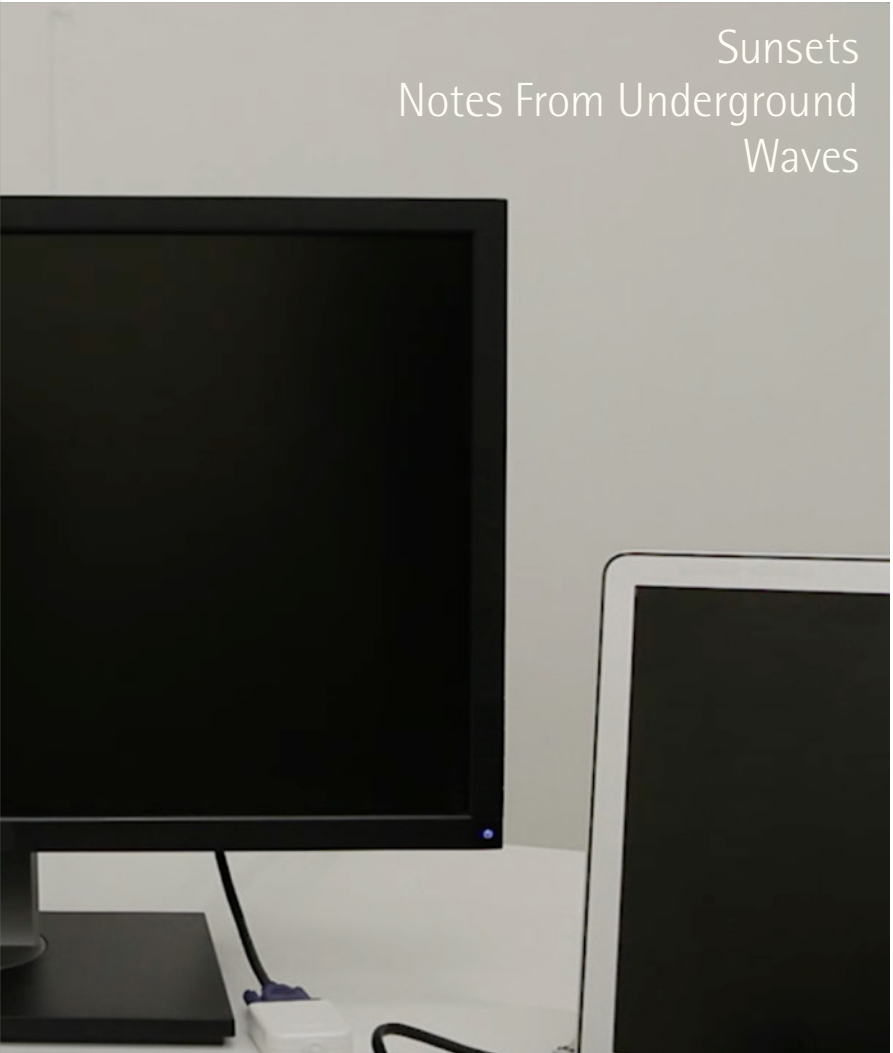


Lisa Tan

Sunsets
Notes From Underground
Waves



Archive Books

Lisa Tan

Sunsets
Notes From Underground
Waves

Archive Books

Sunsets

00:00:00



[typing]
[recorded interview]

Let's see if my computer doesn't crash. I'm doing this in another... browser just in case.

Rilke, in his *Letters to a Young Poet*... uh... replying to one of the... I wonder how you say that in English... it's one of letters but he uses another word... to the young man that wanted to become a writer... if you couldn't write anymore, would you die? The same question I transfer for you.

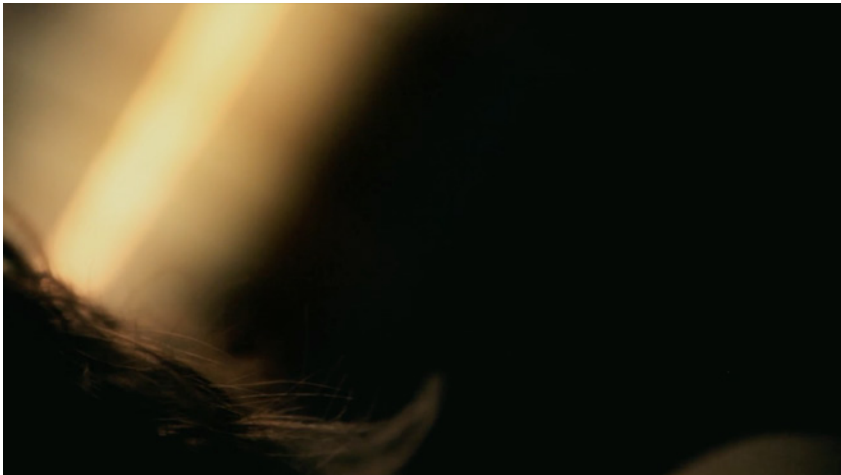
I think that when I write, I am dead.



This period... and then she—uh—he says this period, and then she says, it's very rough, this period between one work and the other one.



And at the same time it's necessary so that there's a certain—um... depletion, no... [translator speaks under her breath in Portuguese and types] deflation of the head... or draining of the head ... so some other thing can be born. If—if it is born... it's—everything is so uncertain.



Um... the guy asks, Clarice, how—how—do you write your works? Is there any specific timetable or schedule?

In general, it's um... or usually... it's uh... early in the morning. These are my favorite hours, the morning hours... of the dawn... no, dawn—dawn... dawn is when it starts, right? You wake up at what time? And she says four-thirty... I wake up.

[translator giggles]

I stay smoking, taking coffee, alone... without any interference... interference.



When I'm writing something, I take notes at whatever time of the day or the night. Things that come up to me. What people call inspiration.

But when I'm in the act of...

[translator speaks under her breath]

Ah. Okay.

I think she's doing the Portuguese version of "concoct"... which I never heard in Portuguese.

[translator gasps] Yes! It's funny... I was trying to discover with my sister if this word existed the other day, 'cause we were using it... but apparently it does. I just discovered a new word.

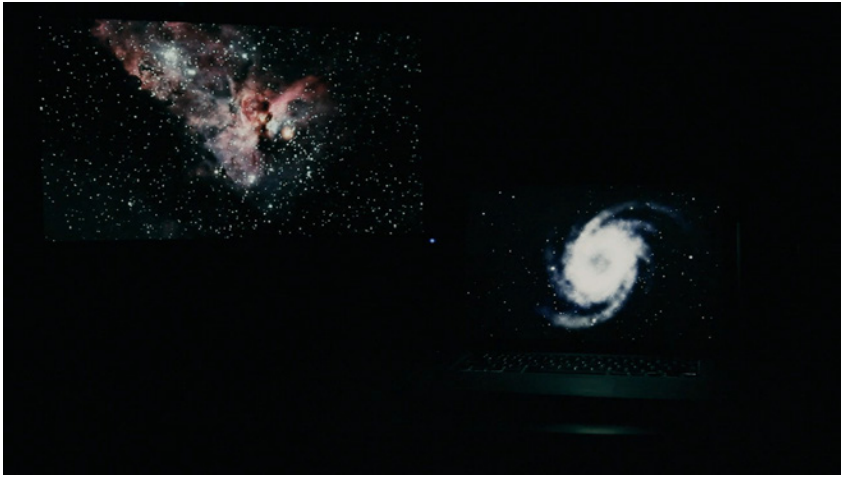


Then at that time, I am forced to work daily.

In several of your different works there's always, I think he says—a natural—but I'm not sure—preferred son... favorite son? Which of those works do you feel more warmth about today?



The egg and the chicken. That is a mystery for me. Something I wrote about a thief... who died with thirteen bullets... when one alone was enough. And that revolted me greatly. I wrote that... whatever was his crime, one bullet would have been enough. The rest was wanting to kill. It was... the translation does "despotism"...



In what measure does the work of Clarice Lispector and the specific case of "Mineirinho"... can alter the order of things?

It doesn't alter anything.
It doesn't alter anything.
It doesn't alter anything.



Because deep down we're not... we don't want to... she says we're not and then switches—we don't want to alter anything... we don't want to alter things—I'm sorry. We are wanting to... [translator speaks a Portuguese word to herself and types] bloom... in one way or another—we want to bloom in one way or another.

00:12:34

[phone ringing]
[chair moving]

Sorry...

Olha Ricardo, não posso falar agora. Eu saio às duas e quarenta e cinco. Não, não, não, eu saio às três e meia. Tá bem, e contigo? Tá bem, três e meia, beijinho.

[chair moving]

In your opinion, what is the role of the Brazilian writer today? [translator giggles] So he says what is the role, and she says... to speak the least possible.





Uh... goes back to the interviewer... your production... occurs frequently?

There are periods of intense production... and there are periods of hiatus... or there are hiatuses... where life seems intolerable.



How do you explain, uh, Clarice Lispector—turns to children's literature?
Is it more—uh—complicated to—for you to communicate with the adult or the child?

When I communicate with the adult, I am—I am in fact communicating with...
The most secret part of myself.
And there... then it's difficult, no?

The adult—is he always solitary? The adult is sad and solitary.



From what moment... according to the writer... does the human being become sad and solitary?

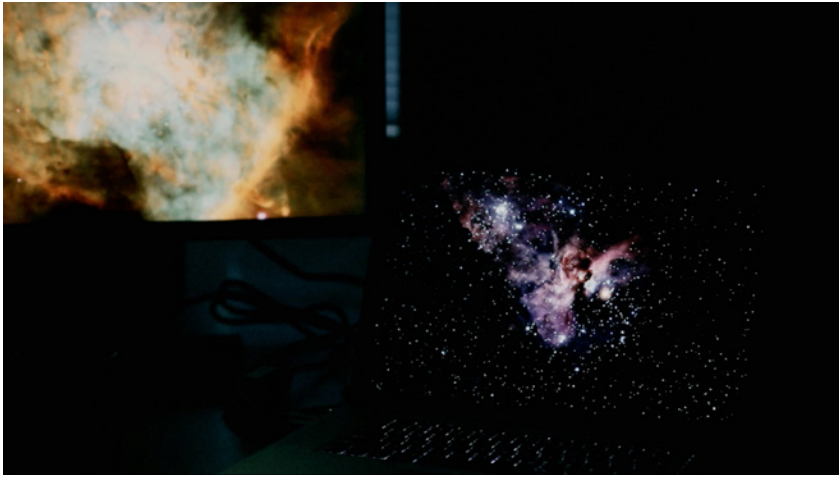
Long pause... and she says, that's—that's a secret. Very long pause... I'm sorry, I'm not going to answer that. At any moment in life... you—you just need a shock. Uh—slightly unexpected... and that happens.



In your formation as a writer, which are those writers that you feel that really influenced you?

I don't know really... because I have mixed up everything. I would read books... romance books for young girls... mixed with... Dostoyevsky. I would choose the books by their titles. I went to read at thirteen... Hermann Hesse... and it was a shock.

And—and then I started to write a... tale that never ended. I ended up... tearing it apart, throwing it away.



Does that still happen that you produce something... and then you tear it?
Tear it like this. [translator tears a piece of paper]
Yeah, I put it aside or I tear it apart—yes, I tear it apart.



Is this a product of a reflection on something, or is it an emotion? And she interrupts and says, it's
anger, it's anger.



With whom?
With myself.

Why Clarice?
I don't know. I'm a bit tired.
Of what?
Of myself.



But aren't you reborn—or renewed—in each new work? Big sigh.
Well now—now I died. Let's see if I—if—if I'll be reborn again. For now I'm dead.



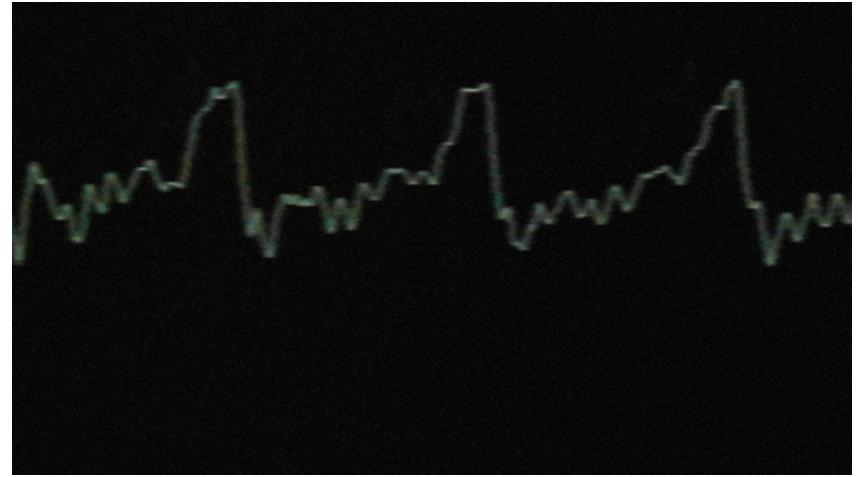
I'm talking about my... I think she says I'm talking about my... tone?
[translator gasps] No! No! No! [translator slaps her hand on a table]
I'm talking from my... tomb. I'm speaking from my tomb.

It's *túmulo* not *tom* [translator simulates the way Clarice Lispector pronounces *túmulo*].

Notes From Underground



[water dripping in a cave]
[voices in a cave]
[sharp, rhythmic clicking]

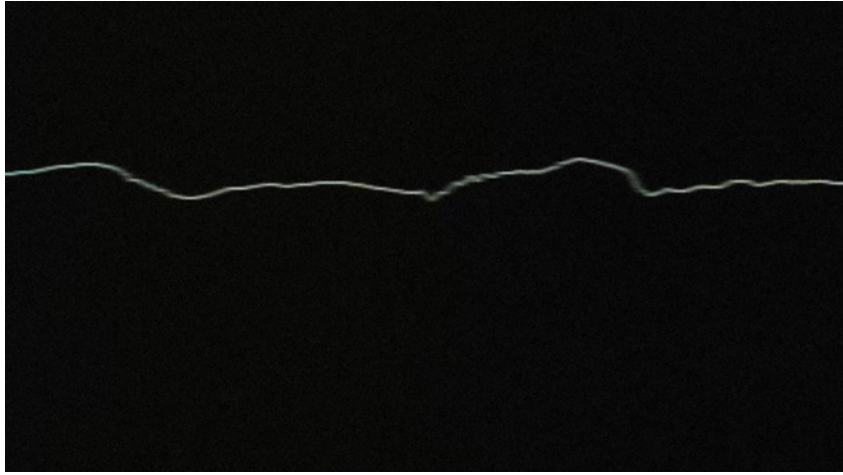


Interviewer: As a critic and essayist yourself, what would you now say is the principal assignment of a critic and essayist? Or should be?

Interviewee: Well—hmm, I—I think, uh... [sigh] Well, to defend the liberty of expression, plurality, diversity, to fight conventional attitudes... established ideologies... to bring people... information and uh... sensibility which would allow them to appreciate and uh... be nourished by more things, because everything is always closing down, so there's always the effort to try to... open it up and to turn people's attention to what is uh... being neglected or underestimated. I prefer to write about things that I like, rather than things that I despise. Uh... but of course, that also is a useful position of the critic to—to tell people this—no, this thing that you—that is admired so much is junk. But that's something that I haven't done.

Interviewer: May I ask you, has your writing in any way made you economically independent?

Interviewee: Well, I—when I was very young...



[subway moving at a fast speed, then coming to a stop]



[escalator]
[unintelligible voice]
[water dripping in a cave]



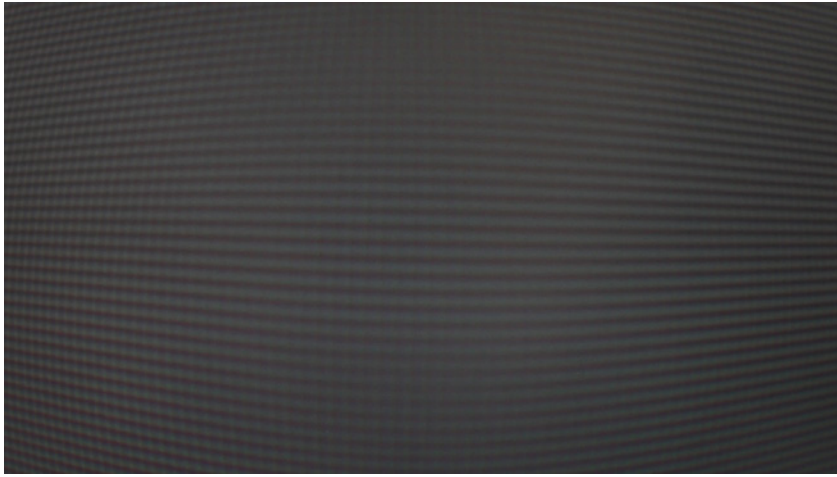


Interviewer: You've been trying several different intellectual and artistic fields, during your career. Is it a relief for you to get off one project and on to another?

Interviewee: Yes, very much so, because it always takes me much longer to—to do anything than I think it's going to. I'm a very slow writer and I rewrite everything many times... and, uh, so I feel very uh... happy when I start something. And then I feel completely enslaved by it when it drags on, and so I'm very glad to finish it and very glad to move on to something that I think is going to be completely different. And even to do things which are not writing. Uh, already within writing, well, I do both fiction and essays... um. And then I have also... been very interested in the cinema. I've made three films, two of them here in Sweden. And, um... now I'm—I've started directing in the theater. So it's even good to stop writing sometimes.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

00:06:10

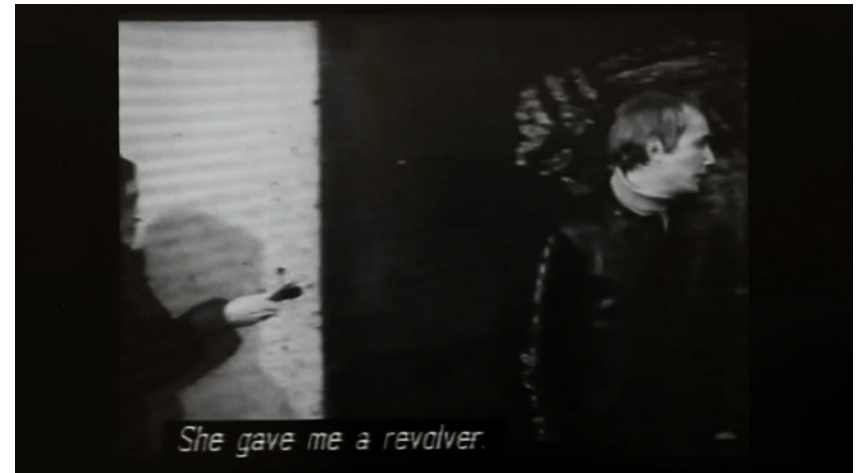
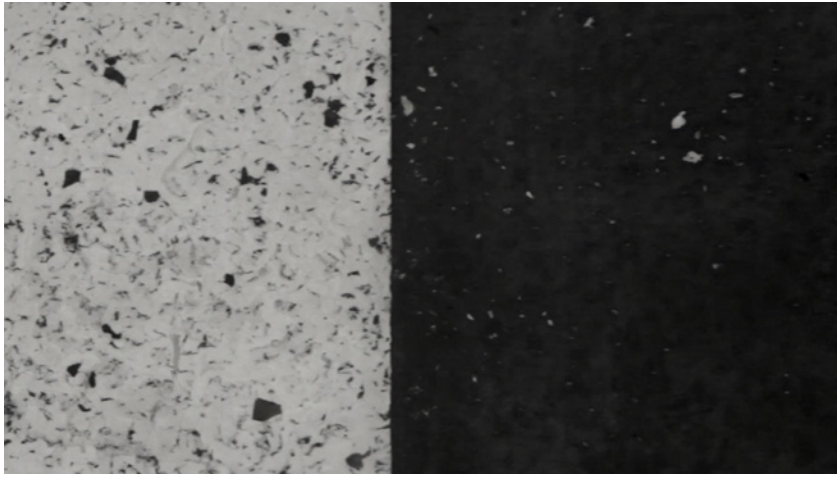


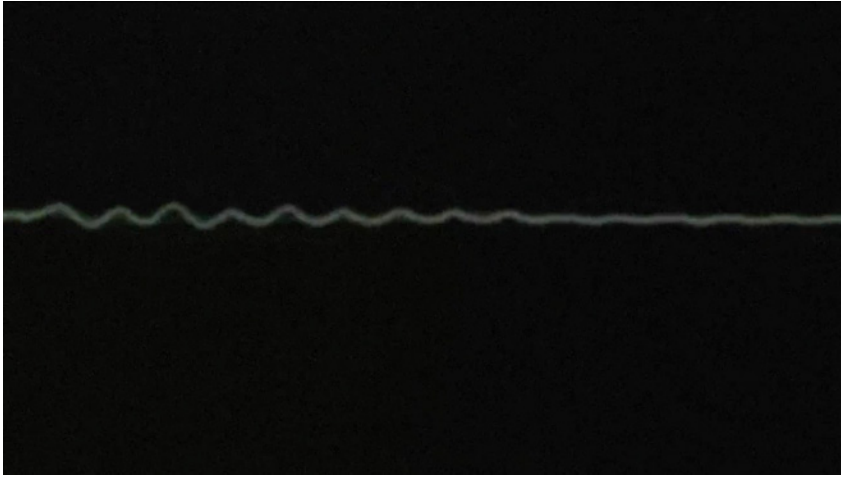
[water dripping in a cave]
[studio interior]
[camera shutter]
[walking on hard floor]
[sharp, rhythmic clicking]
[subway station interior]



Interviewee: ...human beings are capable of unimaginable acts of cruelty. And that one must never forget that. They are capable of other things as well, but they are also capable of unimaginable cruelty and wickedness. And that is the beginning, you might say, of moral adulthood.

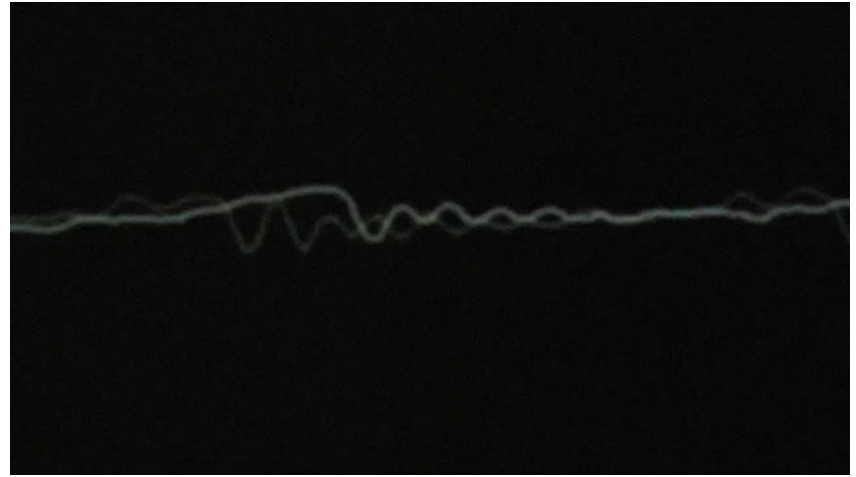
One of the things that drives me nuts, is when people are constantly being surprised by atrocities—saying how can this happen? How—how could people do this to... each other? Ah well, we surely have enough knowledge—or should—if we are morally and psychologically adults—enough knowledge to know that human beings are capable of this. And that is the—that should be at the center of our sense of what it is to be a human being. To understand that—that that possibility—that possibility exists. In most people. I mean, I might say...





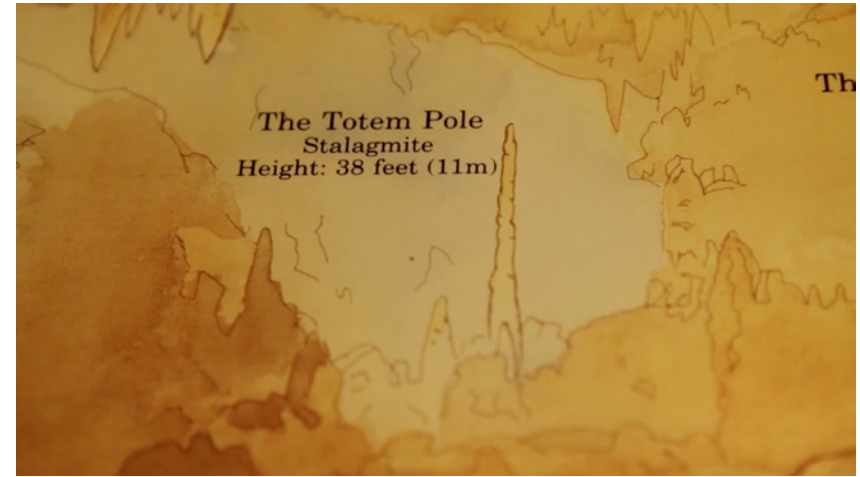
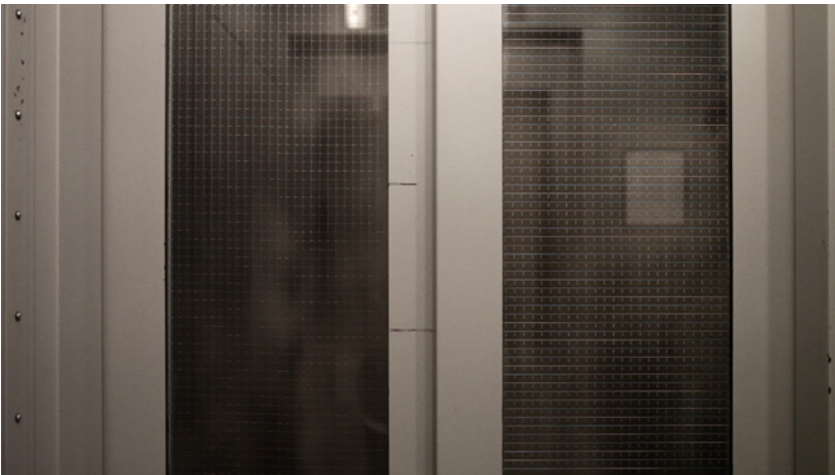
[studio interior]
[recorded interview, unintelligible]
[camera shutter]
[mouse clicks]
[walking on hard floor]

Male voice: It's pretty weird, no? And that's your box... I guess.
Here is nothing... maybe it's up in the storage. Huh...
I will bring this up and tie them up on the shelves.
Female voice: I feel like I saw the speakers somewhere... when you first moved out of your studio.
They're not in this one?



[mouse click]

Male voice: Nope. I went all the way...



Male voice: What's in this?

Female voice: That's mine.

Male voice: It's yours?

Female voice: Yeah. What?

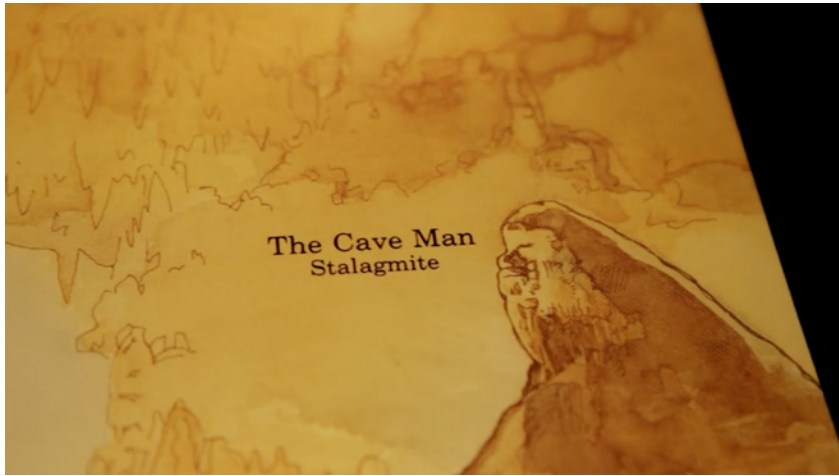
Male voice: The only box which says my name on it?

Female voice: No—this is yours—this is yours. I thought you were talking about the crate.

Male voice: That's from... one of my installations. Ah—whatever. I will bring up this.

Can you lock the door after me?

Female voice: Mm—hmm...



[studio interior]

[music with solo female voice]

[elevator interior]

Elevator attendant: Takes about one minute one way or the other. You will feel some pressure in your ears. Did you enjoy the cave?

Male voice: Yeah. Beautiful.

Elevator attendant: Where you folks from?

Male voice: I'm from Sweden. Stockholm.

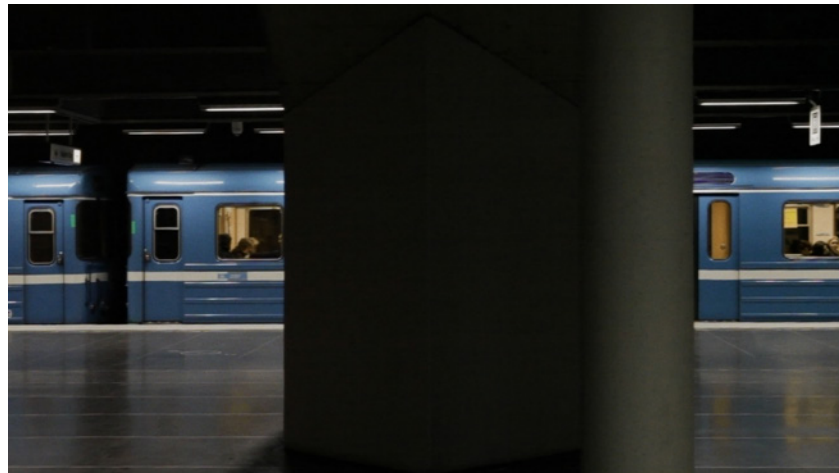
Female voice: I live in Stockholm. But I grew up in this area.

Elevator attendant: Really?

Female voice: Yeah. I used to come here... as a child with my family, but I haven't been back in twenty years, at least. Wasn't there a restaurant at the bottom of the cave?

Elevator attendant: Yeah, they moved the restaurant back a little further and reduced the size.

Um, two reasons. They—they wanted—wanted to mitigate the uh, the, um...

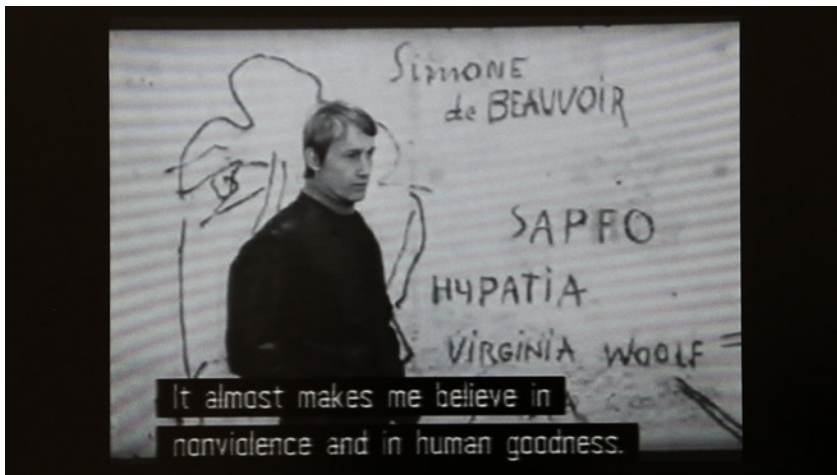
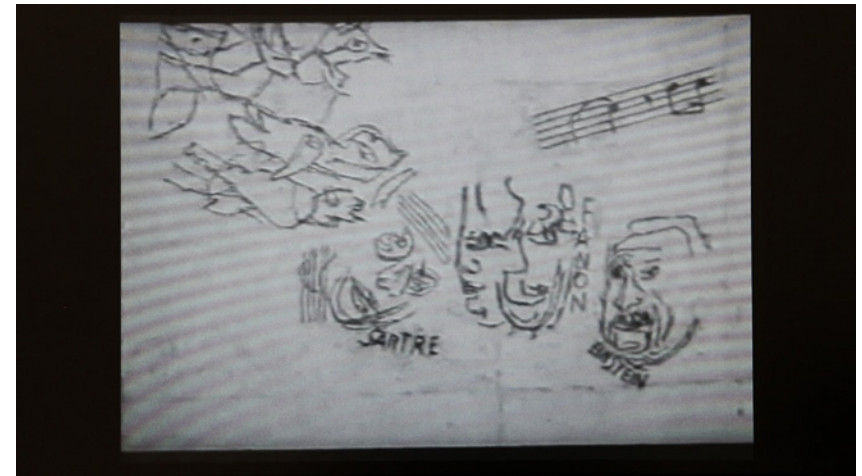
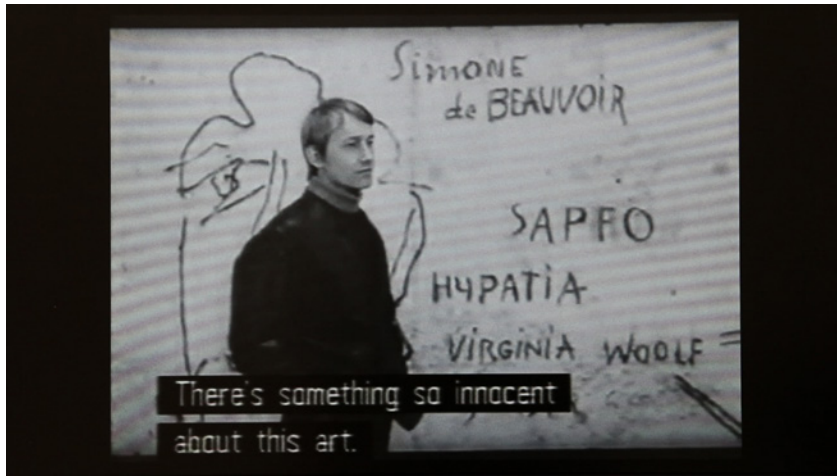


[subway station interior, train arriving]

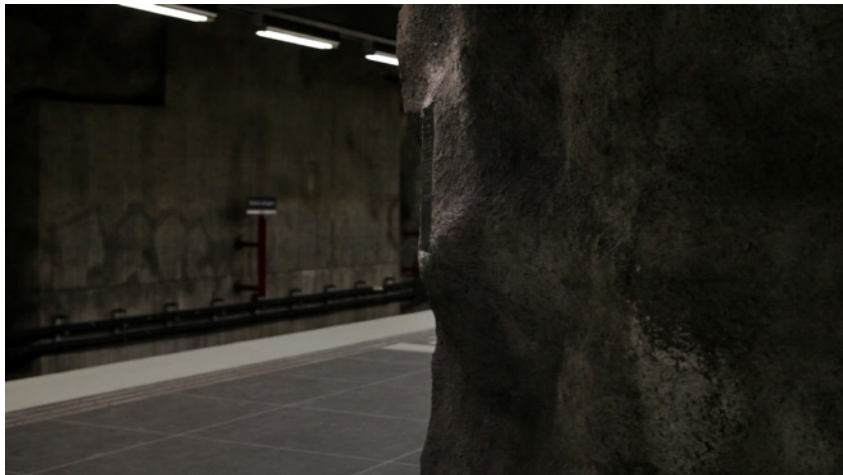
[studio interior]

Interviewee: I mean I might say—this is very, very crude, that—maybe ten percent of people... in the world are—are really cruel and really wicked. And—and it takes absolutely nothing to unleash that. And about ten percent of people in the world, are truly good and truly kind and truly generous. And even at the cost of their lives are incapable of committing a truly wicked or atrocious attack. And then the other eighty percent can go either way. So, we have the two extremes, there are people that I think under no incentives, could ever kill or torture another human being... and another ten percent will do it at the drop of a hat. And the other eighty percent—that's most of us—we'll either way, if encouraged, if—if it's valid. If we're told it's patriotic.

[scene from *Duet for Cannibals*]



[sharp, rhythmic clicking]



[sharp, rhythmic clicking]
[water dripping in a cave]



[elevator interior]



[camera shutter]

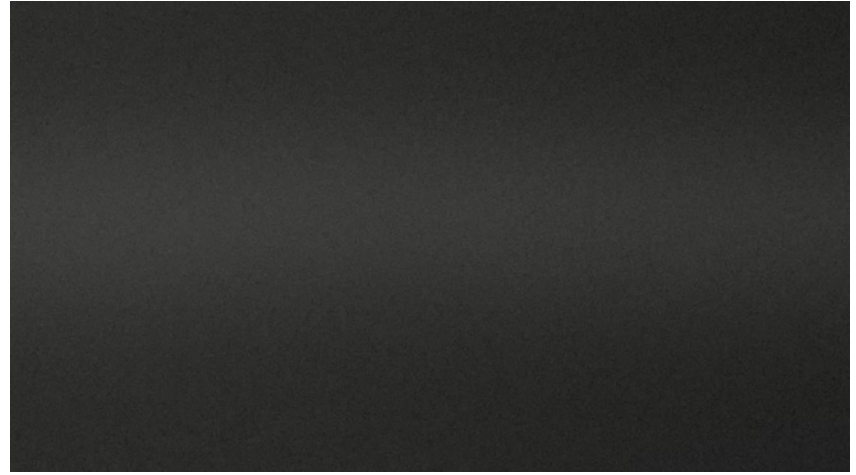
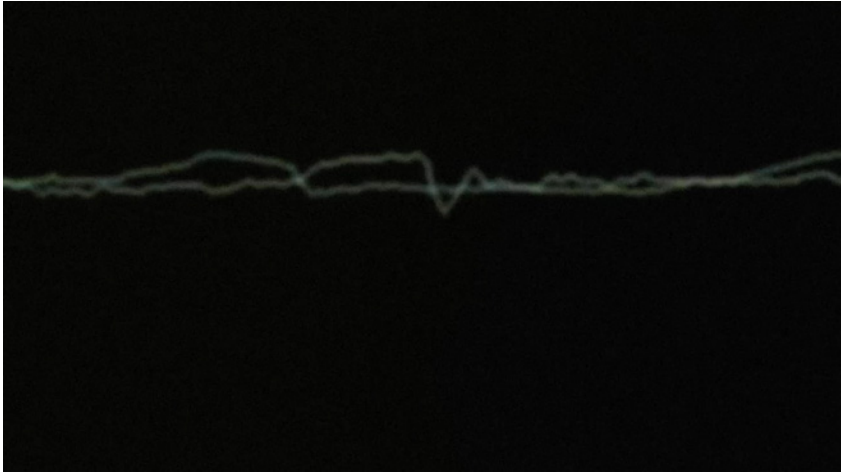
Interviewer: Well, given that caller's pessimism a—a viewer in New Fairfield, Connecticut, emails this question: "The horrific is pictured all around us. How can a person direct their creativity to envision a new and joyous future?"



Interviewee: Well... I think that you don't necessarily link creativity and vision of a joyous future.
[camera shutter]

[water dripping in a cave]

00:14:45



[birds chirping]
[cave interior]
[playful voices]
[studio interior]
[recorded interview, unintelligible]



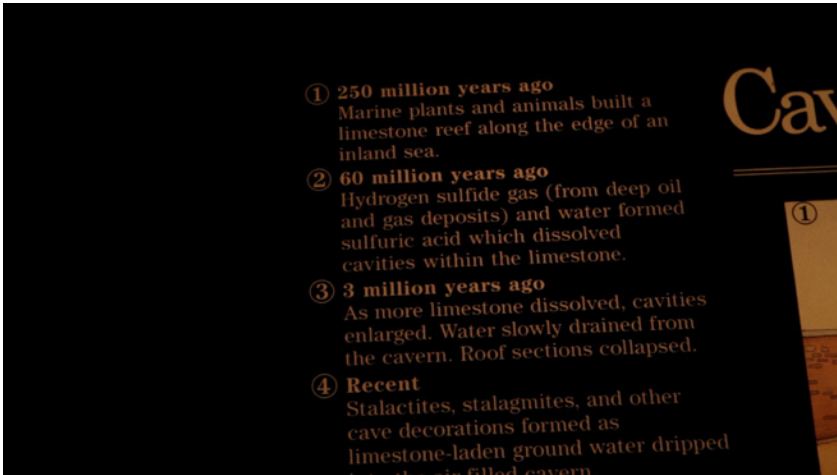
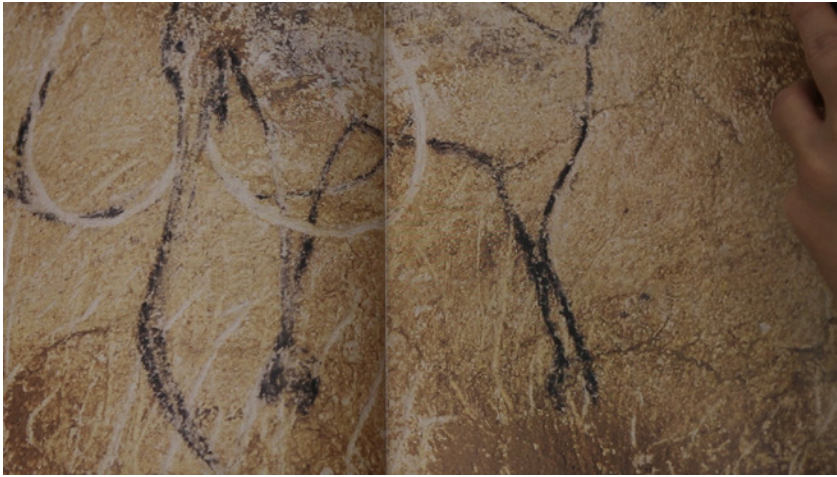
[studio interior]
[inkjet printer]
[turning pages]



Interviewer: New York City. Good afternoon.

Caller with question: Hi, um, yeah, thank you, um... when we talk of civilization and the future, but what about civilization and the past? You look at Iraq and it's one of the oldest... well, not the country, but the people are living on the land of one of the oldest civilizations, you think of the Mesopotamians and I'm not sure whoever else was in that area.

Interviewee: Yes. Sure.



Caller with question: And, um... why—and also you talk about the Northwest and how people say hello and they acknowledge your—your family...

Interviewee: Southwest.

Caller with question: You know that if you go to Iraq, even as an American, somebody would invite you into their home and be extremely hospitable. Why is that we do not—why is it that so many of us do not see others as complex human beings?

Interviewee: Well, you know, I think it's even—I agree entirely with what you've said, but I think it's even worse.

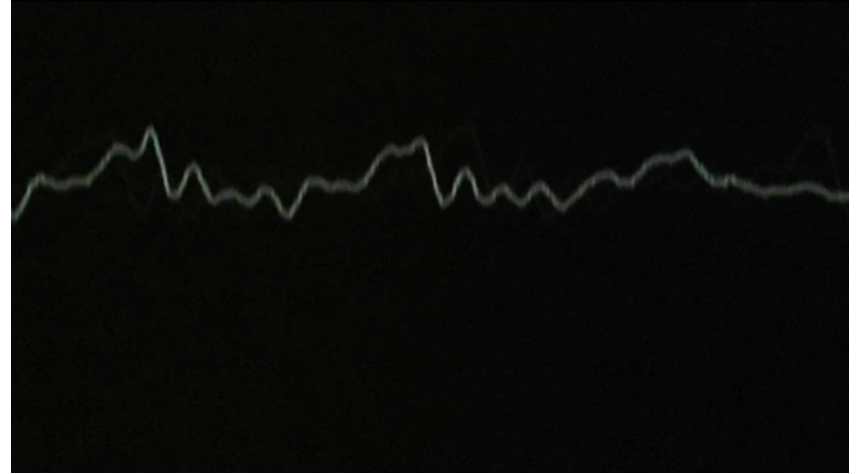
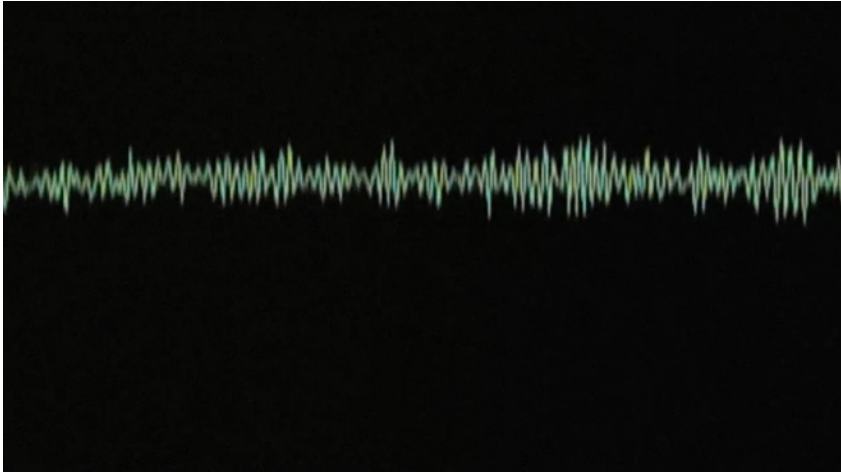


[subway interior]
[talking]



Interviewer: You said someplace that writing fiction is more dangerous than writing essays. What exactly do you mean by that?

00:20:04



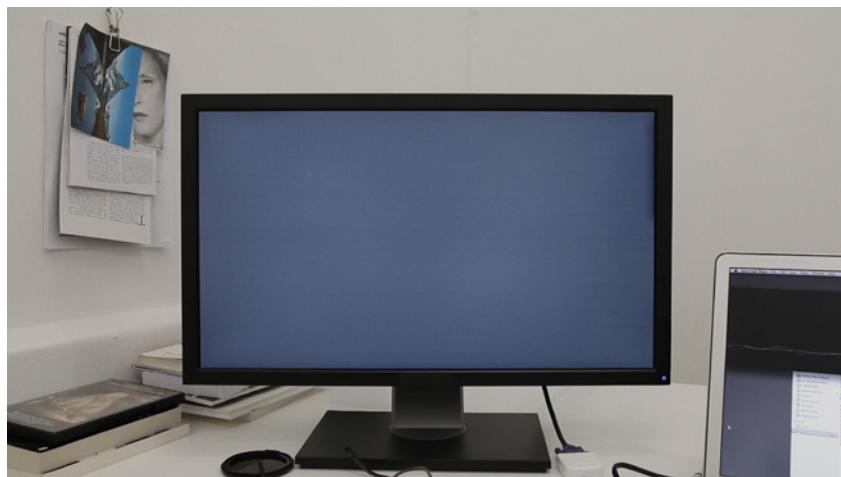
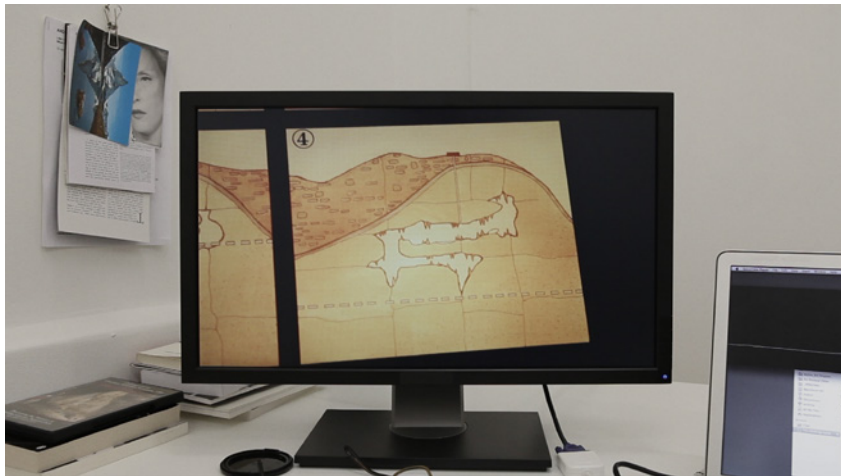
Interviewee: Well, because uh... because you are responsible only to your own imagination. And you... explore feelings which are... painful. Um, that... and uh... you may discover things you don't want to discover and experience... even hallucinatory states which—which seem dangerous. I think they are. It's upsetting and it's exhilarating, you know. Whereas, well, writing essays is something more objective. You say to yourself, is it true, is it clear? For me, for instance, I—I know the difference, because I—I write fiction in longhand and I write essays on the typewriter.

[subway coming to a stop]

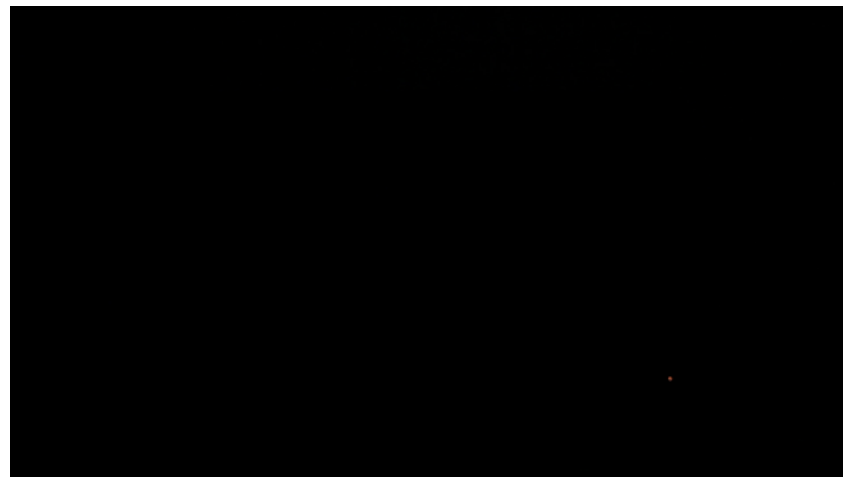
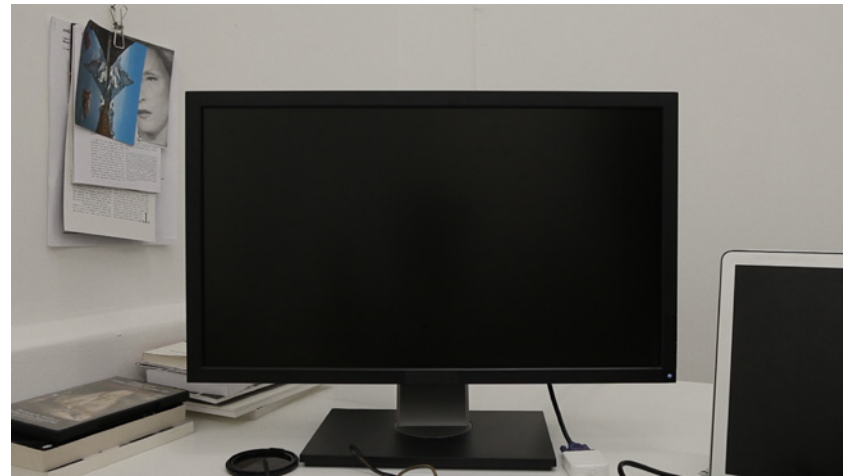


[cave interior]

Interviewee: Everything. Then I won't have seen everything before it disappears.
Everywhere. I've been everywhere. I haven't been everywhere, but it's on my list.
Land's end. But there's water, O my heart. And salt on my tongue.
The end of the world. This is not the end of the world.

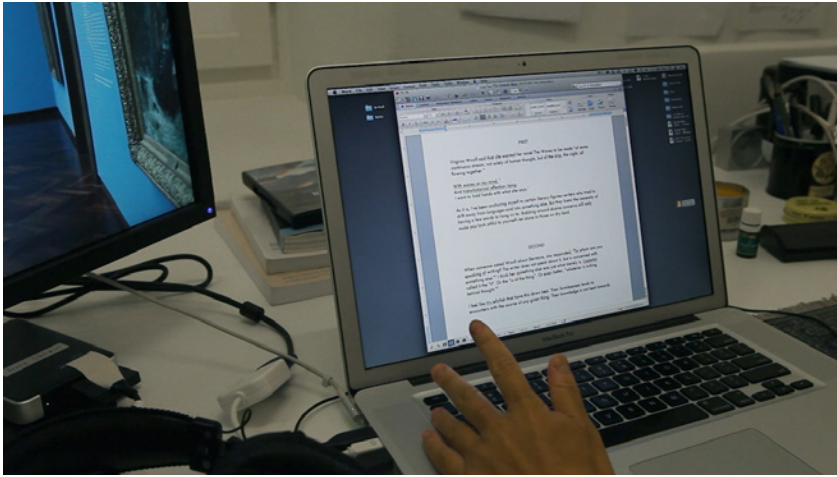


[studio interior]
 [recorded interview, unintelligible]
 [mouse clicks]
 [handling keys]
 [opening and closing door]
 [street noise]



[locking door]

00:00:00



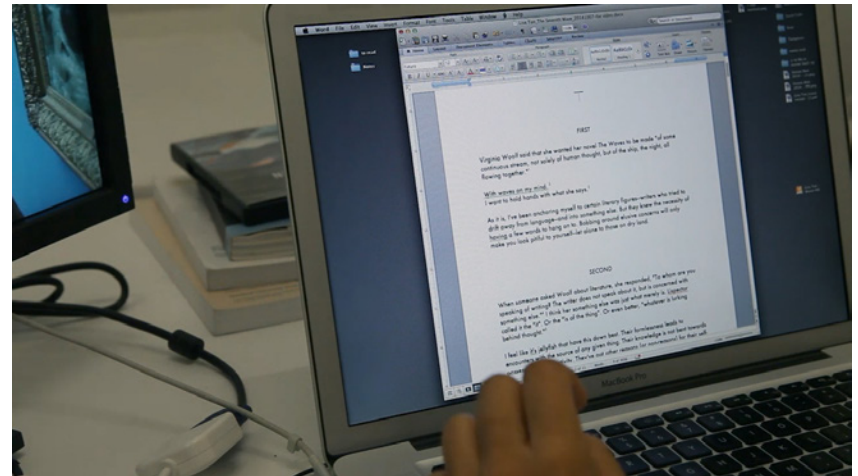
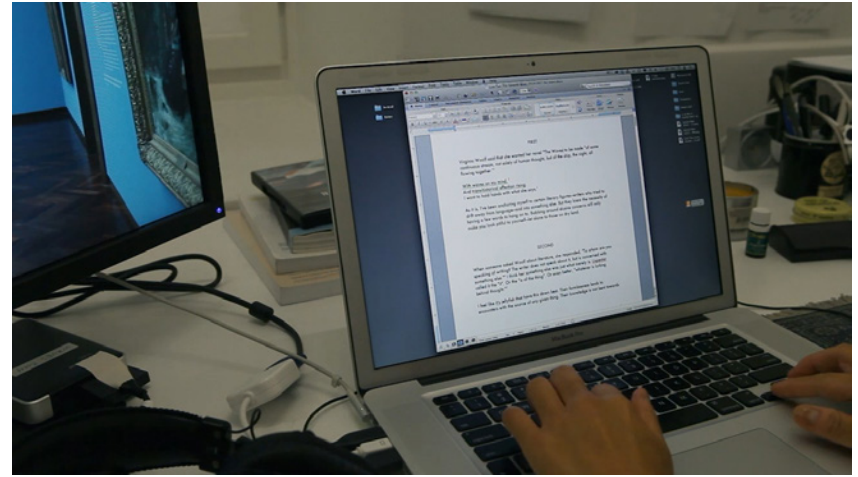
[typing]
[mouse clicks, scrolling]

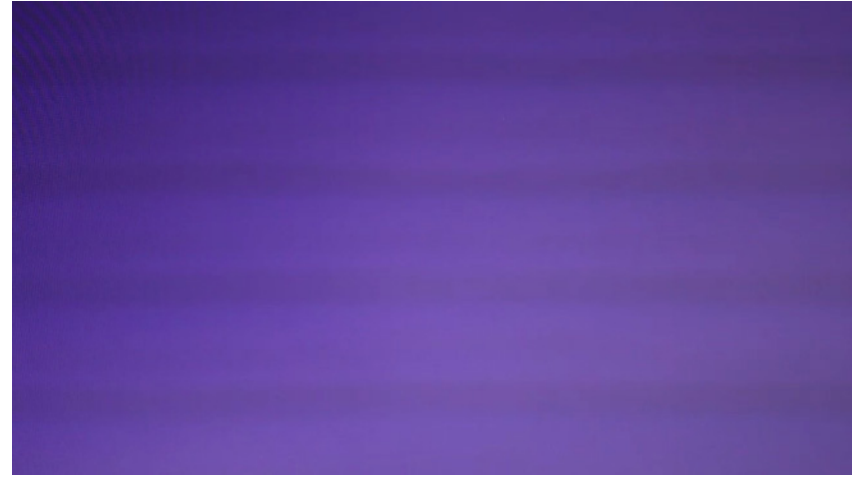
Pro—vis—ion—al.
Provisional.

First.

Virginia Woolf said that she wanted her novel *The Waves...* *The Waves...* to be made "of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night, all flowing together." With waves on my mind... and trans-historical affection rising—with waves on my mind, I want to hold hands with what she says.

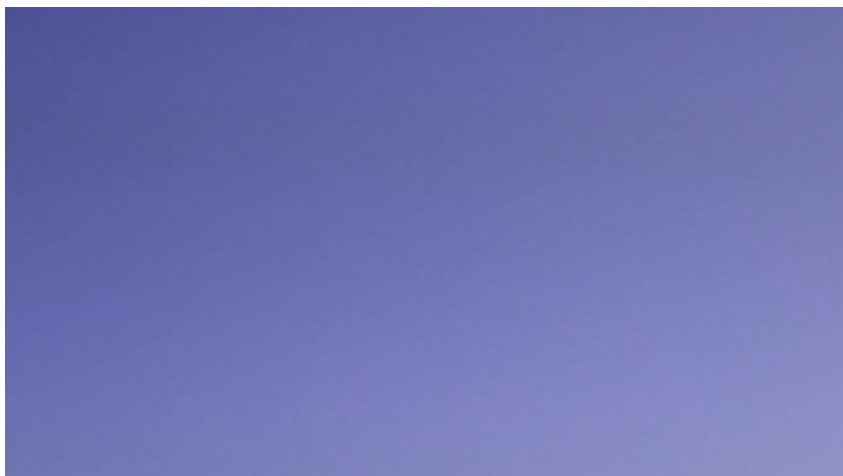
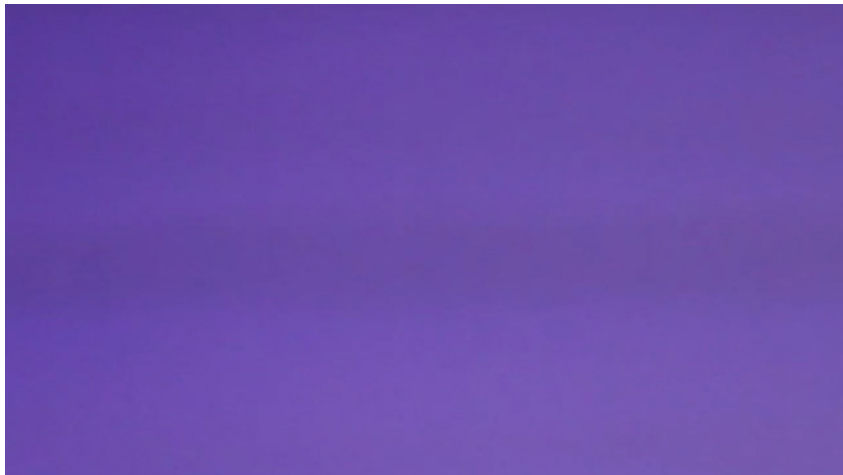
As it is, I've been anchoring myself to certain literary figures, writers who tried to drift away from language and into *something else*. But they knew the necessity of having a few words to hang on to. Bobbing around elusive concerns [mouse click] will only make you look pitiful to yourself, let alone to those on dry land.





Virginia Woolf said that she wanted her novel *The Waves* to be made "of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night, all flowing together." With waves on my mind, I want to hold hands with what she says.

As it is, I've been anchoring myself to certain literary figures, writers who tried to drift away from language and into *something else*. But they knew the necessity of having a few words to hang on to. Bobbing around elusive concerns will only make you look pitiful to yourself, let alone to those on dry land.



Female voice 1: He said that he said—and I've tried to find it—I can't find it. Um. That Baudelaire said, if I want to write a poem about—poem about the sea, I take a bath.

Female voice 2: Ha. Wow. So—he just—it's immersion in the element to just evoke it. It's about evocation.

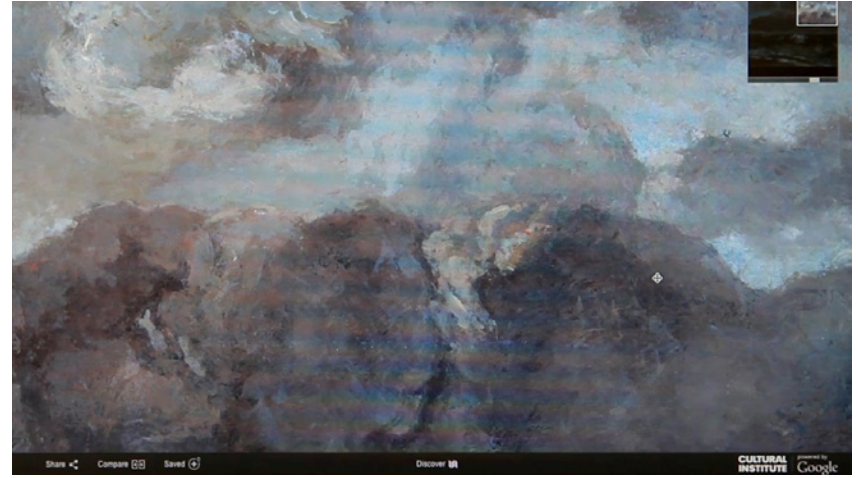
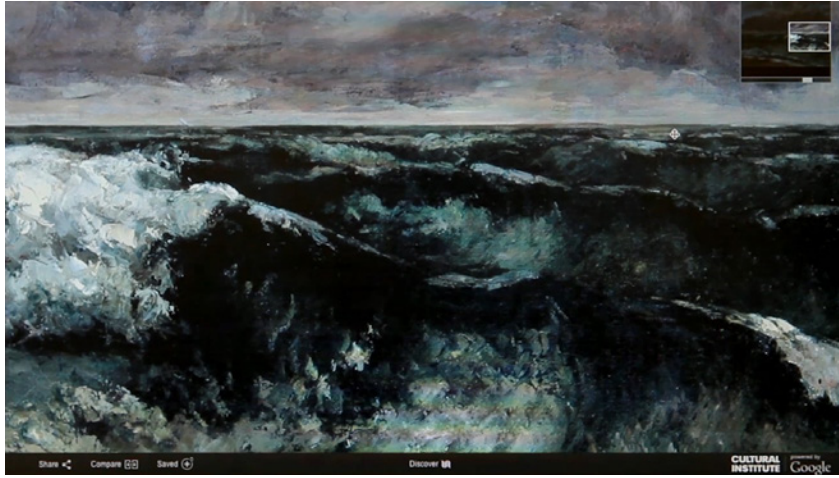


Female voice 1: Yeah... well, that he doesn't need to travel...

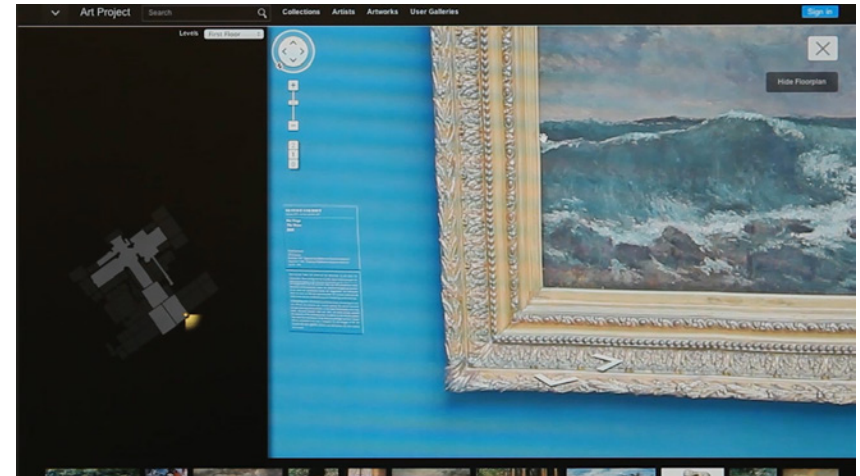
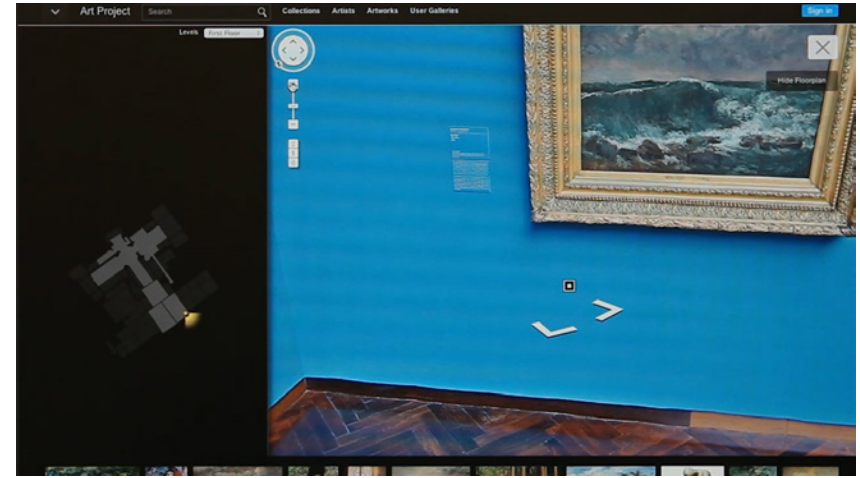
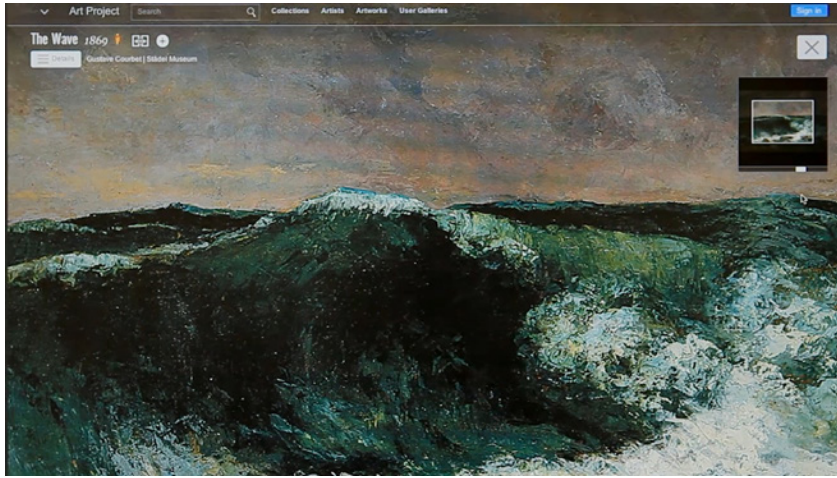
Female voice 2: Right. He can do it. Many—many can't. He can do it. It reminds I had a friend... many years ago in Holland, I was living in the north of Holland... in Groningen. And, um, this one friend of mine...

[airplane interior]
[muffled conversation]

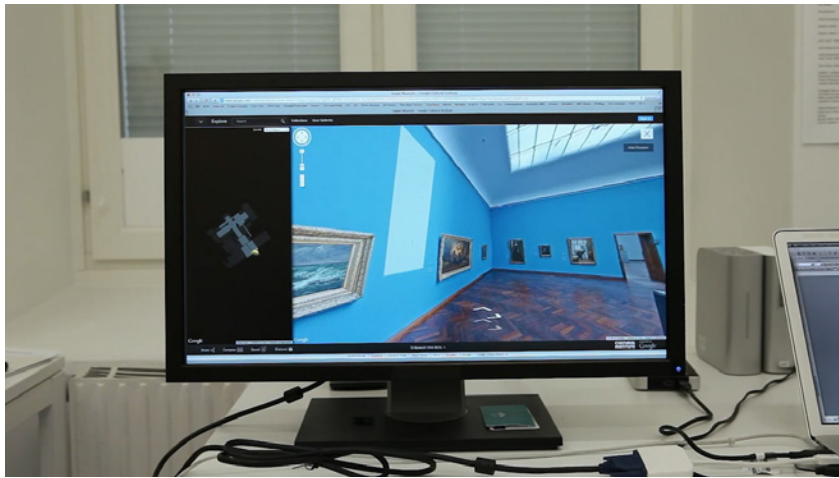




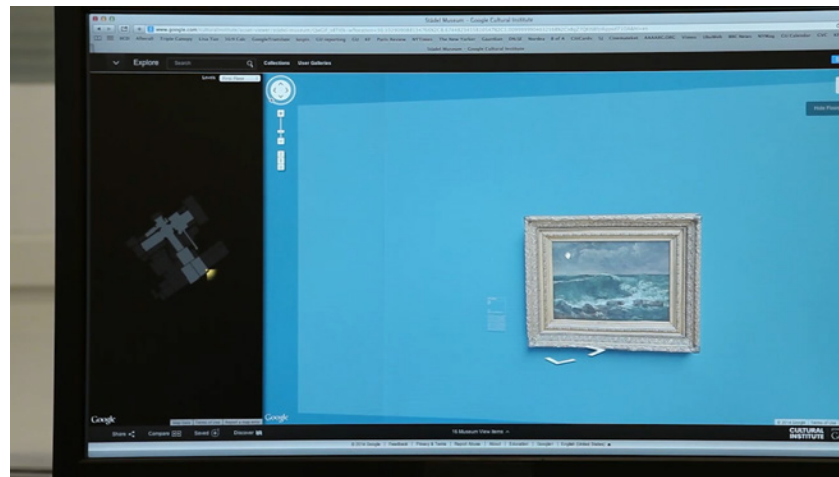
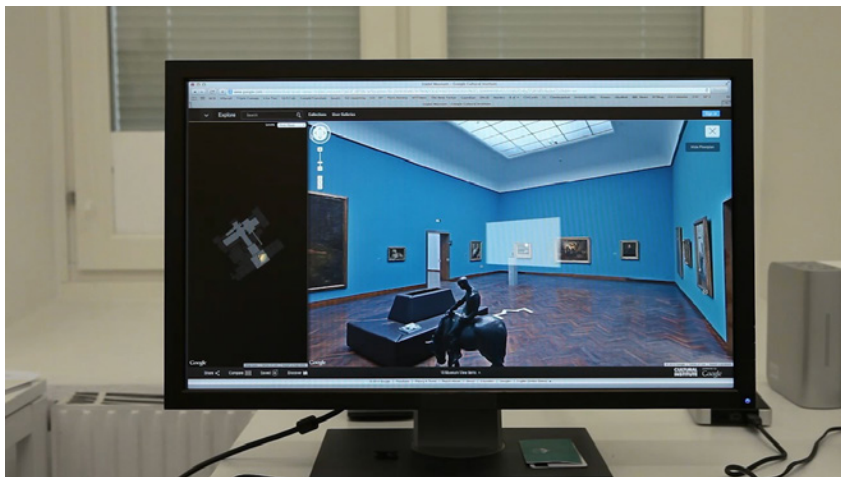
[airplane interior]



I've anchored the word "correspondence." I use it as a term for strange but sisterly agreements between places, images, sounds, and moments—in my own life, and in observing the lives of other people and other things, other phenomena. But correspondence can also mean letter-writing. That's probably why I like it. It's an interaction with something, somewhere, where you are not.



When posting a letter, I call up instant mental images for the route I think it'll travel. With emails—or digital phone calls or web searches—I also feel around for the intervening spaces. But in those cases—which are, of course, far more frequent—mapping the distances becomes one of geometric abstraction, and I just don't get it. For example, when I'm in my studio in Sweden—talking on Skype with a friend in the States—I picture the expanse of ocean between where I am now and where I am from. But my thoughts quickly triangulate from there—perhaps to a satellite—then to transoceanic cables—and finally to a server housed in some uninspired building sitting sixty degrees north of the equator.



Whatever I see on my screen has cycled through data centers. Cooled by water from rivers and from oceans. Outside of Helsinki, the icy Baltic Sea keeps Google's northern European servers from overheating. The energy required is so significant and so costly over time that companies with similar needs have been gravitating to what are for them hydro-desirous zones. It's from this line of thought that I start to find an aesthetic and a spatial relationship for grasping the prodigious movement of data and information as a material force like sunlight itself. And it's the sun that creates wind and wind that forms waves—and waves, that time and again, transform the places where sea meets land.



[refrigeration system]
[airplane interior]

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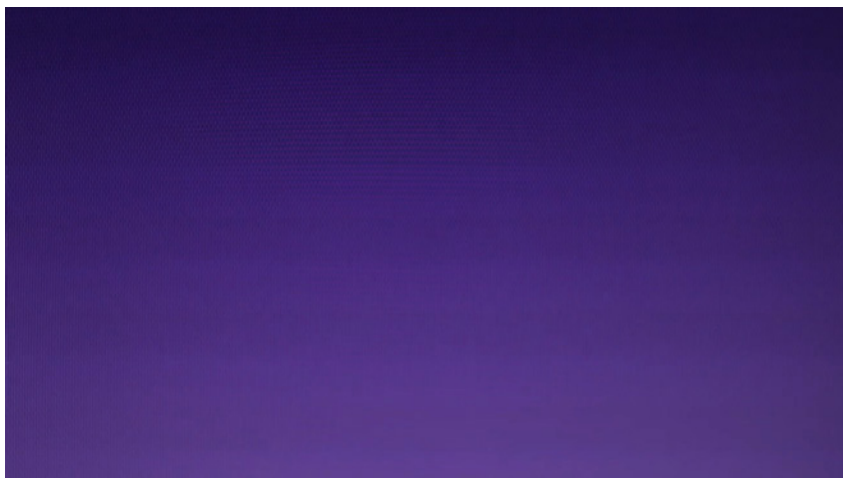
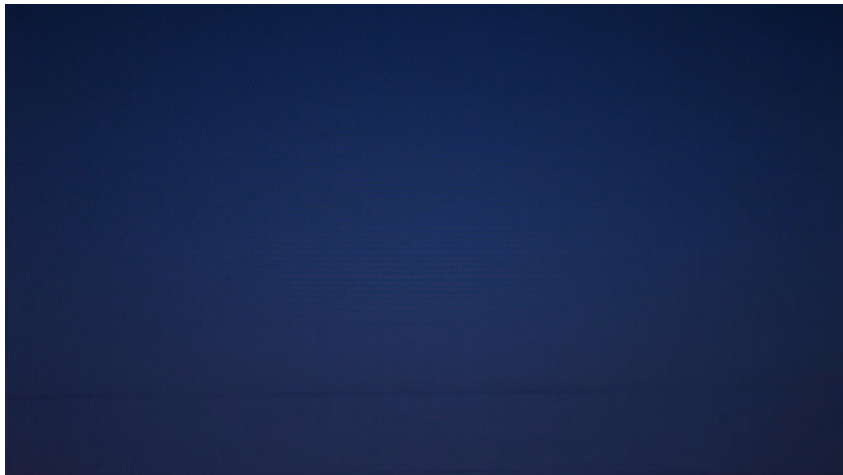


[refrigerator compressor starting]
[airplane interior]

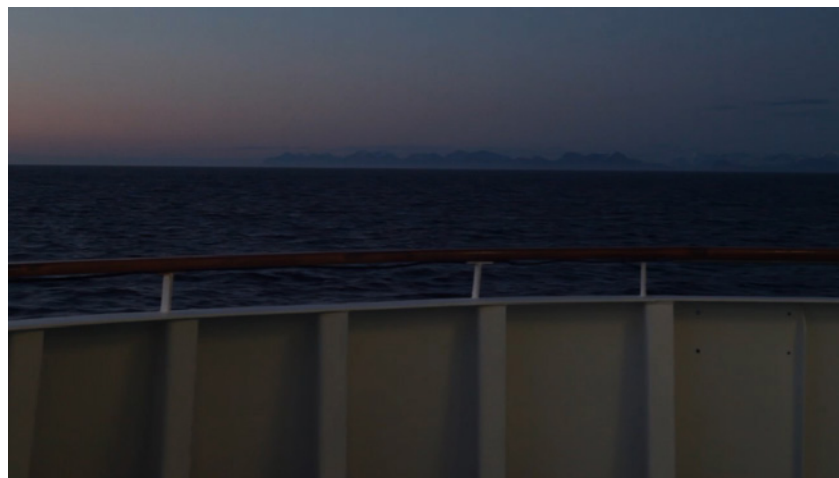


When someone asked Woolf about literature, she responded, "To whom are you speaking of writing? The writer does not speak about it, but is concerned with something else." I think her "something else" was just what merely is. Lispector called it the "it." Or the "is of the thing." Or even better, "whatever is lurking behind thought."

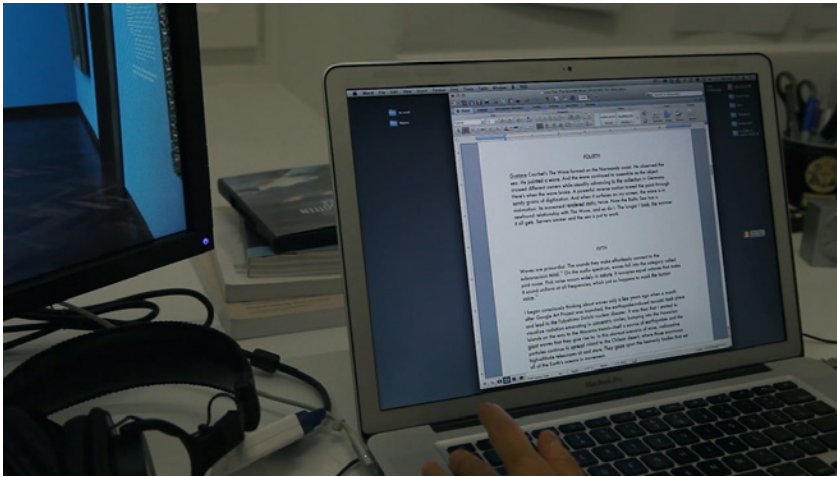
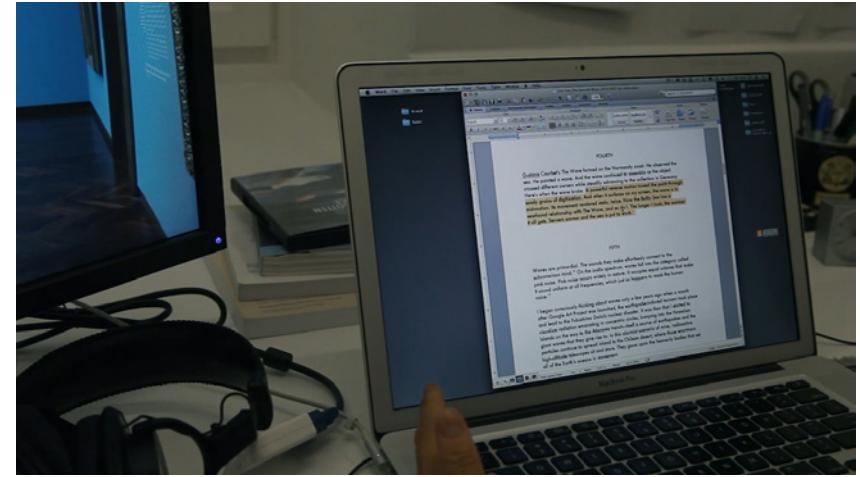
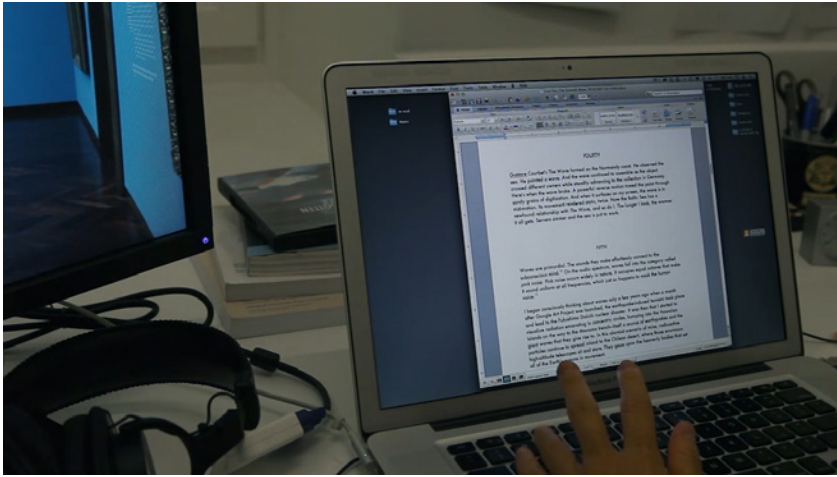
I feel like it's jellyfish that have this down best. Their formlessness leads to encounters with the source of any given thing. Their knowledge is not bent towards possession or productivity. They've got other reasons (or non-reasons) for their self-absorption. A recent pop-science article reported on an invisible jellyfish that "lives most of its life transparently, appearing in full only when the risks that come with invisibility are too great." Now doesn't that sound like *the* most profound ability there is: to be alive yet nearly imperceptible?



Speaking of limits, philosophers have said that the limit is comprised of affects—and that even though they are tricky to fully describe, it's only language that can keep their something-elseness afloat long enough for us to see what we can't describe.



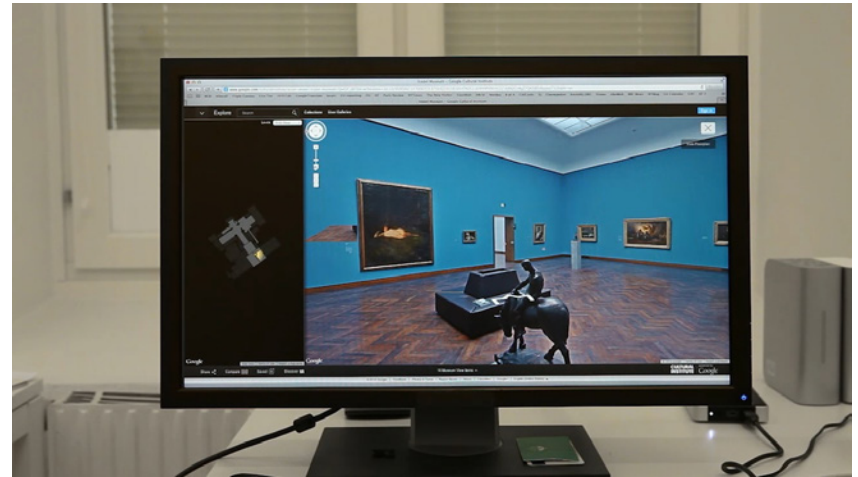
[airplane interior]
[typing]



[typing]
[mouse click, scrolling]

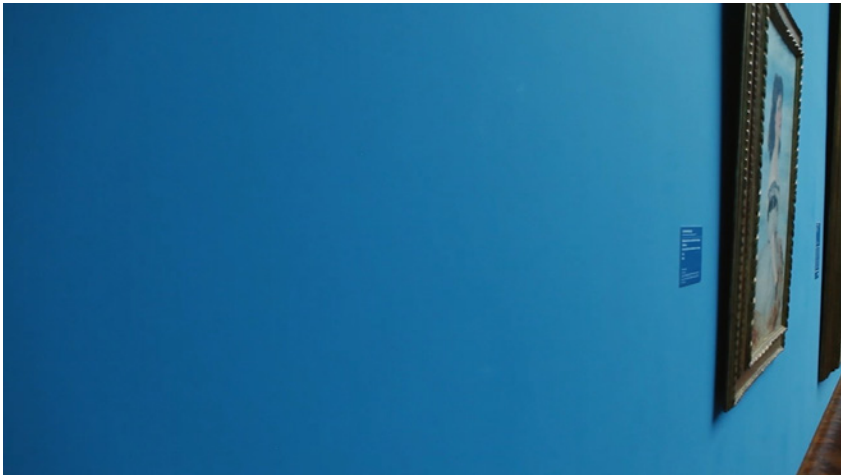
Gustave Courbet's *The Wave*... *The Wave*.

Gustave Courbet's *The Wave* formed on the Normandy coast. He observed the sea. He painted a wave. And the wave continued to assemble as the object crossed different owners while steadily advancing to the collection in Germany. [mouse click] Here's where the wave broke—here's when the wave broke—here's where? No—here's when the wave broke. A powerful reverse motion towed the paint through sandy grains of digitization. And when it surfaces on my screen, the wave is in mid-motion. Its movement rendered static, twice. Now the Baltic Sea has a newfound relationship with *The Wave*, and so do I. The longer I look, the warmer it all gets. Servers simmer, and the sea is put to work. [mouse click]



[typing]

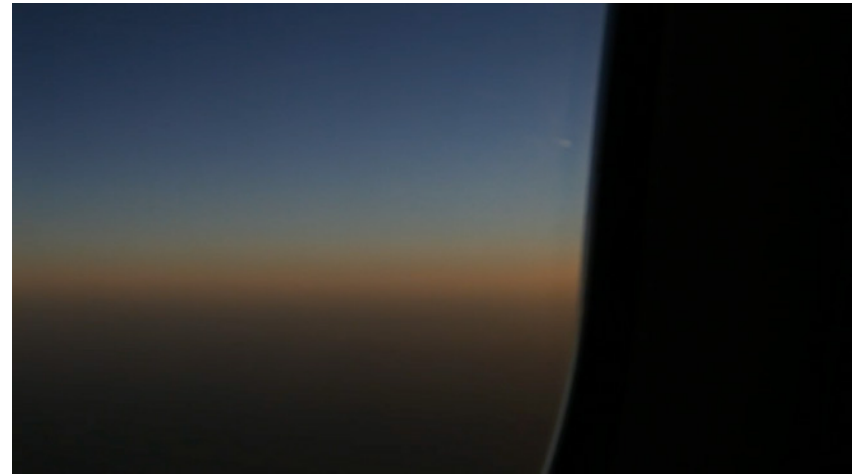
Not—the servers simmer... *the* servers simmer... The longer I look, the warmer it all gets. The servers simmer and the sea is put to work. Um, no... servers simmer—servers heat up? Servers... servers...



[airplane interior]

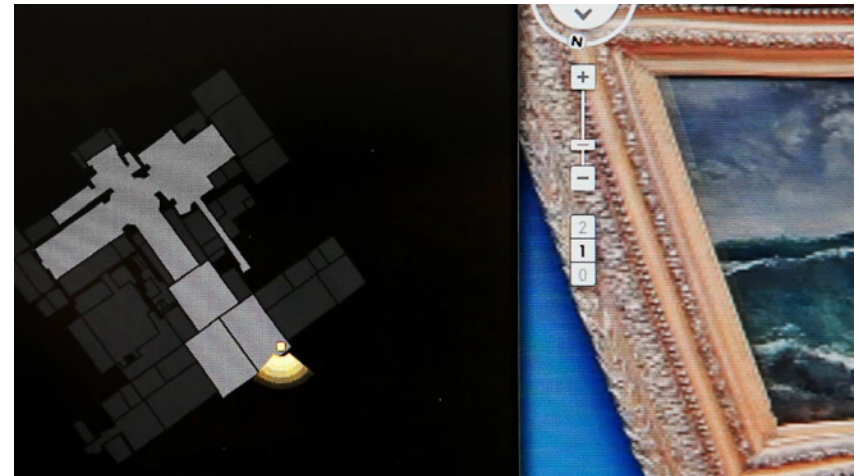
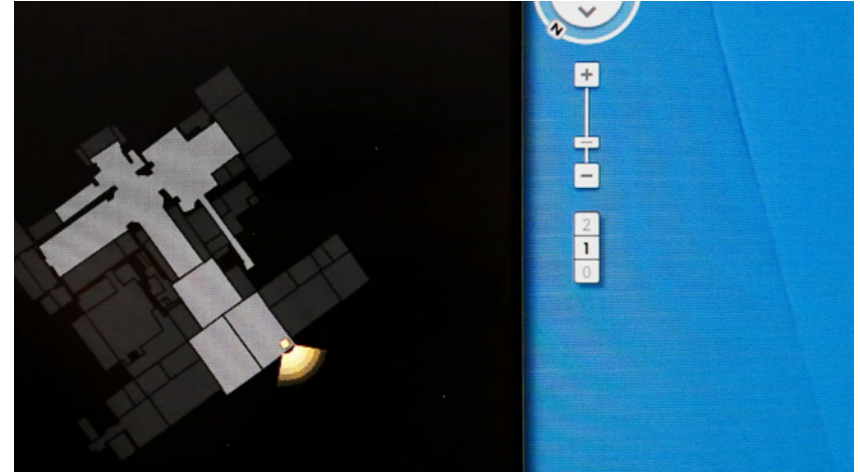


Waves are primordial. The sounds they make effortlessly connect to the subconscious mind. On the audio spectrum, waves fall into the category called pink noise. Pink noise occurs widely in nature. It occupies equal octaves that make it sound uniform at all frequencies, which just so happens to mask the human voice.



I began consciously thinking about waves only a few years ago, when, a month after Google Art Project was launched, the earthquake-induced tsunami took place and led to the Fukushima disaster. It was then that I started to visualize radiation emanating in concentric circles, bumping into the Hawaiian Islands on the way to the Atacama Trench—itsself a source of earthquakes and the giant waves that they give rise to. In this alarmist scenario of mine, radioactive particles continue to spread inland to the Chilean desert, where those enormous high-altitude telescopes sit and stare. They gaze upon the heavenly bodies that set all of the Earth's oceans in movement.

But it doesn't really work that way. The ocean is not contained in a bathtub. There are currents, tidal forces, and downward movements that take water from one place to another in complex ways. Yet the Earth has never fussed over our increasing knowledge of its innermost workings—or of each other, for that matter. It will just go on with or without us, beyond thought.



[airplane interior]
[waves breaking]

Female voice: Yeah, no, I don't see you in the frame. I see the flashlight.
Yeah... just try to light that little, uh... where the rock meets the—sand.

Male voice: Here?

Female voice: Yeah.

Try to get the wave... it's really nice.

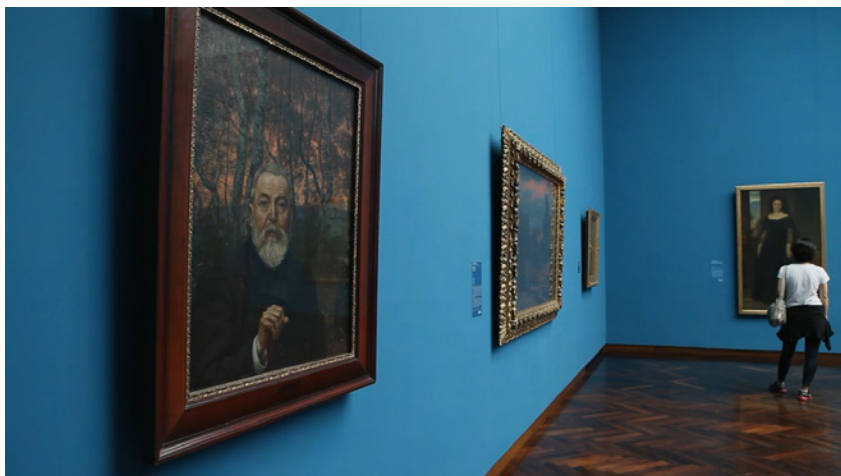
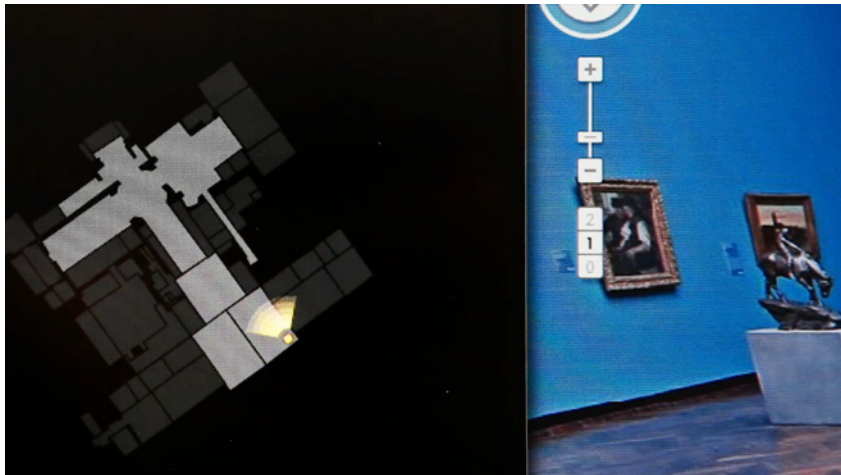
Male voice: I don't reach longer than that...

Female voice: Okay.

Male voice: [unintelligible]

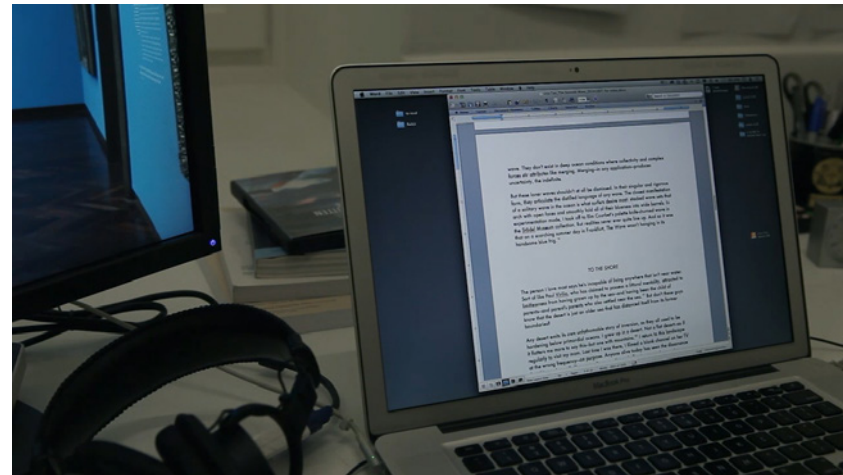
Female voice: Yeah... okay, this one and then we can probably just... call it a night.

Male voice: I can't hear what you're saying...



[waves breaking]
 [museum interior]
 [tour guide speaking in German]

...in the Städel Museum—in the Städel Museum collection... [typing]



[mouse click]

But realities never ever quite line up. And so it was that on a scorching summer day in Frankfurt... [mouse click] um... that on a summer day in Frankfurt. But realities never ever quite line up. And so it was that on a summer day in Frankfurt, *The Wave* wasn't hanging in its handsome blue fridge. [mouse click]

[scrolling]

To the shore. [mouse click]



The person I love most says he's incapable of living anywhere that isn't near water. Sort of like Paul Virilio, who has claimed to possess a "littoral mentality," attracted to limitlessness from having grown up by the sea—and having been the child of parents, and parents' parents, who also settled near the sea. But don't these guys know that the desert is just an older sea that has distanced itself from its former boundaries?

Any desert emits its own unfathomable story of inversion, as they all used to be hardening below primordial oceans.

Enlivened, Woolf said, "I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot."

[waves breaking]



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Editor's Preface

by Joshua Shaddock

Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends...
—Bernard, in Virginia Woolf's, *The Waves*

Lisa moved to Sweden five years ago, leaving an ocean between us. Since then, we've bounced our voices between continents, on wires running under waves, below ground, at the speed of sunlight. Woven into our conversations was the progress of her doctoral research and the trio of videos at its core: *Sunsets*, *Notes From Underground*, *Waves*.

These videos were made with friends. Borne of conversations old and new, far and near—sometimes actually heard or seen, sometimes distant echoes—they exhibit the entanglement of Lisa's life and work, or her refusal to mark the separation. Her inclination to inhabit liminality is as much a generative force in the videos as it is a thematic.

This book was made with friends. Each of its contributors holds Lisa as a dear companion—old or new, far or near—and has been part of the development of these videos. Similarly entangled, they show a reluctance or disinterest in retreating to the distanced viewpoint of critic or historian—and life seeps in. The impulse is to characterize their texts as subjective, but more fitting would be to say they're *involved*.

For my part, I was brought into this project as designer—but discussions were quickly and wholly permeated by content, and editor was added to my title. Together, we fretted over every detail, discussed and weighed every decision and point made. These works have become part of me, and I have become part of them. And in drawing close to these works, so have “I to my friend...”

Airport Hotel

by Natascha Sadr Haghghian

The story begins at the airport hotel in Dubai. A place in which non-presence has hypermaterialized. A non-place.

Wait, it actually starts earlier. Passengers from various flights pour into the airport terminal at four in the morning. They have all missed their connecting flights. All bodies are tired. The bodies of the travellers are tired from endless hours in terminals, airspaces, taxi, and transit. Now, stranded without connection, they become part of procedures, procedures that include vouchers, shuttle busses, and airport hotels. Bodies are exhausted, exhausted also in their relation to one another. They become mere destination, suspended, bundled, and listed on sheets of paper held up by other bodies designated as airport staff: Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul, Jakarta, Sydney, Manchester. Bodies equipped with boarding cards and passports are being divided into destinations. Some are stubborn, they want to keep moving, travel on, but in the end even the exasperated ones are too exhausted to resist the measures put in place for them. The measures follow standard protocols, shaped by regulations, decided by insurance companies and law firms. Rights, responsibilities, negligence, minimum damage, customer contracts bring all the traveling bodies, submissive or resistive, into this non-place called Millennium Airport Hotel.

There are other bodies that take care, carry out those protocols and procedures written in international aviation law. Airport staff, shuttle staff, airline staff, hotel staff, restaurant staff. More bodies. Most had their passports taken away under the *kafala system*, a sponsorship system that applies to migrant workers in the UAE. Their bodies are brought in, exhausted, and spit back out to their countries of origin. This system is part of what makes non-places possible. These bodies are not permitted to show their tiredness. Relentlessly, they offer vouchers, desert tours, jewelry shopping, tea, coffee, water, room service, housekeeping, pool music. They clean up after my tired body with permanent smiles that are part of their contract. Returning the smile, my body tries to pay respect to their tiredness. The passport still in my hand feels sticky and absurd.

Everything in this place speaks hypermaterialized non-presence with its specific sensation of numbness, similar to clogged ears after a rough landing. A sameness algorithm of cultures, lifestyles, religions, eating habits, and corporate interests has come to make a non-place. Everything seems coated with an organic skin, kept fresh and rosy with endless amounts of water, oil, and other fluids. The hotel buffet with its time-and-placeless variety of foods, the evergreen lawn around the pool, even the perfectly tanned, shaped, and depilated Russian-speaking bodies draped on sunloungers around the pool seem like ambitious renderings of living things. Non-place in leisure mode, erasing distance, context, memory, future. The perfect camouflage for everything and anything.

You talked about the distance between things, actual things—concrete and tangible—and abstract things of different registers, emotional, known, learned, seen, heard, researched. You described how figuring out distance towards a thing or between things happens in writing and in visualizing writing in moving images. This process involves different modes of gauging, maneuvering, and looking in variations of outer and inner observations. Looking through the retina as much as with the mind's eye to help understand distances and displacements of things that belong to different registers. Donna Haraway calls this “becoming worldly.” It is a strenuous, often painful endeavor to become worldly, to measure out the displacements of bodies, things, and language, to gauge how things operate over long distances, different time-zones and entirely different realms. Non-place tries to erase any understanding of distance or prevent us from “touching it” as Haraway would say. It deletes coordinates, anaesthetizes the senses, and coats the numb voids with Photoshopped derma. It's hard to know what you're touching, but the quest for it seems ever more important here.

I now understand much better why you prefer to write or work on long-distance flights. You throw your body into a situation of translation rather than transition. In the passenger seat of a long distance flight, between the too-short blanket and the too-small inflight entertainment screen, your body abandons form and becomes something else, maybe a little closer to the state of a jellyfish, an animal that according to you “constantly shifts its nearly invisible self—having no backbone, no structure—something whose inside is outside—in between itself *always*.” It is

in this state that you can begin to apprehend those other distances, those other languages. Not the distance between departure and arrival. After some time the body forgets about those notions and hovers between disembodiment and hypermaterialized physicality on the molecular level, a state of becoming that opens other ports to embodied knowledge of distance. And not those languages that you find listed in the menu of your inflight entertainment. In this state language becomes foreign from within, in translation processes that don't follow protocols of translation. It is here where you gain access to a foreign language within language, one that allows you to see words transform into wave lines, metro stations into caves, data centers into museum galleries, deserts into beaches, jellyfish into pink noise, literature into moving images. It is here where you find sunsets that last for the length of an entire movie. And it is here where the imaginary space and the world of things become one overturning motion, similar to the motion of waves breaking on the shore in a perpetual dispossessed actualization of form and appearance. This is the place where the gaze can register distances between actual and abstract things and the tongue can speak those foreign languages within language.

I learned about this while I was in the non-place. Stretched on the hotel bed, I remembered our conversations about alienation and displacement, and suddenly my senses were able to make out coordinates in this numbed environment. Things around me started to point towards each other and connect. Scenes from your videos *Waves* and *Notes From Underground* popped into my head and my bleary eyes couldn't make out whether they were playing on the hotel room's flatscreen or in my head. The image of your finger making the world revolve on an airplane monitor while you talk about Fukushima, the image of an incoming train in a Stockholm metro station with Susan Sontag's voice from fifty years earlier, and the alternating reverberations of a sonar signal and water drops in a cave that seem to gauge impossible distances between the emergence of a stalactite and the next incoming train. Things that occupy the same spaces without belonging to the same realm, yet we ridiculously try to manage their co-existence in what we encounter as reality. How do we come to think we can manage a green lawn in the desert of the UAE? Or the ocean water used to cool the myriad of hard drives so that I can see the Google image of Courbet's wave? Or the radioactive waste that leaks

from the storage tanks in Fukushima? The reemerging scenes from your videos express this impossibility while not shying away from the vertiginous cliff that they reveal. They don't try to depict or explain or secure reality, but joyfully summit and enter that space, the cliff over which things fall, transform, and evade our possession, use, or management.

This might sound a bit spectacular, but it actually happens in the most banal, often familiar moments, places, and settings. This is why your videos helped me in this air-conditioned hotel room in the desert. All three videos, *Sunsets*, *Notes From Underground*, and *Waves* are anchored in your desk, your computer, your screen. All images and sounds are rooted here, and with shifting transparencies we have access to their directory and neighboring files. Edits are not cuts, but rather shifts in focus of simultaneously open windows. They form sequences that are not seamless or linear, but instead allow for a complex tentative play with the many layers and appearances of language, visibility, and embodiment. The cliff opens between windows on your screen or between the keyboard and your writing hand. Sometimes we only hear you type, like when you Skype with your translator in *Sunsets*. Sometimes we only see the moiré of the screen like in *Waves*, or the oscillating wave line of Susan Sontag's voice in *Notes From Underground*. We hear the intimate sounds of silence, the ventilation of a laptop, a refrigerator, the air conditioning on an airplane. These simple signs of a familiar environment create a sensual knowing, a sense of orientation that viscerally guides to the ports and into the imaginary space that inhabits those environments, any environment, actually. Watching becomes unintentional, a dreamlike experience between being awake and sleeping. In retrospect, watching any of these three works feels like something I experienced rather than watched on Vimeo. Maybe I really did, and watching your work rather has the quality of an experience. It does not represent experience, it does not depict embodiment, it does not recount literature. Instead, it inscribes itself into my memory as an encounter. Your desk could be my desk, your screen could be my screen, and this hotel room could be your hotel room, any hotel room, really. And like any hotel room or desk or refrigerator the Millennium Airport Hotel is also full of ports to imaginary spaces and to becoming worldly.

It was already afternoon and I had given in to the experience, to the exposure to hypermaterialized non-presence, the pain it creates in

invisible limbs that you didn't even know you had. Suddenly I thought why not go to the gym. I felt reminded of the suspended time in Kabul's Serena Hotel three years ago. I was there for research, but we were not allowed to leave the hotel without a driver, so we spent a lot of time in its compound. To ease the urge for movement, I went to the hotel gym. You would find a combination of bodies there, silhouettes of the different foreign operations in Afghanistan: supple, pear-shaped bodies of NGO workers next to enormous, highly trained, beefy bodies of security sector contractors, and indifferent bodies of politicians. The TV screens showed what the filmmaker Reza Haeri had pointed out to me as the Fashion-Military-Complex, with a combination of pret-a-porter and weapon *défilés*. He claims that this specific combination of television shows first appeared during the Iraq invasion. Uncannily, I found the same set of images on the screens of the Millennium Airport Hotel gym on entering. Military air show on the left, pret-a-porter on the right, both devices blaring respective soundscapes. I got on one of the machines in the middle of the rather small room and started running. I wanted to know what happens to my brain while running in this seemingly incongruous stereo field that could easily rip my senses apart. No, actually I felt that it was the only appropriate place to occupy in this space, and quite similar to your desk, or mine, or any desk, really.

The Shadow is Just as Tangible as the Origin

by Mara Lee

It alters everything

It took me a while to accept that the central theme in *Sunsets* is not translation.

The video revolves around an interview with the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. She is presented through several layers of mediation: in the video we see a computer screen which shows us an old television studio where the writer sits reclining in a sofa chair. The gap between the keen interviewer and Lispector's integrity is abyssal, and their words reach us through a Portuguese interpreter. On the screen the year 1977 indicates the time of the recording. Same year as the death of the author. A vertiginous tension splits the observer in two: she will die, she has already died. Or to say it with Roland Barthes: "By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future."¹

In the interview, Lispector talks about "Mineirinho"—a short narrative about a thief who is shot thirteen times by the police. How revolted she felt about the thirteen shots. One would have sufficed.

But instead of turning to death itself, the story turns to the concept of *life* in order to grasp this death, and describes life in its multitude and incomprehensibility. *Sunsets*, on the other hand, speaks explicitly about death, while its addressee is life. The subjective camera gaze is filtered through all-but-mortal stillness. We catch glimpses of a world where the sunlight at three am in the summer is a dead ringer for the light at three pm in the winter.

Minimal movement.

June through December and twilight insists.

The slow camera turns almost everything in its way into still-lifes: a hand resting on a steering wheel, a drooping bouquet of tulips, a sleeping

lover. In the end, day and night, life and death are intertwined. *Sunsets* is balancing on this liminal edge. By doing this, life comes across as something inherently alien, strange. Invaded by night.

This alien life might be described as the “experience of the other night,” in the words of Maurice Blanchot, a night that doesn’t embrace sleep or rest, ecstasy, or rapture. The other night is endless vigilance, interspersed by phantoms and ghosts.

If *Sunsets* might be seen as a negotiation of Blanchot’s other night—then translation is the key instrument of this negotiation.

How?

Spivak: “In every possible sense, translation is necessary but impossible.”²

The poet Robert Frost is often ascribed the infamous words, “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.” Whether or not he uttered them, this view implies a notion of poetry conceived as origin, and translation as a bland copy. But the fact that some phenomena seem untranslatable doesn’t indicate that translation per se is insufficient, it only means that our universe is complex. Loss is not more inherent in translation than in any other language use. But alienation is. Let’s ask Anne Carson if you don’t believe it.

In her study *Economy of the Unlost*, Anne Carson says the poet Paul Celan, “uses language as if he were always translating.”³ Why? And how? Alienation. Strangeness that arose as the consequence of his war trauma and exile.

All other comparisons aside—translation in *Sunsets* is not a translation of “something,” but the very “something” in itself, the very language it speaks. In a place where the difference between day and night is erased twice a year, what does “day” mean? Does it mean “night”? *Sunsets* attempts to comprehend this twilight through the work of translation. Translation is enacted before our very eyes, and the viewers perceive all the cuts, joints, seams, and transitions in their materiality. Travelling from one language to another, one place to another, changes you. What changes?

It doesn’t alter anything.
It doesn’t alter anything.
It doesn’t alter anything.

These are the words Clarice Lispector says in Portuguese when asked whether she believes that she or the story “Mineirinho” can change anything. Three times the interpreter repeats these words in English. But when a single meaning travels between two languages six times, then something is altered. The displacement of the repetition and the translation enacts a minimal linguistic defiance, a resistance against the finality of Lispector’s words. The translation introduces otherness, but also movement, uncertainty that constitutes a counter language against the vestiges of death in the language of Lispector. The most prominent example is when Lispector utters her last words in the video: “I am speaking from my tomb.” At first, the interpreter misunderstands, gets it wrong, hesitates. But suddenly a cry of joy pierces the air—and so the morose tone of the words is displaced entirely towards something else. “No! No! No! I talking from my... *tomb!*” the interpreter triumphantly cries out. This is not death speaking anymore, this speech does not arise from the tomb, but from sheer, vibrant life. Hereby, life as difference, as change and as translation, is inscribed into death.

Katabasis and sparagmos

The place of language is prominent in the three videos. The place of writing is prominent. Clarice Lispector, Susan Sontag, Virginia Woolf. But none of the three videos are actually about the writers. If translation can be perceived as a research tool in *Sunsets*, then the writers can be said to perform as vehicles for Tan’s overall examination of liminal phenomena—for instance, between night and day, underground and above ground. This question is most explicitly addressed in *Notes From Underground*, in which the artist straddles one of the most evocative Ancient Greek myths—that of *katabasis*, the poet’s descent into the underworld. Poets and artists have long struggled with the myth of Orpheus, and its renderings are manifold. Short version: Orpheus pleads to Hades, King of the Underworld, for his loved one, Eurydice, who has died of a snakebite,

to return to the living. Since no one could mourn as beautifully as the lyrical poet Orpheus, Hades yields to his request, under one condition: upon the journey to the light, Orpheus is forbidden to look back. Just as they reach the surface, Orpheus turns his head, and Eurydice falls back into the shadows. Thus she dies a second time, and henceforth Orpheus can only sing about his loved one, but never have her.

The most prevalent interpretations emphasize the sacrificial gesture of art, how the poet gives up his loved one for the sake of art's higher cause. Feminist counter-readings call attention to Eurydice, and problematize her role as mere object of the male gaze and desire.⁴

The myth continues with the ferocious death of Orpheus, torn apart by raging Thracian women. The dismembering of Orpheus is an example of *sparagmos*, the Dionysian ritual that involves Maenads (or Bacchantes). In a more modern rendering though, *sparagmos* is not confined to one sole literary motive. Considering, for example, the literary fragment from the point of view of *sparagmos* would enable the reader to not only to perceive the fragment in terms of form, but also as linked to an originary violence. Also, according to literary scholar Anders Olsson, *sparagmos* might be read as a liminal experience, and the one who sings is "a voice from the border, in dispersion."⁵

So, the question is: What kind of hell does the artist encounter in her modern katabasis?

Notes From Underground undertakes a descent that is accompanied by the voice of Susan Sontag. Why? Here *The Divine Comedy* by Dante—the world's second-most famous katabasis—provides an indication: Sontag is neither the subject or object of the video, but nothing more or less than the artist's guide in the underworld, as Virgil was Dante's guide. By means of old recordings and interviews, Sontag's voice rises from the shadows, and uncannily enough, the mediations only seem to reinforce her presence.

The choice of Sontag as guide is not only due to her grandeur as a writer: like Tan, she is an American working in the field of art who at a certain period of her life moved to Stockholm for professional reasons. (Let us recollect that Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* in exile.) Now, the move from The United States to Sweden is not comparable to the ban-

ishment Dante was subjected to, but the experience of inner exile is not always stirred by excommunication or banishment. Inner exile is marked by liminal experience: a border that feels, like skin, a feeling border.⁶

Worth noting though: Tan is no stranger to diasporic experience—like a red thread, it runs through her family history. Dispersion, in other words, is not mere metaphor in her work—it is literal, material, and historic reality. It is not surprising, thus, that Tan works with geographical layering in *Notes From Underground*. Stratigraphy is used here as a method for uncovering alternative histories. No, wrong of me, I mean a method for *writing* alternative histories. In a way, the artist performs subjective, historical research, but refrains from letting private experience tower in the foreground. Autobiography is not a concern of Tan's. She refuses, consequently, to let her work be reduced to autobiographical self-representation. Sure, an isolated reference to the artist's childhood is made, but not to reinforce a biographical narrative. On the contrary, these occasional references are deliberately empty, signifiers without signifieds, as when the artist says, "That's mine," in a conversation about things in storage. What she refers to as "mine" is hidden from the viewer, as are the things she has kept in storage over the years. Thereby occluding the possibility of biographical interpretation: we know there is a personal history, something that is "mine," a childhood, a lifeline, but the main purpose of referencing this is to place it in relation to a larger picture. One might say that the artist inscribes her life into the overarching structures of both descent and dispersion, both katabasis and *sparagmos*.

These two main lines in *Notes From Underground* are embodied by the sequences shot on the subway. The downward movement converges with a sprawling, dispersing one. As we find ourselves inside a subway car, the name of a station flickers by: Hallonbergen (Raspberry Mountains). We are on the blue subway line in Stockholm. Unlike the two other subway lines that start in the suburbs, cross the city center and then continue to another suburban area, the blue line starts in the very center of Stockholm, then moves outward to the suburbs, which makes its demographic journey so startlingly evident. The suburbs located at the outer end of the blue line lodge an abundance of histories that are rarely told: diasporic histories, experiences of exile. The artist deliberately abstains from getting close to these histories—you will find no attempt to represent the everyday experiences of non-European immigrants. Instead,

we find ourselves in almost empty subway cars, evacuated spaces. But this emptiness shouldn't be read as the artist trying to reproduce how immigrants are made invisible in Swedish society, because then these would no longer be "notes from underground." Instead, Tan creates an absence that is insistent, tangible. Embodied absence. How? The artist has moved to a country that presents itself as the most equal society in the world. But those of us who live in Stockholm experience, on an everyday basis, its adamant segregation, especially the divide between center and margin. On top of that, "Sweden is the country within the Economic Cooperation Organization OECD with the greatest difference in employment between native and foreign-born."⁷ *Notes From Underground* doesn't explicitly address these particular problems, but the empty subway cars speak their own language of visualization and de-visualization. The viewer sees what isn't there. She sees what is not seen, not spoken.

Tan often returns to the concept of the liminal, the threshold. Linger in the farthest stations on the blue line means that we cannot close our eyes before yet another dimension that makes a neat division between visible and invisible, here and there, above and underground, impossible. Namely, violence. In other words, the boundary experience and the liminal require the acknowledgement of the violence by which that very boundary becomes visible: sparagmos, diaspora, dispersion.

The blue subway line is associated with violence. All the Stockholm suburbs with populations dominated by foreign-born, non-European immigrants are associated with violence. *Notes From Underground* also talks about violence. Sontag reflects upon the human capacity for cruelty, and stresses that instead of constantly manifesting surprise over it, we should understand this inclination. There is also the passage when a caller with a question wonders why we are not able to perceive those from other cultures, and specifically from Iraq, as human beings. We can guess that this question is asked during The United States' war against Iraq. Again, Sontag reveals herself as a tough realist without illusions, answering that "it's even worse."

The descent that takes place in *Notes From Underground*, the journey into the underworld that the artist sets out upon with Sontag as a guide, makes us attentive to what is not there: the obliteration of diasporic fragments of generations of human beings in exile. The sharp, snapping sound that runs through the video work is an orienting signal for blind

passengers, and you can only hear it on the blue line. It communicates in a language that most viewers don't understand, taking the shape of a provocative question flung at us: Which one of us is blind?

"I am a miner. The light turns blue. / Waxy stalactites / Drip and thicken, tears," writes Sylvia Plath in one of her most famous poems.⁸

Mining as a metaphor for the research process is just too self-evident for Tan's subtle and profound work, and still: the other journey that is undertaken in *Notes From Underground* is to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. Why is that? Why turn to yet another foundational metaphor for Western thinking—Plato, Freud, you name it? Because, and this is the pivotal point throughout my essay, the cavern isn't a metaphor, it is real, lived life.

The viewer quickly understands that the artist visited these caverns often as a child, and now she returns there as an adult. The easiest thing would be to interpret this descent as a subjective liminal experience where personal history intersects with geologic past, and how different times and spaces intertwine. The viewer is introduced to dark, dripping underground caves. Beautiful, absurd—a tourist attraction. All this fuss to show us a tourist attraction? It strikes me once again that most things that are said in Tan's work are left unsaid, and, by showing us the shadows, the work points at other, unsaid and unseen shadows.

What are the shadows of Carlsbad Caverns? Why is our guide taking us there? Katabasis, sparagmos, diaspora. What is the unspeakable violence that this tourist attraction obscures? New Mexico is a state where the questions of limits, borders, and frontiers are most urgent. Within its population of Hispanics, Chicanos, Latinos, Mexicans, indigenous and native Americans there are thousands and thousands of histories of migration, diaspora, dispersion, and struggle. Again, the artist chooses not to address this fact explicitly, but the viewer can't but be made aware of it while following the ascending elevator ride. The elevator attendant asks: "Where you folks from?" The male voice answers quickly, steadily, no doubt or shivering in his voice: "I'm from Sweden. Stockholm." His national identity is stable. But the artist, on the other hand: "I live in Stockholm. But I grew up in this area." No further explanations, but the attentive listener will be reminded that the production of strangers intensifies each and every time the question "Where are you from?" is

demanded from us in a place that we call “home.” The ease by which our identities are cut in pieces, dispersed.

The old home and the new.

Underground, ancient caves, and the by now obsolete triumph of modernity in the form of the dispersing lines of the subway.

Notes From Underground is a narrative about migration and diaspora. But instead of trying to restore a subjective speaking position for the Other, Tan chooses to speak from within canonical narratives, opening them up for alternative interpretations. We must, however, mind the gaps, fractures and blind alleys. The Orpheus of our time knows that the chthonic moves in various directions: a subway line becomes a sound wave which points towards Tan’s third film, *Waves*. So the basic elements connect the three films: air, earth, water. But instead of fire, there is language.

When did the sea become political?

If translation is manifested as a method and a device to enable the inscription of strange life into death in *Sunsets*, then one may suggest that the modernist novel is a point of inspiration for the video *Waves*. More exactly, *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. But just as *Sunsets* is not an artwork about Lispector, *Waves* is not an artwork about Woolf, but about the liminal state between collectivity and annihilation.

The waves in this video can be construed as a figuration that connects and deletes by the very same movement. They address our longing after community/togetherness, but also the wiping out of the subject, nothingness, merging into the big blue, and thus the loss of ourselves. Waves connect time and space, rewrite borders, and enable alternative histories to surface. Because if “every word has its own shadow,” so with every wave there is an undertow, constitutive for the wave. Moving forward is also a drawing back. Applied to time and history, the movement of the wave stresses the movement of the return. In returning we connect with unwritten histories that alter what is yet to come. Returning enables the future to open in new ways.

The most conspicuous structuring element in *Waves* is provided by the voice-over. The artist is speaking herself. This approach marks a breach with the two other films. It comes as a surprise when the viewer realizes that the voice-over continues—and continues. Sometimes enlightening, sometimes trying, and sometimes outright frustrating as the voice thinks, corrects itself, repeats. The emphasis on the artistic process is evident. Next to the sound of the waves, the typing sounds from the keyboard stand out as the sonic leitmotif of the film.

This is also the one video in which Tan’s passionate relation to words and language is outed. Language as both *mater* and *matter*: primordial, bodily, and material. Listen to the voice-over repeating her alliterations: “[...] what merely is. Lispector called it the ‘it.’ Or the ‘is of the thing’” and “Servers simmer.” The pointy “i”, the hissing “s” carving out new paths in the sentences. It devours the sounds of the letters. A sensuous pleasure is connected to forming the sounds of language. The viewer perceives how different technologies of language coexist. We live in a culture that is oral, written, and digital. What happens then, when the oral and written traces of uncertainty, hesitation, and error, are so easily eliminated on our computer screens? And why is it that new technologies are working so hard to erase the material residues of our precarious bodies?

Cautiously, but consequently, Tan is attentive to all kinds of material residues—human, digital, natural. And maybe that is why the transitions seem so important. Like a tightrope walker, Tan balances smoothness and distinctness in the transitions between frames. The screen saver becomes a sound wave that becomes sky that becomes sea. Their identities are respectively intact, but when and how each transition starts is hard to discern. This can be read as a visual translation of Tan’s interest in correspondences.

Natural phenomena, such as waves, used as models for our thinking, are not news to the field of art and literature. The poet Stéphane Mallarmé, for instance, let the firmament serve as a pattern for his poem “Un coup de dés.” But searching for the new is not the intention in *Waves*. Rather, the returning movement of the waves is engaged on many different levels, for example, in the repetition of the artist’s own words, spoken as voice-over. She pauses, reverses, backspacing on the keyboard, repeating the last sentence over and over. But she also revisits old traditions of thought, such as the science of correspondences. Correspondence

is a key term for Tan in *Waves*, and she uses it in the modernist sense, reminiscent of Baudelaire, amongst others. But if Baudelaire's version of correspondence is but a shadow of Swedenborg's, isn't Tan's version just a shadow of a shadow? Yes and no. But the shadow only appears to be threatening to those who submit to the idea of an absolute origin. Tan, on the other hand, shows right through her work that the materiality of the shadow is just as tangible as the origin.

The artist writes the sea, and the sea writes new histories. Some of these histories mumble their way into oblivion, some are corrected and pass as acceptable records of documentation, while others drown in pink noise.

Which histories drown? If *Notes From Underground* involuntarily evokes an *active* absence of the bodies that populate the blue line, in some ways *Waves* addresses a similar, uncanny, present absence. Today, in Sweden, in Europe, more than anything, waves and the sea evoke the thought of migration. Never before has the idea of the sea seemed as alienated from the thought of the romanticism of Nature. Every day, new reports of nameless people drowned in the Mediterranean. Every day, we observe from a safe distance this limbo into which the sea has transformed. The sea, from a contemporary perspective, is not legible without considering the "flood of refugees" escaping war and terror. (I'll explain why I insist on this horrid metaphor soon enough.)

When explaining her use of the liminal, Tan refers to Jacques Derrida and the *arrivant*: "The absolute arrivant does not yet have a name or an identity".⁹ And thus, this "someone or something that arrives" arrives in a place that is also de-identified. Our notions of home, identity, and borders are thus destabilized by the arrivant. S/he "does not simply cross a given threshold".¹⁰ This "someone or something" might be "the immigrant, the emigrant, the guest, or the stranger." But most of all, it is someone whose arrival reinscribes how we conceive borders, and ultimately, death.

And in the same way, the arrivant does something to the idea of the threshold, the "flood of refugees" who, due to war and terror, are trying to cross the Mediterranean every night, do something to the idea of the sea.

"Flood of refugees"—such abusive language, so often used in media—why do I reproduce it here?

In *Waves*, the voice-over says: "and the sea is put to work." This is important. The new digital era has come up with metaphors such as "seas of information" and "oceans of data." In *Waves* Tan tries to actually follow these metaphors and bring their material fundament to the surface. One example is fiber-optic cables placed on the ocean floor, another how data servers are cooled by water from the Baltic Sea. And so, Tan shows us how certain metaphors are capable of opening up new material realities. This line of thought is influenced by new materialism and the emphasis on the agency of seemingly inanimate objects. But as soon as we approach conceptual, critical thinking, the question about labor has to be asked. So who works for whom by this conceptual displacement? And which ideas are kept static in order to put others in motion?

When the sea is transformed from an aesthetic object of pleasure into an active, living material, new boundaries are cut out and inscribed. This is the partly repressed objective that the gesture of conferring agency rests upon. If "oceans of data" turns out to be a legible, material reality for many of us, the materiality of the sea-metaphor "flood of refugees" is clearly unquestionable. But still, it doesn't make it legible for a majority of us, quite the contrary. The sea is put to work, as Tan puts it, but for whom? The material reality of "flood of refugees" is not only illegible, it marks a definitive incision in language. This will change us, this will change how we address each other.

Our new sea-metaphors point towards the materiality of the digital era, but also towards the materiality of global politics. The sea is, and has always been, political.

And even though mankind has known about the embodiment of metaphors long before the Eucharistic miracle, there is a difference when "flood of refugees" materializes as an embodied metaphor. Why? Because this one doesn't resurrect. Next to the oceans of data, the sea of information—metaphors that we readily accept as living material—there are others that are drowning.

There was another end to this text, in my former, shorter version. I talked about the starry skies, trying to outline a minimal ethics for our time. It is impossible for me today to keep that grandiose finale, when language makes metaphors out of drowning people.

The sea has its undertow, the light has its shadow, and the sound has its echo. In all three videos the beauty of natural phenomena is, in each and every instance, undercut by darkness: an undercurrent of violence brings them tension and charge. In *Sunsets* Lispector talks about José Miranda Rosa, alias Mineirinho, who was shot thirteen times and killed by the police in Rio de Janeiro in 1962—no need to explain its alarming importance today; *Notes From Underground* is permeated with violence—from the sparagmos-motive to Sontag’s reflection upon human cruelty; and lastly, *Waves*, which obviously not only references the title of Woolf’s novel, but just as much her brutal death by drowning, which unavoidably brings to the fore the hundreds of refugees that each day are drowning on the Mediterranean.

The materiality of the shadow is just as tangible as the origin, I said above. Now see how they all cringe.

Time is a Dictator

by Lauren O'Neill-Butler

During the initial pulses of Lisa Tan's video *Waves*, she focuses her lens and attention on a Word document open on her laptop. She recites from this text, highlighting and reading aloud a few lines in an even and reserved tone: "I've been anchoring myself to certain literary figures—writers who tried to drift away from language—and into something else. But they knew the necessity of having a few words to hang on to." These authors include Susan Sontag, Clarice Lispector, and Virginia Woolf, and the movement implied by Tan's choice words—"anchor," "drift," and so on—points to the liquid choreography at work.

Each video in Tan's trilogy considers a specific writer—Woolf in *Waves*; Sontag in *Notes From Underground*; and Lispector in *Sunsets*—though there is always fluidity and room for two or three to tango. Throughout, Tan italicizes her scholarly and personal interests, which are wide-ranging and capricious: in *Notes From Underground*, for example, a connection can be made between the cave as Bataille's site of the birth of art and the Östermalmstorg subway station in Stockholm. Just as unpredictable are the work's bibliographies, which feel unruly—promiscuous, even. *Waves*, for instance, cites Gilles Deleuze amid a range of other thinkers—Lispector, Neal Stephenson, Paul Virillio—as well as the Wikipedia entry for pink noise. Tan never attempts to master this potpourri of material; her text is an open file, constantly being updated. As an artist, she lights up certain ideas to see how they move together, and how, in turn, they affectively move us. What is most lucidly illuminated overall is an elliptical self-portrait of the artist connecting dots in a way that follows an internal code, a personal logic.

Throughout, time plays a central role, and, per Kant, it yields no shape. "I've also been thinking about geological time, trying to connect to it, and even trying to connect to a future whose vastness is so utterly incomprehensible," Tan has said in an interview about these works. "So I've looked to things that I can grasp—yes, my own personal history and

references—but also other histories that have some resonance with the primordial. Correspondences.” The videos query what time is, where it is, and if it is at all. Tan connects her choreography to such spacious ontological questions as if she were dancing along something like the Heideggerian notion of time—an understanding he also calls “primordial,” in which time reveals itself as the glimmering horizon of being. In brief, time goes on but you die.

“Where does it go; what does it do? Most of all, is it alive?” asks Nina Simone during a soliloquy on time before launching into a live cover of Sandy Denny’s “Who Knows Where the Times Goes?” (*Black Gold*, 1970). Simone’s gambit in that short speech that “time is a dictator” finds a surprising kinship with Heidegger—intangible time micromanages all aspects of life (“you go to work by the clock; you get your martini in the afternoon by the clock,” forecasts Simone). Tan’s works heed this everyday reality but also try to grasp or “connect” to primordial time—to the horizon. Her subjects often seem at once here and gone, contemporary and primordial: Tan reads from a portion of her text titled “To the Shore,” then cuts to a scene of waves closing out on the beach; dripping stalactites give way to a craggy, cardiograph-like sound wave of Sontag’s voice; a video of Lispector being interviewed moves to twilight over a darkened body of water. One becomes aware of layered meanings, of different temporal layers, while consciousness does “something else.”

In quoting Simone, I don’t intend to simply read another (deceased, female) voice into Tan’s work. I’m more interested in how that flickering, that “something else,” which may indeed prove to be hovering between life and death, can be activated, as Tan does, by foraging and bringing others into a rich mélange with the self. By relating her interests in the primordial to a few of her favorite writers and other sources, Tan also eschews producing an egotistic memoir or blog-like diffusion of random thoughts. In *Waves*, she writes and rewrites her document, highlights, and recites. She documents this process: the videos often show her studio, revealing the apparatus of production and the importance of context—how images are always conditional on experience, on where and how they are viewed. In this, a political consciousness and ethics emerges. As a whole, the videos explore precarity disguised as freedom, a pedestrian reality birthed by the marriage of digital technology and

capitalism. Moreover, she examines how this union opens up new affective relationships and novel forms of nostalgia: when a real landscape meets a cosmos screensaver; in the voice of a friend over the internet. The latter is explored in *Sunsets*, wherein we hear Tan’s friend (another voice in time) casually translating Lispector’s Portuguese via Skype, in a typical intimate conversation, with no undue self-awareness. Like a great pop song, this tendency to explore the possibility and mutability of intimacy is characteristic of all of Tan’s work. It is buttressed by her insistence on a specific material delivery and her deployment of particular archives.

Yet not all is exposed. In the end, the trilogy produces a subject—the artist—and she remains elusive. Tan states in *Waves* that the person she loves the most says he is “incapable of living anywhere that isn’t near water. Sort of like Paul Virilio.” It is a fact given coolly and with restraint, a bit like Simone’s soliloquy. But not much more needs to be said about her lover, nor Virilio, because her reply comes quickly: “But don’t these guys know that the desert is just an older sea that has distanced itself from its former boundaries?” This is sharing with a point: by not fully revealing every aspect of her interests and her research, Tan productively calibrates and attunes her viewer to what is public or social, speculative or concrete in her work—and our interest is piqued.

Skillfully composing with disclosure in mind, Tan’s videos dovetail with the “something else” (the unnamable? unsayable?) each writer harbors in her own work. In *Waves* she quotes Woolf’s diary: “I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm, not to a plot.” Simone might add that time dictates all rhythm—from the personal to the geological and the meteorological. For Tan, the monologues by six characters told in the third-person regarding a littoral scene and its effects of light in the book, break up the sense of linear time and telegraph back to the primordial, to a “continuum that has gone on and on, and will go on with or without us,” as she says. And while that’s true, it’s not easy to connect to intellectually, visually, nor emotionally in our everyday always-already phenomenological experience. The movements in these videos, however, inch us towards a sophisticated network of stratifications, both temporal and spatial. In the end, they produce a porous voice: a fragmented, decentered self constantly in flux (like the text being written and rewritten). We see that

these works trade not just in affect, but in the shared, multi-vocal quality of *affects*—Tan queries not just intimacy but the possibility of it and the ways in which it affects are not “owned” by specific bodies but can be public and transmutable.

The videos flourish in this primordial soup, if you will, between abstract, universal, and lived experiences (of time and affects) and the primary self-observation of the “something else.” In *Notes from Underground*, Tan links clips of Sontag’s 1969 film *Duet for Cannibals* shot in the Stockholm subway to caves in New Mexico, which she visited as a child growing up in the southwestern US—like water leaving the desert and returning someday in the future.

So, who knows where the time goes? Only time will tell.

Document of its Own Method

by Lisa Tan

Sunsets (2012)

Landscapes appear throughout *Sunsets*. But I'm not interested in nature as such, just in its affects. Take note of the video's images, how most of them are tightly framed, reflecting an addled me, trying to grasp the concept of winter and summer in Sweden—where the extreme light conditions play with my mood, work schedule, social life, and creative abilities. The video documents its own methods, so the viewer follows my research of a 1977 interview with Clarice Lispector—the Brazilian writer whose work I've been socializing with for several years now. During this same period of reading and reading about Lispector, I was setting my phone's alarm for three o'clock in the morning, at the height of summer, getting out of bed to film.

At this latitude, a day's illumination can fade in a glorious, seemingly endless manner or in one that's disconcertingly fleeting. Either configuration offers an experience of radical alienation, felt mostly outside of any social order, and it's both wondrous and destabilizing. I surveyed the quality of light and thought about the activities that occur—or don't occur—at this time. And when summer ended, I waited for the winter solstice, which would signal my next call-time: three o'clock in the afternoon. Inside that dimly lit season, I was also spending parts of every week with a friend. She agreed to translate Lispector's interview for me, over Skype, connecting her apartment in Brooklyn—or her studio in the city—with mine in Stockholm. I recorded our sessions, not knowing that they'd end up being the life force of the video, its driving poetics.

Sunset is a time that elicits a more unstable experience of the world. At the threshold of light and its absence, feelings of displacement, loneliness, fatigue, and anxiety can seep in, as the end of the day ushers in the unknown of night. Will we wake to see another day? Anthropologist and writer Michael Taussig talks about it as a time for rituals—such as happy hour, when we imbibe half-price cocktails, easing our trepidation

of any day's end. In tipsiness, we can forget about how our individual consciousness will soon abandon us in our sleep. Yet we're also attracted to the end of the day, not just wary of it. Taussig cites the way people gravitate to sunsets, particularly in places where the horizon line is visible, better able to witness the orb perform its descent to the underworld.¹ In that instant, some see the flash of the green ray, as the last bit of light meets the retina.

Tacita Dean, who documented the process on 16mm film, relates the social and relational pull of sunsets.² "The evening I filmed the green ray, I was not alone. On the beach beside me were two others with a video camera pointed at the sun, infected by my enthusiasm for this elusive phenomenon."³ But in fact, Dean's naked eye didn't catch the ray. It was revealed to her only later that while her body could not register the phenomenon, her camera's film could. According to art historian Kaja Silverman, this is precisely what the photographic (filmic) apparatus does: it reveals the world to us. It is not a matter of indexicality or representation, both of which are tied to a view of the world centered on human thought and action.⁴ It also goes to show how threshold experiences can elude us if we remain our fully conscious selves. According to Taussig, thresholds solicit the experience "when consciousness pulls the switch on itself," momentarily giving us access to all manner of things and relations that we don't usually recognize.⁵ We cease to be moths, fatally lured to the bright lights of thought, and are fleetingly more open to "appreciate a type of journey from animal awareness to crossing centuries of civilization in a second."⁶ Past works of mine have used background performative methods to cultivate the pulling of the switch.⁷ *Sunsets*, and its method of directly engaging spatiotemporal threshold experiences, accelerates that search, for which transformation is reward.

I started filming after waking in the middle of the night to pee and noticing my laptop in screen saver mode. It had never been more interesting to me than in that singular moment when I realized it was doing nothing, just lazily rotating through images of the cosmos. Jupiter fading to Saturn, Saturn fading to Earth's moon, and so on. In this liminal state, I registered the thing's thingness, its materiality anew. I continued this nocturnal schedule. Flipping the times for productivity is an ever-so-slight social transgression in this part of the world, where norms around work and recreation schedules are rigid. Misbehaving

was pleasurable. Questions quickly arose. What state of consciousness is needed for creativity, and when does it occur?

In Lispector's interview, she takes on questions about when she works and what happens between writing books. She philosophizes about death, how it occurs during her creative process. And when speaking about the end of a period of writing, she ponders aloud, "Let's see if I'll be reborn again."⁸ Her speculative resurrection talk is self-aggrandizing for certain; nevertheless, she could reach the most radical of transformations, and somehow, metaphysically still be able to write about it!

But the winter's light affects similar life and death questions. Will I survive to experience spring, summer, ever again? Did my friend know that the activity of our translation sessions, our loving chitchats, were not only helping my flailing research, but also mediating my loneliness and displacement in my new, darkened surroundings? Consistent with the piece's vulnerable, casual beginnings, the translation in *Sunsets* is in no way "professional." Even though Portuguese is her mother tongue, my friend is from Portugal and Lispector was from Brazil, so there's a dissonance there, compounded by Lispector's strange manner of pronunciation.⁹ As I mentioned before, I didn't anticipate that the recording would end up being the soundtrack for this work—nor did my friend. This explains why she sounds so very free in her task, why there's hardly a trace of self-consciousness. Her uncertainty, hesitation, searching, is generative, closer to the essence of what translation is.

I edited the recording and images to create transient moments of alignment. The first is when we see the screen savers of my workstation's dual monitors in my studio. The following image is the same setting—only now the camera is closer to the monitors, closer to Lispector's interview as it streams on YouTube. "It doesn't alter anything. It doesn't alter anything. It doesn't alter anything."—Lispector responds this way when she's asked whether or not her work induces political change, in reference to an article she had written on murderous police brutality, inflicted upon a notorious criminal in 1960s Rio de Janeiro named José Miranda Rosa, alias "Mineirinho."¹⁰ I'll excerpt her article here because it's stunning.

That is the law. But while something makes me hear the first and second shots with the relief of security, it puts me on alert at the

third, unsettles me at the fourth, at the fifth and the sixth covers me with shame; the seventh and eighth I hear with my heart beating in horror; at the ninth and tenth my mouth is quivering, at the eleventh I say God's name in fright, at the twelfth I call for my brother. The thirteenth shot kills me—because I am the other. Because I want to be the other.¹¹

Lispector repeats that her article doesn't alter anything. The translator then says it to me, again and again. An immensely valued colleague of mine, the poet and novelist Mara Lee, wrote about this passage in *Sunsets* in terms of the movement that language and voice induce. "But when a single meaning has travelled between two languages six times, then something is altered. The displacement of the repetition and the translation enacts a minimal linguistic defiance, a resistance against the finality of Lispector's words."¹² She continues, "The translation introduces otherness, but also movement, uncertainty that constitutes a counter language against the vestiges of death in the language of Lispector."¹³ Words shift into activism, and the politics of Lispector are re-enlivened and *enlivening*.

It's within this passage that the translation momentarily aligns with the on-screen interview, just as Lispector lights a cigarette. The igniting match not only lights the writer's tobacco, but also sets aflame the origin of the voice. There's something that happens within these alignments that may be a primary vehicle for the video's poetics. But this is elusive, just as it is closer to the source of the work, but I suspect it's what makes the video an experience of translation itself. Translation creates new language in its liminal ontology. Walter Benjamin tells us, "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue... For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines."¹⁴

Film's capability to reveal some truth—in the way a good translation does—is completely dependent on editing. The sensibility required is new to me on a practice level; *Sunsets* was the first video I edited myself. But it's not new to me on a lived, embodied level. Real life deprives just as much as it gives, and unfolds within a logic where every image threatens to disappear. Filmic images cut, fade, and bleed into other images, but

they always end. It is a contingency known only through experiences of becoming, when forms are not fixed. The task of the editor is to make this becoming ring true.

I end with the beginning. The video's first scene introduces the source of Lispector's interview, the scratchy internet call commences, typing, transcribing, the translator assumes her role. Journalist Júlio Lerner poses the question, "Rilke, in his letters to the young poet, asks 'if you couldn't write, would you die?' I transfer this question to you." Lispector answers, "I think that when I write I am dead."¹⁵ *Sunsets* is titled in the plural because there are several sunsets in the piece—winter's and summer's—but also Lispector's own death, which would happen the same year. In the interview she says she is tired, and seems irritated and uncomfortable, engulfed by an enormous brown leather armchair, as each drag on a chain of cigarettes seems to fuel her hazy, enigmatic responses.

Notes From Underground (2013)

In *Notes From Underground*, Susan Sontag's voice is translated into a grainy, undulating soundwave. I was doing research at the library, listening to an interview with Sontag that was broadcast on Swedish radio on the occasion of the publication of her book of short fiction, *I, etcetera* (1978), when a small window appeared on the database's screen, framing a soundwave moving along to the ebb and flow of her voice.¹⁶ It's how the database is programmed—though I still don't know what purpose it serves, other than giving the ghostly feeling of seeing Sontag *move*.

I decided to film the jagged soundwave because it also reminds me of the silhouette of a mountain range, or the outline of stalactites, or a cardiograph, or an elevation drawing of the path of a subway traveling above and below ground. The movement seems to correspond with multiple velocities, temporalities, frequencies. It diagrams the negotiation of a border against an imaginary median line that we're conditioned to see, even if it might not exist.

Borders likely attract me because I grew up on one. *Notes From Underground* (abbreviated here as *Notes*), contains distinct horizontal and vertical movements that narrate an unlikely connection between the Stockholm underground and Susan Sontag's sojourn in Sweden, with a

cavern system 5,000 miles away, roughly a three-hour drive from where I was raised in Texas, on the borders of Mexico and New Mexico.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park was one of a handful of places in the region that served as a destination for sightseeing day-trips when my family hosted an out-of-town guest. Other options included a quaint adobe town called Old Mesilla, where Billy the Kid stood trial for murder, and where a restaurant called La Posta used to thrill with its collection of caged parrots, macaws, and toucans. Another destination was White Sands National Monument, impressive for its vast undulating gypsum sand dunes. It's where Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster made her dystopian film *Atomic Park* (2004), aware of its proximity to the first nuclear test site.¹⁷ But it's the caverns that resonate most with the place I live today.

Sontag lived in Stockholm on two separate occasions, for a total of over two years, during an important time in relation to her personal politics, having arrived to the Swedish capital directly after successive trips to Hanoi and Paris in the spring of 1968.¹⁸ She indulged in the generous practical, financial support allotted to her creative work—and made two films, *Duet for Cannibals* (1969) and *Brother Carl* (1971). She was the same age I was when I moved to Stockholm in 2010. Of course, I find myself here at a very different time, but for similar work-related reasons.

A scene from Sontag's *Duet for Cannibals* recurs in my *Notes*. A man and woman walk through a subway station in the city center. The protagonist, a young political activist, reflects admiringly on how the art in the station—a whitish concrete frieze by Siri Derkert—makes him believe in the progress of humanity.¹⁹ But seconds later, his idealism totally collapses, when his lover takes out a gun and proposes he kill her husband, an exiled German Marxist intellectual, for whom he works. Today, the scene reads humorously. It truly looks ridiculous, but still it struck me for the bleak outlook Sontag seems to convey in writing and directing it, as if to say: humans are irredeemable, no matter their politics. A very similar message is found in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novella *Notes from Underground* (1864).²⁰ Like Dostoyevsky, Sontag seems to convey that no amount of utopian social advancement can release us of our insufficiency. In her diary from this time, she jots down some notes after returning from Stockholm.

Dialectic of the relation between conscious and consciousness:

—function of language (language promotes consciousness / an increase of consciousness is not only philosophically debilitating (cf. Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Nietzsche), but, more importantly, morally debilitating)²¹

Sontag, whose life revolved around all things literary, is keenly aware of the notion that language facilitates our own blindness. We are “able to relate only to things which turn us away from other things” (Blanchot).²² But there's more to say on this. In an interview that appears in the first half of the video, Sontag states how she thinks we're capable of inflicting “unimaginable cruelty and wickedness” on each other, and that recognizing this is the start of one's “moral adulthood.” She excavates deeper, telling the interviewer how it drives her “nuts” when people are “surprised by atrocities—saying how can this happen? How could people do this to each other?”²³ She wants us to understand that life is nothing if not total contingency, and so it shouldn't surprise any of us when violence befalls the most innocent, the most desperate among us. This is an example of how I use Sontag as a conveyer of moral questions—questions posed by her answers that I found in a web-archived interview from the American news channel C-SPAN, conducted on the cusp of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, not long before her death in 2004.²⁴ She's really angry—about all of it.

For anyone who's come across Sontag's essay, “Letter From Sweden,” it's abundantly clear that she experienced a strong sense of disappointment and confusion despite, or probably as a result of, her high expectations for it being an advanced social welfare state.²⁵ She's pretty down when she returns home. Her diary from this time reveals her contemplating loneliness—how it affects her creative ability to form new ideas.²⁶ For obvious reasons, I was reading about Sontag's time in Stockholm with particular personal interest.

I thought about her experiences and concerns and then felt my own. The time in which *Notes* was made stands between the Swedish general elections of 2010 and 2014, when the far right anti-immigration party garnered enough votes to reach parliamentary representation for the

first time since the party's founding. It was such a letdown. It resonates in my everyday encounters with varying intensity, but is always felt in relation to the affective experience of my displacement, which is shared with others and other things. And I can't help but recode the scene from *Duet for Cannibals*—of the foreign woman and her murderous demand on her white, Sweden-born lover—through this moment's own iteration of insidious violence and racism.

The scene is filmed on Stockholm's red line. But the *blue line* plummets even deeper. Literally. To reach its subway platforms, commuters must descend what seems like an excessive depth for a single escalator. Along with Carlsbad Caverns, South African gold mines flash through my imagination. The line starts in the city center at a stop named Kungsträdgården, meaning "King's garden," and extends northwest to the largely immigrant-populated outskirts. Waiting commuters can hear a sharp, rhythmic snapping sound. It's an orienting signal for the visually impaired, informing them which track will receive the next incoming train. The sound is appealing in the way a metronome is—or a lover's heartbeat. I pair it with the sound of dripping water in a cave, and as one transforms into the other, blindness and the passage of geological time momentarily share the same frequency.

For several months, I repeatedly traveled the city's complete transit network to its terminal stations, but kept returning to the blue line. It heads in a westward direction, and so I kept heading even further west, onward to the desert, until I arrived at the caves in New Mexico. For if one wants to court an experience of liminality and untether subjectivity in order to re-enter it and the world more knowingly, then Deleuze and Guattari have a formula: "This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times."²⁷ They go on to say how such meticulousness is what's necessary in reaching beyond the strata that precedes deeper assemblages.²⁸

Halfway through *Notes*, the sharp slicing click of my camera shutter abruptly shifts one image to the next. The first image is of a moiré-pat-

terned screen, displaying an image from inside a cave looking up at the light. The next image is of the same site and framing, but without the moiré-pattern. Within the instant between the images, we inhabit the act of looking itself. Thought is absent in that moment, and we cross centuries in a second.²⁹ Marguerite Duras enacts a similar crossing in her film *Les mains négatives* (1978). She captures Paris in the early morning hours as a voice-over narrates the film through a love letter of sorts. It's for someone who lived 30,000 years ago, whose pigment images—the film's titular *negative hands*—were painted in the Magdalenian caves, next to the Atlantic Ocean. Duras's film is a meditation on the expanse of time through the collapse of time.

The association of prehistoric underground spaces is sealed in Freud's structural model as the strata of consciousness that forms before the ego and superego. The pre-linguistic, unmediated part of the self that's responsible for instinct: the *id*. But if we take leave of psychoanalysis for neurobiology, we find that the brain's frontal lobe is supposed to deteriorate with aging, making way for uncensored thoughts to be exposed, unmediated by good sense. When Sontag was given the terminal results in her final battle with cancer, she is said to have yelled out a long and loud blood curdling *no!*³⁰ When Clarice Lispector, hospitalized in her final days, was prevented from leaving her room, she screamed at the nurse, "You killed my character!"³¹ Life resists capture for anyone who wants to be closest to it. Loss ensues. But to be sure, I consult Lispector in her last book, *The Hour of the Star*. "What I write to you is a dank haze. The words are sounds transfused with shadows that intersect unevenly, stalactites, woven lace, transposed organ music. I can scarcely invoke the words to describe this pattern, vibrant and rich, morbid and obscure, its counterpoint the deep bass of sorrow."³² I held this strangeness close to my gut while making *Notes From Underground*, and ended up with something so aggregated that it totally refuses excerpts. It can't be easily summarized.

But in this way, it's like Maurice Blanchot's writing, it needs to be experienced as a whole. Lydia Davis has written on her experience of translating and understanding Blanchot, saying it was *physically* demanding: "It was in the nature of Blanchot's argument to resist summary. The experience of reading had to take place moment by moment; one's understanding proceeded like a guide's flashlight, illuminating one by one

the animals painted on the wall of an ancient cave.”³³ Davis is attuned to Blanchot’s notion of *primordial obscurity* as something that exists beyond the realm of thought.³⁴ It’s in this darkness we feel the desert as an ancient sea that has distanced itself from its former boundaries.

Waves (2014–15)

Waves engages Virginia Woolf and her seemingly intuited novel *The Waves* (1931). I narrate her influence on me, as I find my own way of depicting consciousness in relation to society and its technologies. Much of the work is filmed in between, or at the meeting of land and sea. Such locations are a way to relate the piece’s structuring liminal relationship, while multiple hydro-relations are set into play. Yes, this includes waves and the distances they traverse, but other things are considered as well: jellyfish, professional big wave surfing, Woolf’s persona explored in the literary criticism of Gilles Deleuze, Courbet’s paintings of the sea, transoceanic cabling, homesickness—and how the Atlantic Ocean is both image and material to measure the distance between where I’m from and where I live today.

The logic at play in the video stems from my attachment to a single thought sighted in Woolf’s diary: “I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot.”³⁵ Stream of consciousness may instantly come to mind. But notice how scholar Kate Flint reassigns the writing style away from the linear flow of a stream to that of waves. She explains, “the images of waves, with their incessant, recurrent dips and crests, provides a far more helpful means of understanding Woolf’s representation of consciousness as something which is certainly fluid, but cyclical and repetitive, rather than linear.”³⁶ Why it is that a narrative mode of circularity over linearity hasn’t been more widely considered seems strange. But the video at hand takes leave of categorizations and asks what happens when metaphor swapping ceases altogether.

In an interview conducted about *Waves*, I’m posed the question: “Culture commonly uses natural metaphors to discuss contemporary technology, and frequently I hear terms like ‘oceans of data,’ or ‘sea of information’ used to describe the internet. If we could extend those metaphors, what do you see are the waves within those oceans and seas?”³⁷

The seas, as well as global networking, are already obscured in this use of language, and so the desire to extend the metaphor seems problematic. A song I like pops into my head, “Wave of Mutilation” by the Pixies—and I start to answer the question by talking about it, “...that song isn’t a metaphor for the proliferation of internet technology... But actually, maybe it’s still relevant—and much more interesting.”³⁸ The tune is about a spate of murder-suicides in Japan in the late ‘80s. Husbands were driving off of piers into the ocean with their wife and kids in the car. I describe this and then say that’s “... such a profound image of the ocean’s fatal force and powers of attraction. But those metaphors are actually something I’m trying to open up as material realities. There are ‘oceans of data’—as in—the oceans do consist of data—in the way of an ever-increasing number of undersea fiber-optic cables. And there is a ‘sea of information’—certainly seas that are affected by information.”³⁹

In *Waves*, I speculate on how the activity of looking at Gustave Courbet’s painting *The Wave* (1869) in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt on the internet today connects me to Google’s data center, housed in what was once the Summa Mill, a seaside pulp factory in a town called Hamina, in Finland.⁴⁰⁴¹ Its thousands of servers generate a great deal of heat, and Google has taken pains to exhibit how effectively it channels the nearby frigid seawater as a cooling source. Thus the material connection between Courbet’s painting and the Baltic Sea is nothing less than spectacular. Gaining “access” to the painting online, we come into contact with the sea itself—which is connected to the very thing that Courbet painted on the Norman shores of Étretat. And “I am heating up that same sea by looking at it online.”⁴¹

I convey meetings like this—those that take place over vast spatiotemporal distances, absurd displacements, and multiple durations—by using Google’s *own* aesthetics. Its ‘Cultural Institute’ employs similar capturing technology as ‘Street View,’ which we’ve become rapidly familiar with to such an extent that the program’s awkward regulated zooms and jagged panning movements are just a part of the way we experience place. To mimic this phenomenon, I film using unorthodox camera movements. I look odd doing it, and people in the vicinity stop and stare, but when this Street View movement is applied directly to the physical space where the painting hangs in the museum is when I really see this way of seeing.⁴³

Courbet made several wave paintings. There is one that really moves me. It hangs in a corner next to a window in the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin. It's rough, puffy, and very physical. One can sense the ocean's force while standing in front of it. At the same time, the image is approaching abstraction, and it doesn't really look like an actual wave. Art historian Linda Nochlin points this out too, thinking about Courbet's waves against the iconic Katsushika Hokusai woodblock print *Fuji at Sea*.⁴⁴ She sets both next to Gustave Le Gray's well-known photograph taken from the beach, and compares them with her own experience of looking out at waves from the shore.⁴⁵ She brings along an image of one of Courbet's waves to beaches on Long Island and Normandy, holding it out to compare against actual waves. Nochlin decides that the painting still does not look how waves look, writing that, "Courbet's wave is more forceful, scarier, in short, more 'wavelike'—akin to the wave fixed in our imagination—than any actually viewed wave."⁴⁶

The wave painting in the Alte Nationalgalerie reminds me of a Rothko. It has distinct yet blurred rectangular forms, which constitute the sky, sea, and shore. It might be obvious, but it's worth noting that Courbet is a relevant artist here, not only for his wave proclivities, but also for the histories his oeuvre engages, namely that of art as witness to the society in which one is living, making this life visible as a matter of personal liberty from any institution.⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ *The Wave* was the cover image *Artforum* selected for its issue on the fortieth anniversary of May of '68!⁴⁹ But along these lines, Nochlin shares one "brilliant and politically hopeful" historical reading of Courbet's wave paintings and then swiftly shoots it down. She quotes art historian Klaus Herding, who writes how the wave paintings, "...attempt, through exact observation of nature, to collect experience which could be fed back as imagery into society, in conformance with Courbet's desire to work through art for individual freedom and finally for democracy."⁵⁰ If there is such a thing as a respectful guffaw, Nochlin seems to issue it here, as she turns away from Herding's ambitions for Courbet and narrows in on the artist's pull towards the thingness of the thing itself, offering that "what we might call the 'primordial form' of the natural object, whether it be tree, wave or grotto, an image, however naturalistic in some respects, which is at the same time true to the felt reality of the motif in question."⁵¹

Thus, the connection goes far deeper than tasking art with the service

of politics or sociality. This potently resonates with me. Courbet's painting contains within it so much sensation that it edges towards *non-sense*. It exists as an experience of the unknowable natural phenomena that is simultaneously an experience of being-in-the-world. And within the painting's ability to describe this unknowable thing, it reveals the material force and ontology of the very thing it depicts.⁵² The video, *Waves*, aspires to lend this experience, too. Or, likewise to do what Lispector's writing does, in how she uses language to disassemble language, and in doing so, speaks closer to the truth.

Again, Virginia Woolf's statement: "... I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot."⁵³ It's in her diary (also in a letter to a friend), and it's part of a passage that seems to indicate Woolf feeling productively cast off from subjectivity. "I am not a writer: I am nothing: but I am quite content."⁵⁴ I follow her lead. Loosening my grip, allowing questions to emerge from the subject of inquiry itself, not the other way around. A leveling out occurs, a democratization of ontologies. It's not only Woolf's novel *The Waves* that informs the video, because there is no real origin, merely intersections, shadows—such as an indiscriminate, albeit undoubtedly algorithm-determined, selection of surfing videos I lazily watched over an entire summer, burned out after finishing *Notes From Underground*. The binge proved just as consequential to my process as any active research activity up to that point. *Inordinate* amounts of my time went to gazing at *Teahupo'o*, a surf break whose namesake belongs to the village in Tahiti it rushes toward. The wave's shape is tied to the dramatic configuration of the reef below it.⁵⁵ Sending off a deep barrel with a crest bearing a lip so thick and weighty it's like no other in the world. I continue to look at this wave every now and then, in pursuit not of *the perfect wave*, but rather of conditions equally intangible. Moving-images of *Teahupo'o* not presented in slow motion and/or not distorted by a too wide-angle lens are elusive. *I just want to see the wave as a wave*, but I only get subjectivity.

Late-summer idleness between one work and another, things were shapeless, mutable. Deleuze is interested in the in-between for this reason. He says that as opposed to what modern philosophy ascribes to, this space doesn't limit movement in reaction to origins. He explains this through sports. Sports of the modern era extended from the human

body as the source of movement, specifically as it reacts to something else—basically, think of any track and field sport. But what he calls *new sports* (in 1985)—surfing, windsurfing and hang-gliding—are different.⁵⁶ They possess no real start or finish. They take form in an already existing movement. Waves. He explains, “There’s no longer an origin as starting point, but a sort of putting-into-orbit. The key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to ‘get into something’ instead of being the origin of an effort.”⁵⁷ Deleuze’s claim is for unrestricted movement in philosophy, out of a drive to create things, not merely reflect on them.⁵⁸ This resonates acutely with what I’ve designated in this text as Woolf’s dictum, *rhythm over plot*, and it’s the driver for all of the videos of this trilogy. But her *rhythm over plot* is far riskier than most any other alternative. And I have a hunch that unending risk belongs to the realm of the *impossible*, Blanchot’s (and Bataille’s) idea of an unattainable limit where contact with the divine resides.⁵⁹

Woolf makes her own incisive invocation of the impossible when asked the question of what literature is. Her answer is outright resistance to fixity: “To whom are you speaking of writing? The writer does not speak about it, but is concerned with something else.”⁶⁰ Woolf’s *something else* is the liminal, pre-linguistic space of affect, involved in processes of becoming, and not unlike Lispector’s *it*, or her *whatever is lurking behind thought*. It exists beside a longing for what is far afield from intellect. *The Waves* is a novel as countermovement to finalism. “... life itself is an utter contingency: it need never have emerged, and there is no particular explanation for why it developed in the forms it presently takes on earth,” explains philosopher and feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz, writing on Henri Bergson.⁶¹ Woolf’s Bergsonian plot-free alternative approaches a more materially felt understanding of the way duration makes every thing and every experience differentiated from the previous and the next. Producing another kind of knowledge that Bergson regards as intuition, not intellect. Or as he writes, “... our intellect [is] solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same, intellect turns away from the vision of time. It dislikes what is fluid, and solidifies everything it touches. We do not *think* real time. But we *live* it, because life transcends intellect.”⁶² Grosz instructs that Bergson does not dismiss intellect, but rather that it, in combination with intuition and/or other forms of knowledge, is best when harnessed *together*.

Departing from the preceding videos—where I use the voices of Lispector to structure *Sunsets*, and Sontag for *Notes From Underground*—for *Waves* I use my own voice and writing out of necessity.⁶³ I write, re-write, and read aloud portions of a self-authored script of sorts that began to take shape over the Atlantic Ocean. Suspended between the continent of my birth and the one I live on today, between zones of assimilation, conscientiousness effectively slackens. Since the video is a document of its own making, viewers see and hear the always-provisional work forming. I decide on word tenses, stumble around my limited vocabulary, my own lame metaphors. It’s embarrassing. But in the process, I hear something other than writing or thought—*through* writing and thought (and towards the production of images). Perhaps it’s like putting a nautilus to one’s ear to hear not the inside of a shell, but rather the sound of the sea. Thus, video-making becomes an alternative measuring tool used to grasp distances between relations. Searching for intimacy.

What’s more, my sense of homesickness comes to exist as such, in the process of researching the sea, filming waves in different locations over a year, trying to figure this work out. Reading books and articles about invisible jellyfish, the laying of the first trans-Pacific internet cables, wave mechanics, species extinction, cruise ships, philosophical concepts tied to the sea, watching films on the global shipping industry, morbid documentaries about sea-related natural disasters, people who jump from the Golden Gate Bridge, re-watching a swath of French New Wave films—so many of them ending with a solitary man overlooking the ocean.⁶⁴ I read *Memoirs of Hadrian* by the formidable novelist Marguerite Yourcenar because she is the first translator of *The Waves* into French. Could she connect to something? With a Blanchotian sensibility, her heroic protagonist loved sleep because, like death, he thought of it as the great equalizer of men. I read the novel at a point when I was flailing about, really suffering for lack of a structuring principle for the video, and grasping for some connection between my displacement and that of Yourcenar’s, from her native Belgium to a place in Maine called Mount Desert Island. What a name—each topographical word of it merges towards solitude! It all goes to say that the most daunting task of working with the sea is to find a representational register that can stand up to its countless imaginings (it is also exceedingly difficult to film a scene of waves that is not clichéd).

To enter into any project about waves—or sunsets, or the under-ground—is to face a formidable, protracted lineage of thought. Yet assigning the sea as a symbol for consciousness is hard to knock down for a reason. Primordial reasons. *Oceanic feeling* was an idea introduced to Sigmund Freud by Romain Rolland, a writer, musicologist and mystic—and his most-revered pen pal. Freud initially rejects oceanic feeling on the basis of rationality. But he eventually succumbs, acknowledging that there must indeed be *some* “physiological source” for a “primordial connectedness to other creatures and things,” and he “knew this feeling to be the only possible basis for social cohesion.”⁶⁵ This is explained to me by art historian and theorist Kaja Silverman. She continues that oceanic feeling, “is ‘imposed’ upon us as a ‘fact,’ and it is a ‘sensation’ instead of a thought—the sensation of the ‘contact’ between ourselves and other beings.”⁶⁶ What is boundless is not us, but the totality that we are merely a part of.

Woolf ends her experiment, *The Waves*, with a single italicized sentence: “*The waves broke on the shore.*”⁶⁷ It marks the death of a character named Bernard, and with it an image of a breaking wave is applied onto individual finitude. But like any wave, the writer knows that it’s a double movement—and then some. Other waves will break, fulfilling their own unwritten paths, and life does not cease without us. The writer tracks a continuum that will go on, as I say in *Waves*, with or without us.⁶⁸ The *us* is not any given individual, but the human species itself.

This text is excerpted from Lisa Tan’s doctoral thesis.

Installation Images







Video Credits

Sunsets

2012

HD video, sound

22 minutes 30 seconds

Locations

Archipelago in the Bohuslän region of Sweden

Lisa Tan's residence, Stockholm

Lisa Tan's studio, Stockholm

Stockholm Public Library

A cemetery somewhere between Stockholm and Gävle

Sources Recorded

Clarice Lispector interviewed by Júlio Lerner, 1977, originally televised for the Brazilian program *Panorama*, accessed in five parts on YouTube

Skype conversation

Apple Inc. screen saver "Cosmos"

Production

Video and editing by Lisa Tan

Final editing by Nils Fridén

Notes From Underground

2013

HD video, sound

23 minutes 45 seconds

Locations

Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico

Transit to the terminal stations of the blue and red lines of the Stockholm subway system

Lisa Tan's studio, Stockholm

Östermalmstorg subway station, Stockholm

Västra Skogen subway station, Stockholm

Sources Recorded

Duet for Cannibals, 1969, a film by Susan Sontag, accessed on ubuweb.com

Susan Sontag interviewed by Lars-Göran Bergquist on the occasion of the publication of her collection of short fiction, *I, etcetera*, 1978

The Spirit of Exploration: Discovering the Wonders of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, 1993, a DVD produced by Carlsbad Caverns Guadalupe Mountains Association

"In depth: Susan Sontag," *Book TV*, C-SPAN, 2003

"Amarilli mia bella," Giulio Caccini, *Cecilia Bartoli: If You Love Me/Se tu m'ami: 18th-century Italian songs*, 1992

Jean Clottes, *Cave Art*, 2008

Production

Video and editing by Lisa Tan

Final editing by Nils Fridén

Waves

2014–15

HD video, sound

19 minutes 12 seconds

Locations

Lisa Tan's studio, Stockholm

Ellwood Beach, Santa Barbara, California

Städel Museum, Frankfurt

An overlook near the Cliffs of Moher, County Clare

A flight from London to Los Angeles

A beach in Fårö, Gotland

Ferry from Svolveær to Bodø

El Matador State Beach, Malibu, California

A flight from Dallas to El Paso, Texas

Amado Beach, Algarve

Sources Recorded

Lisa Tan's mother's television on standby

Skype conversation

Gustave Courbet, *The Wave*, 1869, Städel Museum viewed on Google Cultural Institute

Sound from vending machines at the Iceland Academy of Art

"4 Waves, 1 Hour" on British Airways Flight BA0269

Flight map on British Airways Flight BA0269

Tour guide at the Städel Museum

Source Texts

The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3, 1925–30, 1980

Gilles Deleuze, "Life and Literature," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 1997

Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, 2012, first published 1973

Casey Dunn, "A Marine Dunn Magician's Vanishing Act," *The New York Times*, 2014

Rosi Braidotti, "The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible," *Deleuze and Philosophy*, 2008

Neal Stephenson, "Mother Earth Mother Board," *Wired*, 1996

"Pink Noise", Wikipedia

Fredric Raichlen, *Waves*, 2013

Paul Virilio, "Landscape of Events Seen at Speed: Interview with Pierre Sterckx," *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews*, 2001

Production

Video and editing by Lisa Tan

Final editing by Nils Fridén

Notes

Mara Lee

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2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as culture," *Parallax*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2000, 13.
3. Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, Princeton University Press, 1999, 29.
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5. Anders Olsson, *Skillnadens konst. Sex kapitel om moderna fragment*, Albert Bonniers, 2006, 343. My translation.
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9. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans., Thomas Dutoit, Stanford University Press, 1993, 34.
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Lisa Tan

1. Michael Taussig, "When the Sun Goes Down: A Copernican Turn of Remembrance," Lecture, Monash University, Victoria, March 10, 2010, <http://www.digitalpodcast.com/items/7696283>. Thank you to Natascha Sadr Haghghian for letting me know about Taussig's lecture.
2. Tacita Dean, *The Green Ray from the Sun Quartet*, 2001.
3. Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, "Fondazione Nicola Trussardi Presents Still Life the First Major Solo Exhibition in Italy by Tacita Dean," Press Release, May 12, 2009, <http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com>. This quote is pulled from one of several texts that Dean wrote on her individual films, all included in materials accompanying her 2009 exhibition in Milan.
4. Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, Or, The History of Photography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 11. Silverman reconceptualizes photography away from indexicality and representation and instead towards analogy. "When I say 'analogy,' I do not mean sameness, symbolic equivalence, logical adequation, or even a rhetorical relationship—like a metaphor or a simile—in which one term functions as the provisional placeholder for another. I am talking about the authorless and untranscendable similarities that structure Being, or what I will be calling 'the world,' and that give everything the same ontological weight."
5. Taussig, "When the Sun Goes Down."
6. *Ibid.*

7. See the works: *One Night Stand (Paris)*, 2006, and *Moving a Mountain*, 2008, <http://lisatan.net/archive.html>.
8. Lisa Tan, *Sunsets*, 2012, 00:21:00.
9. Benjamin Moser, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.
10. Yudith Rosenbaum, "Ethics in Literature: Reading Clarice Lispector's 'Mineirinho'," *Estudos Avançados Estud. Av.* 24, no. 69 (2010): 174, <http://www.scielo.br>.
11. Moser, *Why This World*, 277.
12. Mara Lee, "The Shadow Is Just as Tangible as the Origin," in *Sunsets, Notes From Underground, Waves*, by Lisa Tan (Berlin: Archive Books, 2015), 15.
13. *Ibid.*, 15.
14. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 81-82.
15. Tan, *Sunsets*, 00:00:35.
16. "Lars-Göran Bergquist Intervjuar Amerikanska Författare. Susan Sontag," interview: Lars-Göran Bergquist, *Sveriges Radio*, 198-, <http://smdb.kb.se/catalog/id/000111576>.
17. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *Atomic Park*, 2004, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8bey8_atomic-park_shortfilms. The end credits of Gonzalez-Foerster's film read (in French and English): "The White Sands desert is located near Trinity Site. It was here, in July 1945, that the very first atomic bomb was tested. The voice of Marilyn Monroe, in John Houston's film 'The Misfits', can be heard in the distance. Arthur Miller wrote the script."
18. Susan Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks, 1964-1980*, ed. David Rieff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 239-321.
19. Siri Derkert's public artwork is in the Östermalmstorg metro station in central Stockholm. It was made between 1961-1965.
20. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).
21. Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh*, 271.
22. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982), 134.
23. Lisa Tan, *Notes From Underground*, 2013, 00:06:38.
24. "In Depth with Susan Sontag," *C-SPAN*, March 2, 2003, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?172991-1/depth-susan-sontag>.
25. Susan Sontag, "A Letter from Sweden," *Ramparts*, July 1969. I received this essay from an expatriate artist living in Stockholm. The version he gave me was transcribed from the *Ramparts* article as a Word document. I suspect that at the time, it was not easily available online as it is today.
26. Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh*.
27. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 161.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Taussig, "When the Sun Goes Down."
30. "Regarding Susan Sontag" Dir, Nancy D. Kates, *HBO Documentaries*, 2014.
31. Moser, *Why This World*, 383.
32. Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: New Directions Books, 1977), 16.
33. Lydia Davis, *Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red*, The Cahiers Series (London: Center for Writers & Translators, The Arts Arena, Sylph Editions, 2012), 31.
34. Maurice Blanchot, *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction & Literary Essays*, ed. George Quasha, trans. Lydia Davis, Paul Auster, and Robert Lamberton (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill/Barrytown, 1999), 385.
35. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3 1925-30*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew MacNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 316. Full sentence: "This rhythm (I say I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot) is in harmony with the painters." Woolf's sentence in parenthesis is from a letter dated 28 August 1930 to Ethel Smyth.
36. Virginia Woolf, "Introduction," in *The Waves*, ed. Kate Flint (London: Penguin, 2000), xi.
37. Nicholas O'Brien, "Lisa Tan: On Literary References, 'Wave of Mutilation' and Oceans of Data," *WAX Magazine*, 2015, 8.
38. *Ibid.*, 8.
39. *Ibid.*, 8.
40. Gustave Courbet, *The Wave*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 63 x 91.5 cm.
41. Pertti Jokivuori, "Workers React to Threat of Closure of Paper Pulp Mills", *EurWORK*, March 3, 2008, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu>. This article reports the closures of the paper manufacturer Stora Enso in 2007 with 1,100 job losses. How fitting that Google's data center is housed one of these former paper mills, reducing the number of employees to a fraction of what was once required in the building. Google itself describes another interesting aspect of the building's history: part of the facility is housed in a former machine hall designed by Alvar Aalto.
42. O'Brien, *WAX magazine*, 11.
43. At the time of my visit, Courbet's *The Wave* was being restored in advance of a loan for an exhibition elsewhere in Germany. I knew this before my trip to Frankfurt, having contacted the museum to gain permission to film. I refer to the painting's absence in the video, "... but on a sunny day in Frankfurt, *The Wave* wasn't hanging in its handsome blue fridge."
44. Katsushika Hokusai, *Fuji at Sea*. Woodcut, *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, vol. 2, 1835.
45. Gustave Le Gray, *The Great Wave, Sète*, 1857. Albumen silver print from two collodion-on-glass negatives, 33.7 x 41.4 cm, 13 ¼ x 16 ⅝ in.
46. Linda Nochlin, *Courbet* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 203.
47. T. J. Clark, "Introduction," in *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973). The introduction alone provides important insight into Courbet's art in terms of its implications on society and politics at the time.
48. "Wie Die Nazis Den Maler Hans Thoma Vereinnahmten," *Die Welt*, July 5, 2013, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/kunst-und-architektur/article117753925/Wie-die-Nazis-den-Maler-Hans-Thoma-vereinnahmten.html>. In place of Courbet's *The*

Wave at the Städel was a stiff-looking self-portrait by 19th century German artist Hans Thoma. Looking at that painting, I wouldn't have guessed that Thoma and Courbet had met, in Paris. Courbet's effect was so great on Thoma that he went on to paint subjects that reflected the people and things around him, feeling liberated from the Academy. For more, refer to the Städel's Hans Thoma exhibition from 2013.

49. Paul Galvez, "Inner States," *Artforum*, May 2008, 346. This issue of *Artforum* includes a text on Courbet by art historian Paul Galvez. He writes about the paintings in a way that seems to me to resonate with Nochlin's reading of a "felt reality" and "primordial form" in the wave paintings. Galvez: "Courbet worked the paint so that to perceive a mark is to understand the object anew." He continues, "This successive unfolding has an erotic component as well. Objects release their inner states of being in a kind of convulsive birth of form."

50. Nochlin, *Courbet*, 203–4.

51. *Ibid.*, 204. T.J. Clark might agree. "I do not want the social history of art to depend on intuitive analogies between form an ideological content—on saying, for example, that the lack of firm compositional focus in Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* is an expression of the painter's egalitarianism..."

T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, 10–11.

52. Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, Or, The History of Photography*.

53. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3 1925–30*, 316.

54. *Ibid.*, 316.

55. "Teahupo'o," Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teahupo'o>.

56. Gilles Deleuze, "Conversation with Antoine Dulaure and Claire Parnet L'Autre Journal 8 (October 1985)," in *Negotiations, 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 122.

57. *Ibid.*, 122.

58. Karl Palmås, "Bodies without Bodhis," *Eurozine*, November 13, 2009, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-11-13-palmas-en.html>. Thanks to Göran Dahlberg for pointing me to this text on the movie *Point Break* and Deleuze.

59. Lisa Tan, *For Every Word Has Its Own Shadow: Sunsets, Notes From Underground, Waves*, (Gothenburg: ArtMonitor, 2015). See: section on "Liminality, Threshold and an Ethics of Becoming."

60. Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 6. Please note: Deleuze does not cite from which source Woolf's statement is from in his text.

61. Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 215.

62. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 46.

63. "Rare Recording of Virginia Woolf," *BBC News*, July 9, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-28231055>. I wanted to use only surviving recording of Woolf in some way for the video, but I just couldn't make it work.

64. Casey Dunn, "A Marine Magician's Vanishing Act," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2014. Neal Stephenson, "Mother Earth Mother Board," *Wired*, December 1, 1996. Fredric Raichlen, *Waves* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013). Elizabeth Kol-

bert, "Annals of Extinction, Part 1 and 2," *The New Yorker*, December 13 and 16, 2013. David Foster Wallace, "Shipping Out: On the Comforts of a Luxury Cruise.," *Harper's Magazine*, January 1, 1996. Kaja Silverman, "The Oceanic Feeling," in *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). *The Forgotten Space*, dir. Allan Sekula and Noël Burch (2010). *The Bridge*, dir. Eric Steel (2006). *Contempt*, dir. Jean-Luc Godard (1963). *Pierrot le fou*, dir. Jean-Luc Godard (1965). *The 400 Blows*, dir. François Truffaut (1959). *Point Break*, dir. Kathryn Bigelow (1991). *By Brakhage*, dir. Stan Brakhage (1955–2003). Listed in chronological order of the listing in my sentence that this note belongs to.

65. Kaja Silverman, "The Oceanic Feeling," in *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 34.

66. Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh*, 29.

67. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1931), 297.

68. Rosi Braidotti, "The Ethics of Becoming-Imperceptible," *Deleuze International*, February 28, 2008, 29, <http://deleuze.tausendplateaus.de/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/trent-final.pdf>. I owe this thought to Braidotti who writes of *becoming-imperceptible*. Hers is an affirmative take on death, "Life will go on, but it is *Zoe*, not the rational conscious, sovereign individual. It will go on in the superior generative powers of a Life that is relentlessly not human in its power to endure, in its obscene capacity to fulfill the vitality that animates it."

Contributors

Mara Lee is a poet, novelist and scholar based in Stockholm. She is the official Swedish translator of Anne Carson. Her novels *Ladies* (2007), *Salome* (2011), and *Future Perfect* (2014) are published by Albert Bonniers Förlag. Lee's recent scholarly study, *När andra skriver: skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid* (The writing of Others: Writing conceived as resistance, responsibility and time) is published by Glänta. She has written several essays on artists, including Lina Selander and Eva Hesse ("Om Eva Hesse" published by Moderna Museet). She is the recipient of the P.O. Enquist prize established by Norstedts, as well as the Svenska Dagbladet literature prize.

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Natascha Sadr Haghighian's research-based practice encompasses a variety of forms and formats, among them video, performance, installations, text, and sound, and is primarily concerned with the sociopolitical implications of contemporary modes of world-making, especially in the field of vision. The text "Airport Hotel" is part of ongoing research into techniques of "looking awry." Rather than offering highlights from a CV, Haghighian asks readers to go to www.bioswop.net, a CV-exchange platform where artists and other cultural practitioners can borrow and lend CVs for various purposes.

Joshua Shaddock is an artist and graphic designer living in South Orange, NJ. He received an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Lisa Tan is an artist living in Stockholm. She received an MFA from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. This book is a component of her doctoral dissertation with the University of Gothenburg, Valand Academy. She has previously lead seminars in MFA programs at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Reykjavik; Parsons The New School for Design, New York; and The Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm. The videos in this book have been exhibited as a group at Galleri Riis, Stockholm (2015), and individually at the New Museum, New York (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (2015); Lofoten International Art Festival, Svolvær (2013); Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, Lisbon (2013); Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm (2013); Parra & Romero, Madrid (2012); VidalCuglietta, Brussels (2012). For more see www.lisatan.net

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-Lisa

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Cover: Lisa Tan, *Notes From Underground*, 2013 (still)

Installation images by Jean-Baptiste Beranger

For every word has its own shadow at Galleri Riis, Stockholm, 2015.

Three 190 x 106.8 cm single-channel projections in 16:9 HD video with speakers and headphones, carpet, paint, and wooden pedestals.

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