# doors

Walking down the middle of the street at midnight, I can smell distinctly the mustiness where the air from the river has risen. I can feel it too, distinctly cooler and damper than the air left on the street from the hot, dusty day. I walk along to the river's edge where I hear its hiss on the rocks, and I can easily imagine what I see daily, the swift rope of the river's water twining and turning, swallows pirouetting across its surface, the currents pouring against boulders hidden deeply on its bottom, upturned into folds, bulges and billows, and I imagine its separate streams sliding against one another - as I walk I can see the two well-lit bridges cross the river, one lit in pink, one in a hard blue-white; beyond the bridges I can see the lights of the smelter which creates a constant roar never easing out of consciousness, punctuated by metallic clanks and the regular whistle, the occasional siren signifying who knows what: I can see the pink lights on the boardwalks rising up the hill between the rows of houses. As I cross the nearest bridge I look down into the black water roiling below and I wonder how deep it might be here, the black surface reveals nothing except the idea that the river is composed of separate, swift currents which twine themselves together down into a rope pulling itself to the Pacific Ocean. I have dropped bottles into the river with messages. They too disappeared into the black surface. As I continue across the bridge on the walkway, the spider webs stand out, spread across the girders. The thick webs proliferate in the spaces between the girders, silhouetted against the lights on the bridge which attract myriads of bugs. Although I enjoy walking here in the afternoon too, tonight it is cool and relatively quiet.

In the afternoons I can also sit in my office and look across the river to the west and into town. When I tire of watching customers in the new Subway I can watch the clouds come over the mountain which the river runs under, which the town sits under. A single cloud sometimes peeks over the top, with the sun just behind it, and creeps slowly over the river and the town. Then again, layers of clouds may pour over the top, racing to be further east and away. A single cloud may come over, pitch black and opaque, and begin to rain. Rain may or may not reach the ground. It may thunder. The wind may whip up the dust. It smells of rain and dust simultaneously and if I am outside, it's Paradise. Other days a dull layer will cover the whole valley and rain thunderously. Sometimes I am lucky enough to be outdoors smelling and hearing the storm, feeling it on my face, but my office, with western facing and polarizing windows, helps me see it more clearly.

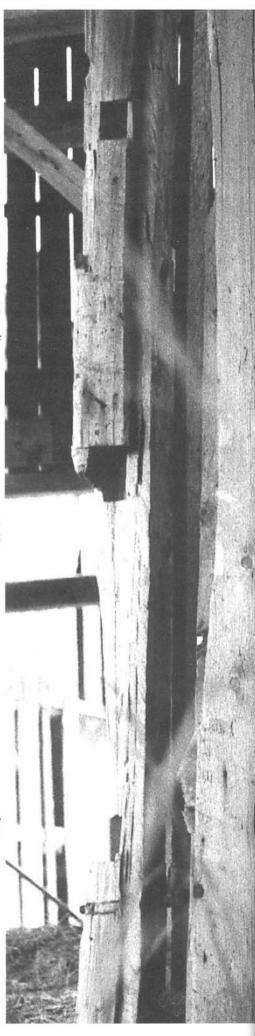
## texture

All these textures, all these details! From any perspective at all, the world is full of texture, large texture like the flow of clouds across the sky or thunderheads undercut by a stream of wind; small textures like the movement of grains of sand as an ant lion snuggles himself into the bottom of his pit. The world is more than full of texture, I would say. The world is texture. It's not as if I can look about and find a structure that the world is painted onto or which the world fills. Texture isn't painted onto the walls and it doesn't fill the world like my cup is full of coffee. Qualities can't be scraped off to reveal bare "matter," pure mass, or the x-y-z of space. The world is texture.

And with little reflection, it seems obvious, I can see I'm another texture. I don't mean just that no matter how closely I look at myself, I see detail. I mean that, yes, in those terms I'm part of the world, a moving part. I mean that if you or I look right, I dissolve into all the textures of the world, become a part of the whole thing, something that, when seen from across the river, becomes part of the landscape. I also mean something like, me, as a person, I'm a texture. I'm like a spot on the wall, only with something added.

You could examine me in detail. You'd find fingerprints (still on my fingers), the level of uric acid in my blood (probably high), my inevitable bit of irritation at something or other, how I am in other ways. Yes, I'm embedded in all these textures, I'm continuous with all the textures of the world. I'm not inside or outside of the world, I'm just part. If you cut it with your knife, you cut me too, like a half-kilo of butter.

But I'm not writing here of my interests or beliefs, attractions or avoidances. These, of course, all happen in the world, are all part of the world and are all part of me. They seem to me to be textures which are more obvious to others as they look at me. I'm embedded in another way, of more interest to me right now. I'm just like the world, granulated, like the waves on the river or the ripple in the clouds. The "me" is a grain of sand, a gust of the air, a leaf falling. I've read it this way: "To be secure and intimate with reality means to be in contact with the inside of which there is no outside. (There is nothing but entrance)."



Everything is an entrance. No matter how I look, how I explore, I am led to more texture. Each cat on the street is an entrance, it crosses ahead of me, my eyes and mind follow it, a new door into cat life, and into my life. It's like grazing. I graze here until the grass is too short for me, then move aside a little and graze. Not to do this, I'd have to hold myself back. And that's another door. I cannot not go through a door.

And that's exactly how I'm another texture. Important: emphasize the "I" here, the unique me. I am a door. For myself and for others. Everything I do opens doors, in just the same way that the river opens doors for me. I follow myself as I go. I notice. As I go, others notice. But it's not a question of who is important enough to be noticed. We are neither more or less important to one another, we simply notice where we are and where we might be. We turn around one another like river currents.

# horizon

So the world is texture, and I'm a texture. Another thing: As I'm led or as I lead myself through the world, something always looms and lingers up ahead, just within sight. Other textures, of course. But where they appear – that's the horizon. Walking through an oak forest, the horizon may be close. In a space suit, tethered to a shuttle orbiting Earth, I might feel the horizon a bit further off. But horizon isn't distance. The horizon is where I think the next entrance may be. ("Think" is too strong a word here, "feel" equally artificial. Those are made-up ideas anyway, just standardizations of what we are supposed to be like.)

To have a horizon, I must have imagination and curiosity. I have to be able to foresee. Not necessarily understand, think, or even feel, but foresee. Definitely not "understand," which means to restrict oneself to "standing under." Understanding comes later, if I want to. In foreseeing, I have to be able to consider what it might be like "over there." What would it be like up there with the cirrus clouds? What's over the hill? Who is that guy, really? What would it be like to be in his shoes? What would it be like if we made decisions based on the flights of birds? That's what's unique about being human. Our particular granulation is to foresee, to become involved in texture with foresight, to create horizon. People are constantly creating horizon in the world.

What does that mean? The world is full of doors – in fact is nothing but a door, if not in the sense of a single door. Every detail is an entrance to another; I've never found the edge beyond which is nothing. No detail is "the last one." We and everything are embedded in the world; the horizon is part of the world too, and embedded with us. The horizon is as close as the texture, but it's not a texture.

I've walked along this river under this mountain before. Today it's misty; the top of the mountain is concealed. I've done this walk many times before. I love the boardwalk which crosses the ravine, its flexibility and creakiness, I love the sound my boots make on it, the thumps and the creaks. I see flowering roses. At a certain point the walk branches and I recall an affair I had once, we went up that path, I still have reason to recall it. I go further and see the apartment where at another time a friend lived. From here, the river is opaque, full of eddies, offering only a surface. I hear car and truck noises. Here is the river, a texture, I am inside, it is inside. We are both doors waiting to be opened by myself and others.

#### Yet it's not so simple.

The texture does not ride alone on the surface of things, like a goose bobs on the river. The opaque water has a depth, the black roiling river follows a way to the Pacific Ocean. The texture itself owes something to the horizon. The river owes itself to my walk, to the bottles I've thrown in, to the Pacific Ocean. The river is found in this essay. The world is not simply. It is layered. What it will be sits on what it is – I'd rather say, what it is sits on what it is. They sit together seamlessly. Can we speak of this?

Where I am depends on my foresight. I foresee, and open doors where they find them. But doors aren't broad and general, they're specific. Like those eyes of needles, they open only to the path I want to travel. The door I see opens only to my touch and only I carry the key. I don't know how to say more now. This is the extent of my horizon.

# location

If we want to know who or where we are, we tell ourselves a story. "I'm the one who – was treated so evilly as a child," or "I'm the one who 'recovered." We locate ourselves. The story can be one of heroic effort and victory or one of continued victimization. It doesn't have to center on efforts. It can be a travelogue: "Here I am, in the middle of the Sahara Desert, lost in time." It doesn't matter. The function is what's important. The story serves to locate, to place one in relationship.

We all have our stories, and thus location; we have location and thus stories. As we locate ourselves, it's always through the stories we use to explain where we are. I don't mean stories spun out for entertainment. I mean the ways by which we orient ourselves, understand our vigils, paths, and flights in life: "Through the woods to grandmother's house...," and "Through the woods to the witch's den..." put us in different locations.

I'm not talking about fairy tales. I'm not even talking about stories with words. I mean the intertwined currents of feelings, precognitions, expectations, determinations, ideas, visions, hopes, disappointments, or glooms that we spin out and which we seldom can even describe, those ways in which we point, goad, and pull ourselves along our straight and narrow, crooked and wide, torturous or facile ways. I mean those ways in which we foresee, which involve us in texture and horizon. I mean those ways in which we participate in being and becoming simultaneously. I mean *all we are is story*. A desert of prickly story, an ocean of comforting story. All we are is a proliferation of forward-looking movement in texture, like a continuous kicking up of dried oak leaves as we walk through the forest.

By the way, that's another story, that one that says we move *forward*. Inside and outside has no direction. Doors just pass one through to the "other" side; one side is "the other," but *not forward*. Perhaps it's a story that we *move*; at least we *participate*. We are the stories. We say we move and we become. I can't see a more fundamental story than participation itself.

Crossing the green, flat surface of Arrow Lake, perhaps a mile wide, in broad, warm sunlight, the water seems transparent for about an inch and then turns into an opaque, jade-like substance, glowing internally. Branches fade away about a foot below the surface. Or so it seems. Perfectly flat and still and almost rising a little with my breath. Little circles on the water surface radiate from it as the slight wind rocks a floating branch. It invites walking on, I know my feet would sink about an inch and find a smooth purchase, and I could walk, kicking up the inch of water before me.

But this idea of story – of pushing a future out ahead of one, one's own horizon – each story has texture and horizon, each story is about texture and horizon, each story uses texture and horizon, each story provides texture and horizon, each story shows texture and horizon. Each story is a texture for me, a spot on the wall inviting cleaning, a fly walking across the ceiling inviting a swat, a green lake inviting water walking. This idea does all of these. Each story, each idea, offers me its horizon, and I take it. Imagine the proliferation of the forest before we arrived.

# god

Where is the best place to go to imagine God? *Here*, I am overwhelmed by the thicket of books, of opinions, of stories – by the thorns of the children bouncing on their bed, the dog squeaking next door, the cat slinking along the edge of the room, the diary on the desk. For me, right now, – *come along with me!* – for me – *come!* – a desert simplifies, where I can become simply hot, dry in the wind, and long-legged. We can spend the night. I've brought enough water and food. We won't need a tent.

We lie on our blankets in the dark, under a bowl of souls. The fire is out and we've done with talking for now. We can still hear the embers snapping and the wind blows the smoke over us. A few noises come from the darkness. But I am not ready to sleep. A plane's red lights blink. A satellite moves there, steadily across the sky. Above everything is the churning backdrop of the sky. The green streak of a meteor catches the edge of my sight, but I'm too slow. Above, everything is the churning backdrop of the sky. I ride the earth through the sky with every soul who has come this way.

Having simplified, I might ask "When is God?" That question fits better for me than "Who?" "Where?" or "What?" When is God? Always. Just as I am. As always as the sky is broad from where we lie. Quick! Catch it! Another meteor streak.

As I'm led or as I lead myself through the world, <u>something always looms and lingers up ahead, just</u> within sight. Other textures, of course. But where they appear – that's the horizon.

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### Coyote Catches the Light

Coyote came down from the mountains walked over the hills came to the edge of the mesa

snorted

farted

and looked out over the desert following the lines of darkness down toward a pool of light filled with shiny boxes red/white ribbons and *them* 

Coyote snuck in to the light Remembered sneaking into it one night and —BOOM— Almost got turned inside out Almost got stuck in the fence Almost got a hole in his hide

So coyote started to chew the cobwebs in the sky Chewed them for a long time Grabbing them with both hands stuffing them in his mouth until his mouth got sore his hair stood up on its end and he was tired

"ugh," coyote said

But the light was gone

and so were they

So coyote stepped out into the cold, dark silence of the desert night

and howled

John Sandlos

Photo by David Pauls