

El Cenote:
a succession of eternities

A Supporting Paper Submitted to the Graduate
Faculty of the Department of Art University of
Minnesota

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Fine Arts Degree in Art

July 2021

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The Yucatec-Maya Maní Land Treaty Map, or Mapa de Maní (1557), is housed in the Mesoamerican Painted Manuscripts collection of the Latin American Library at Tulane University in the city of New Orleans where I was born. The map depicts the region around the ancient township of Maní, now a city in central Yucatán, Mexico. Today, February 26, 2018, I access a high resolution digitized version of it through the University's Digital Library. I was first drawn to the map because of its unusual circular shape.

The digital entry for the document describes it thus:

Circular map on European paper measuring 41 cm x 31 cm

A map showing the boundaries of the Tutul Xiu Province. It is the oldest document in the world known to be written in a Maya language in alphabetic script.

The colonial encounter with indigenous civilizations that would change the trajectory of human consciousness and experience is quite palpable in these few phrases. It is evident that the map was not drafted on local amatl (amate) bark paper as all pre-Columbian codices were. This is because its production was mandated by Spanish authorities just fifteen years after Francisco de Montejo made official his conquest of the region from the (Mayan) Xiu family (Solari, 156). What does name of the Mayan patriarch Tutul Xiu look like in its original hieroglyphic form? As the oldest extant document in which a Mayan language has been transliterated to Roman script, to me the Mapa de Maní represents the very nascence of that colonial and indigenous collision, like a meteor hitting the earth and catalyzing the turning of epochs.

I currently reside in Minneapolis, the northern-most metropolis through which the Mississippi River flows. I often say that I've finally journeyed the length of the river and arrived at its origin, having come into the world in the previous millennium at the river's southern delta where it spills into the Gulf of Mexico, which surrounds the Mayan territories. Even in his quest to demonstrate the spherical nature of the world and to attain the glory and riches of empire, Columbus, through four voyages, never reached these waters.

It is late May in the year 2010. I am at my desk in the century-worn industrial apartment I share with my friend Katya in East Kensington, Philadelphia. We each occupy one side of this L-shaped space and sometimes meet at the intersection of the two branches - the kitchen - to chat and eat. This brick building once housed an old coffin factory. On the walls of the stairwell hang a few original company calendar pages, faded with age. Striking suggestive pin-up poses atop newly manufactured coffins, the women smile as we walk by.

The word "Guatemala" catches my eye and I've now clicked on a link in my browser, which leads to a *National Geographic* article. At times I momentarily forget that my early childhood memories are rooted in the southeastern highlands of the country's Santa Rosa province. The large photograph under the headline of this article transports me suddenly into an uncanny realm. I begin to question whether I've accidentally clicked on a bad link, a fake website, because the photograph I am looking at cannot be real. Is this a joke? I investigate the website more scrupulously to see if something is awry. I believe *National Geographic* to be a legitimate source, but like those emails sent by scammers impersonating your bank, this might be a trick. The aerial photograph depicts a dense section of Guatemala City. In the middle there is an enormous, perfectly formed black hole. The caption explains that Tropical Storm Agatha caused the formation of a sinkhole thirty stories deep, enough to swallow a three-story factory whole. I still cannot tell if the photo is doctored, so I send a Facebook message to my cousin Roy in Guatemala City to ask if it is real. He replies a few moments later to say that yes, it is. I look deep into this circle of perfect blackness and it seems lifetimes are passing through me.

Some authors assert that there are only two notions of time: linear and cyclical. Others disagree, suggesting that time is not either cyclical or linear; rather, a society may possess both types but each operates in different domains. [Name omitted] argues that one of the two must be subordinated to or incorporated into the other.

Linear time is generally considered "durational time," but also sometimes historical, irreversible, secular, or profane time. It is envisioned as a continuous, unidirectional, chronological line or flow from past to present to future. It is time as widely experienced from day-to-day and year-to-year, and in the modern world it is registered by clocks and calendars.

Cyclical time, for those who do not formally observe it, can be difficult to conceptualize. However, most phenomena of the natural world used for time indications and the passage of so-called linear time are recurring or cyclical, such as the seasons and the phases of the moon. Agriculture is also cyclical in its rhythms of planting, weeding, harvesting and planting anew. Cycles may be defined as intervals in which events repeat in roughly the same order or as periodically recurring sequences of events. This has led to the conceptualization of cyclical time as "oscillating" or "zig-zagging" time, a "repetition of repeated reversal" between polar opposites in which "all past is equally past; it is simply the opposite of now" (Rice, 279).

The three-part Mayan cosmic design:

underworld / past earth / present sky / future

It is a bright crisp day in early February 2018. I sit in the quiet communal reading room at the Immigration History Research Center Archives of the University of Minnesota Libraries' Department of Archives and Special Collections. I am reading through the pages of this report:

Amnesty International
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
Human Rights Update #38
October 8, 1990

In this reading room, I can no longer forget, even temporarily, about my earliest memories and the site where they took place. By the time this report had been issued, the Guatemalan Civil War had been waged against the indigenous population by a genocidal government for thirty years; it would not end for another six.

The first section of the report lists DISAPPEARANCES:

CESAR AUGUSTO GAMBOA PEREZ (34), watchman at the Concepcion Candelaria estate in La Reforma, San Marcos, was abducted September 21 from the estate's guard post by 6 armed men wearing woolen face masks. His wife, Laureana Hernandez, reported the detention/disappearance to the authorities. She says that her husband "is not active in politics, much less in unions."

RUBEN ALDANA (30) was abducted on September 29 by a group of armed men in the parking lot at 7th Avenue and 4th Street, Zone 4, Guatemala City. Oscar Medrano reported the detention/disappearance to the authorities.

This is followed by EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS, most of which begin with "The body of [name] was found at [location of discovery]" followed by gruesome details of the body's condition. Not all, however, were identifiable.

The next category presents far less information: DISCOVERY OF UNIDENTIFIED BODIES lists the number of bodies found at a particular site:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Department</u>	<u>Description</u>
9/27	M	-	Guatemala	Bullet wounds (1)
9/27	M	-	Guatemala	Tortured (2)
9/29	?	-	Escuintla	Skeleton

The documents held by this archive span a date range beginning several years after my immediate family and I left Guatemala for the states and for some reason, the absence of those materials makes me feel ungrounded. In the years after we left, my uncle – my father's older brother, disappeared without a trace from his home in Guatemala City. He was reported missing and he remained so for over two weeks. I was 10 years old, my mother had left, and my father had taken my brothers and I in a U-Haul from central California to begin a new life in northern Washington without her. Everything was new to us; our family had become smaller, our rented house was dingy and strange, and I could feel the cold and damp autumn air in my bones. Time moved differently. We were still getting accustomed to our new world when one night after dinner, I saw my father talking intently on the telephone. He was sobbing uncontrollably in a way I had never witnessed. He seemed to be outside of himself. Later – I am not sure when – I learned that this was the moment he was informed that a body had been found face down in a canal alongside a road, a bullet wound in the back of the head, and that it was identified by his widow as the body of my uncle.

The entrance to the mythical Mayan underworld, where the dead journey to eternity, is the cenote: a natural well, sinkhole or underwater cave. These limestone concavities often formed as perfect circles millions of years ago, and for the ancient Mayans they served as sacred burial sites. Their descendants maintain many beliefs and rituals around cenotes to this day. Select cenotes are designated with the modifier “sagrado” (sacred), such as El Cenote Sagrado de Chichén Itza.

Burial in a cenote is far from being a terminus. Victorino-Ramírez et al. expound on the significance of the under-world, or in the K'iche' language, Xibalbá:

The underworld is, besides, a place of wisdom and rebirth, of life renovation for the dead, and a place where linear time does not exist, only cyclic; time for reunion with ancestors and deities. The descent of men to Xibalbá depicts a phase of the cosmic cycle, where the universe emergently needs a renewal due to the imbalance of the forces that endanger it (175-176).

Victorino-Ramírez et al. point to the particular dynamism of this “place of shadows” which is not relegated simply to silence, darkness and death, but a meeting ground where gods and ancestors might commingle with each other and with the living to communicate and gain knowledge or achieve transformation. “Precisely, the cenotes are portals that lead to spheres of wisdom about the cosmos, men and nature” (176).

I am in the highland plateau of southern Colorado where my father, Freddy, raises cows as he once did in the highlands of Guatemala during the war. It is a hot August day in 2017. My father is driving a 1982 Ford F-150 pick-up truck he's had since I was a child. His friend Juanito sits in the passenger seat and I am wedged in the middle between the two.

[Translated from Spanish]

Freddy [to Juanito]: You're praying, eh?

Me [to Juanito]: Can you repeat it? The rosary?

Juanito: [laughter] The rosary?

Me: Yes, so I can record it? [I am already recording this conversation]

J: [*Padre nuestro que estás en los cielos, santificado sea Tu nombre; venga a nos en Tu Reino, haga todo voluntad aquí en la tierra como en el cielo...*] Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen. [Laughter] Amen, Jesus!

F: Wow, you really know it!

Me: Thank you.

F: You need to teach it to Ramón [an inside joke, as they Ramón consider in need of reform]. [Laughter].

J: Another one, let's see if I remember... look: With God I go to bed, with God I get up. The light and grace of the Holy Spirit. God with me, I with Him. Him in front and me behind Him. God goes ahead and another one goes behind and God guides one when he goes on a solitary path, wherever he wants. [Laughter].

R: Wow... it's nice, isn't it?

J: [laughter] Yes.

R: It's powerful.

J: Did Freddy tell you when I came from El Salvador, God guided me the whole way? Because they put thirty people in a van, and only me, one from El Salvador and another from Peru—they never put us in there. But I travelled reciting the prayer the whole way since I'd left.

F [in English to me]: You understand what he's saying? He came illegally across the border the first time. And these two women kind of latched on to him. Not for love or anything like that,

but just so that they could cross the border. And, he prayed and everything and everybody thought that one was his wife and the other one was his daughter. And nothing ever happened to them, the whole trip. They always got the best rides, they never stuck them in the back of those big trailers, rigs, where it's hotter than hell. He never had to do any of that. He said that he prayed the whole way.

F [in Spanish to Juanito]: I'm explaining what you told me.

J: When Jesus came to me in El Salvador, I couldn't speak, I was speechless. And he was kneeling, wearing the cross. With the veil like when you go to church. And I was speechless and, like, fifteen days after I saw him, I had a dream and in the dream I saw this place in Mexico and these great valleys. But I would never have believed that I was going to come to the United States. When my brother, who is in California, called me, "Juan," he told me, "listen, if you want to come, I'll help you." Well, then. And that's how I came here. But it was a dream I had. It was a dream.

F: [in English to me] Did you hear what he said? He said he saw Jesus kneeling.

J: I never thought I was going to make it here.

F: [in English to me] Well after, when he saw Jesus, he wanted to say something, but he was totally dumbfounded. He couldn't speak, he couldn't do anything. And then he had a dream of going somewhere where there were these, like, valleys that were flat. And then he ended up coming up here.

[Pause]

F: Isn't that weird? So that was kind of a spiritual experience.

R [to Juanito in Spanish again]: But you didn't plan it?

J: What's that?

R: That wasn't the plan, right?

J: No... It was what happened.

According to K'iche' myth, the world was created by two creator gods, Q'uq'umatz, the Plumed Serpent, and Tepeu, the Sovereign. They created the Earth out of the primordial sea. Next they created the animals, who couldn't worship their gods, so the gods created humans. There were three attempts. The first humans were made of mud, and they were weak and quickly deteriorated. The gods then created men from wood, and women from reeds. These humans

had children but forgot their gods and all were punished by a flood. Finally the gods molded humans out of maize. These “people of corn” survive still today, worshipping and nourishing their gods.

It is early November in 2017. *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) is still being celebrated in some parts of the world. The Human Rights Program at the Institute for Global Studies here at the University of Minnesota is hosting a small conference entitled “Truth, Trials, and Memory: An Accounting of Transitional Justice in El Salvador and Guatemala”. I walk to a building on the West Bank because I know that Pamela Yates will be speaking in a session on the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Commission for Historical Clarification in Guatemala. Yates is an American filmmaker whose 1983 documentary film *When the Mountains Tremble* focuses on the Guatemalan Civil War and was shot at the height of its bloodshed. Her follow up film, *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator*, released decades later in 2011, is in more ways than one, a resurrection. The film chronicles the process by which Yates' earlier documentary and dozens of reels of previously unused footage became forensic evidence in the trial of General Efraín Ríos Montt, former President of Guatemala who became a dictator via coup d'état. While filming *When the Mountains Tremble*, Yates was granted close access to Montt and members of his military - even surviving a helicopter crash while accompanying a military commander on mission. With this footage and other evidence presented by an international consortium of human rights lawyers and forensics experts, Montt was charged in January 2013 for the killing of 1,771 men, women and children in fifteen Ixil Maya villages.

In direct counterpoint to Montt's murderous personage in *Granito*, the Guatemalan forensic anthropologist Fredy Peccerelli appears in the film as a beacon of light. His life's work provides the physical evidence to bolster Yates' ethereal images in celluloid. We see Peccerelli and his team in Guatemala lowering themselves on hoists dozens of meters to the bottom of enormous abandoned wells. Here, the careful work of recovering thousands of skeletal remains of massacred indigenous villagers begins, in wells transformed into mass graves. The remains are assessed for method of homicide, identified, and most importantly, returned to long-bereft families. There have been over 10,000 bodies recovered so far. Peccerelli was a child of nine years in 1980 when many of these bodies were discarded into these very pits, and when he fled Guatemala for Brooklyn with his middle-class family who had received death threats. Fourteen years later and while a young anthropology student he attended a conference in Atlanta and heard human rights scholar and forensic anthropologist Karen Ramey Burns speak on the exhumation of bones in Guatemala. At that moment Peccerelli decided to return to his native country. He has since dedicated his life to activating human remains so they they can speak from the void.

After Yates' presentation, I approach to tell her that my father is Guatemalan, and that we lived in the highlands during the war. She inquires after the details of my Mayan heritage: do I come from The Mam? The Kaqchikel? The K'iche'? I am dumbfounded: I cannot answer the question. I have always been told that my father's Mayan great grandmother, whom everyone called "Mama Uela" was Mayan and named Matea Matuto. But can I trust my father, who isn't always sure of the date of my birthday, to have gotten this right, and to know which tribe she belonged to? In my mixed diasporic family, there is scant material evidence of our past. We have told and revised so many stories, whether sordid or beautiful; many others have been forgotten or omitted. Yet we possess so few photographs to testify to the unifications and separations, the migrations and premature deaths that defined these generations. Because I cannot answer a question put to me by this white filmmaker, I feel suddenly implicated by my ignorance and the muted specters of my ancestry.

"Those who live their times suffer them and sometimes learn to speak for them."
(Dohmann and Harss, 413)

In her writing on the production of the Mapa de Maní, Amara L. Solari notes that the commissioned surveyors who walked the Maní territories in order to schematize the map began at a cenote called Hoal, in the northern part of the Maní province. From there they traveled west then southwestward, marking the northwestern arc of the region. They returned to the cenote and traveled east then southeastward to demarcate the corresponding northeastern wedge. They did the same for the southern half of the map, ultimately creating a "perfect circle" that "places the city of Maní and the other Xiu towns at the center of an ideally rounded cosmos" (158).

This circular mimesis of the cosmos can be perceived in other Mayan-Yucatec (and even Zapotec) spatial renderings; it can also be linked to "multiple and varied" Mesoamerican calendrical systems, including the k'atun cycle, imaged by ancient Mayans as a wheel (155). K'atun wheels appear in numerous colonial-era manuscripts: remarkably, many designate cardinal and even intercardinal directions. Solari remarks:

With the explicit inclusion of directional indicators within the composition of k'atun calendar wheels, a conceptual link is constructed between the seemingly irreconcilable dimensions of time and space. Contrary to Western modern spatial conceptions, where a circle evokes images of the spherical earth, for the colonial Maya, the circle references the world's terrestrial plane, whose outer edges are defined with specific directionalities (156).

These directionalities are of course integral to maps. Later in her essay, Solari enumerates how the ordered, circular routes of the map-makers were sometimes narrativized through particularly telling words, place names or glyphs, thereby bestowing these spatial renderings with temporal characteristics. This form, which Solari refers to as "calendrical cartography" makes temporality synonymous with the spatial rendering of land. Most significantly, depending upon the ideological impulses of the map-makers, these stories can be interpreted as representing specific temporal registers such as the time of creation (mythical time), or documented accounts (historical time).

Ca haulahi caan	Then the sky was turned face up
Ca nocpahi peten	Then the land was turned face down

(excerpt from The Books of Chilam Balam)

I am traveling by bus from Guatemala City to Panajachel on the 4th of July, 2005. Inside the bus a sign near the driver states, "I drive the bus. God drives me." It begins to rain as we climb higher into the mountains. The nape and thickly braided hair of the woman in front of me is doubled as a reflection in the window next to her, but the image fades as the light recedes with the rainfall. I see an orange sign on the road that reads, "We are working for you." As I read it, a young boy repeats the phrase aloud, as if my own mind were speaking to me. Suddenly, it seems as though a thousand tiny bullets are hitting the speeding metal bus at once. People all around begin to say, "Hail is falling from the sky." I think to myself: how can the temperature have dropped so dramatically - it is summer after all - that there is ice falling from the sky in Guatemala? I worry about my suitcase, which was hoisted onto the roof of the bus when I boarded. I assume it will be soaking wet by the time I next see it. When we arrive four hours

later, I see that all has been considered in advance: the large pile of suitcases is covered by a tarp. I also begin to understand that the altitude here puts us closer to the heavens from which the gods rule and hail descends. I go into a café in Panajachel. There is a sign that reads, "After God, you are the most important person to us."

Some thousands of years after The K'iche' first populated the highlands of what is now Guatemala, the Nobel Prize winning mestizo author Miguel Angel Asturias wrote his sprawling, experimental novel *Men of Maize*. In an introduction to the 1993 University of Pittsburgh Press edition, Gerald Martin describes the novel thus:

It is a profound meditation on the history of Guatemala, contained within a symbolic history of Latin America since the conquest, contained within the history of humanity's passage from so-called barbarism to so-called civilization since the Greeks, contained within the novelist's own reflections on the human condition, based on his own experience of life in the half century 1899-1949, which is the novel's own approximate "realist" time span (xv).

Martin also alludes to a prophetic quality of the text:

[...In] a country where the Indians had been virtually enslaved since the arrival of the Spaniards in 1524... *Men of Maize* exalted the indigenous past and pointed to some sort of economic and cultural revival in the future, *before* [President] Arbenz's agrarian reforms were proclaimed [italics in the original] (xvi).

Men of Maize employs a confounding structure that often proves difficult for readers to process. Indeed, Martin goes provides a narrative outline because of "the special problems posed by the complexity of the novel's subject matter, the unfamiliarity of its reference systems, and its magical, ritualistic concept of language and writing" (xvi).

The first page of Part 1 of the novel in the 1993 edition consists of twenty-eight lines of text with twenty footnotes added by the editors. The footnotes are explained in a Notes appendix, and these first twenty take up three pages. Looking through these notes we learn that Asturias quotes from one of the twenty Hymns of the Gods collected by Sagahún in Tepepulco and bases his main character, Gaspar Ilóm, on a historical figure. He conjures the special emphasis granted to sleep and dreams by the ancient Maya and by French surrealists. He uses a phrase structure which repeats half of a sentence followed by a metaphor, a characteristic of primitive litanies and spells found in Mayan codices. Asturias also uses metaphors of eyes and vision used in the arts of magic. He refers to a type of mat used in the Popol Vuh and alludes to shadows which could signify the soul, magic, the unconscious or an animal double. He mentions the "umbilicus" which may correspond to the "umbilicus of the world," a connection

to the ancestors. He refers to the cosmos by citing their relationship to serpents and monsters. The author employs ritual numbers and emphasizes that the earth came from the stars. He foreshadows in the narrative a call for vengeance towards another family. Asturias uses water as a metaphor for a cut between the conscious and unconscious, and he fuses the action of sleeping with that of being buried. Finally, he evokes ritual punning phrases used in Maya and Nahua poetry. To reiterate: these are the notes for the first page of *Men of Maize*. The novel is 305 pages long.

In each of three phases in *Men of Maize* that Martin names as tribal, feudal-colonial, and capitalist-neocolonial, successive indigenous protagonists are defeated while trying to protect their land and culture of maize production. Each eventually devolves into a state of despair. According to some estimates there are 2.4 million K'iche' Mayans in Guatemala today, accounting for about 12% of the population. *Men of Maize* describes an ever-turning cycle of increasing distance and alienation among the Maya due to the hegemony of the ruling class. The divinatory novel was written in 1945.

I am at the Guatemala City General Cemetery to see where several of my family members are buried. It is July 23, 2005 and I have not been in this country since I was eight years old. The cemetery consists of a large number of mausoleums, some small, some large, private tombs and a few underground plots. It was built in 1880 on the eight Mayan hills which comprise Kaminaljuyu, an ancient Mayan ceremonial site. In the cemetery reside the bodies of former presidents, military leaders, writers, diplomats, socialites and ordinary people. I note that one of the largest mausoleums is fashioned out like an Egyptian sphinx. To the side of the main hills, an annex called "La Isla" was devised for the quantities of poor dead citizens. On November 17, 1917, a series of high magnitude earthquakes began. They continued to convulse the city on Christmas day, on December 29, and into the following year, on January 3 and 24, after which the city was in utter ruins; a fine dust of particulates caused many to contract respiratory illnesses. The greatest threats to public health emanated from the cemetery itself, as 8000 bodies were shaken from their graves and had to be burned by city officials in a massive bonfire. My great-grandmother Catalina Calzia, who married the son of Matea Matuto (la "Mama Uela"), and who everyone called "Mamita," is entombed here. I am observing her grave. I've been told that she had vehemently, repeatedly told the family that she wanted to be buried in the ground level with the stacked tombs when she died. The memory of the thousands of resurrected bodies never left her; she did not want to become one of them. Born in 1894, she died on January 23, 1976. The most catastrophic earthquake ever to hit Central America in the 20th century occurred just twelve days later on February 4, 1976. Our family honored her wishes and laid her to rest near her husband at ground level. This act did

not guarantee that her body and bones would not be convulsed by Earth's deep forces, but I can feel the resistance and strong will of her presence here, among family. Despite major cracks in the structure, her grave is still intact for me to witness.

Scholars of the Popul Vuh have speculated that the figure of Q'ujumatz originates from the highland plateau of the Valley of Mexico. One of its several English translations begins thus:

This is the account of when all is still silent and placid. All is silent and calm. Hushed and empty is the womb of the sky.

I think about Juanito's dream of a highland plateau in Mexico. I think about silence. And I think of border crossings and new beginnings.

It is April 1, 2018. Rios Montt has died of a heart attack in Guatemala City at age 91. I realize that when I met Pamela Yates, Montt was still alive. Two months into the original trial, Judge Yasmín Barrios Aguilar emphatically convicted Montt of genocide and crimes against humanity and she sentenced him to 80 years in prison. It was a long-awaited triumph of justice for millions of Mayans living in Central America. However, Montt's lawyers appealed and he was granted a second trial in 2015, which overturned the original ruling. Montt was barely fit to stand the last trial in 2016, and his old age and senile condition saved him from ever serving time - at least in this life cycle and on this terrestrial plane - for his crimes of genocide.

It is April 7, 2021. Today the only thing I can think of are the burning embers that engulfed written histories of entire generations in bonfires ordered and observed by Spanish priests. I will here invoke an oft-repeated quote from the writings of the Spanish Franciscan Monk Diego de Landa in 1566:

We found a large number of books in these characters and, as they contained nothing in which were not to be seen as superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which they (the Maya) regretted to an amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction.

There is a sense of perpetuity about today. The volcano Pacaya in Guatemala is once again erupting rivers of lava and ash clouds. My cousin Roy has taken numerous photos of Pacaya, which has been active almost concurrently during his lifetime. Pacaya had been quiet over a period spanning from December 1885 and March 1961, over 75 years. Since 1961, it has been Guatemala's most active volcano, and its eruptions are often visible from Guatemala City. Its reawakening in the twentieth century coincides almost exactly with the start of the Guatemalan Civil War in November 1960. The most intense period of summit activity occurred from 1980 -1998, coinciding almost exactly with the beginning of the worst period of violence against indigenous Mayans during the war to the official conclusion of the conflict in 1996. Pacaya has not finished venting fire. Xibalbá seems to speak through the volcano.

Descent and ascension, ascension and descent, over and over again. The stratified layers of a core sample. The repetition of seasons. The infinity of space. The trajectory from the underworld to the heavens and back. Black portals spiral as memories.

Volcanic glass is obsidian from Pacaya. I imagine a large black disk, bright as the light it reflects from the world it inhabits. In its angularity, it is the deepest black substance to come from Earth. This large black disk ascends, descends, and oscillates around and around again through sky, water and space. It floats over triangular pyramids, above churches erected over decimated villages. This obsidian circle hovers over jungles that hide dormant civilizations which await renewal and resurrection.

This black disk is a mirror for all Mayan prophets. In it they see themselves, those who they came from, and all future worlds.

It is close to the end of the year 2020 in late December. I happen upon Kaori Oda's film *Cenote* and I transcribe the following from the screen:

Minstrels are the prophets, prophets are the reciters, the reciters are our memories
The living clean the bones to thin the dead souls
Let them sing, wandering with gazes
Let them sing, making a myth of tomorrow
We are not defeated (No estamos vencidos)

The beautiful star shines over the woods, smoking as it sinks and vanishes
The moon too dies over the green forest

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