



MY

OOZ

# RONI HORN

LISTASAFN REYKJAVÍKUR | 2007



RONI HORN | MY OZ

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LISTASAFN REYKJAVÍKUR  
REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hafþór Yngvason

*Director, Reykjavík Art Museum*

This book is published on the occasion of the first museum exhibition of Roni Horn's work in Scandinavia, held at the Reykjavík Art Museum's Hafnarhús from May 11 to August 19, 2007. Roni Horn has been a regular visitor in Iceland since the mid-1970s. She has traveled around the country more than most Icelanders and sought inspiration in its unspoiled nature. She has struck a core with the Icelandic audience, both as an artist and an advocate for the natural environment, but the full breath of her art has never been presented in Iceland until now. Like the exhibition, this book is a general look at her oeuvre, with particular emphasis on her intimate connection to the country.

Established in 1973, the Reykjavík Art Museum is the largest visual art institution in Iceland. Its mission to present contemporary art in its many manifestations is carried out through diverse programs at the museum's three venues: Hafnarhús, Kjarvalsstaðir, and the sculpture

museum and park, Ásmundarsafn. It is a privilege for the museum to present *My Oz* – the book and the exhibition – in close collaboration with the artist. Roni Horn's interest and cooperation in this endeavor is much appreciated. She has designed this book with Börkur Arnarson and for this too we owe her thanks.

I like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to Kaupthing Bank, whose generous contribution helps make this publication possible, and to Samskip for sponsoring the shipping of the work. Many thanks also to the lenders and to Horn's galleries, Hauser and Wirth and i8 Gallery. I am particularly grateful to Cornelia Providoli of Hauser and Wirth for her extensive help in this undertaking. Finally, I want to thank the Reykjavík Art Festival for co-presenting the exhibition.

from *Haraldsdóttir*, Book VI of *To Place*, 1995





## FORMÁLI OG ÞAKKARORÐ

Hafþór Yngvason

*Forstöðumaður Listasafns Reykjavíkur*

Tilfni útgáfu þessarar bókar er fyrsta sýning verka Roni Horn í listasafni á Norðurlöndunum, haldin í Hafnarhúsinu, 11. maí til 19. ágúst 2007. Roni Horn hefur heimsótt Ísland reglulega síðan á miðjum 8. áratugnum. Hún hefur ferðast meira um landið en flestir Íslendingar og óspillt náttúra þess hefur veitt henni innblástur. Hún hefur heillað íslenska áhorfendur, sem listakona og náttúruverndarsinni, en nú býðst Íslendingum í fyrsta sinn að sjá heildstæða sýningu verka hennar. Í bókinni eru verk Roni Horn einnig skoðuð í heild sinni með sérstakri áherslu á nán tengsl hennar við landið.

Listasafn Reykjavíkur, sem stofnað var árið 1973, er stærsta myndlistasafn Íslands. Safnið sinnir hlutverki sínu, kynningu á fjölbreyttri samtímalist, með margs konar sýningum á þremur sýningarstöðum: í Hafnarhúsinu, á Kjarvalsstöðum

og í Ásmundarsafni. Það er listasafninu heiður að kynna *My Oz*, bókina og sýninguna, í nánú samstafi við listakonuna. Við erum Roni Horn afar þakklát fyrir áhuga hennar og samvinnu við þetta verkefni. Hún hannaði bókina ásamt Berki Arnarsyni og kunnum við henni þakkir fyrir.

Ég vil nota þetta tækifæri til að þakka einnig eftirfarandi aðilum fyrir stuðning við framtakið: Kaupþingi fyrir glæsilegt framlag bankans sem gerði okkur kleift að gefa út þessa bók. Samskipum sem studdu okkur með flutningi listaverkanna til landsins. Listahátíð í Reykjavík, en sýningin var á dagskrá hátíðarinnar, og galleríunum Hauser og Wirth og i8. Þá er ég sérlega þakklátur Corneliu Providoli hjá Hauser og Wirth sem lagði sig mjög fram við framkvæmd verkefnisins.





## PLACE POSSESSES YOU IN ITS ABSENCE<sup>1</sup>

Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir

*Majesty in peaks resides,  
Trust in cliffs,  
Beauty in mountain valleys,  
Force in waterfalls.*

(Jónas Hallgrímsson)

### WHAT IS THE NATURE OF FICTION?

In my generation, Icelanders' relation to the land was moulded by the writings of the national poets – not least Jónas Hallgrímsson. His odes to the fatherland were so imposing that from an early age his interpretation of nature held special significance for me. Yet though it seemed perfectly reasonable to me as a child that “Gunnarshólmi”<sup>2</sup> gave Gunnar himself short shrift and spent far more time on the landscape, this now strikes me as food for thought. My understanding of why Gunnar felt it “nobler far to die, than flee his native shores behind him,”<sup>3</sup> has been transformed. Not only have I grown up; my experience and perception of the land have changed. My relation to the image of “Iceland” has changed. Now, when “the south” exhales

“gentle winds” and “all the ripples of the sea arise” to “crowd home toward the fair land of ice,” this no longer entails the innocent kiss of the southern wave, or the wind’s warm caress on my cheek as in my childhood, but rather a threat to my homeland – an invasion of forces that may change the shape of “the uncharted places,” the “summer valley”<sup>4</sup> and the “glacial crests covered with new fallen snow.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, my understanding of “my” country is no longer one of confidence in the metaphors associated with it. I no longer see the metaphors as real. For nowadays, as I glance across a mountain lake, I may require knowledge to distinguish whether it is natural or artificial. When I look out at the wilderness the horizon is disturbed by power lines, which even in the city are considered too unsightly to remain above ground. As for the waterfalls – who knows what forces govern their flow across the country? Some have lost power to such an extent that they are mere shadows of their former selves. The places that Hallgrímsson described in the early nineteenth century and that enthralled me in the twentieth, no longer exist

<sup>1</sup> See Rebecca Solnit: “Place, which is always spoken of as though it only counts when you’re present, possesses you in its absence” p. 118 in *A Fieldguide to Getting Lost*, Penguin Books, London, 2005. She continues: “The landscape in which identity is supposed to be grounded is not solid stuff; it’s made out of memory and desire, rather than rock and soil,” p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Jónas Hallgrímsson; poem written 1837 in Iceland.

<sup>3</sup> *Gunnar’s holm*; Translations of lines from Hallgrímsson’s poetry in this text are Hans Jóhannsson’s. For those interested in Hallgrímsson’s poetry see Dick Ringler’s website dedicated to the poet <http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas>

<sup>4</sup> Reference to *Ég bið að heilsa* by Hallgrímsson, written in Denmark 1844, in which he imagines the southerly wind carrying his greeting to his country.

5 Reference to  
*Island* by Hallgrímsson;  
written in Denmark 1835.

6 bell hooks;  
*Between us: traces of love*  
– Dickinson, Horn, Hooks,  
in the book *Earths Grow*  
*Thick*, Wexner Center for the  
Arts, Ohio State University,  
Columbus, Ohio, 1996.

as the image of untouched vastness and purity. Places that in his lifetime, he knew to have firm grounding in reality. The fact that these places are Hallgrímsson's *fiction* has taken on a significance that would have been unimaginable for me as a child.

#### ON THE STRANGENESS OF SOLITUDE

While my understanding of Iceland's wilderness was changing, Roni Horn was frequenting that wilderness. She first came to Iceland in 1975, and has returned often ever since. Her visits began around the time I stopped reciting Hallgrímsson's poetry from memory at school and moved on to the "atom" poets, whom we read silently – perhaps because their metaphors were often rooted in impending doom and disassociation rather than nostalgia. But despite the advent of the "atom" poets and the ideological tumult of the late twentieth century, Roni Horn has – like Hallgrímsson before her – sought refuge from the alienation of the inhabited world by gathering material from the solitude inherent in vast open spaces and making use of impressions gained there in her work.

Most people who, like Icelanders, grow up in comparatively vast sparsely populated country are familiar with such solitude. For me – possibly under the influence of the national poets – solitude was an important aspect of growing up and being moulded as an individual. Solitude has, here in Iceland through the centuries, been a decisive factor in each and everyone's relation to their environment. Dire necessity forced people to know, respect and reckon with the forces of nature. Many lived in isolation, of which solitude was a necessary consequence, others were beguiled by nature and its offerings – including solitude. In places where seclusion is part of experience, whether everyday or sublime, few feel threatened by it. Solitude becomes natural rather than strange.

It has been said that Roni Horn's long-term enthusiasm for her compatriot, the poet Emily Dickinson, stems in part from her identification with the solitary lifestyle embraced by her. American writer bell hooks has, in an essay<sup>6</sup> on the works of Roni Horn that focus specifically on Dickinson's writings, pointed out the severe judgment passed by American society on this life choice and its association with eccentricity and strangeness. Hooks has hypothesised that the self-imposed seclusion that characterised Dickinson's life was in no way a sign of strangeness. On the contrary, the writer had chosen solitude





as “essential for the nurturing of her creative imagination. Solitude was the space where her soul could come out of hiding and be heard.”<sup>7</sup>

Hooks suggests that Horn identifies with the writer’s creative process and “concentrates on Emily Dickinson’s solitude, recognizing that this is the source of her genius and power”<sup>8</sup>. She points out that Horn shares the poet’s inner landscape, her “landscape of imagination.” But unlike Dickinson who is “always mapping an inner geography with the spatial constraints of confinement and containment, Horn moves beyond the realm of domestic space, across the globe, to observe, to chart those traces of an inner geography hidden behind the outer busy world of action, change, and ongoing movement”. Horn herself declares that she “uses the outer world to notate the inner”.<sup>9</sup>

References to this process are ubiquitous in Horn’s writings. Her book series dedicated to Iceland (or “the island” Ísland, depending on your point of view) is an obvious example. The title of the series, *To Place*, [with its diverse and ambiguous meanings such as “to position” and “to place,”] alludes to Iceland first and foremost as a mental space. One of the most poignant references to this mental space is to be found in *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* from *Making Being Here Enough*. Just as poet Emily Dickinson shut her eyes to journey through

the mind, Horn is aware of her relationship to the land (Iceland) that she observes and classifies. “I began to wonder about travel altogether, about the how and the what of it. Travel isn’t so simple as a car or a train, or as nameable as a place. [...] Dickinson stayed home, insistently. Locking herself into her upstairs room, she invented another form of travel and went places. [...] For the time being, Dickinson’s here with me, in Iceland”.<sup>10</sup>

Somewhere in this “inner landscape” that she shares with Dickinson, somewhere in the sandy expanses of Iceland, Roni Horn stops for a moment and scans the surroundings. She uses her eyes as a lens, where only the blink of her eyelids marks separate images, like a camera. And only the blink of her eyelids makes it possible for her to differentiate between the external reality of her surroundings and her own inner reality: “They distinguished me, assuring that I was not the place I was in.[...] I’ve been looking out there and I’ve been looking inside and it’s the same thing.”<sup>11</sup> In this place – perhaps because the solitude of this moment is not about enclosure but a revelation of expanse – solitude ceases to be strange and is far from eccentric. On the contrary it becomes a tribute to Dickinson, a tribute to the idea of the inner and outer landscapes as one; we are all responsible for our existence and environment and

7 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

9 *Ibid.*; p. 61.

10 Roni Horn, *Making Being Here Enough Installations from 1980 to 1995*. Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover, 1995, pp. 55-6.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

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1 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book III), *Lava*. Published by the author, New York, 1992.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

12 *Third book of the series To Place. Steidl Verlag, Göttingen, 1992.*

13 *Second book of same series, 1991.*

make decisions that can be crucial to spiritual and material development.

### THE FUSION OF THE INNER AND THE OUTER

This perfect correspondence of inner and outer worlds and the creative ethos that comes along with it, is not only indicative of Roni Horn's first impressions of Iceland. On the contrary her work also abounds in diverse artistic readings of the environment and attempts to engage the experience from the viewpoint of the outsider.

The cataloguing in *Lava*,<sup>12</sup> bears witness to the perceptive eye of the outsider, which discovers the place names of such a wilderness to be an amalgam of natural phenomena and human habitation. Abandoned and unassuming sheepfolds in the artist's book *Folds*<sup>13</sup> are studied in almost anthropological terms. It expresses understanding of an environment where the use of land and nature is based on prudence and respect for what the land/landscape as such represents, irrespective of the presence of man. One of the purest examples of this is the work *You Are the Weather*, 1994-95 which was exhibited at the Venice biennial in 1997 and is also the artist's book, *Haraldsdóttir*,

from the series *To Place*. It comprises sequences of photographs of the face of a woman in numerous outdoor hotspots around Iceland.

The images are similar: only the nuances in the woman's expression and in the surrounding water and air remind the spectator that these are many single events in different places, and not a single event in the same place. The emphasis is on the nuances as opposed to the journey involved in getting there or the harsh environment to which this wonderful warm water belongs. The title *You are the Weather* only becomes significant in the light of the fusion of the nuances in the woman's gaze with the nuances in the surroundings. She becomes the weather and vice versa. In this work Roni Horn appears as an outsider documenting. One who through her knowledge of the solitude of wide open spaces – introduces the viewer to the intimacy of man and environment when the boundaries of what is natural and what is artificial are erased.

*Arctic Circles*, the artist's book following *Haraldsdóttir* in *To Place*, marks a new departure in the artist's approach. Into the unbroken harmony between human and natural aspects of the environment, Horn suddenly introduces a completely different medium and at the same time another external reality; television. Television, which ever since its





advent in the mid twentieth century, has been a representation of something remote; that which occurs in one place but is projected to another – even from a great distance.

*Arctic Circles* is proof that even at the outskirts of the world, where the down of the wild eider is cleaned by hand on a scarred table top in an old house, the alienated domesticity of soap opera stereotypes has infiltrated. The perfect contradiction between an actual elderly couple's home, in the remote northern plains where nothing but the walls and windowframe separates them from nature, and the synthetic homes of television soaps with their artificial walls, creates a multifaceted paradox of contemporary emotions and realities. This paradox is the first real sign in *To Place* that Iceland – or “the island” – is not as remote and sociologically and economically independent as the earlier books indicated. The harmony of inner and outer landscapes is becoming strained.

#### DOUBTS AND INSTABILITY

Although such direct allusion to the intersection of incongruous worlds is not to be found in *Becoming a Landscape*, the next book of *To Place*,

a seed has been sown. It is a seed that casts doubt on the permanence – or even the possibility – of the wondrous interplay and blending of man and environment which up to this point has been the common thread of the artist's experience and record of her travels in Iceland.

*Becoming a Landscape* clearly points to a new position of the artist as an ideological explorer of the wilderness. A note of warning can be detected, almost compromising the confidence that reigned in the sandy wastes as Horn thought of Dickinson. The face of an unshaped young child – to be precise, its wandering gaze – is juxtaposed with photographs of springs. The springs are of all kinds, hot, clear, muddy or full of clay. They suggest depth, or conceal it under an opaque or sometimes almost solid-looking surface. The corollation between the child – and its unknown future – and the natural phenomena, the springs, reveals a previously unexpressed uncertainty as to the oneness of man and nature that up to this point has reigned in Roni Horn's “encyclopedia”<sup>14</sup>.

The geological transformation that Iceland is still undergoing as a “young land” – a volcanic land – is of course the basis for the double meaning that the artist evokes with the child in the foreground. The child and the idea of “becoming a landscape,” alongside the springs in nature, once again

<sup>14</sup> Horn uses the word “encyclopedia” for the series.



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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book II), *Folds*. Mary Boone Gallery, New York, 1991.

9 *Folds*, outtake, 1991. Previously unpublished.

15 *Doubt Box* is the 9<sup>th</sup> book in the series *To Place* and recently published. This particular work is closely related to *Doubt by Water*.

create the impression of an amalgamation of an external reality and that of something underlying or indwelling (or, in the case of the springs, underground). That which flows forth in the gaze of the child is not fully formed and carries a promise, like the water that flows from underneath the earth's crust.

Another variation on this idea appears in a work by Horn that was exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 2004. Again, doubts about the future are afoot, even more strongly asserted here, as evidenced by the title *Doubt by Water*. The child has grown; the innocent sincerity of childhood has been replaced by the resolve of the adolescent and yet the future is still undetermined. Also the future of the natural world portrayed; icy glacial lagoons, icebergs, the spectrum of flowing currents, birds which rely on nature as it is – not as it may become if we are not careful.

#### A SUBLIME EXPERIENCE IN DANGER OF EXTINCTION?

In view of the international context in which the works of Roni Horn have been exhibited, it is of course tempting to expand on the fusion of man

and nature in Roni Horn's Iceland-inspired works. It is as if Horn is asking whether this particular and formerly obscure country is in its "adolescence," as alluded to in *Doubt by Water*. It is at a crossroads which most western nations have already passed; confronted by the largest construction of the late industrial revolution and far-reaching intervention in an unspoiled environment. Horn's question is impossible to answer, for it is yet to be seen which road will be chosen, the road which leads on through unspoiled vastness or the road to industrialisation and the exploitation of the highlands beyond what is required by the population. Iceland itself can therefore be likened to the *Doubt Box*,<sup>15</sup> the next book of *To Place*. Opportunities are endless, but the future is uncertain.

As an adult living abroad for just over a decade, I tasted Jónas Hallgrímsson's bittersweet longing for "snow covered glacial crests" and nature as he describes it in the poem above – a quality that also characterises Roni Horn's explorations. My desire to retreat to wide open spaces and to experience the wilderness took priority on coming home. With childhood poems on my lips, I set forth to rededicate myself to nature. It didn't take me long to realise that Baudrillard's hyperreality had manifested itself in Iceland as elsewhere. The area surrounding the famous and original Geysir was



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11



the first such hyperreality I encountered; the shop across the street (even with its caricature of an “Icelandic” facade) could just as well have been in Disneyland, or any other theme park – anywhere else in the world. My rediscovery of Icelandic wilderness and untouched nature would require much longer journeys than in Hallgrímsson’s time of wandering. I realised that the evolution that Roni Horn has catalogued in her Icelandic works was not prediction but reality.

At the end of the quarter century that has passed since Roni Horn first came to Iceland, it is in no way certain that the opportunities for creative solitude that Roni Horn discovered in her early travels, inherent to man’s relation to nature, will survive. It is equally likely that Iceland will become like any other well known and well defined tourist destination where the individual’s experience is dictated by a previously outlined and familiar route through the landscape [the amusement park] as opposed to his or her own discoveries through interaction with nature, the vagaries of the wind and the weather, that which Roni Horn has called “nowhere.”<sup>16</sup>

Some of Horn’s recent works address this possibility; the Library of Water in Stykkishólmur, for example, is a collection of samples from Icelandic glaciers in danger of “extinction”. Horn’s

recordings and collection of weather stories, Icelandic and foreign, are a clear reference to the necessity of keeping track of the weather in these precarious times of global warming. Yet, as she herself has pointed out, it also refers to the beginnings of a collective worldwide self portrait<sup>17</sup>; a self-portrait that it is time to come to terms with. The title, *Weather Reports You*, is indicative of the changes in the artist’s perspective on Iceland. Her outsider’s view on the fusion of spirit and matter in *You Are the Weather* has been replaced by a view harboring inside knowledge, speaking outwards towards the world. The connection to a sublime solitude is no longer in the foreground, since “nowhere,” like the glaciers, is in danger of extinction: “Is Nowhere gone?” In approaching this subject I come upon the question “what is nowhere”? The dictionary defines it as “a remote or unknown place”. What a lucky find. By this definition Iceland is the place with more nowheres per capita than any other country. Even if Timbuktu’s blown into oblivion, Iceland, by virtue of it’s somewhat more durable geology, can become a leading supplier of nowhere to the world. But regardless of nowheres’ apparent plenitude in Iceland, nowhere is a non-renewable resource, deeply vulnerable to overuse and inappropriate occupation. Wrongly altered, wrongly used, that nowhere is gone. To my mind and even by definition, nowhere is one of the rarest, most

16 See; the series *Iceland’s Difference*, published in twenty-six parts in *Lesbók*, the cultural supplement of *Morgunblaðið*, Iceland, under the name of “Sérkenni Íslands”, in 2002.

17 Roni Horn; *Weather Reports You*; p. 10; Artangel/Steidl; 2007.



12



13

10 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book II), *Folds*. Mary Boone Gallery, New York, 1991.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Folds*, outtake, 1993. Previously unpublished.

13 *Folds*, outtake, 1991. Previously unpublished.

18 Roni Horn; *Morgunblaðið, Lesbók*; June 8<sup>th</sup> 2002, The 9<sup>th</sup> part of *Iceland's Difference*.

19 Marc Augé, *Non-Places; Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, translated by John Howe; Verso, London- New York, 1995.

20 W.G. Sebald, interview with Frída Björk Þygvarsdóttir in *Morgunblaðið*, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2002.

21 According to the definition of Marc Augé in *Non-Places*, p. 94: "The link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts."

22 Roni Horn, an article in *Morgunblaðið* from the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 2002, protesting the construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam.

fragile, and most delectable of experiences. To be nowhere. Can you say you have achieved this experience?"<sup>18</sup>

The French cultural critic Marc Augé has for some time studied what he terms "non places"<sup>19</sup> in contemporary society. He maintains that in the supermodernity in which we live today, certain elements of society have become exaggerated, not least abundance, consumerism and uniformity. "Non-places" are those that connect us all in the same manner, anywhere in the world. Places where no organic sociological pattern can develop – airports, shopping malls, chain-stores, motorways, the digital domain of computer use and commerce – the list goes on. He points out that these places take up more and more of our time and space. You could say that through "non-places", humanity experiences a new type of seclusion which many find hard to live with, a solitude of a different kind than that which thrived in the bustling society of normal "places," possessed of history and sophisticated social structure.

In an interview that I conducted with W.G. Sebald in England, only days before he died in 2001, he described "non-places" from his own experience as a "landlessness," as of someone who no longer belongs to their fatherland but still has no roots elsewhere; a landlessness that is becoming ever

more common with the globalisation of today: "[I am] convinced that I am most at home at railway stations or airports, although I detest those places. They are a sort of contemporary limbo, but there also are to be found all the possible elements of metamorphosis. There, all possibilities are open with the suffering and self examination that always accompanies choices, and these conditions begin to mould one's personality. I belong nowhere and my existence is marked by it."<sup>20</sup>

If contemporary life can be divided between the opposites that Augé has presented i.e. "non-places" like airports, and "places" which have a significance and meaning for the individual, then Roni Horn's construction of Iceland presents another alternative; "nowhere."

From an ideological perspective, Horn's "nowhere", as manifested, for example, in Iceland, is clearly an addition to the established experience of places; a priceless and rare commodity. Hallgrímsson's Iceland and mine has perhaps become a "non-place" – a place we can only become one with through words<sup>21</sup>. Perhaps the likes of Hallgrímsson's words quoted above – but less so through the direct fusion of body and nature which Roni Horn portrayed in *Making Being Here Enough*. As she explained in the newspaper article *One Hundred Waterfalls, Five Hundred Jobs*,<sup>22</sup> the actions of

14 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book IV), *Pooling Waters / Vatnamót*. (Volume 1), Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne. 1994.

15 *Pooling Waters / Vatnamót*, outtake, 2000. Previously unpublished.

16 *Pooling Waters / Vatnamót*, op.cit.



14



15



men change the intrinsic nature of the wilderness. When we have tunnelled through the peaks and thereby weakened the integrity of the cliffs, when we harness the force of waterfalls and divert it from the service of nature, the beauty of the mountain valleys disappears.

Roni Horn's connection to Iceland has as time passes become a metaphor for the world at large; our intervention and intrusion into that which is not ours to exploit. At least not for less than urgent necessity.



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17 *Pooling Waters/  
Vatnamót, op.cit.*

18 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book IV), *Pooling Waters / Vatnamót*. (Volume 1), Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne. 1994.



18

19 *Ibid.*



19

## Á VALDI ÞESS STAÐAR SEM ER HVERGI<sup>1</sup>

Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir

*Tígn býr á tindum,  
en traust í björgum,  
fegurð í fjalldölum,  
en í fossum afl.*

(Jónas Hallgrímsson)

### HVERRAR NÁTTÚRU ER SKÁLDSKAPURINN?

Tengsl minnar kynslóðar Íslendinga við landið var mótuð af kveðskap þjóðskáldanna – ekki síst Jónasi Hallgrímssyni. Óður hans til fösturjarðarinnar var svo stórkostlegur að frá unga aldri átti sú náttúra sem hann lýsti sérstakan sess í huga mínum. Samt er það svo að þótt mér fyndist það fullkomlega rökrétt sem barn að Gunnarshólmi<sup>2</sup> fjallaði einungis að litlu leyti um Gunnar og mest um landið sjálft – þá finnst mér það umhugsunarvert nú. Skilningur minn á því að „Gunnar vildi heldur biða hel / en horfinn vera fösturjarðar ströndum“<sup>3</sup>, hefur breyst. Ekki bara vegna þess að ég er orðin fullorðin, heldur einnig af því að upplifun mín og skynjun á landinu hefur breyst. Tengslin við ímyndina „Ísland“ hafa breyst. Það að „suðrið“

skuli anda „vindum þýðum,“ og „á sjónum allar bárur smáar rísa,“ til að „flykkjast heim að fögru landi ísa“, felur ekki lengur einungis í sér saklausan koss sunnanbárunnar, eða hlýja stroku vindsins um vanga, eins og í bernsku minni; heldur einnig ógn sem stafar að heimkynnum mínum – innrás afla sem kunna að umbylta „vegaleysunni“, „sumardalnum“<sup>4</sup> og „fannhvít[um] jöklanna tind[um]“<sup>5</sup>.

Skilningur minn á landinu „mínu“ er m.ö.o. ekki lengur þess eðlis að ég leggi trúnað á myndmál tengt því; líti á myndmálið sem staðreynd. Þetta er vegna þess að þegar ég lít yfir fjallavatn nú, kann ég að þarfnast þekkingar til að greina hvort það er náttúrulegt eða manngert. Er ég horfi yfir auðnina trufla sjóndeildarhringinn raflínur sem meira að segja í borginni þykja svo ófínar að þær eru huldar sjónum. Og fossarnir – hver veit hvað stýrir flæði þeirra víða um land. Sumir hafa glatað afli sínu að því marki að þeir eru stundum einungis svipur hjá sjón. Þeir staðir sem Jónas skrifaði um á fyrri hluta níttjándu aldar, og ég hreifst af upp úr miðri þeirri tuttugustu, eru ekki lengur til sem ímynd þess ósnortna víðernis og hreinleika sem hann gat á sínu æviskeiði gengið út frá að ætti sér styrka stöð

<sup>1</sup> Sbr. fullyrðinguna: „Því er það svo að staðir, sem er alltaf rétt um eins og þeir séu einungis til ef maður er staddur, hefur mann á valdi sér jafnvel þótt maður sé ekki þar.“ / “Thus place, which is always spoken of as though it only counts when you’re present, possesses you in its absence”, bls. 118, sem Rebecca Solnit setur fram í bók sinni *A Fieldguide to Getting Lost*; Penguin Books, London, 2005. Hún segir enn fremur: „Það landslag sem á að vera undirstaða sjálfmyndar er ekki áþreifanlegt efnislega; það er búið til úr minningum og löngunum, frekar en steinum og jarðvegi.“ / “The landscape in which identity is supposed to be grounded is not solid stuff; it’s made out of memory and desire, rather than rock and soil.” Bls. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Jónas Hallgrímsson; ljóð ort árið 1837 á Íslandi.

<sup>3</sup> Gunnarshólmi.

<sup>4</sup> *Vísanir í Ég bið að heilsa* eftir Jónas; ort í Danmörku 1844, þar sem hann



imyndar sér að sumnavindurinn  
beri kveðju hans heim.

5 *Vísun í Ísland eftir  
Jónas; ort í Danmörku 1835.*

6 *bell hooks;  
Between us: traces of love  
– Dickinson, Horn, Hooks, í  
bókinni Earths Grow Thick,  
Wexner Center for the Arts,  
The Ohio State University,  
Columbus, Ohio, 1996.*

7 *Sama; bls. 57.*

í raunveruleikanum. Sú staðreynd að þessir staðir  
eru *skáldskapur* Jónasar hefur öðlast nýja merkingu  
sem mig óraði ekki fyrir sem barn.

## UM UNДАРLEGHEIT EINVERUNNAR

Einmitt á þeim tíma sem skilningur minn á  
viðernum Íslands hefur verið að breytast hefur  
Roni Horn heimsótt þau reglulega. Hún kom fyrst  
til landsins árið 1975 og hefur komið oft allar götur  
síðan. Þetta var um það leyti sem ég var að hætta  
að fara með ljóð Jónasar utanbókar í skólanum  
og færa mig yfir á svið atómskáldanna sem nóg  
var að lesa í hljóði – kannski vegna þess að þeirra  
myndmál er oft tengt aðstæðjandi ógn og firringu,  
fremur en fortíðarþrá. En þrátt fyrir tilkomu  
atómskáldanna og hugmyndafræðilegt umrót síðari  
hluta tuttugustu aldar hefur Horn samt öll þessi  
ár – líkt og Jónas forðum – leitað hlés frá firringu  
heimsbygðarinnar með því að sækja efnivið í þá  
einveru sem liggur í eðli viðernanna og nýtt sér þau  
hughrif sem þar hafa leitað á hana í verkum sínum.

Flestir sem alast upp í tiltölulega víðfeðmu landi en  
að sama skapi strjálbýlu, líkt og Íslendingar, þekkja  
slíka einveru. Fyrir mig – e.t.v. undir áhrifum  
þjóðskáldanna – var hún stór hluti af því að vaxa  
úr grasi og mótast sem einstaklingur. Einvera hefur

í gegnum aldirnar verið ríkjandi þáttur í tengslum  
hvers og eins við umhverfi sitt hér á landi, þar sem  
brýn nauðsyn knúði fólk til að þekkja, virða og lesa  
í náttúruöflin. Margir bjuggu einangrað og þar af  
leiðandi sjálfkrafa við einveru, aðrir heilluðust af  
náttúrunni og því sem hún hafði upp á að bjóða  
– þar með talið einverunni. Á stöðum þar sem  
einveran er þáttur, ýmist í hversdagsreynslu fólks  
eða upphafinni [sublime] reynslu, stafar fæstum af  
henni ógn. Einvera verður ekki undarleg heldur  
eðlileg.

Því hefur verið haldi fram að langvarandi áhugi  
Roni Horn á samlanda sínum, skáldkonunni  
Emily Dickinson, stafi m.a. af samsömun hennar  
með þeim lífsmáta – einverunni – sem skáldkonan  
ástundaði. Bandaríski rithöfundurinn bell hooks  
hefur í texta<sup>6</sup> helguðum þeim verkum Roni Horn  
er byggja á ljóðlinum Emily Dickinson bent  
á hversu hart bandarískt samfélag hefur dæmt  
Dickinson fyrir þetta val og ávallt sett í samhengi  
við sérvisku og undarlegheit. Hooks hefur sett  
fram þá kenningu að sú sjálfskipaða einvera sem  
einkenndi lífshlaup Dickinson hafi hreint ekki  
verið merki um undarlegheit hennar. Þvert á  
móti hafi skáldkonan valið einveruna þar sem  
hún var „grundvöllur þess sem nærði skapandi  
ímyndunarafl hennar. Einveran var það rými þar  
sem sál hennar kom úr felum og kvaddi sér hljóðs“<sup>7</sup>.





Hooks leiðir að því líkur að Horn samsami sig þessum þætti í skapandi ferli skáldkonunnar; „einbeiti sér að einveru Emily Dickinson, í þeirri vissu að hún sé uppspretta náðargáfu hennar og krafts“<sup>8</sup>. Hún bendir á að Horn deili innra landslagi Dickinson, „landslagi ímyndunarafls“ hennar, en ólíkt henni „sem ávalt kortleggur innra landslag fyrir tilstilli rýmislegra hafta innilokunar og stillingar, hefur Horn sig upp yfir umráðasvæði rýmis heimilisins, yfir hnöttinn, til að fylgjast með, til að skrá ummerki þess innra landslags sem falid er handan hins ytri heims gjörða, breytinga og áframhaldandi hreyfingar. Horn, eins og hún leggur sjálf áherslu á í orðum sínum „notar hinn ytri heim, til að skrá þann innri“.<sup>9</sup>

Visanir í þetta ferli má víða finna í textum Horn. Bókabálkur hennar tileinkaður Íslandi, eða „eylandinu“ – allt eftir því hvernig maður lítur á það – er augljóst dæmi um slíkt. Titill ritraðarinnar *To Place* [sem felur í sér margvíslega og óræða merkingu; t.d. „að staðsetja“ og „að leggja frá sér“] vísar þannig til Íslands sem andlegs rýmis fyrst og fremst. Einna skýrustu skírskotunina í slíkt andlegt rými er að finna í textanum *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* [Þegar Dickinson leggur aftur augun], í bókinni *Making Being Here Enough* [Að láta duga að vera hér]. Á sama hátt og skáldið Emily Dickinson lokaði augunum til að ferðast um lendur hugans, er Horn meðvituð um afstæð tengsl sín við landið

(Íslandið) sem hún skoðar og skrásetur. „Ég fór að velta ferðalögum yfirleitt fyrir mér, hvernig þau gerast og hvað þau eru. Ferðalög er ekki hægt að skýra með bíl eða járnbrautarlest, né heldur er hægt að skilgreina þau með nafni staðar. [...] Dickinson hélt sig stöðugt heima. Innilokuð í herberginu sínu á efri hæðinni, fann hún upp nýja tegund ferðalaga og sótti staði heim.[...] Um stund er Dickinson hér hjá mér – á Íslandi.“<sup>10</sup>

Einhversstaðar í þessu „innra landslagi“ sem hún deilir með Dickinson; einhversstaðar í sandauðninni á Íslandi staldrar Roni Horn við og lítur í kringum sig. Hún notar augun eins og linsu, þar sem einungis flökt augnlokanna afmarkar einstakar myndir, rétt eins og ljósmyndavél. Og einungis flökt augnlokanna gerir henni kleift að greina á milli ytri veruleika landslagsins og innri veruleika hennar sjálfrar: „Þau [augnlokun] aðgreindu mig, tryggðu að ég var ekki staðurinn sem ég stóð á. [...] Ég hef verið að horfa í kringum mig og í eigin barm og það er sami hluturinn.“<sup>11</sup> Á þessum stað – kannski vegna þess að einveran á þessu augnabliki snýst ekki um innilokun heldur afhjúpun frammi fyrir viðáttunni – verður einveran fráleitt undarleg og síst merki um sérvisku. Þvert á móti verður hún óður til hugrekkis Dickinson. Óður til þeirra hugmyndar að innra og ytra „landslag“ er eitt; við berum öll ábyrgð á tilvist okkar og umhverfi og tökum

8 Sama; bls. 60.

9 Sama; bls. 61.

10 **Roni Horn;** *Making Being Here Enough. Installations from 1980 to 1995.* Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover, 1995, bls. 55-6.

11 Sama; bls. 57.



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20 **Roni Horn,** *To Place, (Book V), Verne's Journey.* Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 1995.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 *The photographic work To Nest #5, 2001.*

24 *The photographic work To Nest #8, 2001.*

12 Þriðji hluti  
ritraðarinnar *To Place*. Steidl  
Verlag, Göttingen, 1992.

13 Annar hluti  
sömu ritraðar; 1991.

ákvarðanir sem skipt geta sköpum fyrir þróun bæði  
anda og efnis.

### SAMRUNI HINS YTRA OG INNRA

Þessi fullkomna samsvörun innri og ytri heims og  
það skapandi andrými er verður til samhliða henni  
var þó ekki einungis til marks um persónulega  
reynslu Horn í fyrstu ferðum sínum hingað til  
lands. Þvert á móti má í verkum hennar einnig  
finna margvísleg merki um listræna yfirfærslu á  
þessu umhverfi og tilraunir til að virkja reynsluna  
út frá sjónarhorni þess sem er utanaðkomandi.

Skrásetning hrauns í *Lava*<sup>12</sup> [*Hraun*], byggir á  
glöggu gestsauganu, þar sem m.a. má merkja  
samtvinnun náttúrufyrirbrigðisins og mannvistar  
í nafngiftum um slíkar auðnir. Tómar og  
yfirletislausar fjárréttir í bókverkinu *Folds*<sup>13</sup> [*Réttir*]  
eru rannsaðar á forsendum sem jafna við að vera  
mannfræðilegar og gefa vísbendingu um aðdáun á  
umhverfi þar sem nýting lands og náttúru byggist  
á hófstillingu og virðingu fyrir því hvað landið –  
eða landslagið – stendur fyrir óhád því manngerða.  
Eitt skýrasta dæmið um slíkt frá Íslandsferðum  
Horn, er þó verkið *You Are The Weather*, [*Þú  
ert vedrið*] frá árinu 1994–5, sem m.a. var sýnt  
á Feneyjatvíæringnum 1997, og myndar eitt

bókverk, *Haraldsdóttir*, í ritröðinni *To Place*. Um  
er að ræða röð ljósmynda af andliti fulltíða konu í  
hinum ýmsu heitu laugum sem finna má utandyra  
víða á Íslandi.

Myndirnar eru allar með sama móti, einungis vart  
greinanlegar breytingar í svip konunnar, vatninu  
og loftinu umhverfis minna áhorfandann á að hér  
er um ótalmörg einstök atvik á víð og dreif um  
landið að ræða, en ekki eitt á sama stað. Áherslan  
er á blæbrigðin, en hvorki á ferðalagið sem að baki  
þeim býr, né heldur kaldranalega náttúruna sem  
þetta undursamlega hlýja vatn tilheyrir. Titillinn  
*You Are The Weather* öðlast einungis merkingu í  
skilningi þessa samruna, blæbrigði augna konunnar  
renna saman við blæbrigði umhverfisins; hún er  
vedrið og öfugt. Í þessu verki kemur Roni Horn  
fram sem hinn utanaðkomandi skrásetjari. Sem  
sá er með einstakri þekkingu sinni á einveru  
viðernanna leiðir áhorfandanum fyrir sjónir þann  
nána skyldleika manns og umhverfis sem merkja  
má þegar skilin á milli þess manngerða og þess  
náttúrulega eru máð út.

Í næsta bókverki á eftir *Haraldsdóttir* í *To Place*;  
verkinu *Arctic Circles* [*Heimskautsbaugar*] verða  
ákveðin skil í sjónarhorni listamannsins. Inn í þá  
órofa samsvörun sem ríkt hefur á milli manngerðra  
þátta og náttúlegs umhverfis þeirra dregur Horn  
skyndilega fram allt annan miðil og um leið



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sjónarhorn allt annars ytri veruleika; sjónvarpið. Sjónvarpið sem hefur frá því það hélt innreið sína um miðja síðustu öld verið tákngervingur hins utanaðkomandi; þess sem gerist á einum stað en er varpað á annan – jafnvel í mikilli fjarlægð.

*Arctic Circles* er vitnisburður um það að jafnvel á hjara veraldar, þar sem dúnn villts æðarfuglsins er handhreinsaður við lúid eldhúsbord í gömlu húsi, hafa firrtir heimilshagir staðalmynda sápuóperunnar tekið sér bólfestu. Fullkomnar andstæður raunverulegs heimilis aldraðra hjóna á einangraðri sléttu norðursins þar sem ekkert nema húsveggirnir og skjárin í gluggunum greinir á milli þeirra og náttúrunnar, og gerviheimila sjónvarpssápunnar með sínum sýndarveggjum, mynda í verkinu margræða þversögn um mannlegan veruleika og tilfinningar í samtímanum. Sú þversögn sem þarna er afhjúpuð er í raun fyrsta merkið í *To Place* um að Ísland – eða „eylandið“ – sé ekki jafn afskekkt og óháð í samfélagslegu og efnahagslegu tilliti og fyrstu bækurnar gáfu til kynna. Að samhljómur ytra og innra landslags sé farinn að verða stríður.

## EFASEMDIR OG ÓSTÖÐUGLEIKI

Dótt þessarar beinu skírskotunar til skörunar ólíkra heima gæti ekki í næstu bók ritraðarinnar *To Place* – í verkinu *Becoming a Landscape* [Að verða landslag] – hefur fræi verið sáð. Fræi sem felur í sér efasemdir um varanleika – eða jafnvel möguleika – hins undursamlega samspils og samruna manns og umhverfis, sem fram að þessu hefur verið undirliggjandi þráður í upplifun listamannsins og skrásetningu hennar á ferðum sínum um Ísland.

*Becoming a Landscape* felur enn í sér skýra vísbendingu um nýja stöðu Roni Horn sem hugmyndafræðilegs landkönnuðar viðernanna. Þar má greina viðvörunartón er jaðrar við rof á því trúnaðarsambandi sem ríkti á sandauðninni er Horn varð hugsað til Dickinson. Ásjónu ungs, ómótaðs barns – nánar tiltekið óræðu augnarráði þess – er teflt á móti ljósmyndum af vatnssuppsprettum. Uppspretturnar eru af öllu tagi, heitar, tærar, gruggugar eða leirkenndar. Gefa ýmist fyrirheit um dýpt eða byrgja slíka sýn með ógegnsæju og stundum nánast stirðnuðu yfirborði. Tengingin á milli barnsins – sem á ófyrirsjáanlega framtíð fyrir sér – og þessara náttúruyfirbrigða afhjúpar áður óþekktan óstöðugleika í þeim samruna manns og náttúru er fram að þessu hefur ríkt í þessari „alfraðiorðabók“<sup>14</sup> Horn.

14 Horn notar orðið „encyclopaedia“ yfir ritróðina.



28



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25 Previously unpublished photograph, 1997.

26 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book VII), *Arctic Circles*. Ginny Williams Publisher, Denver, 1997.

27 Ibid.

28 The photographic work *A Mink Look*, 1998.

29 Op. cit.

15 *Doubt Box* er hið tíunda í röðinni *To Place* sem kom út fyrir skömmu. Verkið sem þar er um að ræða er náskyllt verkinu *Doubt by Water*.

Sú landfræðilega mótun sem Ísland er enn að gangast undir, sem „ungt land“ – eldfjallaland – er auðvitað forsenda þess orðaleiks sem listamaðurinn efnir til með barnið í forgrunni. Barnið, og hugmyndin um að „verða að landslagi“, skapar í samspili við uppspretturarnar í náttúrunni enn og aftur tilfinningu fyrir samruna á milli ytri veruleika og þess sem undir býr eða innra með manni [eða í tilfalli uppsprettanna, neðanjarðar]. Það sem streymir fram í gegnum sjónir barnsins er ómótað og felur í sér fyrirheit líkt og vatnið sem streymir undan jarðskorpunni.

Tilbrigði við þessa hugmynd bregður aftur fyrir í verki eftir Horn sem sýnt var á Whitney safninu í New York árið 2004. Enn og aftur eru efasemdir um framtíðina á ferðinni, og jafnvel kveðið fastar að orði eins og titill verksins *Doubt by Water* [*Vatn efasemda*] ber með sér. Barnið hefur vaxið úr grasi; innileikinn í sakleysi bernskunnar hefur vikið fyrir einurð unglingsins, en eftir sem áður er framtíðin óráðin. Einnig framtíð náttúrunnar sem teflt er fram; kaldra jökullóna, ísjaka, litrófs vatnsflaumsins, fugla sem eiga allt sitt undir náttúrinni eins og hún er – en ekki eins og hún kann að verða ef við gætum ekki að okkur.

## UNDURSAMLEG REYNSLA Í ÚTRÝMINGARHÆTTU?

Vegna þess alþjóðlega samhengis sem verk Roni Horn hafa verið sýnd í er auðvitað freistandi að horfa til samruna mennsku og náttúru almennt í þeim verkum hennar sem rekja má til Íslands. Það er engu líkara en Horn spyrji hvort þetta tiltekna, og fyrrum afskekkt land, sé enn á „unglingsaldri“ í yfirferðum skilningi *Doubt by Water*. Það stendur á krossgötum er flest önnur Vesturlönd eiga að baki; frammi fyrir stærstu framkvæmd síðbúinnar iðnbyltingar og umfangsmikilla inngripa í ósnerta náttúru. Við spurningunni er ekkert svar því enn er ómögulegt að segja til um hvort vegur óspjallaðra víðerna verði valinn frekar en hinn – vegur iðnvæðingar og nýtingar hálandisins umfram það er þarfir íbúanna sjálfra krefjast. Sjálfu landinu – Íslandi – má því líkja við „Kassa efasemdanna“, *Doubt Box*<sup>15</sup>; sem er næsta verk í *To Place*. Möguleikarnir eru óteljandi, en framtíðin samt í óvissu.

Er ég bjó á fullorðinsárum í röska áratug erlendis, reyndi ég á eigin skinni ljúfsára þrá Jónasar – sem einnig markar rannsókn Roni Horn – eftir „fannhvít[um] jöklanna tind[um]“ og þeirri náttúru sem hann lýsir í ljóðinu hér í upphafi. Löngun mín til að hverfa á vit víðernanna og upplifa óbyggðirnar var mér ofar í huga en flest annað við heimkomuna. Með ljóð bernskunnar á





vörumum lagði ég því land undir fót til að bindast trúnaðarböndum við náttúruna á nýjan leik. Ég var ekki lengi að uppgötva að ofurveruleiki Baudrillards hafði haldið innreið sína á Íslandi sem annarsstaðar. Svæðið í kringum hinn víðfræga og upprunalega Geysi var eitt fyrsta dæmið sem ég rakst á um slíkt; söluskálinn handan götunnar (jafnvel með sínu skrumskaelda „íslenska“ yfirbragði) gæti allt eins átt heima í Disneylandi eða hverjum öðrum skemmtigarði – hvar sem er í heiminum. Mín endurnýjuðu kynni af íslenskum auðnum og ósnortinni náttúru kröfðust mun lengri ferðalaga en þegar Jónas gerði víðreist; ég sá að sú þróun sem Roni Horn hefur skráð í verkum sínum tengdum Íslandi var ekki forspá heldur raunveruleiki.

Að þeim ríflega aldarfjórðungi liðnum frá því Roni Horn kom fyrst til Íslands er í raun allsendis óvíst hvort möguleikarnir á þeirri skapandi einveru sem hún uppgötvaði í fyrstu ferðum sínum og fölgir er í sambandi manns og náttúru verði áfram til staðar. Jafnvíst er að Ísland verði innan tíðar eins og hver annar vel þekktur og vel skilgreindur ferðamannastaður þar sem upplifun einstaklingsins byggir á fyrirfram markaðri og kunnri leið í gegnum landslagið [skemmtigarðinn], fremur en uppgötvunum hans sjálfs fyrir tilstilli samruna við náttúruna, veðrið, óvissuna – það sem Roni Horn hefur kallað „hvergi“<sup>16</sup>.

Þessu bera nokkur ný verk hennar glöggt vitni; Vatnasafnið/Library of Water í Stykkishólmi er til að mynda safn sýnishorna af íslenskum jöklum í „útrýmingarhættu“. Skráning Horn og söfnun á veðursögum, íslenskum og erlendum, er augljós vísbending um nauðsyn þess að fylgjast með veðrinu á víðsjárverðum tímum gróðurhúsaáhrifa. En jafnframt, eins og hún hefur sjálf bent á, vísir að sameiginlegri sjálfsmynd heimsbyggðarinnar<sup>17</sup>; sjálfsmynd sem tímabært er að horfast í augu við. Titillinn *Weather Reports You* eða *Veðrið vitnar um þig*, segir sína sögu um breytingarnar á sjónarhorni listamannsins hvað Ísland varðar. Ytra sjónarhorn hennar á samruna efnis og anda í *You are the Weather* eða *Dú ert veðrið*, hefur vikið fyrir sjónarhorni þess sem nú talar af þekkingu innan frá og út til hins stóra heims. Tengingin við hina undursamlegu einveru er ekki lengur í forgrunni, því „hvergi“, líkt og jöklarnir, er einnig í útrýmingarhættu: „Er hvergið horfið? Við nálgun á þessu viðfangsefni kem ég að spurningunni „Hvað er hvergi?“ Orðabókin skilgreinir það sem „afskekktan eða óþekktan stað“. Þvílík gæfa í slíkum fundi. Samkvæmt þessari skilgreiningu er Ísland sá staður sem hefur fleiri hvergi miðað við höfðatölu en nokkurt annað land. Jafnvel þó Timbúktú sé feykt út í buskann, þá getur Ísland, þar sem jarðfræði þess er töluvert varanlegri, tekið forystuna sem helsti birgir heimsins hvað hvergi varðar. En burtséð frá því hversu hvergi er algengt

16 Sjá ritróðina *Iceland's Difference* („Sérkenni Íslands“) sem birtist í *tuttugu og sex hlutum í Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* árið 2002.

17 Roni Horn; *Weather Reports You*, bls. 10; Artangel/Steidl; 2007.



31

30 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book VIII), *Becoming a Landscape*. Ginny Williams, Publisher, Denver, 2001.

31 *Ibid.*

18 Roni Horn;  
*Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* 8.  
júní 2002. Textinn er niðandi  
hluti *Iceland's Difference*.

19 Marc Augé,  
*Non-Places; Introduction  
to an Anthropology of  
Supermodernity*, þýð. John  
Howe; Verso, London-  
New York 1995.

20 W.G. Sebald,  
í viðtali við Friðu Björk  
Ingvarsdóttur í *Morgunblaðinu*,  
6. apríl 2002.

á Íslandi, þá er hvergi auðlind sem ekki er hægt að endurnýja, sérstaklega viðkvæm fyrir ofnýtingu og óviðeigandi notkun. Ef því er breytt eða það notað með röngum hætti þá hverfur þetta hvergi. Í mínum huga og jafnvel í skilgreiningum, þá felst í hvergi ein sjaldgæfa og unaðslegasta reynsla sem hægt er að hugsa sér. Að vera hvergi. Getur þú sagt að þú hafir reynslu af því? <sup>18</sup>

Franski menningarfræðingurinn Marc Augé hefur um nokkurt skeið rannsakað það sem hann kallar „non-places“<sup>19</sup>, eða „ekki-staði“, í samtímanum. Hann heldur því fram að í þeim ofur-móðernisma sem við búum við um þessar mundir, hafi ákveðnir þættir samfélagsins orðið ýktari, ekki síst ofhlæði og neysla, auk einsleitninnar. „Ekki-staðir“ eru þeir sem sem tengja okkur öll með sama hætti hvar sem er í heiminum. Staðir þar sem ekkert lífrænt samfélagsmynstur getur þróast – flugstöðvar, verslunarkædjur, verslunarmiðstöðvar, hraðbrautir, stafrænir heimar tölvunotkunar og viðskipta – og þannig mætti lengi telja. Hann bendir á að þessir staðir taki sífellt meiri tíma af lífi okkar og rými. Segja má að fyrir þeirra tilstilli upplifi mannkynið nýja tegund af einveru sem mörgum reynist erfitt að lifa með, einveru sem er af annarri gerð en sú sem þrífst í iðandi samfélagi venjulegra „staða“ er eiga sér sögu og þróaða samfélagsgerð.

Í viðtali sem ég tók við þýska rithöfundinn W.G. Sebald, í Englandi einungis örfáum dögum áður en hann lést árið 2001, lýsir hann „ekki-stöðum“ af eigin reynslu sem „landleysi“ þess sem ekki tilheyrir lengur föðurlandi sínu en á samt engar rætur annarsstaðar; landleysi sem verður sífellt algengara í alþjóðavæðingu okkar tíma: „[Ég er] sannfærður um að ég eigi einna helst heima á járnbrautarstöðvum eða flugstöðvum, þótt ég þoli ekki slíka staði. Þeir eru einskonar limbó samtímans, en þar er líka að finna alla hugsanlega snertipunkta umbreytinga. Manni standa þar allir möguleikar opnir með þeim þjáningum og sjálfsskodun sem ætíð fylgir valkostum, og þessar aðstæður fara að móta mann sem persónuleika. Ég tilheyrir hvergi og tilvist mín mótast af því.“<sup>20</sup>

Ef líf nútímamannsins skiptist á milli þeirra andstæðna er Augé hefur dregið fram, þ.e. „ekki-staða“ svo sem flugstöðva og „staða“ sem hafa merkingu og gildi fyrir einstaklinginn, þá býður hugmyndafræði Roni Horn hvað Ísland varðar upp á enn einn möguleikann; „hvergi“.

Í hugmyndafræðilegum skilningi er „hvergi“ Horn, eins og það birtist til að mynda á Íslandi, hrein og klár viðbót við þekktu reynslu manna af stöðum; sem sagt ómetanleg og sjaldgæf auðlind. Ísland okkar Jónasar er hins vegar hugsanlega orðið að „ekki-stað“ – stað sem við getum einungis



32



33



34



runnið saman við fyrir tilstilli orða<sup>21</sup>. Ef til vill orða eins og þeirra eftir Jónas sem vísað var til hér í upphafi – en síður fyrir beinan samruna líkama og náttúru eins og Roni Horn lýsti honum í *Making Being Here Enough*. Eins og hún útskýrði í blaðgreininni *Eitt hundrad fossar; fimm hundruð störf*,<sup>22</sup> þá breyta athafnir mannanna sjálfu eðli víðernanna. Þegar búið er að grafa í gegnum tindinn og veikja þannig björgin, hverfur fegurð fjalldala samhliða því að afl fossanna er beislað og því miðlað annað en í þágu náttúrunnar sjálfrar.

Tengsl Roni Horn við Ísland hafa í tímans rás orðið að myndhverfingu fyrir sjálfan heiminn; inngrip okkar og afskipti af því sem ekki er okkar að ráðskast með. Í það minnsta ekki á meðan brýnasta nauðsyn krefst þess ekki.

21 Skv. skilgreiningu Marc Augé í *Non-Places*, bls. 94: „Sambandið á milli einstaklinga og umhverfis þeirra í rými ekki-staðar verður til fyrir tilstilli orða, eða jafnvel texta.“ / “The link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts.”

22 Roni Horn, grein sem mótmælir framkvæmdunum við Kárahnjúka í *Morgunblaðinu*, 27. júlí 2002.



35



36

32 Roni Horn, *To Place*, (Book IX), *Doubt Box*. Steidl Verlag, Göttingen, Germany, 2007.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

*White Dickinson*

**FAITH IS DOUBT, 2006**

Aluminum and solid cast white plastic

Ål og heilsteypt hvitt plast

2 x 2 x 26 1/2 inches | 5 x 5 x 67,2 cm





*White Dickinson*

TO SHUT OUR EYES IS TRAVEL, 2006

Aluminum and solid cast white plastic

Ál og heilsteypt hvítt plast

2 x 2 x 5 1/4 inches | 5 x 5 x 13 1/2 cm

*White Dickinson*

**THE MOST INTANGIBLE THING IS THE MOST ADHESIVE, 2006**

Aluminum and solid cast white plastic

Ål og heilsteypt hvitt plast

2 x 2 x 90 1/4 inches | 5 x 5 x 229 cm





*Pages | Síður | 33-36*

*Cabinet of, 2001*

36 C printed photographs | 36 C stafræn prent

28 x 28 inches, each | 71 x 71 cm hver

Installation view | Innsetning í:

Museum Folkwang, Essen.

Collection | Eigandi:

Fundacion la Caixa, Centre Cultural de Barcelona

















*Her, Her, Her and, Her, 2002*

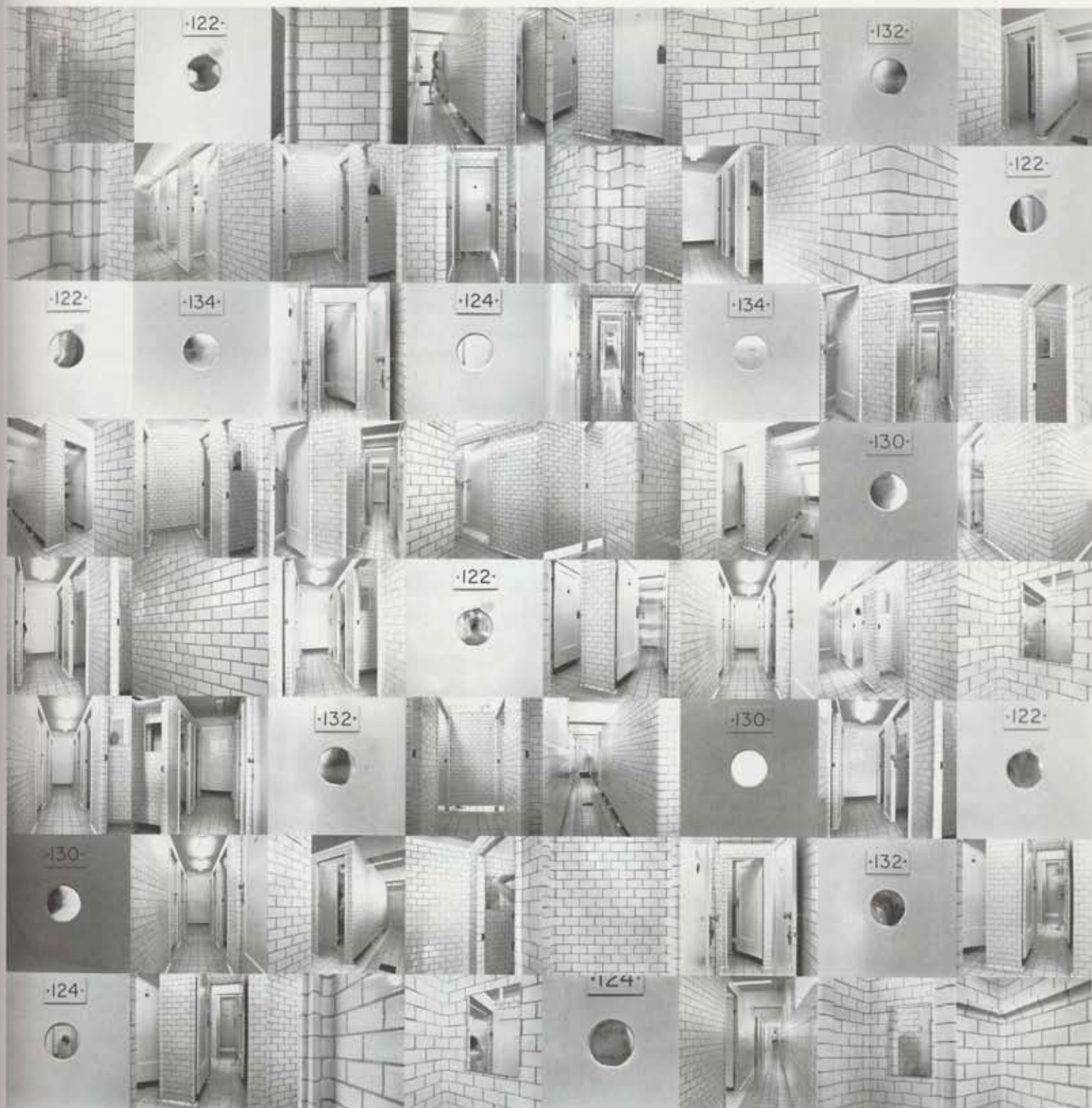
64 black and white photographs on uncoated paper

64 svart hvítar ljósmyndir á óhúðaðan pappir

96 x 96 inches overall | 244 x 244 cm öll myndin

Collection | Eigandi:

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York





19th C. Water	Hot Water Map	Some Thames
A Doubt and Two Naughts	How Dickinson Stayed Home	Something Shimmering
A Here and a There	I Can't See the Arctic Circle from Here	Sometimes Dead
A History of You	If on a Winter's Night. . . Roni Horn. . .	Stevens' Bouquet
A Kind of You	Index Cixous (Cix Pax)	The Net of You
A Mink Look	Inner Geography	The River was Gone
A This and a That	Island and Labyrinth	Things That are Near
All the Words I Remember	Island Frieze	Things That Happen Again
Among Essential Furnishings	Island, Pair and Island	This is Me, This is You
Among Judd	Itself, a Grammar	To Nest
An Evening with Gelatinous and Glutinous	Kafka's Complaints, Complete	To Place
An Island Island	Kafka's Complaints, Selected	To Rock
An Uncountable Infinity	Kafka's Palindrome	Universal Rorschach
Anatomy and Geography	Kafka's Paradox	Untitled ("Blah, blah, blah, blah, moon / blah, blah, blah, above. . .")
Angie and Emily / Dickinson	Key and Cue	Untitled ("Blah, blah, blah, your hair / blah, blah, blah, your eyes. . .")
Another Water	Library of Water	Untitled ("I want a closer relation to the sun.")
Arctic Circles	Lighthousing	Untitled ("I'm Nobody! Who are You?")
Asphere	Limit of the Twilight	Untitled (A Brink of Infinity)
Becoming a Landscape	Little Showers	Untitled (Aretha)
Being Purple	Lóa and Lóa	Untitled (Flannery)
Blake's Burn	Long Title	Untitled (Georgia)
Bluff Life	Making Being Here Enough	Untitled (Gun)
Buzz and Dust	Maze of Me	Untitled ("...in a wilderness not big enough for a decent billard-room")
Cabinet of	Mirror, Desert and Mirror	Untitled (Roni Horn)
Cloth-Home Culture	Molly's Other Bloom	Untitled (Yes)
Clowd and Cloun (Blue)	My Oz	Verne's Journey
Clowd and Cloun (Gray)	Object of Constancy	Vertigo of Meaning
Clowndoubt	One Bird, for Example, Frays the Blue	View in a Room
Clownmirror	One Hundred Waterfalls, Five Hundred Jobs	W
Clownout	Opposite of White	Water, Selected
Clownpout	Other Side of Here	Water, Still
Dead Owl	Pair Object	Weather is National Sport
Deeps and Skies	Pair Well	Weather Reports You
Dictionary of Water	Pastoral and Cave	When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes
Double You	Pooling Waters	When the How and the What are the Same
Doubt Box	Pooling—You	Where the Earth is Hot
Doubt by Two	Portfolio of Questions	White Dickinson
Doubt by Water	Portrait of an Image	White Labyrinth
Earths Grow Thick	Probability of Round Rocks	Wonderwater (Alice Offshore)
Events of Relation	Pronouns Detain Me	You are the Possibility of Me
For Two Locations in One Place	Puff	You are the Weather
Franchising Rainbows	Rare Spellings	You in You
Gold Mats, Paired—for Ross and Felix	Roads Lack Dedication	Youth and Geometry
Gurgles, Sucks, Echoes	Rock, The Hudson, and You	
Her, Her, Her, and Her	Saying Water	
Her, the Water, and Me	Simple and Complete	
Herðubreið at Home	Sleep: Rotation Method	







*Her Eyes (Intimate But Untouchable), 1999-2005*  
HER EYES, INTIMATE BUT UNTOUCHABLE WERE  
THE BLUE OF GREAT DISTANCES AFTER SUNSET  
Aluminum and solid cast white plastic | Ál og heilsteypt hvítt plast  
1 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 144 inches | 3,8 x 11,4 x 366 cm  
Installation view | Innsetning í:  
Inverleith House, Edinburgh

*Untitled (Aretha), 2002-04*

Solid cast glass | Heilsteypt gler

30 x 30 x 15 inches | 76 x 76 x 38 cm

Collection | Eigandi:

The Museum of Modern Art, New York









*Pages | Síður | 52-53*

*Untitled (Georgia), 2005*

Solid cast glass | Heilsteypt gler

12 1/2 x 37 inches diameter | 32 x 94 cm í þvermál







*Cloumpout (4), 2003*

C prints, photographic drawing

C stafrænt prent, ljósmynda-teikning

40 3/4 x 45 1/4 inches | 102 x 115 cm



Illustration for book

R. L. Linton

*Were 4, 2002*

Red pigments and varnish on paper | Rautt litarefni og lakk á pappír  
78 x 84 1/4 inches | 198,1 x 214 cm

*Pages | Síður | 58-59*

*Enough 10, 2005*

Red pigments and varnish on paper | Rautt litarefni og lakk á pappír  
Diptych: 66 1/2 x 70 1/2 inches each | Par: 198 x 214 cm hvor



Handwritten text in Arabic script, possibly a signature or a short note, located on the left side of the page.

Handwritten text in Arabic script, possibly a signature or a short note, located on the right side of the page.





Handwritten text in Arabic script, likely a signature or a short passage, written in brown ink on a light-colored background. The text is arranged in several lines, starting from the top left and moving downwards and to the right. The script is highly stylized and cursive, characteristic of modern Arabic calligraphy. The words are difficult to decipher due to the fluidity of the lines and the overlapping of characters.





*Then 4, 2006*

Brown and black pigments and varnish on paper  
Brúnt og svart litarefni og lakk á pappír  
80 x 82 1/2 inches | 203 x 209,3 cm

*Then 5, 2006*

Red and black pigments and varnish on paper

Rautt og svart litarefni og lakk á pappír

87 x 89 inches | 221 x 226 cm

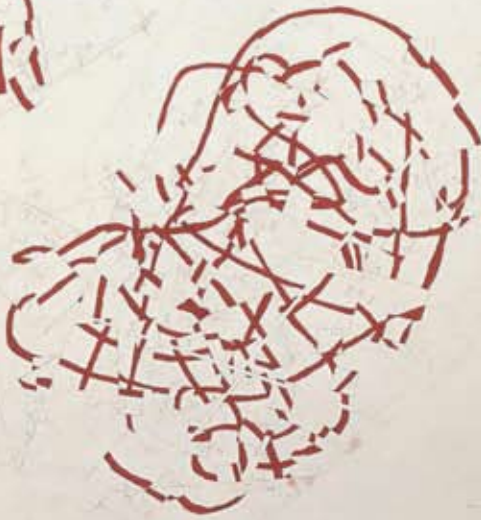




*Then 3, 2006*

Red pigment on paper with varnish  
Rautt litarefni á lakkbörinu pappir  
92 1/2 x 95 inches | 235 x 241 cm  
Collection | Eigandi:  
Museum Folkwang, Essen





Pages | Síður | 67-75

*Still Water (The River Thames, For Example), 1999*

15 photographs and text on uncoated paper | 15 ljósmyndir og texti á óhúðaðan pappir

30 1/2 x 41 1/2 inches each | 77,3 x 105,3 cm hver

Installation views | Insetningar í:

Castello di Rivoli, Torino, Italy.

Collections | Eigendur:

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London, Kunsthau Zurich,  
Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe, Castello di Rivoli, Torino, Philadelphia Museum of Art,  
Milwaukee Art Museum, FNAC Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Puteaux







The construction of the world's largest dam, the Three Gorges Dam, is a massive engineering project that has transformed the Yangtze River basin in China. The dam, which stands 188 meters tall, is the tallest concrete dam in the world. It has a capacity of 22.5 billion kilowatt-hours and is expected to generate 10.4 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually. The dam's construction has also created a large reservoir, the Three Gorges Reservoir, which is the largest artificial reservoir in the world by volume. The reservoir has a capacity of 39.3 billion cubic meters of water. The dam's construction has also created a large reservoir, the Three Gorges Reservoir, which is the largest artificial reservoir in the world by volume. The reservoir has a capacity of 39.3 billion cubic meters of water.

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<sup>1</sup> Is this a gelatinous moment?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> (This formation looks like the result of a local fluctuation in viscosity.)

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes I look at the water and even though I know it's probably just light glistening on the surface, the river looks like it's coated in a colorful metal, perhaps cadmium or silver.

<sup>4</sup> This is a turgid moment.

<sup>5</sup> Turgid, not turbid! But then, in fact, the Thames is turbid, too, endlessly roiled.

<sup>6</sup> A glass of water from the river is full of turbid details.<sup>7</sup> They might settle to the bottom eventually, but they'll be waiting to get stirred up again.

<sup>8</sup> Roiled—not real.

<sup>9</sup> The water is black and maybe the river, too. The river is colorful though—but it's not the water. Can't be. It's just the sur- face, like wrapping that covers what's inside. But it doesn't make a difference because past the wrapping you know it's black in there. And you know that there's an inside in there. Even though the color is beige or ochre, or green or dirty yellow or yellow-grey, or milky brown—or even silver. It doesn't matter. Because you know once you're in there—it's black. You just know it.

<sup>10</sup> Sometimes I look at the water and even though I know it's probably some heavy metal or oil coagulating on the surface it's easy to mistake it for glistening light.

<sup>11</sup> What is water?

<sup>12</sup> Water is the weather: your weather, my weather.

<sup>13</sup> Thinking about the weather is thinking about water.<sup>14</sup> Thinking about water is thinking about the future—or just a future. My future—yours. Water's a personal thing—especially now—so is the weather.

<sup>15</sup> "I think that the Root of the Wind is Water—" <sup>16</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See poem No. 1302 by Emily Dickinson, 1874.

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes during my walks along the river I see a slight, just perceptible thickening of the water. It has a slower reaction to light, like it's out of sync. Like the surface is dislodging and slipping away from the mass.

<sup>19</sup> In some water (not this water) your reflection is coupled to you. It goes where you go. When you walk away from the river your reflection disappears. But there's no witchcraft in that disappearance, maybe a little geometry—it's more just simple optics really. But in this water your reflection uncouples. It drifts away from you. As you stand there on the bank or bridge, helpless, watching your reflection float downstream and disappear, you may wonder what forces black water gathers. But instinctively you already know they must be closer to witchcraft than geometry.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Best witchcraft is geometry." <sup>22</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See poem No. 1158 by Emily Dickinson, 1870.

<sup>24</sup> The Thames is a drain.

<sup>25</sup> The English have a penchant for dismembering their murder victims. I doubt there's a period of London history free from the heads, limbs, and vital organs found in the Thames or washed up on its banks. Last week police found intestines and a leg (they didn't say if it was right or left). Over near Silvertown—intes-tines and one leg.

<sup>26</sup> Yesterday I read in the *Evening Standard*: "A passer-by spotted a man's head and limbs sticking out of the mud . . ." Eleven body parts were found in the river but, "significantly, not the torso." (More river traffic.)

<sup>27</sup> Where is the torso?<sup>28</sup>

<sup>29</sup> I remember a story from when I was a kid about finding a small package in the river. It was wrapped in white cloth and tied with electric cord. When the police opened it up they found identical twins, newborns—boys.

<sup>30</sup> This is water on its way down. Down is the North Sea, more or less. See the next image for farther down.

<sup>31</sup> This water, euphemistically known as water, is actually the opposite of water, another water.

<sup>32</sup> Water: your water, my water is coupled water. Water is never only a form, it's a relation, too. The form, for example: liquid; the relation: water's indivisible connection to all things, superficially with inanimate things, intimately with living things.

<sup>33</sup> (Water is the master verb: an act of perpetual relation.)

<sup>34</sup> Every year they find a body or two in the river that remain unidentified.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Isn't that what you'd expect? Isn't that what you'd be after—to lose your identity? The Thames looks like a solvent for identity, doesn't it?

<sup>37</sup> Which river did Jimi Hendrix shoot his baby down by?<sup>38</sup> Maybe it wasn't a river, but it seems like it should have been. (When I'm in Basel I'm certain it's the Rhine, the fastest, most furious thing in town.)

<sup>39</sup> See the song "Hey Joe" ("I'm going down to shoot my old lady, you know I caught her messin' round with another man . . ."), written by Billy Roberts and recorded by Hendrix in 1967.

<sup>40</sup> "Take me to the river, drop me in the water."<sup>41</sup><sup>42</sup>

<sup>43</sup> (In the Thames that would be murder.)

<sup>44</sup> See the song "Take Me to the River," written by Al Green and Mabon Hodges.

<sup>45</sup> (Did you kill your baby down by the river? Did you kill your babies down by the river? Did you get your baby pregnant down by the river? What did you do down by the river?)

<sup>46</sup> What are you doing down by the river?

<sup>47</sup> Where is the torso?<sup>48</sup>

<sup>49</sup> You have to admit you can't really look at the river in some places without thinking of shit. Maybe not with this particular picture but don't you wonder about the beautification and restoration programs going on around a more or less natural formation that reminds a person of shit? I think of it as nostalgia for an older, simpler meaning of water. This kind of development along the river strikes an ironic note; I can't be the only one who's terrified of falling in—of being submerged even for one second in this water.

<sup>50</sup> Where is the torso?<sup>51</sup>

<sup>1</sup> What do you know about water? When you talk about water, what is it you're really talking about?

<sup>2</sup> What do you know about water? Isn't that part of what water is, that you never really know what it is?

<sup>3</sup> What do you know about water? That it's everywhere, so familiar-seeming and yet so elusive (a kind of everything without definition), never quite graspable, even as an ice cube?

<sup>4</sup> What do you know about water? Only that it's everywhere differently?

<sup>5</sup> You say water is troubled or calm. You say water is rough and restless. You say water is disturbed. You say water is quiet. Water is serene and sometimes clear, it might be pure and then it is brilliant. Water is heavy; that's a fact. Water is often calm, even placid. Water is still and then it might be deep as well. Water is cold or hot, chilly or tepid. You say water is brash or brisk, sometimes crisp. You say water is soft and hard. You say water irritates and lubricates. You say water is foul. You say water is fresh. You say water is tranquil and languorous. You say water is sweet.

<sup>6</sup> What is water?

<sup>7</sup> You say it's a river. I can believe that. But when you say it's water, I get suspicious.<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Is the Thames a case of mistaken identity?

<sup>9</sup> Have you ever noticed how light camouflages water?

<sup>10</sup> Have you ever noticed how rarely water looks like water?

<sup>11</sup> What does water look like?<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See military camouflage. For example: "Polish Presidential," "Italian Woodland," "San Marco Mediterranean," "Indonesian Spot," and "Belgian Jigsaw" patterns.

<sup>13</sup> Have you ever noticed how reflections on the water at night make water look more watery?

<sup>14</sup> From out here near the quieter currents you can see fibers of light stretching out on the river's surface. Moving still and swiftly among the dark water, amorphous white energy elongating describes only the surface of this blackness—the beginning of something that cannot be seen.

<sup>15</sup> You can't see the blackness at night—only the darkness. It's only during the day that you can see the blackness. That's when you know it's not a reflection.

<sup>16</sup> In the quieter spots near the shore, the surface of the water is quilted and soft. (Doesn't the water look soft here?)

<sup>17</sup> In the rain or under a grey sky, in a weather that imparts little light, water is water less simply.

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes you can hear the water. But you can't really hear the difference.

<sup>19</sup> Every now and then, mostly at night, I hear splashes and plops—but I never see anything. (Do you ever really know what's going on in the river?)

<sup>20</sup> "A Rat surrendered here."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See poem No. 1340 by Emily Dickinson, 1870.

<sup>22</sup> Did you see *Blow-Up*?<sup>23</sup> Do you remember the park scene?—and the rustling of the bushes in the wind? And the camera—just watching—wandering over the clearing? The sound of the bushes was dark. The river reminds me of that sound.

<sup>23</sup> A film directed by Michelangelo Antonioni in 1966 based on the short-story "Blow-Up" by Julio Cortázar.

<sup>24</sup> The sound of the bushes in *Blow-Up* reminds me of the sound of the flagpoles in *Eclipse*<sup>25</sup>—of the ropes banging against the poles, a row of them, at night—in an empty parking lot or something.

<sup>25</sup> A film directed by Michelangelo Antonioni in 1962.

<sup>26</sup> I don't know if you've had this experience but occasionally when I'm watching the water I hear snippets from various songs drifting up from the river. (Sometimes I even recognize the voice.)

<sup>27</sup> I doubt you've had this experience but last night when I was watching the water "Ain't No Way" wafted up from the river, slow and endless, more or less as I remembered it: "Ain't no way . . . just ain't no way, no way . . . it ain't no way, baby . . . sure ain't no way . . . just ain't no way . . . ain't no way, baby . . . (for me to love you)."<sup>28</sup> It was so brief, I probably just imagined it.

<sup>28</sup> From "Ain't No Way," written by Carolyn Franklin, 1968. Version referred to was recorded by Aretha Franklin in 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Is water unclear? I mean you might say it's cloudy and that it's not clear. You might say it's dirty or impure or turbid or roiled, but would you say it's unclear? It seems to me that water is always clear even when it's filthy. Isn't this the basic notion of water? Isn't this what we cling to?

<sup>30</sup> (The Thames is us.)

<sup>31</sup> I remember an incident where a man drowned himself in front of his lover. It was quite sensational, more like a movie. The story goes that the couple was walking across Westminster Bridge late one summer night when the man turned to his boyfriend and said, "I love you," and then without warning jumped over the parapet into the river. The man ran over and looked down into the water. He could hear his name called from under the bridge but he couldn't see his boyfriend. Finally he caught sight of his face, as he emerged from underneath the bridge and just when the current caught him and pulled him under. Do you remember it? Probably not. (I thought it sounded familiar somehow.)

<sup>32</sup> (Drowning is a more common suicide here than in the States. In the States it's mostly shooting. Maybe it's because you can't get guns here. But maybe it's also the quality of the water. It must be, because foreigners come to drown themselves in it.)

<sup>33</sup> There was another incident recently: a guy was thrown into the river by his friends. (On a lark—they were just having a little fun.) The guy grabbed onto the first thing that came along—it turned out that the first thing to come along was a corpse.

<sup>34</sup> The way things happen on a river you really have to keep your eyes open. I'm always afraid I'm going to miss something.

<sup>35</sup> A witness says he saw one person jump (it was late at night) and two people come out the other side. (They still haven't found the bodies.)

<sup>36</sup> Every now and then, mostly at night, I hear splashes and plops—but I never see anything. (Do you ever really know what's going on in the river?)

<sup>37</sup> (What are you doing down by the river?)

<sup>38</sup> Are you wondering if I'm talking about the Ganges? Or the Yangtze? Or even the Mississippi?

<sup>39</sup> Aren't these shapeless, changing shapes surprising? So intricate, so elaborate, so brief; these treasures in their brevity are especially rare.

<sup>40</sup> In the light, isn't water water more simply?

<sup>41</sup> But what does water look like?

<sup>42</sup> Is this water?





The water's surface is a complex, ever-changing pattern of light and shadow, reflecting the sky and the surrounding environment. The ripples are small and frequent, creating a dense, textured appearance. The colors range from deep, dark blues to bright, almost white highlights, depending on the angle of the light and the depth of the ripples. The overall effect is a sense of movement and depth, as if the viewer is looking down into a vast, shimmering sea. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the intricate details of the water's surface without creating harsh shadows or bright spots. The composition is a close-up, focusing on the texture and color of the water rather than the horizon or the sky.



This image illustrates the intricate patterns of a coastal landscape, showing a large, shallow, greenish-brown lagoon or bay in the foreground, surrounded by complex, dark, wavy patterns of land and water. The patterns suggest a highly textured and possibly vegetated terrain, likely representing a coastal or estuarine environment. The overall scene captures a natural, undisturbed coastal or estuarine environment.



<sup>1</sup> Darkness reflects the sun. Blackness reflects nothing.

<sup>2</sup> Darkness reflects the sun. Blackness reflects nothing. ("Between grief and nothing, I will take grief."<sup>3</sup>)

<sup>3</sup> From the novel *The Wild Palms*, by William Faulkner, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> From out here near the quieter currents you can see fibers of light stretching out on the river's surface. <sup>5</sup> Moving still and swiftly among the dark water, amorphous white energy elongating describes only the surface of this blackness—the beginning of something that cannot be seen.

<sup>6</sup> Have you ever noticed how light reflections on the water sometimes look like camouflage?

<sup>7</sup> Attracted by the lights upon this liquid blackness, you wade in among them, flowing with them briefly and submerging; from underneath maybe they will appear as constellations in the darkness. Other constellations than the ones you've grown accustomed to. Constellations from some other place, unseen until now.

<sup>8</sup> You can't tell from looking at it how treacherous the water actually is. I mean you can't see what's going on with the currents; the river runs fast and tidal reversals work up strong undercurrents. But you sense it: the complexity, the threat, the difference. It's part of the river's attraction, part of its darkness.

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes, in a quiet area, the water is tremulous and tender: an easier entrance beguiling you.

<sup>10</sup> Crumbs of whitish froth float on the water. They cluster in formations that are not affected by the river's movement, in formations that linger too long.

<sup>11</sup> The water is black here, but it isn't really visible. You feel it, but you can't see it. It takes the breath out of you not being able to see it, point to it, touch it or just say it. But that's black.

<sup>12</sup> Imagine combining black with water: two equals. One unchangeable, the other wholly corruptible.

<sup>13</sup> Going into water is going into yourself. Water is a mirror. But even in black water there's a reflection, though a degraded one. You don't have to witness yourself in black water.

<sup>14</sup> And what about juvenile water—immature water, young water? Water that's never seen the light of day. Juvenile water emerging from within the earth, arriving at the surface. All I can think to say is, "Hello."

<sup>15</sup> Your reflection uncouples in this water. It drifts away from you. As you stand there on the bank or bridge, helpless, watching your reflection float downstream and disappear, you may wonder what forces black water gathers. But instinctively you already know they must be closer to witchcraft than geometry.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "Best witchcraft is geometry."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See poem No. 1158 by Emily Dickinson, 1870.

<sup>18</sup> There was an article in the newspaper some time ago about a young man jumping off a bridge. He strapped his bicycle, a black Phantom, to his chest and jumped in. (It took six months to identify the body.)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Isn't that what you'd expect? Isn't that what you'd be after—to lose your identity? The Thames looks like a solvent for identity, doesn't it?

<sup>20</sup> The river is a drain.

<sup>21</sup> In winter the darkness in the water deepens, and the river's flow seems to accelerate.

<sup>22</sup> In winter the Thames is so drab, the darkness of the water is palpable. Close your eyes and you feel the darkness wafting up from the river: dank, clammy, close.

<sup>23</sup> In winter the sky is low and the water is mobbed by clouds. The atmosphere becomes an extension of the river. Its water saturates your view. Its water silently permeates the streets and homes of London, and you live in the river.

<sup>24</sup> Boatmen talk about seeing jumpers often—actually seeing people jump—from London Bridge, Hungerford, Tower, Blackfriars, Waterloo, Westminster, Vauxhall. Too many to remember. They're common, jumpers—another form of traffic.

<sup>25</sup> A boatman described the tendency of jumpers to stand on the parapet of the bridge and stare down at the water for a while and then let go—face down into the river.

<sup>26</sup> It will be cold, stunning. Cramp you up and make you stop breathing—make your heart attack. And then you enter a place that is not visible. But that's an act of faith—you just have to believe it's there.

<sup>27</sup> It will be cold, stunning. When you enter the water it's shocking and you breathe fast, so fast euphoria comes, only briefly, but lightening everything up as you pass down and on.

<sup>28</sup> It will be cold, stunning. When you enter the water it's shocking, and you breathe deep (you can't stop yourself) and you breathe the water in and you let go.

<sup>29</sup> It will be cold. Even in the summer the water is cold; it lingers on—the cold of unabating darkness.

<sup>30</sup> In some places when I look out across the river I see crumbs of something or other floating on the surface. The water's reflections are speckled with them. (Mine are, too.)

<sup>31</sup> The English have a penchant for dismembering their murder victims. I doubt there's a period of London history free from the heads, limbs, and vital organs found in the Thames or washed up on its banks. Last week police found intestines and a leg (they didn't say if it was right or left). Over near Silvertown—intes-tines and one leg.

<sup>32</sup> Yesterday I read in the evening paper: "On the night of July 8th a man walking on the foreshore at Lower Pool stumbled on a human head." The body it belonged to was found in pieces over the following weeks, a leg here, a hand there. It took one month but police found all the parts including the torso. (More river traffic.)

<sup>33</sup> Body parts (victims of murder), corpses (suicides—mostly jumpers), sewage (human waste), heavy metals (lead, mercury, cadmium, for example). Herons and cormorants lighten up the look, but not much—and only briefly.

<sup>34</sup> (The Thames is us.)

<sup>35</sup> What is the darkness in the Thames?<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> "... It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river, especially, . . . that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest . . . and its tail lost in the depths of the land."<sup>37,38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See *Heart of Darkness*, written in 1898–99 by Joseph Conrad. Viking Press edition, *The Portable Conrad*, New York, 1947: 497.

<sup>38</sup> (Are you wondering if I'm talking about the Ganges? Or the Yangtze? Or even the Congo?<sup>39</sup>)

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also outlines the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and analysis techniques.

The second part of the paper presents the results of the study, which show that there is a significant relationship between the variables being studied. The findings are discussed in detail, and the implications of the results are explored.

The final part of the paper concludes the study and provides recommendations for future research. It also discusses the limitations of the study and the potential for further exploration of the topic.

The study was conducted in a laboratory setting, and the results were compared to those of previous studies. The findings are consistent with the existing literature, which suggests that there is a strong correlation between the variables being studied.

The study also identified several factors that influence the relationship between the variables, and these factors were discussed in detail. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the understanding of the topic and to inform future research.

The study was supported by the following organizations:



*Sometimes Dead, 1993*

Gouache, transparent watercolor and gum Arabic on paper

Guass, gegnsær vatnslitur og akasíulím á pappír

8 x 10 inches | 20,3 x 25,4 cm



s o m e t i m e s

d e a d

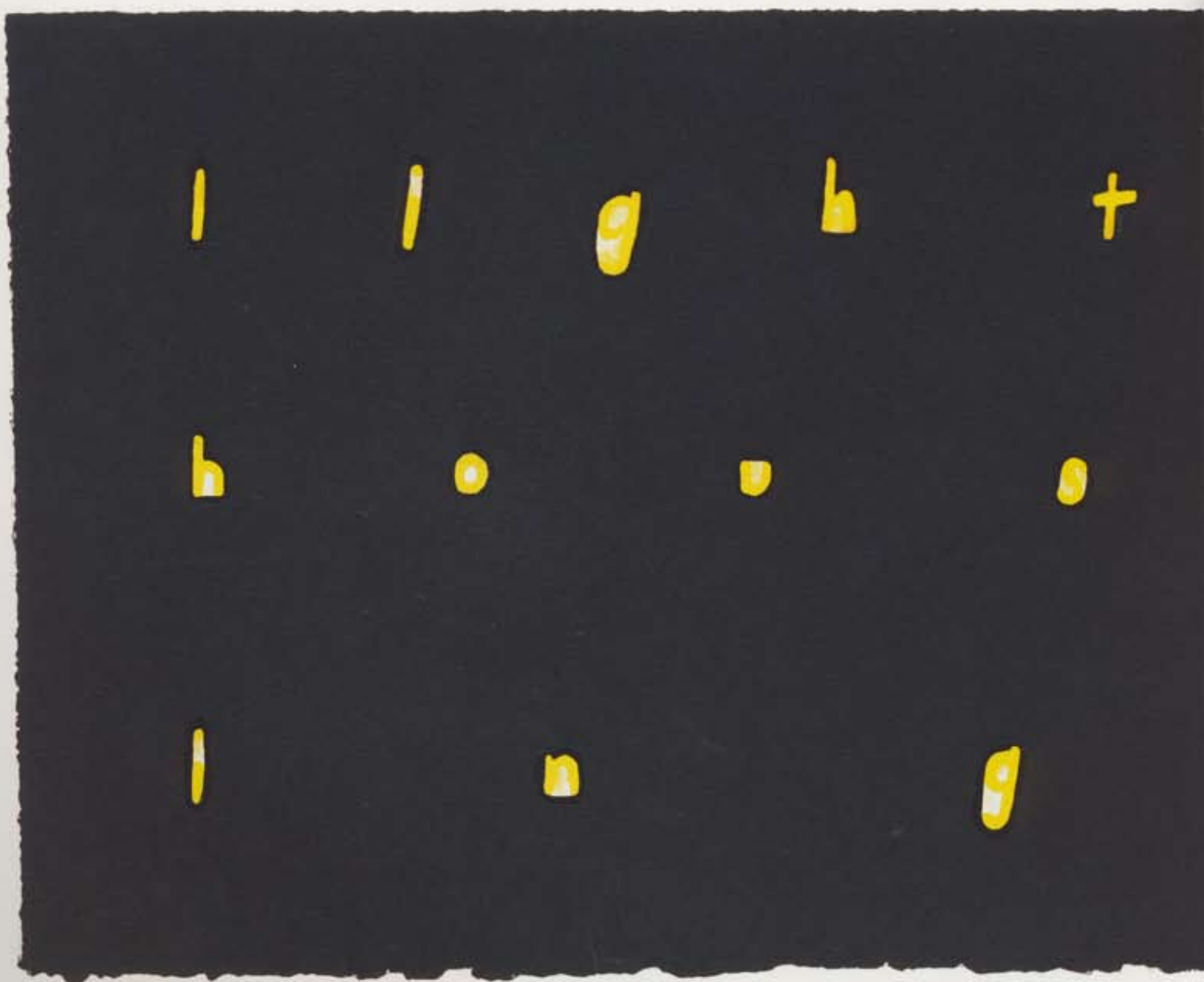
*An Island Island, 1993*

Gouache, transparent watercolor and gum Arabic on paper

Guass, gegnsær vatnslitur og akasíulím á pappír

8 x 10 inches | 20,3 x 25,4 cm

an  
island  
island







*Lighthousing (v. #2), 1993*

Gouache, transparent watercolor and gum Arabic on paper

Guass, gegnsær vatnslitur og akasiulim á pappír

8 x 10 inches | 20,3 x 25,4 cm

*Gurgles, Sucks, Echoes, 1993*

Gouache, transparent watercolor and gum Arabic on paper  
 Guass, gegnsær vatnslitur og akasíullim á pappír  
 8 x 10 inches | 20,3 x 25,4 cm

*Pages | Síður | 84-85*

*Dead Owl, 1997*

Iris print on Somerset heavy weight paper  
 Stafrænt Iris prent á þykkum Somerset pappír  
 29 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches each | 75,3 x 75,3 cm  
 Collections | Eigendur:  
 Kunstmuseum Basel, Kunstmuseum Winterthur,  
 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
 Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

*Pages | Síður | 86-93*

*You are the Weather, 1994-95*

64 C prints and 36 black and white prints | 64 stafræn C prent og 36 svart hvít prent  
 10 7/16 x 8 7/16 inches each | 25 x 20,3 cm hver  
 Collection | Eigendur:  
 Depont Foundation, Tilburg, Kunsthalle, Nurnberg,  
 Bayerische Staatsgemäldeammlungen, Munich; Sammlung Goetz, Munich.

gurgles,  
sucks,  
echoes



























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*Doubt by Water, 2003-04*

30 two-sided photographs, each 16 1/2 x 22 inches and 30 aluminum stanchions: 14 inch diameter base x 70 1/2 height each, overall

30 ljósmyndir eins báðum megin, hver 42,3 x 56 cm og 30 álstandar:

36 cm í þvermál x 179 cm háir

Installation view | Innsetning í:

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York









*Doubt by Water*, 2003-04  
Installation view | Insetning i:  
Inverleith House, Edinburgh



*Doubt by Water*, 2003-04  
Installation view | Insetting f:  
Hauser Wirth, London

*Doubt by Water*, 2003–04  
Installation view | Inseting i:  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York







*Ant Farm, 1975*

Wood, glass, earth habitat, living ants

Viður, gler, jarðvegur, lifandi maurar

47 1/2 x 71 3/8 x 19 1/2 inches | 120,6 x 181 x 49,5 cm

Installation/Performance, studio | Innsetning/gjörningur, vinnustofa

Providence, Rhode Island



## KEYNOTE SPEECH: CLASS OF 2006, ICELAND ACADEMY OF THE ARTS

Roni Horn

*Reykjavik, May 24, 2006*

### 1

I know you were expecting Dolly Parton, but I'll be standing in for her now . . . so sit back and relax and . . . I'll tell you a story . . .

Good afternoon. I'm honored to speak today. Being an artist – speeches are not my profession. So what I say now may be news to all of us. Including me. I'd like to share a few thoughts about my time in this country, about how it's influenced my work.

I might approach this talk by suggesting ways for us to imagine a future. Talk about the dire need in our time to be critical, to question, and above all *not* to be passive. Things that I believe are essential to us anyway – more so now than ever. We have witnessed the lose or is it extinction? – of islands in our time. Iceland is no longer an island: economically, chemically, climatically, and even psychologically speaking. This is a consequence of Iceland's expanding relationship with the world at large, both voluntarily in the form of economic interests and communication and involuntarily in the form of pollution and inappropriate political pressure. It is also the consequence of an

overpopulated, increasingly polluted planet. And this fact necessitates a new approach to maintaining the integrity of Iceland's land, water, and culture.

Al Gore's down at the Cannes film festival talking about global warming. And it looks like the Americans are cooking up the next big wave in entertainment – global climate catastrophe. I know it's been in development for some time. It seems the only way for us to acknowledge climate change is to make it part of a capitalist venture.

In the last 10 years the value of art has gone up astronomically. As the economic value of culture increases it can albeit inadvertently become a more effective tool through which to realize political and moral responsibility. This is especially true in mass media forms like film, music and literature. However an unfortunate side effect at least in the fine arts is the degradation of meaning in art. This is the consequence of the very recent phenomenon of extreme commodification. Today as some of you may already know people buy and sell art in ways not unlike stocks and financial instruments – based exclusively in investment potential.



Speaking of the fine arts in particular the vast majority of what is being produced today *only* exists because it can be sold. Very little of what is created is motivated out of the necessity of the individual. When an artist plays to their audience it always results in compromised work. And artists above all must exercise critical judgment with regard to the demand for their work.

But I promised myself that I would try to keep it light, to honor this occasion that addresses the complex future facing all of us. If my mother were still alive, she would urge humor and if I could just mix that with a little weather or even water I think we'll be off to a good start.

So I thought I'd begin by suggesting a new word for the Icelandic language. That word is:

## relaxness

I'm not sure what it means—but it sounds like a word that can't be translated.

## 2

But speaking of the weather — this is or certainly was one reason to become a permanent tourist here. My status as permanent tourist, something I invented over the years of coming to Iceland — allows me the distance I need to be near it. For me, it seems my nearness to Iceland is something I can only have by keeping this distance. There was a point early on in my visits that I was so taken with this landscape I wanted to experience everything here. Every road, river, mountain, and rock. When I was 22 I fantasized about retiring and doing a complete inventory of all the rocks. But short of that, I just went out. It started with a tent, walking and hitching. Then after I graduated from college I was given a travel grant. I bought a motorcycle and shipped it to Iceland. And for someone who had no money it was a great way to get around. Of course it was the coldest wettest summer on record at that point. So amidst all the sublime moments there was a certain misery to it all that I thoroughly enjoyed.

I developed an exquisite sensitivity to the landscape. Indoors I became anxious when I turned my back to a window for fear I might miss something. Especially on a clear cold night when there was a chance the aurora might perform. When I was a kid my first experience of the northern lights became my touchstone. It happened in a suburb north of New York City.



From my parents driveway I saw the lights – and it seemed to be something opposite to all I had known. Ephemeral, intangible, beyond simple understanding. It was a kind of epiphany – a moment of enlightenment for a young girl living in a highly material world with all the illusions of permanence. I understood in the presence of that fugitive display the potential that existed out there that would always and thankfully be beyond my grasp. But the northern lights from a suburb of New York City is one thing, from a mostly uninhabited landscape, another.

### 3

Now the weather is an important thing in our life. It's no longer simply an occasion for small talk. It is constant in its indifference to us and unpredictable in every other way. It keeps circumstance complex and beyond our final control. I think it is essential to have something that tells us who we are. And weather has a way of doing this.

I have always taken the weather personally. Was it Freud who said *talking about the weather is talking about oneself*? And I am as attracted to weather as much for what it is as for what people have to say about it. The beauty of weather is also its challenge to us— because we share it equally.

One of the projects I have going here is a kind of collective self-portrait of Iceland – I'm more or less ghost writing/producing it – I'm collecting through interviews the story each of us has about their weather. My own starts something like this:

My weather began back in grade school. In class the teacher announced a hurricane was on its way. With that she dismissed us and emphatically instructed: "Run home!"

I guess it gave me such a thrill I've been running to Iceland ever since.

But here in Iceland dramatic weather is not necessarily the most memorable. My time here has brought me an awareness of the less perceptible things. And being here has exerted a great influence on my work. It was in the matter of learning to see – in the sense of experience that Iceland became essential to me. Sounds like a simple achievement, but it's an act of will that took me years to grasp. I learned to be present in the here and now, I learned the unchangeable nature of each moment as it passes and locks into other moments forever. I learned the importance of being in the place I am, of paying attention. That was my discovery of the Highlands.

## 4

In 1990 I wrote about my time in the Highlands:

“You use the desert as measure, as lucid reflection. It gives nothing. What you take from the desert *is who you are more precisely.*”

—*Anatomy and Geography*, 1991

And also about that time I wrote –

“Big enough to get lost on. Small enough to find myself. That’s how to use this island. I come here to place myself in the world. Iceland is a verb and its action is to center.”

—*Island and Labyrinth*, 1991

And of course it’s no coincidence – as Jules Verne discovered already in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – that the entrance to the center of the earth is actually located in Iceland. He may have been inventing a fiction at the time. But I have, in my travels here, discovered its reality.

Well now that the weather has improved so to speak here in Iceland I often have the sense I could be in Florida. One thing I loved about the so-called bad weather was that the rainy, misty days would only reveal a small portion of the view at a time. I spent many, many days in fogs that allowed only enough visibility to inspire mystery. So I kept coming back to get the rest of it.

And that was *years* of coming back to see the same thing that was also completely different.

But of course there are yet passages of Iceland I have not traveled to. And even now I feel the magnetic pull of these places. I imagine never going to them – just to keep this energy alive in me.

## 5

“**THE WIZARD OF OZ** brought me Kansas, if only briefly when I was young. And to this day Kansas is still one of the places I’ve never been. But since I watched Judy Garland journey to Oz, Kansas has inhabited my imagination, and Toto too. And in this way we come to dwell in places we’ve never been. It’s a form of dreaming – these unseen places, only known through rumor, word-of-mouth, flights of fancy and a map – or no map – just a story told. And we need the idea of them, the idea – that from early childhood has become a part of our being.

The existence . . . of these unseen but accessible places is of consequence to each of us. They dominate the geography of our imagination and dreams. To recognize that some of them are real is essential to the life of our dreams. They offer us extension and breadth, hope and

faith. We need these places that we've never traveled to, that we may never go to. We need them, not for escape, but for measure: of all the places we have been to, and even – of ourselves as well. We need them as a way of balancing what is, with what might be; And as a way of understanding the scope of things, of admitting that the things beyond us are also the things that define us. These are places that are at once both actual and acts of imagination. They function to keep the world large, hopeful, and unknown.

These rarely experienced places – are no less valuable than those we occupy daily, no less inhabited by us than our most familiar and intimate ones. In acknowledging them we understand that we are something more than the body we inhabit and the things we consume; and that we dwell in places beyond our immediate perception or reach – so that we may see beyond our sight.

It is common to believe that because we will never travel to them, their loss will have no effect on us. Or that losing a place that is not occupied by humanity is a loss of no importance. That going from unseen to non-existent will make no difference. But the difference runs deep. We are losing the prime infrastructure of our imagination.

To undervalue them, to allow them to be destroyed, is to live in a smaller and meaner world.”

–Unpublished text for *Lesbok*, 2003

I wrote this text prior to the building of Kárahnúkar dam. But now I see that it applies to many things: the future of ice and the future of whiteness, and in a sense the future of north as well.

## 6

“When I went to the North, I had no intention of writing about it. And yet, almost despite myself, I began to draw all sorts of metaphorical allusions based on what was really a very limited knowledge of the country and a very casual exposure to it. I found myself writing . . . critiques, in which, for instance, the north – the idea of the north – began to serve as a foil for other ideas and values that seemed to me depressingly urban-oriented and spiritually limited . . .”

This is Glenn Gould writing for a radio program he produced called – *The Idea of North*, 1967.

I go north. It's in my nature. But it turns out that the vast majority of people go south. To the sun and the heat and perhaps the more social nature



of life in southern climes. The desire to go north is an attraction to solitude, open space, subtle expressions of light and time. Vast expressions of scale and horizon. Sometimes going north is about whiteness. Sometimes it's about darkness. I'm attracted to the darkness, it relieves me of the incessant call to visual attention – it opens interior spaces that offer untold possibilities of discovery. This darkness is really another form of light. It nurtures the wilderness inside me. That wilderness and what it takes to sustain it may be different for each of us. The fact of this wilderness, the necessity of it is basic to individual well-being. And each of us must find a way to keep this space whole in themselves. As an artist so much of what one does is based in faith – in a belief that exceeds or ignores society's interest. Pursuing creative instincts demands faith, endurance, and intelligence. It demands independence and simple strength as well.

## 7

I have spent many key moments of my life here in Iceland. I have used this place as an open-air studio of unlimited scale and newness. In retrospect I see that I have chosen Iceland the way another artist might choose marble as the substance of ones work.

Iceland taught me to taste experience. Because that's possible here – possible because of the intensely physical nature of experience on this island. This palpable quality has been one lesson. Sensual experience balances the intellect and here the best of both worlds exist in provocative union – This added dimension that presence gives to experience – is partly how the landscape here mastered me.

Presence is the thing sensed, never known. And this has become an essential ingredient in my work. Part of my desire is to equate the meaning of my work with the experience it offers. This Iceland taught me too.

## 8

In 1982 I stayed in a lighthouse for two months. I had been living in urban areas all my life, New York, Providence, New Haven and I had this idea that I'd go to this lighthouse in southern Iceland – I had known of it since my first trip – and I'd just “let the sea lie before me.” I was haunted too by the desire – of seeing a landscape as it is when I am not there. I know this sounds absurd, and the effort was full of absurdity – but for me it was a completely new experience, a true adventure. An Antarctic explorer, I've forgotten which, said that having an adventure is a sign of incompetence. I would find out one way or another. The adventure



of just being here. Not wanting to change here.  
This remains an elusive desire. In some sense too  
simple to achieve. I come to Iceland to discover  
this possibility still.

## 9

So this talk is equal parts love, faith, and fear. Love  
for the uniqueness of your island, your culture  
and you. Faith that you will invent a future that  
does not forsake the essence and uniqueness of this  
island. But then being a realist I also have fear.  
Fear for a future in which Iceland fails to take  
responsibility for its uniqueness.

I wish you luck  
But as Emily Dickinson said:  
"Luck — is not chance"

Thank you.

Eldhraun, Iceland, 1975



## ÁVARP FLUTT Á ÚTSKRIFTARHÁTÍÐ LISTAHÁSKÓLA ÍSLANDS

Roni Horn

Reykjavík, 24. maí 2006

### 1

Ég veit að þið áttuð von á Dolly Parton, en ég kem í hennar stað í þetta sinn... hallið ykkur aftur og slakið á... ég ætla að segja ykkur sögu...

Góðan dag. Það er mér heiður að fá að tala hér í dag. Þar sem ég er listamaður, þá eru ræðuhöld ekki mín sérgrein. Því kann það sem ég segi núna að koma okkur öllum á óvart. Þar á meðal mér. Mig langar til að deila með ykkur fáeinum hugleiðingum um veru mína í þessu landi, um það hvernig hún hefur haft áhrif á verk mín.

Ég gæti hafíð þessa ræðu á því að stinga upp á leiðum fyrir okkur til að setja okkur framtíðina fyrir sjónir. Talað um hina brýnu nauðsyn þess á okkar tímum að við séum gagnrýnin, efumst, og séum umfram allt *ekki* óvirk. Það sem ég trúi að sé okkur lífsnauðsynlegt hvað sem öðru líður – nú fremur en nokkru sinni. Við höfum orðið vitni að úreldingu (eða kannski útdauða?) eyja á okkar dögum. Ísland er ekki lengur eyja: hvorki í efnahagslegu, efnahagsfræðilegu, loftslagslegu né jafnvel sálfræðilegu tilliti. Þetta er afleiðing sívaxandi tengsla íslensku þjóðarinnar við

umheiminn, bæði viljandi vegna viðskiptalegra hagsmuna og upplýsinga og óviljandi vegna mengunar og óviðeigandi pólitísku þrýstings. Og þessi staðreynd gerir það að verkum að nauðsynlegt er að nálgast með nýjum hætti það verkefni að varðveita ósnortinn heilleikann í ásýnd Íslands, vatnið og menninguna.

Al Gore er núna á kvikmyndahátíðinni suður í Cannes að tala um hlýnun loftslags á jörðinni. Og það lítur út fyrir að Bandaríkjamenn séu sjóða upp næstu risaholskefluna í skemmtanaíðnaðinum – loftslagsstórslys á jörðinni. Ég veit að það hefur verið í þróun um tíma. Svo virðist sem við getum ekki horft í augu við loftslagsbreytingar nema við gerum þær að hluta af einhverju gróðabralli. Á síðastliðnum áratug hefur verðlag á listaverkum hækkað stjarnfræðilega. Eftir því sem efnahagslegt gildi menningarinnar eykst, getur hún með þeim mun áhrifaríkari hætti stuðlað að því að pólitísk og siðferðileg ábyrgð verði að raunveruleika, enda þótt það hafi kannski ekki verið ætlunin. Þetta á sérstaklega við um listgreinar sem ná auðveldlega til fjöldans, kvikmyndir, tónlist og bókmenntir. Hins vegar hefur þetta haft



þá ólánlegu aukaverkun, að minnsta kosti í myndlistinni, að merking listaverka hefur orðið fyrir aftignun. Þetta er afleiðing hinnar nýtilkomnu öfgakenndu varningsvæðingar. Eins og sumum ykkar kann að vera ljóst kaupir fólk og selur listaverk nú til dags á svipaðan máta og það kaupir hlutabréf og gróðavænleg fyrirtæki – eingöngu á forsendum fjárfestingarmöguleika.

Í myndlistinni sérilagi gildir það að mikill meirihluti þess sem er búið til um þessar mundir er *einungis* til vegna þess að hægt er að selja það. Mjög lítið af því sem er skapað sprettur af brýnni hvöt listamannsins. Þegar listamaður kemur sér í mjúkinn hjá áhangendum sínum leiðir það alltaf til málamiðlana í verkunum. Og í ljósi eftirspurnar eftir verkum þeirra verða listamenn umfram allt að beita dómgreind sinni og vera gagnrýnir.

En ég lofaði sjálfri mér því að ég skyldi reyna að hafa þetta í léttum dúr, í virðingarskyni við þetta tilefni sem snýst um þá margbrotnu framtíð sem biður okkar allra. Ef móðir mín væri enn á lífi, þá myndi hún hvetja mig til að grínast og ef ég get bara blandað saman fyndni og dálitlu veðri eða jafnvel vatni, held ég að við komumst á góðan rekspól.

Þess vegna datt mér í hug að byrja á því að stinga upp á nýju orði fyrir hina íslensku tungu.

Þetta orð er:

relaxness

Ég er ekki viss um hvað það þýðir – en það hljómar eins og orð sem ekki er hægt að þýða.

2

En úr því ég minnst á veðrið – það er eða var sannarlega ein ástæða þess að ég gerðist varanlegur túristi hér. Staða mín sem varanlegur túristi, nokkuð sem ég fann upp á í rás árána sem ég hef komið til Íslands, gerir mér kleift að vera í þeirri fjarlægð sem ég þarfnast til að vera nálægt því. Mér virðist sem nánd mína við Ísland geti ég einungis öðlast með því að hafa það í þessari fjarlægð. Þegar ég kom hingað í fyrstu heimsóknir mínar var ég um tíma svo hugfangin af landslaginu að ég vildi kynnast öllu hér af eigin raun. Hverjum einasta vegi, hverri einustu á, öllum fjöllunum og sérhverjum kletti. Þegar ég var 22 ára lét ég mig



dreyma um að fara á eftirlaun og búa til tæmandi skrá yfir alla klettana. En þar sem það var langt í það, þá fór ég bara af stað. Í upphafi var ég með tjald, gekk og húkkaði mér far. Svo eftir að ég útskrifaðist úr háskóla var mér veittur ferðastyrkur. Ég keypti mér mótörhjól og sendi það með skipi til Íslands. Og fyrir þann sem á engan pening er frábært að ferðast um á mótörhjóli. Að sjálfsgöðu var þetta kaldasta og vætusamasta sumar allra tíma samkvæmt mælingum fram að þessu. Þannig að þótt yfrið nóg væri um himnesk augnablik blandaðist saman við þau ákveðin vesöld sem ég naut til hins ýtrasta.

Ég þróaði með mér tilfinningalegt næmi fyrir landslaginu. Ef ég var innanhúss varð ég áhyggjufull þegar ég sneri baki við glugga af ötta við að ég kynni að missa af einhverju. Sérílagi á heiðskírurum og köldum kvöldum þegar hugsanlegt var að norðurljósín dönsuðu. Þegar ég var krakki varð sú reynsla mín að sjá norðurljós í fyrsta sinn minn prófsteinn. Af heimreiðinni við hús foreldra minna sá ég ljósín – og þau virtust vera andstæð öllu sem ég hafði kynnst. Hverful, ósnertanleg, handan hins einfalda skilnings. Þetta var nokkurs konar vitrun – andartak uppljómunar fyrir unga stúlku sem bjó í mjög efnislegum heimi með öllum sínum blekkingum um varanleika. Í návist þessa hverfula sjónarspils varð mér ljóst að þarna úti var til máttur sem yrði alltaf og til allrar hamingju ofar mínum skilningi. En að sjá norðurljósín frá

úthverfi New York-borgar er eitt, að sjá þau frá svo að segja óbyggðum stað er annað.

### 3

Veðrið skipar vissulega mikilvægan sess í lífi okkar. Það er ekki lengur bara eitthvað sem við getum spjallað um. Það lætur sig aldrei um okkur varða og er óútreiknanlegt á allan máta. Það gerir aðstæðurnar margbrotnar og sér til þess að við getum ekki haft fulla stjórn á þeim. Ég held að það sé nauðsynlegt að við höfum eitthvað sem segir okkur hver við erum. Og veðrið gerir þetta á sinn máta.

Ég hef alltaf tekið veðrinu persónulega. Það má umorða Freud – að tala um veðrið er að tala um sjálfan sig. Og ég heillast ekki síður af veðrinu fyrir það hvernig það er en af því sem fólk hefur um það að segja. Það sem er stórkostlegt við veðrið er að við deilum því öll jafnt. Á þessum stað í mannkynssögunni er það kannski það eina sem hvert og eitt okkar á sameiginlega með öllum öðrum.

Eitt af verkefnum sem ég er að vinna að hér er nokkurs konar sameiginleg sjálfmynd af Íslandi – ég er meira og minna að skrifa handritið/framleiða verkið – og er með viðtölum að safna saman þeim sögum sem hvert og eitt okkar hefur að segja um

veðrið sitt. Min eigin saga hefst einhvern veginn svona:

Veðrið mitt skall á þegar ég var í grunnskóla. Kennslukonan tilkynnti bekknum að það væri að koma fellibylur. Að svo mæltu leyfði hún okkur að fara og fyrirskipaði skörulega: „Hlaupið heim!“

Ég held að þetta hafi gert mig svo spennta að allar götur síðan hef ég verið á hlaupum til Íslands.

En hér á Íslandi er rýsjótt veðurfar ekki endilega það sem er minnstæðast. Vera mín hér hefur gert mig meðvitaða um hluti sem er síður skynjanlegir. Og hún hefur haft mikil áhrif á verk mín. Það var í tengslum við það að læra að horfa – í þeim skilningi að upplifa – sem Ísland skipti sköpum fyrir mig. Þetta hljómar eins og auðvelt sé að komast upp á lag með það, en það veltur á ásetningi og það tók mig mörg ár að ná því. Ég lærði að vera til staðar hér og nú, ég skildi hið óhagganlega eðli hvers augnabliks meðan það líður og þegar það rennur að eilífu saman við önnur augnablik. Ég áttaði mig á mikilvægi þess að vera á þeim stað sem ég er á, að veita hlutunum athygli. Það var uppgötvun mín á hálendinu.

## 4

Árið 1990 skrifaði ég um veru mína á hálendinu:

Maður notar öræfin sem mælikvarða, sem skínandi endurspeglun. Þau hafa ekkert að bjóða. Það sem maður fær frá öræfunum er nánari skilningur á því hver maður er.

*Anatomy and Geography, 1990*

Og um þetta leyti skrifaði ég líka:

Nógu stór til að maður geti týnst. Nógu lítil til að ég finni sjálfa mig. Það er þannig sem á að nota þess eyju. Ég kem hingað til að finna minn stað í heiminum. Ísland er sögn og það sem hún gerir er að staðsetja miðpunkt.

*Island and Labyrinth, 1991*

Og auðvitað er það engin tilviljun – eins og Jules Verne uppgötvaði strax á 19. öldinni – að inngangurinn að miðju jarðarinnar er í raun og veru á Íslandi. Það má vera að hann hafi verið að spinna upp skáldverk á sínum tíma. En ég hef, á ferðum mínum hér, uppgötvað hversu raunverulegt það er.

Nú þegar veðrið hefur að segja má batnað hér á Íslandi hef ég oft á tilfinningunni að ég gæti verið í Flórída. Eitt af því sem mér fannst svo stórkostlegt við hið svokallaða slæma veður var að á rigningarsömum þokudögum sást einungis lítill hluti útsýnisins í einu. Ég eyddi mörgum, mörgum

dögum í þoku þar sem skyggnið var bara rétt nóg til að vekja forvitni. Þess vegna hélt ég áfram að koma aftur til að sjá allt hitt. Og því kom ég *árum saman* aftur til að sjá það sama sem var um leið algjörlega breytt.

En auðvitað eru enn þær slóðir á Íslandi sem ég hef ekki farið um. Og jafnvel núna finn ég hvernig seiðmagn þessara staða dregur mig til sín. Ég hugsa að ég muni aldrei fara á þá – bara til að halda þessari orku á lífi í mér.

## 5

**GALDRAKARLINN Í OZ** færði mér Kansas, þótt það hafi bara verið í stutta stund þegar ég var ung. Og enn í dag er Kansas einn þeirra staða þar sem ég hef aldrei verið. En síðan ég horfði á Judy Garland ferðast til Oz hefur Kansas búið í ímyndunum mínum, og Toto líka. Og með þessum hætti gerist það að við dveljum á stöðum þar sem við höfum aldrei verið. Þetta eru nokkurs konar draumar – þessir óséðu staðir, sem maður þekkir bara vegna orðróms, einhvers sem berst frá manni til manns, hugarflugs og korts sem maður er með – nema maður sé ekki með kort – og þetta er bara saga sem er sögð. Og við þörfnumst hugmyndarinnar um þá, hugmyndarinnar

– sem hefur allt frá fyrstu bernskudögum verið hluti af lífi okkar.

Tilvera ... þessara óséðu en aðgengilegu staða hefur sínar afleiðingar fyrir hvert og eitt okkar. Þeir drottna yfir landafræði ímyndunaraflsins og drauma okkar. Að viðurkenna að sumir þeirra eru raunverulegir er nauðsynlegt fyrir viðgang drauma okkar. Þeir framlengja okkur og víkka okkur út, veita okkur von og trú. Við þörfnumst þessara staða sem við höfum aldrei ferðast til, sem við kannski aldrei förum til. Við þörfnumst þeirra, ekki til að flýja á þá, heldur til samanburðar: við alla þá staði sem við höfum komið á, og jafnvel – við okkur sjálf líka. Við þörfnumst þeirra til að jafna vægi þess sem er, og þess sem gæti orðið; og til að skilja umfang hlutanna, viðurkenna að hlutirnir handan við okkur eru líka þeir hlutir sem skilgreina okkur. Þetta eru staðir sem eru í senn bæði raunverulegir og hugarburður. Þeir miða að því að heimurinn verði áfram stór, vænlegur, og óþekktur.

Þessir staðir sem við höfum svo takmarkaða upplifun af eru engu minna virði en þeir sem við erum á daglega, við búum ekki síður á þeim en þeim stöðum sem við þekkjum best og eru okkur kærastir. Með því að viðurkenna þá skilst okkur að við erum eitthvað meira en líkaminn sem við búum í og hlutirnir sem við neytum;



og að við dveljum á stöðum sem eru utan nánasta skynsviðs okkar eða seilingarfjarlægðar – svo að okkur sé fært að sjá lengra en sjón okkar nær.

Það er algengt að fólk trúí því að vegna þess að við höfum aldrei komið á þessa staði, þá hafi það engin áhrif á okkur þótt þeir glatist. Eða að það þegar glatast staður sem enginn býr á, þá skipti sá missir engu máli. En sá missir ristir djúpt. Við erum að glata helstu grunngerð ímyndunarafis okkar. Að vanmeta þá, að leyfa að þeir verði eyðilagðir, jafngildir því að lifa í minni og grimmari heimi.

–Óbirtur texti fyrir *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*,  
2003

Ég skrifaði þennan texta áður en Kárahnjúkastíflan var reist. En nú sé ég að hann á við um marga hluti: framtíð íss og framtíð hvítleikans, og á vissan hátt einnig framtíð norðursins.

## 6

„Þegar ég fór á norðurslóðir hafði ég ekki í hyggju að skrifa um þær. En samt, nánast gegn vilja mínum, fór ég að móta alls konar líkingavísanir sem byggðust á mjög

takmarkaðri þekkingu á landinu og afskaplega yfirborðslegum kynnum af því. Ég var farinn að skrifa ... gagnrýni þar sem til að mynda norðrið – hugmyndin um norðrið – var í fegrunarhlutverki andspænis öðrum hugmyndum og gildum sem mér virtust svo þunglyndislega mörkuð borgaruppruna sínum og andlega takmörkuð ....“

Þetta eru skrif Glenss Gould fyrir útvarpsþátt sem hann framleiddi og hét *Hugmyndin um norðrið (The Idea of North)*, 1967.

Ég fer norður. Það liggur í eðli mínu. En það kemur í ljós að mikill meirihluti fólks fer suður. Í sólina og hitann og kannski fjörlegra mannlíf sem einkennir suðræn lönd. Löngunin til að fara norður stafar af hrifningu á einveru, víðáttum, dularfullum birtingarmyndum ljóss og tíma. Gríðarmiklum stærðarhlutföllum og sjóndeildarhringnum. Stundum snýst norðurferðin um hvítleikann. Stundum snýst hún um myrkríð. Ég er heilluð af myrkrinu, það leysir mig undan hinu þráláta kalli eftir sjónrænni athygli – það lýkur upp innri rýmum sem bjóða upp á óteljandi möguleika til uppgötvana. Þetta myrkur er í raun ljós í annarri mynd. Það nærir auðnirnar innra með mér. Þessar auðnir og hvað þarf til að viðhalda þeim getur verið með misjöfnu móti eftir hverju og einu okkar. Staðreyndin á bak við þessar



auðnir er að þær eru nauðsynlegur grundvöllur velferðar hvers einstaklings.

Og við verðum hvert um sig að finna leið til að varðveita þetta rými í heilu lagi innra með sjálfum okkur. Þegar maður er listamaður er svo margt af því sem maður gerir grundvallað á trú – á trú sem fer út fyrir eða hunsar hagsmuni samfélagsins. Að fylgja sköpunargáfunni eftir krefst trúar, þolgæðis, og greindar. Það krefst sjálfstæðis og sömuleiðis styrks.

## 7

Ég hef lifað mörg af mikilvægustu augnablik ævi minni hér á Íslandi. Ég hef notað þetta land sem útvinustofu af ótakmarkaðri stærð og með óteljandi nýja möguleika. Þegar ég lít um öxl sé ég að ég hef valið Ísland á sama hátt og annar listamaður kynni að velja marmara sem meginefni í verk sín. Ísland lét mig fá nasapef af upplifuninni. Vegna þess að það er mögulegt hér – mögulegt vegna hins sterka líkamlega eðlis upplifunarinnar á þessari eyju. Þessi áþreifanlegi eiginleiki hefur verið mikill lærdómur. Tilfinningaleg upplifun vegur upp á móti greindinni og hér er það besta úr báðum heimum til staðar í ögrandi sameiningu. – Þessi viðbótarvidd sem nærveran ljær upplifuninni skýrir að hluta hvernig landslagið hér náði tökum á mér. Nærvera er það sem er skynjað, aldrei þekkt.

Og þetta er orðið að ómissandi þætti í verkum mínum. Að hluta til er löngun mín sú að samsama

merkingu verka minna upplifuninni sem þau veita. Einnig þetta kenndi Ísland mér.

## 8

Árið 1982 dvaldi ég í tvo mánuði í vita. Ég hafði búið í borgarumhverfi allt mitt líf, í New York, Providence, New Haven, og mér datt í hug að setjast að í þessum vita á suðurströnd Íslands – ég vissi af honum frá fyrstu ferð minni til landsins – og bara „láta hafið liggja fyrir framan mig“. Þetta var takmark mitt, að gá hvort ég gæti – bara látið hafið liggja fyrir framan mig. Ég var friðlaus af þessari þrá – eftir að sjá landslag eins og það er þegar ég er ekki þar. Ég veit að þetta hljómar fáránlega, og tilraunin var gjörsamlega fáránleg – en fyrir mig var þetta fullkomlega ný reynsla, sannkallað ævintýri. Bara að vera hérna. Vilja ekki breyta neinu hérna. Þetta er enn sem fyrr viðsjált takmark. Í vissum skilningi of einfalt til að ná því. Ég kem þó enn til Íslands til að uppgötva þennan möguleika.

Þessi ræða er jafnt um ást, trú og ótta. Ást á hinni einstæðu eyju ykkar, menningu ykkar og ykkur.

Trú á því að þið búið ykkur framtíð sem mun ekki hlaupast frá kjarna hins einstæða á þessari eyju. En þar sem ég er raunsæismanneskja er einnig í mér ótti. Ótti við framtíð þar sem íslensku þjóðinni lánist ekki að taka ábyrgð á hinu einstæða í landinu.

Ég óska ykkur öllu gæfu.  
En eins og Emily Dickinson sagði:  
„Gæfa — er ekki tilviljun.“  
Ég þakka ykkur fyrir.



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