

A Spiritual Ecology of the Line

Thesis

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By

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Abstract

The following essay reflects on foundational pools in my life: art, love, death, spiritual and material cycles, the body, color, nature, one-ness with the universe... Through all of this, drawing lines has shown itself as a worthy starting ground.

As you read this essay, it offers an entrance into the philosophies that I am exploring, currently in their infancy. It is comprised of a written language intended to companion the language of my visual art practice.

Dedication

To the garden / Humming

Acknowledgments

For helping to plant the seeds. / For helping to see how they grow.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Vita.....	v
Chapter 1. Sun and Earth and Sex / The First Line	1
Chapter 2. The Evolution of Holding / The First Eye.....	4
Chapter 3. Eye Contact	7
Bibliography	10

Chapter 1. Sun and Earth and Sex / The First Line

In the beginning, Maker did not intend on beginning Earth because they knew it would make them deeply sad. But, when Maker did in fact go ahead, they did so on the condition that there must also be a star.

A star is incredibly functional, they reasoned, because it acts as a necessary pivot point, a belly of gravity from which a planet may twirl around and around for an unfathomable amount of time. With this logic, rooted in the beauty of physics, a large shiver trembled through the universe and two orbs took shape like dinner plates emerging from an inky pool. As if it had never been any other way, Sun and Earth became partners.

This event, a physical and kinetic love-poem, birthed the origin of many things dark and mysterious. It may be referred to as *The First Widening*, *The First Distance*, and—residually—*The First Longing*.

As point of necessary clarification, in order for true longing to manifest, there must be a lacuna. Generally, this word describes a space between, often capable of being filled or with history of having once been full: a tooth-gap, an absence of pages in an ancient tome, and small cavities within the matrix of a bone are some examples of lacunae. Botanists would add that the lacuna is also the space between plant cells that allow for the passage of light.

When Earth and Sun became aware of the great lacuna between them, their desire to resolve this distance became unbearable. In resolution, Sun produced a heavenly burst of light

that traversed outer space with the supple pleasure of a lover's arm. From this moment and to this day, the vast lacuna between Sun and Earth was filled with a journey of radiant sunlight.

As you may know, to be touched by sunlight is to be touched by warmth that seeps through the skin and into the body. This permeating quality of sunlight is invigorating, kind, and remarkably similar to the effects of a hug. Given the correct circumstances, both the touch of light and the touch of skin are capable of producing a banal miracle—perspiration.

As heat builds from either sunlight or extended physical contact (i.e. a hug), the receiving human body responds by pushing beads of mineral-rich water through a dense constellation of pores. As the sweat evaporates into the atmosphere, the body is cooled. While this function can be understood as an adaptive, physical response, we may also see the sweat that slickens our bodies through the following dichotomy of possibility:

- 1. This fluid, when excreted out of the skin, becomes separate from the human body.*
- 2. This fluid, when excreted out of the skin, remains the human body.*

When understood through the latter of these two options, sweat may be understood as a part of the body that has been let loose, like a gasp, from its container. In the instance of a shared hug, specifically, the sweat from each individual eventually does something fascinating—it mixes indistinguishably together. In joining these watery extensions, the two distinct human bodies have actually become one. Reflecting on this miracle is to reflect on the physical manifestation of love; it is an anecdote describing the consensual, molecular mixing of two bodies.

In much more complicated terms, a similar phenomenon occurred between Sun and Earth. As Sun perpetually hugged light upon the curving body of Earth, they perspired an ocean from the pores of Earth's landscape. As this magnificent and sparkling liquid frothed forth from canyons and geysers, Earth became wet, untameably blue, and vividly alive. Water and light had entwined.

Chapter 2. The Evolution of Holding / The First Eye

When Earth was covered in ocean and formations of land were dreams held in volcanic fog, the days were long and romantic. Every morning, without blinking, Earth would hold all of Sun's sunlight in a sweep of one trillion sparkling waves. There was absolutely no one else to see it, and this made the sight particularly splendid. You may try to imagine the vision of these trillion sparkling waves, but it's not possible.

It is in this act of holding that Earth accidentally became the first eye: a container, lidded with brine, sensing the entirety of the universe. And, while it is true that only earth remembers this earliest of times, the limpet understands that Earth is an eye better than any other creature.

The limpet is inconspicuous, finding home in the ocean's intertidal zones. At first appearance, they are forgettable, sized roughly the diameter of a quarter. With activated attention, however, each shell resembles a shallow mound, slightly conical, shaped closer to an almond than a circle. The texture is mottled and decorated in browns and creams. The belly of a limpet presents a squishy underside, mustard in color, with edges that undulate like a thick, wet ribbon. This strange body part, known as the muscular foot, provides limpets with locomotion and suction. In addition, the foot also assists each individual limpet in creating a lacuna upon the monolithic rocks that they inhabit.

This indentation is called a "home scar," and each one fits the unique contour of its creator's shell perfectly. The precision ensures the limpet a tight seal to their rock during low, exposing tides. When submerged, the limpet temporarily wanders from their home scar for the scraping of algae and the thrill of mating. If one is relocated, death will likely occur.

Humans, mostly children, often mistake limpets for rocks. As a result, violent curiosity tends to exceed the value of the limpet's life; it is taken quickly at the hand of the child who splits their shells in half. Once burst, their guts gift the viewer with an intoxicating orange hue that glimmers sickly in the sun. Humans enjoy this encounter, accidental or otherwise, because it is a way to look at death softly—padded, like a sad painting, with the enchanting mystery of color.

The eye of the limpet is particularly special because it is truly open. If human eyes were truly open then something could fall into them. It would have to be something small—a pinky fingernail shaped like a crescent moon, perhaps? If our eyes were truly open then a fingernail like this or a crumb could be dropped aerially into a wide-open eye and it would disappear into the black of the pupil. So, no, human eyes are not truly open. Limpet eyes, however, are.

Described simply, the eye of a limpet is a cup-like indentation in its skin that contains a cluster of photoreceptive cells; while capable of sensing light, the opening at the top of the structure is not capable of expanding and contracting like a human pupil. Instead, it remains widely, truly open for the entrance of sunlight and the briny sea of one trillion sparkling waves. The limpet recalls the story of the first eye because their eyes hold the entirety of the ocean within them. It is remarkable and it is true, the limpet's eye is a sensory cup of water overflowing into the atmosphere, it is Earth.

Evolving from a once similar structure, the human eye is now completely encased by the tight seal of the cornea. Such an adaptation proved useful for the transition to life on land, but sacrificed the eye's ability to hold the ocean inside it. Ironically, such nostalgia and great longing

are capable of producing tears—the oceanic replacement for an eye no longer bathed and full of the sea.¹

As Sun drew a line of sunlight to Earth, Earth became wet with sparkling vision. Humans, descendants of this first seeing and holding, can no longer see like the limpet who contains the whole world in its eye, but they still partake in the rituals of light. Today, like Earth at the dawn of time, we are holding the radiant journey of sunlight inside us. And, as Earth does, we may hold this line of light, sense it, and bloom it forward into something true.

Chapter 3. Eye Contact

Known most prominently for his contributions in understanding the anatomy of the human eye,² Johann Gottfried Zinn was also a clever botanist. Despite his pre-mature death at the age of 32, his contributions to both fields were honored in the naming of the Zinnia, a gorgeous ruffle of a flower with a prominently pupiled center.

In the garden I grow with my love, the Zinnias hush in oranges, reds, pinks and yellows. Along the pad of their soft button centers, a fairy circle radiates a ring of miniature yellow flowers. Rows of shingling petals follow them, unfurled into existence from mysterious hollow tubes. Accumulating petals throughout the length of its bloom, the flower becomes full and robust. As they grow, they tangle their way up to the sky on fuzzy stems, exerting toughness and rigor in finding the sun. They are at ease and blissful on the hottest of days.

I wish to be more like them, I think, and so I raise my body erect, feet planted in the soil, back straight, and palms pushed into the sky like solar panels. As they warm, hot blood trickles down into the rest of my body.

I look back down at the lovely Zinnias.

Through patience and sensing that is slow, my attention saturates and I become mindful. In this state of consciousness, I forget the boundaries of my body. I forget my body completely. My body is loose and these flowers that I see, they are me and I am them. I say this because the flowers have entered me through my pupil, the hole of my eye. As they glow as a vision inside me, they mix into my consciousness, bonding my inner and outer worlds.

I let out a twinkling gasp.

~

What is the origin of the gasp?

In this particular case, it began with the first line;

When Sun conjured a beam of light, filling the lacuna, and warming Earth.

Through this line of sun, the Zinnia is born, holding light in its leaves, condensing and converting it into sprawls of wandering stems.

A stem is a line of sun extended.

A flower is a line of sun extended.

A flower is a line of sun e x t e n d e d.

The Zinnia vibrates inside my mind like a supernatural feeling.

Am I looking at the sun, a flower, or myself?

Of this beauty that has seeped into my being, it mixes with my internal world. Translated, I present it back to the universe—the line has been released yet again, it is now a gasp.

~

I was looking in the mirror, into my own eyes, and this reminded me of a time in early summer when Moonchild and I split three tabs of acid. The sky was extra lavender this day and sheened with periwinkle. The clouds were milky.

We found our way through the garden and to the hilltop with our friend the cedar tree. This is my favorite tree in the world. Sitting under it, we giggled like monkeys, clumsy into each

other with two bottles of beer between our tangle of thighs. Caught in a hiccup of time, we began a game of staring directly, so truly open, into each other's eyes.

During this most mindful attention, I came to notice myself mirrored in the center of Moonchild's wide pupils, resting like a vision on the cornea's surface. This perfect image of myself was formed from the bouncing of sunlight off my complexion and into the eyes of my lover. It was me, only smaller, glassy, imprinted onto the eye of a man who looked at me after years of partnership and shared understanding.

Akin to the interplay of parallel, dressing room mirrors, I came to realize the eyes of my reflection contained an image of my love, and, from this image's eyes, mine again, and again, and again. Endlessly this pattern continued, each eye a portal from which our bodies were carried by sunlight back and forth at incredible speed. We were two men entwined, our bodies woven together by love's fractal of reflected light.

~

If two humans stare at each other with eyes truly open, it is not just an act of extending Sun's line through space to Earth, it is extending love to infinity upon a radiant journey of light.

Bibliography

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