

GRANITE

Shevaun Cooley

*Yesterday I went out for a walk, and was suddenly overcome
with an inexplicable urge: I took my shoes off and walked
barefoot on the cold earth ...*

Andrei Tarkovsky

Be specific. Go granular.

Colum McCann

GRANITE

Snapshot: Something in Violent Movement

In June 1928, in the high Arctic, the strengthened

In February 1945, a bullet splinters open

These are never metaphors

In December 1875, the *Deutschland*, a ship
of emigrants *broke*

ship *Krassen* drives itself over ice, crushing it
with pure weight.

the skull of the spy Violette Szabo, executed
on her knees in Ravensbrück.

but approximations.

When the Earth was cold and insular
and dense with minerals, it was stricken

by a second planet, Theia; core plunged
through core and Theia *disappeared in a welter*¹

of rock vapour and outflung
flash-melted debris. And a thing hot and globular,

a swirling mass of magma emerged, and over
time became what we call now the Earth.

Aristotle, in his *Physics*,

In June 1928, the airship *Italia* plummets

her back on the sandbank of Kentish Knock.

posited two kinds of motion; the natural,
and the violent.

Violent for Aristotle is another word
for *unnatural*. As an example of the unnatural

he gives us: *the upward motion of earthy things
and the downward motion of fire.*

into the pack ice off Spitsbergen. Men die.
The impact snaps the leg of the explorer

Umberto Nobile, who puts out a call
for rescue.²

When I turn back on the railway overpass, the man
has his hand on the throat of the woman.

Stop – I say, ridiculously – *that's not cool.*

If magma is an argument, then basalt is the result
of an argument that cools fast.

Granite is a symptom.

GRANITE

To make granite you have to let it simmer;

What distinguishes

I have seen the cross that hangs

Not approximations

¹welter is a surging mass; or to roll and writhe about, or to be hyperbolically soaked with blood and gore. The quoted passage is from Jan Zalasiewicz, *Rocks: A Very Short Introduction*.

to cool only slowly and over time.

a natural motion from an unnatural motion, according to Aristotle, is *volition*. The stone thrown

is in violent motion because someone chose to throw it. I wonder whether to include here

the decision to lift the hand and squeeze the fingers deep into another's hyoid bone³

under the cool Church vaults, writes Tomas Tranströmer. *Sometimes it's like a snapshot of*

something in violent movement. The man with the hand on her throat says, *what? She's only a junkie*.

but an uneasy equivalence.

The idea scratches its way across the tin roof.

²rescue (ult. from Latin *re-executere*, RE + *shake out, discard*) is to deliver or save from evil or harm; or else recover and take back by force (1450).

³Every act of becoming conscious / (it says here in this book) / is an unnatural act.' Adrienne Rich, 'Phenomenology of Anger'.



King's Bay Hangar prima nel rivestimento - 1. Aprile

‘Words are grained into our landscapes, and
landscapes grained into our words.’
Robert MacFarlane, *Landmarks*.

phaneritic comes from the Greek φάνερος visible,
evident; see also epiphany, an appearance or sudden
realisation; in rock, it is a type of igneous texture.

To think of how we are ‘dense, open, torn beings’.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Eye and Mind’.

rivestimento (Italian): coating or covering

Snapshot: Kings Bay Hangar
‘Prima del Rivestimento’
(Spitsbergen, April 1926)

1. *Granite is phaneritic, because its grains
are visible to the eye.*

Scaffolding of wings
caught in an upstroke,
half-risen from ice.

Parentheses left
unfilled, except by distant
white mountains.

As if something here
upturned and died, its flesh
fallen away.

Enormous ribs bared,
open to elements;
the ice making its own light.

Epiphany falls from the depths.
In chthonic shining –
the thing left unclothed.

igneous from the Latin *ignis*, pertaining to,
or of the nature of, fire.

grain, from the Latin *granum*: grain or seed, therefore small, compact and hard particles; or the arrangement and size of the constituent particles of any substance, delivering its texture. In *The Grain of the Voice*, Roland Barthes: 'the "grain" is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.' In photography, the particles in a photographic emulsion, which, when the image is enlarged, cause a loss of definition.

2. *Igneous because it solidified
from magma.*

The image is grainy but clear enough; yet in the background the mountains shift and blur; in flux as much as anything is. In time,

the earth will warm,
and the ice give up its bodies;
disinterred and blackened
as a vaulted hangar

built in the perpetual
darkness of the winter of 1926,
on an archipelago of permafrost,
as far north as anyone dared;

of twenty-seven kilometres of shipped-
in wooden beams, and fifty tonnes
of iron, by men who drank through
230 litres of brandy, and warmed

themselves with work. In the photograph,
we can see the singular trail
of the photographer in his snow
shoes. If the distant mountains are unclear,