

Trumpeter (1996)
ISSN: 0832-6193
What is the World

Steven Slavik
Trumpeter

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 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 river pouring against the boulders hidden deeply on its bottom, upwelling into folds, bulges and billows, and I imagine its separate currents 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 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 it, 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. All these textures, from those of my fingertips to the details about 1st/Sgt Warden in *From Here*

to Eternity which a reader fills in, or about Hawaii in 1940 only hinted at. 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 if full of coffee. The world is texture. Qualities can't be scraped off to reveal bare "matter," pure mass. I can't even say it's a "bunch" or a "bundle" of textures held together, or a string of them attached in sequence somehow; there's no way I see to relate to it except "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, that 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. Or that I even become another river. 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. I don't know how to say this yet, so I'm searching.

You, say, 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.

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. But 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 - a bird of the air, a lily of the valley. 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. We are a forest.

Horizon

So the world is texture, and I'm a texture. There's one other thing. As I'm led or as I lead myself through the world, there's always something up ahead. Other textures, of course. But where they are - 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. Men in the smelter are on the horizon as I walk the streets at night. The horizon is where I think the next entrance may be. "Think" is perhaps too strong a word here, "feel" equally artificial. Those are made up ideas anyway, just standardizations of what we are supposed to be like.

That latter bit emphasizes an important point. 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. 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 the birds?

So we are textures which can foresee. We are foreseeers: we foresee. That's it. You can't scrape off foreseeing and find something else, the "bare matter" of humans. 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's that mean? The world is full of doors - in fact is nothing but a door, if not in the sense of a single door - and that's how it seems to be. Every detail is an entrance to another, there's never any 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 on that path, there is still 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? Is a forest lumber or a home? Is a forest wilderness or park? Is a forest the grounds of fearful witches and trolls or unclaimed farmstead? This hints at what I mean.

Where I am depends on my foresight. People 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.

Citation Format

Slavik, Steven (1996) What is the World *Trumpeter*: 13, 4.
<http://www.icaap.org/iuicode?6.13.4.2>

Document generated from IXML by ICAAP conversion macros.
See the [ICAAP](#) web site or [software repository](#) for details