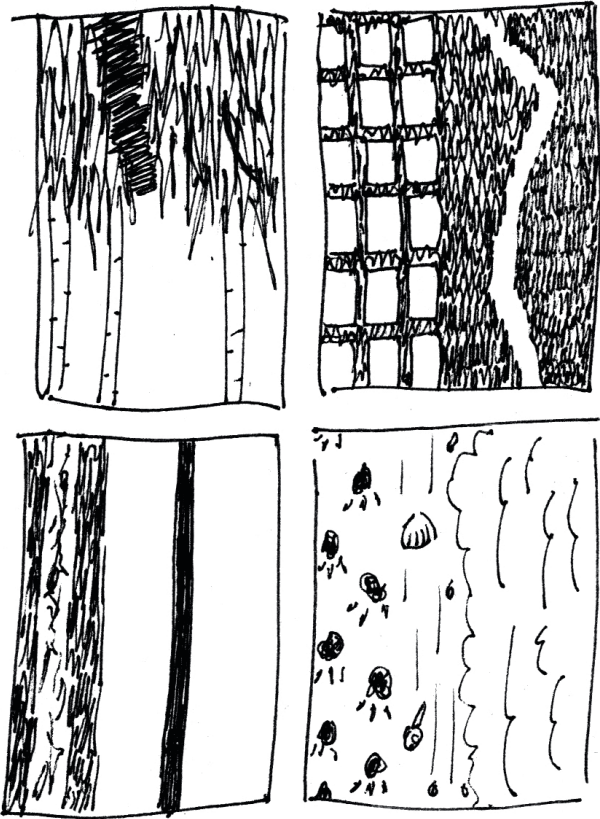


Desire Lines



couldn't keep walking, that much was clear. But I also didn't want to go back. I don't like retracing my steps. I looked up. I could hear the cars. I thought, Maybe?

I tried to climb up the side of the cliff. It wasn't smart, I admit, but all day, I had been thinking about desire lines. I had been thinking about those paths we make when we don't like the one set down for us. They say it only takes a dozen people to make a new line in the grass. You have to trust that when you step off the trail, you'll find your way back again. Even if you have to cut your own trail.

The ground was soft with dried leaves, and what I thought were strong branches broke off in my hands. The smell of decomposition was thick in the cold October air. Summer is definitely over, no matter what the nude bathers on Wreck Beach might say. I made it halfway using ferns to drag myself up, their roots unlikely strong enough to hold my weight. I found a place to pause on

small, but sturdy tree, curved like a seat and jutting out from the cliff. I drank some water, looking down at where I had been and where I had to go. There was no path to be seen. If it had been there at all, it was obscured by the bush now.

If it had been later, colder, darker, I might have convinced myself to give up and turn back then. But the road was so close. The crest was lined with big trees, and I was underneath, where the earth had eroded and their roots were visible. I thought, if I could just grab hold of one strong branch, I could pull myself up over the edge.

I battled my way through a patch of brambles, thorns catching my shirt and my hair, scratching up my hands and arms. I took a detour to a tree which looked closer, tantalizingly close. Then I slipped in a muddy patch; it rained last week. I caught myself. I looked up. I wasn't going to make it.

The trip down the mountain was easier than up. I found the trail. I trudged back to

Pacific Spirit Park is a piece of old
rainforest standing tall between the ocean
and the city. Down on the beach, you can't
see the expensive houses and the glass
university buildings. But we can see the
container ships coming into the port. We can
see inside the earth, where the cliff has fallen
away to reveal the lines of sediment.
They don't make it easy to walk around
the peninsula. The trail gives way to the
beach. It leads back to the road, then down
to the sea. Keep walking. The end of the trail
doesn't have to mean the end of your day.
Even on the beach, you can see where
people have walked before you. You can see
the shoe prints in the sand. You can follow
the trail of seaweed leading back to the
path.
We're supposed to walk where they tell
us. We keep on our side of the line. We learn
the rules of the road. That's all society is, a
set of rules which we've all agreed to follow.
But it's more fun to take a wrong turn and

But maybe if I get off the trail, away from
the road, where no path has been cut
through the wilderness, I'll find a little piece
of something untouched I can love. Maybe I
can find something in this city which still
loves me back. My cut-up palms and
splinters in my fingertips say I probably
didn't find it on the side of that cliff above
the Strait of Georgia. But my hands will heal.
And I'll keep looking.

the map. I walked up the stairs that lead
back to the road. I walked along the side of
the road with no sidewalk until I found a bus
stop. And then I came home, scratched and
bruised, with tree bits in my hair and dirt
down the back of my shirt.

Since I started hiking again this year, I've
lost 40 pounds. I had to get rid of those
jeans and buy the next size down. But that's
not why I go looking for new trails. What I'm
really looking for are the pieces of the city I
can still love.

Vancouver doesn't know how to be a city
anymore, if it ever did. It's a place in a
constant state of rebuilding and rebelling
against change. I just assume every house
costs a million dollars. When I walk through
the obviously rich neighbourhoods, my brain
can't even conceive of a number. It's a city of
old hippies who have hung onto all the
boring parts of the '60s and forgotten how to
be radical.

see what else is down the road.

I didn't set out to walk the Vancouver
coastline. I only wanted to fit into my old
jeans. I started where most tourists start in
Vancouver, with Stanley Park, walking from
Yaletown to Waterfront. Then I decided to
walk the other way from the Skytrain station,
around False Creek, to Granville Island, and
onward to Spanish Banks. Now it's a project,
walking the jagged line of the coast in three
hour chunks.

The trail is hard to follow in Pacific Spirit
Park. At times, it looks overgrown and
unused, a path returned to the wild. There
are wooden steps leading down to the
beach, but the rest of the trail wasn't built by
the city. Still, I know which way to walk. I
know someone has been here. I can see the
path chosen by the thousands of dreamers
before me.

When I found the true end of the trail,
beyond the map, but sooner than I
expected, I didn't know what to do. I