

**This land is your land**

**This land is my land**

### **Anecdotes on the Collapsing of the This and That, and the Here and Elsewhere**

»But something is causing these statements to be irrevocably read and experienced through a new drama, not the drama of life and death, but a form of death that begins and ends in Nonlife—namely the extinction of humans, biological life, and, as it is often put, the planet itself—which takes us to a time before the life and death of individuals and species, a time of the geos, of soullessness. The modifying phrase ›insofar as‹ now foregrounds the ›anthropos‹ as just one element in the larger set of not merely animal life but all Life as opposed to the state of original and radical Nonlife, the vital in relation to the inert, the extinct in relation to the barren. In other words, it is increasingly clear that the ›anthropos‹ remains an element in the set of life only insofar as Life can maintain its distinction from Death/Extinction and Nonlife.«

Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, 2016.

»Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in allowing traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things. It is important to note that ephemera is a mode of proofing and producing arguments often worked by minoritarian culture and criticism makers.«

Jose Esteban Munoz, *Ephemera as Evidence - Introductory Notes to Queer Acts*, 1996.

### **Anecdote I**

There are undoubtedly endless paths that can and even must be taken to reach that land called the self/own. Paths that are direct, rugged, abbreviated, indirect, speculative, mechanical, sentimental, paved with bad intentions, compromised, unnatural or human. Paths that are queer, conditional, inhuman or paved with good intentions, natural, disjuncted. But no matter the adjectival complexity and uncertainty of the paths, once one gets to that land called self/own, one is likely to notice that both ›land‹ and ›self/own‹, as notions, exist merely in the realms of the imaginary. **This land is your land I This land is my land.** The claim of land as ›my‹ or ›your‹ land is often first and foremost a claim.

The irony of destiny is that the land in which the song ›This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land‹ came into being is the land that was forcefully taken away from the indigenous peoples of the lands by successions of Spanish, Dutch, French and British colonialists. The irony of destiny is that the folk singer Woody Guthrie wrote ›God Blessed America for Me‹ in 1940 (based on a Carter Family tune called ›Little Darlin', Pal of Mine‹)

later to be renamed as »This Land Is Your Land« as a sarcastic response to Irving Berlin's »God Bless America«.<sup>1</sup> It is ironical because of Guthrie's choice to shift from the present to the past. From bless to blessed. And ironical because Guthrie replaces »God blessed America for me« with »this land was made for you and me«.

The irony of destiny is that the original version of Guthrie's piece, which is indeed an eloquent description of the beauty of the United States and an expression of scorn for those who don't see fit to share it,<sup>2</sup> contained two verses that were later deleted and document his discontent for the capitalist greed and chauvinism that reigned the country at the time:

»As I was walkin' – I saw a sign there  
And that sign said – no trespassin'  
But on the other side ... it didn't say nothin!  
Now that side was made for you and me!  
In the squares of the city – In the shadow of the steeple  
Near the relief office – I see my people  
And some are grumblin' and some are wonderin'  
If this land's still made for you and me.«

The irony of destiny is that in this land, which Guthrie rightly claimed to be his and your land, walls are being built, people are not allowed to trespass, thousands of children are separated from their parents accused of illegal migration. The irony of destiny seems to be that God blessed and blesses America for a few, and not the many.

## Anecdote II

In Engelmann's and Lachauer's work the examination of proximity and distance to land and self are central. It might not be a hyperbole to suggest that Antje Engelmann's journey to the land of the »self« leads through the path of the familiar and familial. Maybe this proximity can be understood as the »here«. For Engelmann the familial and familiar are the spaces of departure in an engagement in an investigation of understanding the self and the world. In her work she looks both at the family genealogy of transitioning spaces and of transposing pain. It is as if the deeper Engelmann digs in the histories of origins, pains and other stories, the more distances between a here and a there collapse. **This land is your land I This land is my land.** Cyrill Lachauer's journey to that self could be described as a wandering into the yonder and the afar. It is in digging in what might at first glance seem to be the unfamiliar, exploring the histories and myths of some others, that one sometimes

---

<sup>1</sup> Margolis, Lynne (2012): Behind The Song: This Land Is Your Land, retrieved on November 29th 2018: <http://americansongwriter.com/2012/06/behind-the-song-this-land-is-your-land/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

localizes one's self in one's universe. It is the search of that promised land which is mine and yours that might be that land of the self in this case. The subject of concern, although at first sight an »other«, is indeed the reflection of, or at least an effort to find the »self« in that other being, land, space. Once again, the gap between a purported or semblance here and there collapses. **This land is your land I This land is my land.** Land and self within economic or political frameworks are resources of power, but land and selves are products of imaginations, too.

### **Anecdote III**

In response to the question of how to perceive of feminism in relation to environmentalism, ecology and the anthropocene, Erika Balsom in a conversation with Trinh T. Minh Ha, answers that it is about »the many tools at our disposal and the forces of nature. When you do not conceive of these in binary opposition, but rather as forces that co-exist and mutually sustain one another, then the human is not opposed to the non-human.«<sup>3</sup>

The possibility of imagining and living a world that is not divided between animate and inanimate beings might be another trajectory to follow in the works of Antje Engelmann and Cyrill Lachauer. The collapsing of this or that, so to say. And it is not about the humanisation of objects or the inanimation of humans, but rather a shift that is reminiscent of the proposal Elizabeth Povinelli makes in »Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism«:

»From a geological point of view, the planet began without Life, with Nonlife, out of which, somehow, came sorts of Life. These sorts evolved until one sort threatened to extinguish not only its own sort but all sorts, returning the planet to an original lifelessness. In other words, when the abstraction of the Human is cast as the protagonist of the Anthropocene, a specific set of characters crowd the stage—the Human, the Nonhuman, the Dead, the Never Alive.«<sup>4</sup>

It is to this end that Antje Engelmann proposes to reflect, metaphorically and literally speaking, on the processes that are involved in the structuring of properties of the earth's crust and their evolution through time – tectonics. An understanding of tectonics is an understanding of the way the earth functions as a being – ontologically, so to say – in relation to quakes, fossils, resources etc. In other words, it is an understanding of the relation between the »bios« and the »geos«, one that has existed since time immemorial . An understanding which doesn't consider them as binaries or opposites, but rather one that asks: How are we – those with life or nonlife, i.e. the existent, or the being – going to live together in this space called Earth. In the piece »Collection 1955-2018«, 2018, a series of slide photographs of stones that Engelmann has collected on several travels on all continents since 1995 are projected - now in one and the same space. The photographs are detached from their

---

<sup>3</sup> Balsom, Erika and Minh-Ha, Trinh T.(2018): Reality is Delicate. In Decolonizing Cultures: Where Do We Go From Here?, In: Frieze (199). Nov/Dec 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Povinelli, Elizabeth A. (2016): Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism, Duke Press, Durham, 11-12.

geological environment and staged in her studio thereby allowing for a focus on the form and inner structure of the individual stones. But even more importantly, this piece points at the artist's current concerns with the powers and agencies of other beings than humans, or as she puts it: »Assuming that things have powers, what happens if we snatch them from certain locations? Since my collection is about stones, rocks, and meteorites, the collection tells of worlds that transcend the earth itself.«<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the concepts of the »here« and »elsewhere«, the »this« and »that« crumble.

Likewise, Lachauer's works tell of worlds that transcend the earth itself, too, at least in their engagement with the yonder. In »Let the fire fall (I)«, 2018, Lachauer deliberates on how by the age of 12 or 13, he began to dream of the sheer endless granite walls and the legendary climbing stories associated with the Yosemite National Park: »The small valley with its high walls was part of the American Counter Culture, albeit far less politically than on the nearby West Coast. German climbers brought the philosophy and ethics of American climbers to Germany and fundamentally changed their fascist-dominated alpinism. The climbing and the dreams of this valley were part of my own belated Counter Culture as an insecure teenager in the country where everyone else played football. Every year since 2011, I returned to this valley, which many call the Center of the Universe. The two most striking rock formations in the valley are two of the most impressive granite monoliths on earth: the El Capitan and the Half Dome. Last year I dedicated a first work to these two mountains, as I was interested in the overlapping of names and the attribution of the mountains as male and female. Even the climbers speak of the Captain and the Mother.«<sup>6</sup>

The fascination for cliffs, but also humans' wish to conquer nature, to be on top of the world, can be seen as expressions of power, but they could also be an attempt to build a relation with the sheer intensity of nonlife. Trained as an anthropologist before becoming an artist, Lachauer has closely observed the efforts of humans to humanise the monoliths by typifying them as male or female. Critically, he examines the colonial problematics of figures like philosopher and explorer John Muir, who is said to have »discovered« the valley and still graces the California Quarter. The irony of space on this earth is that it is by going somewhere else that one learns about or recognises one's own space.

It might be on the cliffs of the Yosemite National Park that Lachauer was able to situate or re-find himself within the landscapes of the alpine mountains. Such is said about the great Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire whose seminal 1939 publication »Notebook of a Return to the Native Land« was begun upon a vacation trip to Yugoslavia in 1935 with his Croatian friend Petar Guberina, after passing the entrance exam to the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and while he was unable to return to his native Martinique. Thus the return to the native land happens through the poetic and political sensibility for another space thereby another collapse of the here and there.

---

<sup>5</sup> Notes from Antje Engelmann.

<sup>6</sup> Notes from Cyrill Lachauer.

## **Anecdote IV**

However, one can't think of the earth and tectonics without thinking of the earth's strata and stratification – the layering that occurs in most sedimentary rocks and in those igneous rocks formed at the earth's surface, from lava flows and volcanic fragmental deposits.<sup>7</sup> The layers are related to each other by the mere fact that they lie on top of each other as sediments, while having different sizes, characters, modes etc.

In Engelmann's »ongoing kin«, 2018, a video loop in which one sees the artist's hand layering in between her grandmother's, her mother's and her son's hand, one by analogy thinks of the stratification processes of the earth. The lives that give lives to others. The sediments that make a genealogy. One sees time and feels the rhythm of a history. It is a game of alternating closeness and detachment, a game of ancestry and repetition of cycles. The cycle can also be witnessed in the 15-minute HD video »Fake roses never die«, 2018, featuring the blossoming of a plant is witnessed. It is the Rose of Jericho, a desert plant that can survive centuries of drought and blossoms when coming in contact with water. Because of the plant's possibility to embody both the »bios« and »geos«, it has been said to possess healing and spiritual forces.

## **Anecdote V**

In Lachauer's travels to the rifts, he has noticed that the discourses and protagonists in the narrations of the Yosemite National Park seem to be dominated by white men. Discourses and projections of manness, hardness, the conquering of nature through the culture of adventure. Characteristics of patriarchal discourses and reminiscent of what Minh-Ha called »mono-subjective patriarchal system of domination, subordination and exploitation.«

Lachauer met Justin already back in November 2011, who lives and works in the so called men's world as a queer person. Over the years, Lachauer's friendship with Justin led to a collaborative project in 2017 in the form of a dance performance by Justin in front of El Capitan, the »male« rock, recorded by Lachauer on 16mm and transferred to a video with title »Justin«, 2018. Justin's rhythm in performativity, as well as in relation to the cliff, begets the cycles of rapports of humans to their imagined lands and spaces, and between animate and inanimate beings. It is also a reinstating of queer spirits and bodies within spaces that have been taking hostage by the fits of patriarchy. Through the performance, other narratives and textualities of the queer body within toxic masculine spaces are proposed. As Jose Esteban Munoz put it in *Ephemeris as Evidence - Introductory Notes to Queer Acts* "It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in allowing traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things." [8]

---

<sup>7</sup> Stratification (Britannica), retrieved on November 29th 2018: <https://www.britannica.com/science/stratification-geology>.

## Anecdote VI

»These characters act out a specific drama: the end of humans excites an anxiety about the end of Life and the end of Life excites an anxiety about the transformation of the blue orb into the red planet, Earth becoming Mars, unless Mars ends up having life... Just as things are getting frothy, however, someone in the audience usually interrupts the play to remind everyone that Life and Nonlife and the Human and the Nonhuman are abstractions and distractions from the fact that humans did not create this problem. Rather, a specific mode of human society did, and even there, specific classes and races and regions of humans. After this interruption the antagonism shifts and the protagonists are neither humans and other biological, meteorological, and geological forces, nor Life and Nonlife. The antagonism is between various forms of human life-worlds and their different effects on the given-world.«<sup>8</sup>

Earth might not yet have become Mars, but there is an increased interest in institutions and spaces that simulate life on Mars. Just as much as there is an increase in wealthy earthlings that aim to travel to the moon for vacation, or if the worse comes to the worst on earth, they hope to move on forever. During a visit to the NASA Station in Houston, Texas, Engelmann and children posed for a portrait inside of an artificial Mars backdrop. The piece titled »Mars«, 2017/ 2018, shown on an iPhone, embedded in crushed quartz, marble and rainbow rocks in a steel bucket is at the threshold between a humorous gesture and a hyperreality, a utopia of many people who would be able to flee from the ecological and other disasters eminent on the earth. The simulations of Mars on earth are possibilities of collapsing Earth and Mars, possibilities of thrusting humanity outside of the burdened realities awaiting the earth. A heterotopia.

The first time Warren Harding and Royal Robbins mounted the Half Dome Northwest Wall must have felt like transiting the earth to the moon. In »Harding and Robbins - we salute you«, 2018, shot on 8mm transferred on video, Lachauer pays homage to those two who allegedly first »conquered« the granite walls of the Yosemite Valley. While with »Line of Thoughts«, 2018, a film along the US Mexican border leading from California from Border Field State Park to the gulf of Mexico in Texas, Engelmann puts a spotlight on her itineraries that led to places that are experimenting with alternative or utopian forms of society (for example, Arcosanti, Arizona) or even, like the Biosphere 2, exploring life on foreign planets scientifically and experimentally. Flight. Escape. Survival. Extraterrestiality.

---

<sup>8</sup> Povinelli, Elizabeth A. (2016): *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, Duke Press, Durham, 12.

**This land is your land I This land is my land** is meant to be an exhibition by Antje Engelmann and Cyrill Lachauer that evolves as a series of dialogues that have happened over a decade as artists and as a couple. It also happens to be my last exhibition at Galerie Wedding, which I intended to do with artists and friends that I have known and accompanied, as much as they have accompanied me, for over a decade. **This land is your land I This land is my land** is supposed to be an exhibition that provides evidence of the nearness in the afar and the impossibility of demarcating, as well as existing in, the simplicities of binaries, but rather thinking or being in points of intersection, crossroads, and junctions. This is the case with the piece » Crossings (The Monarch Butterfly)«, 2018, a collaboration between Antje Engelmann and Cyrill Lachauer, after a journey along the US-Mexican border from California to the Gulf of Mexico in Texas. Found Footage on 16mm material, transferred on video, the piece's protagonist is the Monarch butterfly, known to migrate across four generations from the US and parts of Canada to Mexico. The Monarchs born in late summer or early fall make the migration, and they make only one round trip. By the time next year's winter migration begins, several summer generations will have lived and died and it will be last year's migrators' great grandchildren that make the trip. Yet somehow these new generations know the way, and follow the same routes their ancestors took—even returning to the same tree. This millennia-old migration route, which spans several generations challenges the conceptions of nation state and country as property to be separated and demarcated. Monarch butterflies seem to have another understanding of what land is or can be. With the Monarchs, the title **This land is your land I This land is my land** ultimately gets a new meaning, and bears witness of humanity's limitations within the spheres of the »bios« and »geos.

**Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung**