

DEAD IN MY TRACKS
(a poetic diary)

by

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ROUGH DRAFT FOR
CLASSROOM USE ONLY

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For
Mar / '90

A cowbird flits among the rocks in a creek.
 One day the cowbird follows the hikers down the
 trail to a waterfall.
 Far down the valley a chainsaw whines.
 The bird waits for stragglers, then swoops from tree
 to tree.
 Raindrops like crystals sparkle as they fall from
 the fir boughs.
 Suddenly, the bird disappears.
 That night some of the creeks disappear.
 Winter.

August 4/89, Friday

This last day we hike up to the col between Peto
 and Mistaya but get caught in a cold mist/fog.
 Just behind the gauze the oval of the sun teases.
 The cover didn't break so we didn't go further
 than the snow field. We spend the rest of the day
 circumnavigating the head of the valley and
 several glacial lips up and down and home and
 that's eight and a half hours to a spaghetti dinner
 and the sky lifting to a blue evening.

Now nearly 9 o'clock and the mosquitoes, after days of rain, are up for it.

Out of the corner of my eye more rocks. And out
 an ear I hear a few birds sing their particular
 song, not solitary: the creek rushes and gurgles
 down to the valley below. In a corner of my mind
 is tomorrow's two and half hour hike out to the
 trailhead and then the long drive home.

clear stingin' peaks
 rock green moss
 surface
 inked
 same shards here
 same square
 network"
 a "percolation
 five lines,
 five soldiers a line
 duende stone
 thana-stone

Saturday, July 29/89

Oh morning!

Golden.

West of Golden we left the trans-Canada and drove north about 60 k up Blaeberry River past Doubt Hill. We can see south to Howes Pass from the chopper site, the long sweep of valley brilliant in a pillowed mid-summer haze. An hour's spent wrapping the cars and trucks in chicken wire; old paranoid visions of the imaginary porker chewing our tires and rad hoses. Camp's just west, a short swirl and plop up Wildcat Creek, on the west slope facing east to the continental divide on the the BC/Alberta ridgeline.

Ringed by glaciers as usual. Ayesha, Baker, Parapet.

While we set up camp this afternoon:

My Borders are Altitude

and silent

a pawprint's cosine
with climate from the lake to the treeline
all that under foot at the edges cruddy summer
snow melt
wet soft twig and bough-sprung alpine fir
more than this
height is my pepper (China
don't
do it.) Now

(broken breaths contour interval at the
next 100 feet and then the sky-
remembered night on the plateau above
the Qu'appele oh stars what solitude that
blue line and flight or weight the inverse
holds me shoulder-to-shoulder my
clouds as alpine meadows Newton would
have cut yet later minds find bandwidth
in such *topos*-parabola chaos around the
earth house

stone under heathered turf
back bent as I dig and ruffle sacrum
drawn to the music
a slow and daily curve of elevation
is this numbered boundary nowhere, I'm
close to 7000 here
the border's thin
yesterday's Tiananmen still now
vibrates along my spine, my legs
go up and down.

Sunday, July 30

We hike east across the valley toward Mistaya Mountain as far as a scree slope on the south side of something too massive for the first day out.

Each rock is vectored through to the height of my stomach. Each singular surface impossible to avoid. I stop and stare, stop and stare, at the rivers of limestone, sawtooth schist embedded, pinks of molten sunset. But at this rate such a day's hike would take many lifetimes.

No animals, no print, no scat. (Goat tracks now to be sure.)

No sky-mirrored glacial swimming holes today.

No fresh water. Heather very dry. Bees buzz. Butterflies.

At the bottom of a scree slope waiting for the others.

death in the warm night so far away
might be the simplest equation
for the headwaters
and now the sun decreases
the friction. Fingers
of my right hand trace
a band of quartz. My eyes sink
under the brim.

Monday, the 31st

Today we climb the same side of the valley as yesterday. But now we've taken a keep-more-to-the-left route to a neck or col between Alberta and BC below Mistaya. Lunch beside a snowpatch lake.

when deconstructing rock
hold back the crude and the harsh
or take "reality" for simple's sake
the sun
a country of such a size as China
is only another scheme for hunger and
competition
fingers poked wet into the mud of a rice paddy
rumours, the same large-spun sky here
in the thin air and during the long winter
quartz grows with the sparkle of a bridge
every stone on this mountain clicks
some old biotic tumbler locked then
unlocked

After lunch drowsiness sets in under the warmth of the sun; no birds sing; all around us the glacier rivers roar under such heat.

shale shard weep shard shale weep shale weep
shard shale weep shale weep shard shard weep
shale shard weep shale weep weep shhh

Those rocks this morning on the way up, they looked back with all sorts of signs and messages. So I wandered around in a meander and kind of grilled each striated spot for information, news of the conglomerate earth

or

ee

ent

How wonderful to be able to go right for the source. The day feels real hard-core.

The others' words around me buzz, fall like horseflies.

Alberta looks busy from this side;
Jasper/Banff those new equations to satisfy hunger. Sky-line jet-tracked.

ent

re. Pren

eur. Prende

I look at the wooden handle of an ice ax stuck in the snow: "When making an ax handle," the pattern is occasionally too far off.

snow pond fed by two large drifts vectored off of

morraine.

no real fish.

the Beijing hotline surfaces and then sinks at news of saddest killing.

deep, like a floating thermostat.

deep, like a disappearing hook.

baited.

Tuesday, August 1

I didn't sleep very well last night because I had to get up as breakfast helper this morning — fretted about the alarm on my wrist-watch being loud enough. And so, now mid-afternoon, sit on a slope above "crystal gardens" on the cool (windy) side of a grassy knoll tired and lulled by the rush of waterfall across the valley and above this alleyway that led us here full of quartz crystal treasures dangled and hidden for years we poke under little rock ledges.

It's so quiet here. Light breeze to keep the horseflies down. I glass a snow-slope for yesterday's tracks, but they've melted out. Pan back to a blurry knoll of purple yellow red pink and white on green with songs (I Don't Want a Sickle) that I can't get out of my head and there're the others, Pauline reading her flower book.

Small thunderstorm coming round Trapper Peak should force us down the hill while on this beared-over gopher-searching mountainside I linger, can't keep my eyes off the rock outcrops surging to not so much arrest myself in all this "otherness" as greedily scour the dripping quartz for crystal jewels for my daughters.

Hand-held Pictogram

from above Wildcat rockscape of old Renaissance bullet hole or navel with tracks going out the sides a type of Malthusian linear function along the aisles of a Saturday afternoon matinee forever pocked with edge and gouged embedded pebble from distant beach a cracked and weathered map of textured tilt propellor hummed out from omphallic sedimentary lint enough to tell story's history warped high enough in the diurnal headlines from Beijing and Shanghai so that a geologist imagining fake fish in a fake lake scrapes around the edges for shrapnel but me I think in my own mittened photos of the life look out of and far away from these threads through the hole to continue the prospect beyond impact of landing very hard fast and past the anima button.

New moon tonight.

Wednesday

Wet day. Drizzle started last night after days of heat. The snow-line is about 8500 feet this morning. Very cool all day, off and on rain and sleet, some hail. No respite tonight so now I sit/lie in our tent at 9 pm still light enough to write. I've put on my toque and gloves. No thought. Just body.

A few of us walked up the valley on the other side of Wildcat Creek and crossed many feeder creeks and the glacier river at the head of the valley. I took off my pants and boots once. The water came up to just above the knees. I thought about crossing Toby moraine with my brother and Loki-dog so long ago and how that crossing, river just below the crotch, had rejuvenated bruised ligaments. This time my feet remain ice all day.

All these rocks. Constant mirror and presence in my eyes. More rocks than grains of sand in the whole world, I bet someone. Intricate pattern, surface, keeps stopping boot in pitch for eye to zoom. Sometimes I stop and try translating.

Scale of shale
jamb stone

Say that the face-lines travel,
time on the move.

When the square is empty
there is nothing to catch the eye.

Now this place, this tent
on the outside of a non-scaled phenomenon.

We'll see, Fred, he says
how was that language, to himself, the tree.

— the hillsides going by each day.
"with uncountable broken arms and legs floating..."

This ocean is a series of depths;
fields fold under, you can see them.

By forcing them into the centre of the square
the indelible occupies the heart until next time.

These "basins of attraction"
these grains, these fractal editions.

Night swoops very low
just a reminder.

Thursday, 8/3/89

This morning I sit in the tent and try to place this place as a play. But it's all stage. Nothing moves. A set set. There are the mist hackles huge, but no history. Uprising's silence just feels sad now.