PÉ'TÚKMIYAT · PÉ'TÚKMIYAT

LEWIS DE SOTO · SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

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♦

ESSAYS BY

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AND

REBECCA SOLNIT

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Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat, 1991
installation, San Jose Museum of Art
video image of fire from pendulum
(detail)

¹THERE WAS NOTHING BUT DARKNESS.

¹péʔ túkmiyat míyaxwen ʔívʔi ʔú·mun paʔ míyaxwen péqi wam túkmiyat.   ²ʔíʔ témal sáwa·qal qáwiš sáwa·qal péqi wam túkmiyat míyaxwenʔah, ʔú·mun.

³péŋaʔ pe péʔ túkmiyat péqi qamíyaxqal man, peta ʔíka pewíwlemqal ʔíka pewíwlemqal ʔí·ka ʔúmun kúʔti ʔáyaxqal, háni ʔáy péŋa pepáčaylawqale wíh, wé·vuʔuy ʔáyaxweʔn.

⁴péʔ ʔíka yéŋilewqal péʔ ʔíka čaqe hí·ščeqal ʔíka, ʔíka čaqe čúxqaʔl.   ⁵péʔ pe ʔíʔ táxliswetem piš hemʔíyaxwenap ʔívʔax, qamíyaxqal pen hempúmiwen hémyaxweʔn.   ⁶péʔ péʔ pe péŋa man taxkúkulqal múluʔnuk, piš hemʔéxap táxliswetem piš hempúmiwenap, qamíyaxqalepaʔ.

⁷ʔáŋapa yal yéŋilewqal pe ʔáŋapa čeʔíyaxqal pé ʔáy ʔíka pewíwlemqal kúʔti péŋki ʔíka.   ⁸ʔípika ʔíka pewíwlemqal pen ʔáŋapa pepáčaylawqal ʔéŋax wíh, súnčih.   ⁹péŋa peta ʔáyax taxkúkulqaʔl.

¹⁰péŋa čaqe wé·vuʔuy ʔáyaxwen, péŋa pétuk pa hemqálʔe pa hemkíyawen péʔ hémsun.

¹¹hán ʔáy péŋa hemwélwen man hemwélwen, ʔáy hemʔáʔavukwen péŋa pe ʔáyax píka pe·mčekápalwen péʔiy wé·vuʔuy péŋki·čih, hempúnay, pa hemwénivey.

¹²péŋa pe ʔáyax hempíswen péʔ, táxat, yáxqal súple néʔ néʔ henʔáʔavuwet yáxqale.   ¹³kíʔi néʔ néʔ henʔáʔiva yáxqal pemnáwaswen taxat háxʔi ʔáʔawuwet piš míyaxweniveh.

¹⁴péŋa pe yal péʔ túkmiyat péŋax mémleqal taxat, táxmuqal péʔ túkmiyat.   ¹⁵mé·mleqal pe pe·mnáqmawen héʔ, yáxqal.   ¹⁶híčeʔa ku péʔ man míyaxqal yáxqal.   ¹⁷há· yáxqal pe ʔé ʔenʔáʔiva ʔíyaxqal méxenuk kil peʔéʔnanqale yáxqale, péʔ témayawet.   ¹⁸péŋa pe yal pe yáxqal ku péʔ túkmiyat péʔ čemeʔáqyawve man míyaxqale yáxqal.   ¹⁹ʔáy péqi níyaxqal ʔé péqi ʔetyáxik pen níyaxqal yáxqal táxat, múkat.   ²⁰péŋaʔ pe hemʔíyaxwen yal táxat.

²¹ʔáy yal yéŋilewqal péʔ, yáxqal há· pen ʔáčema ʔívʔax ʔaxʔíyaxnem qaméxenanuk piš čemqálveʔa qaméxenanuk piš čempísiveʔah, ʔaxʔíyaxnem yáxqale.   ²²pen ʔéʔ ku yáxqal taxat, muk ʔéʔ ku henʔáʔiva ʔíyaxqal pen ʔéʔ ku ʔíyaxnem yáxqal.   ²³ha· yáxqal, péŋaʔ pé náxa·š man ʔáyax pekúsqale táxmuʔay taʔ.

²⁴péŋa pe qaméxenuk piš hemwénive qaméxenuk piš hemqánive péʔiy péʔ pe néʔ péʔ pe túku péʔ pentáxmuqàl.   ²⁵péʔ péŋa ʔíʔ pekúsqal.

²⁶péʔ táxat múkat péŋa čepéŋa máŋax piš tá·v piyáxeqal taxat, táxmuʔay.   ²⁷ʔíyaxwen péŋa man péʔ péʔiš pe wíh táxmuʔat tuháyimaniči néken netáxmuʔah.

²⁸péŋa hemʔíyaxwen taxat ʔáy yéŋilewqal peʔ, ʔáy yéŋilewqal pe hemwélwen ʔay ʔíka pemčeʔéxanwen ta ʔévan čaqe čaqe, čaqe qahíčaŋa ʔípa čaqe ʔáwsunika, wálʔa kile míyaxwen čaqe péqiwen, túkmiyat.

²⁹péŋa pe ʔáy man ʔáyax pe·mʔáyawen téma·li peykúlkatem.   ³⁰péŋa pe ʔáyax pe·mnánvayaxaniwen hemháwuwayñiŋa háni ʔáyax pe·mkúkulwene pe·mpísaniwene qahíčeay hemhúyanaxay hémyaxwen.   ³¹péʔiy pe·mpíʔpsaniwen péʔ pe néʔ pentáxmuqàl: háni písaniyem ʔemhúyanaxa níyxqal péʔ péŋa piš pe·mpísanive.   ³²péŋa pe pe·mčíškemiwen péŋa pe ʔáyax qaméxenuk wám.   ³³péŋa pé man témali peta pe·mnúkwen ʔíviy.   ³⁴ʔí tévišnekiš pekúkulqal témayawet ʔí túlnek ʔínis ʔáyaxwen kúla témal.   ³⁵péʔiš pe ʔí témal ʔínis súpul tévišnek pe súpul túlnek.   ³⁶ʔéxenuk ʔíyaxwen hemkúlʔa mewíh.

³⁷péʔiy pe·mčú·mìnwen péʔiy témal hemnúkay hémuŋax yal píka písqal pál wáneqal ʔáyax qahíčeam ku péʔ.   ³⁸qamívax néken kile háxʔi peʔéʔnanqal, súnaxwenepaʔ, ʔámnaʔam qahíčeam.   ³⁹mu ʔíviy mélkičem hemtétiyaxwenive ʔáyaxwen dió·s hémyaxwen; ʔíyaxwen dió·s, híčemiviy pekúkulqal.

⁴⁰péʔem hemʔíyaxwen hemqálve; hán ʔáy péʔiy pe·mčú·mìnwen ʔíviy témali taxat; péʔ netáxmuʔa piš qál néʔ túku péŋa pe man netáxmuqal.   ⁴¹háni ʔáyax péŋa pe me·mnúkwen táxliswetmi.   ⁴²yúli·či pe·mkúkulwene; čém ʔišyúličem ʔí.   ⁴³péʔ el

pekúkulqal taxat ʔí čaqe wén miyáxeqal hávun ʔáčaʔe
péʔ, témayawet. ⁴⁴múkat taxat ʔemíyaxwen yáxqal ta.

⁴⁵ʔáčema yáxqal hani ʔáyax pe·mpísaniwen
hemyúliy; pen ʔí pívaʔti pe·mpí·psaniwen háni ʔáy
péʔiy pe·mčútwen piš pe·mhátinwene pe·mpívawe.
⁴⁶péŋa piyk meytéhuyktem pe hát· piyáxe yal táʔ,
múkat. ⁴⁷ʔí témayawet núkam ʔípika hemqálve
peté·wqal peté·wqal púti ʔí héʔma el ʔí ʔípaʔ
míyaxwen héʔma pen súpul hémʔi ʔípika wíčiw
hémʔiʔ ʔípika, héʔmaʔ wíčiw, ʔípa hémpuš wén ʔípa
ʔúmun ʔípa. ⁴⁸héʔma ʔúmun taxkʷetákiwen.

⁴⁹ʔelélema ʔét ʔekúlam kile ʔáčema yáxqale péʔ,
múkat. ⁵⁰kíʔi yáxqal ʔí ʔíyaxwen híčemiviy
pe·mhívinwen híčemivi kile síl̄ipi kíʔi yáxqal.
⁵¹há· yáxqal kil̄ peʔté·wqal ʔíʔ néʔ nenúkam; héʔmay
ʔaxpe·méxanem pe kil̄ híčea pesíl̄ipi yáxqal. ⁵²ʔí
hémpuš wíw pen ʔípika hemʔélašŋiypi míyaxwen
ʔípika. ⁵³hémʔi wíh pen ʔípika vukménipi míyaxwen
yáxqal. ⁵⁴kíʔi yáxqal taxat kil̄ paʔáyawqal; kil̄e
ʔáčema yáxqal táʔ.

⁵⁵kil̄e ʔáčema múkwenet kil pemíyaxwenap yáxqal;
kil̄ pemíyaxwen múkwenet taxháyinwenet yáxqal.
⁵⁶kil̄e ʔáčema miš čemʔíkluwe pe ʔéxanuk
ʔaxʔíyaxwenem yáxqal.

⁵⁷péʔ yal taxat múkat yáxqal kíʔi yáxqal kil̄e ʔáčema
yáxqal hemčéxpi míyaxwen ʔíʔ pe míyaxwen
paʔčemqánive ʔí ʔípa pewén ʔelélkʷiš, híčeʔami
ʔéwel híčeʔami míyaxwen ʔáčaʔe múlulqale ku péʔ
piš hemčéxwenap yáxqal péʔ.

⁵⁸kíʔi yáxqal kil̄e ʔáčema yáxqal kil̄e
hempečéxwenap čaqe he·máxnem tuháyimanišpaʔ.
⁵⁹kíʔi témali pa·mtéminpulu ʔíviy ča hemqálve.
⁶⁰ʔaxpičemkúkulnem témali ʔaxpičemhílkʷininem.
⁶¹wáyikiwenet ʔaxmeháyinem yáxqal.

⁶²wáyikiweneti pičemkúkulnem péʔ tuháyimaniš
četúnišnem táwpaxiči táwpaxiči yáxqal.

⁶³pé taxat hemémlanwen ʔéxenanuk, kíʔi yáxqal pe
kil̄ taxhemhéʔanwen qamíviy piš sáwa·qal.

⁶⁴há· yáxqal témayawet ʔéʔ kil̄ meʔáyawqal
nenúkami netávami pe néʔ ʔaxneŋíynem ʔíviy

nenúkay témali qáwici túkvači ʔúmun híčemiviy
peman neŋíynem yáxqal.

⁶⁵kíʔi yáxqal méxanuk ʔáče ʔaxpeʔyuŋíynem
ʔúmun taxkíyaʔlawnem ʔínis kʷánaŋ néʔ neméxanʔah
yáxqal, múkat táxat.

⁶⁶púti péŋa yáxqal ʔáy táxat péŋa púti pekúleqal
témaŋa ʔáy témal hemnúkam míyaxwen, témaŋa
pekúleqal péʔem núkami mečemáqinqal memaʔan
pekúleqal péʔem, ʔí·ka témayka páxʔi mívaʔpa
híčilewʔi taʔ.

⁶⁷púti yal túkvaš, čémyaxwen túkvaš, péʔ paʔáyaw-
qal pekúlika témayka ʔípika pesétika. ⁶⁸ʔí témali
ʔúmun peyáwqal peykí·ničika. ⁶⁹púti náxa·š peyáw-
qal ʔípa. ⁷⁰péʔ núkam metaméčiwen ʔípika peyáwqal
ʔíviy túkva·či. ⁷¹qahíčea ku péʔ súnaxwènepaʔ.

⁷²péŋa púti ŋilá·qal témal ʔí čaqe táwk·· yáxʔi ʔípa
pemúmlulanqal témal čemúmaʔaqiqal qáwiš.
⁷³péʔ man ʔelélekʷal taxat ʔéxanuk ʔíyaxwen péʔem
hemímiyaxwen taxat.

⁷⁴peqi yéʔŋil̄ew petéklulawqal. ⁷⁵hemkíyalawen
yal péŋa ʔíʔ, ʔísil̄, máwl, ʔáswet séʔih, pen ʔáʔawet, ʔí
péʔ pe témayawet núkam. ⁷⁶pe yúkničem piyk
hempekúlil̄ewene péʔiy, múkati man hemkíyaʔlawen.

⁷⁷péʔ péŋa pe héʔmay ʔáy pekúkulqal peʔiy, máwl
hémay pesásluqanqal peʔ héma ʔíyaxwen ʔívʔax.
⁷⁸pen ʔísil̄ taxat ʔíka hépuš wíway ʔáŋapa pekúkulqal
hépuči. ⁷⁹pen ʔí ʔáʔawet hémaʔ métewet ku péʔ.
⁸⁰ʔívʔax pe ʔí hépuš mé·tewet ʔáʔawet súpl̄e mí·l.
⁸¹péʔ témayawet kúlam péʔ hemkíyalawen. ⁸²ʔívʔax
man mu hemqál ʔívim.

⁸³péŋa hemʔíyaxwen ʔáy taxat ʔáyax, ʔáy ʔú·mun
híčemivi tétekluqal péŋa. ⁸⁴pe ʔíʔ ménil híwqal ʔáy
hempísaniʔah, piyik meytéhuyktem hemnúkam.
⁸⁵ʔí yal támi ʔ ti písanigal, náxa·š, múkat. ⁸⁶pé támyit
pekúleqal ʔíka témaŋa ʔíka pekúleqal pe·myáwaneken
taxat kil̄e míyaxwen piš pe·méxap píka metahíčiʔi
ʔí·ka témaŋa pekúli ʔíka.

⁸⁷ʔí ménil̄ peqi kíyalawqal híwqal péʔ piyk
me·mté·wenive hemnúkam híčemiviy piyk
me·mté·wen.

² THIS SOIL WAS NOT THERE; NOR WAS THERE ROCK; ONLY DARKNESS EXISTED, EVERYWHERE.

WORLDMAKING AND POSTMODERNITY

Patrick J. Mahaffey

Human beings have a fundamental need to locate themselves in an intelligible cosmos. The primary means of doing so has been through myth, although there are many ways—artistic, scientific, philosophical—in which we formulate worldviews or pictures of the world. We live in a time when we are conscious that the very idea of a "world" is a social construction, a product of our way of seeing and conceptualizing the context of our experience. This awareness informs Lewis deSoto's multimedia installation, *Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat*, a work based on the creation myth of his ancestors, the Cahuilla people of southern California. This essay explores some of the themes embodied in his work from the perspectives of comparative religion, philosophy, and theories of interpretation in the humanities.

I

A myth is a complex of stories, symbols and images, which reveals the mysteries of life. The creation myth of the Cahuilla Indians is the story about how the world emerged from the primordial darkness (*Pé Túkmiyat*) that preceded creation.

> Before the beginnings of all things there was nothing but a mystic darkness, a darkness different from anything now known. This deeper-than-night darkness was permeated with strange, beautiful, far-away sounds—sounds such as might come from distant singers, but it was singing unlike that from the throat of man or bird.[1]

The darkness divided into two formless masses, one male and one female, and colors appeared. The colors intermingled and whirled into these masses to form a giant embryo that attempted several times to conceive and give birth. The third attempt successfully produced two embryos which grew rapidly into adults capable of speech. These two, brothers named Témayawet and Múkat, became the twin creators of the world.

Although the brothers quarreled, they finished creating the earth and its creatures. Eventually they embarked on creating human beings. Témayawet worked too fast and produced bodies that were ugly and poorly shaped. Múkat ridiculed him for his creatures. Témayawet threatened to leave and take his creatures with him. A great earthquake occurred. The earth opened up and Témayawet and his creatures disappeared into the cavity. The people created by Múkat remained on the earth. With the closing of the fissure the mountains of the earth were formed. Múkat found, however, that Témayawet had tried to take the sky with him and had to wrestle with one of the fierce whirlwinds to maintain possession of it. He won the great struggle and the sky remained over the earth. Then the sun, which had earlier eluded the brothers, appeared. The people near it were burned by its rays. Fear struck the people and the animals and they began to speak in a confusion of sounds. Múkat could not understand a word and was greatly distressed by the babel of noise. He listened carefully to find a familiar sound and at last heard one man speaking in Cahuilla, his own tongue. Múkat singled out this person and named him ancestor of the Cahuilla people.

[1]There was nothing but darkness.
[2]This soil was not there; nor was there rock; only darkness existed, everywhere.

[3]Something was happening in that darkness; above the darkness something was going back and forth, this way and that, like fire, until an egg-like thing—two beings—dropped.

[4]Then after a while it (the egg-like thing) went away, disappeared. [5]When the same thing happens to people today, we say they have had a miscarriage. [6]Thus for the first time a miscarriage took place, just as it may happen that people have miscarriages [now].

[7]After a while the same thing happened again—the thing went back and forth in a straight line like fire. [8]It went back and forth, and again something fell, two beings, close together. [9]Up there above the darkness, this (something) developed.

[10]This something was just like an egg, and in it they were alone, the heart of them.

[11]And they grew and grew, until they were big, and then they broke out of that egg-like thing, their covering, inside of which they were.

[12]Then they left [their shell] and one of them said 'I am older.' [13]'No I am older,' they were quarreling over who was older.

[14]Then the night made a noise. The

night was singing. [15]They listened to the noise made by the night. 'Listen,' said one [of them]. [16]'What is going on there?' [17]'You said you were older; how is it that you don't know what's going on,' said Témayawet. [18]It was Témayawet who went on to say: 'The night is rocking us, that's what is going on.'[1] [19]'What I say is just what you would say,' said Múkat. [20]That was the state of things.

[21]After a while he (Témayawet) said, 'I think it is time for you to tell how we lay [in the egg] and how we came out.' [22]'You are the one [to tell it],' said Múkat, 'You say you are older, so you should tell it.' [23]'Alright,' said Témayawet, and plucked a song [from within him].

[24]Then he sang about how they lay there [in the egg] and how they grew— what I (the narrator) sang about yesterday. [25]That song came from within him.

[26]Múkat, made his song the same [as Témayawet's] but a little different. [27]That was the state of things; and that's why my songs always come in two.[2]

[28]That was the state of things. As time went by they grew. They floated somewhere high up, up there, for there were no roots; all that there was was night.

During the creation of the earth, Múkat and Témayawet also quarreled about death. Múkat thought that humans should die and Témayawet disagreed. Múkat pointed out that there would not be enough food unless humans were mortal. Témayawet said he would create more food. Múkat then argued that if people didn't die there would not be enough space for them all. Témayawet responded that he would make more worlds. After Témayawet and his creatures descended into the earth, Múkat decided to trick his people into killing each other. He created war games and gave his people bows and arrows. After a while, the people got tired of this and killed Múkat. Yet, after Múkat died, the people had no one to guide them. They were filled with sorrow and regret and sent envoys in search of Múkat who was just a light in the distance. Múkat told them that he now existed only at the site of his cremation. Now his teeth were the corn that grew there and his kidneys were the beans. Then all the Cahuilla people gathered and went on three very long migrations around North America. Their travels paralleled the migration of the birds. The Bird Songs of the Cahuillas come from these migrations.

The creative darkness of the Cahuilla myth has many analogues in the cosmogonies of other cultures. It is found, for example, in the first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching*, a Chinese Taoist text ascribed to Lao Tzu:

> The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
> The name that can be named is not the eternal
>   Name.
> The unnamable is the eternally real.
> Naming is the origin of all particular things.
> Free from desire, you realize the mystery.
> Caught in desire, you see only the
>   manifestations.

> Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the
>   same source.
> This source is called darkness.
> Darkness within darkness.
> The gateway to all understanding.[2]

The source of creation is called darkness because none of our senses can perceive it. Nor can our mind conceive it. The Taoist text also describes this source as "the eternal void" filled with infinite possibilities. As in the Cahuilla myth, the creative darkness is feminine, empty yet eternally pregnant: "The Tao is called the Great Mother: empty yet inexhaustible, it gives birth to infinite worlds."[3]

The void in the *Tao Te Ching* is not emptiness in the ordinary sense. Lao Tzu's use of this term is similar to the Buddhist conception of *Sunyata*. While the Sanskrit term *Sunyata* may be translated as "nothing" or "empty," Mahayana Buddhists maintain that the term is synonymous with *tathata*, meaning "suchness" or "thusness," which indicates things as they essentially are. Emptiness in this sense means that objects are devoid of what is called self-nature or independent existence. All beings and all objects exist in relation to other beings and objects. None are absolute; all are relative or related to each other in a vast web of interrelationships.

Similar ideas are expressed in the Hindu tradition in the Vedic *Hymn of the Origins*:

> At first was neither Being nor Nonbeing.
> There was not air nor yet sky beyond.
> What was its wrapping? Where? In whose
>   protection?
> Was Water there, unfathomable and deep?

> There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;

of night or day there was not any sign.
The One breathed without breath, by its own
    impulse.
Other than that was nothing else at all.

Darkness was there, all wrapped around by
    darkness;
and all was Water indiscriminate. Then
that which was hidden by the Void, that One,
    emerging,
stirring, through power of Ardor, came to be…

The Seers, searching in their hearts with wisdom,
discovered the connection of Being in Nonbeing.

Who really knows? Who can presume to tell it?
Whence was it born? Whence issued this creation?
Even the Gods came after its emergence.
Then who can tell from whence it came to be?

That out of which creation has arisen,
whether it held it firm or it did not,
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He surely knows—or maybe He does not!⁴

The hymn does not analyze the cause of this world or
the source of creation. It expresses an intuitive vision
of the whole, a mystical awareness that transcends the
discursive distinctions of the intellect. The first verse
expresses the heart of the mystery and is composed of
a series of questions. Neither an affirmation nor a
negation is capable of carrying the weight of the ulti-
mate mystery. The Ultimate is neither real nor non-
real, neither being nor nonbeing. The ineffable can
only be described in negative, symbolic language:
"darkness was wrapped in darkness." This language
asserts that the primordial mystery cannot be defined
in the terms of any concept. The how and why of crea-
tion is beyond conceptualization. Similarly, the

primordial water has no form of its own yet pervades
everything as the first condition of life. Darkness and
emptiness are also symbols of the first moment. This
darkness does not refer to a moral condition but rather
to the primordial darkness of the Origin. The negative
as well as the positive aspects of existence belong to
the Ultimate. Evil and good, the positive and the nega-
tive, both are embraced in the One that encompasses
everything. The last two stanzas conclude with ques-
tions concerning what may be known about the source
of creation. It is suggested that only one who is beyond
and above everything could possibly know and that
even such a one may not know. Thus there is no cer-
tainty, no ultimate assurance concerning human
knowledge. This uncertainty is constitutive of
our existence.⁵

II

The ink dripping on the text in deSoto's installation
gradually erases the inscribed language and opens up
new possibilities of experience and insight. It is like
the story of a Zen master serving tea to a scholar:

> Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era
> (1869-1912), received a university professor who
> came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He
> poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on
> pouring. The professor watched the overflow
> until he could no longer restrain himself. "It is
> overfull. No more will go in!" "Like this cup,"
> Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions
> and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless
> you first empty your cup?"⁶

The ink dripping on the text also makes us aware of
intertextuality and the irreducible plurality of mean-
ings entailed by every text. Every particular text is

²⁹*Then they were ready to create the
earth.* ³⁰*When they had agreed on
that, they went to work. They took from
within them something called a cane.*
³¹*They both took out their cane, as in
my song 'You two creators, take out
your cane,' which is about their taking
out [the cane].* ³²*Then somehow or
other each set up his stick.* ³³*And on
top of them they created this earth.*
³⁴*Témayawet made the earth white;
what the other one made was darker.*
³⁵*That is why the earth is sometimes
whitish, sometimes dark.* ³⁶*Such
were the creations of these two.*

³⁷*As they were finishing the creation
of the earth, water started to flow from
the noses of these beings.* ³⁸*Where it
came from nobody knows. It happened
simply because they were extraordi-
nary beings;* ³⁹*so is that being whom
the white people call diós; diós too
created everything.*³

⁴⁰*These two were of that kind [crea-
tors]. Well, they finished creating the
earth. The song that I sang yesterday
was about that.* ⁴¹*Then they set about
creating people.* ⁴²*They worked with
clay—we are made of clay.* ⁴³*He
(Témayawet) molded his clay, and
quickly put it aside.* ⁴⁴*Múkat said 'I
wonder why you did that.'*

⁴⁵*Then they pulled out their pipes
and their tobacco, and they lit the*

tobacco, and as they smoked they made light. 46Múkat made some light so that they could see their creatures. 47Then Témayawet looked at the creatures which were there, and saw with surprise that they had four arms and four legs and eyes all over. 48Their fingers were joined together.4

49Múkat said, 'Your creatures are bad, not at all good.' 50'Their fingers are like that so that they can scoop up things and nothing will drip' [answered Témayawet]. 51'Haven't you looked at my creatures?' [said Múkat]. 'They do this with their hands [he cups his hand] and nothing drips. 52They have [only] two eyes and can turn in every direction. 53They have two legs and can turn around.' 54'No,' said the other, dissatisfied: 'I don't think they are right that way.'

55'It's not right that sickness should exist,' said Témayawet; 'sickness and exhaustion should not exist. 56It's not right. We like our creatures, so they ought to be free of sickness.'

57But Múkat said 'No, that won't do, they must have sickness; the thing we were hatched in [the afterbirth] is bad, bloody and violently steaming; that is why they will have to have sickness!'

58'No,' said Témayawet, 'it's not right that they should get sick and die. They should live forever.' 59'They

itself plural. It answers not to an interpretation but to an explosion, a dissemination. Intertextuality is an extension of how language and signs achieve meaning. Just as the meaning of one sign is another sign, the meaning of one text is what another text says it is. As G. B. Madison explains:

> As one text has for its significant effect another text which it calls forth and which in its turn will call forth another and so in this way is essentially oriented toward an indefinite future with no foreseeable end, each text opening up unlimited possibilities of new texts, so likewise one text refers back to another text which refers back to another, this constant referring back being that which ensures the continued existence of each text as part of an ongoing speaking and writing community. Like the future which texts project, this retro-reference is without discernible end.[7]

No one, then, can hope to have the last word. And nowhere in our archives do we find an original text. This plural and disseminating quality of literary texts is also characteristic of postmodern art. It does not intend a single meaning or privilege a particular style or perspective. As Howard Fox has observed: "At root Post-Modern art is neither exclusionary nor reductive but synthetic, freely enlisting the full range of conditions, experiences, and knowledge beyond the object. Far from seeking a single and complete experience, the Post-Modern object strives toward an encyclopedic condition, allowing a myriad of access points, an infinitude of interpretative responses."[8]

Postmodern understandings of language entail a new way of understanding the connection between words and things. It is the awareness that there is no world apart from our various interpretations. What we

apprehend is a particular world, and this suggests an inevitable plurality of worlds. Different cultures and religions do not all inhabit the same world. They are not just so many attempts to explain some common, objectively available order of things "out there," but traditions that actually create, structure, and dwell within a universe that is their own. Language itself, as George Steiner put it, "is a constant creation of alternative worlds."[9]

This understanding of language is reflected in Ludwig Wittgenstein's description of "world pictures" and his critique of the quest for metaphysical knowledge. Wittgenstein argued that our knowledge ultimately depends upon a particular world picture. If we search carefully for the reasons and pieces of evidence that support a claim to knowledge, we find that they come to rest upon a *groundless* base. The chain of reasoning or evidence must come to an end or must face the futile prospect of an infinite regress. This terminus is a world picture. It may be described as a network, framework, or system of concepts, beliefs and practices that—for a person or group holding the picture—is fixed, accepted, and unquestioned. Wittgenstein uses several metaphors to describe the nature of a world picture such as a "river-bed of our thoughts," a "scaffolding," and an "unsided siding." Like the arrangement of twigs in a nest, the components of a world picture mutually support one another, and, in doing so, provide the grounds or supports for any items that may come to rest within or upon them.[10] This account of the basis of our beliefs raises questions about the world or reality. What is the relation between world pictures and reality itself? Can we determine the truth or falsity of world pictures? How are we to understand the term "the world" in the expression "world pictures"? For Wittgenstein, the

question concerning the relation between world pictures—treated as schemes of representation—and reality is a pseudo-question. It is a version of the quest for metaphysical knowledge, and presupposes a view of language in which we regard reality as the referent of a name. A world picture is not made by confronting the world independently and then drawing a picture of it, so that we may look at both and see how faithful, adequate, or true the picture is. On the contrary, we are limited to the picture. There is nothing to compare our world pictures with. We can only compare one world picture with other world pictures, not with something that is not a world picture—something which we may wish to designate as "reality." A world picture, we may conclude, is not a mirror of nature. It is, in Wittgenstein's terms, a kind of mythology.[11]

III

Although the meaning of the term "postmodernism" is elusive and the subject of a lively debate, most writers on the subject agree that pluralism and world culture are essential to its definition as well as its commitment to indeterminacy, openness, and multiplicity. It also entails the suspicion of metanarratives which control, delimit and interpret the diverse forms of discursive activity in the world.[12] This suspicion makes us more aware of the fact that our various symbolic systems of meaning—religions, political ideologies, scientific theories—are social constructions of reality. As a result, we now live in our belief systems in an entirely new way. When we choose to adopt one, we know that we could choose an entirely different one. As Walter Anderson observed: "The postmodern individual is continually reminded that different peoples have entirely different concepts of what the world is like. The person who understands this and accepts it and

recognizes social institutions as human creations knows that even the sense of personal identity is different in different societies." Such a person knows that religious truth is not an eternal and perfect representation of cosmic reality and—going beyond secular humanism—sees the work of science as yet another form of social reality construction and not a secret technique for taking objective photographs of the universe.[13] The postmodern insight, according to Anderson, is "that life is a matter of telling ourselves stories about life, and of savoring stories about life told by others, and of living our lives according to such stories, and of creating ever-new and more complex stories about stories—and that this story is not just about human life but is human life."[14]

The creation myth of the Cahuillas describes a time when the people began to speak in a confusion of sounds. Múkat was greatly distressed by this babel of noise. The confusion of speech, also symbolized in the biblical Tower of Babel, pertains to the multiplicity of human languages and the diversity of cultures. For many postmodernists, Babel is also a metaphor for different kinds of discourse and the plurality of voices and perspectives in contemporary culture. They reject the view that Babel was the occasion of a curse being laid upon humankind from which we need deliverance. To the contrary, Babel is a positive symbol for the pluralistic-dialogical frame of mind and a critique of all forms of totalizing discourse.[15]

Postmodernism is not only a movement of thought and artistic expression. It may also be described as an attitude toward politics as well as toward culture. Todd Gitlin has made a plea for a politics of limits, a politics inspired by the vital edge of the postmodern—its love of difference and the exuberantly unfinished. Put simply, he argues that there must be limits to what

might crowd the earth if they were to live forever.' [60]*'We can do something about the earth. We'll make it wider.'* [61]*'They'll run short of food.'* [62]*'We'll make things grow that will bear fruit year after year.'*

[63]*They continued to argue. 'No,' they said, and they were not able to decide anything.*

[64]*'Well,' said Témayawet, 'since you don't like my creatures and the things I have created, I shall leave, and take these creatures and the rock and the sky and everything else with me.'*

[65]*'No,' said Múkat, 'How could you possibly take everything with you? A few of these creatures will remain with me and be mine.'*

[66]*Then Témayawet went into the ground[5] after gathering together the creatures they had made; he took them into the ground.*

[67]*Now Témayawet wanted to take what we call the sky with him, and he started to squeeze it into the earth.* [68]*The whole earth would have followed him, but Múkat held onto it.* [69]*He held it in place.* [70]*He knelt on the creatures and held on to the sky.* [71]*He could do this, because he was a mighty man.*

[72]*Then the earth started to shake and tremble, and to bubble up in places, and the rocks piled up.* [73]*It*

was terrible, but that was how they behaved.

74After a while it became quiet again. 75Left behind were coyote, palm tree, Eagle-Flower, and the fly. These were Témayawet's creatures. 76These had been left behind; they were frightened and clung to Múkat.

77Then he finished their hands; he tore open the hands of the palm tree, which is why hands are that way. 78And he finished coyote's eyes again, two times two.6 79The fly had many arms. 80And to this day the fly has many eyes—a thousand. 81These creatures of Témayawet's were left behind. 82They are still in existence.

83That is what the creatures were like. It had become altogether quiet again. 84The moon was already there; they had taken it out, so that they could look at their creatures. 85Múkat had taken out the sun. 86But the sun disappeared over there into the earth. They brought it7 back. But they could not prevent it from going again. It went into the earth over there.

87Only the moon remained as they looked at the creatures and at everything else.

human beings can be permitted to do with their powers. A postmodern politics must be rooted in three protections—ecological, pluralist, and libertarian. The earth and human life must be safeguarded against the nuclear bomb and other human-made perils that threaten the environment. Each social group must be protected from domination by other social groups. Individuals must be protected from domination by larger groups. A politics of this kind respects horizontal social relations. It promotes multiplicity over hierarchy, juxtaposition over usurpation, difference over deference, and disorderly life in its flux against orderly death in its finality.[16] For Gitlin, the primary principle of a global culture must be the preservation of the *other*. "The hallmark is coexistence: that in the preservation of the other is a condition for the preservation of the self; *we* are not *we* until *they* are *they*; for to whom else shall we speak, with whom else shall we think, if not those who are different from ourselves? The ideal towards which politics strives is conversation—and conversation requires respect for the other. *The fundamental value is that the conversation continue toward the global culture.*"[17]

Richard Rorty also envisages a postmodern culture, a liberal utopia, based on human solidarity and conversation. Solidarity, he argues, is not achieved by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see others different from ourselves as fellow sufferers. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar kinds of people. "The realization of such utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias," he writes, is "an endless process

—an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth."[18] These visions of remaking the world are expressions of the worldmaking celebrated by Lewis deSoto in *Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat*, a work that affirms both the cosmogonic myth of his ancestral culture and the pluralistic myth of postmodernity.

NOTES

1. See Harry C. James, *The Cahuilla Indians* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1960), pp. 68-75, for this description of the myth.

2. Stephen Mitchell (trans), *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 1.

3. Ibid., see chapters 4, 6 and 25.

4. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 58.

5. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

6. Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen & Pre-Zen Writings* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co, 1957), p. 19.

7. G. B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 132-33.

8. Quoted in Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 90.

9. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 235. For other discussions of how language constitutes a plurality of worlds see Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978), chapter 1; and William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), chapter 3.

10. This discussion of Wittgenstein is based on a recent study on cosmology by Milton K. Munitz, *The Question of Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 106-119.

11. Ibid. For an important critique of knowledge as accurate representations see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

12. Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 3; Connor, p. 18.

13. Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 8.

14. Ibid., p. 102.

15. See Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schoken, 1985), pp. 98-110; Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); and the collection of essays by Ingeborg Hoestery, ed., *Zeitgeist in Babel: The Postmodernist Controversy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

16. Todd Gitlin, "Postmodernism Defined, At Last!," *Utne Reader*, 42 (July/August 1989), p. 58.

17. Ibid., p. 61.

18. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. xvi.

NOTES

1. Night is considered to be the mother of the two creators. She is rocking them and singing lullabies.

2. Cahuilla sacred songs are generally paired and the two parts of each pair are usually very similar.

3. The informant had at one time acted as interpreter translating the Gospel to the Indians; occasional remarks of this sort may be traced back to this activity.

4. This passage is unduly condensed. Témayawet makes the hands webbed on the grounds that they can then be used for scooping up water and nothing will drip. His creatures have four arms, four legs and four eyes so they can walk backwards and forwards. Múkat has equipped his creatures much more economically and argues that, so equipped, his creatures can do all that Témayawet's can, and more.

5. The informant lives in Banning and the place where Témayawet went underground is, according to Cahuilla legend, near Indian Wells southeast of Palm Springs.

6. Coyote has white spots arranged in horizontal lines above and below his eyes.

7. The sun is represented as belonging to the male sex.

MAPPING PARADISE

Rebecca Solnit

"And he never was in Eden, because coyotes live in the New World. Driven forth by the angel with the flaming sword, Eve and Adam lifted their sad heads and saw Coyote, grinning."

–Ursula Kroeber Le Guin, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be"[1]

I

In Greek mythology the sea had a child named Proteus, whose shape shifted so constantly that he was impossible to capture. Lewis deSoto's work is itself protean, not delineatable by genre or medium nor measurable by a simple application of known ideologies. The theorist-filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-Ha declares: "If art can be neatly contained in systematic forms of closure, if it can be made an object of knowledge, then it is no longer art. Its very 'essence' rests upon its elements of inexplicability and of wonder."[2] A cautionary note on which to begin an essay on an oeuvre, though perhaps more a note of what ought to be than what usually is.

Certainly perennial interests are manifested in all the work from the first photographs to the current installation, *Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat*. The landscape is one, though in this case landscape seems a near misnomer since it's been treated as so much narrower a field of meaning by most landscape artists. The relationship between philosophy and perception is another, manifested particularly in explorations of the relationship between spectator and spectacle, of light (and its precursor, darkness) and of the passage of time. These interests have carried the work through photography into video, installation and other media which incorporate a broader range of sensory experience and a greater capacity to investigate temporality. The work has a cool curiosity that might seem like objectivity if it did not also have a richness of metaphor that is wholly personal.

Not only the work's breadth but its astonishing independence from the binary codes that structure most other work in that genre make it awkward to call him a landscape artist. Landscape art as currently practiced reflects a number of European-originated ideas, including the sense of the landscape as a domain of pleasure or refuge outside the social, with its concomitant emphasis on the "view"—on the land as a detached spectator sees it; and the embedded belief in some kind of a fall, whether it be from Eden or into suburbia. Photography from the manifest-destiny-fueled imagemaking of the U.S. Geological Survey to contemporary ecological landscape work reflects a self-consciousness about white incursions into the Americas that takes the form of a before and after schism, in which development becomes a new fall, the "untouched" land a paradise lost. As someone who did not arrive in California recently, and doesn't have a heritage of despoliation to expiate, deSoto is not obliged to dichotomize nature and culture. Instead culture manifests itself as a set of activities and tools with which one continues to participate in the world of sensory experience by which we know and are nature.

This particular facet of landscape—the extent to which

Botanica #3 (Botanica series), 1981
color photograph
24 × 36

creation mythology is a determining factor in its perspectives—has come to the forefront in deSoto's recent work, with *The Language of Paradise* and *Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat*. These recent works explicitly invoke his heritage as a Cahuilla—a culture indigenous to the semidesert east of Mount Palomar and south of Mount San Gorgonio in southern California—though the Catholic church, entrenched Western "scientific" beliefs, the Buddhist and Taoist philosophies he studied at U.C. Riverside and Claremont Graduate School, the particulars of suburban car-culture southern California and the conversation of postmodernism are all also elements in the work.

II

Creation mythologies explain how we got here. In a sense, every one of deSoto's projects has dealt with creation mythology, or generative philosophy: with how a given set of beliefs shapes perception and thereby creation. Each project begins at the beginning, reexamining the philosophical underpinnings, consciously selecting its premises from the cornucopia that is present-day California. His own account of his artmaking usually begins in depth with the color series *Botanica*, and *Botanica* itself began with a reflection on photography and botany. There was a symmetry in their responsiveness to light, he decided, and chose to incorporate that phenomenon by using both a regular, slow exposure and a flash, so that both camera and flora gave and received light. Taken up close and at angles that had nothing to do with human position/perception, the photographs reflect his observation that "To a plant the horizon meant nothing, the sky meant everything."

The resultant photographs are luxuriously eerie, with foliage in and out of focus, crowding images that have nothing to do with compositional conventions. They don't come out of the imperatives of the photographic tradition, with its emphasis on replicating human vision and on traditional notions of quality; and so for the decade deSoto's work was largely photographic, it would be a misnomer to call him a photographer. Instead the work has been generated by a philosopher's ability to reexamine originating premises and a belief that the nature of the subject and the nature of the artwork should be related; the formal approaches of a piece often arise from contemplation of subject. The result has been a body of work that is neither a formalist disavowal of content nor a literalist's obliviousness to the languages of form. Whatever beauties result are deeply rooted in the implications of the work.

There's a story about the oldest living thing in the world, a bristlecone pine in the California Sierra, and about the park rangers who wanted to find out exactly how old it was: they cut it down and counted the rings of its cross-section. Photography has usually attempted to stop time, to slice a moment out of the ceaseless flow of phenomena—Henri Cartier-Bresson's decisive moments, Edward Weston's supreme instants—with the result that the image reports appearance but eliminates time; it isolates the moment as Western philosophy isolates the object. What, in a comparison of Eastern and Western theories of vision, Norman Bryson observes of the spatially isolated is equally true of the temporally isolated:

> Stabilizing the entity as a fixed Form, with a bounded outline, is possible only if the universe surrounding the entity is screened out and the entity withdrawn from the universal field of transformations. The concept of the entity can be preserved only by an optic that casts around each entity a perceptual frame that makes a *cut* from the field and immobilizes the cut within the static framework. But as soon as that framework is withdrawn, the object is found to exist as part of a mobile continuum that cannot be cut anywhere.

If the object is, say, a flower, its existence is only as a *phase* of incremental transformations between seed and dust, in a continuous exfoliation or perturbation of matter: at no point does the object come under an arrest that would immobilize it as Form....[3]

After *Botanica* came the *Projects*, which investigate the relationship between passing time and the light-sensitivity of photographic media in a more controlled, and more explicit, way. Each photograph is accompanied by a blueprint which restates the compelling visual image as record of a performance that can be re-created, demythologizing its appearance but enriching its understanding. That is to say, the diagrams shift emphasis from the isolated photograph to the photograph as indexical record, and the genre of the work from photography to something in the general territory of performance/ritual documentation (though at the same time the conceptual approach taken to the possibilities of photography explored its potentialities—from outside—in ways that can seldom be achieved from inside, from work contained by the medium). This could also be described as a shift from *representation* to *presentation*, from an artmaking that is about substituting one thing for another to one that is about the inherent, immanence.

This was a shift taking place in a number of ways in the larger artworld, particularly on the West Coast. Such areas of activity as installation, materials-generated sculpture and site-specific art attempted to invoke what was there, what the place or substances *were*, rather than what meaning the artist could impose upon inert materials, neutral spaces. And this shift reflects an attempt to abandon the Western cosmology of modernism for a less alienated way of being in the world. Representation itself has been a project about absence and about the immaterial: about making one thing stand in for another in such a way that neither the referent nor the reference are wholly pre-
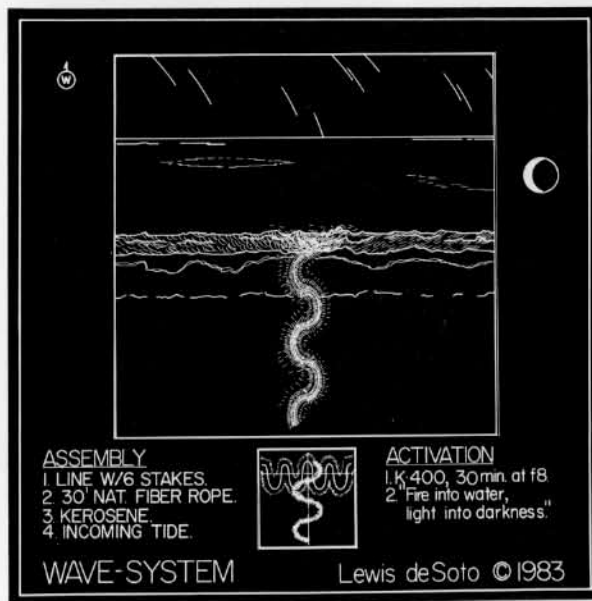
Wave System, 1983
site project, Leucadia, California
ocean, beach, fire

Drawing for *Wave System*, 1983
12 × 12

17

sent—a painting of a bird is not a bird, but in being about birds the work ceases to be about its own presence as materials (the premise behind Greenbergian formalism, with the caveat that truth to materials is only as interesting as the materials themselves). The premise that the sensual world is a kind of raw, neutral material, to be given meaning by the dictates of the mind, is a belief in accord with the Platonic-Judaeo-Christian-Cartesian tradition of the radical separation of mind and matter.

Somewhere in the back of the minds of the writers of Genesis is the Tiamat world of dark and storm, and the story of the masculine warrior-god who creates the cosmos from out of chaos....The theology of Genesis, however, cannot admit primordial struggles between deities because there are no deities to struggle; God is one and he alone is divine. Moreover, the material out of which he creates the universe is not himself, or any other divine material. He creates out of "nothing"—neutral stuff that has no religious identity. Jewish and Christian theologies both insist on *creatio ex nihilo*, maintaining that God cannot be confused with his world....The mythology of the Bible thus undercuts the presupposition of earlier myths of the interpenetration of the human and divine.... The creation language of Genesis is not the language of nature. It is the language of craftsmanship...of *technology*. [4]

In substance and site-based work the sensual world is conceptualized in a radically different cosmology, in which meaning is inherent, and in which the artist collaborates with that meaning which is already present in the perceptual world. In this cosmology, things represent themselves: representation is no longer about absence, but about the interfusion of being and meaning, of matter and mind. Creator and creation are no longer of two separate orders; the artwork manifests as entity, equal and offspring. This immersion

in an alternative cosmology both is and is not part of the project of postmodernism. Much of postmodern theory was given over to a kind of hand-wringing about the crisis of representation, about the rift between the signifier and the signified or between the real and the symbolic order. "Our access to reality is mediated by a gauze of representation," wrote Brian Wallis. "What is fragile about this oppressive contract is that the representational model we employ (and which cannot be avoided)...is arbitrary...." [5] The existence of the rift was itself premised on a world in which the real was mute, inarticulate, the symbolic unnatural, impositional, immaterial—in other words, on a world in which mind and matter were mutually alienated.

The map is not the territory is a truism of this mindset, a disavowal which doesn't recognize that the territory is in some sense a map, the map in fact a territory—its own, a sensually apprehensible thing itself aside from its referentiality, with a poetics all its own. As this author has stated elsewhere, "Such a proposition has little place in the systems of thought that emphasize the separations between mind and matter; on the other hand, it has everything to do with the eco-ontologies that are strong elements of West Coast thinking. The scientist-philosopher Gregory Bateson, for example, concludes an essay on biology and syllogisms with, 'Metaphor was not just pretty poetry, it was not either good or bad logic, but was in fact the logic upon which the biological world had been built, the main characteristic and organizing glue of this world....'" [6] The work *Analogue/Evolution* suggests a relationship between the avian and human that is based less on imitation per se than on ritualistic empathy: the feathers bound to an unseen man's hands are less about appropriating the appearance or ability of a bird as in some way participating in its essence: a cultural act that is not quite the mediated experience of representation.

On the other hand, postmodernism also grew out of

Analogue/Evolution, 1987
two black and white photographs with gold text
38 × 38 each

the reappraisal, by feminist, multiculturalist, ecological and other subversive theorists, of a number of aligned dichotomies. These often sought to raise the status of the Other within the binary terms which organize the culture: male/female, nature/culture, mind/matter, light/darkness, high/low, white/non-white— categories whose alignment becomes clear in comments such as Freud's reference to women's sexuality as *the dark continent* (which assumes a European male subject and postulates women as an Other, as Africa/nature was to Europe/culture and darkness to light). The reversals themselves have tended to operate within a cosmology in which difference is oppositional, rather than symbiotic: switching sides rather than giving up the game.

These issues shed a sidelong, glancing light rather than full illumination on *Tahualtapa*, the major work after the *Projects*—itself a kind of landmark in the center of the photographic oeuvre and the place in which deSoto began to investigate Cahuilla culture.

Tahualtapa is most basically a multimedia work centered around a mountain in San Bernardino County; it was instigated by a friend's remark to the effect that it was too bad the mountain wasn't there anymore. The leveling of the mountain had been so gradual deSoto himself hadn't realized it was going on: *Tahualtapa* made that history and some of its implications visible. The four photographs relate to four chapters of that history: *Tahualtapa*, or Hill of the Ravens, for its time as a mountain significant to the Cahuilla people of the region; *El Cerrito Solo*, the Little Hill that Stands Alone, for its renaming by the missionary Spanish; *Marble Mountain* for its earlier Anglo history as a marble mine; and *Mt. Slover*, for its current phase as a cement quarry. "Words are outward signs of specific cosmological belief," deSoto later wrote, "the words we use to describe the world translate in what we believe we can *do* to that world." The images had their titles inscribed on them, props set in the foreground of the photographs, and frames as much a part of each

Tahualtapa (Tahualtapa Project),
1983-88
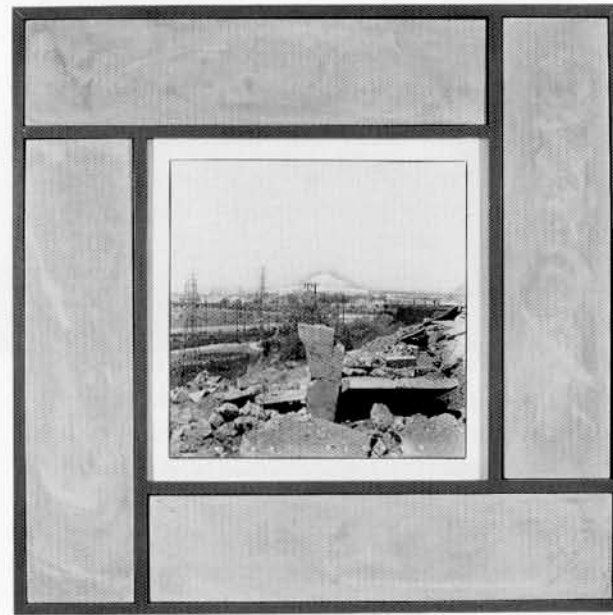black and white photograph, text,
paint, feathers, wood
32 × 32

Mount Slover (Tahualtapa Project),
1983-88
black and white photograph, text,
paint, cement, wood
32 × 32

work as the photograph. The frames were filled with materials relating to the mountain's role: feathers; feathers and marble dust; marble slabs; cement.

Regarding the substances as equally a part of the mountain's essence as its form gives a different emphasis to its metamorphosis: *Tahualtapa* is not a mourning for what has been so much as a chronicle of what has become, and a recovery of both lost history and lost material. Further aspects of the project position the mountain in its surrounds and extend the territory of the artwork to that of the mountain: in *Slover Compass*, a compass-cross of U.S.G.S. maps and photographs document the artist's distance-markings on nearby cement sidewalks made from the mountain; in the sand and cement relief of *Slover Quadrant*, the mountain's materials are extended into the exhibition space. Clearly, the evolution from the sacred hill of the ravens to a cement quarry is not a paean to progress, but the loss recuperated by the project is as much of the knowledge of where so much of the cement in the region comes from as where the mountain went to. The mountain appears not as itself, but in terms of its perception by three cultures; the piece is as much about the metamorphoses of perceptions of the mountain as of the mountain's own metamorphosis. As the artist remarked recently, understanding the history of the mountain and the source of the material meant that you could be in the landscape while driving on the freeway—not a devaluation of nature, but a revaluation of culture.

Another work dating from the year *Tahualtapa* was completed (1988), *Kachina (Heyheya Kachin Mana)*, presents an electricity tower in terms of a southwestern fetish, suggesting a landscape narrative of continuity rather than disruption.

III

To the hunter, much of what he had seemed given; to the farmer, earned by continuing labor.
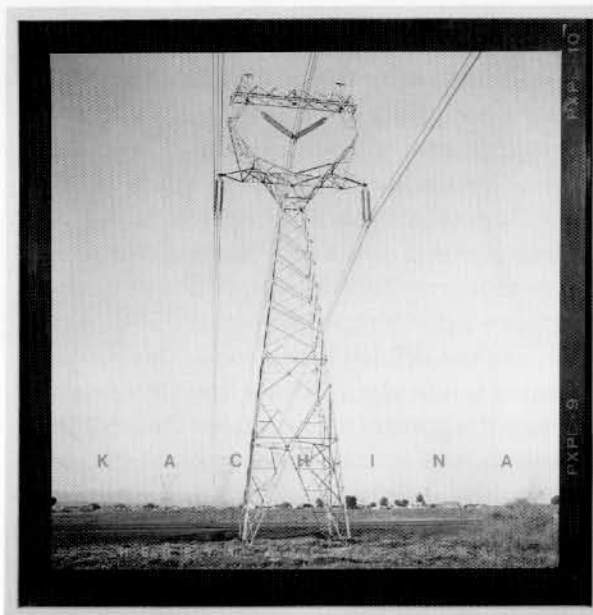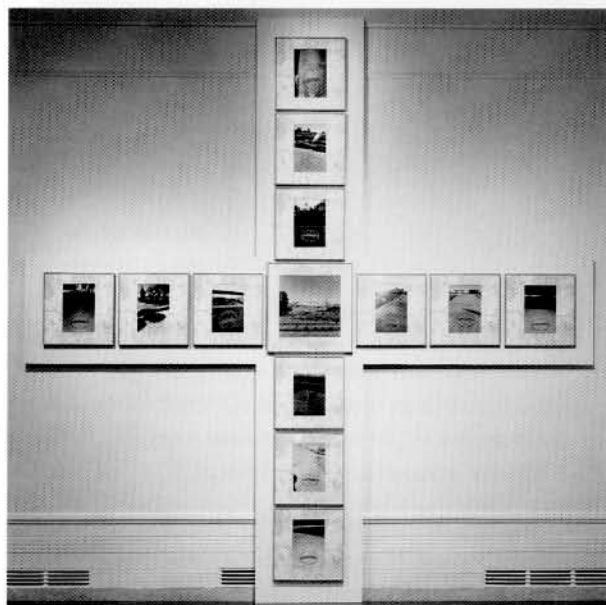
Slover Compass (Tahualtapa Project), 1988
installation view, Seattle Art Museum
thirteen color photographs and maps
156×156

Kachina (Heyheya Kachin Mana), 1988
black and white photograph with colored text, yellow frame
36×36

For the farmer the contrast between the ease of childhood and the burdens of maturity had increased. For him there was a lost, more perfect world, the images of which were enhanced by his awareness of this contrast. Surely the biblical Garden of Eden must have seemed perverse to those hunting peoples on whom missionaries inflicted it (but whose courtesy and good humor compelled them to stifle their laughter).[7]

Many dispute when the Fall took place, few doubt there was a fall. Feminists trace a fall from agricultural-matriarchal into mercantile-patriarchal societies, environmentalists from a dreamtime of organic harmony into technological disruption, Freudians from the maternal embrace, and so forth. All postulate a completed act of orderly creation and a subsequent fall toward entropy, ruin and disorder. The Cahuilla creation myth that is the source for both *The Language of Paradise* and *Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat* is radically different, beginning with a kind of miscarriage, continuing through arguments between the twin brothers born of the original egg, into the creation of flawed beings and of tools, to the death of Múkat, the older and better of the beings. Although the creators are male, they are plural, and the darkness which gives birth to them and the moon that existed before them are female; and the original darkness is fecund rather than chaotic. The narrative doesn't make for a before and after of nature and culture or of perfection and ruination: no original order is violated; instead, the system metamorphoses continually and creation is ongoing and diffused among many. This is a cosmology of spectacular difference from Genesis, one in which it is possible to contemplate the affinities between flowers and cameras or to consider freeways as extensions of the landscape (which is not to suggest that the cosmology has engendered the artist's thinking so much as that thinking has found a grounding in the cosmology). "Cultures in general inhabit borrowed

cosmologies," deSoto remarked in conjunction with *The Language of Paradise*. "The Cahuilla viewpoint is still alive and should be added to the fabric of our understanding."[8]

The Language of Paradise re-presented elements of the Cahuilla creation myth via: technological devices —a slide projector, an oscilloscope, a tape recorder; representations—slides of a Cahuilla basket, anthropological texts; and things themselves—a desk with drawers full of sand. Installed in a room whose windows were tinted dark blue, the crepuscular light of beginnings and endings thickened the atmosphere and slowed the senses. Projected straight down onto a bed of sand on the floor, the basket-image appeared to turn slowly, looking as much like a radio-telescopic picture of a spiral galaxy as a domestic artifact. The sound of an old recording of the creation myth was registered by an oscilloscope's dancing lines: an assertion of the permeability of media, the perpetuality of translation, the fraternity of the codes of language, electronics, sound vibrations. Drawers full of sand: a wildly lyrical transgression against the distinction between sensation and information, far beyond Rimbaudian synaesthesia. A thing which is not merely metaphorical or representational and therefore which cannot be replaced or dissected—"elements of inexplicability and of wonder."

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical.[9]

Installation itself differs radically from the fine-art genres it outgrew. It uses real things, real place and real space, bringing the viewer inside the frame of the

The Language of Paradise, 1991 installation view, Matrix, University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley

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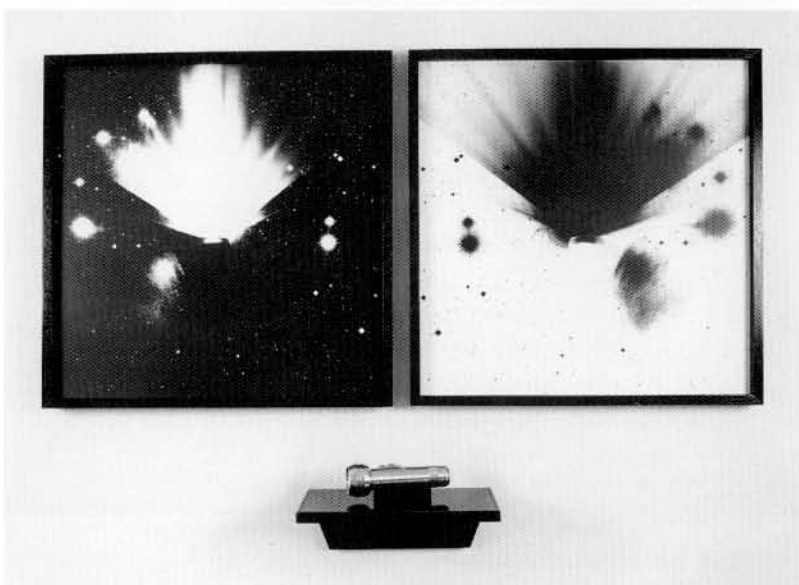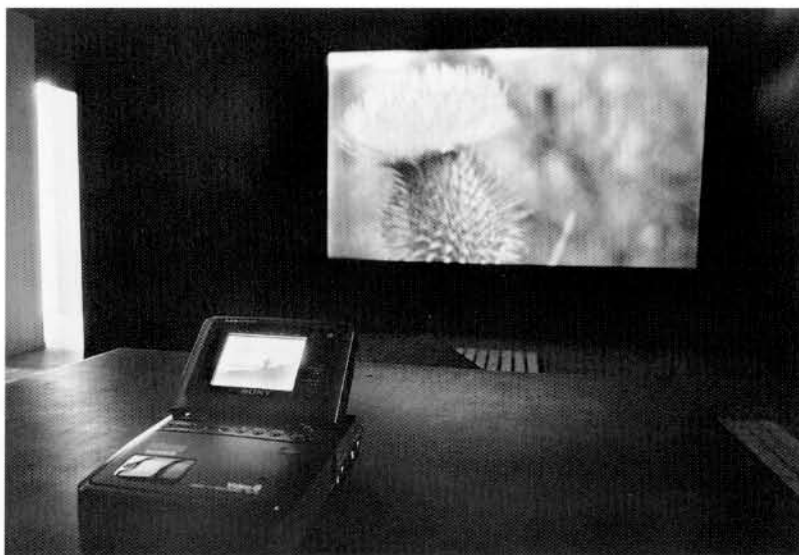
work and blurring the subject/object relationships usually established between spectator and spectacle. The camera and Renaissance perspective usually assert the spectator as omniscient and absent, possessor of a dematerialized gaze across space a little like that of the alienated technocratic deity himself. In installation the viewer explores a space that is necessarily permeable and incomplete—far from the hermetically sealed space of the modernist artwork—and spectatorship becomes a form of participation (deSoto compares his installations to cameras obscura, with the implication that the work presents pictures in the process of being made). Another recent piece that didactically investigated a landscape in terms of its perceptual possibilities also brought the viewer into the picture, *Háypatak, Witness, Kansatsusha*; its triple title approximating the same thing in Miwok, English and Japanese (the Miwok are indigenous to Marin County). Three styles of videotaping Drake's Beach in Marin (where Sir Francis Drake landed in 1579) invoked the three modes of consciousness more dynamically than the photographs in *Tahualtapa* had; and the projected video images were beamed across the darkened installation in such a way that the viewer could stand in the beam, seeing her or his own diffracted shadow as part of the moving landscape. The luxuriant engagement with the near-at-hand of the Miwok segment and the austere lyricism of the Buddhist segment—of clouds swiftly moving across a deep blue sky—presented a complex of alternatives to the surveying glances of shoreline, rather than an either/or of vision—pluralist rather than dualist thinking.

IV

The unnamable is the eternally real.
Naming is the origin
of all particular things.

Yet mystery and manifestations

arise from the same source.
This source is called darkness. [10]

Ink drips on dictionaries. In books meaning is made of ink; more ink should somehow mean more meaning. Alternately, meaning in books is made out of the contrast of black and white, more ink means the loss of difference, of particulars; more ink means an end to manifestations and another beginning of mystery. *In the beginning was the word* is only one version of the story; the first words broke in on silence; light is rimmed by darkness. In Western cosmologies, white and black do duty as good and evil, though the fact that meaning in books depends on the presence of both—no story without difference—suggests a more intricately symbiotic relationship. In the beginning of the book was the white paper; in the end of these books is a superabundance of ink, of dry facts drowned in their own medium. The books outlive their representationality and become presences, not very different than the birchwood table beneath them. In the end is an end of denotative meaning, while connotation remains endless, as though the imagination survives the reason. In the end, this paragraph is only a soliloquy on some of an unnumbered quantity of possibilities; in the end, beginning is perpetual.

Time itself is running backwards, as though the swing of a pendulum had reached its maximum extension. The modernist faith in progress, in transcendence, has withered; in its place has come a passion for the past, for roots, for immanence, a desire to turn back to Paradise's tender nights rather than the brilliance of Utopia. [11] Which is to say, in the good as being found in the organic realm of things as they were rather than in a future of technological control, a dream of the cyclical time of biology rather than the linear time of history. To invoke that list of opposites again, beginnings and cosmologies fall on the side of the dark and the female, together describing generative interior space, while teleologies, Platonic absolutes and the glare of reason, on that of the luminously male, the light beyond Plato's Cave. Ecology postulates a world that is, or is ceasing to be, paradise, that needs no improvement but our own coming to terms with it. If modernism—both the modernisms of art and of science—was itself about faith in the upward march of innovating reason, then postmodernism is likewise a recantation of progress. The fertile darkness of origins is reimagined and re-imaged, this time without the evil laid upon Eve and Tiamat.

Pé Túkmiyat, Pé Túkmiyat consists of these spaces and ingredients: three chambers opening off a central room, the room in which the birch table stands. The spaces themselves are upstairs in the old building of the San Jose Museum of Art. The central room is illuminated by light stained blue by gels over a south-facing bay window, and this light shifts as the day passes by. In the south chamber, comprised of two rooms, a slide projector beams an image of the full moon onto a tall turning fan, against a background wall covered in black curtains; in the middle chamber a tiny video monitor on a pendulum swings back and forth, transmitting an image of fire; in the north chamber, maps are stacked on a table, in an environment of light and birdsong which vary in intensity in concert with one another. This last room refers to a later portion of the myth, recounting how the Cahuilla wandered for 16,000 years before settling in their present location, a kind of morning after the darker chambers of generation.

It could be proposed that rematerializing such things as the moon and fire with machinery is perverse; it could be proposed with at least equal credence that this rematerialization reinvents out of the media of human ingenuity those energies as well as those images: a moon made out of a continuous flow of light, a fire made of a stream of electronic and magnetic information, as though Utopia itself dreamed of Paradise. There are a number of ways such things

Háypatak, Witness, Kansatsusha, 1990
video installation, San Francisco Arts
Commission Gallery

Beacon, 1987
two black and white photographs, shelf
with flashlight
photographs: 25½ × 25½ each
shelf: 5 × 13½ × 7¼

could be referenced in visual art: by representation, which is to say, by an inert image of the thing itself; by re-creation, which would mean scale models— a little fire, for example, to refer to the primordial fire and to Fire; and this reinvention, which offers forth the original things in an entirely new form and entirely human media, which is to say with a kind of creation that metaphoricizes Creation more faithfully. In this form, they insist on the presence of the primordial even in the most contemporary mechanical, and they constitute an environment that is continuous with the viewer: the beam that makes the image of the moon can be broken by anyone who passed between it and the fan, and the fan can be felt breathing back in the direction of the light. It is alive to the spectators' presence. Like the sand-bearing desk of *The Language of Paradise*, the situations that constitute this installation don't have an exact correspondence to their subject-source, which sets them apart a little from representation; the arbitrary, the irrational, the secret enter in, and the creation with a small *c* becomes a little inexplicable too, demands to be regarded on its own terms rather than in terms of its references.

Too, these machines present not finished images, but images constantly in the process of being made—the moon is being projected, the birdsong played, the fire flickering off the tape, and the ink drips on the books. The installation is constantly in the process of making itself, its creation remains in the present tense, and as an implication, so does Creation.

NOTES

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 90.

2. Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "Critical Reflections," *Artforum* 28, no. 10, (Summer 1990), p. 132.

3. Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988).

4. J. A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 5–6 and 12.

5. Brian Wallis, introduction to *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (Boston: David R. Godine; New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. XV.

6. Rebecca Solnit, essay on substance, *Artspace* (New Mexico), to be published Summer 1991.

7. Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1982), p. 26.

8. Preliminary exhibition statement for Matrix, University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, 1991. Quote from Matrix announcement, March 1991.

9. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1962; transl. Colin Smith), p. XV.

10. Stephen Mitchell (trans), *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 1.

11. Paradise nearly always relates to a lost dreamtime of organic harmony, Utopia to a future of manmade, technologically achieved orderliness; they represent opposing visions of a better world, a dualism that deSoto's work doesn't engage.

LEWIS DE SOTO

EDUCATION
M.F.A. Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, 1981
B.A. (Studio Art), University of California, Riverside, 1978

PUBLIC PROJECTS
Phoenix Arts Commission, Phoenix International Airport, "A Lineage of Wings,"
1990-91 (In Progress)

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1991   "The Language of Paradise" (installation), Artists Space, New York

Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California

"The Language of Paradise" (installation), Matrix, University Art Museum,
University of California, Berkeley*

1990   "Háypatak, Witness, Kansatsusha" (video installation, part of *Festival
2000*), San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery

"Air" (audio installation, October/November); "Aviary" (audio installa-
tion, June/August); "The Language of Paradise" (installation, April/May);
"Edison Song (Tesla Sings For A Deaf Edison)" (audio installation,
March/April); Headlands Center for the Arts, Fort Barry, Sausalito,
California

1988   "Tahualtapa Project," University Art Gallery, California State University,
San Bernardino

1986   "Tahualtapa Project," Nine-One-One Contemporary Arts Center, Seattle,
Washington

"Site Projects/Botanica Series," Nagase Gallery, Tokyo and Osaka, Japan

1985   "Heaven and Earth" (with Don Anton), The Friends of Photography,
Carmel, California

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1991   "Three Archaeologies," California Museum of Photography, University of
California, Riverside

1990   "Waterworks," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California*

"Earth Day 1990: Artists Respond to the Environment," Palo Alto Cultural
Center, Palo Alto, California

1989   "Night Light," Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
(travels through 1991)*

1988   "Photographic Memory," Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington and
Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia (1989)*

1987   "Visual Paradox," John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan,
Wisconsin*

1985   "International Triennial Exhibition of Photography," Museum of Art and
History, Fribourg, Switzerland*

1983   "Messages From Earth: An Alternative Space Probe," Houston Center for
Photography, Houston, Texas

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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University of California, Berkeley, April/June 1991.

Lazzari, Margaret, "On View," *New Art Examiner*, (April 1991), pp. 30-31.

Knaff, Devorah, "Through the Eyes of Others," *Artweek*, (March 7, 1991), pp. 13-14.

Ross, Jeannette, "Intrinsic Value of the Ordinary," *Artweek*, (April 5, 1990),
pp. 1, 24.

Biren, Jordan, "Before Thought," *Reflex*, (July/August 1989), p. 26.

Slemmons, Rod, "Clarifying Reality," *Reflex*, (May/June 1987), p. 19.

Bellon-Fisher, Linda, "Documenting the Metamorphic," *PhotoMetro*,
(February 1987), pp. 20-21.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS
California Museum of Photography, Riverside, CA
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Security Pacific Bank, Los Angeles, CA
Syntex Laboratories, Palo Alto, CA

*catalog produced in conjunction with this exhibition