



BERTRAND FLEURET

LANDMASSES AND RAILWAYS

TIME FORKS AND TERRESTRIAL MAPS:
BERTRAND FLEURET'S *LANDMASSES AND RAILWAYS* BY ADAM BELL

"I AM ALONE. WALKING AT RANDOM. WANDERING, AS IF AT RANDOM, AMONG THE UNRECOGNIZABLE FRAGMENTS OF WHAT WERE PALATIAL HOMES, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, PRIVATE RESIDENCES, GAMING HOUSES AND HOUSES OF PROSTITUTION, THEATRES, TEMPLES, AND FOUNTAINS. I AM LOOKING FOR SOMETHING".

-ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET, *TOPOLOGIES OF A PHANTOM CITY*, 1976

I USED TO HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT SPELUNKING. CRAWLING DEEP BENEATH THE EARTH'S SURFACE, I WOULD QUICKLY LOSE MY WAY ALONG THE FORKING PATHS AND FLOODED INTERIOR. SWALLOWED WHOLE AND TRAPPED WITHIN THE EARTH'S STRANGE INTERIOR, I WOULD AWAKE IN A COLD SWEAT. IF I'D KNOWN BETTER, I'D KNOW THE EARTH WAS HOLLOW AND, THAT IF I'D JUST KEPT DIGGING, I WOULD HAVE EMERGED ON THE OTHER SIDE. SIR EDMOND HALLEY (THE FATHER OF HALLEY'S COMET) KNEW THIS AS EARLY AS 1691. ACCORDING TO HALLEY, BENEATH THE EARTH'S CRUST LAY THREE CONCENTRIC SPHERES, NESTLED TOGETHER LIKE A TERRESTRIAL RUSSIAN DOLL, COMPLETE WITH THEIR OWN SUN. CYRUS TEED, FATHER OF KORESHANITY, TAKING HALLEY'S THEORY ONE STEP FURTHER, REVEALED THAT WE ACTUALLY LIVE ON THE INSIDE OF OUR HOLLOW EARTH. ROUTINELY DISCREDITED, HOLLOW EARTH THEORIES NEVERTHELESS LINGER IN THE BACKWATERS OF OUR SCIENTIFIC AND UTOPIC BELIEFS, REFUSING TO DIE AND INCESSANTLY ASKING THE QUESTIONS - HOW DO WE GET THERE? WHICH WAY IS UP?

BERTRAND FLEURET'S *LANDMASSES AND RAILWAYS* (J&L BOOKS, 2009) IS A PHOTOGRAPHIC TRAVELOGUE TO OUR INTERIOR, OR PERHAPS AN EXPLORATION OUTWARDS, TO THE ENCIRCLING SPHERES ABOVE. DIVIDED INTO FIVE SECTIONS - I. THE MELANCHOLY OF DEPARTURE, II. APPROACHING THE CITY, III. INSIDE THE WALLS, IV. AN EMPTY BUILDING, AND V. THE GARDEN - THE BOOK TAKES US ON A WINDING JOURNEY THROUGH A STRANGE BUT FAMILIAR WORLD. IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE THAT FLEURET BEGINS OUR TRIP WITH A CRYPTIC PHOTOGRAPH OF AN ANTIQUE BOOTH . . . OR IS IT SOME ANCIENT SPACE-POD? NO TIME FOR QUESTIONS. WE QUICKLY CRASH DOWN INTO THE OCEAN. PAST THE SWARMING JELLYFISH, WE SCRAMBLE FOR LAND, GASPING FOR BREATH BEFORE SAFELY MAKING IT ASHORE.

FROM OUR INITIAL DESCENT, FLEURET TAKES US ON A BEWILDERING JOURNEY TO THE CITY, THROUGH ITS MODERN RUINS AND BACK TO THE PRIMAL UNDERGROWTH OF THE GARDEN. SHOOTING IN IMPRESSIONISTIC BLACK AND WHITE, FLEURET HAS THE EYE OF A HARRIED DETECTIVE OR ALIEN CARTOGRAPHER. REMAPPING AND EXPLORING THE WORLD, FLEURET GATHERS FRAGMENTS THAT COHERE AND THEN BREAK APART. IS THAT A DISTANT HEAVENLY BODY OR A GLOWING BALL OF TRASH? DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM SUCH SOURCES AS THE COSMIC JAZZ MUSICIAN SUN RA, CHRIS MARKER'S *SANS SOLBEIL*, THE NOVELS OF ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET AND *SOLARIS*, FLEURET'S BOOK IS A RETRO-FUTURISTIC TRAVELOGUE AS TOLD BY A BASTARD CHILD OF *PROVOKE*.

A DISCREET 6.7"x9.5", *LANDMASSES AND RAILWAYS* IS WONDERFULLY SEQUENCED AND EDITED BY FLEURET AND JASON FULFORD. PRINTED IN MATTE DUOTONE, THE PHOTOGRAPHS HAVE THE ROUGH BEAUTY AND IMMEDIACY OF CRIME DOCUMENTS. GIVEN ITS MODEST SIZE, THE BOOK FEELS MORE LIKE A SURREALIST NOVEL WITH THE TEXT EXPUNGED THAN A FINE-ART PHOTO BOOK - A PUZZLE MISSING ITS REASSURING REFERENCE PHOTO. LIKE FLEURET'S FIRST BOOK, *THE RISK OF AN EARLY SPRING* (ARTIMO, 2004), WHICH OFFERED A SIMILAR STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS JOURNEY THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, THE PATH OUTLINED IN *LANDMASSES AND RAILWAYS* IS OPAQUE. MYSTERIOUS AND BEAUTIFUL, FLEURET'S PERIPATETIC JOURNEY MAPS THE LITTER-STREWN STREETS, ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDINGS AND ENTANGLED GARDENS OF AN ALTERNATE WORLD - FARAWAY, YET SO CLOSE, HIDDEN, JUST BEYOND OUR REACH.

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BERTRAND FLEURET WAS BORN IN VERSAILLES, FRANCE, 1969. HE STUDIED PHOTOGRAPHY AND GRAPHIC-DESIGN AT ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE VERSAILLES AND LONDON COLLEGE OF PRINTING. HIS FIRST BOOK, *THE RISK OF AN EARLY SPRING* WAS PUBLISHED BY ARTIMO IN 2004. FLEURET LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN, GERMANY.

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