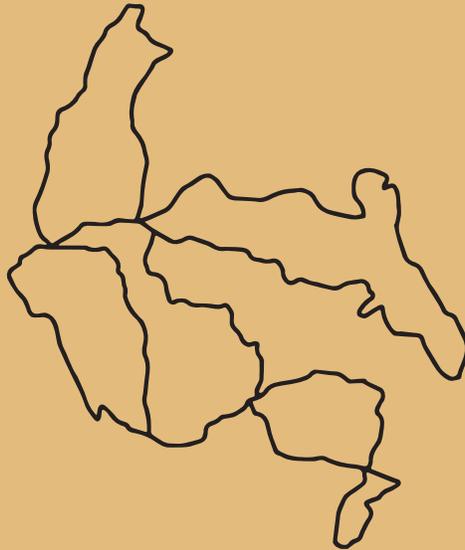


INTERNET LANDSCAPES
FIELD REPORT NO. 1

Clouds of the American West
by
KELLEY O'LEARY



June, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF SITES	1
MAP OF SITES.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
SURVEY MAPS.....	5
HIGH NOON.....	6
A CRACK.....	9
TOMBS.....	10
HEAVY CLOCKS.....	13
CEILINGS.....	15
RUNES.....	17
SUN.....	20
CONTACT.....	22
60HZ.....	25

LIST OF SITES

1. National Security Agency Data Center
40.4257796598849, -111.93419625915199
2. Facebook Data Center
44.29512284907158, -120.88501868367571
3. Apple Data Center
44.28855126056528, -120.87613851490943
4. Apple Data Center
39.56667605261107, -119.54850721164398
5. Google Data Center
36.056316005111185, -115.00905600154655
6. Switch Data Center
39.512824, -119.472852
7. Google Data Center
39.500887, -119.429850
8. Digital Realty Data Center
33.276752, -111.889563
9. Edgecore Data Center
33.70950919626336, -111.43315270068169
10. Facebook Data Center
33.35120432169686, -111.66429198242842
11. Apple Data Center
33.347625816491856, -111.60433051904087
12. Tonaquint Data Center
37.08157099060394, -113.6071193573538

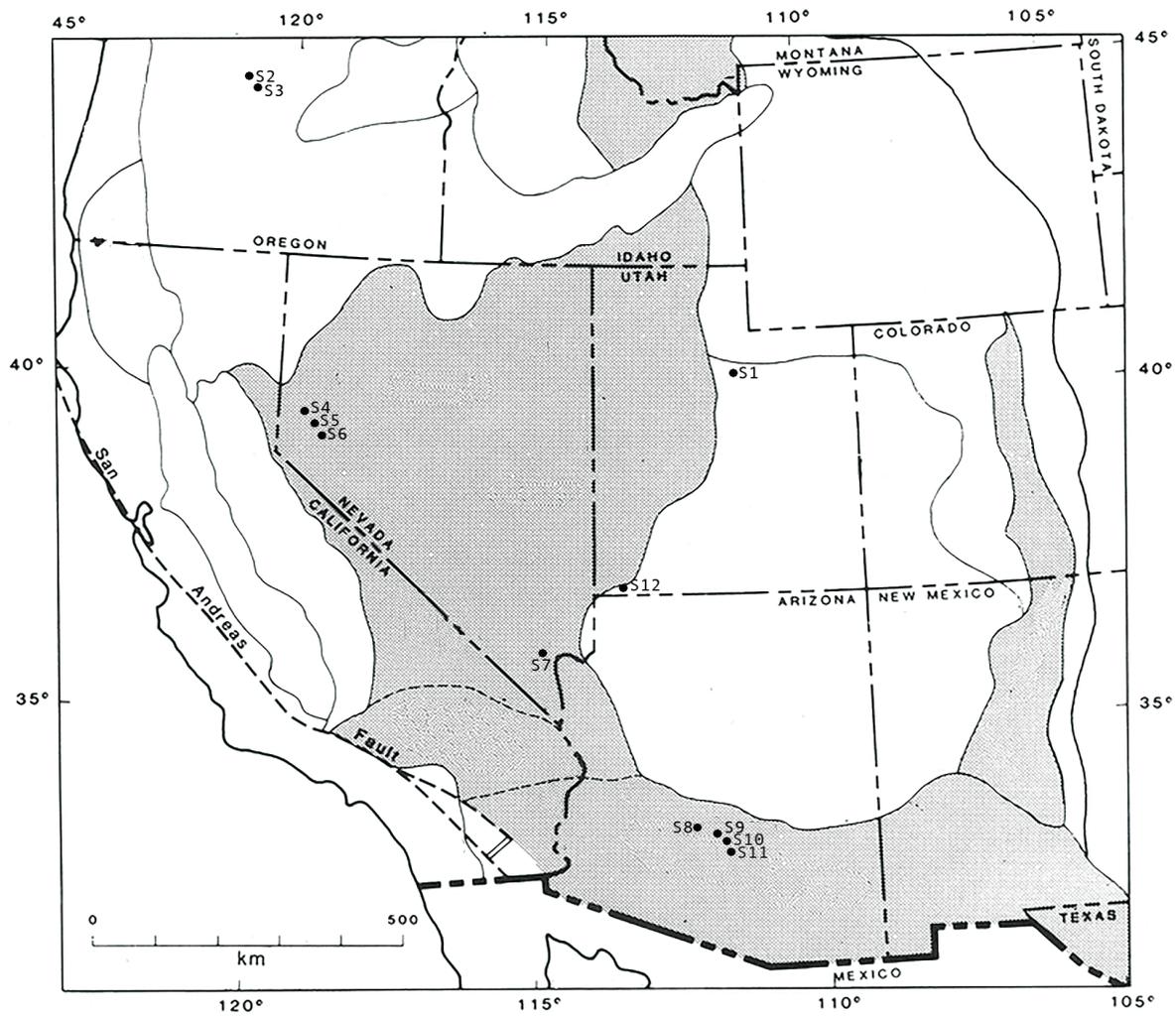


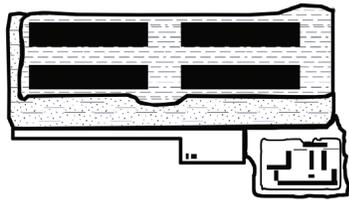
figure 1: map of sites

I.Introduction

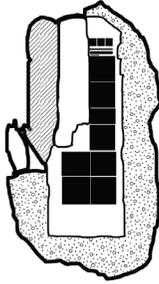
It starts with a screen, a barrier and an itch to break through the layers of glass, liquid crystal, fluorescent light and tear through pixels into a million scattered cement boxes. I keep encountering the sense of being held like a little yellow man dangling at the end of a god-like cursor, dropped in the middle of a street, surrounded by facades of snapshots in time, the sun stuck in place in the sky forever.

I hear about the data centers in the summer. I read about the rows and rows of blinking servers that hold the contents of our overflowing devices. I learn about the millions of gallons of mostly potable water required to cool the machines each day. A dry scratching like sandpaper on my skin each time I remember the rainless winters, and the long, smoky summers. I mark a paper map with the unadvertised locations of ten data centers, strewn across the desert landscape of the American West and suited up my hatchback with a makeshift bed so I can rest easy at night while I camp alone. I set out to visit the Cloud. I don't really know what this means, or what I plan to do when I get to each stop on my map. But I have some sense that if I see the buildings where the internet lives, if I stand on the earth above buried fiber optic cables, the inner-workings of the cryptic machine I hold in my hand may be revealed. It seems possible I can uncover direct links between my body and the high-voltage lines, the sagebrush and the cement warehouses, the sky above and the towers piercing into it.

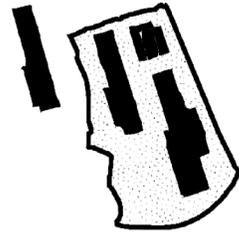
I rove through desert landscapes and industrial parks, unraveling my own inattention and connection to the hidden terrain. I brush against these massive, austere and energy-consuming buildings seeing them as more than just computational infrastructure, but containers of human knowledge in an increasingly disconnected society. I harvest clay and native plants from below the towering fences that kept me out. I'm not looking for answers, but find more questions. About how to live on a planet where it is easier to talk to someone on the other side of the world about the end of it all than it is to feel the parched earth between your fingers. About how to hold the ecstasy of the last rays of sun and welcome the dark. About what knowledge exists outside of the concrete walls, embedded within the rocks and the sagebrush and the shadows of clouds falling on barbed wire fences.



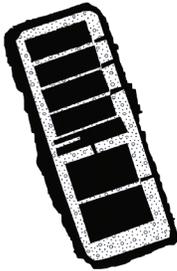
S1



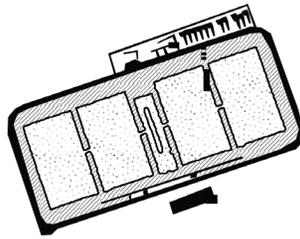
S2



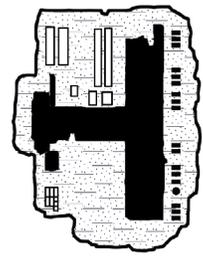
S3



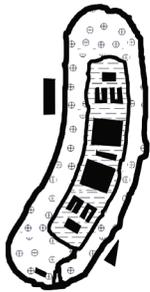
S4



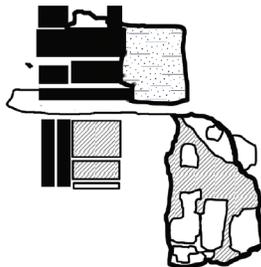
S5



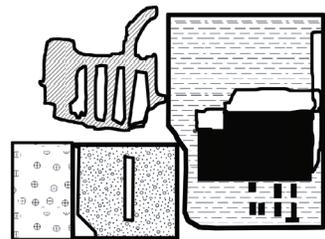
S6



S7



S8



S9

figure 2: survey maps of each site

II. High Noon

Venus sets, then Mars, but first the Sun. The Moon appears in the southeast as I tuck the sheets around my shoulders and I happen to stir as it dips below the ridge at 12:44am. Day breaks. I wake up in a salty valley, bright and blinding, the mountains are bruise-colored. The sky is everywhere here. I rise from my metal cocoon and build a circle of rocks I find here and stand in the center as the sun emerges from the ridge, casting my long shadow, touching the sand and stones towards the west. I want to place myself inside time as it is here in this place, without relying on numbers to tell some version of where and when I am.

I watch the shadows as they move and change over the sand and pebbles. When the sun casts their shadows, the small rocks look bigger and easier to imagine as giant boulders to ants. The bright light comes from the center, comes from above and comes from eight minutes ago. In the distance, a monolithic data center looms; windowless, even on all five sides. It's made from these same materials: sand, rocks, light, but infused with a cold magic I can't get close to.

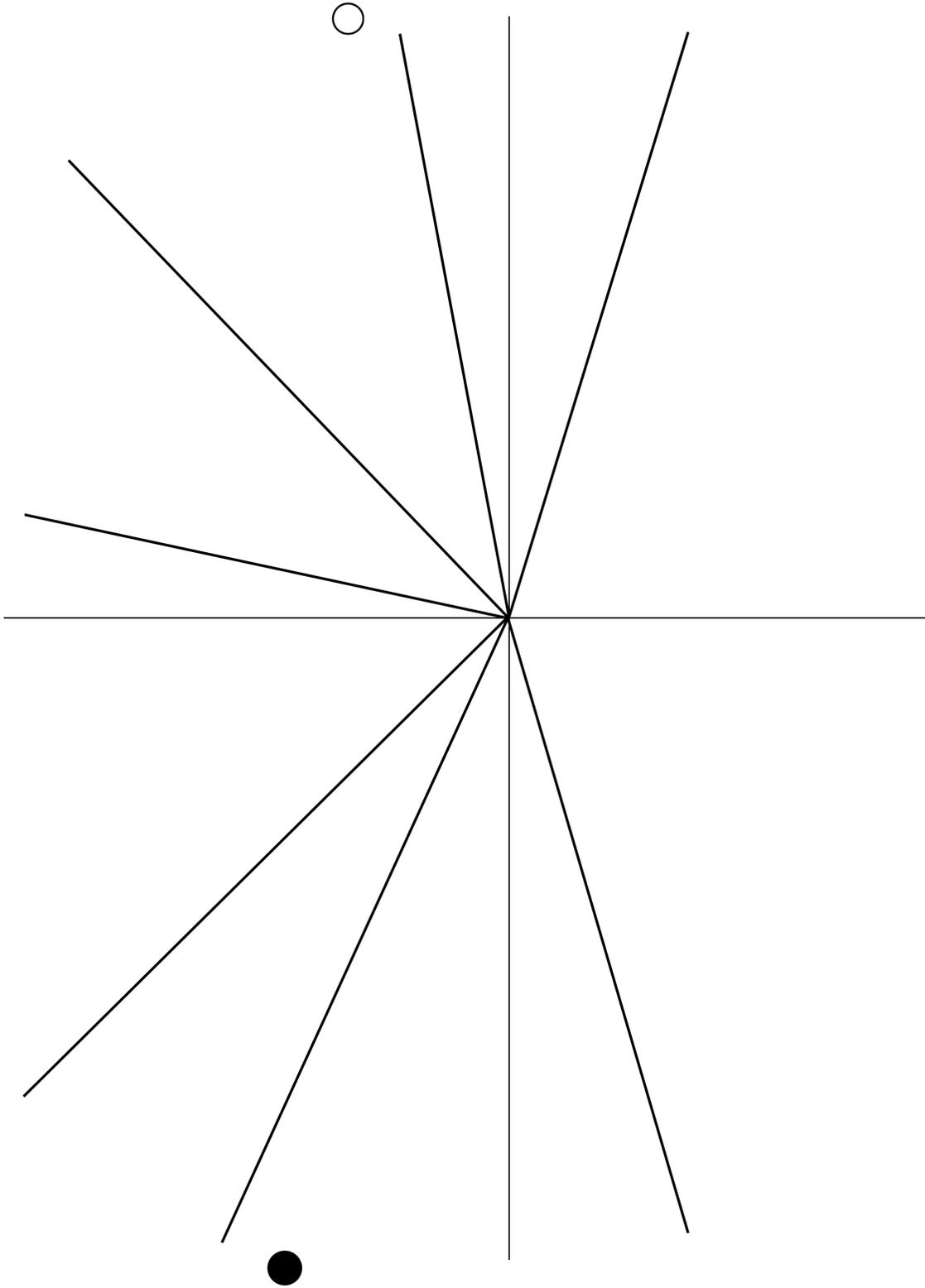


figure 3: path of the sun [S2] 08-13-21



fig. 4

fig. 5



figure 4-5: standing stones from [S2] 08-13-21

III. A Crack

Yesterday my windshield was cracked by a loose stone on a wash-board road. The crack is growing longer. It's hard to forget the glass is there, between me and the desert. The first day, the chip in the glass looks like a little flying saucer leading me to my destination. One instant leads to the next and the day unfurls without a plan and the vessel that guides follows the rules of a compound eye.

As the crack grows longer, spreading like a graphite mark tracing the eastward trajectory of my car on the glass of it, I enter a very novel and sincere state. My journey becomes curious about itself, so entrancing and peculiar. It's an awareness of touching everything around me, each sense enhanced and expanded. I flutter with energy and react to some strange entanglement familiar only to my gut. I know that on this exploration my gaze must be that of some ancient person or maybe not of this Earth, accepting everything in my field of vision as completely unknown and unrecognizable, archaic like the mollusks who don't assign good and evil, a primordial sea of mesh. This is life seen by life. If I look for meaning, I may miss it. Perhaps it has the same meaning as a long shadow cast by a pebble.



fig. 6

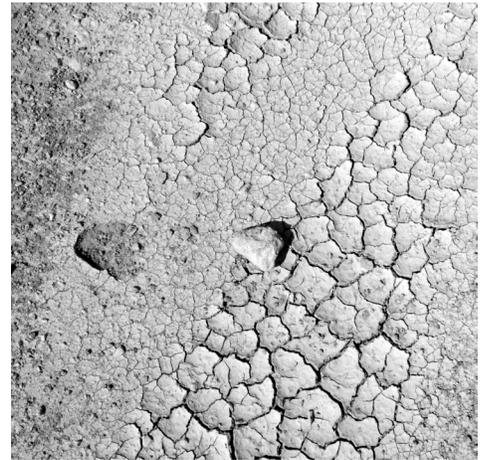


fig. 7

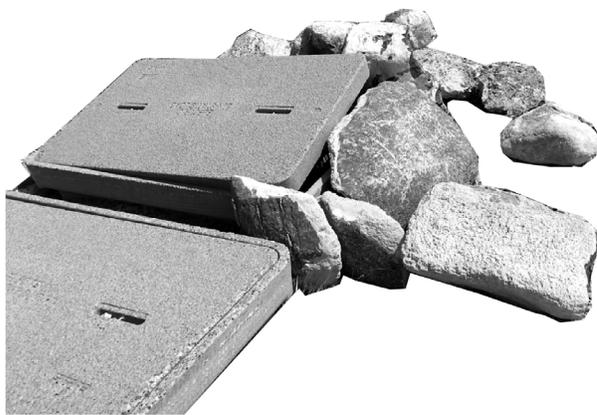


fig. 8



fig. 9

figure 6: [S1]
figure 7: ground [S6]
figure 8: utilities boxes,
mojave desert
figure 9: pylons & fiber optic
cable poles, mojave desert

IV. Tombs

At a diner counter in Arizona, with a Texan trucker over eggs and coffee. He's been contracted to drive truckloads of servers to data centers in the middle of the desert and recruited to roll them up into their slots next to the others in rows and rows of blinking boxes. He said he's gone into the underbellies of residential neighborhoods where abandoned homes are converted into earthen containers for cables, basements dug three stories deep into the dirt like faerie portals to the otherworld. He told me a trick he learned to remember which color wires get bundled together for each server.

the sky is **blue**,

sun is **orange**,

grass is **green**,

dirt is **brown**,

slate is in the **ground**.

Plunged into the earth, dark but glowing within- extravagant and precarious tombs. These subterranean networks, gaping polyps of the Earth, where stalagmite computers, circuit boards encrusted with mineral deposits and cable fissures come together. Void of animal life, save the few who tend to the fires that must not go

out. Clouded in memory, melancholy and desire. Sticky sweet, char-
treuse blinking ectoplasm like the slime of time. Snakes slide
along the ground and up the walls, guarding the precious innards.
Dust would accumulate if there were a source of it.

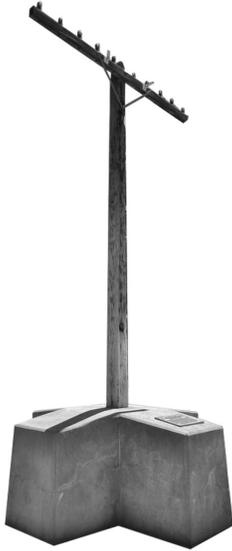


fig. 10

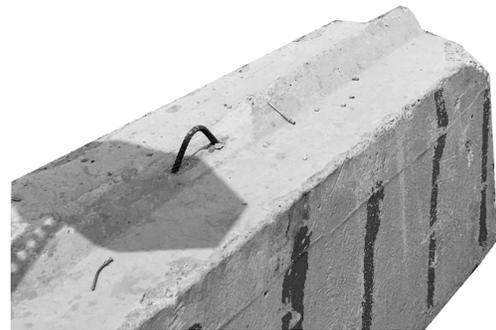


fig. 11`



fig. 12

figure 10: last splice of first transcontinental telephone line w. wendover, nv
figure 11: cement traffic barrier from building 10 construction site [S2]
figure 12: cement utility vault in great basin desert

V. Heavy Clocks

I woke from a dream, your brother was in it too. We were in a cave holding rocks and he said that they were like heavy clocks. And when I looked down, it was glowing like a screen, the cubic crystals like moirée pixels, quartz veins vibrating with white light. Startled, I dropped it on the limestone floor and it cracked open, seeping out a bright viscous liquid, a prima materia which crawled into hollow corners. Rooms filled with the stuff and we became engulfed, holding each other and our heads above the radium glow. Memories, other people's memories of living rooms, grand canyons and babies lying on their backs floated past our treading bodies.



fig. 13

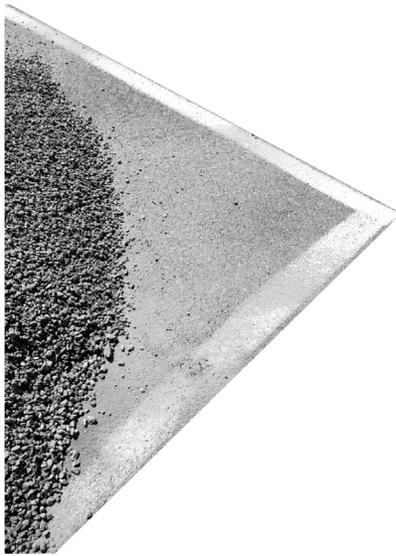


fig. 14

fig. 15



figure 13: cement pipes, las vegas, nv
figure 11: pile of landscaping rocks in parking lot [S7]
figure 12: cattle guard at secure entrance [S4]

VI. Ceilings

I want to write like learning. I photograph each moment and place the image under a microscope, in a hand held at arm's length with one eye closed, picked up by the wind and blown into a dusty expanse getting caught on a barbed wire fence, the event recorded by a security camera. I want you to look with me.

On my platform bed with the back door open, I lie with my head bent over the foot of the bed seeing everything the other way. The Earth scattered with sagebrush and tumbleweed is the sky and the sky a landscape without gravity, a deep and bellowing abyss. I fall in for a moment. When I was young, I'd visit this upside down world. If footsteps followed the contours of the ceiling-as-floor, I'd step over doorways and inhabit new white corners.



fig. 16



fig. 17



fig. 18

figure 16: barbed wire fence [S5]

figure 17: ground [S4]

figure 18: wild horse, tahoe-reno industrial center

VII. Runes

I've been taking photos of the NSA Data Center in Bluffdale, Utah. I stand across the street in a construction zone. Along the edge are thistles growing from the dry, cast tire tracks. The spiny body with its tufted amethyst hair makes its home along roads and railways, pastures, rangeland, gravel pits and vacant lots. They're like prickly sign posts to mark the wounds and keep out more harm during the healing, but the scab keeps getting torn off.

I can set up my tripod and film from a distance here on the sidewalk that is not technically private property yet. But making images of this world feels redundant. Taking photos of this giant digital temple doesn't pierce the veil, but generates a sort of mutant ouroboros, a snake eating its own tail. But if the head of the snake is my camera, the tail is so swollen and contorted that when I snap the shutter, the camera chokes violently and hacks, eyes watering.

I look down, the earth is fine and cracked on the surface like a broken circle of warm beige powdered makeup. I collect my shovel up and fill a bucket with the stuff and lift it into the back of my car. When I get back to California, I can soak it in water and sift out the rocks and debris. I'll pour the hydrated clay into a t-shirt and hang it from a post like a bulbous pendulum until it forms into a tender dough-body I can work into shapes and gestures with my hands. The dry summer air will drink any remaining water

before I place them in the kiln to be transformed by fire once again.

And these runes will tell the story to those who are patient and quiet, those who are willing to suspend themselves upside down. The runes will start from the very beginning, when they were stone and the wind and the water caressed them and how they became silt in a lake before there was a word for it.



fig. 18



fig. 19



fig. 20

figure 18: clay soil [S1]
figure 19: plumeless thistle [S1]
figure 20: dirt pile [S1]

VIII. Sun

I drive by fields of solar farms most days. Stretches of flat, dusty land with south-facing panels. They are like ardent believers in the veneration of Sun, the most worthy of deities. Giant pylons guide Sun's gifts towards the data centers and along the highways to Las Vegas. Sun, bountiful sun. I hear on the radio that every eleven and eleven hundredths years there is a cycle of increased sunspot activity. Every eleven and one tenths years there is a cycle of mass human excitability. If the solar flares get big enough, it could wipe out all telecommunications, a mass blackout. Within hours, we'd lose all ability to communicate, our phones dead on dark tables.



fig. 21

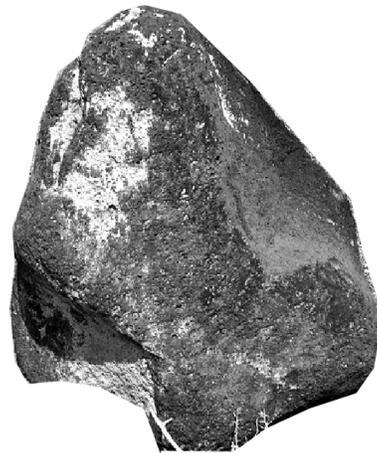


fig. 22

figure 21: stones mark the shadow of a wi-fi tower 13:42 pst [S7]

figure 22: stone from crescent dunes solar energy project

IX. Contact

I follow my phone's GPS to the Facebook Data Center, a series of tall warehouses in different stages of construction sprawled upon the high desert under a smoky sky. Dull headaches and a dry throat have colored the past few days while the forest to the south violently burns. I pull up to the security entrance which resembles a customs checkpoint and ask if they do tours. The guard in the booth tells me no, but I could try contacting Press@Facebook. He gives me a business card with a message directing questions to facebook.com/help. I'm not exactly sure if I should laugh because there isn't exactly anything funny. Oh on the contrary, behind it is all that is unanswered. Questions that cannot be answered by some faceless-other-end of a contact form, nor by being here.

I pull around, park on the side of the public road and stand outside the black slat fences, setting my gaze upon the stark cement warehouse at the entrance. The landscaping looks brand new; young grasses separated by mulched space and sleek boulders extracted from below, cleaned up and arranged to mimic the high desert terrain. A series of vertical cement slabs block the full view of a polished lobby where modern leather chairs watch a screen flashing with indistinguishable pictures. I look down below my boots at the soil, but it hides what lies below the surface with a gray, gravelly sand and crunches like broken glass.

Across the empty street, a carpet of brush extends to the muted horizon. Rough constellations of silver and mustard, bone dry, loamy earth beneath. I collect some of the sage and rabbit brush, clipping just a handful from many as I was taught. How satisfying this silence is. It's been built up of centuries. It's the silence of a kestrel looking. The peripheral vision of a security camera. Everything looking at everything, everything living in the other. In this desert, things know things.

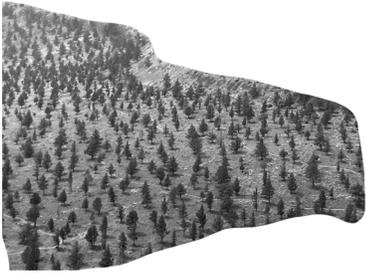


fig. 23



fig. 24



fig. 25



fig. 26

- figure 23: young forest [S2]
- figure 24: gnomon stone [S2]
- figure 25: towers at noon, moapa valley
- figure 26: walk in a circle [S11]

X. 60 HZ

I gently close my eyes and rest my hand on the caked dirt below. I listen to the sound of the train as it moves and changes across the hills. Knocking metal on metal, there's a deeper sound, one I recognize in my bones to be the knocking of old ways out of the land. I listen to the electricity of the high tension wires above the field where I glean the plants. It's a steady throb of bodiless voices whispering over the terrain, sending waves through me. A tremble from the earth enters my hand. In my skin I hear the story of what will resound after everything. Like a satellite in the depths of space broadcasting the Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F forever.
