mesmerized by fire, gaze on mountains, and trace the silver lining of fancy clouds as if God left there calligraphic answers to questions we feel awkward to ask of other people, like “When are you going to get married?” or “Does your job pay well?”

Why do we love watching the elements?

Simple, I guess. While any of the elements in too much quantity is deadly, life is impossible without any one of them. We love watching them as long as we are in control, just as we crowd around tigers in a cage, and tend to run away when meeting them in person under less restricted circumstances for the dangerous species.

Water is especially...interesting. Air or fire are always the same except for pollution levels and intensity. Earth, as an element, offers a degree of variation, of course, but ultimately it is the proverbial dust from which Nature (or physics) builds everything from sand particles to mountain ridges. Water is more...fluid. It freezes into ice or evaporates; it stands still, runs or crushes its waves against the shore. It seems to have a temperament that it passes over to the spectator: a beach bum in Thailand is very different from its lake counterpart in Switzerland; an Eskimo skiing through tundra and a Courchevel vacationer are two worlds apart.

Water is life beyond its literal sense. A Buddhist monk will use water to illustrate soul immortality: he will break the cup holding it, explaining that when the body (the cup) is smashed into pieces, the soul (water inside it) is still there, albeit in a changed form.

An atheist may rebuff the Buddhist metaphor by pointing out water ultimately evaporates until there's no water.

Which the Buddhist monk would perhaps counteract by noting that any water we drink has already been drunk at some point of its molecular history, and it's the transformation of evaporation that makes it possible.

Unless you are a chemistry teacher or a swamp enthusiast, you are bound to notice evaporation more often in its metaphorical meaning. Your anger boils and evaporates. People evaporate from your life to condense into dew on someone else's Facebook page. Happy and sad moments sparkle, twinkle and dissipate into the mist of memories. And ultimately, we evaporate too, hoping next time we liquefy in a smarter life-form.

All these evaporations make life what it is, an improbable combination of zillions of soulless atoms unaware and uncaring of each other's existence.

[Evaporations](#) is also a book. An album of photographs by John R Pepper, who is more of a graphic artist employing a camera rather than a pencil to make his images. And just as water can be about life, death, and everything in-between, *Evaporations* is a book of life moments that make up life, but tend to evaporate as life goes on. John is exclusively black and white, and grainy, at that. If photography is about capturing a moment in life, John's art is about delivering it to you well-peppered to accentuate its taste. Because if a moment is bound to evaporate, let it be at least a moment of truth, when your thoughts are jolted into travelling beyond the boundaries

of that split second of time that we call a “moment”. This is also why his photographs come undated, and without a place reference. These photographs are not meant to illustrate someone else’s life, they are intended to make the observer think of his own.

**Kirill Petrin**