



# STALACTITE

*Tricky Walsh*

STALACTITE

LOST ROCKS

# STALACTITE

Tricky Walsh



All of my dreams have dark dirt ceilings.

It sounds like an exaggeration, but I can assure you, I've examined them from all sides. That's the trouble with flying in a dirt box, you hit the edges eventually (and then repeatedly. An unfortunate side effect of the desire for confirmation.)

Sometimes they are close; I can make out delicate root systems that have pushed through and stunted into the air, as if the air were solid and they had encountered an uncrossable border.

Sometimes they are far,  
football fields away,  
but still, the shadows  
of a corner meeting.  
An oddly specific  
geometry that  
makes me think,  
even in sleep;  
*cube.*

I  
can  
recall  
my early  
dreams with  
a vividness they  
have lacked since.  
I know this is the  
nature of memory, the  
early formations that we  
build upon. The fictions that  
coat the reality in thick blankets  
of sentimentality, but we \*are\* talking of  
dreams after all. What would they be without  
the coating? What would leak from the surface  
through to the understorey if all I buried it with  
were anaemic propositions?

Mine are coated in dirt. Dirt and other materials.

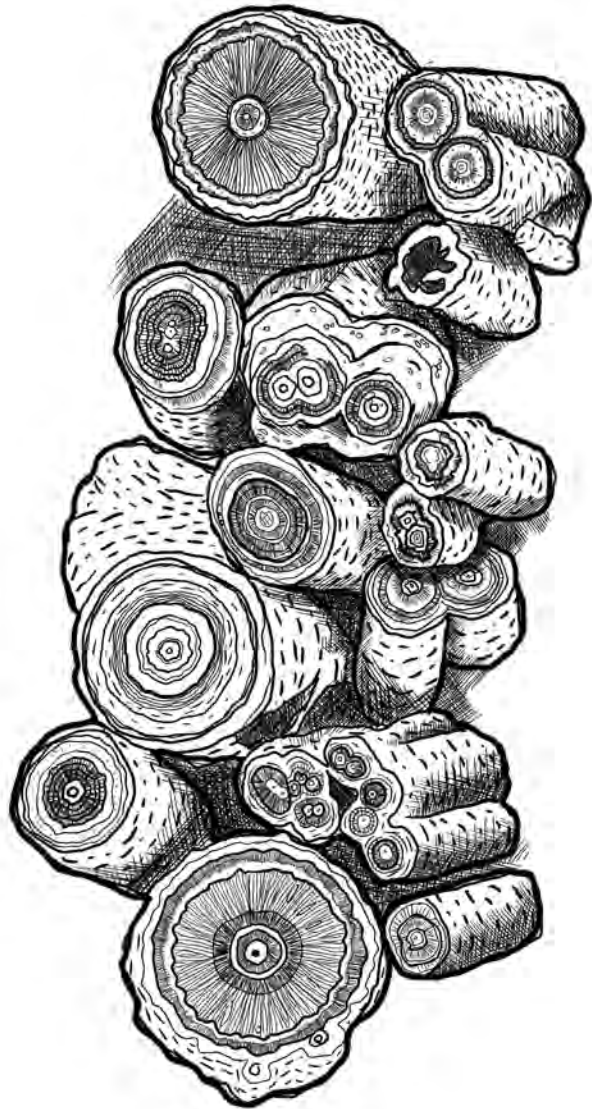
*This is me, waiting in a hallway with a hundred other people.  
 We stand, in front of three alternate doors in a low rooved  
 space. Everyone is wearing dark brown woolen coats in various  
 kinds of patterning - houndstooth, herringbone, twill.  
 The doors are flanked by guards whose faces are obscured,  
 except for their eyes, which watch us with intensity although  
 they don't otherwise move, and we are hardly a raucous crowd.  
 I have been here many times before and have entered through  
 each set of doors.  
 Inside there are fun park rides. A carousel with spotted dark  
 mirrors, a set of wavy orange slides and a small rollercoaster  
 which makes the worst screeching sounds.  
 They sit inside a perfectly squared off room whose edges are  
 clearly discernible as being carved out of dirt.  
 Each time I have this dream we wait for an unreasonable  
 amount of time before being allowed to sombrely file into the  
 room and get onto the ride.  
 We sit, silently as the rides move us around circuits, on rails  
 and we patiently wait single file for our turn on the slides in  
 perfectly choreographed lines.  
 It is humourless and joyless and once the rollercoaster went off  
 its track.*

*the nature of memory as strata.*

Every night in the underworld I carry a thick  
 carpet bag of my previous night's adventures. I  
 open it and coat myself in another layer until  
 I almost solidify into immobility.

Each night I dream and the world  
 around me thickens. Like the edges  
 of a travertine terrace, or the  
 precipitation on a stalactite  
 or the thickening of  
 the strata due to wind  
 or volcanic deposits.

Every morning  
 I waken and  
 move through  
 the world.  
 I stuff  
 my pockets  
 with a damp  
 residue that  
 hardens over time  
 and populates the universe  
 that is within. An accretion of memory and  
 dream melding together to confuse the idea of  
 what is real. I'm not sure of most things.



*(The Village)*

*[The age of mechanics and geometry.]*

These things leach through the unconscious

one drip

at

a

time.

A tube of copper, a tin of coffee, a pair of broken wheels. Timber, always timber and string. I always seem to carry around these props with the elegance of an 8-bit game character. Or a set of lego hands.

Just some sort of awkward extension of my self, projected forward with an unknown significance. Once I got stuck with a can of red beans while trying to escape from a terrifying group of people.

I eventually did, but

with no help

from

the

beans.

*This is me, flying with an enormous copper antenna.  
The wind (how is there wind?) whistling over it as I rise  
higher and higher and into stars that are actually voids in the  
overhead soil.*

*I never notice the air moving when I am moving through it.  
The antenna and I are sweeping through a building like a  
colosseum, where the interior facades have been removed and,  
as we swoop around in ever-increasing circles searching for an  
exit, we glimpse glaringly domestic moments from the daily life  
of its inhabitants.*

*In every space there is an object sitting casually in a particular  
shade of crimson red. Most people ignore me but there are a  
few who stop to wave or chat and they stand awkwardly as if  
from within an invisible window frame or door.*

*Things fall out of the rooms. They drop heavily, not like a  
waterfall but more like bodies dropping from the sky. They hit  
the ground far below with damp thuds. No-one seems to notice  
except me, but I am climbing higher and higher so it barely  
rates as important.*

*It used to be easy, the flying. Now it is a lot more effort  
to maintain. I am more aware of the process and my own  
mortality perhaps. I imagine that I make voids in its substance,  
as if leaving hollow tracks inside the solid block of space. Even in  
my dark dirt dreams, the earth is waiting patiently to blanket  
me in shadows.*

Now.

We pause at the edge of the river to feel the silence  
swell, filling space and time. I have nothing in  
my pockets except lint, but the river accepts.

It always does, at least initially. At  
points you can glimpse it, a thick  
sort of green that you can  
feel between the trees and  
hear as a constant and  
quiet staticky-roar in your  
left ear as you ride this  
road. An equally opaque  
liquid, although that  
could be the sun,  
illuminating and  
obscuring the  
river's bed  
in turns  
beneath  
a thin  
veneer of  
aerated  
foam.



I am riding on unknown roads that are as red as the water is green. A bulldozer paws at the ground, turning grasses over into thick white roots twisting in the dirt. I dismount my bicycle to pass by, the river and the bulldozer competing for my attention but I am already too distracted to notice much else. The water runs between foliage; a tapestry of leaves and grasses and air and water and earth, fragments all woven into one flat plane glimpsed at the periphery.

I merge all the rivers I have known into one continuous body. Even those with which I am barely acquainted. From the streams of my childhood through to the broad and endless bodies that accompany me on my daily journeys - they have aged with me, accumulating mass, drop by drop.

*This is me, looking through cities for a glass room where people wait for me, one in particular but with a face that lacks definition. I found it once, I may again.*

*It always starts out the same.*

*I am on the outskirts of the town which is shaped like a bowl. Towards the centre, but vaguely south east from it is a tiny glowing speck.*

*The city is unnavigable. Every time I take a corner or climb a building to note my progress the glass box sits, glowing in the same middle distance, mocking my progress.*

*There are people on the streets.*

*The streets themselves are a foot deep with some sort of weightless dust that kicks up in whorls into the air as I (or anyone else) step through it.*

*There is a blue light equidistant from the glowing box and I have come to realise that it is tracking my successes and failures.*

*People move like survivors from a nuclear fallout. Closer to the centre their clothes are noticeably more ragged.*

*I am a moth, obsessed only with the light.*

STALACTITE

Together we fall from cloud and hills. Together  
we weather the porous carpet, to descend into an  
unknowable bulk relieved only by gaps in  
the surface of its skin. Weathered by both  
wind and rain, each pock mark leads to a  
crack, leads to a vent, leads to a hollow.  
Each hole a punctuation or code or bit  
that holds within it a stream of  
untranslatable text. Each drop  
punctures, it drags the light  
down with it for a beat before  
the darkness takes both  
the liquid and the wave.  
The river holds its fill  
and releases the rest  
to the air and the  
ground.

From here,  
in the daylight  
the holes look like tiny  
caverns. From the underside  
they look like stars. Perhaps it is  
these that I have seen, have tried to  
congregate into familiar constellations, hoping  
to navigate to more familiar waters. I try to watch  
my feet but my head, as always, is in the clouds.

The  
silence  
is louder  
than the rush  
of the water as it  
dissolves rock and  
moves mountains.  
It meets like an infection,  
unexpected and feverish, attacking  
the host.

From somewhere around the hill there is music.  
Another quieter roar of voices and footsteps  
mark some sort of celebration or ceremony. My  
feet shuffle in the upturned dust by a bridge, the  
bicycle wheels dragging awkward and intersecting  
snakeskin patterns between pebbles.

I remember the late afternoon light filtering into  
an empty room. I think of time passing through  
my hands like lint.

This I will gift regretfully to stormwater drains  
a few days later, halfway around the world.

*This is me, hoping that the technique I have always used to fly with will not suddenly fail me and I will plunge face first into the soil. I was particularly clumsy as a child and sometimes I wonder if this might not be the reason why I never put my hands out. It was the flying you see; it required a level of complicity.*

*There is still some small part of me that thinks it still works. Try it. But mortality and sensibility and whatever else have come between me and my intentions.*

*The feeling is tremendous though. The falling and the flying up into the air. A sometimes inelegant breaststroke-like technique up into the atmosphere where the village shrinks to a field of tiny lights. The earth below moves like a giant spherical hamster wheel beneath me, time passing with each revolution, the rising of the moon and sun on either side as I take in the surface of the earth; its planes and rises. The thin connecting lines from city to town. The even thinner ones dictating one political landscape from the next. Arbitrary. Even more so from here where you watch mountain ranges cross them carelessly. Where the oceans threaten to reconfigure them with an enthusiastic exhale.*

*Once I tried to fly up beyond the lower layers of atmosphere but it was like trying to move through wet concrete, and I started to feel the struggle of my movements like tiny tremors.*

*Perhaps the ceilings are not so solid after all, but the limitations are.*

Time.

It

always

comes

back

to

time.

Everyone

wanted a superhero

power, mine was always to

be able to stop time. Initially

I think it was so I could walk

around cities and other places

in a bubble of silent calm as the bustle

froze around me. Now of course, it would

be to slow down those moments to an infinity.

To take a point, and a point and another point

and construct lines and planes between them.

STALACTITE

A thread of hair catching the wind in a certain way. A gesture, a laugh. The light filtering behind, caressing a plant that hangs just an inch above the water.

Silence.

But time is an impatient custodian. It pushes us along and casually ignores our feeble protestations. And so we developed the idea of memory. And though it is a thinner kind of reality, we can play it on an endless loop well into the early hours. We expand the point beyond its borders, we give it direction and eventually we allow it to form a membrane. The act of remembering becomes a geometric process. It is dimensional. The act of remembering is the process of manifesting our internal images out. It is why we tell and retell stories. We are constantly reinforcing the boundaries and reaffirming the locations.

*This is me following a path that never ends, searching for something beneath the tree which grows at its walled centre. The light inverts every time I glance at it, as if we are both struck by lightning. Or perhaps all I am allowed is an afterimage. I never reach it, after all, but sometimes I come a little closer.*

*The floor beneath me is cobbled, it blends somewhat seamlessly into the walls which are stone.*

*I am looking for something I never remember upon waking. I have had this dream so often I know where the loose stones are and can avoid them. I also know that I will never succeed, but that doesn't warrant any kind of giving up. On the contrary, it is the loop that is the journey.*

*Each time I learn a grain more.*

*That's enough. Every recurrence is indicative of this cyclic process.*

*The tree encompasses all. I look instinctively for the sky or the ceiling but I cannot see through leaves, black then white, then black.*

*The wall opens here and there into small landings, a dry fountain awash with leaves; a discarded pair of shoes; a sapling growing between the cobbles. I wonder at each as I pass, climbing higher on this endless circular pathway.*

STALACTITE

We'll do this in reverse, because we lack the  
foresight to do it differently.

On the northern coast of Alaska there are  
indentations in the permafrost. Like the  
hollows left on a carpet when the furniture  
is finally moved; the lakes and the sinkholes  
mirror or swallow the sun a thousand times.

From the mountains, with their strange  
perspective, they look like a gathering  
of houses at night, occupied or not.

From the mountains it resembles  
a village. A clustering of regular  
forms, shifting in scale, dotted  
throughout the landscape.

From the mountains, where  
time moves faster, it  
looks like a million  
tiny candles burning  
from window ledges,  
waiting for someone  
to return.

Time.

But not just time.

You need a recipe to make  
a mountain. And a plan to disperse one.

The village sits on strata of clays and soils, pocked  
between islands of limestone. When the waters  
come, they wash away the ground in an uneven but  
predictable topography. Later the villagers  
will bridge the divides with timber and try  
to stop the inevitable landslides which drag  
the surface into the subterranean.

These waters have been following  
the same indentations for centuries.

Probably those songs I can hear in  
the distance are at least  
as old. We grow best near  
water, I think. When  
the forces of nature  
remind us that we  
are not the  
architects  
of this  
sphere.

70°58'15.4"N 156°41'26.5"W

X

We're going on a tangent again, but it's okay. I  
brought the map.  
We're just twelve degrees north of the X.

I am staying a block or so from the Musée des  
Arts et Métiers in Paris. It is my absolute favourite  
place to go. I would say *anywhere* but I'm keeping  
my options open. Inside are three floors of devices  
that have taken some sort of problem  
in our physical world and  
countered it with a solution.  
There are devices that measure,  
that replicate, that suggest,  
that transmit, that receive, that  
transfer or transform. One of  
my favourites is a large wooden  
sphere flanked with a globe on  
either side that replicates the  
effects of an aurora inside its glassy  
interiors. It sits unobtrusively  
amongst an array of much  
more glitzy mechanisms  
and devices, wedged  
between the overlapping  
glazed scales of a  
lighthouse Fresnel  
lens and a polished  
brass disc used  
to reflect  
the sun.

## STALACTITE

It occurs to me that the entire cabinet (dark woods, relatively free of handprints and smears at child height) is dedicated to those things that augment natural phenomena (the sun, light, the aurora etc)

It is quiet, but I have come in early to beat the crowds.

In the next room there sits a Figured loom from 1748. It was invented by Jacques de Vaucanson (b. Grenoble, 1709. Died near to my birthdate some 73 years later.) Jacques also invented a number of automata which earned him the accusation of being profane. I can appreciate it, the compulsion to breathe life into a thing. This loom and I are acquainted. We met some ten years ago on the kind of rainy day (always in October) in Paris where the sky turns a warm grey that dulls the light on everything except the golden tops of all the buildings and bridges.

It steals the shadows that form beneath anything which stands still; the houses, the buildings, the trees - even the moving feet which stagger gently against uneven cobblestones in a distracted gait, uses them to blanket the city as high as it can reach before giving up and relinquishing the very highest peaks to the invisible sun.

I was in a hurry, and not expecting to find a collection of objects that would still my breath and accelerate my heart, but this, this unexpected device built by hand out of common materials was surprising in its lack of exoticism.

Knowing I had but an hour and feeling time march mercilessly towards a finite finish line, I stood, memorising dark woods, clusters of string and silk, angles and the ways and means of the thing. The floors in the room it sits in are wooden, and they scream mercilessly as people navigate through the space, so my memories are tinged with the slow footed valkyrie screech of indifferent tourist.

In  
the  
room,  
surrounding  
the grand loom  
are a series of models  
or smaller versions, each  
facing into the room,  
with a kind of patient tension  
that whispers *waiting...*

To my mind, the loom is a perfect  
machine. I am biased, naturally, but  
let me tell you why, or how, or  
*something*. We'll get there eventually.

I love boats. I mean materially, although I also  
enjoy their pace and rhythm. There is something  
to me which makes a kind of linguistic sense in  
the meeting of timber and glass to string and  
rope. Something about their responsiveness to  
the human form, to human motion and activity.  
Something about the warmth of them - they  
are receptive to us and they retain a little of  
our warmth as we interact with them, like a  
transference of energy.

The loom is like this. You read it, and  
you can see where the moving parts  
will extend the structure beyond its  
slumber. Everything moves in a slow  
and lumbering repetition that  
augments the physicality of its  
operator in a way that uses  
the energy of the body but  
releases the mind.

As if it allows,  
within its design,  
a moment to  
dream beyond  
its own  
situation.



## STALACTITE

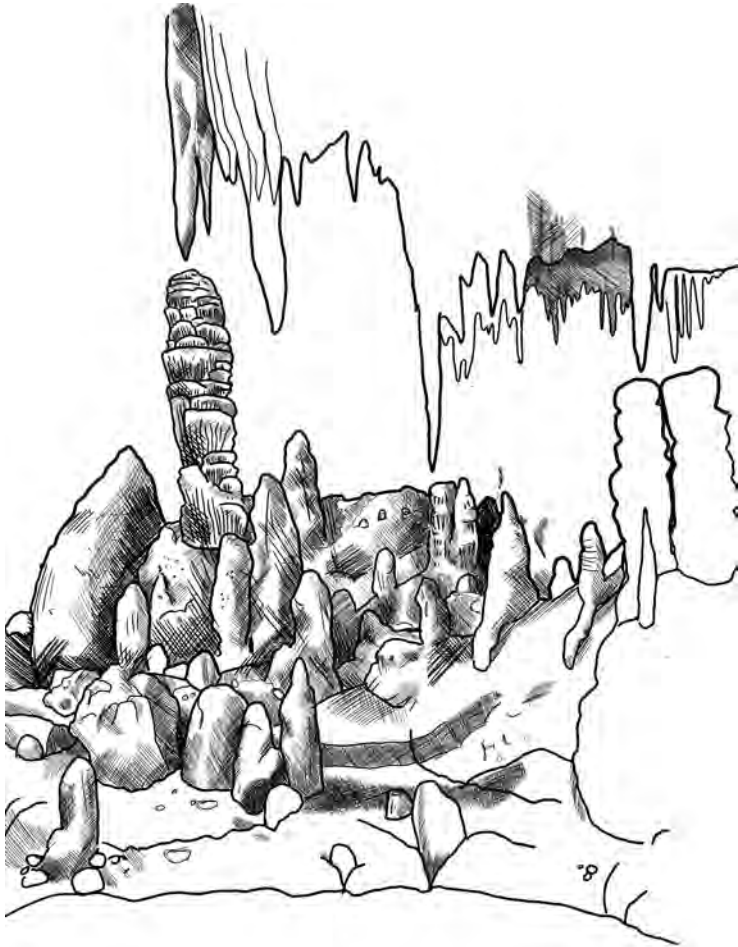
I made one when I returned home in 2009.  
I have plans to make another to mark the ten  
years since I first came here. You see, a loom  
is not only the perfect machine  
(to my mind) but also the perfect  
mechanism for examining  
space and time.

Time,  
  
after all,  
  
is a kind of  
  
fabric. Its warp  
  
and weft affected  
  
by the gravity of bodies.

Of both masses and energy.  
Which brings us to manifold space.  
Take a Möbius strip, I mean, you can almost  
make one with a rubber band if you have one  
handy. It's the concurrent inside- and outside-ness  
of it that appeals, and this is what the standard  
loom suggests: an infinite two dimensional plane,  
with a pair of relative surfaces waiting to be  
transformed.

Even its simplest form, say, a simple fabric  
scarf worn by a human figure, is bending a  
two dimensional plane to encapsulate a  
dynamic three dimensional solid that  
moves through time and space. A scarf  
is a two dimensional manifold and  
possibly also a model of our universe.

It is a dynamic material. You can  
transform its planar surface with  
simple movements to produce  
new forms. It is its inherent  
flexibility that connects it to  
spacetime, after all, Spacetime  
curves in all directions. My  
loom will produce the  
blueprints for infinite  
forms. Built from  
materials rough  
and fine, it will  
suggest an ever  
expanding  
model of  
our universe  
focussing  
specifically  
on the  
passing  
of time.



*(the Temple)*

time

is

all

we

have.

In here, we measure it in drops.

*[The age of thermodynamics.]*

For

four

days it

rains in

the

Temple.

It happened like  
this in the beginning.

It happens like this every  
six months or so, a brief  
monsoon that brings the rainfall  
down from the heights of the mountains  
in a torrent that pools into a valley floor that  
was once, a long time ago, hundreds of millions  
of years possibly, a sea floor.

Although the ground must feel some sort of familiarity, a kind of intuitive rightness far into its strata, not even the valley can remember it.

Nothing  
on the surface of the earth has a memory that long. It is a race to see if the sky will reclaim the pool or the earth will. It seeps from below as it evaporates. The floor beneath the valley, beneath the topsoil and the subsoil is a slowly dissolving honeycomb of compacted skeletal chalk.

Beneath a ceiling of blue  
(now, the clouds have passed)  
so bright it hurts to look at it  
for long, the water seeps and  
filters its way through the dirt  
and the chalk, through layers  
of history, of time, of  
species, of extinctions  
and, as it seeps, it  
pulls tiny grains of  
shell and bone  
down into the  
cavern.

Inside.

At the mouth  
of the cavern there  
is still light. It cuts  
through night not  
determined by time  
and turns liquid to stone.

The cavern is an unexpected  
mirror of the above terrain, although  
in reverse. The ground, after all, is only  
discerned by what gravity will stick to it.

In here, the sky is an irregular mass squeezed  
between a forest of elongated stone that grows  
up, down and occasionally sideways. In directions  
we don't have names for yet. The convolutions  
are reflected in the small pools which ripple with  
every drop but fall into stillness between each light  
percussion.

Greenery clings to cracks in the rock overhead but  
still trains its focus on the largely invisible sun.

The sun. How strange to imagine its presence  
in the depth of this cavern. It creeps up in  
investigative beams, its path feeding the densely  
carpeting mosses and tentative tendrils that reach  
for a moment of its attention. The carpet thins at  
the edges where only the winter light touches. The  
strongest in the centre hold court with the most  
power. So it goes.

STALACTITE

If you're still you can feel movement shifting in the almost-dark. A kind of flickering, between the raindrops. The powdery clap of a moth's wing seen in the periphery, the shifting of the seasons, that dark shadow I glimpse when I turn my head too quickly. Each drop tracing a deliberate path from the hole in the ceiling, through the air to fall in an exasperated plunk against the wet rock floor. Some trail slowly, slowed by friction, leaving stains to build on later.

Each one  
falling like sighs.

Each one falling like breath.

An intimate hyperventilation that gathers in pools and torrents before falling under the weight of yet more gravity and searching for still lower ground.

There are after all, so many layers of ground.

Beneath them all sits the Temple proper. There is no dust in there, no motes or spores seeking the light. No hordes of people with their inquisitive flashlights, their curiosity a burning constellation of the coldest of stars. Which is not to say that the Temple is empty.

Explorers should have to study poetry before they head out. After all, generally if you find a thing, you get to name it.

*The conspirators.*

STALACTITE

They've had other names before, in tongues that no longer exist, describing things that no longer happen. They will be named this in years to come. It is something about the way they bend towards each other in the first low-roofed part of the cavern, a humble entrance to the greater grandeur of the Temple itself, where a cacophony of stalactites, of straws and drapes, ribbons and columns wait to be admired.

There is something simple about the two, whispering secrets as old as the universe.

Something about the way they formed, one growing towards the floor, the other towards the invisible day.

At some stage they will both connect and together they will hold up the ceiling, but for now their intimacy is measured by the diminishing space between them.

Their constancy rivals the sun.  
A dependency that is night/day  
winter/summer, north/south.

They sit in magnetic contradiction on the threshold of where the first of the tunnels descend. Between two fissures in the walls that let in alternatively; the rising sun and the falling sun. In brief rivulets many hours apart, illuminating the falling and rising of each stone. The light animates their mottled surfaces, catching a drip here and there on each.

Glistening jewels of  
water and  
calcium.

Cast in the shadow of the morning sun, of the afternoon sun, neither ever in the same instance except for once a day, at the height of midday, when the dim grey of *neither* sun filters through and pushes back both shadow and light. The two glow with a pale light in the pale darkness. People would describe it as *unearthly*. They'd be close.

STALACTITE

Time transforms out of sight. We only notice  
change in a state of absence. We might  
know a space, but the intimacies of  
it will inevitably change. We will  
pause at the wrong moments.

We will put a foot  
  
wrong. It is  
  
almost  
  
pre-determined,  
  
in the  
  
process of  
  
re-familiarisation.

Above the Temple the thin lattice of the cave roof  
is densely populated with an almost impenetrable  
ceiling of straws. Below, the overflow drops  
and fills the rising pools. Both have  
hollow centres that will block and condense.  
Further along, where the formations are  
older, the stalactites thicken in the  
darkness. They congregate like  
tourists, redirecting the  
streams.

They have  
felt the warming  
of the air and the  
dissolution of foreign materials.  
They are marked in places with a thin  
orange veneer where iron has bled into the  
cavern from above. They are stained with the soot  
of volcanic ash that had [for a time] blocked out  
the sun.

## STALACTITE

Water drops like tears down the edges of cheeks.  
Less salty, they surprise the surfaces of the  
surrounding stones, and splatter against  
each other with a light coating of  
embarrassment. The transformation is  
mutual, even in a strange, low  
atmosphere environment like the  
Temple cave. One tear can track  
its paths from rock to  
rock; a kind of  
sympathetic  
contagion.

Like trees,  
they accrete  
from the centre out.

Like trees they carry the effects  
of their surrounding environment,  
they both bend slowly away from the wind.  
Unlike trees they don't note the passing of each  
year. Instead, they note the basic passing of time in  
regard to each other. It is their relationships which  
are relative, and their relationship to time.

From here there are two pathways. From the one  
on the right you can make out the sound of distant  
water rushing. From here it sounds like static.  
Like waking up in front of the television at  
three am to the impersonal noise on a white  
and cold screen. I remember they called it  
snow. They should have called it dust;  
it would be more accurate.

The saddest parts of technology  
are the things we leave behind.  
Every house at some point had  
a magical box that, in the early  
hours of the morning, (once  
we had satiated the need to  
broadcast ourselves to  
the world), would  
receive radio waves  
travelling from the  
origin of the  
universe.



STALACTITE

It is one of the most beautiful things, I think, that  
oddly desolate and confusing time, the pale  
white/green glow on the walls and the  
furniture surrounding you, the vast  
aloneness, the stillness of objects, the  
silence except for that quiet rush.  
The flickering of tiny black and  
white dots, yes no, yes yes no.

The energy of the big bang  
reaching us, its light waves  
a stream that we can  
interpret only as *noise*.  
Except early in the  
morning, before the  
world wakes,  
perhaps we see  
in its  
abstractions  
a tiny  
speck  
of  
  
perspective,  
  
or  
  
transcendence.

Now of course, the world is digital and we  
*never* stop broadcasting and our connection  
to this initial burst of creation, this meeting  
of atoms and the exploding of gases, the  
clouds of particulate, the melting  
and freezing of it all is a  
stream of images on  
a touchscreen we have  
*again* come to  
interpret as  
noise.

Touchscreen.

The only person  
I knew as a child who  
touched a screen was  
that girl from *poltergeist*.  
And look where that got her.

So you can take that tunnel to the right  
(let's call it nostalgia) or you can continue on  
through the tunnel to the left. The one that looks  
like it heads up to the surface but which actually  
almost immediately dips down, and keeps winding  
down, turn after hairpin turn until you feel the air  
shift, until, in the darkness you can feel the space  
open, and you know that you have arrived.

STALACTITE

They named it the Temple, for within it they encountered things they could never control and could barely comprehend. The sky is not grey or blue down here but black and pressing against every available surface, defying gravity itself to determine the up or down-ness of the space. Within, the formations are spectacular. They emerge and surround small still lakes that separate each into tiny islands, bridged occasionally by the sheets of wavering stone that drip frozen from the ceiling. Here the sky is no distant thing watching benevolently from above. It seeps everywhere, much like the water. It envelops the wings of the insect I can hear in the distance; it creeps between the lips and into the throat as one breathes. A darkness, chill and thick. One can easily imagine it congealing the bravest of curious hearts.

There are fewer drips here. Water slides down the side of rock, of reconstituted bone. It grafts slowly and intimately to these lumbering giants in the dark. It favours one side more than another. Like the touch of a distracted lover, leaving more and more traces of themselves as they follow the same pathways. But. It is the absence of sound that is more stifling than the absence of light.

One  
 day they  
 will find the  
 Temple. [they  
 will not be the  
 first, but they will  
 change the nature of  
 the cave forever] A  
 wavering hand holding a  
 burning taper will see the  
 formations which seem to stop time.  
 The Temple cavern is 200 feet tall,  
 dripping with the enormity of  
 almost-translucent stone sheets curling  
 around an inclusion of ancient lava.  
 The lava has formed a seam of dark stalactites  
 which glisten in the firelight amongst the pale  
 limestone which came afterwards. On some there  
 is a fine encrustation of crystals from the intruding  
 calcite imposing upon their inherent porosity.  
 Behind them sits a large white shelf of flowstone,  
 and upon that, embedded into the calcite, is the  
 remains of a human form.

The volcanic stalactites almost reach the surface of  
 the water beneath, and when you see them from  
 the pond, the foreshortened perspective creates  
 a dark architecture around the flowstone which  
 appears to float in a brutal kind of darkness.

That first person to see must have  
 considered the fragility of their own  
 existence. To find this encrusted and  
 embedded skull, staring blankly into  
 the black roof of the cave from the  
 pale yellow flickering light of a flame  
 must have almost stopped their  
 breath, if not their heart.

Did they depart there?

Did they enter the  
 cave and find  
 this perfectly  
 composed  
 position  
 to expire,  
 or

were

they placed,

with ceremony, after their passing?

Discussions have surfaced about exhuming the  
 remains for scientific research. It's funny how we  
 become public property after a time, useful for the  
 comprehension of ourselves.

The  
world  
changes  
outside as  
flippantly as a  
spring day. The  
cave is more constant,  
as steady as its atmosphere.  
Actually, a lot of caves breathe.  
They try to maintain an equal  
pressure with the surface, so when  
the barometric pressure rises outside  
the cave, it forces air inside to normalise  
the pressure within.

I imagine the atmosphere created by our bodies.  
Imperceptible to ourselves perhaps, but  
imagine that it exists for the bacteria  
which inhabit our shells. I've been  
thinking of the sun and our  
spherical home as the  
basis of our geometry  
and imagine the  
  
kind of geometry  
  
our bacteria  
  
would create  
  
given  
the  
complexity  
of our form  
as building blocks.  
Is it imperceptible?  
Perhaps only introverts  
with their enhanced gravity  
send out a quiet pocket of atmosphere  
which allows the like-minded to share and expand  
this invisible membrane of comfort. Certainly  
I can breathe more easily when I am near those  
whom I favour.

STALACTITE

I write this on a bus heading for an installation  
of an exhibition. I write this in the midst of an  
inconvenient bout of vertigo which  
is disappointingly *not* like a Hitchcock  
movie at all, but rather like  
being drunk without all the fun  
parts. It makes me consider  
the cavities of my body.  
How the crystals in my  
ears have gone awry.  
My own personal  
stalactites suddenly  
sending mixed  
messages  
to my  
  
brain  
  
about  
  
distance  
and  
direction  
and again  
I consider that  
insinuating darkness and  
wonder about the permeability of bodies.  
And molecules. And forces and gravity. It would be  
better if we were stuck together with glue.

There is a group of limestone caves a couple of  
hours from the town where I was born.

37°29'45.2"S 148°09'46.7"E

I remember well the first time I went into a cave,  
about how, before I was distracted by the lighting  
and the spectacular forms, I was taken by the  
solidity surrounding the hollows.  
The density of the earth around  
this pocket I happened to  
inhabit. All those early  
dreams came flooding back,  
but I had never  
felt the  
heaviness  
of the  
layers  
before.

The darkness, of course was another thing  
altogether, but the density of the earth was  
something I had not experienced, and for some  
reason I equated it to drowning. But then, I seem  
to have a differentiation problem with phase  
states. I experienced this sensation twice more,  
both times giving me pause mid-step.

STALACTITE

The first, Paris, 2009, descending the catacombs.  
It wasn't the idea of death or even the reality of  
seeing so many ornately stacked human  
remains. It was not even the thought of  
plague or disease, although at one stage,  
upon resurfacing and noting the white  
chalky secretions all over my shoes,  
it did give me pause.

But

it  
was  
the

descending.

I am no Orpheus,  
it would seem. Or  
perhaps I have not  
discovered the right  
motivation yet. But the  
process of giving myself  
to the earth – with its implicit  
sense of the word *voluntarily* caused all  
the problems. Halfway down there is a  
defibrillator machine waiting on the landing.  
They stick a skull of top of it, brown with age and  
grinning with its ghoulishly wide smile.

The second time, Chongqing, 2018.  
Again descending, this time a series of escalators  
to a train so many levels down I thought I might  
never surface.

Chongqing.

The city that builds down as far as it builds up.  
Like the reflections of the stalactites caught in a  
pool, like a heartbeat, an oscillating sound wave;

down

up, down down up.

We stayed there all day and left just after  
the city had grown dark and turned on  
its incredible lighting display.

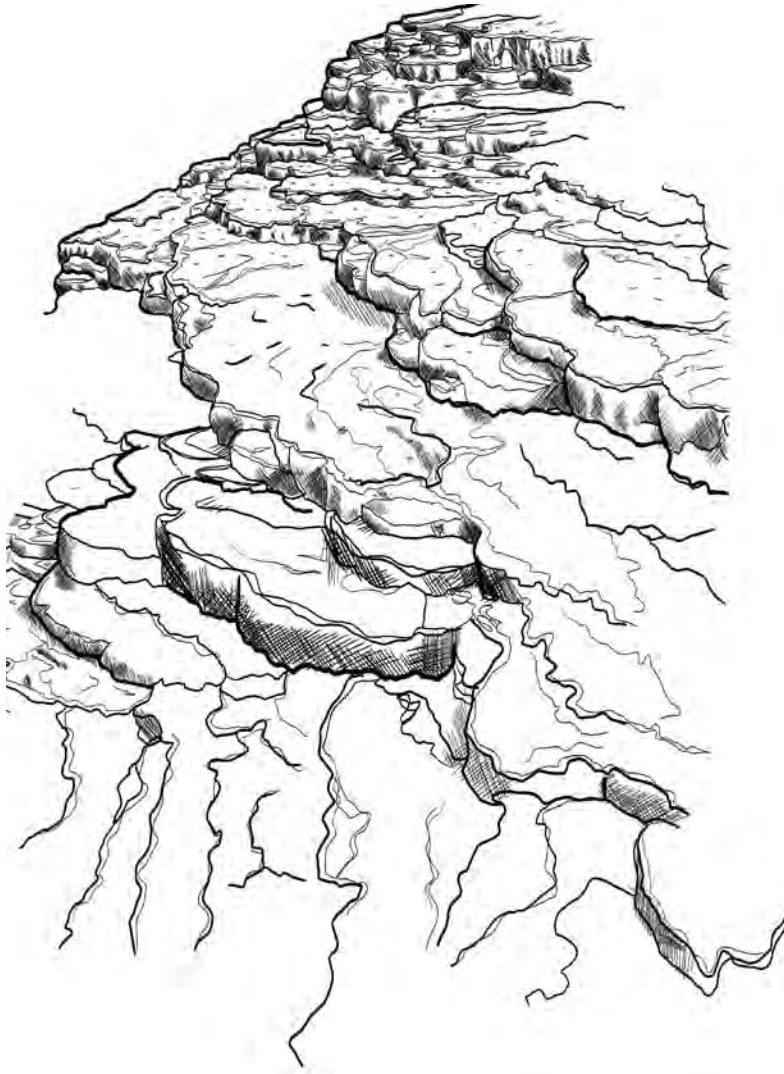
I bought a bag of some  
sort of sweet orange  
fruit and we walked  
around the  
convoluted  
streets  
eating  
them.

STALACTITE

Maps don't work there because the flat plane plan  
of the city is actually an almost-solid,  
multi-dimensional series of layers.  
Behind the streets the blocks open  
up into rubble and scattered  
throughout, markets. You can  
buy just about anything here,  
for whatever reason you  
choose. I wanted to  
liberate a bunch  
of turtles,  
but didn't  
know  
*to where,*  
for *what*  
or even  
really,  
*how.*

So instead I stared at them, and wondered at all  
the rubble. Waiting to feel the earth move.

It  
didn't take  
long. It's unsettling,  
to say the least, to feel the  
earth turn to liquid beneath  
your feet and throw you like an  
ocean wave tosses a plank of wood.



*(The terrace)*



STALACTITE

The terrace grows still. It has been a long dry year  
after all.

The terrace is broad and tessellated and lies just  
beyond the edge of the cave entrance. It starts,  
in fact, inside the cave some dozen or so  
metres, where the river seeps out of a  
fissure in the rock. It gathers, flowing  
from pool to pool, forming more pools  
like scales as it drops, a hand's width  
each step. Inside the cavern it is  
flanked by figures, a series  
of squat stalagmites that  
form a loose circle,  
as if surrounding  
a convivial  
fire.

Two  
taller  
formations  
sit further into  
the cave out of the  
light – as if only just  
arriving, as if time, for  
some reason has stopped  
entirely mid-step. Perhaps it  
has. The river trickles between  
them dispelling the illusion of stasis.  
Less ornately theatrical than the Temple with  
its straws and curtains, the terrace's beauty is in its  
sparseness.

*[The age of information.]*

The  
pools are  
shallower  
at the beginning,  
where the water flows  
faster, and then spreads  
out and deepens with each  
course. On the left there are  
four terraces which have dried  
out almost completely, and when  
you peer into them, the bases of all  
are coated in tiny white spheres.  
They call them cave pearls, and from  
here I can just make out the fine dusting  
of sparkling crystal that signifies their  
progressively expanding architectures.

I suppose the flow of the river has changed,  
or perhaps these terraces are fed only seasonally,  
when the heavy rains create less discerning  
pathways, and attempt to engulf the entire  
skin of the valley, not merely the veins.

STALACTITE

They are too regular to be eggs and too insinuatingly close to be stars, but they make me think of both and between those, and the crusted, thickening edges of each progressive terrace I cannot help but think of the origins of life as I glance back into the mouth of the cave.

From inside there comes a faint gurgle, like distant voices that raise and soften against the current.

*All minerals grow the way they do because their molecules are connected in those forms. So a small trigonal crystal like that piece of calcite over there is basically just an oversized model for its molecular lattice structure.*

*Really? Is that true?*

*Mostly. Pretty sure. Don't be coming to me for truth. Imagine it though, if we were like that and we looked like this because our molecules formed tiny lattice shaped you and me's. if we were fundamentally you and me because all the way down to the molecules we'd been determined to look and, I guess, be like this.*

Predetermination is always a disappointment.

I spent six weeks in China last year working on a project about time and other dimensions.

I spent six weeks in China and the week I planned to visit the Huanglong travertine terraces in the south of the country there was an earthquake which closed them down for the remainder of my stay.

They descend (apparently) for 2.2 miles down the Huanglong valley, flanked by trees which turn the whole area into a wall of flaming reds and oranges each autumn.

I was there in October and the possibility (now dashed) of witnessing the terraces in their most picturesque (and oxygen deprived) state broke my heart slightly.

STALACTITE

If you squint you can find them here.

32°45'03.8"N 103°49'25.1"E

My concept of geography is dislocated and, like those early dreams, I travel mostly far above the ground. I am writing this in airports and on planes which seems counter to the solidity of minerals but in fact, provides the sluice to eat through the limestone.

Distance. Heart grows fonder,  
more clarity, all the things.

I trace pathways over  
ground I will never  
set foot on.

I am  
resigned  
to this now.

I won't see everything.  
It's not going to happen and so I  
spend my transient useless hours scrolling  
though imagery taken by satellites who have  
even less connection to the land they document  
than I do. We are conspirators.

Memory helps. It's something about the re-telling, even to oneself that soothes the need to keep moving throughout the world. I follow these terrestrial pathways and embed them with memories of things; smells, sights, sounds and touch.

I know what  
the ground

feels like

because

I have

known

different

kinds of ground.

I can imagine the  
marble-like skin of

other stalactites because

I long ago touched one myself.

I'm aware that I'm missing out on the subtleties, of the irreducible details, of the *difference* amongst the sameness. It's just something I've had to come to terms with. This pre-emptive sense of loss.

STALACTITE

So. I walked this path.

It was I, with a careless hand that grazed  
the surface of this damp rock so that it  
thickened away from the residue of my  
touch. Fluting fingerstripes dragging  
through damp moonmilk.

The gentle decline, the  
subtle curves, the  
texture –  
smooth  
but solid,  
soft almost.

I remember

the unexpected  
coolness of it.

The smoothness of it.

The foreignness of it.

Those not-quite-figures, descending limbs.  
Though my traces are not prehistoric, at some  
point they will be. There were almost certainly  
others before me and there will be others after, but  
I feel the weight of my traces like a millstone.  
The leaving of unexpected traces, the idea of  
*impact.*

And now I wander streets, while far below me  
my pathways are reflected by storm water and the  
waste water of the city churning through cobbled  
tunnels that are marked with street signs for their  
subterranean workforce.

There are two skeletons in a  
museum in Philadelphia, a  
man and woman  
who both suffered  
from fibrodysplasia  
*ossificans progressive*  
– an exceptionally rare  
disease which ossifies  
the soft tissue of the  
body, turning and fusing  
the body into solid bone.

The water in this city leaves calcium  
scales on the inside of the kettle, inside the  
bathroom, anywhere it touches. I imagine my  
body like those old diagrams of a hollow earth,  
slowly accumulating growths that begin at the  
cavern of my throat and slowly fill every hollow  
with elaborate ribbons and formations as they  
accumulate around organs that resist initially  
before surrendering with their own hardening  
white flags, until I too achieve the stillness of rock.

STALACTITE

I picture this apartment, at some point in the future, flooded and growing crystalline around the chairs and the bed and the tiny cupboard where my suitcase is wedged at an angle so that I can open the door. Perhaps I will still inhabit this space, as a hollow, switching on a lamp or turning off the kettle. We leave stains of ourselves as surely as the errant drips from the shower. At night, the apartment courtyard is a slowly orchestrated ritual of movement from behind sheer curtains; crystalline, we are singular mosquitos slowly settling into the amber coloured chambers of our separate tiny worlds.

Beneath this building at night, our dreams drain into empty catacombs, washed from the rains that spill from cloud through streets running with people and cars and scooters and cigarette butts. Our voices, dreams and loneliness leach into the hollows between bricks, stunted tree roots and through the manmade honeycomb of city regulated permeations to eventually find that same lower ground. Eventually we will fade altogether, the memories coagulating in one spectacular formation to be found by the intrepid, thousands of years from now, who will discover, and name, and wonder.

As above, so below.

## STALACTITE

This city sits on the Paris basin, once an alternating series of shallow and deep water seas, whose rich sea life constitutes the calcium rich geological makeup of the city bedrock. Between the 17th and 19th centuries the city was mined extensively for that particular Lutetian limestone that so many of the buildings are made from.

That same warm grey that blankets the skies also covers the stonework along the grand boulevards, and the voids left behind are filled with the bones of the dead,

arranged  
in ways  
nature would  
never encourage.

An interesting exchange.

Below the city we have carved hollows, as if inviting our own spectacular demise. The stalactites of the future will be built with anonymous remains. Much as they always have been, but here and there an overlooked gold tooth or titanium pin will disrupt the elegance of gravity with their angular inclusions.

Eventually  
they (those  
future us-es)  
will  
find this place.  
They will wonder  
at how these pockets  
of air came into  
existence, at the odd  
weathering techniques  
that they will assign  
to harsh cave winds,  
or some other kind  
of erosion. They won't  
know the mark of a  
hammer and chisel, the  
blast patterns of explosives  
on rock by then. They will  
spend time remarking on the  
structure of the underground  
rivers and marvel at our ingenious  
but primitive technologies for  
bringing water from the source and for  
taking it back again.

STALACTITE

They will find these pockets, built far from and  
near to the surface of the earth, beneath the  
rock and ruin of desolate buildings,  
whose forms will eventually settle  
into the soil, through the  
sinkholes of a porous crust.  
Eventually the division of  
horizon will lose its  
relevance – instead,  
it will compose a  
thin oscillation  
across a  
border;  
an  
occupiable  
space between  
the air and the  
earth that is composed  
of both, but which services neither.

A kind of heartbeat in stone. Or a sound  
wave, recording the very last moment of our  
presence, or the very first moment of an earth free  
from our pettiness. Within, the ceilings and floors  
where our particulate meets – from me to you and  
you to I, our grains, our collective minerals and  
dusts will meld together to drip slowly from one  
geography to another, making a mouth out of this  
cavern and filling it with a frozen but wonderful  
menace.

*I once dreamt that my hand was also my mother's hand,  
and it (without my control or consent) set about tearing  
out my teeth one by one.*

*As it placed them into my other hand they turned into  
rubies and diamonds and other precious gems, stained in  
blood.*



They will find the pockets, but they won't be able  
to fathom the reasons that we turned away from  
the sun and chose the darker corners.

They won't understand the compulsion  
for treasure hunting by then. For the finding –  
or the hunting, this governing compulsion that  
will surely undo us. A need for the new, or the  
unknown, or at least the little known. A  
covetous desire we will never be able to  
fulfil, no matter how much we stuff our  
rarely empty pockets.

My father was a treasure hunter.  
So much so that he searched for the  
hidden things and then in turn  
buried them in pockets around  
our house. I remember very  
little of him except that his shed  
was full of both the tools for  
finding, and the tools for  
catching. A box of duck  
decoys next to a  
metal detector.  
A hole in the  
floor stuffed  
with  
alluvial  
gold,

A

box

of

bullets.  
He was a  
man who  
liked his secrets  
and he took them  
to his grave, although I  
am only wishing him dead  
now.

He can keep his secrets. I'd rather have mine.

Time shifts me from an angular city to the continuous oscillation of masses moving at once. This is a country of colour, which is probably why the stalactites here also grow in reds and pinks.

I am standing high on a ridge after a bone bouncing journey by bus over unsealed roads. Far below is a dark green fabric of mountains and hills, quite as if someone had wrinkled the bedspread into this dramatic landscape. In a conversation on Time, philosopher Michel Serres spoke of the handkerchief as a perfect example to demonstrate space time, that you could spread it out flat

and time would exist as we experience it, but that upon wrinkling it or folding it, we could possibly shrink time (or space) between locations.

Looking at the range below makes me wonder on the nature of time, of how it moves differently at altitude, and at how, perhaps, this wrinkled fabric below might distort both time and space in patterns we are not ready to perceive. That it might already anyway.

That I could be watching tiny pockets of space and time shift between the valleys and ridges of the terrain below. Certainly, from here I feel distortions of myself as I traverse the landscape. As if I both belong and don't, as if I have both seen this before, and will never be able to really comprehend its beauty.

I have paused in my descent because sometimes I am compelled to slow down the journey, so that I might remember the details.

## STALACTITE

Around the path the sparse foliage gives way to a series of descending terraces which continue over the edge of the cliff. It is warm so there are a few people swimming in the pools which gives one a sense of their scale.

### Scale.

It is as if all stages of their growth are shown at once. From the tiny detailed texture which adorns the travertine walls, part stalactite type growth, part bodily-like pocket – the terraces form edge first, like slip-casting, their edges thick with calcite and other minerals. Inside each, increasing shades of greens and blue-greens, as if reflecting the sky and the mountains around. There are no fences to disrupt the elegance of the fall – if it can be called such. Its name *Hierve el agua* literally means *the water boils*, although it is not so warm when I inevitably slip on the wet travertine and end up ankle deep in the mineral rich water.

*Cascadas petrificadas* feels more apt – since the waterflow is subtle, and honestly, feels more propelled by clumsy tourist than the tiny bubbling vents that rise from the stone. From the amphitheatre formation you can see the dominant waterfall *cascada grande*, which projects out from the surrounding foliage and drops dramatically, caked in white fluting, some ninety metres down into the valley. It looks partly like a melted candle, but almost certainly like a frozen waterfall, especially from this distance. I have the same sense of wonder looking at it as I did the first time I saw a glacier spilling over the top of a mountain range in Iceland.

STALACTITE

The car slowed; my comprehension also, as I  
stared at what appeared to be an enormous  
frozen wave about to descend between the  
mountain folds and crash down to consume us far  
below in the valley.

This is less ominous, but there is something  
about a static formation that slows time  
around it. As if it tries to  
still the  
pulse  
  
and  
  
the  
  
mind  
  
into  
  
a  
series  
of  
tiny  
beats  
and  
drops  
so that one  
might make sense  
of the greater whole.

From the ampitheatre to the greater fall there is a  
descending path of oversized steps assembled  
out of rocks. Amongst the common pebbles,  
marbled slabs have been cemented in and  
have worn underfoot into beautiful layers  
of translucent quartz with opaque matrices.  
Glistening in the heat of the day and  
polished by thousands of footsteps,  
they sparkle in random stripes  
amongst the hot dry dust  
marred only by an  
occasional wet  
footprint  
carried  
from  
the  
  
pools  
  
nearby.



*[ten hours]*

*[the age of fusion and dispersal]*

I need to sleep. It's becoming problematic.  
Instead I board planes. If I cannot dream-fly, then  
perhaps I can traverse that space in other ways.  
From here, of course I have the benefit of doing it  
without the ceilings. Although those many layers  
of atmosphere are surely as effective. If not more  
so.

I am moving again. It is as if I am trying to keep  
up with the continual movement of the earth.

I can feel my self dissolving at twenty  
thousand feet but fortunately I come  
back to land as we descend.

I wonder what parts of  
myself I will leave  
behind and what I  
will gain in  
exchange.

Such  
is  
the  
nature  
of energy.

I am in that place  
where dreams and the  
other lucid states incorporate  
into a sticky gravity-like glue whose  
bulk makes me conform to certain realities.  
I'm not so fond of most of them.

STALACTITE

Outside my window trumpets blare. Outside my window there is another window to another city that I have only seen too briefly, with the wind carrying me from place to place without pause and barely an anchor to tie myself to. I held fast to any solidity, but fall again, like lint, upon waking, into the river of sleep, and I'm unsure of the truth of anything much but skin.

Outside this window a thousand pairs of feet march and dance in time to dozens of enthusiastic drums. Their faces are a blur but I remember the masks painted upon them, the marching army of festive skulls. I feel that particular chill when my eyes meet theirs, again, like a dream made flesh or almost flesh.

It is each  
night,  
marked  
by  
the

close and singular bangs of fireworks.

From  
the hollowed  
out undergrounds  
of Paris filled with  
bones to the streets  
of Oaxaca where  
representatives of the  
dead walk the earth,  
I am surrounded by the  
skeletal in all stages of  
dissolution, so it is hardly  
surprising that they should filter  
down, through my internal honeycomb  
and into these unconscious dreamscapes.

*This is me, walking inside an endless house. Apparently a guest, I nonetheless am replete with uncomfortable burdens. Packages and bags fill my hands and occupy parts of my person. I am here to see someone – the daughter of the house – but she is busy with a friend who refuses to take off their motorbike helmet, so all I can see of them is their bright green eyes, regarding me. Sizing up my responsibilities perhaps.*

*The house is lavish and set for a party. This is not my world and honestly I'm just hoping for a quiet corner to leave my bags. I'm also aware that I am severely underdressed. My clothes are covered in paint and this is how I realise that I have been at art school. [Which is weird, considering.] This is confirmed by the two people with me, and the ensuing conversation I have with them.*

*The daughter of the house is debating with herself as to whether she should stay or go.*

*The one with the helmet watches without contributing, but I confess to them both that I don't really have an option but to continue. [Again. Odd.]*

*Suddenly I am walking alongside a river.*

*Shallow and broad with the suggestion of a shore on either side, it runs slowly, like honey and is filled with pieces of equally slowly moving detritus.*

*Chairs and tables and pieces of furniture, it would seem.*

*Probably from the house, considering how expensive they look.*

*A flow of broken antiques floating on a thin skin.*

*The figure beside me has taken off their helmet but I still can't make out their face, but they are – it would seem, a decent listener, although I'm not convinced that I am actually talking out loud.*

*The daughter reappears. Frantic now, she grips my arms and is yelling in my face but her voice is swallowed, as if a strong wind is ripping the sound from her mouth as soon as it forms from her lips.*

*I know that I am squinting, trying to make out what she is saying, while also being aware of the faceless person and the congealing pile of detritus on the shore behind us.*

*Eventually I can make out what she is asking, behind the urgency, over and again, almost a chant if not for the scream.*

*Help me to solidify  
Help me to solidify  
Help me to solidify*

*Again with the green eyes watching while I am being shaken awake out of the dream as I try to explain that I cannot possibly help with any of that.*

*Not a single grain. Not a single drop.*





# COLOPHON

*Stalactite* is one of forty mineral recompositions commissioned by A Published Event for *Loſt Roĉks* (2017–21).

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These things leach through  
the unconscious one drip  
at a time.

A tube of copper, a tin of  
coffee, a pair of broken  
wheels. Timber, always  
timber and string.

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