

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Joel Kuennen

As a map is drawn, a transformation happens. Space and material cease to come into being through the encounter—a scintillating exchange between a subject and their surroundings that pierces the idea of individuality with the complexity of being.

Rather space and material are situated as abstract objects, part of a kit of defined knowledge that can be woven into topologies of use, transforming space into place.

Places, once known, become articulated into the machinery of exploitation.

This lake became known by people collecting tequesquite, fish, and spirulina. But as they searched the lakeshore for crusts of white salt their feet felt the squish of alkaline mud pushing between their toes.

New edges became known by the building of chinampa, homes, sanctuaries, and pyramids in its middle. But as they built causeways and dikes to divide its waters into sweet and salty, they felt the cold water lift the hairs on their skin when they jumped in.

The lake's bottom became known as it was diverted, drained, and drilled to protect people from sudden gluttony. But as a heavy city was built on its belly, pushing it downward, people still felt each satisfying gulp of water as it traveled down their throats.

We don't think of lakes as being larger than their surface. They extend out to lap at the lips of the land, but they also go down, between the cells of the Earth. Their waters lift up into the sky and flow back down the mountains, through us, and deep into the Earth.

The tendrils of water's solvency fill every possible crevice, even transforming dried minerals into hydrates, alums and salts. The lake that holds dissolved mountains, the lake that was home and grave to countless generations, is above, within, and below, in the salt of the Earth.