

Doug Bolling

Terrain with Text

... on a forsaken road, moreover, where one keeps slipping
in the snow in the dark, a senseless road, moreover,
without an earthly goal . . .

Kafka, Diaries 1914-1923

30 November

We had set up a plan, a calculation of distances attached to times, such that a degree of confidence became us. There were the three of us, or two. Depending. I remembered how Maria laughed as we took the train northward into the mountains.

Believe in the journey she said over the brandy. But not too much.
We may get lost, may forget our names, the taxonomy of selves
each has compiled.

We'd met in Bordeaux at the Ecole, taken the Derrida seminar, shed many tropisms of a lagging culture, the accumulations dogging the cortex. Somewhere in Poitiers we became lovers. I'm fairly sure of it. How it rained that night. Wind through the narrow window of the small hotel. A virtual shrieking as of something gothic, a wuthering. Our small talk before the culminations.

All we really knew was we were heading east into the mountains.

We were going to leave vehicular transportation behind, take to our feet, let them lead onward or wherever. The question being who was in control: our plans or chance, some suddenness grabbing us, taking away all command & control.

I remember Maria, or Sanje as she preferred, I'm almost sure of this. We'd flown over from Jersey, spent a week in London then onward. They classified us as students but we weren't sure of how we stood in the flux. Somehow we got to the Bay of Biscay, lived on the beaches, became lovers.

Sanje was dubious. She'd forgotten my name, when we first met, or if we ever had.

The narrow path carried us into the woods below the bluffs. Our water bottles were empty. The prepackaged rations mostly gone. The sun hung just above us without mercy. The words we'd hoarded for years began to fall away, broken things lapsing into the wind and emptiness.

Of all my numerous personas Sanje whispered
none arrives to help me out of this.
I feel trapped between the vanished path behind
and the murk ahead. She stared my way as
though I were a blank wall.

Keep moving I managed to say not realizing
how we were stepping along a circle.
But who am I and how/why
I whispered.

24 November

How far we've gotten is unsure. The terrain strangely familiar then not. Carla saying she'd spotted a large beast on the crags above us. Perhaps a mountain lion she called out through the snarl of wind, the whipsaws of pebbles & grime smacking down on us. I am becoming ever more unsure she added. My contours, the shapes of a rationale.

It was then that Carl joined us. A lanky lad from Estonia he claimed. An outcast of the frenzy called modernity. Sojourner amid the rubble, the shards of old untruths.

I live in a cave a quarter mile upward he said with a surprising softness to the vowels, the edges of consonants.
Call me Carl he said. Call me Carlos
Call me Monsieur Karlo. Call me what you most need to.

I'm fleeing from my very own Cogito, the persistent monster claiming to own me, the entire damned world. I reached this place hoping to drown the thing, cut it into small obscene bits and be done.
I aspire only to dwell among shadows, attend the delicate music of their weightless motions, a dance without measure or calculation.

We welcomed him in, partook of the wine and Gouda located in his backpack. The night was long and slippery, a negation of the everyday world of sun, newspapers, malls, one automobile after another. Couldn't help but notice how Sanje seemed turned on by this guy.

Call me Carla call me Cara
call me Carlotta call me Carlos
she said to him. I feel a kinship growing inside me she added.
We are two but maybe we're
exotically one after all. Let
it begin she added.
Let something begin.

18 November

I began to sag a bit, the weakened knees
the ruptured disk. Each step a challenge
as though the fire might ravage. I
remember calling out to Maria:
don't abandon me here, carry me
along like the poems unread, still
warm but fading.

It's becoming clear that Carlotta
& Karl are heating up. They walk
always ahead, their words muffled,
small darts to my inner cosmos.
I tried to recall how we got here,
what circuitry guided the design.

13 November

I stole a look at Maria's diary, saw
where she'd scrawled out:
MAYBE WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS.
BUT WHAT IS THE MEANING.
I AM QUITE COLD. I MAY BE
LOSING TOUCH.

It was too much then not enough.
PROGRESS?
To where. How much. What weight
in the outcome.
I scoped out the pair as if to find
an answer: Carla & Carl.
I thought of them as two nouns
loose in a Gertrude Stein anti-text.
Without warning it began to snow.

Below an overhang we built a small fire,
opened a can of red salmon, tore chunks
from Karl's last loaf of brown bread.
Sanje spoke in an unbroken stream, a

spillage of subjects, objects, a weird
parataxis.

All I could catch being:

What I'm seeing isn't what I'm
believing. Only a blackness painted
in white of snow, snowing.
The self I've never measured,
surveyed. A text untexted,
unclothed and thus naked,
more question than answer.
I suspect I am fashioned of
words wrapped in a grammar,
unfree, some warping of
signifiers signifieds in a
hissy fit.
Let it come through me,
the unscripted, a wilding
a breaching of the
cultural knee-jerking.

10 November

. . . to give unreality to reality
one must give reality to the unreal.

_____ Ionesco

Modern art is the art of the dream. . . .

_____ Fernando Pessoa

The snow deepened. Three, four feet about us. We were slowly
going under. The litany of false beliefs in an unmoving.
It began to fail after all the years of bad faith, skating over
the mirrored surfaces. I stared at my companions, lovers now,
an apartness from my single being. I had written us up in
the Proustian diary kept concealed inside the jacket.
I ripped out the pages now in some ritual of giving up,

closing another window.
I imagined the pair fading from sight, the words of
their texts only streak of bad ink across a desert
of paper.

I became increasingly drowsy, unorchestrated.
Was it the snow or dream that took over, mingled
whatever shards of my Jungian/Freudian other
self into a fuzz, a liquidity.
I heard the soft steps along a corridor, saw the
door slowly open, witnessed a gigantic Bengal
tiger enter to survey the possibilities of
my quivering flesh.

It approached, smelled of my frozen
limbs, the outlines of my terrain.
O fearful symmetry I whispered,
what do you desire of me. Flesh,
Cogito, memories, a future among
the outcasts?

No response. Only the great mouth
opening. The gleaming porcelain teeth
at the ready.
No escape possible.
I slept. Slept.

8 November

But Watt moved no more, as far as they could see,
than if he had been of stone, and if he spoke he spoke
so low that they did not hear him.

Samuel Beckett, Watt

I remembered the snow growing over us, the three of us
huddled together in our apartness as one. There were no
words no facial signals. Only an enormous silence.
I no longer possessed a name, a nomenclature, a niche
in the phone book.

I remembered how we stared ahead, icons now to
be discovered in some future exploration of the
past, a pastness unmoving as a still life, a bit
of statuary.

Is it then to negotiate the distances between us
Is it to release into the air the hidden contours of a claim,
a plea,
a compromise

Yes, I see you through the scrim of atmosphere
Through the dubieties of words orchestrated

Yes, I am attempting to cement a meaning to this
Temporal-spatial locus,

If you receive my current of air, the flow, the wavelets
I ask only a like response,

A crossing over/under the barricades
A small triumph of the flesh
A temporary conjoining.

Soggetto Songs

A lifting there

Spaces made of dream

Or else the indefinites

Mountains high the Adriatic far down

Our words dissolving

As though

In flight from

Our carapace of flesh

The wounds dragged up

I offer you my blood

The ancient one

Whispered

Death is the echo of a universal

Absence

In the bistro the gathering of

The living dead

A guitar

Faintly

Then stronger

The high wind from the sea

The scree the schist.
