

A BRIEF EXCURSION INTO PETER GOIN'S "SUBSIDENCE CRATER"



***“When Goin shows slides from the *Nuclear Landscapes* project, invariably someone in the audience will ask, ‘What was it like?’ and ‘Why did you do it?’ Audiences want to understand not only the photograph but the photographer, and they rightly suspect that behind every photograph lurks an interesting story.”**

A photograph of a Nevada desert could be one of many sere environments of the Southwest United States. There are no trees and only a sparse scattering of sagebrush, saltbush, Black Brush, Red Molly...with no apparent animal life save for an occasional scampering of a rodent, the sudden leap of a rabbit through its own scant shadow, or an ominous rattling from behind a rock. Thin poles shoulder lines of electric power; farther away, strings of grayish-blue limestoned mountains grow paler with every backward step.

**Noon acting as if ready to occur
is a flute, a painting on stone cared for,
is a lizard waiting in the curve of hands
holding the end of history...**

**a scene looking like sand
waiting for something without people:
just an intense sky, never a continent
without consequences.**

Earth itself is a carpet of brown loess laid across various aggregates of silica. I can hear my boots crushing the clinical silence, the wind constantly shifting as a pre-existential being, which preceded everything else in the world. This follows, for example from the Aggadah according to which the Torah was created two thousand years **before speed and direction. There are no gods, but massive waves giving birth to new metaphors for death.**

Out of the range of hearing or sight, a plane slides over the sky, its cargo of tourists heading for the fantasies of Las Vegas where everything had to come from this almost menacing perfecting—experienced in nature and rendered immediately, thus without relying on memory, **while a few miles away and below a different dream exposes itself to the bright lights that decades later still flash back to the nightmare that created this zone of emptiness.**

Sometime after 1963, when the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that outlawed atmospheric testing was signed, beneath this plot of northern Mojave Desert a huge defecation of light, heat and ghetto-blasting sound lifted the earth, shaking and vaporizing the hardpan with pressures exceeding one million atmospheres, melting into a bowl-shaped depression sixty meters deep, sinking and fissuring rocks painted with suns that for 10,000 years augured what was to come; now—

**They are gone,
the great herds,
the hunters.
the dancers,
gone.**

It is extremely hot and the going is slow, the anticlines harder to climb than they looked from outside the picture. Resting a moment, I look for it is surely no coincidence that only one subspecies of the entire hominid line has survived. Most other species of mammals have at least several existing subspecies, each occupying a **shelter. Taking a long swig of tepid water, with a racing heart I realize that the dark side of my unconscious terrain is this subsidence crater, and that down through the ages it will relentlessly continue to implode.**

Notes and References:

***C. Glotfelty**, "Corporeal Fieldwork and Risky Art: Peter Goin and *The Making of 'Nuclear Landscapes.'*" In, S. Iovino and S. Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism*. Bloomington IN, 2014.

Peter Goin's "Subsidence Crater." From, *Nuclear Landscapes*. Baltimore, 1991 p.59. A subsidence crater is "A crater resulted from the collapse of earth into the cavity created by an underground nuclear detonation." p.58.

as a pre-existential being: G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. New York, 1969.

where everything had come from: R. Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*. Charlottesville. VA. 1985.

bowl-shaped depression: "Pressurized, alone in their moment of infamy, stones weep uncontrollably, a bridge floats beneath broken clouds, a temple bows to shallow bowl of sand...as a plane, like a paper crane, flies from a child's hand. From, J. Weishaus;, "Wings Over Trinity." In, *The Deeds and Sufferings of Light*. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/Deeds/wings.htm>

with suns: One petroglyphic symbol for the sun is concentric circle. For the Hopi, an alternate reading of a concentric circle is as the footprint of Masau, the god of death. During the mythic Hopi migration, when they first arrived on this continent, or to this level of reality, "they found a place where (there were) many footprints like this...Four days our uncles searched for the maker of the footprints, when our oldest uncle saw, coming over the west mesa. a who-was-it. Our uncle went to meet the stranger who was hideous and terrible, covered with blood and loathsomeness, and there no flesh on his head. They kept walking toward

each other and when they came together our uncle took hold of him and it was Masau..."A.M. Stephen, "Hopi Indians of Arizona." *Southwest Museum Leaflets* #14. Highland Park, CA., 1940.

They are gone: From, Paiute song.

it is surely no coincidence: M. Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind* . Cambridge, MA., 1991.

Albuquerque, NM, 1997

Rev. Ojai, CA, 2016