

The Satellite

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Since it always appears to every observer, whether on the earth, the sun, or another star, that one is, as if, at an immovable center of things and that all else is being moved, one will always select different poles in relation to oneself, whether one is on the sun, the earth, the moon, Mars, and so forth. Therefore, the world machine will have, one might say, its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere, for its circumference and center is God, who is everywhere and nowhere.ⁱ

Nicolas Cusanus (1401 – 1464)

In shifting between geocentrism and heliocentrism – a shift that arguably has happened many times throughout history – both the sun and the earth have been satellites to each other. The moon has remained a satellite to the earth, though, and is only rarely granted the privilege of centrality. Most people however, when they are not contemplating the big stuff, bring along the centre of the universe as they go.

To shift the location of the centre of things amounts to a certain mental exercise, performed by people such as Copernicus, Kant and Einstein. Copernicus flipped the bird on the Ptolemaic cosmic order, Kant short-circuited the binoculars of empiricism and Einstein ventured to discover the malleability of spacetime, all in the spirit of the God whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. History is rewritten by such panoramic superheroes that can move the heaviest of all things, the anchorpoint of view. And it only budes to the power of imagination.

Standing by the water in a seaside city at night, you might come to realize that the reflections in the water follow you as you move. With immaculate precision, the rays of light stick to you like compass needles. All the light you ever saw, see or will see is attached to you in this way. And so the field of vision is a very exclusive thing. Surrounded by nothingness it moves along with the seer, it is the seer. From the outside it is a black hole. But if you can imagine this hole as being independent of the subject, imagine it to be something that could be accessed by others, you may arrive at something akin to J. L. Borges' miraculous *Aleph*: A point, under the basement staircase where all points in space coexist:

Under the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brightness. At first I thought it was spinning; then I realized that the movement was an illusion produced by the dizzying spectacles inside it. The Aleph was probably two or three centimeters in diameter, but universal space was contained inside it, with no diminution in size. Each thing (the glass surface of a mirror, let us say) was infinite things, because I saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas, saw a silvery spiderweb at the center of a black pyramid, saw a broken labyrinth (it was London), saw endless eyes, studying themselves in me as though in a mirror...ⁱⁱ

We were on a bus. We passed a lake where the moon reflected brightly in the water. The reflections followed our movement. It occurred to us that if we could have seen the lake from many angles simultaneously, the whole surface could have been shining. We thought of making a floating fire and gather a circle of reflections from around the fire.

We found a suitable location, *Revurtjern*. It is a small, almost circular lake on the mountain Fløyen, close to Bergen. We made a structure that can carry a light source on water. Four boat-fenders keep it afloat. A rock, mounted on one end of it keeps it stable. And on top, about 1.2 meters above the water surface, a plate can hold a burning object such as a cube of wood.

All fired up we pulled the structure out on the lake, in the middle of the night. With an analogue camera and pockets full with slide film we went around the lake in a circle. We had already put out degree markers, and so for every second degree we took a picture of the lake, directed towards the centre where the fire was burning. The full

circle made 180 photos. The slides show the fire, the lake, the background landscape, and every image has the reflection in the water that designates the line between the fire and the camera lens.

In the manner of the old Copernican flip, we got the idea of inverting the relation between the fire and the camera/eye. To do this, we modified a Kodak Ektagraphic carousel slideprojector. It has a special carousel that holds 180 slides. The tray is fixed to the roof of an exhibition space, so the projector itself is rotating, clicking two degrees further on the orbit for every slide. A rod with a rock attached counterweights and balances the machine. In this way, the original orbit is turned inside out and a continuous series of images are skipping over the walls of the exhibition space.

The project evolved from a simple reflection into something elemental, almost ritualistic. The fire, the water-mirror, the air-filled floaters and the rock come together in a kind of photographic mandala. It is a satellite that circles around notions of subjective vision, the panorama, the relation between a receiver and a sender, the interlocking of the eye and the ray of light and the struggle to extend this absolutely subjective point of view. It searches to reveal something about the structural reality of vision. It is a machine that attempts to sculpturalize the idea of an eye.

ⁱ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, H. Lawrence Bond, tr., (Paulist Press).

ⁱⁱ Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, Andrew Hurley, tr., (Penguin Putnam Inc.)