

A brightness – a signal – a sign
(the light explored and questioned everything)
((Tlatic in xochitl in cuicatl))

by
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Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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in the
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Abstract

A brightness – a signal – a sign (the light explored and questioned everything) ((tlattic in xochitl in cuicatl)) is a project that begins with a process of walking throughout Vancouver, finding objects, walking with the objects, then constructing sculptures collaboratively with them. This is done while considering the possibility for quantum entanglement between the human and non-human, and forming a bond between the human body, the sites where the objects are found, and the found objects themselves. This labour is driven by the experience of being an immigrant living within a diaspora and is a performative means for creating a dynamic and reciprocal relationship with the Land of Vancouver.

Keywords: Aztlán; sculpture; in xochitl in cuicatl; installation; poetry; diaspora

Dedication

For Gosia and for the person growing within

who I've yet to meet

Empezamos este viaje juntos - todos juntos seguimos

Acknowledgements

First I want to acknowledge that this work came into being on the traditional unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and the Tsleil-Waututh Nations. This is a fact that I have been cognizant of, and worked hard to keep in sight always.

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A brightness – a signal – a sign (the light explored and questioned everything) ((tlatic in xochitl in cuicatl))

1. The lighthouse

Start.

Quetzalcoatl can see the
line that connects through me to
the past to the future to the past
to the future

—

I begin with a quote from Dylan Miner¹

... Aztlán was activated through the performances of *in xochitl in cuicatl*, literally meaning flower and song. By performing the codices, particularly the Aztlán narratives written within them, tlacuilome not only “read” the text, but likewise *activated* them thereby adding supplementary and irreplaceable knowledge not directly inscribed on the *amatl* of the codices. Therefore by performing the codices... Mexica scholars fully galvanized the visual or written knowledge of these migration texts in a modality where the performance supplemented the visual text. Aztlán was located in the space

¹ Miner is a Michif (Metis) artist, scholar, and associate professor at Michigan State University.

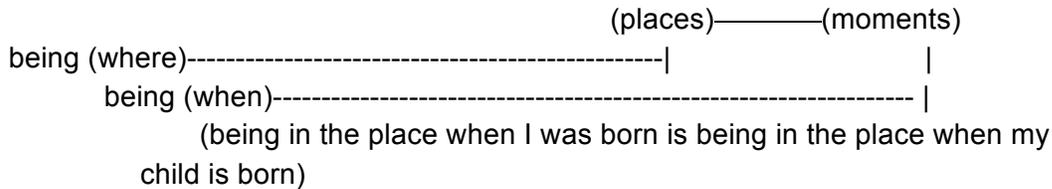
created by the performance. Aztlán was transformed from a site within representational space to one that existed within real space.²

This quote, from his book *Creating Aztlan: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island*, is a foundational idea to the work I have done. Through a performance of place, that site can materialize and become the site where I am. While Miner is focusing on a continuum the Mexica made between representational space and real space, my project is about eliminating the distinction between representational and real space, as well as the distinction between actual places in space/time (or even space-time). This is an idea that, 500 years after the Mexica Empire, is echoed within Robert Smithson's Earthwork, especially his site/ non-site projects. The limitation within Smithson's work is that it does not consider history or people. For Smithson, his Earthworks exist within a land that is a *tabula rasa*, and exists independent of the complex politics of identity, migration and colonization.

Miner's words mark ideas that I have thought through with wood, tarps, walking, cyanotype, poetry and science fiction, within a process that I see as a type of *in xochitl in cuicatl*. That is, a performative process of creating personal narratives about land intended to create a series of dialectic relationships between past and present, Vancouver and Aztlán, Indigenous and Immigrant, and even between myth and science-fiction. The intention is to collapse the distinctions between them, turning them into one site, while simultaneously fostering and reinforcing their difference. *This text along with the sculptures in the Audain Gallery is my performance of in xochitl in cuicatl. This project is a performing of Aztlán.*

² Miner, Dylan A. T. 2014. *Creating Aztlan: Chicano art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island*. 1st edition ed. United States of America: University of Arizona Press. 33

portals for transport



To return to Aztlán. Aztlán is both the mythical homeland of the Mexica people (more commonly known as the Aztec, a name they did not call themselves), and the historical site that they migrated out of. Thought to have been located somewhere in what is now Northern Mexico, or the Southern United States, Aztlán both does and does not exist. It is the locus of ancient Mexica nationalist narratives, and the embodiment of contemporary emancipatory potential, which has been taken up by Chicano, or Xicano (Mexican-American), civil rights activism. Aztlán is a site of utopian potential that enables ongoing inquiry and dialog among competing positions. It is also a powerful claim to indigeneity and sovereignty. The practice of *in xochitl in cuicatl* is a performative practice that blended storytelling, poetry, song, and dance, in which the space of the performance became the space of Aztlán. The differences between the two collapse and the two become one.

2. The lighthouse keeper

I arrived in Canada when I was 13, but I left Mexico when I was only 5. In the intervening years, thanks to my parents' job, I lived in a number of places. Having left my "home" country when I was quite young meant that my connection to my parent culture is highly attenuated. Having arrived in Canada in my early teens meant that I was viewed as a Mexican despite not actually having had a stronger connection to

Mexico. Being an immigrant determined how others interacted with me, and blocked me from forming a connection with the culture and land that I found here. Now, at 33 years, I am still viewed as an immigrant despite having lived more than half my life here.

~~spoke to me~~

English ————— to learn quicker

—practice

at

~~home~~

Now years later, having learned about Indigenous experiences in Canada, I feel that there are some things that Indigenous people and immigrants might share. Immigrants like myself are a people disconnected from our parent cultures and our parent languages, while striving to connect to the place where we are. However, Indigenous peoples in Canada have their own cultures and their own struggles separate from immigrant struggles. Of Indigenous struggles Glen Coulthard³ writes:

Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of *land* – struggles not only *for* land, but also deeply *informed* by what the land as a mode of reciprocal *relationship* (which is itself informed by place-based practices and associated form of knowledge) ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a

³ Glen Coulthard is Yellowknives Dene, and assistant professor in the First Nations Studies Program and the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia.

respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way. The ethical framework provided by these place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge is what I call “grounded normativity”⁴.

In contrast, “grounded normativity” is disrupted by the immigrant experience, which is rooted in being part of a diaspora. Any possibility for creating a sense of grounded normativity is undercut by the fact that there are others who not only are indigenous to British Columbia, and therefore have a concrete claim to the land, but whose claim to the land also requires my separation. Paradoxically, this is a separation I must help maintain. For my claim to any reciprocity with land to hold any value I must uphold the rights of others who have been displaced from their lands. This means learning how to be an ally in solidarity with Indigenous peoples across Canada (and the world in general).

This dynamic is made strange by the fact that this country is part of the Americas, of which Mexico is a part. I am, like most Mexican people, of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. With me, as with most Mexicans, the knowledge of which particular Indigenous Mexican nation I am part of is lost and forgotten. I am not making a claim for an Indigenous identity, but I see the link that stretches out behind me and binds me to the Americas. I see the link that binds me to here. This project, *A brightness...* is a practice of learning what this link is, and of working to build a reciprocal relationship with the land of, the unfortunately named, British Columbia.

⁴ Coulthard, Glen. 2014. *Red skin, white masks: rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. 1st Edition ed. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 60

spanned a length of the US/ Mexico border. *Repellent Fence* speaks to the fact that the people that live on either side of the border are the same people and that the border itself is a violent colonial construction imposed upon the land.

I have to stop for a moment and clarify what I mean by the word “land”.

I have to first consider the dialectic that Martin Heidegger conceived between what he called “Earth” and “World”. In regards to “Earth”, he writes:

What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent.⁵

For Heidegger, Earth is that which is elemental. He calls it something that “cannot be analyzed by dividing it into constituent parts, nor can it be summarized as a single entity. Likewise, the earth for us is not a mere thing with clear boundaries, but rather the essential terrain that orients all perception.”⁶. Later he clarifies what he means when he says “World”:

World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds.⁷

⁵ Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, edited by Clive Cazeaux, 80. New York: Routledge, 2000. 89

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15

⁷ *Ibid.* 90

In other words, Earth is the very life force of matter, which is inexhaustible, and withholds itself from being fully apprehended, and World is the matrix of relations between politics, culture, species, etc. I posit Land as being the point of contact between the Earth and World within the particularities of place. Land is where Earth and World come into contact and create friction as they slide against each other. Land is where the struggle between entities manifests as resistance. Land, far from being a quaint, antiquated term, is where the confrontation between Earth and World manifests as it becomes real. Within the context of my work, Land can also be understood as the *in xochitl in cuicatl* of Earth and World. In other words, it is the performative emergence of matter and meaning ceaselessly giving rise to itself, a concept already identified and named *teotl*, by the ancient Mexica⁸.

Found throughout the sculptures that comprise *A brightness – a signal – a sign (the light explored and questioned everything) ((Tlatic in xochitl in cuicatl))* are objects found while walking throughout the city. The finding and walking with these objects has been an act of entangling myself with the objects, the places where they were found, and the places we walked to. Entanglement is a phenomenon that is very real and is observable at the quantum level. With quantum entanglement⁹ in mind I set out to link myself with multiple entities through the practice of walking. The walking is an embodied practice of reading the land with my body, making myself attentive to the world, especially through senses other than sight. While doing this, there were moments that particular objects made themselves apparent to me. Sometimes a stone, another time, a bone, a piece of fur. I collected these objects, and on further walks, with a specific found object in my

⁸ Maffie, James. Aztec philosophy. in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy [database online]. [cited September 5 2016]. Available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/#SH2a> (accessed September 5, 2016).

⁹ “What is a quantum entanglement? Entanglements, like superpositions, are uniquely quantum mechanical - they specify a feature of particle behavior for which there is no classical physics equivalent. In essence, the notion of an entanglement is a generalization of a superposition to the case of more than one particle.....” Basically it’s a very technical and detailed way of saying that once you do something to make more than one particle do the same thing they are linked and behave as if they were the same particle, and they do this simultaneously regardless of the distance separating them. Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press. 270

hand, shared the experience of the walk with the object, always with the possibility of encountering more objects.

walks between significance
walk from my home to my studio.
walk up Mount Fromme (mountain)
relationship
a walk from my studio to the ultrasound clinic where I saw
my unborn child developing within the belly of my
sweetheart

3. The light

Entangling myself with these various non-human entities is a way to create mutual exchange of knowing (or epistemic systems of knowledge if you prefer). Through entanglement I can become part of these entities and they can become part of me.

These objects now appear alongside sculptures made of reclaimed or found material. These materials have had a life as parts of different objects before meeting me. Because of this they are fragile and can easily fall into ruin, bringing their life as sculptures to an end. In fact, once the exhibition is over, the materials will be carefully disassembled and donated to the SCA visual arts studio, where they will be available to

the students to turn into other artworks once again, transforming them, turning them into a new life, maybe even repeatedly.

Inspired by the aesthetic of protest camps, my sculptures take the form of protest signs, placards, and are heavily influenced by protest camp architecture. For example, the temporary shelters that were seen around Vancouver that were created by protests like the Anti-Kinder Morgan protests on Burnaby Mountain or the Anti-Site-C protests in front of the BC Hydro building on Dunsmuir St¹⁰. These instances of protest are materializations of the idea of Land being a site of resistance as Earth and World come into contact. Just like the protest camps, the sculptures exist in a precarious state where they could easily fall apart, and are always a temporary materialization. They are briefly propped up and buttressed with kluges upon kluges, just this one more time, so that they can stay up just a little longer for one more day.

Many of the objects have circular forms on them. These are directly inspired by ancient Mexica art that I recently got a chance to examine at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, the place of my birth. They also bring to mind the different mimetic aspects of different species. Such as the spots on a butterfly's wings which mimic the eyes of a larger animal, so that the butterfly may ward off predators. Within *A brightness...* there are many eyes (or I's). That is, the various objects are distinct agents with their own distinct ways of being and relating to other agents. The circles on them are ways that we (humans) can relate to entities such as stones or sticks or what-have-you. These are entities, which are so alien, and different from us, but which also have a complex inner life – they are participants in creating this *in xochitl in cuicatl*.

Many of the colours applied to the found objects are also inspired by Mexica art and culture. Black, white, blue, and red, all colours that are part of the Mexica colour wheel.

¹⁰ The Canadian Press. "Site C protesters to dismantle camp outside Vancouver BC hydro office". in CBC News [database online]. 2016 [cited Sept 18 2016]. Available from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/sitec-protesters-dismantle-vancouver-camp-1.3572136>.

Each of the colours is associated with a particular cardinal direction, and a particular Mexica god, and their aspects.

South Huitzlampa
blue textotli azul
Huitzilipochtli

East Tlalpallan
red tllili rojo
Quetzalcoatl

West Cihuatlampa
white istatik blanco
Tonatiuh

North Mictlampa
black tlapalli negro
Tezcatlipoca

Instead of the colour red, I use a very particular colour with very particular connotations. The high visibility safety orange appearing on many of the sculptures is something that would quite commonly be found in construction sites to signal hazards, or to mark, section and divide land. This orange is interesting for these reasons as well as for its ability to signal presence, like a flare. Often the signalling has urgency to it. Notice this, because your safety depends on it. There is a beauty in that urgency; that act of contact. For me there is a mutual signalling happening within these sculptures; the signalling of my presence to the land, and the signalling of the sculptures' presence to others. The particular orange is similar to the orange of Mexican Marigolds, which are often seen during Dia de Muertos celebrations (day of the dead), a celebration that has roots in Mexica tradition.

The blue is important as well, blue being the colour of Huitzilopochtli, the patron god of the Mexica. In some cases the material that makes up the form of the blue in some

circles is actually cyanotype chemistry¹¹. The chemistry on my sculptures however is left unprocessed and is still sensitive and changing. Eventually the chemicals become spent by their interaction with light and stop becoming sensitive to light. At that point however, they are still very sensitive to water, and the slightest touch from even a slightly damp hand will register upon its surface.

The object - sensitive

world

manifest

makes its sensitivity to contact manifest

This underscores a particular concern that I have for creating things that are vulnerable, of fragile construction, and sensitive to contact. Objects have a life and exist for a short time before they collapse into ruin, and are then recycled and turned into something else. The objects are transformed.

¹¹ The cyanotype is an early photographic process, which was the first process to solve the problem of how to create multiple images. The treated surface was typically contact printed with either a paper negative or other objects, such as leaves. The prints are fixed by simply washing with water, leaving a striking blue and white image.

portals——— > —— transpositions

always

becoming

something

else

transforming

()

(transformer)

Having come from a background in photography¹² I saw the limitations that this medium has in representing experience. Language on the other hand has a peculiar ability to allow for the picturing of images within our minds. My relationship to language is peculiar as well. I first learned to speak in Spanish, but like I said before, my grasp of the language is tenuous. Weirdly, however, I am a native speaker of English, which is my second language. This makes the poetic aspect of *in xochitl in cuicatl* take on a role of supreme importance. By playing with words, in English, Spanish and Nahuatl, the language of the Mexica people, varieties of which are still spoken today by millions of people, I capitalize on these peculiarities of language, and in the process become more adept at Spanish, and learn of its assimilation of Nahuatl words.

Finally I have to call attention to science fiction. There is no identity more science-fictional than that of immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples worldwide. We are alien; we are other; we are of multiple worlds. Science fiction provides a crucial lens through which I create and relate to these works.

¹² I majored in photography for my Undergraduate degree at Emily Carr University.

In Orson Scott Card's, *Speaker for the Dead*, the book's main protagonist, Ender Wiggins, is engaged in a philosophical discussion with some students. The discussion turns to a classification scheme for determining what is human.

The Nordic language recognizes four orders of foreignness. The first is the otherlander, or *utlänning*, the stranger that we recognize as being a human of our world, but of another city or country. The second is the framling... from the Nordic *främling*. This is the stranger that we recognize as human, but of another world. The third is the raman, the stranger that we recognize as human, but of another species. The fourth is the true alien, the verelse, which includes all the animals, for with them no conversation is possible. They live, but we cannot guess what purposes or causes make them act. They might be intelligent, they might be self-aware, but we cannot know it.¹³

Raman, the third order of foreignness, is curious because it is concerned with what is human but not of the same species. But how can something be human, and not of the same species? Isn't that a contradiction? Isn't part of what the human is, is by definition, a species? If something is not of the same species as humanity, but is human anyway, then does that mean we can have a definition of the human that is able to also include what is not of the human species? This means that the definition of what is human might also be able to include plants, other animals, bacteria; and it also means that what we previously thought to be solely human might not actually be strictly ours. For example, culture, language, emotions, ideology, art¹⁴.

But how are raman and verelse different from each other? The difference is that raman includes other humans that are not of the same species, and the verelse includes other species, *with which no conversation is possible*. The critical difference is the ability to communicate.

¹³ Card, Orson Scott. 1986. *Speaker for the Dead*. First printing ed. New York. Tor. 38

¹⁴ A wonderful thing to ponder is what ideology a mountain holds, or what culture a prairie dog makes and is a part of.

Some might make the obvious (and boring) criticism that we clearly cannot communicate with the non-human and that to talk about things as being alive and aware is anthropomorphizing them. To which I would respond with, so what? We are currently in a deeply troubled time, when the climate is in the process of collapsing, and the struggle for social justice is entangled with the struggle for ecological justice. This is a direct result of holding the colonizing perspective that humans are the only agents within an inert world. Jane Bennett¹⁵ says something similar in her wonderful book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. She writes that “we need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism – the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature – to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world.”¹⁶ My practice of *in xochitl in cuicatl* provides a means of reorienting how we relate to the world, allowing for the possibility of inhabiting the site of the performing, and the utopian site of Aztlán. Bennett would be pleased. In fact she says, “Ethical political action on the part of humans seems to require not only a vigilant critique of existing institutions but also positive, even utopian alternatives... We need both critique and positive formulations of alternatives, alternatives that will themselves become the objects of later critique and reform.”¹⁷ What better place for ongoing discourse and imagining than Aztlán?

Start.

Quetzalcoatl can see the
line that connects through me to
the past to the future to the past
to the future

¹⁵ Jane Bennett is Professor of Political Theory and Chair of the Department of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University

¹⁶ Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. xvii

¹⁷ *ibid.* xv

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Project Documentation



Figure 1 ***Installation view of A brightness – a signal – a sign (the light explored and questioned everything) ((tlattic in xochitl in cuicatl))***

On the left: *Solaris signaling its sovereignty/ Todo la luz ve todo (jolín)*
Scrap wood, glass, brick, Japanese maple branches, paint, text
Dimensions variable

On the right: *Desde el río Churobusco por el División del Norte a Proxima Centauri*
(Huitzilopochtli watches from Xicotencatl)
Scrap wood, cedar, tarp, dried wild grass, glass, mirror, paint, text
Dimensions variable

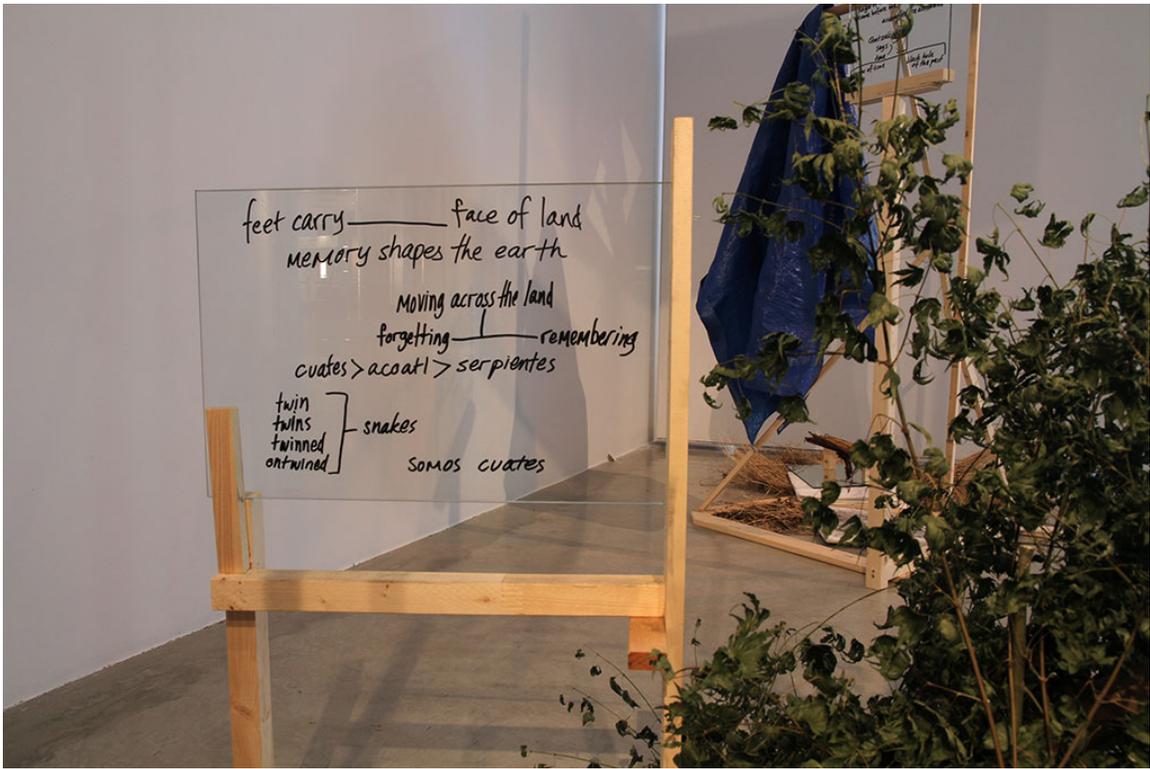


Figure 2 *Solaris signaling its sovereignty/ Todo la luz ve todo (jolín)*. Detail



Figure 3 *Desde el río Churobusco por el División del Norte a Proxima Centauri (Huitzilopochtli watches from Xicotencatl). Detail*



Figure 4 Installation view of *A brightness – a signal – a sign (the light explored and questioned everything) ((tlatic in xochitl in cuicatl))*

On the left: *Emerging/ excavated/ close-encounter (OVNI)*

Dead tree, cinder block, stone, sand, cyanotype, wood, paint
Dimensions variable

Centre: *Contacto con otros/ non-corporeal extra-dimensional entities within non-linear time (ehecatl)*

Scrap wood, wild grass, found steel, emergency blanket, glass, paint, text
Dimensions variable

On the right: *All the light gathered there (Chicomoztoc) Estando ahí y estando aquí*

Mexican Marigolds, buckets, scrap wood, tarp, glass, paint, chain, stones, sand, burnt firewood, moss, pot, ceramic tile, bark, feathers, wax, paper, rusted steel, mason jar, sawdust, computer key, broken circuitboard, fur, peanut shell, cedar, text
Dimensions variable



Figure 5 *Emerging/ excavated/ close-encounter (OVNI). Recto detail*

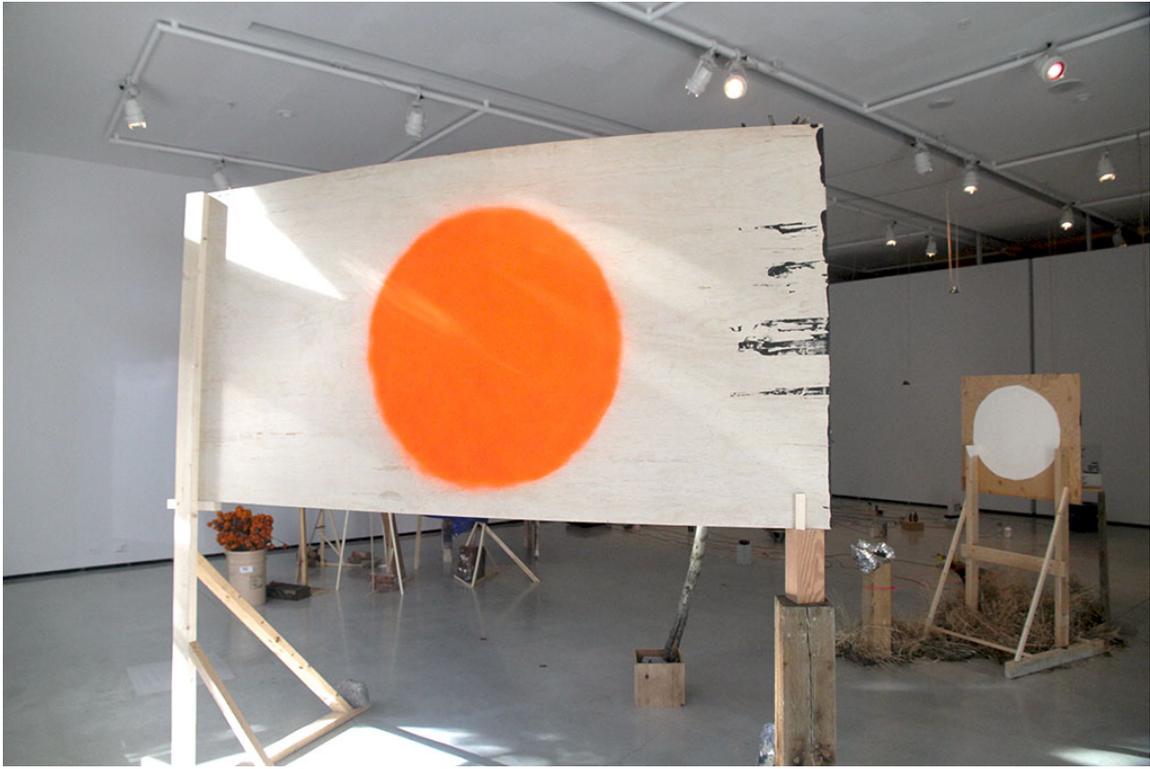


Figure 6 *Emerging/ excavated/ close-encounter (OVNI). Verso detail*



Figure 7 *Emerging/ excavated/ close-encounter (OVNI). Detail*



Figure 8 *Contacto con otros/ non-corporeal extra-dimensional entities within non-linear time (ehecatl). Verso detail*



Figure 9 *Contacto con otros/ non-corporeal extra-dimensional entities within non-linear time (ehecatl). Detail*



Figure 10 *Contacto con otros/ non-corporeal extra-dimensional entities within non-linear time (ehecatl). Detail*



Figure 11 *All the light gathered there (Chicomoztoc) Estando ahí y estando aquí. Verso detail*



Figure 12 *All the light gathered there (Chicomoztoc) Estando ahí y estando aquí. Recto detail*



Figure 13 *All the light gathered there (Chicomoztoc) Estando ahí y estando aquí. Detail*

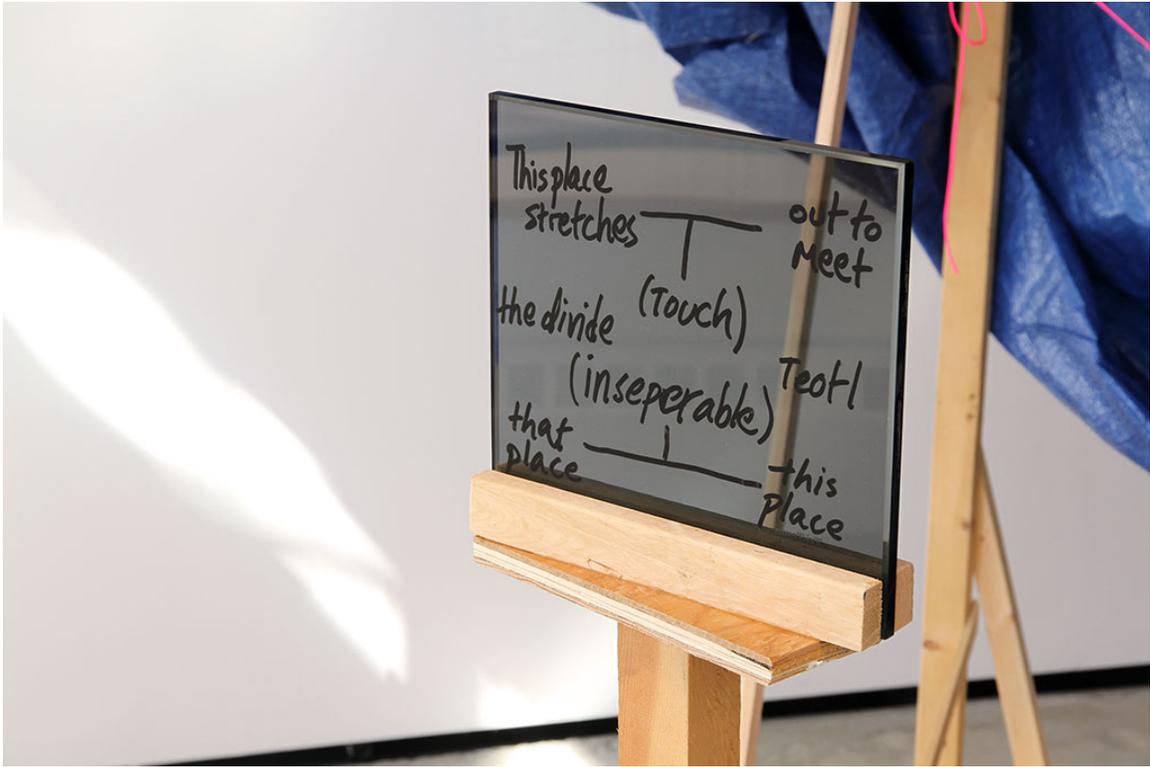


Figure 15 *All the light gathered there (Chicomoztoc) Estando ahí y estando aquí. Detail*



Figure 16 *Within the lighthouse/ the lighthouse keeper/ Tezcatlipoca mira a Area X/ from quantum entanglement*

Scrap wood, mirrors, paint, glass, bone, text
Dimensions variable



Figure 17 *Within the lighthouse/ the lighthouse keeper/ Tezcatlipoca mira a Area X/ from quantum entanglement. Detail*



Figure 18 *Within the lighthouse/ the lighthouse keeper/ Tezcatlipoca mira a Area X/ from quantum entanglement. Verso detail*

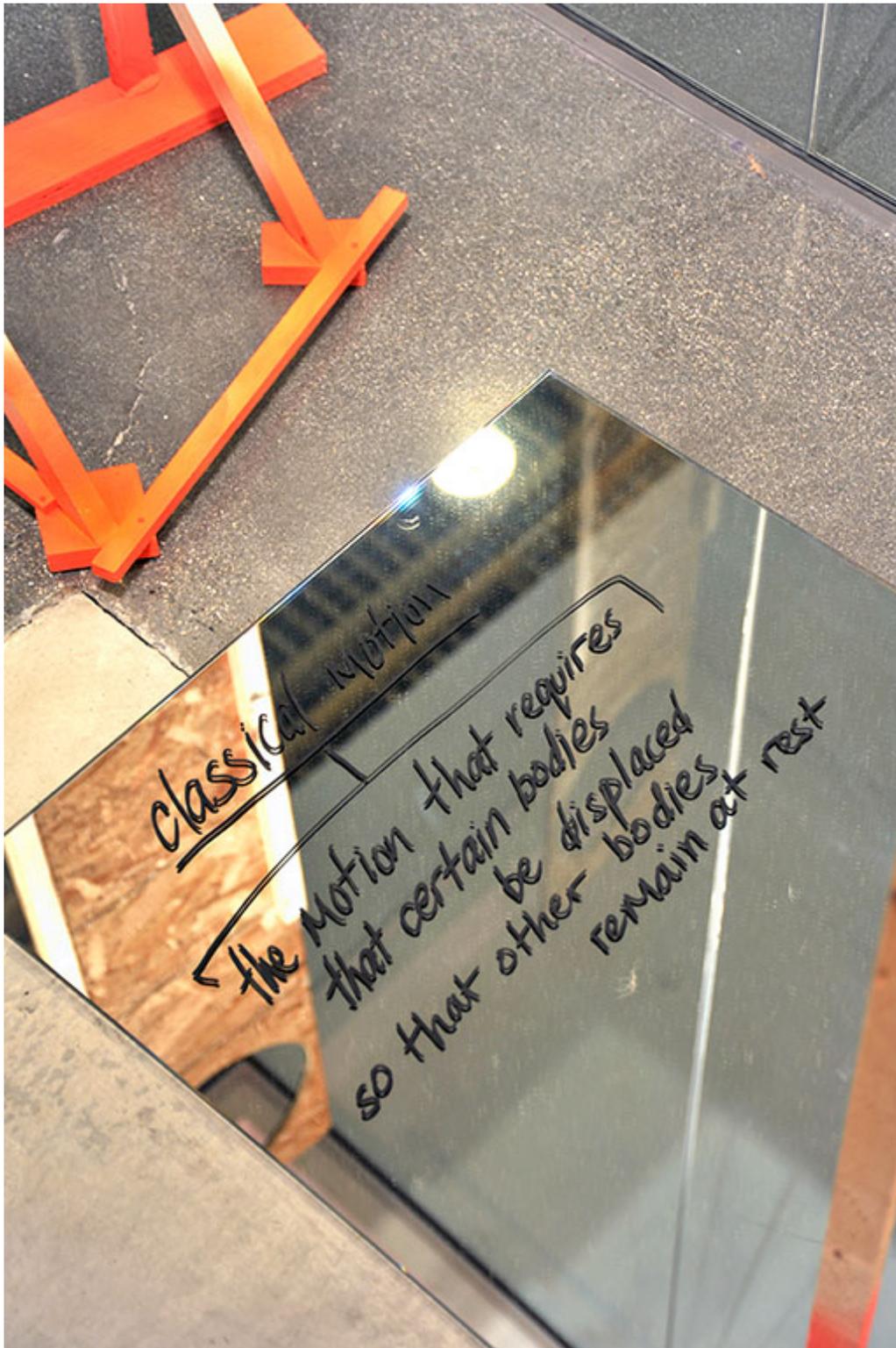


Figure 19 *Within the lighthouse/ the lighthouse keeper/ Tezcatlipoca mira a Area X/ from quantum entanglement. Detail*



Figure 20 *Within the lighthouse/ the lighthouse keeper/ Tezcatlipoca mira a Area X/ from quantum entanglement. Detail*

Words become touch

/

Palabras se convierten a contacto

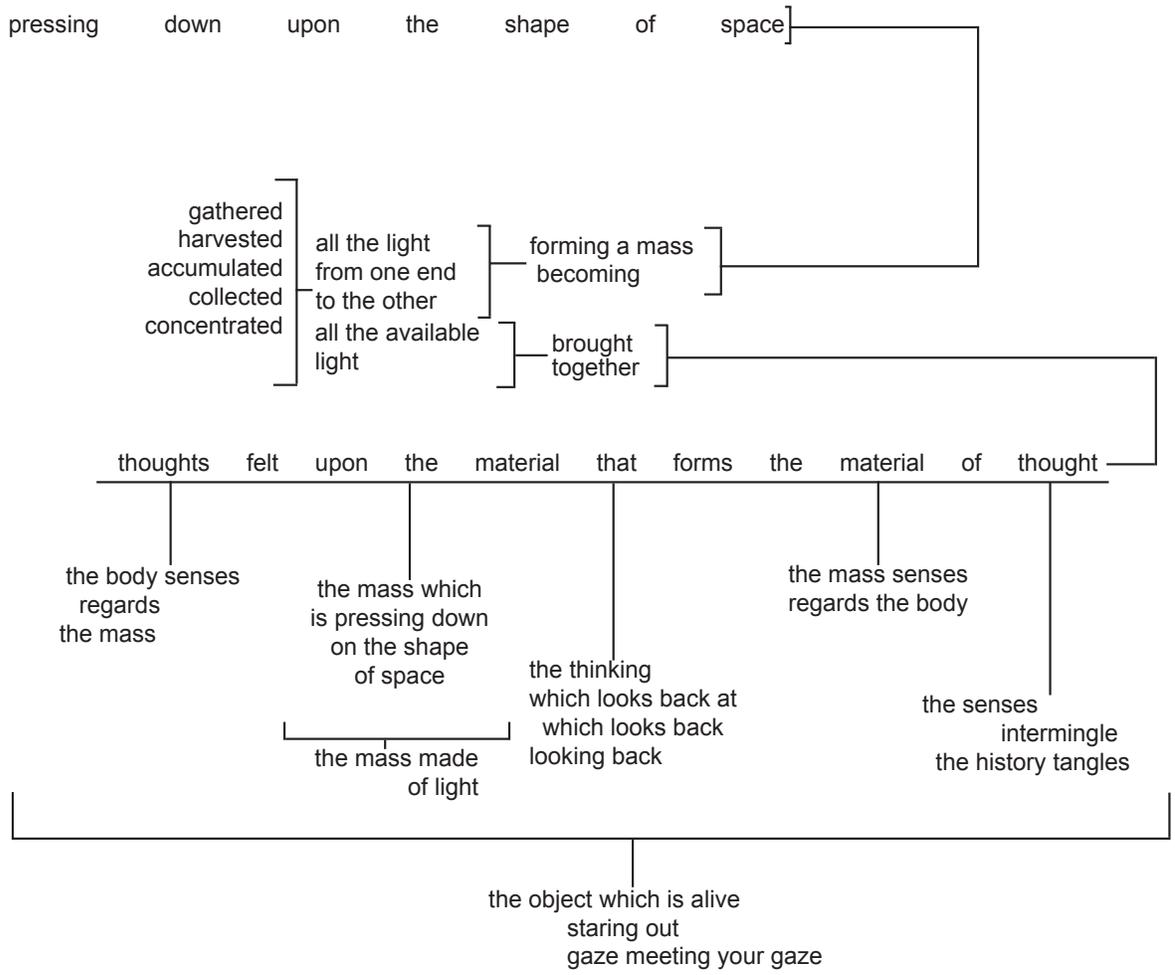
place

stretches

a scratch parallax
an awl a ray
a scrawl a star
 an act that marks a walk

AZTLAN attracts
 an anagram
 la raza maps

Time moves one – Huitzilopochtli looks over
my shoulder
Quetzalcoatl looks at his watch
“habla”



IF:

A moment creates a twisting force which can be detected and measured as a twisting motion impelling an object – exerting an effect on mass – either accelerating it or changing its direction – which leads the object to find itself following a new vector (or velocity) – leading it to the resistance that registers the effects (which are expressions of entropy) of the phenomena – finally sensing – cataloguing – classifying the change upon the system – but only after the decay of the moment has halved the life of event of the moment – and enough moments have accumulated – accreted – collected – accumulated – compounded – accumulated – gathered – accumulated again (forming a critical mass) – built up enough to be sensed – registered – catalogued and classified as a moment but only after the fact (of the moment has passed)

AND IF:

This set of collected phenomena has been received and accepted as true for an agreed upon amount of time – then the trusted archive (an archive which has been declared a standard which others can trust by those that are trusted) can be allowed to report that the recordings are statistically significant enough to justify calling the set of observed phenomena representative of a representation of a unified behavior of a physical system – in effect granting this set of observed phenomena the status of an example of a law of physical matter (at this level of analysis)

THEN:

Quetzalcoatl can see the line that stretches out behind¹ me connecting me to history² as
it is entangled with histories³ that I am connected to and can see the line that moves
ahead⁴ of me stretching
connecting me to
my unborn child
and to what I pass on
once I've learned
what it is
that I've
inherited
as
the
line
twists
and

¹ From the particular perspective of this moment

² The collected impressions of moments twisting building up what can be called time

³ The sets of collected impressions that can be called time from a particular perspective

⁴ From another particular perspective

(the light explored and questioned everything)

a brightness { the words I have written as they are being read by my child who is yet unborn - as I write these words - she stands holding these papers reading - she practices kicking within the womb - taking her first breath - holding my hand - reading these words as I am writing them they are written have been written stand written laying on the page having always been on the page being encountered for the first time and being read - light from the sun hitting the page and bouncing off to meet the eyes of my daughter as she reads is reading these words the moment I am writing these words before she is born she grows becomes an old woman dies

a signal { the actions - beliefs - ontologies - epistemologies of the people standing in the place where I will be born 500 years later speaking a language that I will never know as we stand within the same place in Tenochtitlan their actions - beliefs - ontologies - epistemologies leading to the moment when I am born as their actions - beliefs - ontologies - epistemologies mix with others - mutate - replicate - imprint - spread across a landscape of minds for 500 years as their blood mixes with others - mutates - replicates - imprints - spreads and is found within the blood of my daughter as she reads

a sign { the motion of a photon of light from a distant star as it becomes visible in Tenochtitlan 500 years ago - the light from the earth that is now reaching that star - the contact of the light making contact the contact visible as it makes contact - Tenochtitlan visible to that star that is visible to my daughter who can see the star that can see the contact

((tlatic in xochitl in cuicatl))

matter and meaning ceaselessly giving rise to itself singing

Classical motion

the motion that requires
that certain bodies
be displaced
so that other bodies
remain at rest

A place that is another place even as it is the first place switching back and forth
constantly oscillating over and over a chaotic attractor
swinging

- spiraling - spinning - fragmenting -

(increase of entropy)



a slow movement across the skin of
land ("we didn't cross the border
the border crossed us!") (a great
grandfather from the San Diego
great grandfather from Arizona
great grandfather from Venezuela
great grandfather from Mexico City
grandfather from Venezuela
father from Mexico City)



great grandmother from... great grandmother from... great grandmother from...
great grandmother from... great grandmother from Venezuela - grandmother from
Venezuela grandmother from Mexico City
Mother from Costa Rica

("being from" being the same as the place of birth)

a sandbox half filled with black sand
half filled with white sand both sides
perfectly separated and ordered
entering the sandbox
running
circles
over and over
mixing the sand with footfalls

being in Vancouver
being in Mexico City
being from Vancouver
being from Mexico City

the divide

(teotl)

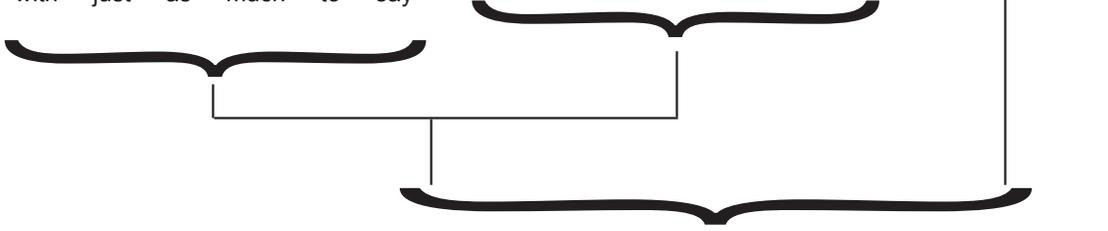
touch

inseperable

My dead aunt Diana
I have sunk my fingers
into the matter that used
to be her skin and flesh
and hair and bones and fat
and felt the texture of a ma-
terial that contained all the
possibilities of a person
and all the possible dice
rolls within a life – that pres-
ent is a present that is
a repeating program of un-
ending possibilities
tested within the continu-
ous rolling dice of my presence
the grit and ash collect-
ed underneath my fingernails
just as vibrant and alive
with just as much to say

The dead sit and live with us as the
past forever fades and recedes be-
yond the horizon of its own weight – a
weight that is living with hair or no hair
maybe maybe not – in any case not
detectable even as it falls in on itself
collapsing under its own weight mass
pressure in any case not detectable
even as it falls in on itself collapsing
under its own weight its presence in-
escapably felt as the present accretes
around it its own weight adding to the
weight of the weight that continually
builds – the dead sit and live with us
as a past that is not actually past but
a long present that extends before
my birth and after my death, or is it
after my birth and before my death

the past is the
past is the past
is the past is
the past is the
past is the past
is the past is
the past the past is
the past is the
past is the past
is the past is the
past is the past
is the past is the
past is the past



dancing as a skeleton danc-
es as the past builds and
adds flesh to the bones as
they move and shake

WHEN:

La Niña La Pinta La Santa Maria

become

Armstrong	Exeter	Pueblo
Atlantis	Farragut	Puget Sound
Baton Rouge	Franklin	Rhode Island
Shenadoah	Gettysburg	Saratoga
Berlin	Havana	Syracuse
Biddeford	Honshu	Tian An Men
Billings	Kongo	Ticonderoga
Bozeman	LaSalle	Trieste
Budapest	Leeds	Tripoli
Cairo	Lexington	Valdemar
Carolina	Livingston	Valley Forge
Charleston	Madison	Veracruz
Chicago	Maryland	Wellington
Columbia	Melbourne	Wyoming
Concord	Okinawa	Yellowstone
Constantinople	Omaha	Yorkshire
Denver	Nebraska	Yorkton
Essex	Philadelphia	Yukon
	Portland	
	Princeton	

(NCC-)

how do
we boldly
go
where has
no man
(sic)
gone
before

} why

OUGHT:

(NCC-)

Ahwahnee
Copernicus
Cortez
Crazy Horse
Ganges
Huron
Lakota
Malinche
Mekong
Orinoco
Pueblo
Rio Grande
Rubicon
Tecumseh
Yangtzee
Kiang
Zapata

the crews of these ships think about their ships as they
move through the stars being their ships thinking about
the past now in the now they are now making while being
their ships thinking about their ships as their ships think
about their crew being the past the present all at once
over and over again?

XVII Movement, on the face with the diagonal stripes

Quihtoznequi iyaouh itech [Quetzalcōātl](#), Quetzalcōhuatl ocatca in Iztac Tezcatlipōca ihuan yehhuatl ocatca in Tliltic Tezcatlipōca.

Itlahtol huitz itech tezcatl in campa hueliz quimottaz ica quihtoznequi ma tlamacaz. Poca huitz itech poctli, inin ahmo hueli tiquitta ixpan. In tlein tiquittaz yez mix tlaxixinilli, quihtoznequi in tlamantli opatlaloh, ca ahmo in tlein tiquitta. Tezcatlipoca ixiptla in yohualli in ehecatl, in ahtlamatilli, no tenehualo Moyocoyatzin, Quequeloani, Monenequetzin, Titlacahuan, Necoc Yaotl, Teihmatini, Teyocoyani.

Yehhuatl achtopa otlacat, ipil Tonacateuctli ihuan Tonacacihuatl, in ihcuac otlacat in cahuitl, eyin yezqueh iteachahuan, inic ome itoca Quetzalcohuatl, inic eyi itoca Tlalocan teuctli ihuan inic nahui itoca Chalchihuitlicue.

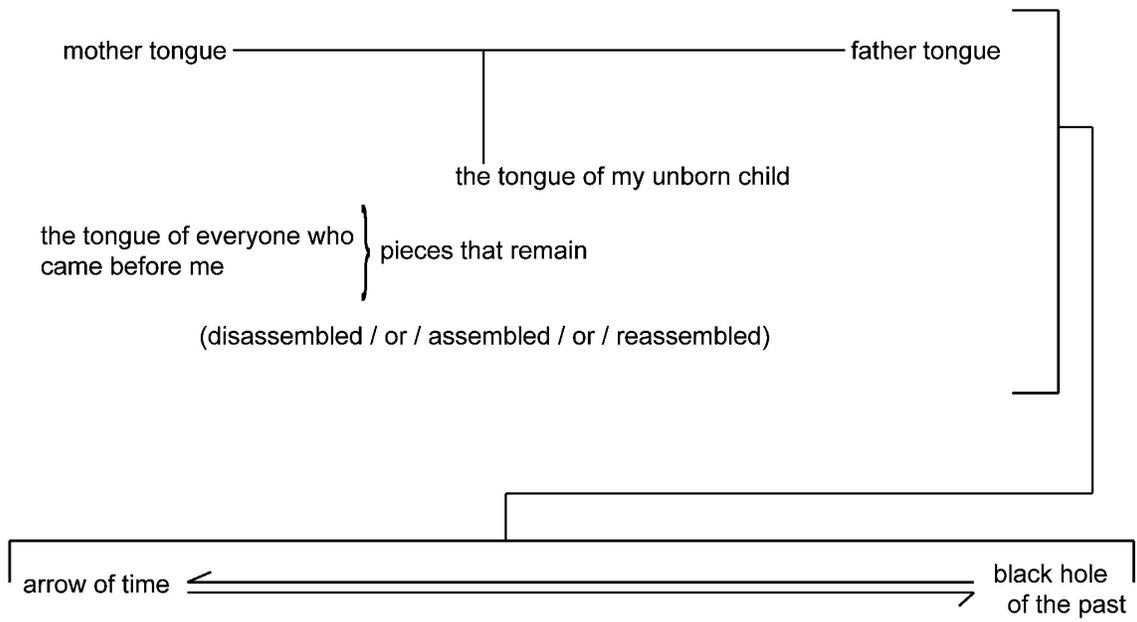
(the entire Nahuatl language Wikipedia entry on Tezcatlipoca)

I Cayman on the foot

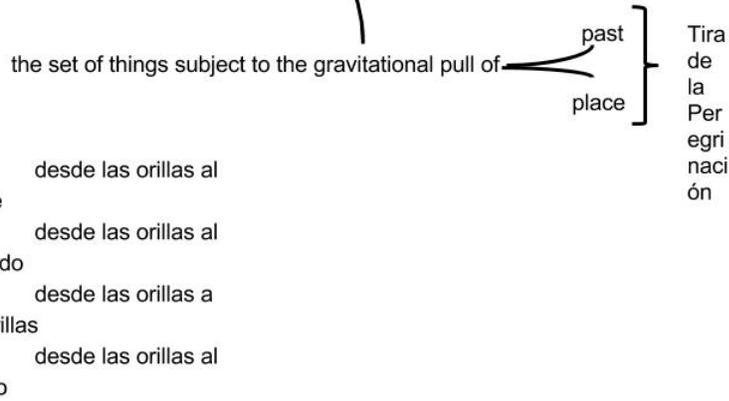
IX Water, on the temple mirror

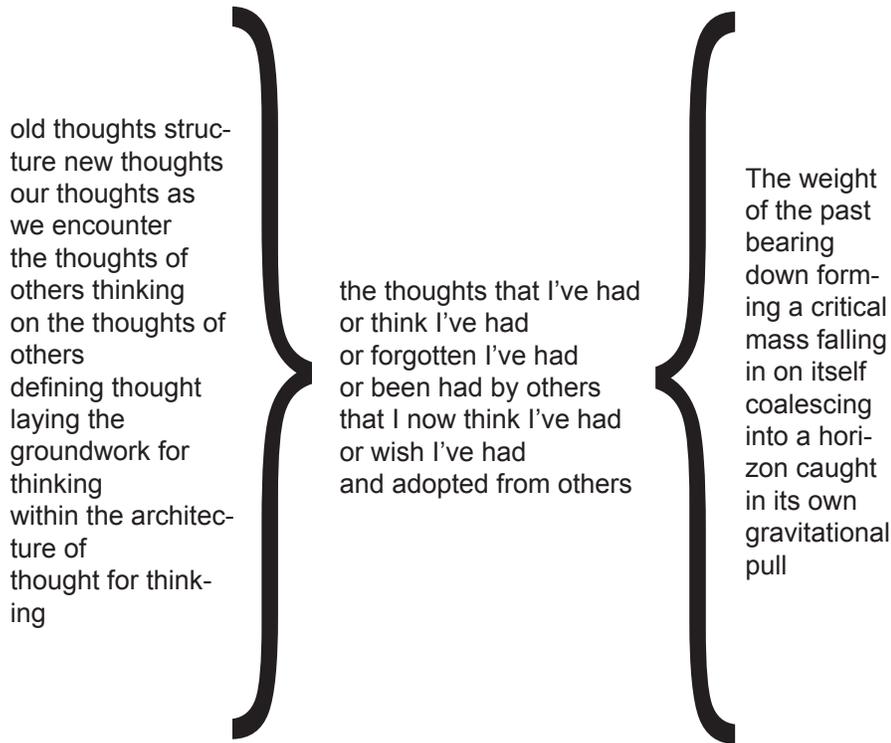
II Wind, on the rear of the breech cloth

Quetzalcoatl
says
time



(the longer I'm here the more I'm from here and the more I'm necessarily from there while not being there and not being from there making me more from both)



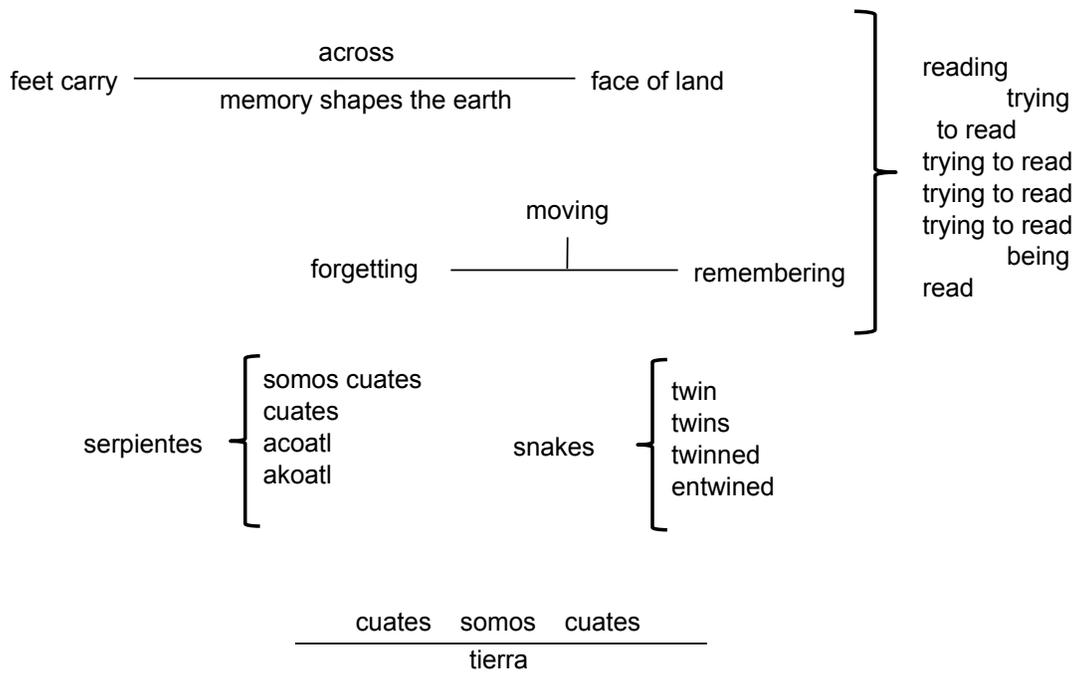


As the past is no longer past and cohabits with the present it pulls the present into orbit circling (perigee and apogee) connected to language which is culture which is place which is land which is identity which reaches out with and against the arrow of time jumping forwards and backwards making the past the present the past the future the past the present which always comes back even as it disappears

As the past is no longer past and cohabits with the present it pulls the present into orbit circling (perigee and apogee) connected to language which is culture which is place which is land which is identity which reaches out with and against the arrow of time jumping forwards and backwards making the past the present the past the future the past the present which always comes back even as it disappears

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As the past is no longer past and cohabits with the present it pulls the present into orbit circling (perigee and apogee) connected to language which is culture which is place which is land which is identity which reaches out with and against the arrow of time jumping forwards and backwards making the past the present the past the future the past the present which always comes back even as it disappears



All the moments of all the lives, and thoughts, and loves, and struggles and desires and entire set of a-priori assumptions about the world and the entire set of ideologies and systems of power as they butt up against the matrix of the world and biology and evolution and quantum physics all entangling and evolving and entangling and evolving and entangling and evolving
(mangled)

what we think of as the past is actually just the brief present which stretches long before my birth and long after my death and past the birth of my child to long after my death and after their death

(the present)

(we
remember the past just as well
as we remember the future)

IF:

Xipe Totec wears his own flayed skin - the skin of his hands dangling from his wrists - would have been flayed with an obsidian knife - flayed himself - Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca - Red Smoking Mirror - bringing the spring rebirth following the knife the object that can kill can harm can inflict pain can also heal transform create wisdom

AND IF:

Xipe Totec has flayed himself coming from the East also bringing the spring and life back to the things that have died transforming them from something that was never inert but seemingly inert but always vital and vibrant into something that is visible and obviously vital and vibrant and the experiencing of pain is different from the experiencing of suffering

THEN:

moving across light years⁵

spanning the void⁶

both here

and not

here

path determined

once arrived and felt⁷

I am the starship that has moved across time that was sent out

departed from Tenochtitlan⁸

generation ship that has a velocity extending through my daughter currently living in her womb⁹

⁵ Two hundred and ninety nine million, seven hundred and ninety two thousand, four hundred and fifty eight metres per second

⁶ Which is the expanse of time as it has twisted

⁷ And become torqued

⁸ Straight outta Aztlán

⁹ Two hundred and ninety nine million, seven hundred and ninety two thousand, four hundred and fifty eight metres per second

stretches

To this place

The Sensuous Field of Aztlán: A site/ non-site

Moving down into the valley/ turning towards Aztlán

As I move down the mountain descending into the Valley of Mexico, sighting what was, what is, Lake Texcoco. My legs carry me down the rocky slopes, my eyes sight the lake as a vision of the present unfolding within the past and my gaze flares out from my eyes in a Goethian seeing that extends into the time before contact with Europeans, and into the current moment, revealing the lake to me as it is and as it was. Or is it the lake as it was and as it is? Or is it as it will be and as it might be again? This double vision holds me connected to the center of an ever-widening whirlpool where I spiral towards and away from the center simultaneously.

A fragmenting double vision that holds me in its gyre.

With each footfall my senses perpetually split and crystallize, widening the valley, while also pulling me to the forgotten location of Aztlán. This is a fiction.

I am sitting cross-legged on my living room floor scribbling these thoughts down, old-fashioned pen and paper style, in a notebook. Beside me I have a laptop with multiple tabs open on my Internet browser, all showing me Wikipedia entries for Mexico City, Aztlán, Tenochtitlan, Lake Texcoco, The Valley of Mexico. Outside the rain is falling in the vague undefined way that Vancouver is so well known for. On the street, traffic is moving through the curtain of mist, generating a white noise almost indistinguishable from waves on surf. This is also a fiction.

I am actually sitting at the computer labs at my school, frantically hitting the keyboard in an effort to meet a major deadline that is part of my masters' requirements. This is also a fiction. All of these narratives of where I am and what's around me are elaborate constructions that always fail to place the writer and the reader in the same location. It is a romanticization of the writer's senses and of the landscape around, which amounts to a questionable ethical relationship to the landscape. Timothy Morton¹ identifies and calls this device, *ecomimesis*², saying,

The more I try to evoke where I am-the "I" who is writing this text-the more phrases and figures of speech I must employ. I must get involved in a process of writing, the very writing that I am *not* describing when I evoke the environment in which writing is taking place. The more convincingly I render my surroundings, the more figurative language I end up with. The more I try to show you what lies beyond this page, the more of a page I have. And the more of a fictional "I" I have-splitting "me" into the one who is writing and the one who is being written about-the less convincing I sound...

This rhetorical strategy appears with astounding frequency of ecological texts. In trying to evoke a sense of the reality of nature, many texts suggest, often explicitly, that (1) this reality is solid, veridical, and independent (notably of the writing process itself) and that (2) it would be better for the reader to experience it directly rather than just read about it. But in making their case these texts are pulled into the orbit of writing, with its slippery, tricksterish qualities of never quite meaning what it says or saying what it means...³

I have failed because instead of managing to describe the vitality of the living world and grounding your reading of these words, in the reading of an environment I've only

¹ Cultural theorist, philosopher and professor of literature and environment at University of California, Davis.

² Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. 31

³ Ibid. 30

managed to fill two pages with words. Weirdly though, despite the fact that all I've done is fill pages with verbiage, I've managed to build the skeleton of a relationship that will continually center and ground my words while also fragmenting and flinging them outwards with centrifugal force. Being in the site of the Valley of Mexico is also being in the non-site of my living room floor, which is also being in the site of the living world and the non-site of words. This spiraling motion pulls me to the site of Aztlán while pulling me down to the point in time and space where I am sitting in the computer lab furiously typing away. The site/ non-site of space-time as it enfolds itself and its surfaces touch and scrape each other, exchanging which is site and which is non-site. The dialectic of site/ non-site provides an important way of getting beyond the ecomimesis of words to get to what Morton calls *ambient poetics* which is a *strong* form of ecomimesis. He says, "Ambience denotes a sense of a circumambient, or surrounding, *world*. It suggests something material and physical, though somewhat intangible as if space itself had a material aspect..."⁴, and "ambience, that which surrounds on both sides, can refer to the margins of a page, the silence before and after music, the frame and walls around a picture..."⁵ This getting beyond the writing on the page, to call attention to the margins, and everything around them is at the heart of my project, which is also my performative incantation to invoke Aztlán.

⁴ Ibid. 33

⁵ Ibid. 34

Crossing the causeway/ pulled to Chicomoztoc

The site/ non-site originated with Robert Smithson, the canonical earth artist *par excellence*. His art and his writing brought the idea of earth art to widespread attention and influenced generations of artists that followed. His Earthworks were some of the most ambitious art projects ever undertaken and his massive piece, *Spiral Jetty*, is one of the most important works of the twentieth century. However, it is his earlier site/ non-site projects that most concerns me here

The site/ non-site sculptures are about a dialectical relationship between two very different spaces, a space within a gallery in which his sculptural work is located, and a space somewhere outside of the gallery that is referred to by the gallery sculptural work. The site/ non-site sculptures are about a dialectical relationship between two very different spaces, a space within a gallery in which his sculptural work is located, and a space somewhere outside of the gallery that is referred to by the gallery sculptural work. The site/ non-site sculptures are about a dialectical relationship between two very different spaces, a space within a gallery in which his sculptural work is located, and a space somewhere outside of the gallery that is referred to by the gallery sculptural work.

The site/ non-site sculptures

are a dialectical relationship

two spaces - a space within a gallery a space somewhere elsewhere

site/ non-site relationship

dialectical sculpture made of space

two spaces - a space within a gallery a space somewhere outside

The non-gallery spaces were his sites, while the gallery spaces were the non-sites. non-site – site – non-site

The non-site pieces were sculptural installations incorporating rocks and earth from the sites, as well as drawings, maps, and photographs as a way of representing the sites. In “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects”, he describes these works saying, “[the] bins or containers of my *Non-sites* gather *in* the fragments that are part of the Earth’s geology as they sink back into their original state.”⁶ He saw the sites as embodying a geological deep time in which things moved towards states of higher entropy.



Non-site (Essen Soil and Mirrors). Robert Smithson, 1969. Soil and twelve mirrors. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Image courtesy of ARTstor.

⁶ Smithson, Robert. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects." In *Art in Theory 1900 - 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999. 865

However, the non-sites are not simply documents of the site but instead the two exist in a much more complicated relationship. In "A Provisional Theory of Non-sites", Smithson further describes the non-sites.

The Non-Site... is a three dimensional logical picture that is abstract, yet it represents an actual site... It is by this dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it - this The Non-Site. To understand this language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construct and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three dimensional picture which doesn't look like a picture... Between the actual site in the Pine Barrens and The Non-Site itself exists a space of metaphoric significance. It could be that "travel" in this space is a vast metaphor. Everything between the two sites could become physical metaphorical material devoid of natural meanings and realistic assumptions. Let us say that one goes on a fictitious trip if one decides to go to the site of the Non-Site. The "trip" becomes invented, devised, artificial; therefore, one might call it a non-trip to a site from a Non-site.⁷

The non-sites are not a reduction of a site to an "essential" but instead they are an otherworldly manifestation of the earth as a powerful element that cannot be contained by representation within the non-site, and escape being experienced totally at the site; a place can also be another place at the same time, and to be in one place is also to be in the other. The two places are alive, dynamic and elusive, turning into wormholes leading into each other. Time is both a deep time of the past and the deep future simultaneously. The site/ non-site dialectic provides us with a tool to give rise to the strong ecomimesis of ambient poetics that can restructure how we represent and consider our connection to land.

⁷ Smithson, Robert. "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites." Holt-Smithson Foundation.
<http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm> (accessed Dec 09, 2015).

A PROBLEM! Despite Smithson's fascination with time and deep time, history does not enter into his practice. By history I mean the history that Earth has with human culture. The sites are always presented as sites of fragmentation and ruin but this does not fully encompass what the history of the site might have been or the possibility that the sites might have played host to human habitation and culture. It's this idea of earth as a host to culture which is most pressing. Despite the fact that Smithson's work makes us aware of land as an active elemental force that escapes reduction to representation, and in the words of Martin Heidegger, withholds itself from being known, Smithson forgets a crucial element of the land, which is its history.

Visiting the markets/ travelling north

This land where I am writing these words has a history. It is a history known and unknown, of First Nations, and settlers and of culture inevitably intertwined with the very ground it's on. Land is central to Aboriginal worldview, and is far more than the simple dirt beneath one's feet. It is a metaphor for the natural world and the connection to the larger more spiritual cosmos. Gerald McMaster, a Plains Cree and Blackfoot curator and artist, expands on this idea:

The philosophical foundation for the majority of Aboriginal cultures is based on the land. This idea can be somewhat misleading in its reference, suggesting that 'land' refers to the ground we walk on. Here, the land is a much larger and more complex concept. The idea of land encompasses the land in itself - what's beneath it, the sky above and beyond; in other words the entire universe and what extends beyond it.⁸

This perspective of land is then inseparable from culture, which explains the connection that Aboriginal people have with their ancestral land. The land is their culture and they are the land, existing in a continuum where there is a constant two-way flow between all expressions of World and Earth. McMaster's clarification of what land means bears a significant resemblance to Heidegger's, definition of Earth in "The Origin of the Work of Art". Heidegger says:

What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and

⁸ Trépanier, France and Chris Creighton-Kelly. *Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review*. Canada Council for the Arts, 2011. 23.

shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent.⁹

Further on Heidegger defines what he means by World:

World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds.¹⁰

Land is an in between Earth and World. It is an intermediary, a particular place, between Earth, which is the elemental and irreducible aspect of the living world, and World as being culture and all possible expressions and performances of culture.

The living world is culture, history, identity.

Land is where the earth and world mix

It is the open gate and the open window

For one to flow out and one to flow in

Where the World Worlds and the Earth Earths

But land is also language.

⁹ Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, edited by Clive Cazeaux, 80. New York: Routledge, 2000. 89

¹⁰ Ibid. 90

James Nicholas¹¹ speaks:

Back home there is an ancient language, an old way of speaking
(kyas-seh-thin-ne-mo-win), a Classic Cree as it were.

It is a language which only the very elderly use now, if at all,
Plus some not so old who were raised by grandparents.

What is unique about this Classic Cree is that the whole of the idiom
pertains to and concerns itself with landscape, to specificity of place,
and to one's relationship to the land.

Classic Cree is a precise and economic language
colorful and poetic in its speaking.

....

It is a language made for the observant, not the talkative.

When I speak to you in Cree, I acknowledge you as community.

When the land speaks to me, she acknowledges me as community. [my emphasis]

...

Learn from me, listen to me: the land is speaking.

Language, whether classic Cree or contemporary Cree

¹¹ Rock Creek Cree writer, actor, poet, and storyteller

is the basis of our community.

How we speak and why we speak formulates, shapes, dictates and drives

The engine of essence (who we are) and landscape (where we are)

In fact the Plains Cree word for Cree Nation translates into a Cree speaker.

We ask each other on first meeting, Are you a Cree speaker? Are you one of us,

do you speak the language, are you of our community?¹²

The speaking of a language is the fostering of a land. It is the bringing forth of the Earth and the World. Land has a performative element, which is speaking. When a person speaks it is a reinforcement of the connection to land. When a person speaks it is the land speaking the person speaking the land. Speaking is the performance and emergence of land as the enfolding mesh of Earth and World, in a dynamic and reciprocal exchange of human speaker (non-site) and land speaker (site). Language is the emergence and performance of citizenship as it is connected to land. Citizenship not in a nationalistic sense that is tied to nation states but citizenship as a recognition of the intermeshing of the body, with culture, which is also an intermeshing with land, which is an intermeshing of the World with Earth as the World worlds and the Earth earths.

Language is culture is land
The sensuous field of the earth
Emerges from our mouths
And pulls us into the ground
Rooting us
As we speak

¹² Nicholas, James. "Land, Relationship, and Community." In *Land, Relationship, and Community: A Symposium*, edited by Bill Jeffries and Jonathan Wills, 24. North Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 2001. 25

Following the canals/ beginning the flower beginning the song

There are genomes in my body

the same genomes

as those that belonged to the people who lived in Tenochtitlan

the city that was/ will be/ is/ maybe again Mexico City

there are genomes in my body that are the same genomes

the same genomes as those that belonged to the people

who lived in Yucatan before Europe arrived

There are genomes in my body that belonged to the people who
spoke

still speak a variety of the Uto-Aztec family of languages

the American South West before the American South West

Or so my mother and father tell me

there are genomes in my body

that travelled across the Atlantic Ocean from Spain

forcefully entered the bodies of all those other bodies

and whose memes entered their minds

forever changing the idea landscape across Ixachitlān

Or so I am reminded when I look in the mirror - my Spanish phenotype overwhelming my Ixachitlān phenotype

Europe visibly dominant over Ixachitlān phenotype

these raw materials coalesced into my emergence

via my mother and father

in the city now known as el Distrito Federal (*Chilango!* ((Ixachilān)))

my mother and father separated - with her and my sister I left Mexico

we came to Canada - I learned English

we left again

moving to Singapore then Indonesia before world events intervened in Mexico

the Peso collapsed under its own weight

returned to Canada 1995



Hernan Cortes map of Tenochtitlan, 1524. University of California, San Diego. Image courtesy of ARTstor

Ultimately this project is about myself. It's about my investigations into the cultural history that I am heir to and about how I integrate them and embody them into my epistemology. This is about what land I am tied to, where my citizenship arises, and what land and culture I am creating and performing when I use language. Embodiment is the confirmation and adoption of an epistemology into the body so that it can intermesh with the senses. But it's also more complicated than this. The intermeshing of ontology into the senses isn't just the adoption of an idea into the status of received wisdom it is also the real time process of thinking through ideas and testing them against the real world.

As a human with a Latino heritage, with a connection to indigenous cultures, however broken and attenuated, as an immigrant, and a person of some colour, I share similar concerns that many indigenous peoples across Turtle Island-The Americas do

and I strongly believe that there is much that immigrants, Latinos, and Indigenous communities can learn from one another. Dylan Miner¹³ would agree. In his book *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island*, central to the arguments he makes is the idea that Mexican-Americans, who are referred to as Chicanos, or Xicanos are Indigenous to the places where they are thought of as immigrant. "...*Creating Aztlán* is an indigenist intervention into settler ontologies and colonial political formations that attempt to render Xicano presence as immigrant (and therefore settler), as opposed to Indigenous in orientation."¹⁴ Further on he says, "...I position Xicanos not as 'illegal' or undocumented immigrants but as an aboriginal people firmly situated in this hemisphere. This position has precedence in the work of Indigenous scholars like Jack D. Forbes (Powhatan-Renape and Delaware-Lenape), who wrote in 1973... that Xicanos are the largest Indigenous nation on Turtle Island."¹⁵ By turning to Xicano explications of culture we can find some ideas that can help us understand the site/ non-site dialectic.

¹³ Michif (Metis) artist, scholar, and associate professor at Michigan State University.

¹⁴ Miner, Dylan A. T. *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island*. 1st edition ed. United States of America: University of Arizona Press, 2014. 7

¹⁵ Ibid. 9

Sighting el Templo Mayor/ Siting the reeds, siting the egrets, sighting Huitzilopochtli

Xicano turn to Aztlán as a narrative for legitimizing their claim to sovereignty as a nation. This is what I know of Aztlán. It is simultaneously a real place and a mythic idea. Its power as real non-site, and mythic site, is its ability to exchange which is site and which is non-site. Aztlán is both the mythical homeland and the actual North from which the Mexica people migrated down into present day Mexico City. This corroborates scientific evidence for historical migration patterns across Turtle Island-the Americas. The Mexica people tell of their emergence from seven caves at Aztlán, and beginning a migration south. It is actually unclear if Aztlán was ever a real place, but for the Mexica, Aztlán's power was how it functioned as a discursive utopian device, rather than a physical location.

To investigate this utopic function, Miner turns to Thomas More's *Utopia*, whose book was the source of the word.

...More's *Utopia* is frequently circumscribed by its surface qualities and theoretically collapsed to produce its mere opposite: dystopia. Utopia, even a socialist or indigenist Xicano utopia, must never be reduced to the superficiality of its products or practices, as has frequently and repeatedly been the case... [Utopic] spaces, much in the vein of More's original manuscript, do not enunciate a monolithic, all-encompassing solution to social ills; rather, these non-distinct spaces are sites that enable critical inquiry and dialogue among competing positions. It is at this juncture that a redefinition of utopia (and by extension Aztlán) must begin if we are to fully understand Aztlán's potential.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid. 37

This discursive utopian function is one that still exists and is why Xicanos still turn to Aztlán as a space that originated the Mexica people.

Over in Tenochtitlan, the ancestors of Xicano people had a practice of engaging with their knowledge of Aztlán in a discursive manner that was open ended and embodied elements of the site/ non-site.

In Codex Boturini, for instance, the scribes depict a bundle that embodies the divine spirit of Huitzilopochtli... This bundle is humbly carried by the Mexica as they migrate south. In fact, many of the codices depict Huitzilopochtli held inside a sacred bundle. By transporting this sacred bundle from one site to another, the codices document the metaphorical transition... of the axis mundi from one location (Aztlán) to another (Tenochtitlan).

Inversely Aztlán was activated through the performances of *in xochitl in cuicatl*, literally meaning flower and song. By performing the codices... tlacuilome not only “read” the text, but likewise *activated* them by adding supplementary and irreplaceable knowledge not directly inscribed on the *amatl* of the codices. Therefore by performing the codices or amoxтли, Mexica scholars fully galvanized the visual or written knowledge of these migration texts in a modality where performance supplemented the visual text. Aztlán was located in the space created by the performance. Aztlán was transformed from a site within representational space to one that existed within real space.¹⁷

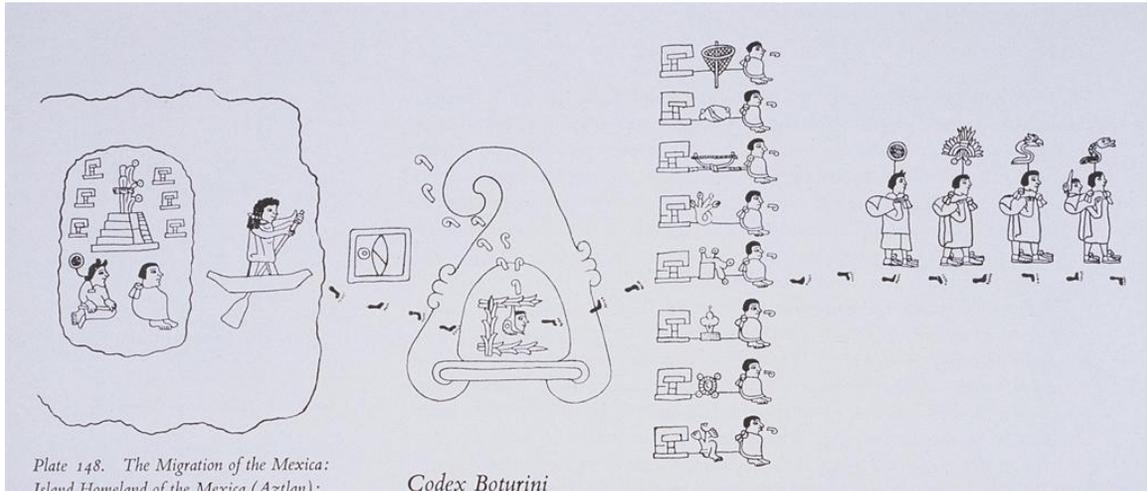
Within the codices there is the idea that Aztlán is something that can be carried and moved from one place to another. Aztlán is a place that can be moved from one location to another.

¹⁷ Ibid. 33

A portable land.

A migrating earth

A nomadic world



Codex Boturini. Migration of the Mexica. Eight tribes and four leaders carrying the image of Huitzilopochtli. University of California, San Diego. Image courtesy of ARTstor.

Entering the square/ Moving among the herons

Up to this point I have been working to expand Smithson's site/ non-site dialectic so that it can provide a means for changing the way we as a species think about our relationship to Earth and World. This increase in the World of the site/ non-site has helped us see the connection between Earth and World in Indigenous and Xicano epistemologies. These ways of knowing are analogous to Earth Art ontologies that Smithson and others have been practicing. However these ideas are not new by any means, and it is clear that they form a praxis that Indigenous peoples have been embodying since time immemorial. This is a way of living that embodies many of the same ethics and ideas that earth art does. In many ways Indigenous peoples are the earth artist *par excellence*.

This becomes even clearer when examining what earth art is in general. Amanda Boetzkes¹⁸ does this and she even provides a definition of earth art that is good to keep in mind.

There are two risks in employing the category "land art"... First it lends itself too easily to an interpretation of art as a surface marking, as though the earth itself were merely a textual archive of human history and events. Second, "land art" does not necessarily address the earth's quality of withhold and its resistance to representation that Heidegger identifies and that has been compelling for so many contemporary artists since the sixties. It seems appropriate to use the term "earth art..."¹⁹

Also important is the idea of Earth as elemental, which is necessary for a Heideggerian understanding of Earth art. Boetzkes clarifies Heidegger's definition of an elemental from his analogy to a stone, which withholds itself from being known. "An elemental cannot be analyzed by dividing it into constituent parts, nor can it be summarized as a

¹⁸ Art historian and assistant professor at the University of Alberta

¹⁹ Boetzkes, Amanda. *The Ethics of Earth Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 17

single entity. Likewise, the earth for us is not a mere thing with clear boundaries, but rather the essential terrain that orients all perception.”²⁰ An elemental then is the aware Earth that has intention and intelligence as it comes into contact with human sense and experience, and offers an ethical model of understanding nature. Even when earthwork is not explicitly about ecological politics there is an ethical ideology embedded within it. If Earth is an aware entity, and a participant in the creation of culture, then it ceases to be an inert mass of resources ready for exploitation.

A PROBLEM! In my discussion of the site/ non-site, I have not talked about what this dialectic is not, and for that it is helpful to turn once more to my body. On first glance it may seem that my mixture of both Indigenous and European blood might be another site/ non-site but this is a reading that would turn us away from Aztlán. As someone with genes from Spain and “New Spain” I could easily be labeled *mestizo*. Indeed, *mestizaje* (or *métissage* in Canada) is something that characterizes most Mexicans, Xicanos, and many Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island-the Americas. Miner also grapples with this problem and he turns to Peruvian literary critic Antonio Cornejo Polar to expose it. “As Cornejo Polar argues: ‘what *mestizaje* does is to offer a harmonious image of what is obviously disjointed and confrontational, proposing representations that deep down are only relevant to those for whom it is convenient to imagine our societies as smooth and non-conflictive spaces of coexistence.’”²¹ This is reminiscent of Glen Coulthard's idea that colonial recognition of Indigenous identity is a reassertion of colonization that further dispossesses First Nations of their land.

... Canada is no different from most other settler-colonial powers: in the Canadian context, colonial domination continues to be structurally committed to maintain – through force, fraud, and more recently, so-called ‘negotiations’ – ongoing state access to the land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of

²⁰ Ibid. 15

²¹ Miner, *Aztlán*. 216

Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other.²²

The state's move towards "recognition" of Indigenous sovereignty and "negotiation" is a move towards mestizaje/ métissage that privilege "the homogenizing logic of the nation-state, which stigmatizes the ethnic differences of the present, even while it glorifies... the civilizations of the past"²³

Thankfully Aztlán gives us a way out.

Through the site/ non-site

Its generosity is the generosity of the Earth

The power of the site/ non-site is its ability to hold two very different places

two locations

two subjects/ subjectivities

two Earths

two Worlds

in tension

while never dissolving – never privileging one

over the other

²² Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. 1st Edition ed. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. 7

²³ Jose Antonio Lucero qtd in Miner, *Aztlán*. 7

the matter of the site is utterly dependent on the anti-matter of the non-site.

or is it the other way around?

Coulthard speaks:

...[The] struggle for Indigenous self-determination... must challenge the relationship between settler colonization and free-market fundamentalism in ways that refuse to be coopted by scraps of recognition, opportunistic apologies, and the cheap gift of political and economic inclusion. For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it.²⁴

I find Coulthard's call to action incredibly exciting. Coulthard also says "this reality demands that we continue to remain open to, if not actively seek out and establish, relations of solidarity and networks of trade and mutual aid..."²⁵ As an immigrant I am heartened by this, and I see the mutual fostering of difference as a way to reinforce and revitalize our respective cultures. This is the invoking of Aztlán, the extension of the site/ non-site to cultural relations and to politics.

²⁴ Coulthard, Red Skin. 173

²⁵ Ibid. 173

Climbing the pyramid/ entering the caves

Throughout this text I have worked to treat my writing as a substance that maintains my connection to Earth as I strived to weave World in with it. This was done to keep with the spirit of *in xochitl in cuicatl*. We have seen how language is land, and speaking is an enactment, a performance of citizenship. Poetry has been an important material for this discussion and for maintaining a connection to the ambient poetics of the page, and by extension the world.

There are two poems that I would like to share with you now. The first one is by Stephen Collis, and the second is by Jordan Abel. Collis is a Vancouver poet of European descent, while Abel is a Nisga'a poet. Both poems call our attention to language as citizenship and culture and as something that defines our relationship to land.

|

I trudged on

I translated

I rested

I caught

I gazed

I must remember²⁶

|

²⁶ Abel, Jordan. *The Place of Scraps*. Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 2014. 161

Come the Revolution

For Larissa Lai

1.

Come the revolution
we will the revolution
we will return to the
revolution return to the
sensuous body of language
come the revolution
we will return to the
sensuous body and
sound will propel us
through the barricades
of others the revolution
through the barricades
of otherness and come
as mere sparks will
spark us come
the revolution anew
and we will the
revolution come anew
and irony will no longer
bind us the sensuous
body of language lift us
fringe to feather to fold us
the sensuous body of
our methods
singletogetherness and
come the revolution
we will have time
the revolutionary time
the live the silent lives
of animals the revolution
animals we have lost
that is animals we have
killed the extinctions
corrupt economies come

the revolution throwing
throwing off sparks and
new economies and throwing
sound will propel us through
the revolution sensuous
the animal walls we are
as producers and consumers
as time and sound and
the sensuous body of language

²⁷
...

²⁷ Collis, Stephen. *To the Barricades*. Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 2013. 103-4

Ironically while I'm calling for a greater attention to the intermeshing of Earth and World, I am subject to the World abstracted from Earth. My limbs atrophy because I must sit to write these words. My body is abstracted from my thoughts, and words, and your body is as well as you sit and read these words. A corrective is required, either by my not writing more, or by you putting down this paper and walking away.

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