

Cook's Line

I cut into Cook's pen's
line at latitude 48° 57', longitude 57° 58',
just below his much vandalized
monument
on the edge of Corner Brook.

I lift the section of line extending west
along Humber Arm's south shore.
At first it is no thicker than a thread,
but I flatten it between my palms, I shake it
like a long ribbon, sending
waves down its length.

I tug it from side to side, get it limber
and loose.

The pigment he used was remarkably
dense;
it somehow muffled everything on both sides,
like the Great Wall of China,
kept the smell of the sea out of the land and smell
of the land out of the sea.

I dip the severed line in the salt water
and make it soft,
knead it, stretch it wide like black
dough.

I hold the bottom edge down with my feet spread
wide apart. I stretch
the top corners out with my hands,
making a tunnel, a kind of nighttime road
of Cook's line.

The pigment thins and separates,
you can walk along inside Cook's line
like a long grey cloud.

Listen. There are French voices inside the line
and voices that might be Micmac
or even Beothuk, men singing in something
like Spanish or Portugese, you can hear
birds and waves among beach stones,
taste the kelpy sound of the surf, clear

serum of mussel juice, clams' fine
squirts.

I take my cassette recording of Alfred saying:
"There's nar fish be d' wharf clar of a sculpin."
and throw that down inside Cook's line.

I take the photos out of all the groc and confs
and take-outs between Corner Brook
and Lark Harbour and throw them down inside
Cook's line,

then I throw in the C & E Takeout
itself and the John's Beach church that used to be
in my grade three geography book,

and I pick up all
the kids hitchhiking in Mount Moriah
and drive them to the side of Cook's line
and let them out and watch them go
running out of sight in the ink mist,

and I pick up a ball that comes bouncing toward me
in the street in Curling and pitch it
down inside the line, and the ball-hockey players
go chasing after it,

and the car
that's rocking up and down on its springs
in the bushes just off the Cook's Brook Park
parking lot, I push it slowly into Cook's line
and give it a shove – two startled flushed faces
in the rear window –

and I throw in
Woods Island and Pissing Horse Falls
and the solar orgasm rock and Mad Dog Lake
and Lisa and me at the top of Blomidon Head
(Is that a caribou in the pond below? Yes,
it's moving. No, it isn't. Yes, it is.)
And Walt LeMessurier napping in the sun
on the rim of Simms Gorge,

and I drag
the line over to the start of the Clark's Brook
road, and a row of skidoos, the riders all
in zipped suits and helmets, roars
down inside Cook's line,

and the line
is stretched to bursting now, the inside
spilling back out to the outside, birds'

calls, crinkled light on the bay, and I know
Cook is down there somewhere, bent
to his table with pen and dividers,
still leaving his fine black trail.

What will he think when his line
spreads and explodes at his pen's
tip and the first of the ball-hockey kids
and skidoos come tumbling in front of him?