

The climb to Tenner Chrüz

I have always imagined myself as a red dot moving across a piece of ancient parchment. A map of the world. A drop of red ink fading and reappearing as my body moves through space, from location to location. Anyone who wishes can fold back the map to see where I am. The mark is not indelible. It fades as I also fade from that place. But the memory of the place never fades. I explore locations, as might a bird or a cloud, casting my mind up in order to survey down, joining the imaginary dots and somehow knowing where to go. Back at ground level I am cartographer, mapping the image with my mind.

Today I go as the crow. I use my intuition to guide me through the valley. I make no advance decisions and let my gut lead the way. I want to feel the landscape, to sweat in its belly, dive into its heart, be carried by its breeze, to feel my body, to feel alive in this palpable green. The wind is audible, penetrating. I sense in the way it navigates my limbs that rain is advancing. I must also advance. Complacency will get me nowhere. When I assume I know the way, nature sends a reminder that I know very little of her ways. I retrace my steps and find marble. It sits mollusc like, feeding from a rock. Like miniature drones, hoverflies stop to observe me. The sound is overwhelming, almost biblical in proportion. Swarms, swarming, to look at me. Fighting one another for a better view. I return their gaze. What do they see, sense, want? I wrongly attach human attributes to these most complex and yet simple of buzzing entities. Do/can they imagine the same of me? Are they my guides? My protectors? Or markers like the painted flags on trees, of my route through the forest. What footprints am I leaving? What does it mean to make a mark? Will future generations sense that I passed here? Will my descendants feel me in their bones as I feel my ancestors in mine? I am lost. A pine branch offers me its hand and I turn and regain my senses, sensing, the sensation of my body, bellows-like, chest heaving like a concertina in well-oiled hands. I stop once more and am re-joined by the deafening buzzing of my stripy yellow companions. Am I being mapped through sound? What sound do I make? What do they apprehend? I suddenly feel self-conscious and commence walking again. I am a magnet for flies. Just as the bells of Tenna ring out, cascading in ever increasing circles across the valley, I too emanate whirlpools of scent that leave an imperceptible (to me) trace on the landscape. The forest clears me a window through her branches. I comprehend the view. I myself am a signpost, a beacon, a map of man in a realm of trees. Who is the specimen? Whose life will play out longer? Whose trace will be felt on this mound of rock and ferns for centuries to come? The trees signal their answer in their swaying branches. Time seeping through the delicate fingers of their arching hands. I run. I want to imprint the mountain on my body, to feel its footprints on my flesh, its pine needles tracing tattoos in my memory. I let the terrain be my guide. I want to feel the mountain in my exhaustion, trickle her sweat down my back, taste her blood in my mouth, exalt in her elements. I am alive in the mountain and she is alive in me. In the swirling of the ants, in the chiming of the cowbells, in the proliferation of yellow flowers on the sloping ground. I teeter at the top of a ravine. I test my balance against the counter forces of wind and sky. I am eye-level with the clouds. I am vulnerable and

eternal. I stop to drink. I am mapped in the broken spider webs that cling to my arms. Will the hoverflies remember me? Is my pollen carried by the bees? Are my fingerprints visible on the branches, as the landscape is printed on me? I climb more slowly now. The landscape is vertiginous and I want to feel its pull. Downward, outwards, upwards. The sky is oceanic in its vastness, though it does not need to distinguish either way. A cow spots me before I her. She shakes her bell in my direction and I know the way to go. I drink water from the valley. It traces a watercourse through my body, resembling the path of the melting mountain snow. My heart crashes like thunder. I'm a mountain goat. I'm defrosted snow. I'm a collection of cells. The sky is my map now; the clouds give me my bearings. The terrain is mapped. Its coordinates deep. Etched into its rock faces. It too is etched in my face, in me. I see the air in my skin. Written in invisible yet perceptible traces.

Hannah Standen, July 2018