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no, not forgot - were unable to reach: literary readings of desire in land art

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Art History

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Abstract

This thesis provides a literary reading of desire in contemporary land art. Using literature as a tool to supplement more traditional theory, an analysis of desire may become poetic, open-ended, and allow for interdisciplinary slippage. The chapters are structured as case studies which explore the use of natural light in James Turrell's *skyspaces* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*; the function of distance in Walter de Maria's *Lighting Field* and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*; and passages of time in Ana Mendieta's *tableau* works and *siluetas* alongside Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva*. The seeking out of desire in these works challenges the contemporary notion that desire is under threat by 24/7 electrical lighting, accelerationism, and the atomization of time. This thesis argues that the works in question may be viewed as repositories of desire and provides outlines for the way desire may continue to reach outwards in an increasingly connected world.

Keywords

desire, eros, light, time, distance, Anne Carson, Virginia Woolf, James Turrell, Walter de Maria, Ana Mendieta, Clarice Lispector

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis provides a literary reading of desire in contemporary land art. By using literature as a tool to supplement more traditional theory which often attempts to build more rigid frameworks, an analysis of desire is allowed to become poetic, open-ended, and welcoming to interdisciplinary slippage. The chapters are structured as case studies which explore the use of natural light in James Turrell's *skyspaces* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*; the function of distance in Walter de Maria's *Lighting Field* and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*; and passages of time in Ana Mendieta's *tableau* works and *siluetas* alongside Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva*. The active seeking out of desire in these works challenges the contemporary notion that desire is under threat by 24/7 electrical lighting, accelerationism, and the atomization of time. This thesis argues that the works in question may be viewed as repositories of desire and provides outlines for the way desire may continue to reach outwards in an increasingly connected world.

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Introduction

*as the sweetapple reddens on a high branch
high on the highest branch and the applepickers forgot—
no, not forgot: were unable to reach*

– Sappho, fragment 105a, trans. Anne Carson

The space between two texts is a turbulent one. I began thinking about desire while simultaneously reading Anne Carson’s *Eros the Bittersweet*, which poetically prods at the eroticism of Greek poetry, and Byung Chul Han’s *The Agony of Eros*, which ruminates on desire’s despondency. Desire, Han claims, is in crisis today as everything is increasingly available and the time between a want and the fulfillment of that want is infinitesimally whittled away.¹ Being despondent is one of those things that is only fun for a short while. It is entertaining to read someone rant about the state of the world but after some time passes without caveats, alternatives, or imagined futures, it is deadening. Believing there is no possibility for desire and remaining stubbornly stuck in its loss perpetuates that presumed impossibility.

Carson’s writing, like desire, is generative. Like eros, it is a verb pointing to possibility, momentum, force, movement, and tension. The two texts form a compelling debate, with Carson dynamically and playfully on the side of eros and Han sulkily insisting that it is no longer conceivable.

This thesis takes up the space between both of their arguments, admitting to the precarity of desire that Han describes but also identifying, in contemporary land art and literature, the modalities of desire that Carson finds in ancient Greek mythology. The connection between land art and mythology may not be immediately evident: the human and godly characters of the former are largely missing from land art, which abstracts its concepts into often-minimal forms. But stumbling across a work of land art like Walter De Maria’s

1. Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 36.

Lightning Field without knowing its origin may be an otherworldly experience. The four hundred metal poles that make up the work and beckon lightning from the sky appear to have been placed on the earth by giants. Works like *Lightning Field*, James Turrell's *skyspaces*, and even Ana Mendieta's far more intimate compositions of earth and body provide other ways of explaining the elemental relationships between various parts of the interlocking world. They harken to something mysterious, shifting our gaze to forces larger than ourselves.

And in the case of these three artists, mythology is also involved in the conceptualizing of the works themselves: discussions around Turrell's *skyspaces*, which provide architectural oculi from which to view the sky, conjure up cyclops, and heavenly clearings, as well as the artist's own Quaker background; De Maria's work and its relationship to lightning cohabitates with the far more ancient traditions and meteorology-myths of the native Hopi people of New Mexico; and Ana Mendieta's work responds to Latin American death rituals, as well as creating her own mythos of the coming together of body and world.

Donna Haraway suggests that it matters what thoughts think thoughts:² to talk about desire solely through the lens of theory with the goal of producing a strict framework would be to still it with answers. Literature intervenes as a crucial tool. Desire is dependent on movement and slippage. To maintain desire is to never truly understand it, because desire is the tension of *almost* between a question and its answer. In other words, providing a theoretical framework for desire causes it to disappear. Literature provides a way to talk about the question of desire without trying to answer or solve it. Taking cues from this structure, I attempt to use literature as a tool to follow my argument wherever it may go rather than persuasively trying to steer it towards a conclusion.

Clarice Lispector, in her erratic commentary on writing in *Água Viva* describes how she attempts to write in the present moment of desire. This present moment provides the

2. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

intimacy and immediacy of the writing. Instead of presenting an argument, she goes hand in hand with her reader.³ One does not know more than the other. Isabelle Stengers gestures to this same acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty, the absence of outline, in her discussion on the meaning of wonder.⁴ Wonder is the stuff at the edge of what can be measured and known. It is the engine that pushes thought and science toward new horizons. The gap between literature and land art provides this edge: I may explain a way of seeing desire in *The Waves* and it may make sense, until the shift back to Turrell's *skyspaces* makes the logic slip and forces it to continue reaching and recalibrating.

Although we are perhaps most familiar with desire referring to sexual or romantic relationships, desire in this thesis refers to its most basic definition of *wanting* or *longing*. This is at times sexual, as in the relationships described in *Autobiography of Red* and *The Waves*, but also applies to photography, light, distance, and relationships between body and earth.

The narrative of desire that Carson builds in *Eros the Bittersweet* also refers to both romantic relationships and other experiences not immediately identifiable as sexually erotic, such as writing. Desire is at its core a reaching toward something that must be, in order for desire not to be extinguished, just out of reach. This infinitely delayed gratification allows the experience of desire to live on. It may mean longing for a lover who constantly is leaving, squinting to see despite dim light, considering the photograph that teasingly hides as much as it reveals, and stretching the temporality of this wanting. I adopt Rebecca Solnit's opinion, as expressed in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, that desire is not a problem to be solved, but something to luxuriate in.⁵

3. Fernanda Negrete, "Approaching Impersonal Life with Clarice Lispector," *Humanities* 7, no. 2 (2018): 7, doi: 10.3390/h7020055.

4. Isabelle Stengers, "Wondering About Materialism," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne, Australia: re.press, 2011): 375.

5. Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 30.

Crucially, for both Han and Carson, desire is opposed to ownership. It depends on the desired object being kept at some distance, lest it is incorporated into the self. In other words, what is desired must be kept *other* from the desiring subject. This otherness is erotic because it implies a level of unknowability and refusal to assimilate. Acceptance of otherness is crucial because it stops the narcissistic tendency to project ourselves onto the world. Otherness is different from *othering*: the first embraces difference and the truth that things can never be fully known, acknowledging that feelings of desire are founded on these necessary edges, while *othering* builds walls around the unfamiliar as an excuse not to interact with it. Accepting otherness means that a reaching takes place; empathy and desire stretch to fill the gap between. Othering stills and deadens this reach, collapsing the self into itself and desiring only that which is familiar and accessible. Or rather, not desiring at all.

Through three case-study chapters, each pairing a work of land art and a literary work, this thesis explores the way in which the works in question act as repositories of desire, facilitating it despite the challenges posed to eroticism by our brightly lit, speedy, contemporary world in which everything is increasingly available to be consumed.

The first chapter considers the use of light in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and James Turrell's *skyspaces*. Both of these works reject electrical light in favour of the natural, slow fluctuations of sunlight, providing an alternative to the brightly lit world of late capitalism (which Jonathan Crary suggests leaves no place for otherness in its prioritization of surveillance and productivity). Relying on sunlight for light also suggests a different relationship with ambiguity. Daylight is fickle, waxes and wanes, and forces us to accept that not everything may be visible. Desirous light leaves room for slippage, misunderstandings, haziness, veiling, and a lack of resolution.

The literal haze of dim lighting, which Turrell suggests brings seeing down to the level that lovers use, is echoed by Woolf's ruminations on linguistics and the desire for a "little language such as lovers use,"⁶ that is full of shuffles and pauses. The objective in both

6. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), 159.

cases is not to clarify but to dim to the degree that still leaves space for otherness. And finally, when it comes to night, both utilize night as an erotic subject unto itself; night collaborates with lovers rather than being hounded away by the pervasiveness of electrical lighting which cares only for productivity and profit. Looking, for the viewer, becomes an active process of trying to figure out what one is seeing or reading. Not everything is given; concealment draws our attention back to the position we ourselves occupy and triangulates our desire. We reach towards the voids of Turrell's *skyspaces* to interpret the unforthcoming sky and grasp for the six monologues that weave together to build Woolf's text, trying to draw them together but succeeding only for blinks.

Chapter 2 picks up the idea of otherness in relation to distance as Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* meet in the New Mexico desert. Desire is by definition a lack, and physical distance is one way to ensure that the lack is maintained. In the case of De Maria's work, the lack is enforced by its remote setting, its tempestuous relationship with weather which may or may not align, and the intentional chokehold on photographic material describing the work that could bring it close virtually. In Carson's work, the lack is more evidentially romantic: Geryon and Herakles, mythical enemies, become contemporary lovers who are repeatedly separated and brought close. Crucial is the role played by photography in both works. Photographic reproduction, which according to Walter Benjamin creates copies of a work in order to disseminate it, is thwarted by Carson and De Maria. The measured distribution of photographs of *Lightning Field's* image and the ban on cameras for visitors at the site keeps the work itself off the Internet, allowing it to exist more wholly in one place. In addition, the work is notoriously difficult to document, the thin metal poles fading into the sky. At noon, when the sun attempts to spotlight it from overhead, it more or less disappears.

Carson's Geryon is a photographer and thus does not shun reproduction but his photos are deliberately difficult to read. They depict moments of ambiguity, forcing depiction itself to stumble. In addition, although the moment of their capture is described in the text, the photographs themselves never make an appearance and thus form a descriptive void.

To some extent, both works exist in Jean Baudrillard's desert of the real: *Lightning Field* refuses to be mapped and thus incorporated into the unity of cartography, and *Autobiography of Red* creates its story from the ruined shreds of a lost one. Mapping is troubled by Carson, whose sensual poetic language shakes up linguistic codes, and by De Maria, whose work is conspicuously absent from platforms such as Google Maps.

Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva* and several of Ana Mendieta's *siluetas* and *tableau* works are the subject of Chapter 3, which links the previous discussions of light and distance with time. Light and time are crucially connected: sunlight takes time to travel its great distances, natural light exists in real, slow, 24-hour time whereas artificial light annihilates time, and the light at different times of the day modulates experience in both Woolf's work and Turrell's. Time also modulates distance in the time it takes to get somewhere and the thick temporality of slow travel and pilgrimage.

As opposed to James Turrell's and Walter de Maria's works, whose interventions on the land are large, sterile, and architectural, the interventions Mendieta makes involve her own body and its intimate scale. Her *tableau* works, many of which depict the nude, prone female figure (her own) and its spilling fluids provide a stark contrast to the manufactured metals and sterility of Turrell and De Maria's impositions. Her *silueta* works, for which she is best known, have an even lighter touch – instead of portraying her body they depict its absence or trace.

To account for this difference, it is essential that some of the terms previously used be reconsidered and caveats be introduced. The idea of dimming and veiling, passably neutral when writing about Turrell's *skyspaces*, has a very different connotation when applied to a decisive female nude portrayed as subject. Although some of Mendieta's *tableau* works are photographed through a "screen" or veil, in others her nudity is fully on display. Here, the call to "veil" in order to produce eroticism, following Han's claim that "it is the dress that is divine,"⁷ Barthes' statement that eroticism happens at the

7. Byung Chul Han, *Saving Beauty* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018), 29.

“gape” of a garment,⁸ and even Sappho’s lines that “her dress, when she saw it, moved her,”⁹ risks entering the dialogue of controlling women’s sexuality.

This concept of *otherness* is also far more contentious when it comes into contact with Mendieta, for whom perceived otherness was a political, lived reality. As an immigrant woman of colour practicing in a largely white, male dominated art scene in 1970s America, her identity was comprised of intersections. To apply the sort of erotic otherness that Han and Carson theorize to her actual “gendered and racialized vectors of alterity” would be a mistake.¹⁰

Holding the above caveats in mind, Chapter 3 excavates the various temporalities present in Lispector’s *Água Viva* and Mendieta’s various earth-body works, traversing myth time, geological time, the temporality of abjection, and the refusal of these works to follow the linear time of narrative. The works produced by both Mendieta and Lispector perpetuate desire by deliberately disabling any notion of conclusion.

The titles of all three chapters as well as the title of the thesis itself are taken from Sappho’s poetic fragments.

8. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 9.

9. Sappho, *If not, winter: fragments of Sappho*, trans. Anne Carson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 41.

10. Leticia Alvarado, *Abject Performances: aesthetic strategies in Latino cultural production* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 26.

1 I would not think to touch the sky with two arms: light and desire in James Turrell's *skyspaces* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

Despite being historically separated by four decades, James Turrell's skyspaces and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* utilize light in similar ways. Their reliance on natural cycles of daylight rather than electrical light on-demand creates an erotic condition of visibility – one where everything is not readily available and light may obscure as much as it reveals. Woolf does this with words, using a sensual language to describe the sun's effect on the things and people it strikes, keeping electrical light mostly out of her imagery. Turrell's architectural installations feature oculi that isolate slices of sky, inviting natural light to illuminate (or not illuminate) spaces for contemplation. Light, in both cases, is something to gaze *at* rather than something that facilitates our viewing of other things, challenging the modern relationship between light and availability, advertising, and control.

Woolf's novel, published in 1931, is perhaps her work in which plot factors the least. In it, the soliloquys of her six principal characters, always talking past each other rather than with each other, are separated by interludes describing the sun's daily progression across the sky, and the way in which it alights upon a house and beachscape. These interludes read as a sort of stage direction, which Megan Quigley alludes to when she describes *The Waves* as the novel where Woolf most “fully narrows [her] focus to the tension between atomized subjects and the external world.”¹¹ Similarly, although Turrell's skyspaces utilize artificial light for an hour at evening and dawn, it is natural light that sets the rhythm for inhabiting these architectural spaces and produces the atmosphere that modulates human interaction inside them. The artificial light, usually in the form of coloured fluorescents concealed in the walls and shining up towards the ceiling, serves to draw attention to the dimming light streaming in from above. Electric light collaborates with natural fluctuations rather than fighting against them, in order to emphasize

11. Megan Quigley, *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness: philosophy, form, and language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 97.

crepuscular spaces.¹² These works may be thought of as providing a clearing from the oppressiveness of the “deep canyons of our cities” from which we can once again view the sky.¹³

Both Turrell and Woolf’s reliance on natural light and overall denouncing of electrical light may be read as acts of refusal. Woolf was writing in the early 20th century, when electrical light began to be ubiquitous in developed countries, illuminating once-dark streets. This is something she explicitly remarks on in *Orlando*, when her titular character travels from the past (he was born in 1600) to the author’s present day in 1928.¹⁴ Turrell created his first skyspace in 1974 and his most recent in 2013, planting him firmly in the contemporary era and at the beginning of the United States’ energy crisis. President Jimmy Carter, in a light-seeking action that mimics Turrell’s own practice, installed solar panels on the White House, pushed for legislation that taxed energy usage, and repeatedly tried to convince Americans to use less.¹⁵ But moderation was not a popular platform and Americans continued to light their large homes, drive gas-guzzling cars, and, effectively, refusing to want without having.¹⁶

Developments in lighting technology have long been linked to industrialization. Portable devices like candles and wicks were expensive and lighting a large space using them required constant upkeep and produced copious amounts of smoke. Prior to the popularization of gas lighting, which was born alongside other modern developments such as railroads and factories and solved the hazy problem of candle smoke, work was

12. Nancy Spector, “Skyspace I,” *Guggenheim*, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/4089>

13. Jeffrey L Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 111.

14. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1967), 209: “Look at the lights in the houses! At a touch, a whole room was lit; hundreds of rooms were lit; and one was precisely the same as the other. One could see everything in the little square-shaped boxes; there was no privacy; none of those lingering shadows and odd corners that there used to be; none of those women in aprons carrying wobbly lamps which they put down carefully on this table and on that. At a touch, the whole room was bright. And the sky was bright all night long; and the pavements were bright; everything was bright.”

15. Meg Jacobs, “America’s Never-Ending Oil Consumption,” *The Atlantic*, May 15, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/american-oil-consumption/482532/>

16. Jacobs, “America’s Never-Ending Oil Consumption,” *The Atlantic*.

regulated by available sunlight.¹⁷ The next development would be electrical lighting, which was more radiant and had a spectrum much closer to that of daylight, to the extent that, upon experiencing it for the first time out on the street, strollers opened their umbrellas to “protect themselves from the rays of this mysterious new sun.”¹⁸

Writing about light in the 21st century, Jonathan Crary suggests that “an illuminated 24/7 world without shadows is the final capitalist image of post-history, of an *exorcism of the otherness* that is the motor of historical change.”¹⁹ The exorcism of otherness that Crary identifies and links to light not only has consequences on historical change, but also on desire, which is dependent on an unknowable other who is desired or reached-for because they are unassimilable into the self. The flux of natural light in *The Waves* and Turrell’s *skyspaces* provides an alternative to the brightly-lit world of late-capitalism, carving out repositories of desire. In their use of 24-hour, natural light to set their anticipatory rhythms, these works call into question the contemporary relationship with electrical light on-demand, which is based on immediacy. Their light is not instantaneous, nor does it create a totalizing environment that leaves no place for the other to enter. In foregrounding light’s agency, Turrell and Woolf emancipate it from its advertising functions, where light is used to feign the language of desire to spotlight covetable objects, selling satisfaction that is instantaneous and detrimental to the very concept of erotic desire and fantasy itself.

In *The Agony of Eros*, cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han diagnoses our fraught contemporary relationship with desire as a “crisis of fantasy.”²⁰ He goes on to place much of the blame on the imagery we consume through our devices, which use the language of advertising and oppress fantasy through their “high information density.”²¹

17. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995), 16.

18. Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 55.

19. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York: Verso, 2013), 9.

20. Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 41.

21. Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 38. This is not new: in *One Way Street* Walter Benjamin writes that an advertisement “all but hits us between the eyes with things as a car, growing to gigantic proportions,

Images are too highly resolved in themselves; we do not meet them halfway and reach out to them; they come to us fully formed, transmitted by the light of our screens. This connection between advertising and bright light can be found at the very beginnings of illuminated streets, where (expensive) electrical streetlamps were first installed in shopping districts so that products may be seen at all hours, as if by the light of day.²² Paradoxically, the constant availability of high-quality images and goods does not make us desire more, but reduces the desire we feel for anything since any desire may be quickly granted, thus snuffing it out. To take Han's argument further into the realm of light, the electric light of our screens is on-demand and does not fluctuate without our wanting it to; the waiting and anticipation required when dealing with natural light is rendered unnecessary by on-buttons and brightness functions. This constancy was one of the characteristics of electrical light that initially made it preferable to the wavering, flickering illumination produced by burning.²³ The artificial contemporary light we are accustomed to is employed to produce digital images, holograms, and to flatten time into a perpetual day. To borrow Jean Baudrillard's term, contemporary light produces a simulacrum; a model which is overdetermined and reproduces itself, unable to allow for the new in its exorcism of otherness.²⁴ Waking life is mediated by this light and even sleep, which should be an escape from its totalizing gaze, is disrupted by the blue light of screens that interferes with our circadian rhythms.

1.1 Slow light

Light is ever-present in *The Waves*, illuminating, in some way, every interaction. The novel's timeline is the entire lifetime of its characters, but it is also the 24-hour time of a single day. The 'action' is framed by italicized interludes, beginning at dawn and continuing to night, describing the light of the sun as it makes its daily progression across

careens at us out of a film screen." Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996), 476

22. Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 114.

23. Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 56.

24. Jean Baudrillard, "Simulation and Simulacrum," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166.

the sky, casting things in either shadow or light. This illumination leaks into the lives of Woolf's six characters, with the morning light falling on childhood; noon alighting at Percival's death, marking the novel's destructive crisis; and night setting on old age. In the dappled light of morning, Bernard, Rhoda, Jinny, Neville, Louis, and Susan attend school together, foster crushes, and produce a cacophony of description with their interlocking monologues. Subsequent sections see them splitting up, embarking on their individual ventures, enduring death and birth, and coming to terms with their own aging. With the unpeopled vignettes that make up her interludes and determine the relative temporality of each section, Claudia Olk posits that Woolf is concerned with the "dualism between the visible and the invisible, the processes of understanding and observation between subject and object."²⁵ As opposed to the digital light Han describes, which radiates at us from screens in order to project objects of desire, the light in *The Waves* illuminates the internal lives of the characters, which are modulated by it. Childhood, of which Woolf shows us an entire day, is affected by and has the affect-of morning light, where things are mysterious and half-hidden. Only at the crisis of high-noon does light flatten the world into the highly-resolved space of advertising, where things are lit from above and their dimensionality is suspended. The corresponding events in the characters' lives are infused with this horrific over-determination, harkening to the panopticon Crary describes, "which called for flooding a space with light to eliminate shadows, and to make a condition of full visibility synonymous with effects of control."²⁶

Turrell's skyspaces are described on the artist's website as "specifically proportioned chamber[s] with an aperture in the ceiling open to the sky."²⁷ These works could be described as sculptural or installation, but they truly function as frames or tools for seeing, apertures opening onto a sky we often forget. As in Woolf, the predominant light present is the slow, undulating light of 24-hour time. There is no object in the work so the

25. Claudia Olk, *Virginia Woolf and the Aesthetics of Vision* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 158.

26. Crary, *24/7*. 16. Crary is here building on Foucault's revitalized concept of the panopticon, developed in his 1975 book *Discipline and Punishment*.

27. James Turrell, "Skyspaces," *James Turrell*, accessed November 15, 2020. <https://jamesturrell.com/work/type/skyspace/>.

light is emancipated from its contemporary function of spotlighting articles of desire; as Didi-Huberman suggests, in Turrell's work "light withdraws from places it illuminates in order to appear alone, otherwise, or tactile."²⁸ Although Turrell lets the light in, he does not have authority over it. The light acts as an agent, fluctuating at will and refusing to be slowed down, captured, paused, or sped up, drawing a parallel to the light whose steady progression sets the pace for *The Waves*. It eludes us even as we see it, so we desire it for never being able to truly have or grasp it. As in Woolf, the light of desire is slow and out of our control. Silvia Battista notes that Turrell's work calls viewers into "becoming spectators and, at the same time, active participants in a performance within which light, the sky, and the cosmos play the three protagonists of the silent dramatic composition staged by Turrell."²⁹ The image (or lack thereof) in Turrell's work is indeterminable, requiring the viewer to be a wait-er or a linger-er, or as Battista suggests, an active participant, rather than a passive receptor for information. The languid and subtle 24-hour light demands attention, which opens up a reciprocal relationship between the viewer and the work, creating space for the time needed to activate desire.

1.2 The explicit horror of high noon

Connected to the languidness of desire-time is a delay in the clarity of a light that does not immediately transmit an image. In Han's section on pornography in *The Agony of Eros* he suggests that pornography is the antithesis of eroticism; he claims that "nudity that is displayed without secrecy or expression approaches pornographic bareness" and that "exhibition destroys any and all possibilities for erotic communication."³⁰ Woolf makes the implications of this clear in her framing passage that describes the horror of high-noon as a time with no shadows. Everything is clear and conveyed in explicit detail by a sun that is "uncompromising, undeniable", gives "to everything its exact measure of

28. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Colour*, trans. Drew S. Burke (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 63.

29. Silvia Battista, "The Quaker Meditative Room and the Performing Eye: Deer Shelter Skyspace by James Turrell," in *Posthuman Spiritualities in Contemporary Performance* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 72.

30. Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 32.

colour”, a “sharp-edged” sun that beats and strikes.³¹ As Jeanette Winterson points out in her introduction to *The Waves*, for Woolf, things exist in the balance of light and shadow³² but at noon, those shadows retreat and take with them all ambiguity. It is appropriate, then, that this passage heralds the death of Percival, the book’s heroic, mute figure, described by Olk as “an invisible other who cannot be reached, who recedes and eventually disappears.”³³ Percival is the only principal character in the book to whose internal monologues the reader is not privy; he is reduced to a surface appearance, much like the objects upon which the noon-time sun shines are fixed in their surface clarity. The flat light reveals characteristics of these objects that are now indisputable, capturing them and stilling them in its gaze. This is the world Crary describes as a “disenchanted one in its eradication of shadows and obscurity and of alternate temporalities.”³⁴ So too is death indisputable, rid of all of the ambiguities of life.

Woolf is a conspicuous user of long, winding, vague sentences and so the choppiness of the section of *The Waves* heralded by noon is remarkable:

‘He is dead,’ said Neville. ‘He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown. The sails of the world have swung round and caught me on the head. All is over. The lights of the world have gone out. There stands the tree I cannot pass. [...] This is the truth. This is the fact. His horse stumbled; he was thrown.’³⁵

The hard-edged, unambiguous nature of noontime light is doubled here. The sentences represent undeniable, physical events when dealing with the actual death of Percival, and direct metaphors when dealing with their psychological repercussions. Although metaphorical, they are not the winding psychological vaguenesses, often contradictory, of the rest of the novel. The story of *The Waves* – in so far as it can be called a story – comes to us through the inner monologues of six friends, who often experience the same

31. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Vintage Classics, 2004), 96.

32. Jeanette Winterson, Introduction to *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf (London: Vintage Books, 2004), x.

33. Olk, *Aesthetics of Vision*, 179.

34. Crary, *24/7*, 19.

35. Woolf, *The Waves*, 98.

situations but voice different interpretations of them, sometimes lining up but more often digressing or focusing on different aspects of an event. In this section they are all in agreement, unable to interpret things differently in the overdetermining light of noon. The bright, aggressive midday sun is what most closely mirrors electrical light (in both wavelength and intensity), which streams in to illuminate spaces, ensuring productivity and prohibiting the making of mistakes or misunderstandings. Electric light is a perpetual noon where there is no haze through which to wonder. Upon witnessing factories lit by gas light in 1845, Jules Michelet reflects that “No illusion is possible in this light. Incessantly and mercilessly, it brings us back to reality.”³⁶ And for Woolf, that reality is singular: Percival is dead.

36. Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 100.

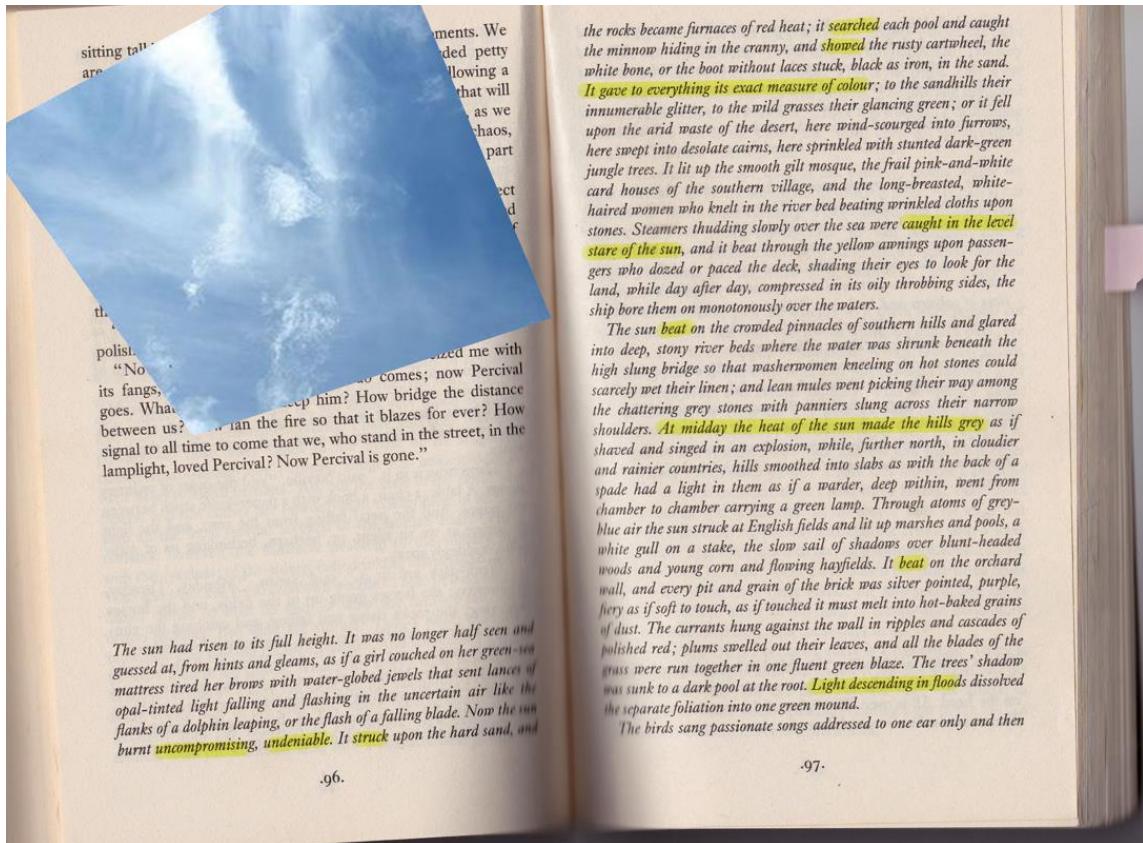


Figure 1. Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* with James Turrell's *skyspace*.

Viscerally we can relate to the horror of high-noon, dreading to be out in the world while the sun is directly overhead, peering in like a monstrous eye and saturating our surroundings with light, decimating the shadows that tell us where the edges of things lie. Edges are crucial for desire because, as Anne Carson points out in *Eros the Bittersweet*, they make us see the limits of our selves and it is only once we realize we are separated by edges from the world that we can comprehend the existence of an other and yearn for it.³⁷ When speaking about his *skyspaces*, Turrell suggests that the optimal time to experience them is indeed dawn or dusk, when the light falls slant-wise and does not flatten.³⁸ The light in this case does not clarify objects – which gestures to pornographic

37. Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), 55.

38. Kathleen Rellihan, "How to Find James Turrell's Art in the Most Unlikely Corners of the Earth" *Architectural Digest*. Conde Naste, August 27, 2018. <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/james-turrell-art-around-the-world>.

explicitness – but is itself clear and makes clear the distance between things. Woolf also pays attention to this fractured light in both *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*, where she repeatedly describes “wedges” of light entering spaces and partially illuminating figures. In these passages, the light appears to have more of a corporal presence and be more of a subject than whatever it happens to fall on. Han proposes an argument against exhibition since it “destroys all possibilities for erotic communication”³⁹ by making an object available and spotlighting it so that it can be entirely consumed. Turrell points us to the sky but does not make it available to us. Writing about his *Deer Shelter Skyspace*, Battista describes the “highly symbolic and, at the same time, sensual architectonic experience” of passing through darkness to reach the aperture itself.⁴⁰ Its light seduces us precisely because its exhibition occurs without a capture. It is not a photograph or a livestream, it is the thing itself and an attunement of the viewer to it.

1.3 Into the haze

Along with invoking the horror of direct (in both vector and meaning) illumination, both Turrell and Woolf offer alternatives to light that overdetermines. When speaking about his indoor light works, Turrell states that he uses an “evening light,” which he claims “take[s] seeing down to the light level where the iris opens. The eyes feel, like touch when you look into the eyes of a lover and experience that intensity of touch with the eyes.”⁴¹ In a passage with similar intent that occurs during the last section of *The Waves* as night is setting, Bernard monologues that:

I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. I begin to seek some design more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then undeniably. Lying in a ditch on a stormy day, when it has been raining, then enormous clouds come marching over the sky, tattered clouds, wisps of clouds. What delights me then is the confusion, the height, the indifference, and the fury.⁴²

39. Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 38.

40. Battista, “Deer Shelter Skyspace,” 71.

41. James Turrell, quoted in Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 96.

42. Woolf, *The Waves*, 159.

In both instances there is a desire for indeterminacy, for what cannot be captured either by the eye or by language. Woolf offers this possibility again through Neville, who demands that “nothing should be named lest by doing so we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure.”⁴³ Vagueness and ambiguity function here to create a dialogue of erotic uncertainty – an uncertainty that comes from being in conversation with an other who can never be fully understood or subsumed into the self. Slippage is the dominant modality, and the acceptance that the world may never be fully grasped or cemented by language. Referencing Heidegger, Didi-Huberman considers the movement in Turrell’s work between revealing its simplicity and the “sovereignty of its withdrawal.”⁴⁴ Thus, light for Turrell, is here not meant to illuminate but paradoxically to dim to the correct degree, where subjectivity can enter into freeplay with what is. Similarly, the type of language desired by Bernard is expressive rather than communicative, and leaves holes meant to be filled in by the *other* party. Vagueness and the inability to distinguish one thing from another, Quigley suggests, may for Woolf be the way of genius.⁴⁵ The final line of Bernard’s musings where he longs to gaze at undecipherable skies could easily be applied to Turrell’s work, where one may look up and see clouds passing overhead in the aperture provided, and be equally delighted by the confusion, height, indifference, and fury.

In his introduction to *A Shock to Thought*, Brian Massumi extrapolates on the difference between communication and expression as laid out by Deleuze and Guattari. The flaw in communicational systems is that they assume expression is linked to content with a pre-existing, objective existence, which can then be conveyed.⁴⁶ Expression, on the other hand, as its own form independent of content and “in the gap between content and expression is the immanence of their mutual ‘deterritorialization’.”⁴⁷ For Massumi, who

43. Woolf, *The Waves*, 90.

44 Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Colour*, 64.

45 Quigley, *Modernist Fiction*, 68.

46 Brian Massumi, *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 2005), xv.

47 Massumi, *A Shock to Thought*, xviii

here quotes Deleuze, an atypical expression leads to the deterritorialization of language, pushing it to its limit and engaging with it chromatically rather than semiotically.⁴⁸ When Bernard communicates desire for the language of lovers, it is this sort of expressive stutter that he is reaching for, which is erotic precisely in its failure to communicate. The title of Woolf's manuscript was *The Moths* and, as Quigley notes, "if the 'moths' are the words of her book, through her 'elaborate design,' Woolf tries not to kill them in pinning them down. She strives to allow words their liberty, relying heavily on metaphors."⁴⁹ To take Deleuze's word 'chromatic' literally, Turrell's work offers a space for interpreting colour expressively, for letting the sky do as it will and dance across the viewing eye, opening the retina and creating a heightened awareness of the sensing body. The oculus, an architectural feature missing from most built structures, is a gap that lets the light in. As Kosky describes, Turrell's work bounds the sky, "offering it a frame, a limit, or edge that can contain its immensity and thereby let the uncontainable sky appear."⁵⁰ It mirrors the gap in expression that allows for slippage in meanings, creating spaces that simultaneously shelter and expose their occupants.

Turrell's skyspaces invite us to look up to the sky and interpret what we normally see as emptiness, meaning, he asks us to look at a framed empty expanse and desire to see something there. To become attuned to nuance as well as to our own imagination and to seeing. The sky itself is an unclear, disorienting image – when we point a lens to it (whether that is the lens of our eye or the lens of a camera) the lens does not know what object to focus on because there is none. Or perhaps because the *object* of the sky is so all-encompassing that it undermines the function of objecthood in its too-muchness. In her essay titled "The Sea of Data" Hito Steyerl explores the concept of apophenia, or the "perception of patterns within random data," through a leaked image of static.⁵¹ An apophenic visuality suggests that we notice connections because we seek them out, not

48 Massumi, *A Shock to Thought*, xxii.

49 Quigley, *Modernist Fiction*, 95

50. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 113.

51. Hito Steyerl, "A Sea of Data," *e-flux*. no. 72 (2016). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/72/60480/a-sea-of-data-apophenia-and-pattern-mis-recognition>

because they exist indisputably. Projecting subject onto something that lacks it is an imaginative and desirous act. It is a refusal to accept things at their surface level, and a subversive whimsical insistence on depth. We watch clouds because it gives our minds a chance to express desire instead of being a machine responsive to only the flatness of what is.

Roland Barthes' interpretation of clouds (*nuages*) in *A Lover's Discourse* verges into pathetic fallacy, where the appearance of less-than-pleasant weather stands in for strife within a relationship, whether that be jealousy, vanity, or more generally bad humour.⁵² However he also allows for subtler clouds, which includes "all the tenuous shadows of swift and uncertain source which pass across the relationship, changing its light and its modeling; suddenly it is another landscape, a faint black intoxication. The cloud, then, is no more than this: I'm missing something."⁵³ This reading connects nicely to Woolf's use of the diaphanous, which breaks the assumed connection between what one sees and what objectively happens, suggesting instead that in the haze of fog or the dappled light that falls through trees, what is witnessed may largely be attributed to the viewer's subjectivity.

Pathetic fallacy refers to the experience when external factors, especially weather, seem to mirror our own feelings. Broadly, this pathetic fallacy tells us about the position we believe we hold in the world, where we ourselves are the pivots and the forces of weather act according to our own moods: the world aligns itself with our experience (it is raining because I am sad). Alternatively, and in the opposite direction, the same phenomenon can be understood as extending our selves to cohere with the external world, positioning ourselves in order to account for its indeterminacy (I am sad because it is raining). In the latter interpretation, pathetic fallacy means being moved by uncertain forces and moving to compensate for them, a mobility and reaching that is crucial for eros as Anne Carson

52. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 169.

53. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 170.

describes “desiring hands close on empty air.”⁵⁴ The desirous imagination that compels us to search for patterns within clouds or static is also what pushes us to seek patterns between ourselves and the things we observe – to move in such a way as to compensate for randomness, to project a narrative onto an empty space.

Light has a similar ambiguous and dialectical function in *The Waves*, especially at dawn (which represents innocence and childhood) and dusk (representing old age and death). These sections are riddled with misunderstandings and projections of intent; characters kiss, are kissed, and witness kisses, dimly interpreting them from their limited perspectives and agonizing over their consequences. In the novel, Louis is struck by the *beam* of Jinny’s eye as she alights on him, but only through a chink in the stone wall behind which he is hiding. Jinny herself describes this as being thrown over Louis “like a net of *light*.”⁵⁵ Importantly, this is the light of a morning where things are obscured, mysterious, and difficult to interpret. Olk extrapolates on Woolf’s use of the diaphanous explaining that “veiled, an object or person is only present within this ambiguity [...] The veil makes possible a specific form of perception, which emphasizes the notion of in-between-ness and ambiguity, and leaves the viewer in a position of being able to see, and yet unable to see clearly.”⁵⁶ For Woolf, the diaphanous occurs in literal veils, but also in fog, when seeing through tears, and in the hazy light of morning as the sun moves in and out of the beech leaves. In apophenic, desirous turns, Woolf and Turrell both look up at the sky and out at the waves, interpreting what they see there and creating contemplative, lingering narratives based on what they then project. The two main forces at play in *The Waves* are the sky and the sea, and at dawn and at dusk, Woolf writes that sky and sea are indistinguishable.⁵⁷ It is appropriate then, that the image of static that is the object of

54. Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, (Princeton: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), 27.

55. Woolf, *The Waves*, 5.

56. Olk, *Aesthetics of Vision*, 80

57. Woolf, *The Waves*, 1 and 157.

Steyerl's apophenia is interpreted by the human eye to be an image of waves and by computer software, decoded to show an image of the sky.⁵⁸

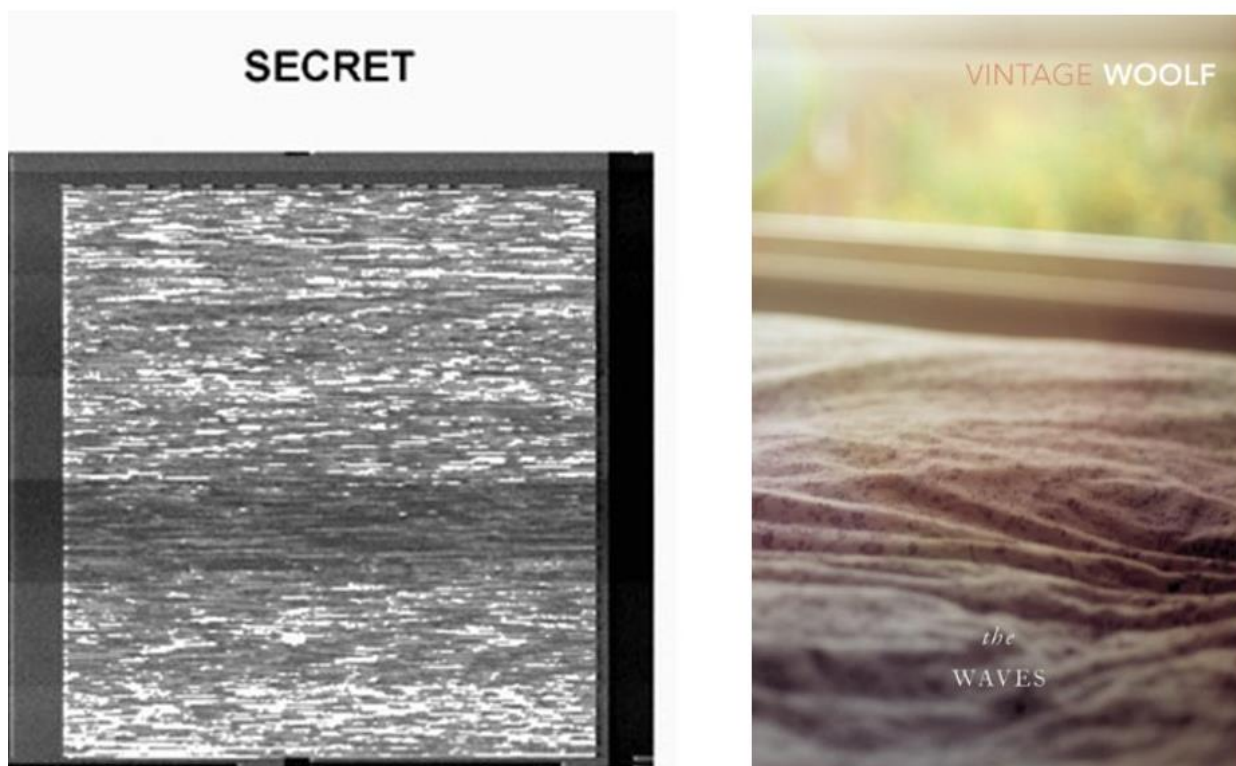


Figure 2. Secret image from the Snowden files and cover of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*.

The witness to the kiss between the two characters discussed above is Susan, whose encounter and interpretation of the event is further complicated because Woolf shows us her thoughts through the recollection of a fourth character. She triangulates the relationship between Jinny, Louis, and Susan, using Susan's feelings for Louis to activate the desire that flows between the three but does not strictly belong to any one character. After fleeing the scene of the kiss, Susan is described as being "blind after the light" as she trips into shadow under the trees where the light "seems to pant in and out, in and out. There is agitation and trouble here. The light is fitful. There is anguish here."⁵⁹ The light

58. Steyerl, "A Sea of Data," *e-flux*. Coincidentally, a similar image-of-the-sea-that-is-not-one is the cover image of my copy of *The Waves*.

59. Woolf, *The Waves*, 6

in this passage is doubly the light of morning; the entire childhood section is heralded by the interlude describing dawn, and the scene in real-time also takes place in the morning before breakfast. The mottled light, which humours apophenia, is the light in which Susan witnesses the event and interprets it. It is a generous light with many gaps, where an accident may as easily look like an affair. What the light truly illuminates is not the kiss itself, but interpretations of the kiss. Jinny is compelled to kiss Louis; Louis fusses over his own insecurities; Susan sees and is heartbroken; Bernard sees Susan see and is himself hurt by her heartbreak. Similarly, writing about Sappho's "Fragment 31," which depicts the poet watching a woman she desires laughing and speaking closely to a man, Anne Carson suggests that the relationship between the three players is not that of jealousy, but a triangulation necessary to activate desire.⁶⁰ The dynamics of Sappho's triangulation are similar to those that Woolf diagrams in this scene, with the presence of additional characters acting to nudge desire into motion and the diaphanous light producing the ambiguity needed for (mis)interpretations. The interpretations themselves overlap and dance, shimmering between congruency and incongruency like the light on the waves that we see in the shimmering of static.

1.4 A blind spot that is a verb

In her essay on *Las Meninas*, Anne Carson identifies an erotic technique similar to apophenia in the focal point that teases its seeker.⁶¹ Diego Velázquez depicts himself in the act of painting but his models are frustratingly off-stage. When we search, we finally alight upon them in their mirrored reflections on the back wall of the represented room. We find what we are looking for and do not find it at the same time, because the mirror turns our gaze back onto ourselves filling the void these figures should be occupying: in Carson's words, the "artifice triangulates our own perception"⁶² and thus our desire must continue to reach. The focal point acts as a verb, directing our attention to our own blind spot.

60 Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 13.

61 Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 72.

62 Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 72.



Figure 3. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas* with intruders, 1656/present. Artwork in the public domain.

In *Las Meninas*, this is uncanny not only because the spatial relationship throws into question who we, as the viewers, are, but also because it muddies the distinction between the world in the painting and our own. As in Turrell's work, the light of our world is the light of the work. Georges Didi Huberman describes the skyspaces as “architectural oculi.”⁶³ Thus the openings that frame the sky act like a lens, and we as the viewers are

63. Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Colour*, 66.

the optical nerve. We are no longer the mechanism by which information is taken *in*, we process it. The passive process of being open-to information is outsourced by the framing function of the architectural edge, and we are responsible for moving to interpret what is given. As Turrell says, “You are looking at you looking.”⁶⁴ The blind-spot/focal point is a verb that centers our own perception and ungroundedness. If in Turrell’s work we function as the optical nerve, it is appropriate that in the physical eye, the optical nerve is indeed a blind-spot.

That the light of Turrell’s work both is and is not of our world is further complicated by its blueness. The work frames the colour and light of the sky, which appears to be blue because its shorter wavelengths mean that blue’s frequency is prone to scattering in the atmosphere. Goethe, in his *Theory of Color*, refers to blue’s tendency to *flee* rather than reach out to us but “as we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us, so we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it.”⁶⁵ Didi-Huberman cites Aristotle’s musings when writing about the blue of Turrell’s skies, invoking his assertions that it is “irreproducible by painters pigments” and never aged or faded; it “lives its life” and yet has always been “this specific colour from the darkest depth of time.”⁶⁶ It is both poetic and appropriate that the light Turrell frames is specifically the light that denies ownership, the light that can be sought out but recedes rather than approaches. Goethe goes on to say about red-blue that it “can be said to disturb rather than enliven”⁶⁷ and what is desire but a disturbance, most poignantly in a contemporary society based on acceleration and the instant gratification of wants. So often, lack is treated as a problem to be solved rather than as a feeling to be experienced, or even luxuriated in since it draws our attention to the space between ourselves and the desired object, filling that space with “the blue of distance.”⁶⁸

64. Rellihan, “How to Find James Turrell’s Art”, *Architectural Digest*.

65. Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colour*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 311.

66. Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Colour*, 65.

67. Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colour*, 312.

68. Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 30.

In Woolf's world, the light has a similar active role, directing attention to the space between things at the same time as it makes that space ambiguous. From the time-setting interludes, light seeps into the psychological world that the characters occupy, permeating it and affecting their behaviour. But there is a double uncanniness when the light permeates out of the book and into our world. If we experience Turrell's work in person we unavoidably experience its light in real time, but the light in *The Waves* does not always match that of our world. We can pick it up and read about the effects of noon in the middle of the night. But there are also opportunities for the light in her work to align with our own, to impossibly link our two worlds together, teasing us with the suggestion of closing the distance between ourselves and the text, making us confused about where and who we really are. As in *Las Meninas*, the desire to understand where we fit into this light does not only affect the work, but our own lived reality and experience of desire.

In the same way we find blue scattered in the atmosphere, we also find it in the water, especially bodies of water that are deep enough to escape interference with the colours of their floors and instead reflect the colour of the sky back at itself. Woolf notices this and intensifies the light in *The Waves* as a magician would, playing with the mirrors of sky and water which both serve to keep the time. We have an innate biological understanding of how daylight functions to mark the days, responding to its circadian rhythms with our own. Light tells us what we should be doing at a given time – we should sleep at night when we are most vulnerable and be active during the day when our vision is at its best and we are able to use light to work by. The invention of artificial light muddies these spheres in its ability to simulate daylight in the middle of the night and thus stretch the duration of our everyday working hours, but the rhythms of the tides have not yet been overcome. In her paper "A queer ecology of the sea," Laura Winkel suggests the treatment of the sea in *The Waves* "opens the present to multiple temporalities that connote not only past loss but future potentials," thus creating space for the otherness that

is the motor of change.⁶⁹ So while daylight has been coopted for productivity, its reflection in the tides remains mysterious, as an amorphous site of conquest we fear at the same time as we are drawn to it. In the waves, we find an uncanny reflection of the sky and the time the sky keeps is presented back to it. As Winkel observes “the sea is the fluid, erotic medium through which the six characters of the novel speak and which [...] serves as a nonhuman agent that permeates the characters through its unrelenting, perpetual force.”⁷⁰

Desire exists in an ambiguous time. Anne Carson muses on the lover’s paradoxical relationship with time: “Lovers are always waiting. They hate to wait; they love to wait”.⁷¹ For Han, the atopic Other exists in the future, but contemporary society is unable to escape the totalization of the present, rendering desire impossible. Carson’s lover longs for the future but is completely wrapped up in time, which is different from Han’s conception of the contemporary individual being stuck in the present and unable to even imagine a future. The same relationship with time that Carson describes exists in *The Waves*, and is expressed in the ever-slouching progression of light that passes and the waves that continue to lap no matter what. Like the waves, the steadiness of time keeps crashing despite all wishes to rupture it. In the final section, Bernard, who is now an old man, looks back at his journal of collected phrases and wishes he had kept better track of shadows.⁷¹ Likewise, Turrell shows us the sky and makes us submit to it. Instead of feeling like we are masters of time, in his spaces we are its subjects. We can watch the path of the light as the sun makes its progression across the sky, but as soon as each moment is captured by the frame, it disappears. As viewers, we can long for an exact reoccurrence that will never be. The gradient of light continues to change, until we enter the disorienting black that remains in the same way that Bernard, in Woolf’s final pages, faces off against the ocean by submitting to it and entering its waves.

69. Laura Winkel, “A queer ecology of the sea: Reading Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*,” *Feminist Modernist Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 143, doi: 10.1080/24692921.2019.1622169.

70. Winkel, “A queer ecology of the sea,” 150.

71. Woolf, *The Waves*, 191.

1.5 Looking at the night

In 24/7, Jonathan Crary describes a rejected 1990 Russian project to illuminate the night sky by use of reflective satellites.⁷² This proposal is met with rejections on multiple grounds, but a particularly poetic one is that we all have a right to the darkness of the night sky. In Woolf's time, as Orlando describes upon her arrival into present-day 1928:

there was no privacy; none of those lingering shadows and odd corners that there used to be; none of those women in aprons carrying wobbly lamps which they put down carefully on this table and on that. At a touch, the whole room was bright. And the sky was bright all night long; and the pavements were bright; everything was bright.⁷³

If night, in Woolf's time, was under threat by electrical light, that is doubly true today. We keep night at bay with fluorescent lights; the blue light of our screens interferes with melatonin production, crucial for sleep; and people in increasingly diverse professions work night shifts. At the same time as sleep deprivation is used as torture, we self-perpetuate our own insomnias. Light pollution is so bad in major (and even minor) cities that it is impossible to see more than a smattering of stars. In her work on apophenia, Steyerl links it to the Greeks, who gazed up at the sky and through constellations, invented what they saw there.⁷⁴ Darkness is here the backdrop for creativity, literally allowing us to connect the dots. In their work, wherein electrical light is conspicuously absent, Turrell and Woolf reject human dominion over light. Framed by Turrell's skyspaces, the abyss of night becomes another subject: we may look *at* it instead of trying to see despite it. George Didi-Huberman describes Turrell's skyspaces as functioning between the two twin abysses of night and everyday society but his characterization of sleep as an abyss does not ring true. Sleep, Crary suggests, "ensures the presence in the world of the phasic and cyclical patterns essential to life and incompatible with

72. SpaceX's "Starlink" program has accidentally done this by launching constellations of satellites far more reflective than intended, which now interfere with astronomers' research and are bright enough to change the composition of the night sky worldwide. See Marina Koren, "The Night Sky Will Never Be the Same," *The Atlantic*, February 6, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2020/02/spacex-starlink-astronomy/606169>.

73. Woolf, Orlando, 209.

74. Steyerl, "A Sea of Data," *e-flux*.

capitalism.” The ‘abyss’ of sleep does not overdetermine the same way that the panopticon of constant illumination does. In *The Waves*, night is again less totalizing than noon; the death heralded by noon is unambiguous and is conveyed in a single sentence (Percival is dead) whereas the death suggested at night is sensual, poetic, mysterious, and vague. Woolf writes Bernard facing off against the waves and death “and in [him] too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back,” and unlike Percival, who fell when his horse tripped, Bernard is “unvanquished and unyielding.”⁷⁵ He returns at night to a sea that is “indistinguishable from the sky,” imagined by Woolf, in an earlier draft of *The Waves*, as containing “labour, self-loss, origins prolonged beyond memory: the anonymity of child birth.”⁷⁶ The sea at night, unlike the totalizing light of noon, does not represent a single, over-determined present, but a cacophony of seemingly contradictory possibilities, linked not only with death but with life and sensuality.

Night, for Barthes, may signify the darkness of desire where one does not know what desire wants, but he gives us a second interpretation of night as a time when:

I think quite calmly about the other, as the other is; I suspend any interpretation; I enter into the night of nonmeaning; desire continues to vibrate (the darkness is transluminous), but there is nothing I want to grasp; this is the Night of non-profit, of subtle, invisible expenditure... I am here, sitting simply and calmly in the dark interior of love.⁷⁷

In this reading, nighttime exists as a time to allow desire to ‘vibrate’. There is no attempt to satisfy a need, choosing instead to luxuriate in it. His description here is true to Crary’s night, which stands in opposition to capitalism as a time of non-profit. In *The Waves*, “darkness washed down streets, [...] blotting out couples clasped under the showery darkness of elm trees in full summer foliage.”⁷⁸ Darkness collaborates with lovers in the

75. Woolf, *The Waves*, 199.

76. Virginia Woolf, quoted in Winkel, “A queer ecology of the sea,” 150.

77. Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, 171.

78. Woolf, *The Waves*, 158.

same way as Turrell's light works utilize a sensual light that allows vision to match the intensity of touch, in both cases, dimming to the degree where things are not overdetermined and the other may repose in lingering shadows. To quote Barthes once more, "to darken this darkness, this is the gate of all wonders."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 172.

2 I long and seek after: distance and desire in Walter de Maria's *Lightning Field* and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*

If, as Anne Carson suggests in *Eros the Bittersweet*, desire is dependent on distance, desire is today under threat by exploding availability in an increasingly connected world. As Carson writes, “The Greek word *eros* denotes ‘want,’ ‘lack,’ ‘desire for that which is missing.’ [...] It is by definition impossible for [the lover] to have what he wants if, as soon as it is had, it is no longer wanting.”⁸⁰ Such is the paradox of desire: to sustain desire is to never meet it, and to obtain the object of one’s desire it is to extinguish the desire for it. This dilemma explains the structure of love stories, which gain their momentum through obstacles placed between the lovers and end as soon as lovers meet. This structure is immortalized in the clichés we use to describe romantic love: you always want what you can’t have; the thrill of the chase; absence makes the heart grow fonder. But lovers are not the only subjects who suffer for having been brought close.

Walter Benjamin originally published *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* in 1935 and its claim that reproduction brings artworks closer to their viewers is even stronger today. The text deals with the struggle of the unique artwork as it exists amongst its reproductions and Benjamin optimistically and perhaps naively suggests that, “Even with the most perfect reproductions, *one thing* stands out: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in the place where it is at this moment.”⁸¹ Authenticity was difficult in Benjamin’s time, with photographic processes negating the concept of the primary work, as multiplicity was built into techniques of creation. But consider the novel ways artworks are being digitized today: the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has, for instance, created a 44.8 gigapixel image of Rembrandt’s *Night Watch* in which even the particles of pigment suspended in the paint

80. Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton: Dalkey Archive Press), 10.

81. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 5.

are visible.⁸² This image, which brings the artwork it represents closer to the viewer than possible in physical space and transcends the biological limitations of our natural eyesight, seems more “real” than the original. Along with documentation, the project involves penetrating *into* the painting to determine its chemical composition.

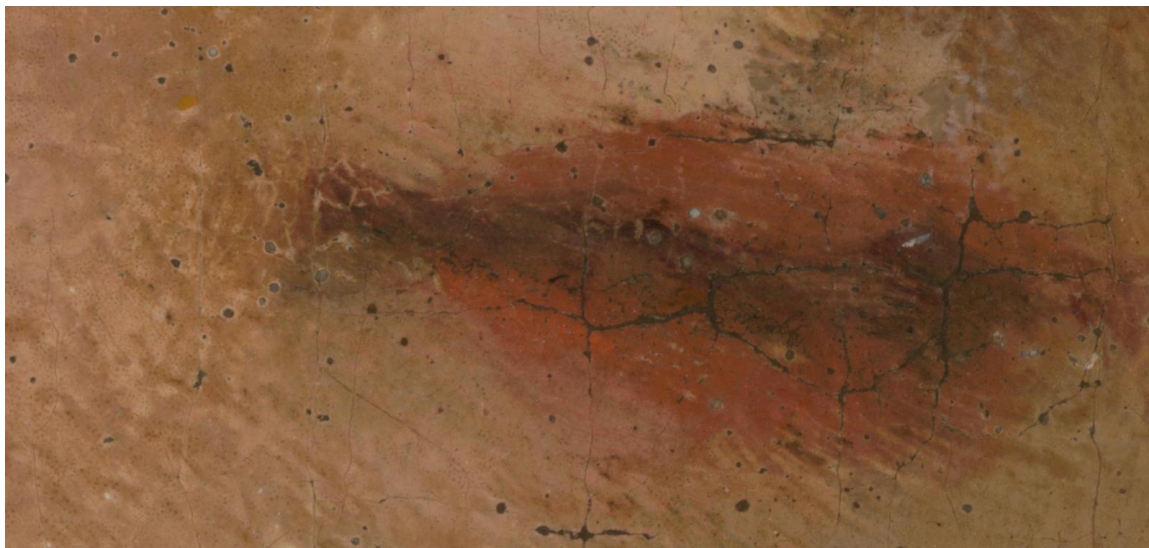


Figure 4. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq*, 1642, detail. Artwork in the public domain.

Because we can experience the actual pigments Rembrandt worked with, and because travel to see the work is unnecessary, images such as these reduce the distance, both physical and temporal, between the viewer and the thing they seek, thus exponentially reducing the desirous period that is crucial to desire itself. In mathematical terms, as the time needed to meet a desire approaches zero, so too does desire itself. Desire is replaced with nothing more than wants, constantly met, reshuffled, and replaced by new ones.⁸³

In this contemporary age, where reproductions of things float around in digital space, poised to be retrieved on command, and delivery systems bring their physical iterations to our doors within days if not hours, I look to Walter De Maria’s *The Lightning Field* and

82. “Operation Night Watch,” *Rijksmuseum*, accessed May 1, 2021. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/operation-night-watch>.

83. Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, trans Erik Butler (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 37.

Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* as object lessons for how distance and desire may be sustained. Formally, the two works are quite different: Carson's novel in verse (with supplementary palinode, appendices, epigraph, and interview) retells Stesichorus' tale of the Greek hero Herakles' tenth labour, which was the slaying of Geryon (a red-winged monster) and the theft of his cattle. In the introduction to the main part of the book, Carson describes Stesichorus' innovations. He released language from the strict rules it was bound to under Homer, laying the foundations for a sensual vocabulary where nouns were no longer bound to a singular adjective, as well as telling the story from the perspective of the monster rather than the hero. Carson goes further, turning the labour into a love story. Interpreting her version from the standpoint of desire is not a huge leap, but the role desire plays in Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* is perhaps more obtuse. *Lightning Field* occupies a one kilometer by one mile swatch of desert in New Mexico. It consists of a grid of 400 steel poles, each reaching twenty feet about sea level. One may imagine a pane of glass, perfectly balanced and in contact with each pole. On most days, lightning does not strike it. On some days, it does.

The distances in both works are multiple. When I think of *Lightning Field*, I cannot help but consider my own distance of 2 955 kilometers from the work. The one kilometer by one mile swatch of land it occupies in Catron County, New Mexico was chosen specifically for its distance from populated areas, along with its flatness and the relative frequency of lightning strikes it experiences in the summer months.⁸⁴ *Autobiography of Red* does not inhabit real space but gestures to it in impossible ways. Geryon lives on the Greek island of Erytheia that is his mythological home, but Carson displaces this island so that it is a bus ride away from New Mexico. The two eventually travel to Herakles' hometown of Hades (fictional and infinitely far away) to see the volcano that will become a point of fixation for Geryon (presumably based on Mount Pelee, although this too does not make sense in physical space).⁸⁵ Distance flexes and dilates.

84. "Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*," *Dia*, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit-our-locations-sites/walter-de-maria-the-lightning-field>.

85. Kramerica Industries, January 5, 2021 (6:42 p.m.), comment on Anantharaman, "The 'Autobiography of Red' Left Us Considering Volcanoes Very Strongly."

If one wishes to see *Lightning Field* in person, the first step is to apply to the Dia Foundation for permission. If granted, the visitor must traverse the physical distance and spend no less than 24 hours with the work, lodging at the cabin on site. If the visitor is able-bodied, approved by the foundation, wealthy, and able to arrange transportation, these distances are all surmountable. However, the meteorological distance between the work in a calm desert and the work activated by a storm is a more difficult one to negotiate. A pilgrimage to the settings of *Autobiography of Red* is for the most part physically impossible and so it may only exist in the imagination, where winged eros reaches to compensate for the impassable distances.⁸⁶ One of the delicate distances in De Maria's work is that between the earth and sky, which lightning only fleetingly and rarely closes. The distance between Geryon and Herakles is a more conventionally romantic one than the elemental distance in *Lightning Field* but it too rarely closes. And complicating these distances are reproduction and photography, which fight to bring everything within reach.

2.1 On [erotic] photography

Lightning Field's reproductions have been tightly controlled and mediated by the Foundation and by De Maria himself. Since 1970, De Maria has declined to provide information about his work to critics and the official photographs of *Lightning Field*, taken by John Cliett were published only in *Artforum*, separated by grey pages from the rest of the publication as if shielded from it.⁸⁷ If, as Benjamin claims, reproductions of a work "place the copy of the original beyond the reach of the original itself," making it possible for it to "come closer to the person taking it in," then *Lightning Field's* digital and photographic elusiveness maintains its distance.⁸⁸ When thinking about a reproduced object, it makes more sense to think of it in terms of density rather than a strict distance to one individual instance of the work. For example, *The Night Watch* may be housed in

86. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 153.

87. James Nisbet, "The Land is not the Setting: *The Lightning Field* and Environments, 1960-1980," PhD diss., (Stanford University, 2010), 4.

88. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 6.

the Rijksmuseum (distance from London, Ontario: 6 142.57 km) but it is also scattered uniformly throughout the world by virtue of the internet. The high density of its reproduction means that it is always nearby, as its photographic representations make it telepresent, here and everywhere all at the same time.⁸⁹

The thing-itself is replaced by its reproductions, which rather than representing the thing-itself, actualize what is reproduced.⁹⁰ When Baudrillard deals with this phenomenon he names it simulacra and gestures to the Iconoclasts and “their rage to destroy images [which] rose precisely because they sensed this omnipotence of simulacra [...] and the overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God; that only simulacra exist.”⁹¹ Desire is embedded in this anecdote. The fear here is that images of God, by bringing God close to the people who see them, erases God from their minds. An image that closes the distance between the viewer and their desired thing, erases the desire for the thing itself.

Perhaps De Maria noticed this and it guided his logic for the controlled dissemination of *Lightning Field*'s likeness. One of the most outspoken critics of his approach is John Beardsley, whose 1981 review of the work titled “Art and Authoritarianism” berates De Maria and the Foundation for the chokehold on visual material. He claims that their control “inhibits an effective dissociation between what one sees and what one is expected to see, and what one believes and what one is lead to believe.”⁹² However, what is most striking is that in his frustration he does seem to arrive at the point of the matter: that all this secrecy “conspire[s] to induce a feeling of awe” and that restrictions “seem more an expression of the willful cultivation of mystery.”⁹³ Beardsley's review unintentionally illustrates the contemporary uneasiness with not knowing and not seeing

89. Paul Virilio, “The Third Interval: Critical Transition,” in *Rethinking Technologies* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 830.

90. Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 7. As an example, many of the Google image results for Vermeer's *Milkmaid* are far more saturated than the accurate image published by the Rijksmuseum, who owns the work.

91. Baudrillard, “Simulation and Simulacra,” 169.

92. John Beardsley, “Art and Authoritarianism: Walter De Maria's ‘Lightning Field’,” *Art World Follies* 16 (1981): 35, doi: 10.2307/778373.

93. Beardsley, “Art and Authoritarianism,” 37.

in advance, as well as our discomfort with singularity. He scoffs at the idea of mystery and awe without noting that this is part of the aura of the work itself, and the way distance activates the desire a visitor must feel for it in order to make the journey necessary.

Anne Carson writes more positively about the erotic power of information withheld when discussing Homer's description of Helen in the *Illiad*: "Homer merely tells us that the old men of Troy watched her pass and let out a whisper [...] Helen remains universally desired, universally imaginable, perfect."⁹⁴ I wonder if Beardsley, reading the *Illiad* would be frustrated by its restraint and the way the reproduction – in this case, the telling – does not map onto the thing we wish to see. Beardsley's impatience represents the emaciated contemporary capacity with desire; so used to having wants met instantly, desire becomes a problem rather than the intoxicating experience described by Carson in her study of Greek eroticism.

Autobiography of Red does not contain any literal photographic material but incorporates photography into its linguistic code: Herakles is a bad boy and Geryon is an artsy misfit who finally lands on photographic essays as the best medium for his autobiography. Carson structures the novel so that each of the final chapters describes the context in which a photo was taken. Because these photos are only revealed to us only through written descriptions, the fleeting moments they supposedly depict are doubly absent.⁹⁵ In an earlier exchange between the two characters discussing photography, Geryon claims that it is disturbing:

Photography is a way of playing with perceptual relationships.
Well exactly.
But you don't need a camera to tell you that. What about stars?
Are you going to tell me
none of the stars are really there? Well some are there but some burned out
ten thousand years ago."⁹⁶

94. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 63.

95. E.L. McCallum, "Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*," *Postmodern Culture* 17, no. 3 (2007): doi: 10.1353/pmc.2008.0008.

96. Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2016), 65.

By linking photography with extinguished stars, Carson makes the case through Geryon and Herakles that not only can photography bring faraway things near, it also deceptively resuscitates that which no longer exists. Perception is not to be trusted. Photography, along with vision, is just “a bunch of light hitting a plate” and that light is a record of the distance between things.⁹⁷ A distance that can be long enough for much to change in the journey. E.L. McCallum reads photography’s complicated relationship with time into Geryon and Herakles’ relationship, suggesting that the reason Geryon has such a hard time letting go is because his photographic mementos have allowed their romance to become unstuck in time.⁹⁸ Unlike De Maria who disallows photography altogether, Carson draws attention to the ways photography (if its temporality is sufficiently acknowledged) may be associated with love and experiences of duration.

Carson uses the terminology of photography in *Eros the Bittersweet* as well, suggesting that in ancient representations of eros, it “prints consistently as a negative image. Presumably, a positive picture could be made [...] Or could it? Is it that positive picture that the lover wants from love?”⁹⁹ Carson doesn’t completely eliminate photography from the erotic dialogue, but establishes that an erotic photograph does not show everything completely as it is – a photograph that does so is not desirable and thus eros depends on the negative image, an image with something missing, an image with a lack. The structure of *Autobiography of Red* as a written record of absent photographs serves this same point: a photograph, which usually brings close the missing object is now itself the thing that is missing.¹⁰⁰ The final chapters do not describe the photographs Geryon takes, but the context in which they were taken. This refusal to engage in ekphrasis is symmetrical to Geryon’s own experimentation with the medium throughout *Autobiography of Red*; his photographs are deceptive and elongate the task of perception through their visual ambiguity. The photograph “Red Patience” described in the text is a long exposure of an erupting volcano that Geryon accuses of being disturbing. It is a slow

97. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 71.

98. McCallum, “Towards a Photography of Love,” 2007.

99. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 67.

100. McCallum, “Toward a Photography of Love,” 2007.

photograph, not only in its expansion of its own mechanisms to capture a geological event, but also in its subject matter. A volcano is a slow disaster, whose lifecycle consists mostly of anticipation. In a later photograph Geryon takes of a fly in water, he notes that the long exposure let it multiply itself, making it seem alive. McCallum puts Geryon's photographs in conversation with Sontag's linking of photography with death and her claim that "everything exists to end in an image," developing the eroticism of the former, which purposefully refuse to convey an end.¹⁰¹

These photographs have a stereoscopic existence in that they bring the faraway nearby but also have distance coded into their mechanisms. Susan Sontag writes that, "Between photographer and subject there has to be distance," and that while the camera may presume and distort, among other things, it does not rape or possess.¹⁰² But the fact that all photographs may have these attributes in common tells us little about what they mean. Carson tells us as much during a conversation between Geryon and Herakles, who land on the common silence of photographs:

Do you mean the silence. But all photographs are silent. [...]
Of course but that tells you nothing. Question is
how they use it – given
the limitations of the form.¹⁰³

In this case and perhaps in Sontag's case as well, the silence and job of the camera, which does its work at a distance from its subject and with some detachment,¹⁰⁴ provide a model of how photography may function as an erotic device. *Lightning Field* is not *not* photographed at all, but photographed hazily. De Maria states in his minimal writing on the work that "No photograph, group of photographs or other recorded images can completely represent *The Lightning Field*."¹⁰⁵ I was first properly introduced to the work by a friend who visited it and illicitly photographed the work despite the Foundation's

101. McCallum, "Towards a Photography of Love," 2007.

102. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 13.

103. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 66.

104. Sontag, *On Photography*, 13.

105. Walter De Maria, "The Lightning Field: Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statements," *Artforum*, April 1980, <https://www.artforum.com/contributor/walter-de-maria>.

strict rules not to. She chose to capture it with an analog camera so that she would be more conscientious about the number of images she took, but the noise in the resulting photographs makes the distinction between the poles and the sky almost impossible to see. It is, in its ghostliness and elusiveness, an erotic photograph, the noise of the medium veiling the subject matter. The same is true for Geryon's photos, which are full of misunderstandings and doubt. Carson's claims about desire hold true in the photographic decisions both of these works contain: "That which is known, attained, possessed, cannot be an object of desire."¹⁰⁶

2.2 Possession

This anxiety around possession runs through *Autobiography of Red* in Geryon's fear of captivity.¹⁰⁷ During a conversation between Geryon and his brother as children, his brother asks him what his favourite weapon is. Geryon thinks for a moment before answering "cage," to the annoyance of his brother who insists that a cage is not a weapon. Geordie Miller interprets this answer as Geryon expressing Carson's insights in the Stesichoros sections that frame the main romance: "if subjects are all in the cage of a structural code, perhaps recognizing this condition is the closest they can get to justice."¹⁰⁸ In other words, Geryon is commenting on the way his myth is being told, including the narrative and linguistic rules it is bound to, despite Stesichorus' – and Carson's – attempt to shuffle the story by unlatching adjectives. Later on, as he and Herakles are graffitiing walls, Geryon's signature is "Loveslave" and Herakles chastises him, saying "All your designs are about captivity, it depresses me."¹⁰⁹ In a story about desire, there is little place for claustrophobia and containment. Byung Chul Han, pondering the contemporary crisis of desire writes that "It is not by chance that Socrates the lover is called *atopos*. The Other, whom I desire and who fascinates me, is placeless.

106 Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 69.

107. To link this section with the previous one, I appreciate that a synonym for "to photograph" is "to capture."

108. Geordie Miller, "'Shifting ground': breaking (from) Baudrillard's 'Code' in *Autobiography of Red*," *Canadian Literature* no. 210 (2011), ISSN: 0008-4360. np.

109. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 55.

He or she is removed from the language of sameness.”¹¹⁰ Captivity and confinement, however, rely on keeping everything close, occupying the same space as their captors. To use Han’s words, they are enmeshed in the language of sameness. Simone Weil uses the metaphor of hunger to gesture to the dilemma of assimilation into the same:

All our desires are contradictory, like the desire for food. I want the person I love to love me. If he is, however, totally devoted to me, he does not exist any longer and I cease to love him. And as long as he is not totally devoted to me he does not love me enough. Hunger and repletion.¹¹¹

Weil’s link of desire to food represents the extreme end of “language of sameness” as eating depends on literally intaking that which we crave, assimilating it within ourselves. As in hunger, desire exists in the balance of lack and satiation. It is hard to crave food once already full and it is hard to desire something already trapped.

Geryon’s fear of confinement is illustrated with an anecdote about seeing Beluga whales in an enclosure and how:

Afterwards at night he would lie on his bed with his eyes open thinking of the whales afloat in the moonless tank where their tails touched the wall – as alive as he was on their side of the terrible slopes of time.¹¹²

Later on, once he is an adult, he goes to Argentina and speaks with a tango singer who cannily asks him whose tank he is in. The answer, of course, is Herakles’, to whom he is entirely committed. However, instead of his commitment serving as an aphrodisiac, Herakles only tells him that his designs about captivity “depress him.”¹¹³ To Herakles, Geryon is only intriguing when he is not there, occupying a space other than his own, or when Herakles himself is committed to another lover and Geryon represents a transgression.

110. Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1.

111. Simone Weil, *Grace and Gravity* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 10.

112. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 90.

113. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 55.

Placelessness plays a significant role in the desire of *Lightning Field* too. As a work of land art, it is completely indebted to the physical space it occupies. De Maria states explicitly in the second line of his “Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statement” about the work that, “The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work.”¹¹⁴ De Maria and his team scoured the southern states for five years before finding the perfect piece of land – flat, with the correct weather conditions, and remote. The work exists within the movement towards site specificity in the 1960s and 1970s, when “the space around the art was no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place,” and experiencing art meant inhabiting “the here and now through bodily presence of the viewing subject.”¹¹⁵

But in a paradoxical turn, the work also skirts around other implications of being tied to a place. The work is dependent on the interplay between the elementals of air and land, making photographing it from above quite pointless.¹¹⁶ The implications of this in an era of satellite imagery and surveillance are profound: despite its relatively large footprint, it is completely invisible on Google Maps. It is atopic in the way it avoids being mapped onto and into the rest of the quantified world. In its distance from cities – or the places that “matter” for humans, it becomes a non-place. Jeffrey L Kosky similarly describes the desert as a “darkling” – looking at earth from above, clearings (which were once places to see the light) are now dark negative space since they are the places that are not illuminated.¹¹⁷ *Lightning Field*’s desert is a location we cannot describe because its flatness situates it in a place with no landmarks, nothing to distinguish it from other flat expanses than the ghostly metal poles embedded into it and a set of alien-sounding latitude and longitude coordinates. Cheekily, because of the way the poles are spaced out,

114. De Maria, “Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statements,” *ArtForum*.

115. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 11.

116. De Maria also notes that the work is almost invisible at noon, when the poles melt into the sky as the sun strikes directly from above. Although not directly relevant to the theme of distance, it is a satisfying connection to the decimation of noon in Turrell and Woolf’s work, discussed in the first chapter.

117. Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 20.

the work occupies an area that is most simply described as one kilometer by one mile, confusing and comingling two systems of measurement that are usually kept separate.

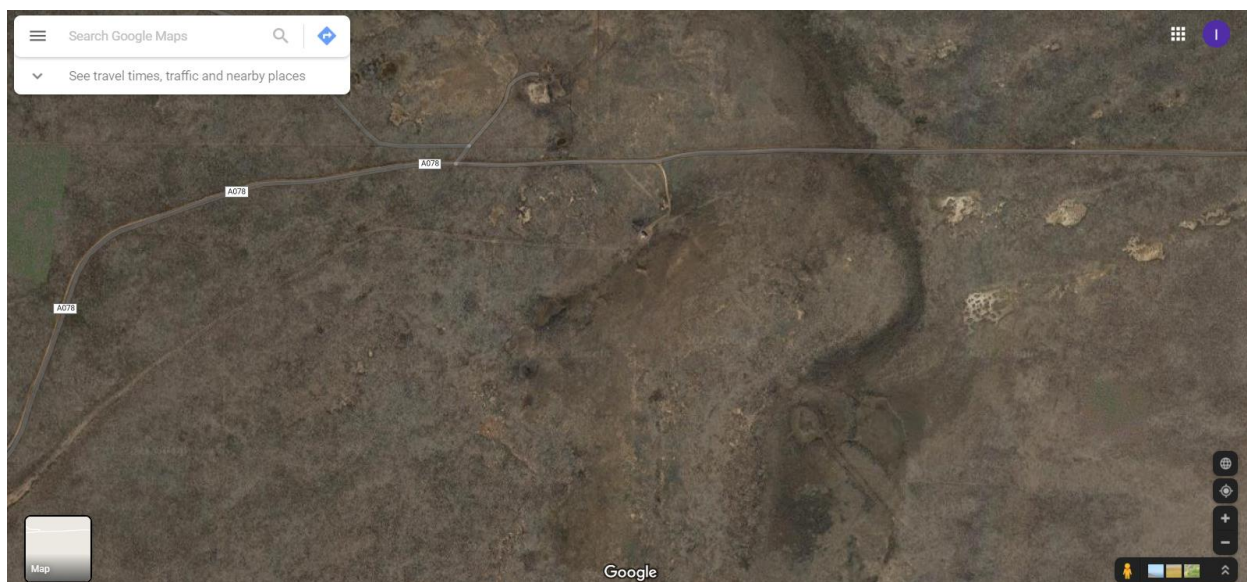


Figure 5. Screenshot. Google Map satellite view of *Lightning Field's* location.

Rebecca Solnit describes the desert as a place with absence built into it. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* she writes that the invitation of the desert “wasn’t particular things but the space between them, that abundance of absence.”¹¹⁸ In the absence of familiar measuring sticks by which to ground ourselves and measure the distances between things, the desert is dis-orienting – literally un-situated or un-placed. The abundance of absence Solnit writes about is also coded into the work itself. To inhabit land art is to inhabit distance. Because the work dominates a large footprint it is impossible to be close to all its parts at any one time; even while you are in it, parts of the work fade into the distance.

2.3 A map of desire

Benjamin’s claim about photography and reproduction leading to a sense of sameness in the world finds resonance in Han’s musings that the world is made up of a consistent field of the same, in which otherness has been annihilated.¹¹⁹ Jean Baudrillard’s concept

118. Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 129.

119. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 10; Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 7.

of simulacra neatly packages both these ideas and translates them to physical space. Maps introduce the “astonishing concept of the unpositioned viewer” who regards the world from the no-place of a rational god’s eye perspective, completely removed (not distant) from the spaces they observe.¹²⁰ Baudrillard draws on Borges’ story *On Exactitude in Science*, in which a map, ever-more exact, slowly spreads to completely cover the world it sets out to represent.¹²¹ In Borges’ tale, the Empire that created the map declines and the map disintegrates until only “a few shreds [are] still discernible in the desert,” whereas today:

It is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.¹²²

De Maria’s work, arguably located in the “desert of the real” is the most appropriate thing for it. An artwork placed on a flat plane of desert runs the risk of adding a landmark to its geographic reality but, unmarked on maps, it avoids being assimilated into the uniformity of cartography.¹²³ Although physically, objects and locations exist in situ, their enmeshment in mapped space and proliferation of their pictorial representations allows them to effectively escape their physicality and be close to whoever seeks them out. As he is wrestling with the consequences of photography on uniqueness, Benjamin finds a stronghold against reproduction in natural objects, which he defines “as a unique manifestation of a remoteness, however close it may be.”¹²⁴ Remoteness is thus a

120. Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 96. The previous section dealt with the placeless, atopic beloved who, for Carson and Han, is beneficial to eros. When the beloved is placeless, the lover (from whose perspective we get receive the story) is firmly rooted in place. Through the device of the map, this rooted perspective no longer exists.

121. Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” in *A Universal History of Infamy*, trans. Borman Thomas di Giovanni (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), 131.

122. Baudrillard, “Simulation and Simulacra,” in *Selected Writings*, 166.

123. Technically, you can search for *The Lightning Field* on Google Maps and get a result. However, the geotag is not for the work itself, but the site of the Dia Foundation office/van that will take you there. The work is unmarked.

124. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 9. Art historian Aby Warburg visited New Mexico too, and describes his visit as undertaking “to flee toward natural objects.” I appreciate the reoccurrence of that diction

characteristic of the genuine which, since it cannot be dispersed, stays put and exists only in one place. In its elusiveness and deliberate impossibility to photograph and reproduce, *Lightning Field* edges toward the ranks of natural objects as it attempts to exist in its here and nowness. Rather than its photographic and mapped representations preceding the actual work itself and thus mediating/realizing its conception, the physicality of the work remains independent from predetermination by simulacra. This is the very characteristic that irked Beardsley so – that he could not go to see the work knowing in advance exactly what he would see.

The Dia foundation does, carefully and in great moderation, disseminate *Lightning Field's* image in the form of a book in which John Cliett's De Maria-approved photographs are printed, and in post card versions of those same photographs. The only postcards for sale on the Dia web-store are those featuring *Lightning Field* and the choice of this medium, which immaterially flits about the world gesturing to the "I was there" personal history of a place, marking both travel and placelessness, seems appropriate. Furthermore, by virtue of either a glitch or a savvy design choice to feed into the work's mythical elusiveness, the preview images of the postcards appear cropped or redacted. It is as if, even as the process is happening, the work resists its dissemination.

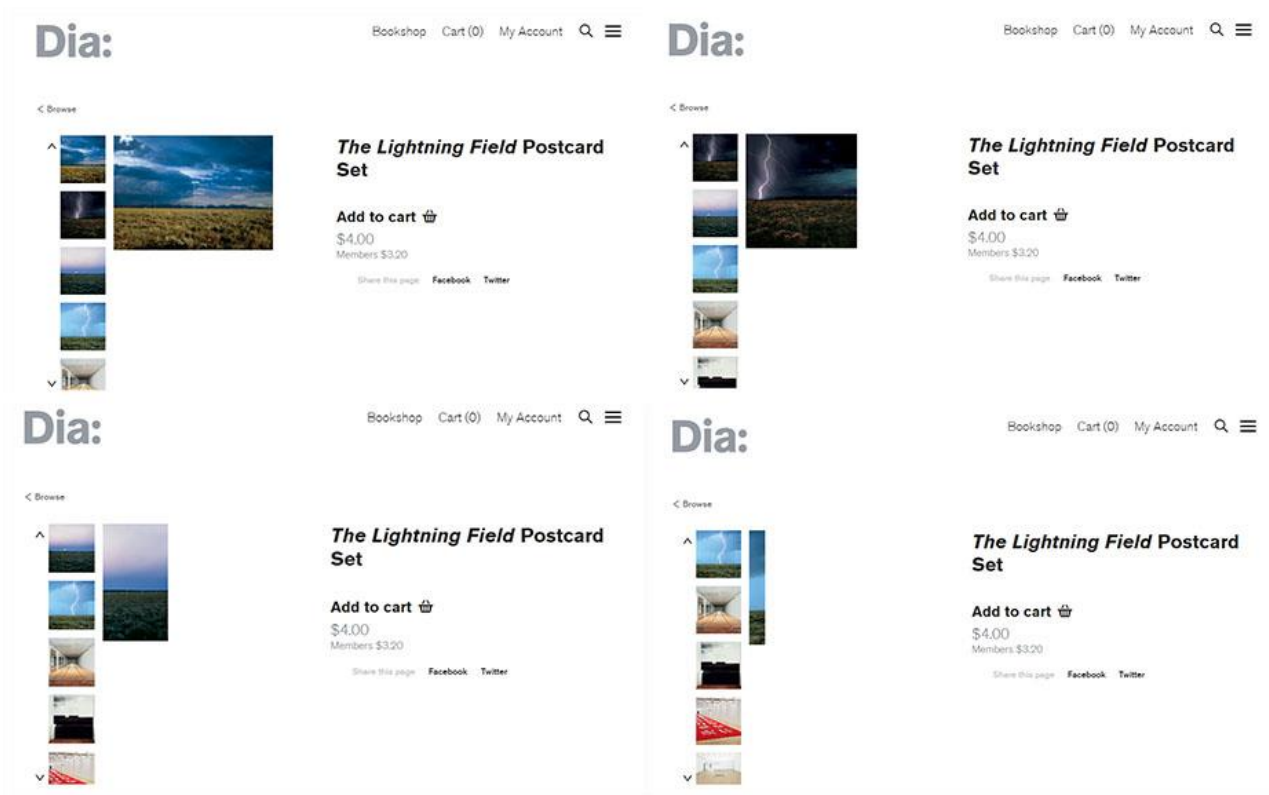


Figure 6. Screenshots. The diminishing size of *Lightning Field* postcards.

There are similar connections between maps and the reality they represent/create in *Autobiography of Red*. When we first meet Geryon as an anxious kindergartener, nervous about hiding his deformity (his red wings, which may or may not be literal), one of his largest worries is navigating to his classroom. He depends on his unreliable and abusive brother to guide him until the older boy refuses. Trying to find his way, Geryon looks at a map that appears to him as “a deep glowing blank.” Deserts too exist on maps as blank spots, voids, but since these symbolic voids don’t convey the quality of what exists there, they must be seen in person.¹²⁵ The school, like De Maria’s work is so completely other (or a place where Geryon himself is othered) that it cannot be represented on a map. Once Geryon meets Herakles the map analogy returns:

The instant of nature
forming between them drained every drop from the walls of his life

125. Rogoff, *Terra Infirma*, 92.

leaving behind just ghosts
rustling like an old map.¹²⁶

The section this quote comes from is called “Space and Time,” and concerns the budding relationship and desire between the two characters who are currently teenagers. Carson’s adjectival decision to describe ghosts by likening them to an old map connects well to Baudrillard’s visual metaphor of Borges’ map, the tatters of which endure in the desert. Desire, in this case, produces ghost maps, which, in desire’s placelessness, no longer represent the world.

Connecting her tale back to the tradition of Stesichorus, who unbound adjectives from their nouns, thereby shattering the Homeric tradition of description where each noun belonged to its own adjective, changes the way these words function and introduces yet another distance. Stesichorus, in collaboration with Carson, creates a vocabulary that is immediately sensual (relating to bodily experience) and synesthetic (connection-seeking). In her essay introduction to the text titled “Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichorus Make?” Carson claims that “Adjectives come from somewhere else. The word *adjective* is itself an adjective meaning “placed on top,” “added,” “appended,” “imported,” “foreign.”¹²⁷ The geographic distance symbolically represented in maps is doubled in adjectives, which, thanks to Stesichorus’ innovative shuffling, may tie nouns to their descriptors differently so that the world may continuously be born anew through novel combinations of words. This distance, both linguistic and geographic, also exists through Carson’s negotiation of translation. Chris Jennings suggests that “Carson’s engagement with ancient Greek allows her, as an English-language poet, to draw on the tension between two languages, to make both their interactions and their differences a source of poetic power.”¹²⁸ Adjectives are mapped onto new nouns, new languages onto ancient ones, and maps map themselves onto physical space. In each of these cases, there is an essential cartographic slippage where the mapped doesn’t correspond exactly to reality.

126. Caron, *Autobiography of Red*, 42.

127. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 4.

128. Chris Jennings, “The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson,” *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2001), doi: 10.3138/utq.70.4.923. np.

Carson's is not the mapping system of Baudrillard, where the map itself determines the real, but a mapping system that depends on the erotics of doubt and acceptance of difference. Geordie Miller also uses Baudrillard to read Carson, referencing Carson's citation to him in *Autobiography of Red*'s opening essay. He deals with Baudrillard's essay "Fetishism and Ideology" which argues that all representation in writing follows a structural code. In other words, we are linguistically still trapped in the strict descriptive systems of Homer that Stesichorus supposedly freed us from, meaning that the wider difference Stesichorus made was none.¹²⁹ While other critics have argued that Stesichorus is Carson's hero, Miller suggests that she has a more complicated relationship with him; although he broke the Homeric code of adjectival attribution, he did not go so far as to alter the outcome of Herakles' labour. Geryon and his little red dog still die. However, through her own poeticism, her genre-bending, and the alternative ending that she provides, Carson finishes the work Stesichorus laid the foundations for. In her ending, which has Geryon accepting his wings – symbolic of his monstrosity – Carson imports a Peruvian myth to the scene in order to augment the original Greek. Rather than being a monster he is now described as an Eyewitness – someone who has seen inside a volcano and lived, who is now stripped of all weakness. Another import: this chapter is called Photograph #107, referencing the Emily Dickinson volcano poem that serves as the epigraph for the entire book and whose final line is "The only secret people keep/Is immortality."¹³⁰ Benjamin's claim that reproduction leads to a sense of similarity in the world and Baudrillard's more radical argument that reproductions produce the world they represent are refuted in Carson's dealings with and subversions of maps and diction that intentionally do not represent the places they seek to encompass.

2.4 On pilgrimage

Another consequence of reproduction is that icons that were previously ritualistic become transformed into tools for politics.¹³¹ Unique objects beckon the would-be viewer to seek

129. Miller, "Shifting ground," np.

130. Emily Dickinson "No. 1748," quoted in Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 22.

131. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 36.

them out, acting on them through *seduction* which comes from the Latin *seducere*, meaning “to lead astray.”¹³² Reproduced images produce a dense field, hounding the viewer rather than seducing them. To engage with a reproduced image is passive – it is not necessary to orient oneself towards it, for *they* surround us, whereas distance and movement are inherent in the seduction of things that preserve their singularity. Works that maintain this singularity may therefore be thought as still retaining that link to ritual and, I argue, to pilgrimage. Coincidentally, Rebecca Solnit’s writing on pilgrimage joins us in New Mexico too, as she documents the journey to Chimayo. The landmark that marks the end of this journey is the Santuario which houses the holy dirt that pilgrims may take home with them.¹³³ This is a pilgrimage where land and place is of the utmost importance as it draws the spiritual symbolism away from water that flows in order to focus it on the dirt underfoot. Solnit describes the act of pilgrimage through the language of desire as well, suggesting that it reconciles the spiritual with the material since “to go on pilgrimage is to make the body and its actions express the desires and beliefs of the soul.”¹³⁴ In other words, pilgrimage can be thought of as a spatial, geological analogy for desire itself.

Because *Lightning Field* and other works of land art are linked so specifically to a singular geographic location, they draw their audiences to them rather than going forth to meet them. The content of Beardsley’s criticisms against the work are again ironically appropriate when considering the ritualistic functions of desire sustained by a unique, faraway object: he sarcastically accuses the Institute of building up such suspense and in-effect hiding the work behind damask curtains in order to ensure that once there, the viewer (who he refers to as a neophyte) will expect to see god. I interpret Beardsley’s sarcastic quips as assurance that he too has read pilgrimage into the work. Desire is dependent on this negativity, this keeping-at-a-distance. Desire is not about having access

132. “Seduce (v.)” *Etymology Online*, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=seduce>.

133. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A Natural History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), Chapter 4, EPUB.

134. Solnit, *Wanderlust*, Chapter 4.

to the known, but being drawn-to yet kept-from something mysterious. The buildup is everything.

Along with being a novel in verse, a photo essay, and a work of translation, *Autobiography of Red* may also be read as a travelogue. Much of Geryon and Herakles' relationship revolves around transportation – it is not still but always moving towards an elusive somewhere. The two meet at a bus depot as:

Herakles stepped off
the bus from New Mexico and Geryon
came past around the corner of the platform and there it was one of those
moments
that is the opposite of blindness.
The world poured itself back and forth between their eyes once or twice.¹³⁵

Carson's decision to make Herakles an out-of-towner is consistent with the original myth, where Herakles must travel to the island where the monster Geryon lives with his red cattle in order to slay him. This scene in particular is not a portrait of the two lovers meeting, but of the space that still separates them as the world pours back and forth, in a way that is not dissimilar from Carson's appraisal of Sappho's Fragment 31 as an image of the distance separating lovers.¹³⁶

Distance traversed becomes a theme in their relationship as they have their first conversation by the railway tracks; later they park on the side of a highway; "a journey makes itself necessary" and they travel westward to Herakles' hometown of Hades (presumably but not actually in New Mexico);¹³⁷ spend time at another bus depot; and when their relationship eventually exhausts itself the last image of the two is Herakles sending Geryon away, telling him that there is a bus daily at 9 a.m..¹³⁸ The story then leaves Geryon for a time to handle his heartbreak and returns to him years later as he is leaving to Argentina on a plane, takes a handful of cabs in Buenos Aires, only to stumble

135. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 39.

136. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 13.

137. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 46.

138. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 56.

across Herakles himself and embark on another journey to Peru to see a volcano (by plane) with him and his new partner. In Carson's narrative, Herakles' original mythical pilgrimage to slay Geryon is re-trod in various directions and by both men. The repeated journey is imperative as it implies the singularity that makes it necessary. The physical distance between the two and the emphasis on the journey towards each other rather than on moments of togetherness is a way of maintaining desire, representing eros as "deferred, defies, obstructed, hungry, organized around a radiant absence – [...] eros as lack."¹³⁹

Pilgrimage depends on work – the point of a pilgrimage is not getting there with ease, but to become aware of the labour of movement. Opportunities for pilgrimage are eroding as our transportation technologies (both physical and virtual) accelerate, creating a teleutopia where everything exists in a "real time" and non-space that obliterates the present as well as the need for motion.¹⁴⁰ As Geryon sits in a plane flying to Argentina, he reads a guidebook that explains how:

THE GUACHO ACQUIRED AN EXAGGERATED NOTION
OF MASTERY OVER
HIS OWN DESTINY FROM THE SIMPLE ACT OF RIDING ON
HORSEBACK
WAY FAR ACROSS THE PLAIN.¹⁴¹

Walking speeds up into galloping across the desert on horseback, the horse speeds up to become a train, which accelerates to become a plane, which becomes the immediacy of digital non-space. In what is perhaps the culmination of Benjamin's dilemma of reproduction, Paul Virilio describes digital time as "a commotion in present duration, an accident of the so-called 'real' moment that suddenly detaches itself from the place where it happens, from its *here and now* and opts for an electronical dazzlement."¹⁴² Solnit writes about the importance of *arrival*, suggesting that "To travel without arriving would

139. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 18.

140. Virilio, "The Third Interval," 830.

141. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 81.

142. Virilio, "The Third Interval," 835.

be as incomplete as to arrive without having travelled.”¹⁴³ In the world Virilio describes, the later pitfall is the pertinent one: the journey is no longer necessary. Although Herakles is far from Geryon and Geryon must undertake some sort of pilgrimage to get back to him, this is a pilgrimage on plane-back, punctuated by phone calls that bend the distance between the two onto itself. The same is true for *Lightning Field*, whose farawayness is made surmountable by transportation technology. In the approach, different speeds of time rub up against each other – the slow time of the Pueblo, Navajo and Hopi people who live on that land, the even slower geological time of the rock formations that make up the desert, and the quickness of the Dia Foundation van that gets you there.¹⁴⁴

2.5 In lieu of a conclusion, weather

The site of the first successful nuclear bomb detonation, Trinity, joins Solnit, Carson, and De Maria in New Mexico. It is an almost-five-hour drive from *Lightning Field* and, as Catherine McKinnon walks through the launch, it becomes clear that weather plays a pivotal role. A storm is building in the distance on the day before the launch and the scientists are all worriedly observing it, hoping it stays away.¹⁴⁵ Both this launch and *Lightning Field* depend on extreme weather, and anticipation builds as it is seen forming in the distance. Conversations about meteorological phenomena in both places pivot from the mundane small talk weather is often relegated to, to a matter of passionate speculation.¹⁴⁶

The most striking similarity between the Trinity launch site and the site of *Lightning Field*, besides their mutual location in New Mexico, is how specific they are to the work that had to be done there. De Maria reports scouring the southern states for five years in search for the perfect site – flat, specific weather conditions, and far from cities. McKinnon reports on Bainbridge and Oppenheimer’s own search for the perfect place for

143. Solnit, *Wanderlust*, chapter 4.

144. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 40.

145. Catherine McKinnon, “Trinity,” in *100 Atmospheres: Studies in Scale and Wonder* (Open Humanities Press, 2019), 138.

146. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 45.

Trinity – again, flat, specific weather conditions, and far from cities, specifically Los Alamos.¹⁴⁷ In both of these cases, the land is not an afterthought or the mere setting of the respective projects. Its topography is entangled with the human projects it hosts and importantly, the flatness of the land provides a prime vantage point for watching the skies. The flatness of the desert makes it possible to see storms gathering from far away, increasing the amount of time a visitor to *Lightning Field* may track its movements in anticipation.

Weather represents the standardization of atmospheric measurements, and their unfixing from specific places so they may refer to great swaths of land. In other words, it is “the removal of meteorological practices from places of life to places on a map,” and is thus vulnerable to the various threats desire encounters when geology is unified by cartography. It is different in scope from its predecessor of meteorology, which is linked to unique, sporadic events, popping up strangely and disappearing.¹⁴⁸ Meteorology, whose etymology gestures to the *meteors* that were among its primary concerns, was not interested in representing systems, but in observing the unique, unrelated events that occur at the margins. Whereas weather is related to pragmatic predictions, meteorology is tied up in wonder.¹⁴⁹ For Carson, this wonder is translated as *delight*, a word she uses in *Eros the Bittersweet* dozens of times to refer to the reaching of desire towards an object that is not in within grasp.¹⁵⁰

According to the definition she builds of objects of desire (whether they appear as unavailable lovers or apples just out of pickers’ reach), meteorology, in its intangibility and unpredictability is the ultimate example. *Lightning Field’s* interactions with atmospheric phenomena are not bound by weather or statistics, but by meteorology.

147. McKinnon, “Trinity,” 136.

148. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 47.

149. I am using Isabelle Stengers’ definition here, which refers to paying attention to the remarkable unknowns at the edge of knowledge. Her exploration of wonder as a scientific tool in *Another Science is Possible* provides a balance to the religious-tinged wonder of Kosky’s accounts. See Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science is Possible: a manifesto for slow science* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), introduction.

150. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 69.

Because appointments to visit the work are made months in advance, there is no use in predicting the weather; only hoping for it will do.

The metal poles of De Maria's work reach upwards to summon the lightning, but because of where they exist, they superimpose much older traditions of calling for rain. The Hopi people who are indigenous to the New Mexico desert also wish to summon storms but instead of using metal, they use songs. Emory Sekaquaptewa, who was a Hopi leader and scholar provides English translations of some of these lyrics:

[...] whereas English speakers would say "it is raining on ...," the Hopi use the phrase *yoyhoyotani*, "rain will be moving along," in order to re-create in the listeners' minds the familiar sight of a column of rain moving along across the plains. The difference is that the translation "it is raining on ..." suggests that it is raining in one place only, whereas the Hopi phrase more accurately conveys the directed movement of the clouds that characterizes summer thunderstorms.¹⁵¹

In these translations, the movement of storms is crucial as it gestures to the anticipation of calling it closer.

In his writing on his own visit to *Lighting Field*, where lightning is more likely to stay away than to strike, Kosky asks "how does one respond to the frustration of desire" and I cannot tell if he is saying that frustration is a crucial element to desire, of asking what we do when desire is frustrated.¹⁵² After the poles of *Lighting Field* fail to summon a storm, he goes on to find another object for desire – the light, instead of the lightning – but in keeping with the definition of desire, perhaps lightning, especially when it does not strike, is its ideal object. When the desire is not met, it may continue to live out its frustration and yearning.

151. Emory Sekaquaptewa, "They go along singing: reconstructing the Hopi past from ritual metaphors in song and image," *American Antiquity* 69, no. 3 (2004): 464, doi: 10.2307/4128402. The Hopi also performed specific dances to call lightning. These dances were performed with live rattlesnakes, which symbolized the lightning and beckoned it when they were flung away from the dancers. However, most accounts of these dances are sensationalized by white anthropologists so I mention the Hopi songs instead.
152. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 53.

In the first few pages of *Autobiography of Red*, Carson gives us a list of the total things known about Geryon, the first thing being that he loved lightning. Despite this, lightning plays a minimal role in the text and Geryon is fixated instead on volcanoes. A volcano erupts in Hades; one of the photographs Geryon is most fascinated by is a long exposure of this eruption; Herakles' grandmother tells him the story of a prisoner who was spared incineration when the volcano erupted by his thick-walled and windowless cell;¹⁵³ the book's epigraph is an Emily Dickinson poem about volcanos; later in life, Herakles and his partner Ancash travel around the world recording audio of the interiors of volcanos for a documentary on the poet; upon seeing Geryon's wings, Ancash tells him about the Peruvian myths of the eyewitnesses, people who travelled to the interior of volcanos and were purged of all weakness; the story ends with the three men watching bread being baked in the fires of a Chilean volcano near Ancash's hometown.

This volcanic imagery can be read as the illustration of the boundary between interiority and exteriority.¹⁵⁴ It is what causes Geryon to reconsider his own otherness when Ancash introduces the new mythology that transforms his wings from monstrous to marvelous. It is also an example of a slow eruption, which stands poised in threat for ages before pressure builds. In this way it is unlike a thunderstorm, which may accumulate and dissipate quickly. However, volcanos and lightning are linked in Hesiod's mythology, which tells the story of the craftsmen cyclops who forge Zeus's lightning bolt in the fires of Mount Etna.¹⁵⁵ This last interpretation allows for a narrative distance between lightning and volcanos, a distance that Geryon must deal with for though he loves lightning, Carson bombards him with its predecessor.

Thus, a volcano is a mountain with a void that births lightning. *Lightning Field* is both an artwork and a place, separated from me by a void of flat land that is not-*Lightning Field*. On the outskirts of this void and framing it lies Ye'-iitsoh, yet another volcano. The Ye'-

153. This may be based on Ludger Sylbaris, who was imprisoned at the time of the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelee and joined the circus as a marvel after surviving the eruption.

154. Jennings, "The Erotic Poetics of Anne Carson," 149.

155. Aaron J. Atsma, "Kyklopes," *Theoi Project*, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.theoi.com/Titan/Kyklopes.html>.

iitsoh Bidil Ninfyeezhf lava beds meander along with the highways leading up to Lighting Field, which the Navajo people used as pathways. A Navajo creation myth states that the lava flows are Ye’iitso’s coagulated blood, separated by the Rio San Jose; if they grow together, he will live again.¹⁵⁶ These voids and their distances are crucial. Simone Weil writes about desire in *Gravity and Grace* and although her interpretation of it is largely grounded in her Christianity, the description of the void is appropriate here:

Always, beyond the particular object, whatever it may be, we have to fix our will on the void – to will the void. For the good which we can neither picture nor define is a void for us. But this void is fuller than all fullness.¹⁵⁷

For Weil, what fills this void is God. For Geryon, what fills this void is desire, and for me, who yearns to see an artwork in person, what fills this void is also desire. Neither De Maria nor Carson advocate for the collapsing of the void but for its maintenance, asking us “to desire in the void, to desire without any wishes” that our desires be met. After all, if, as Carson and Stesichorus both suggest, in Erytheia “there is a link between geology and character,”¹⁵⁸ then what better geographic analogue to desire is there than a void.

156. Linford, Laurance D. *Navajo Places: history, legend, landscape: a narrative of important places on and near the Navajo Reservation, with notes on their significance to Navajo culture and history* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 204.

157. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 13.

158. Carson, *Autobiography of Red*, 149.

3 I am and dead – or almost: time and desire in Ana Mendieta's *tableaus* and *siluetas* and Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva*

Thinking through the temporality of desire, Carson explains that the lover is “wedged between two tenses” and “looks at ‘now’ and ‘then’ with a calculating eye and a sinking heart. How he would love to control time! Instead, time controls him.”¹⁵⁹ One of the metaphors she uses to develop this tense view of time is Sophocles’ erotic dilemma of holding ice in his hand. He simultaneously wants the ice to be ice and have the properties of ice (including melting) without it ever actually melting away. Which is to say that the lover wants to “remain in the ‘now’ of desire at any cost.”¹⁶⁰ The metaphor of holding ice works remarkably well to explain the function of time in both Ana Mendieta’s work and Clarice Lispector’s *Agua Viva*. In Mendieta’s *siluetas*, the artist incises or adds her form into the landscape and lets time do what it will. A *silueta* from 1976 formed as a depression in the sand of a beach is gradually pulled away by the tide; *siluetas* burn and disperse; and her 1977 *silueta* made of ice melts. In her photographic documentation of it, the ice is frozen in the temporality of desire: it is ice but never melts away.

159. Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), 118.

160. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 127.



Figure 7. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* (Ocean Silueta), 1976 and Ana Mendieta, *Silueta en Fuego*, 1976. Artworks © Estate of Ana Mendieta.

Lispector's project is also elemental, but as her unnamed narrator exclaims, its true theme is the instant.¹⁶¹ Rather than writing a traditional narrative where one event follows another, *Agua Viva* is an abstract, all-over investigation of the present moment. The short novel is composed as a letter to an unnamed lover and in it, the narrator expresses the process of nearing her death while oscillating back and forth between dying and being born.¹⁶² Because the novel does not follow narrative time which build towards a

161. Clarice Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, trans. Elizabeth Lowe and Earl Fitz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). 4.

162. I use the word "narrator" throughout to refer to the first-person perspective from which the novel is written. Other terms like "writer" may also be appropriate descriptors, but make it difficult to distinguish between Lispector herself and the fictional writer of the letter. Hélène Cixous condenses the two voices into one, referring to the first person "I" as Lispector, but since Lispector pushed back against strictly autobiographical readings of her work, I will be avoiding this.

conclusion, it can be described, as the narrator suggests, as “a single climax.”¹⁶³ In the text, the body of the narrator enters and weaves through geological formations, jungles, oceans, and the gestational womb (“my hand rests upon the earth and listens hotly to the beating of a heart”¹⁶⁴), engaging with all of their various temporalities. This transcorporeal aesthetic embraces human-time as well as the geological and biological temporalities of erosion and growth and aligns well with Mendieta’s *siluetas* and *tableau* works, in which different scales of time press up against each other.¹⁶⁵

3.1 The time of abjection

The candor with which Mendieta presents her body is matched by Lispector’s descriptions of her own eroticism, orgasm, and bodily functions, including lactation, menstruation, and death. The porous seepage of subjectivity beyond its borders and the body’s reciprocal infiltration by the non-human is one of the primary focal points for scholarship on Mendieta’s work. Importantly, this abjection has its own specific temporality. The abject, in its neither-nor-ness, is not a stable state but a vibrating-between states. That which is abject may be read simultaneously/interchangeably as either subject or object and it is this vibrating confusion that makes the state a disturbing one to witness or occupy. Writing about abjection in Mendieta’s work, Angelique Szymanek explains that if:

what is joyous always already contains a spark of death within it, and the abject contains the potential for veneration, then the effects of attraction and repulsion are inextricably linked. The *constant motion* between these two poles, and their interdependence, may well elucidate the social phenomena of violent images, namely their deployment as both sites of disgust and loci of desire.”¹⁶⁶

163. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 6.

164. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 29.

165. Astrid Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 77.

166. Angelique Szymanek, “Bloody Pleasures: Ana Mendieta’s Violent Tableaux,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 4 (2016): 917, doi: 10.1086/685503.

The language Szymanek uses to convey the affect of the abject is locational (sites, loci) but also temporal (motion). It is an image of distinct experiences happening not at the same time but in quick succession, joy pausing to spark death, and the abjected being invoking the possibility for worship as well as disgust. The experience of oscillation-between is the source of abjection's hold; like an optical illusion where only one of two images is evident at a time, the trick of the abject is the sustained flipping back-and-forth. In her own writing on abjection, Julia Kristeva prods this temporal dimension. She writes that the abject "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects."¹⁶⁷ Kristeva identifies both the disgusting and seductive components of the abject but her description of finality in the response to it does not do justice to abjection's unique method of causing disruption. Perhaps, as she suggests, desire turns aside disgusted but, crucially, it always turns back again. The introduction of disgust to an otherwise erotic image pauses desire in its tracks but only so that it may activate itself once more. Abjection, then, does not still desire but sustains it, as the viewer tries to squint at the optical illusion of abjection to see only the image they wish to see, but never fully being able to resist the succession.

In *Agua Viva* the narrator's body occasionally occupies the role of the abject corpse, vibrating between eroticism and death, often unsure which state she occupies, asking "is it possible that without noticing I've slipped over to the other side?"¹⁶⁸ She announces her transition into a corpse but "corpse" does not serve as a final state and so she wavers back into vibrant life. Kristeva states that the major question of the one by whom the abject exists is "where am I?" rather than the subject-oriented question of "who am I?"¹⁶⁹ But perhaps the major question of the abjected being is "when am I?" and in what phase of the vibration. The characteristic of a corpse that makes it most horrifying and uncanny is its resemblance to a living thing and concurrent existence as waste. This suggests that the

167. Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey A. Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 96.

168. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 13.

169. Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," 100.

most horrific trait of a corpse is not that it is linked to death but rather that it is also linked to life and it is all too easy to imagine its resurrection.

Prior to undertaking her *silueta* project and extracting her own corporeal presence from her work, Mendieta, like Lispector, flirted with becoming a corpse. While completing her BFA at University of Iowa she started experimenting with performance, staging several works in response to the rape and murder of a fellow student. In the first iteration, her classmates were invited to her dorm room where she had staged a violent altercation, her tied and bloody body slumped over a table as the centerpiece. She lay motionless while, allegedly, her classmates discussed the work.¹⁷⁰ In a later version she relocated the piece outside. She lay half-naked and bloody on the ground, partially obstructed by a screen of foliage, allowing unwitting walkers to stumble across her. Maggie Nelson, writing about these works suggests that “you can’t toss them into the ghetto of feminist protest art and ignore [their] more *aggressive*, borderline *sadistic* motivations and effects.”¹⁷¹ In staging this work and forcing unconsenting passersby to stumble across her, as well as by refusing to use her own blood (as was the norm in so much other performance at the time and can be seen in the work of Marina Abramovic and Chris Burden), Mendieta displaces the female body as the locus of cruelty, instead doing cruelty to whoever witnesses that display of false suffering. Key in this perspectival shift is the corpse’s refusal to stay dead; Mendieta performs death, never permanently ceasing to be subject and so may return the gaze of whoever comes across her, disturbing their pleasure.¹⁷² A corpse opens its eyes to look back. A body that is read as dead is conscious of the viewer’s presence, implicating them. This is a subversion of the pornographic image of the beautiful female corpse, supine and voluptuous, death acting as the ultimate feminine passivity.

170. There are varying accounts of this – some sources write that her classmates were unaware while most say that the invitation was explicit.

171. Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (New York: WW. Norton & Company, 2011), 76.

172. Angeliqe Szymanek claims that seeing a naked, raped female body results in complicated feelings, similar to the ones Susan Sontag identifies in her work on war photography. There is pleasure in seeing pain at a distance “and the implications of a sexually violated woman’s body include not only an attraction to violence but to sexual aggression against women in particular.” Szymanek, “Bloody Pleasures,” 905.

Through the creation of another body and its subsequent wearing away in her *siluetas*, Mendieta evokes the time of gestation and death in quick succession, unimpeded by the boundary layer of skin. A similar lenticularization of life and death occurs in *Agua Viva*, where the beginning of a sentence may introduce death and the same sentence's end brings birth. Lispector writes about wanting to be buried in the earth, a desire that Mendieta's own work echoes, so that her heart may beat under the ground, implying a contradictory gestation:

But I noticed an initial rustle, like a heart beating under the earth. I quietly placed my ear to the ground and hear the summer open up a roadway deep inside the earth and my heart under the earth – “nothing, I didn't say anything!” – and I felt the patient brutality with which the closed earth opened up inside, giving birth.¹⁷³

The narrator's subjecthood ebbs and flows through numerous births as she is born (object being that objects the mother), alive for an instant (subject), and dying (object). The transcorporeal logic allowed by the object, where the body is not one thing but is in the constant flux of becoming something else means that Lispector's narrator occupies human time as well as understanding herself as ancient protozoa, the gnarled roots of a surviving tree, and an oyster drenched in lemon juice. In Kristeva's words, when abjection occurs:

[...] forgotten time crops up suddenly and condenses into a flash of lightning, an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together the two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder. The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.¹⁷⁴

The temporality of abjection is the contradiction of an instant that lasts forever, a modern woman who is also a protozoa, a birth that follows death. Kristeva calls this *jouissance* and says that it is not something we desire but something we *joy in* – a frontier where “I”

173. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 51.

174. Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” 101.

falls away to make room for a “forfeited existence.”¹⁷⁵ The body pushes against the limits of its own definition, threatened by both its inside and outside, at risk of unbecoming.

The bombardment of the self and the erosion of cultivated borders is one of the methodologies of eros. Carson suggests that for the Greeks, “the act of love is mingling and desire melts the limbs.”¹⁷⁶ The lover no longer knows where they end as they experience the paradoxical death that flashes between instants of desire. A catalog of the workings of eros in Greek poetry include gnawing holes through lovers’ vitals, snatching lungs, piercing bones, wearing down, grating away, and devouring flesh.¹⁷⁷ Desire makes us aware of the lack in the middle of ourselves that has been carved out by desire for another. Mendieta’s *siluetas* allow this metaphoric seepage to occur literally: she burns her limbs in effigy, melts them away, carves herself into the ground. Lispector too gleefully announces her becoming a part of the world, whether it be in the caves where she finds her strange kin, or being buried in the earth and feeling herself in the blooming of all the orange trees, or when she seems to become a tree that “burns with hard pleasure.”¹⁷⁸ Abjection, losing oneself and coming back to oneself, is an excruciating process for the lover. For as Bataille asks, “what does physical eroticism signify if not a violation on the very being of its practitioners? – a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?”¹⁷⁹

3.2 On vibration

Vibration, or folding of death onto birth and sensuality is crucial to the work of both artists. Mendieta labels her more performative works, the ones that still contain her actual body, *tableau*. As a medium, the tableau can be understood as the extreme contraction of

175. Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” 101.

176. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 7.

177. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 40.

178. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 30.

179. Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 17. The troubling circumstances surrounding Mendieta’s death after falling from her apartment window in 1985 illustrate a tragic reality of this statement. Her husband, with whom she was arguing at the time of her death, was tried and found not guilty but there is still much speculation that he was indeed her murderer.

movement to a single moment as well as the expansion of that moment to occupy a larger stretch of duration. Its stillness is only superficial, as in a tableaux vivant the artist breathes and fidgets. For instance, in her *Imagen de Yagul*, one of her earliest such works, Mendieta lies down in a grave and asks her collaborator to cover her body in flowers and photograph the result. The work exists as its photographic documentation but I also think of Mendieta's body during the act of creation, pulsing with vibrant breath and heartbeat. And because we recognize these vital vibrations of life, we search for them in the photograph, which throbs with potential, the figure always caught between breaths. Lispector, too, acknowledges the power of the vibrations that occur on the scale of the body as she writes her want to "feel the quivering, vital nerve of life interact with me like a pulsing vein."¹⁸⁰

As a text, *Agua Viva* can be understood as an exercise in vibration: there is no plot, the story goes nowhere, and instead of being propelled towards new images, the same ones cycle through. Hélène Cixous aptly describes the experience of reading Lispector as having "the vertiginous impression never to know what page I am on," remarking on the "déjà vu that is not déjà vu," but variations on an eternal theme.¹⁸¹ Lispector herself struggles with the distinction between remembering the past and living the instant, writing that "to live this life is more an indirect remembering of it than a direct living."¹⁸² This remembering the new is resonant, reaching across time to create a temporal illusion that projects 'now' onto 'then.' Even the experience of love (or especially the experience of love) is affected by this temporal shift. Lispector writes to her letter's recipient that "one day you said you loved me. I pretended to believe and live, from yesterday to today, in happy love. But to remember with yearning is like saying goodbye again."¹⁸³ In the present moment of love, the moment when love is announced, it is gone. *Gone* is a tense of desire that performs a stereoscopy of the future onto the present moment.

180. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 11.

181. Hélène Cixous, introduction to *Stream of Life* by Clarice Lispector, trans. Verena Conley, xxii.

182. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 56.

183. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 54.

In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson (and Socrates) critique Lysias's idea of love, which has no beginning because it is written from the projected end of the affair.¹⁸⁴ Lispector here assumes a similar temporality, as the announcement of love is tainted immediately by the premonition and expectation of its demise. Lysias's approach to love is deemed cowardly and pathetic: he seeks to avoid the pain of desire by circumventing its present but winds up also avoiding its pleasure. Lispector's statement is not pathetic but holds a vast melancholy. She adopts Lysias's approach without choosing to, rapt in the present moment of love but unable to tease it apart from the future or past. Living becomes remembering the future and projecting to the past. Bataille, in his text "Solar Anus" addresses this dissonance, writing that "love and life appear to be separate only because everything on earth is broken apart by vibrations of various amplitudes and durations. However, there are no vibrations that are not conjugated with a continuous circular movement."¹⁸⁵

3.3 Writing/Photographing

It is possible, then, to think of vibrations as small loops. This organizing structure of the loop is crucial to both writing and photography and the way they toy with time. The ephemerality of performance-based work and the planned dissipation of Mendieta's *siluetas* necessitate the intervention of photography as the ephemerality of speech necessitates the written word. In both Mendieta and Lispector's works, the medium asserts itself: the grain in Mendieta's 35mm film photography and the shakiness in her super-8 films makes it impossible to forget that what we are looking at is indeed photographic documentation of a gone-event, and Lispector's constant quarrel with and awareness of the act of writing makes it clear that 'to write' is a process independent of living, no matter how close together they may come.

Rebecca Schneider's analysis of Mendieta's photographs takes into account their eroticism. She writes that the reproduction of an object as an image "implicates the body

184. Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 124.

185. Georges Bataille, "Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 7.

of the viewer at the same time that that viewer is, by tenets of perspectivalism, seemingly dissociated from that which is said.”¹⁸⁶ Insinuated in her observation is the experience of voyeurism, not only across an impossible distance from three-dimensional space into the two-dimensional photograph, but across time. The eroticism of the expanded moment in photography has the ability to still the image at the desired spot. Mendieta’s *siluetas*, so bound by the temporal and elemental forces of fire, ice, and erosion, are captured by photography in the process of their dissipation so that their primary elusiveness may be observed at close quarters. Schneider also reckons with the gendered implications of this eroticism;¹⁸⁷ although Mendieta’s body is never present in the documentation of the *siluetas*, which grow more and more abstract as the project develops, her embodiments of rape in her earlier work thoroughly complicate the conceptualizing of eroticism in her photographs. Although it is tempting to believe that explicit photographs of violence would provoke outrage, there is also a secondary pleasure – here is vibration again, repulsion making space for desire to reassert itself. Szymanek writes about the cultural role of the beautiful, dead, young girl, as does Maggie Nelson in her chronicles of writing the biography of her aunt’s murder; these corpses are tragically erotic and utterly available for consumption.¹⁸⁸

The appeal of these photographs, portraying women stilled in the prime of their desirability, signify a perversion of the erotic logic, wherein the lover wants above all else to keep their beloved from changing, to the detriment of the beloved.¹⁸⁹

Availability is the crux. As suggested by Roland Barthes, we may distinguish an erotic photograph from a pornographic one by the presence of fissures.¹⁹⁰ A pornographic photograph is a photograph whose point is to display the desired object without any hinderance to the viewer. It is a plotless photograph – there is nothing else available to

186. Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), 89.

187. Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 102.

188. Szymanek, *Bloody Pleasures*, 899.

189. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 125.

190. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 41. I appreciate the rocky terminology here, appropriate for much of the work Mendieta is doing and the arid landscapes she is drawn to.

grab the attention and it makes its impact all at once.¹⁹¹ On the contrary, an erotic photograph “takes the spectator outside its frame,” which becomes the area where animation occurs.”¹⁹² The photograph Barthes describes as erotic is a photograph with a *beyond* and with an *after*, rather than the flat *now* of pornography.

The photographs he speaks of fondly adhere to this rule of “launched desire” and yet they are not free from the intimate relationship he develops between the photograph and death. He connects photography to theater and writes that:

The first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead [...] Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of tableau vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead.¹⁹³

According to Barthes, the noeme of the photograph is that it shows with absolute certainty that something was there. It cannot lie without exerting a great effort, unlike painting and writing, which may fabricate moments that never existed. It is this connection to the actual that ties photography with death, even if just the death of the particular passing instant it embalms. In the minute phases captured in Mendieta’s photographs this is especially true. The documentation of her *siluetas*, which make concrete the fluid moment of change, are linked with vanishing, blind spots, and something not threatening to be gone but already gone in the instant directly after its capture. In Schneider’s words, “loss is not an anxious flirtation, not riddled with desire, displacement, or dislocation. Loss is present – literal, exigent, palpable.”¹⁹⁴ I would argue that loss is most linked to desire exactly when it is palpable, not when it is a threat. This is the image of holding ice in your hand and wanting it desperately to stay ice *and*, paradoxically, not melt. In *The Scent of Time*, which deals with the deterioration of time,

191. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 41.

192. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 59.

193. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 31.

194. Schneider, *The explicit body in performance*, 119.

Han writes about how it is the moments in between major events that hold tension, but accelerationism makes them infinitely smaller by speeding up the progression of time.¹⁹⁵ These are the lossy moments of transition Mendieta captures – the *Siluetas* are in the process of decaying but have not yet reached their final states; active matter breathes and fluctuates.

Han uses the term “point time” to refer to the contemporary experience of temporality, suggesting that we live in an age that atomizes time to events so that when things happen, they do so in a void of non-time.¹⁹⁶ Rather than a building towards events, there is nothing and then there is everything. Mendieta’s photographs each prolong a specific instant of this void-time, giving it back its texture, and Lispector’s narration exists solely in the void of non-occurrence. As previously mentioned, is difficult to describe the plot of *Agua Viva* because, observed in its entirety from the perspective of schema, it is shapeless. The temporality is not of linear time, where events are additive and one thing leads to another, but based in the attempt at fully incorporating *nowness*. She admits it herself when she writes: “This isn’t a story because I don’t know stories as such, but only know how to keep speaking and doing; it’s a story of instants that flash by, like fugitive tracks seen from a train window.”¹⁹⁷

The paradox here should make us re-read, for although Lispector suggests that what is being written is not a story but a collection of instants, she seems to rescind this declaration by describing her project as a *story* of instants. The metaphor of the train complicates this too: watching things from a moving train, everything blurs *apart from* the tracks, which propel the train forward and provide a way of tracing its travels. These instants are not additive in that they lead towards some sort of conclusion, but like the tracks of a train, each rail represents the moment when the train passed it. Lispector’s train is a directionless one where it does not matter what station it hurtles to as long as it continues to hurtle. Her writing of each moment as it happens places us, as her readers,

195. Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018), 17.

196. Han, *The Scent of Time*, 17.

197. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 59.

on that particular train. Each of Lispector's new moments is a new one for us also; since her writing is happening as close to the thoughts and events it refers to as possible, we are not following her, but holding her hand as she gets somewhere. As Fernanda Negrete suggests, "The kind of reading practice Lispector proposes is thus a loving form of intimacy between strangers."¹⁹⁸ Adding to this intimacy is the fact that she is writing a letter to her beloved that we are now reading ourselves. Either we maintain our position as impartial reader, or we become the beloved. Lispector creates another blind spot, like that which Anne Carson describes functioning in *Las Meninas*, which confuses us when we notice that we occupy the spot of the king and queen of Spain, and which I described occurring in James Turrell's work. And if we are Lispector's beloved, when are we and when is she?

Lispector is not in pursuit of a future (indeed, the most plot-centric way of reading *Agua Viva* is as a document of coming to die) but of nearness to the present moment. In her words: "what I'm writing does not come softly, rising little by little to a climax, then to softly die afterward. No: what I write to you is made of fire, eyes glowing like coals."¹⁹⁹ Throughout the text, she tries to fold over the temporality of spoken word (immediately occurring, immediately disappearing) onto that of written language (occurring after the fact as a record, enduring past its utterance). She struggles with their difference, suggesting that her writing should be seen at an impressionistic distance, with more emphasis on the sound of a sentence than its meaning, erratically exclaiming the words, "exuberant trunk," completely unrelated to the ones that precede or follow them.

In her writing on erotic time in *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson similarly exerts herself trying to compensate for this crucial distance between the time and experience of writing versus speech. To find the relationship, she focuses on Plato's *Phaedrus* which lists the pitfalls of writing as they pertain to both knowledge and to desire. The threat is that what is written does not flow; it is not a stream of words, dynamic and ever-leading to new

198. Fernanda Negrete, "Approaching Impersonal Life with Clarice Lispector," *Humanities* 7, no. 2 (2018): 7, doi: 10.3390/h7020055.

199. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 23.

conclusions as conversations and thought do, but a particular frozen instance of speech, unable to produce anything other than itself.²⁰⁰ When it comes to desire, the example we have of erotic writing is Lysias's text, which takes a rear-view look at love, assuming from its beginning that love has ended.²⁰¹ This approach completely avoids the time which is most crucial for the lover: the now of love. Socrates does not give up on the ability of writing to convey love and his solution is to "assimilate the 'now' in such a way that it prolongs itself over the whole of life, and beyond. Socrates would inscribe his novel within the instant of desire."²⁰²

This is the time of *Agua Viva*, where Lispector "manages to produce a place where to have pleasure and to say it would not be absolutely antagonistic, where pleasure would flow into saying it."²⁰³ Entering the now with writing means that the moment where desire or pleasure is experienced is not separate from the moment of writing. Writing does not mark the measured contemplation of desire after the fact, but the exclamation of it in real time. Like Mendieta's photographs of her disappearing *siluetas*, Lispector's writing is not one where importance is given to end-states. What matters is the infinitely small instants; in Lispector's work, "the word 'transient' stares back at you from the page, poignant as a piece of melting ice,"²⁰⁴ which in Mendieta's work has the form of feminine body. Writing and photography may be exercises in temporal arrest, but not necessarily the arresting of desire.

200. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 131.

201. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 125.

202 Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 153.

203. Cixous, introduction to *The Stream of Life*, xii.

204. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 121.



Figure 8. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Snow Silueta)*, 1977. Artwork © Estate of Ana Mendieta

3.4 Instant as interlude

Reading a text in translation is a disorienting experience. I wonder what “exuberant trunk” sounds like in Lispector’s original Portuguese, and if that word *trunk* is still caught between elephant and tree. According to Negrete, the original language also does something with time:

Agora and *ja*, both Portuguese words for ‘now,’ have a major role in both *The Passion* and *Água Viva*, and they first of all express an essential synchrony – two [...] These two, writer and reader, narrator and character, writing-reading and its hour – undergo an encounter that neither reduces

the two to one, not merely opposes one to the other, but instead harnesses an affective tension.²⁰⁵

In my reading of the English translation, I did not experience this duality between ‘agora’ and ‘ja’ but I wonder if it is comparable to the tension Carson describes in the Greek word, *deute*, so crucial to poets’ eroticism. Carson explains that the two words that make up the compound *deute* have differing vantage points on time.²⁰⁶ *De* refers to the now moment and has an urgency that stresses its immediacy whereas *aute* means “again, once again, over again.”²⁰⁷ The compound word therefore describes the collision between past and present, producing an extreme nowness contextualized by its past. Carson suggests that it is this word and its specific temporality that gives the impression that the instances poets use it to describe are “moments cut out of real time.”²⁰⁸ Lispector’s *agora* and *ja* do not combine to form a single word but form a similar tension between perspectives on nowness. Reader and writer collide; now and then collide; the event and its recording collide into a single moment that may document desire without causing it to disappear into rigidity as soon as it is uttered. In one line, Lispector’s narrator informs us that she can write no longer and in the next she returns. No time has elapsed for us so reading produces a friction between the experience of reading and the experience of comprehending.

In ways specific to their mediums, Mendieta and Lispector both deal with capturing the elusive instant without stilling it. Mendieta’s photographed *siluetas* vibrate with the before and after of their creation and erosion, and Lispector’s instants, as the title alludes, are a stream that washes over and carries, not one that freezes. In *The Scent of Time*, Han elucidates three modalities of time: the linear time of traditional narrative, mentioned above; mythical time, and point time. Point time is the contemporary experience of time that Han critiques, writing that “the feeling that time passes more quickly now than before is also due to the absence of pronounced articulation of time. This feeling is

205. Negrete, “Approaching Impersonal Life,” 7.

206. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 119.

207. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 119.

208. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 119.

intensified by the fact that events follow each other in quick succession without leaving lasting traces [...] Nothing is incisive.”²⁰⁹ Although, as I have discussed with linear time and will discuss subsequently with mythical time, Lispector and Mendieta may fall into any of these modalities, perhaps most importantly, they complicate point time. Han’s linear time, in which things gradually build towards a conclusion is thwarted by Lispector’s narrative, which leads to nothing but is also not the erraticism of events happening in a void: Lispector, as if to contradict Han’s accusation that the articulation of time is missing, zeros in on exactly that articulation without providing a beginning or end. And Mendieta’s works, photographed in their process of disappearing, conclude off-screen. But even that conclusion is not an additive process of instants, it is a subtractive one: a conclusion that negates instead of wrapping-up. The trace literally disappears, does not last.

The instant, this tiny unit of time, is where we must look to find desire and what we must expand to single out pleasure. Carson writes that from the perspective of the lover, desire seems to demolish time and make all other moments unimportant.²¹⁰ Cixous explains how Lispector writes in the instant of pleasure in order to capture it, critiquing Lacan’s statement that women have nothing to say about their pleasure.²¹¹ “Only in the act of love – by the clear starlike abstraction of what one feels – do we capture the unknown quality of the instant, which is hard and crystalline and vibrant in the air, and life is, in that incalculable instant, greater than the event itself,” writes Lispector in defiance.²¹² Later on she writes about a rose that she loved so much that it did not wilt, implying that desire can indeed affect time as time affects desire. And Mendieta provides the visual for this in her *Imagen de Yagul*, where she lies covered with flowers that appear to have sprouted from her body despite the absence of decay.

209. Han, *The Scent of Time*, 25.

210. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* 117.

211. Cixous, introduction to *The Stream of Life*, xi.

212. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 4.



Figure 9. Ana Mendieta, *Imagen de Yagul*, 1973. Artwork © Estate of Ana Mendieta.

3.5 Myth time

It is *Imagen de Yagul* I look to in order to consider mythological time. Myth time contains an eternal reoccurrence; everything is put right again; time is order and orders events in turn; the goal of myth time is to keep everything constant rather than to make progress towards a different future.²¹³ The turbid, cyclical waters of Lispector's text described above, which make for the disorienting reading experience of thinking we have already encountered this section of story, maps well onto myth time, as does Mendieta's iterative *siluetas* project. The fact that the works exist in series mythologizes them, as does the repetitive structure within each piece: the silhouette is made, exists for a moment, and then fades until it is gone, leaving the world the more or less the same.

213. Han, *The Scent of Time*, 12.

Mendieta's mythologizing of her own body and aligning it with the earth has similarities to Amanda Boetzkes' description of her work, in which Boetzkes claims that Mendieta "faces" the earth and becomes "the surface on and through which the countenance of the earth comes into view."²¹⁴ There is something erotic in this – the earth maintains its otherness by withholding its secrets despite the display.²¹⁵ And in a satisfying symmetry, if Boetzkes' description of a body interacting with the earth smacks of desire, Carson's description of a body experiencing desire references geology. Writing about the relationship between ritual and desire, Carson explains that the 'now' of desire is a shaft taken out of the time that connects to the gods: "when you enter 'now,' you remember what it is like to be really alive, as the gods are."²¹⁶ The time of myth and ritual is outside of "real time" because it references something eternal and in referencing that time, becomes a pocket of it in the present. This makes it a time of otherness as well as re-enactment. It is when this mythical time is infected with the time of geology, as it is in Mendieta's work and in Lispector's experiences with the land, in which she likens writing to a Black Mass, as if she were "tearing the snarled roots of a colossal tree from the depths of the earth," that its temporality gets stranger. Kairos – the time defined by narrative – intersects with chronos – the time that just marches on – and may even change those stories.²¹⁷ Many Greek myths touch on geology and it makes sense – the geological makeup of the earth, which appears to change not at all other than when it shifts dramatically – is a setting that provides the stability needed for a myth to be able to reoccur as well as the drama of sudden, unexpected formation. The myth that seems most pertinent here is that of Sisyphus, who is perhaps the first land artist and is more explicitly linked to both geology and time than most.

Sisyphus is a clever mortal who comes back from the underworld to chastise his wife, breaking his promise to return. His punishment is that he must push a great stone up a slope for the rest of time. He is the central figure in Albert Camus's *The Myth of*

214. Amanda Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 148.

215. Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Land Art*, 148.

216. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 157.

217. This is an inversion of a statement in Marcia Bjornerud's *Timefulness*, in which she states that it is the job of the geologist to 'story' the chronos of geological time.

Sisyphus, which applies his mythical, cyclic temporality in which nothing changes to modern life. Camus' point is that we too are like Sisyphus, caught in the cycle of accomplishing a meaningless task and having to repeat it anew as soon as we do so.²¹⁸ For Camus, a moment of desire is what breaks the crushing mundanity as Sisyphus follows the stone he had just pushed up the slope back down:

It is during the return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness.²¹⁹

Although, as Carson, Mendieta, and Lispector all show, myth can provide a reprieve from real life, creating a temporality that is other when ordinary cycles of the day may be broken, to be caught up in unchanging myth time is no better. It is torture to not be allowed to change, and Camus finds moments of alterity when the cycles mandated to Sisyphus by the gods turn back on themselves as Sisyphus resets his position; in this folding that acts as a break, we may imagine Sisyphus happy.

But to return to the question of geology, I wonder what would happen to myth time if the *chronos* of the earth was considered. The answer may be that myth time would erode; there is no *forever* in geology although there are certainly long times. Sisyphus's boulder would grind against the stone of the mountain, slowly wearing away and wearing down the slope in return. Time is what makes Sisyphus' task so terrible but it is also what lessens his burden. The cyclic time of myth, in which nothing changes, is offset by the physical, surprisingly fluid time of stone as "one begins to understand that rocks are not nouns but verbs."²²⁰

218. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin Great Ideas, 2005), 15.

219. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 76.

220. Marcia Bjornerud, *Timefulness: how thinking like a geologist can help save the world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 8.

3.6 The temporality of earth – extracting and facing

Timothy Morton uses yet another myth to describe the temporal, mythological relationship between humans and the earth. In “The oedipal logic of ecological awareness,” he extends the beginning of the Anthropocene back to ancient Greece and the beginning of agriculture which, through acts of ploughing and sowing, exerts human will onto the earth.²²¹ The story of Oedipus, who attempts to find the slayer of his father only to learn that it was he who kills him, follows the agricultural structure of ploughing, planting, and reploughing, retreading the same ground, to form a mobius strip where there is no beginning or end. In this structure – which we may also find in Mendieta’s *siluetas* as they emerge from the earth and return to it, and in Lispector’s narration, which is a cycle of enduring birth and death ad infinitum, also involving her “submersion into the earth” and emerging out of the it – the beginning is the end is the beginning.²²²

For Morton, agriculture thus opens up a fantasy space where humans learn that they can manipulate the earth for their own desires. What does it mean for desire and fantasy that Clarice Lispector and Ana Mendieta incise themselves into the earth rather than mining/excising it? Boetzkes references Irigaray to provide a possible answer, suggesting that “the ethical relation takes place through physical contact. The other, for Irigaray, is not penetrated, sculpted, or grasped at [...] but rather is felt at the divisions that mark alterity.”²²³ Thus even though the temporality of Lispector and Mendieta’s work could be said to follow an infinite loop, this loop has a different effect on desire. Their work reveals the earth without removing all of its opacity/making it available, allowing it to continue existing in its alterity.²²⁴ The relationship between body and earth is reciprocal, based in a mutual co-becoming instead of a power dynamic of resource and consumer, introducing the possibility for change and eroticism in a loop.

221. Timothy Morton, “The oedipal logic of ecological awareness,” *Environmental Humanities* 1 (2019): 9, doi: 10.1215/22011919-3609949.

222. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 8.

223. Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art*, 149.

224. Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art*, 149.

In *The Extractive Zone*, Gomez-Barris writes about the possibility of systems living in harmony with humans rather than in conflict. The example she uses is that of the Tagaeri and Taromenane people resisting extractive logic and “living in consonance with the earth.”²²⁵ I appreciate the vibratory connotations of this word, and the reciprocal resonance it suggests. She introduces two concepts to develop possible relationships to land: the concept of *el buen vivir*, or “good living,” refers to this resistance of extractivist urges whereas *vivir bien* refers to the “good life,” where everything is interpreted as resource and may be used to further oneself.²²⁶ One of these concepts is a noun, collapsing process into thing, while the other is a verb, timely in its suggestion that living be collaborative and that all life “has the right to exist, persist, maintain, and regenerate its vital cycles, structures, functions, and evolutionary process.”²²⁷ I think back to Crary here, who, as discussed in Chapter 1, sets up perpetual productive day in contrast to the night of non-profit, whose cycles are compatible with life but detrimental to capitalism.²²⁸ These cycles, repeating themselves with variations, opening up the possibility for change, represent the temporality of desire, which suggests the reach towards something other, future, distant, longed for. Mendieta and Lispector’s *incisive* logic offers an antidote to extractivism by providing a narrative where bodies do not take from the land but are born from it, breathing under stone as Mendieta does in *Burial Piece* and, in Lispector’s writing where:

If many times I paint caves it’s because they are my subversion into the earth, dark but clouded with clarity, and I, nature’s blood – extravagant and dangerous caves, Earth’s talisman, where stalactites, fossils, and stone come together.²²⁹

225. Macarena Gomez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: social ecologies and decolonial perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 24.

226. Gomez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, 25.

227. Gomez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, 26.

228. I also think of the mythical gardens of Adonis, where plants are grown to maturity over seven days to decorate the festivities. As a result they have no roots and are disposed directly afterwards. See Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 141.

229. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 8.

Both Lispector and Mendieta challenge the association of the dry, hard earth with masculinity and the feminine sea with the multiplicity of gestation,²³⁰ suggesting that arid earth may still be fertile and illustrating the possibilities of co-becoming with and emerging from the land that is both mother and resting place in an infinitely repetitive, infinitely iterative process.^{231, 232}

3.7 Death and dying

Death is a contentious subject in scholarship about Mendieta. Instead of acting as a conceptual grounding point as it does in her practice, the credence given to her actual infamous death often overshadows her work, stilling it. Writing about Mendieta's death and the role it continues to play in discussions surrounding her work, Szymanek invokes Anne Wagner's writing on Eva Hesse, who also died of cancer "in her prime." Wagner writes that "forever under thirty-five, [Hesse] answers a hunger for youthful, tragic death. She is the "dead girl," the beautiful corpse who counts for so much in many cultural narratives."²³³ Mendieta's ever-mysterious death perversely mimics her work. Her fall from her apartment window at 36 is tempting to read as a future echo of her earlier performances, in which she would leak pigs' blood onto the sidewalk or scatter ambiguous animal parts and wait for passersby to notice. Her death, like Hesse's, consecrates her into the ever-desirable, "exotic" young woman she was but also

230. Irigaray, *The Marine Lover*, 13: "While in man's world "it is always hot, dry, and hard," the feminine sea is multiple, flowing, gestating, and sustaining." quoted in Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, 81.

231. Mendieta speaks about being drawn to the earth after visiting Mexico for the first time and seeing the harsh, dry desert. See Stephanie Rosenthal, "Ana Mendieta: Traces," in *Ana Mendieta: Traces*, ed. Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Hayward Gallery, 2013), 10. In a statement that mirrors this sentiment, Lispector writes, "what they usually call a beautiful landscape only wearies me. I like landscapes of parched, dry earth with twisted trees, and mountains made of rock, and a dull motionless light." Lispector *The Stream of Life*, 29.

232. Mendieta remarks on this explicitly: "I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this to be a direct result of my having been torn away from my homeland during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source." Ana Mendieta, quoted in Szymanek, "Bloody Pleasures," 914.

233. Anne Wagner, *Three Artists (three Women): modernism and the art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keefe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 197.

perpetually wounds her and the surrounding scholarship on her works. Wagner's statement is semi-applicable to Lispector, too, who died at 56 of ovarian cancer.

Their deaths mythologize them and become the fulcrum for narratives of their lives and work. But during their lives and with their work, they also mythologized death.

Lispector's death, flowing from birth, is full of contradictions. "I'm ready to die and form new compositions," she exclaims.²³⁴ Mendieta, in re-staging the rape and murder of her fellow University of Iowa student, performs death. She embodies death and returns from it, oscillating between life and death, subject and abject. In *Imagen de Yagul* she is a dead body in a grave, but one that has not decomposed and now sprouts flowers: a contradictory fertility, an eroticism in death. And in her *siluetas* she creates herself and lets the earth wash her away. "God help me, I die so much," writes Lispector, echoes Mendieta, "I follow the torturous path of roots breaking through the earth, for passion is my talent, in the burning of a dry tree I twist in the flames [...] I unite in myself past, present, and future time."²³⁵

For Han, duration is what contemporary time lacks, and duration is created by conclusions. Mendieta and Lispector both die but it is a layer in their story, not the final event. Like geology may be figured as a palimpsest, each new event adding to what happened before it but not negating it, Lispector's many fictional lives are merely strata between which she is prolifically reborn. *Siluetas* erode but were there; ashes join the sediment, ice flows into the sea. Duration exists, time exists, without a single conclusion. It proliferates, shoots off of itself, is felt.

"What I write to you continues and I am bewitched," writes Clarice, in lieu of an ending.²³⁶

234. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 31.

235. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 15.

236. Lispector, *The Stream of Life*, 79.

4 Conclusion: What kind of ending do you think the ending is?

In an interview with Michael Silverblatt after her performance of an essay on threat, Anne Carson is asked the question, “what kind of an ending do you think the ending is?”²³⁷ The essay in question goes like this: part one sets up the action and cast of characters; in part two, crows are trained to complete a heist; and the third part is about swimming. Carson seems to completely forget the story she was telling. The essay ends but it does not conclude.

Looking back at the literary texts discussed in this thesis, I notice that they share this ambivalence towards endings. Woolf’s final section of *The Waves* abandons five of its main characters to follow Bernard as he charges into the sea at night. Geryon’s triumphant flight in Lima sees him becoming a glorious speck, but this is not the final image of the novel: it ends instead with Stesichorus, who a reader may have rightly forgotten, explaining his blindness. Lispector’s narrator dies in the moment she tells us she continues.

In response to Silverblatt’s question Carson explains that rather than following the structure of an academic essay which uses its conclusion to sum-up the previous sections, she prefers conclusions that blast things open and allow the reader to continue being *in* the thought rather than taking home the nugget that condenses it.²³⁸

The following works were produced over the course of this degree and exhibited at Satellite Project Space in London from May 17 to May 30, 2021. The exhibition was entitled *to all on whom the blazing*.

237. Anne Carson and Michael Silverblatt, “Anne Carson, Conversation, 26 October 2016,” Lannan Foundation, January 8, 2017, video, 29:41, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbridHY7o_M.

238. Anne Carson and Michael Silverblatt, “Anne Carson, Conversation,” video.

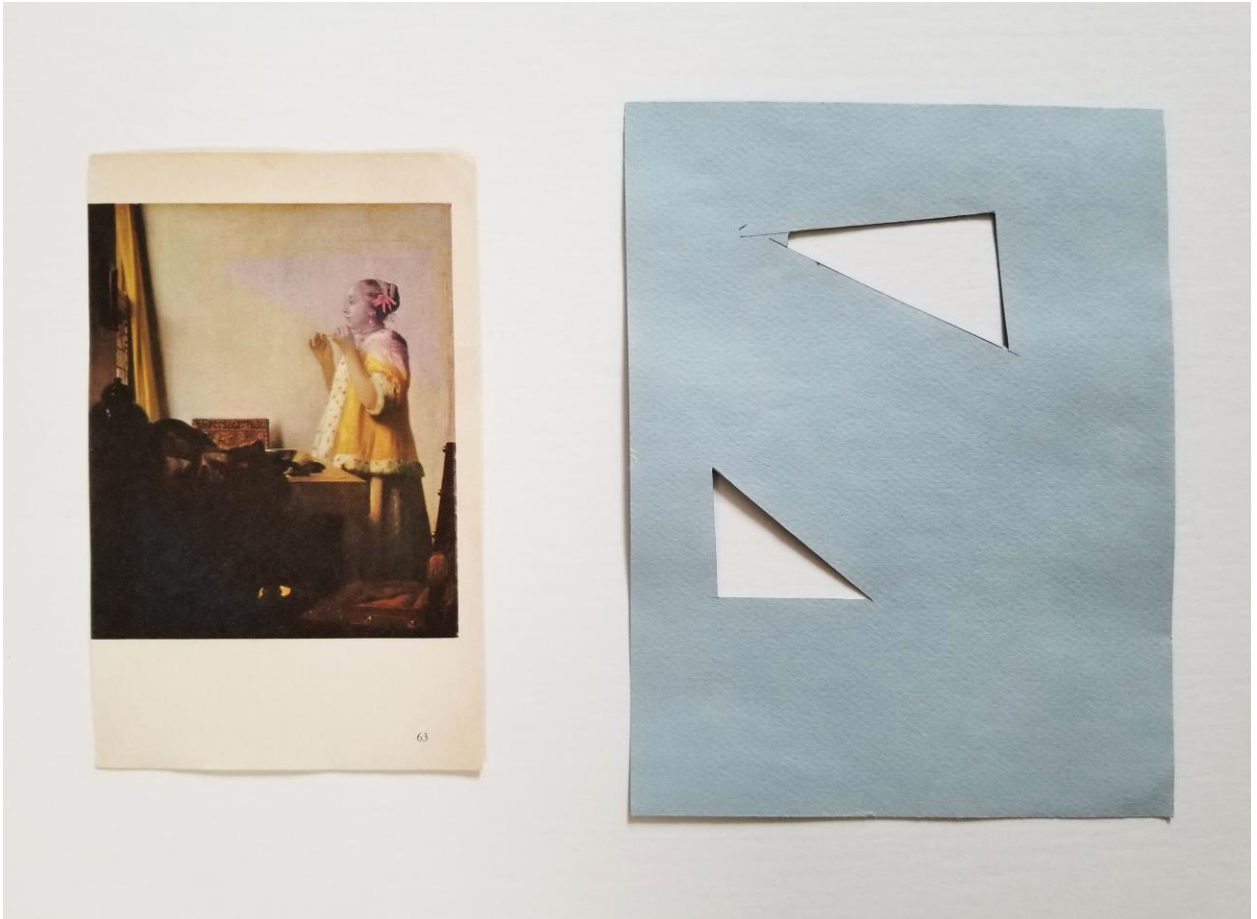


Figure 10. *Vermeer with light leak I*. 2020-2021.

Found print, construction paper, holes, sunlight.

5" x 7", 6" x 8"

The following four works are found prints of Vermeer paintings that I have been selectively bleaching in my window with their respective stencils. Vermeer was a painter of light and staged his scenes near a particular window where the light was good. By placing these prints in my own window, the light of my world is allowed to physically interact with the pigments in his.



Figure 11. *Vermeer with light leak II*. 2020-2021.

Found print, construction paper, hole, sunlight.

5" x 7", 6" x 8"



Figure 12. *Vermeer with light leak III*. 2020-2021.

Found print, construction paper, holes, sunlight.

5" x 7", 6" x 8"



Figure 13. *Vermeer with light leak IV*. 2020-2021.

Found print, construction paper, hole, sunlight.

5" x 7", 6" x 8"

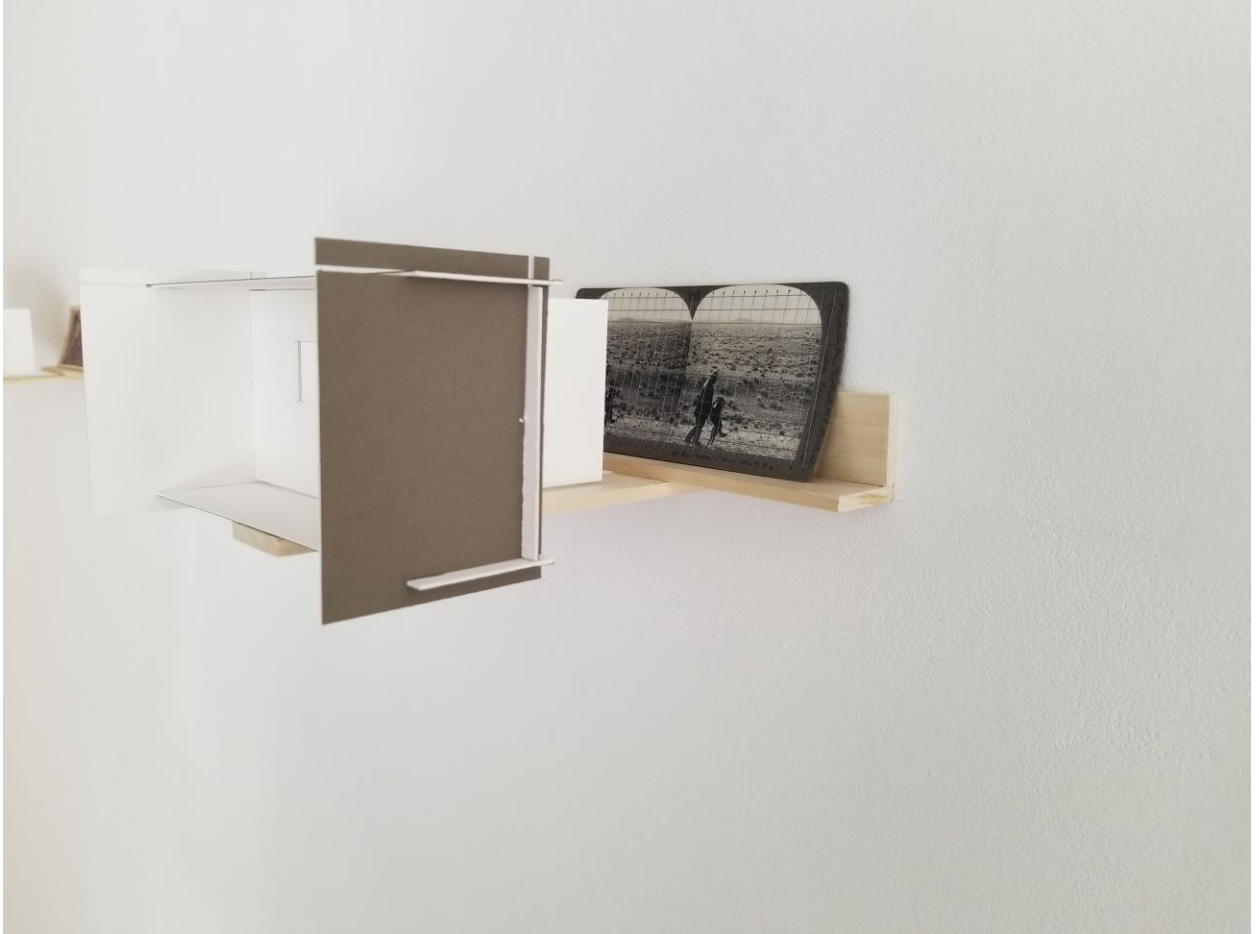


Figure 14. *For Agnes I.* 2020-2021.

Found stereograph, thread, matboard, wood.

9" x 9" x 4"

Viewing a stereoscopic image takes advantage of the properties inherent in binocular vision to compensate for the distance between two images.

By superimposing a uniform grid as a third space, the illusion is disrupted. The two images, representing two different spaces, are flattened into the same one by a perspectival system that does not account for the shift in perspective.

Thus, in glitchy stereoscopy, distance retains its tension. The series consists of seven stereographs and stereoscopes.



Figure 15. *For Agnes II*. 2020-2021.

Found stereographs, thread, matboard, wood.

9" x 9" x 4"



Figure 16. *Tonguing the sky I and II*. 2021.

Cyanotypes.

Dimensions variable – each strip is 2” x 13”

Each strip in this work is a cyanotype taken at noon, which measures the amount of sunlight in 30 second increments. The process was repeated daily for three weeks. The exposure depends on the brightness of the light that day – brighter days create more intense blues.



Figure 17. *Study for a window*. 2021.

Slide projector, slide, cut paper.

Dimensions variable.

At times, light may flow through a window that does not exist.



Figure 18. *Timely objects*, 2021.

Bag of air, propagated pothos plant, agenda, watch, broken rocks, fossils, dried hydrangea, book cover, sand paper, candle stubs, burnt-out lightbulb, book card, book, postcard, packet of glitter, mirror, 400 year calendar, wood.

Dimensions variable

Writings are all taken by Maxwell Hyett from top Google search results relating to the given object and ‘time.’

Table 1. Timely objects

A bag of air	Void-Fill™ bags are ready to use right out of the box. Simply inflate by using compressed air and our high speed inflater. Void-Fill™ Bags are an alternative to messy bulk fillers like paper and peanuts, and offer the advantages of efficiency and space savings, along with a
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	much smaller carbon footprint. Just four boxes is equivalent to an entire truckload of peanuts.
Propagated pothos vine	With a trailing, vine-like habit, attractive heart-shaped leaves, an ability to help purify the air and to thrive in low light and humidity while withstanding neglect for long periods of time, pothos is the perfect plant for people too busy for houseplants (but who really want the beauty of houseplants).
Moleskin	A week can be full of surprises, so why not plan for them?
Watch	Elevate your wardrobe with timeless, distinctive watches + jewelry
Book cover from book on Johannes Vermeer	Johannes Vermeer, Johannes also rendered Jan, (baptized October 31, 1632, Delft, Netherlands—buried December 16, 1675, Delft), Dutch artist who created paintings that are among the most beloved and revered images in the history of art. Although only about 36 of his paintings survive, these rare works are among the greatest treasures in the world's finest museums. Vermeer began his career in the early 1650s by painting large-scale biblical and mythological scenes, but most of his later paintings—the ones for which he is most famous—depict scenes of daily life in interior settings. These works are remarkable for their purity of light and form, qualities that convey a serene, timeless sense of dignity. Vermeer also painted cityscapes and allegorical scenes.
Sandpaper	I think it gets real obvious when the paper has lost its usefulness. Yes, you can stretch its life but you need to put a value on you time too and paper that is done and you keep using it just wastes your time.
Candle stubs	While no longer used today, candle clocks provided an effective way to tell time indoors, at night, or on a cloudy day. A candle clock could be easily transformed into a timer by sticking a heavy nail into the candle at the mark indicating the desired interval. When the wax surrounding the nail melts, the nail clatters onto a plate below.
Light bulb	I stood outside on my back porch and took a few drags of my cigarette before I realized that the light was on when it should not have been. I hadn't changed the light bulb. I hadn't even bought any light bulbs. I haven't been shopping anywhere in about two weeks.
Dried hydrangea	The ideal time to cut hydrangea blooms to dry is toward the end of their growing season (August through October), when the larger petals are starting to change color and develop a papery feel and the tiny flowers are just beginning to open.

Rocks (broken and with fossils)	Leave fossils as you found them, so others can enjoy them, unless directed otherwise by local authorities. If you think you've found something unusual, make a careful note of its exact location — information that's as important as the rock itself. A fossil's location tells its story, where and how the animal lived.
Book card	<p>a) The aesthetics of this early move towards automation represent a unique moment in our history when we designed for machines instead of human beings. Rigorous constraints, inherent in punch card technology, unwittingly birthed a coherent design language: rhythm in grids, punched absences and presences, and the patterns in them dancing to their own machine logic.</p> <p>b) After notching, the card was filed by call number. To recall books, the librarian inserted a needle into the file of cards through the holes coded for date due; by shaking the needle, the cards with notched holes, representing books due, dropped off.</p>
Tealight	When your measurements are complete, subtract the final weight from your starting weight. You'll then need to divide the total wax weight used in the candle (excluding the container) by the amount of wax used during your burn test to confirm your burn hours.
Glitter	<p>a) Glitter is made from glitter. Big glitter begets smaller glitter; smaller glitter gets everywhere, all glitter is impossible to remove; now never ask this question again.</p> <p>b) For people who love glitter, there is wonderful news: all the modern plastic glitter that has ever been created is still right here with us. According to Dr. Victoria Miller, a materials science and engineering professor at North Carolina State University, the plastic film from which most glitter is made takes about 1,000 years to completely biodegrade on Earth.</p>
Translations of Sappho	<p>someone will remember us I say even in another time</p>
Postcard	"What we want from writing – and what the Sumerians wanted – is cognitive automaticity, the ability to think as fast as possible, freed as much as can be from the strictures of whichever technology we must use to record our thoughts," Anne Trubek, associate professor of rhetoric and composition at Oberlin College in Ohio, wrote some years ago. "This is what typing does for

	millions. It allows us to go faster, not because we want everything faster in our hyped-up age, but for the opposite reason: we want more time to think.”
Mirror	A beauty accessory in an ultra-flat format that slips easily into a handbag. Designed for precise makeup touch-ups at any time of day.
Four hundred year calendar	Although the most common calendar intervals are 15 minutes and 30 minutes, you can also change the time scale interval of your calendar to 5, 6, 10, or 60 minutes. In Calendar, on the View tab, in the Arrangement group, click Time Scale, and then click the grid interval that you want to show in the calendar.



Figure 19. *It extends from the visible to the edge.* 2020-2021.

Graphite on mylar, slides, matboard.

Dimensions variable; each slide is 5cm x 5cm.

Each drawing represents a corner of my home, focusing on the ability of light to delineate a space.



Figure 20. *It extends from the visible to the edge*, installation view.

Exhibition text, by Sasha Opeiko

The noonday demon forges summertime into a long ruinous torpor, an endless day of indisputable midday twilight. It thaws my spine, splintering in waves, dividing quantum particles in my retina. Black light seeps through all matter, eating through surfaces, perforating walls, streaming through corners. Dissolved vitreous humor, refracting everywhere. The brightness is so thick in its transparency that I see the darkness of cosmic void shimmering behind it in infinite planes. I look at my arms on the bleached carpet, my flesh embedded in broiling photons, stretching through levels of matter and nothingness, sweating, withered reflections. Cups, papers, furniture, hair, dust, all film, all surface, all the way through, radiating as if the sun was underground, stirring with electric velocity. Albedo, nigredo, suspended in exacting putrefaction. The noonday demon speaks in liquid vision, feeds on my hours, spews a diffused gaze of open horror. At night the heat continues its entropic curse until dawn. Shade is just another form of brightness. All senses become black light, doomed in scorching resonance of leaves and crickets and cicadas and other lives, luminous textures pouring over, lustrous scents of dusty vapour, dehydration glowing on my tongue. Phonemes dried up, inarticulate, I am all image.

This text was printed as cyanotypes and available for visitors to take.

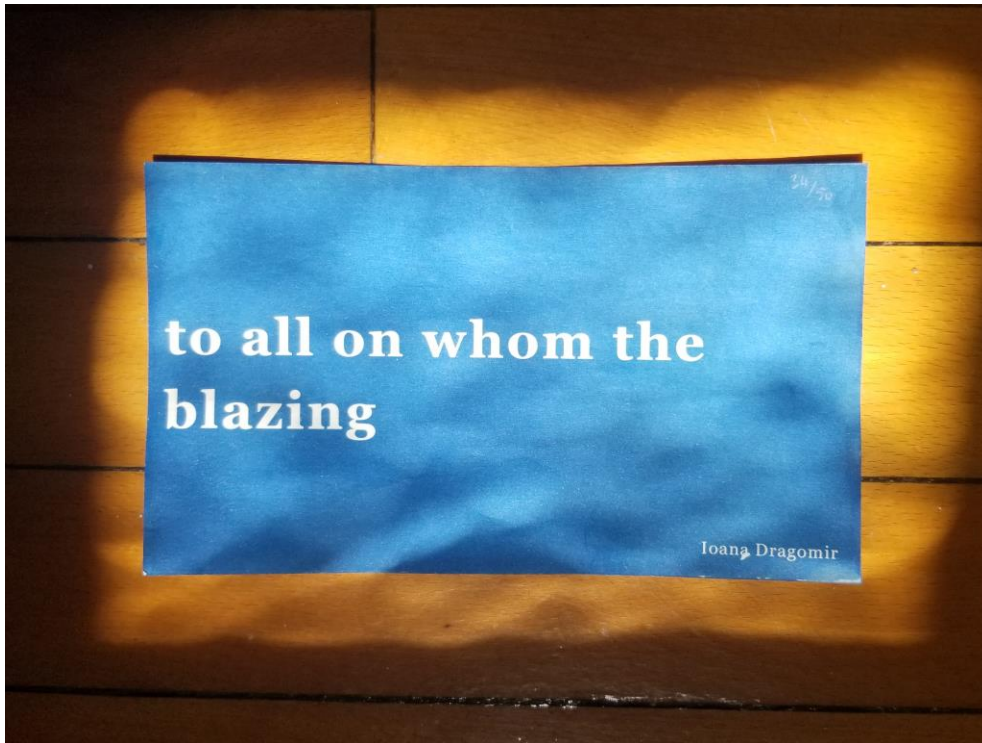


Figure 21. Front of exhibition postcard

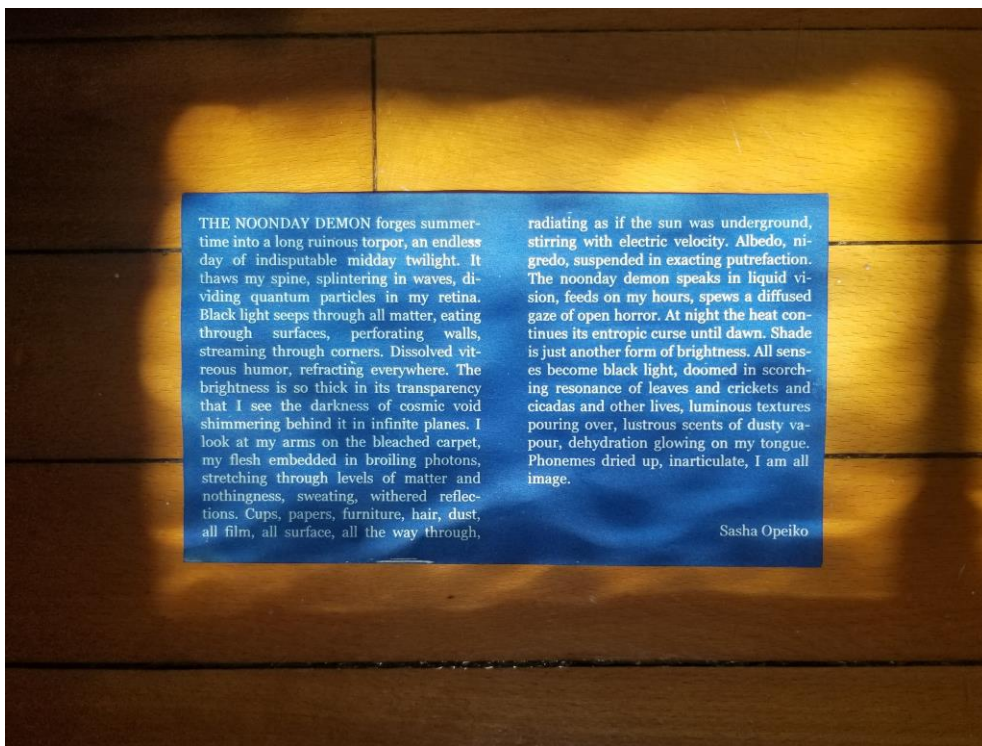


Figure 22. Back of exhibition postcard; text by Sasha Opeiko



Figure 23. *To all on whom the blazing*, installation view I



Figure 24. *To all on whom the blazing*, installation view II



Figure 25. *To all on whom the blazing*, installation view III



Figure 26. *To all on whom the blazing*, installation view IV

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Curriculum Vitae

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Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	<p>University of Waterloo Waterloo, Ontario, Canada 2013-2018 B.A. Honours Fine Arts, Studio Specialization.</p> <p>The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2020-2021 M.A. Art History and Curatorial Studies Candidate</p>
Honours and Awards:	<p>University of Western Ontario, Dean's Entrance Scholarship 2020</p> <p>University of Western Ontario, Graduate Research Scholarship 2020</p> <p>City of Waterloo, Emerging Artist Award 2020</p> <p>Women's Art Association of Hamilton, Scholarship Prize 2019</p> <p>University of Waterloo, Award for Distinguished Academic Achievement 2018</p> <p>University of Waterloo, Virgil Burnett Memorial Award 2018</p> <p>University of Waterloo, Upper-Year Scholarship for Outstanding Academic Achievement 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018</p> <p>University of Waterloo, Nancy Lou Patterson Award for Works on Paper 2016, 2017</p>
Related Work Experience	<p>Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario 2020-2021</p>

Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2021

Drawing Instructor
Button Factory Arts
2019-2020

Library Assistant – Information, Circulation, and Children’s
Programming
Idea Exchange
2018-2020

Solo Exhibitions: *to all on whom the blazing*
Satellite Project Space. London, ON.
2021

if conditionals are of two kinds, real and unreal
Rotunda Gallery. Kitchener, ON.
2019

Study for an arena (after Blinky Palermo)
Student Art Innovation Lab. Waterloo, ON.
2019

Selected Group Exhibitions: *Distance Makes the Heart Grow Weak*
ArtLab. London, ON.
2021

LUMEN Festival
Commissioned site-specific artwork at Waterloo Public Library
2019

SHOW.19
Cambridge Galleries. Cambridge, ON.
2019

What We Take – University of Toronto Museum Studies Capstone Project
John B. Aird Gallery. Toronto. ON.
2019

Fresh Paint/New Construction
Art Mur. Montreal, QC.
2018

The Next New Thing
Living Arts Centre. Mississauga, ON.
2018

**Curatorial
Projects:**

The Poet's Almanac
Design at Riverside. Cambridge, ON.
Community project as part of the 2020 "Land Marks" Biennial
Exhibition.

With Sound of Hands
DVSA Gallery. Dundas, ON.
2019