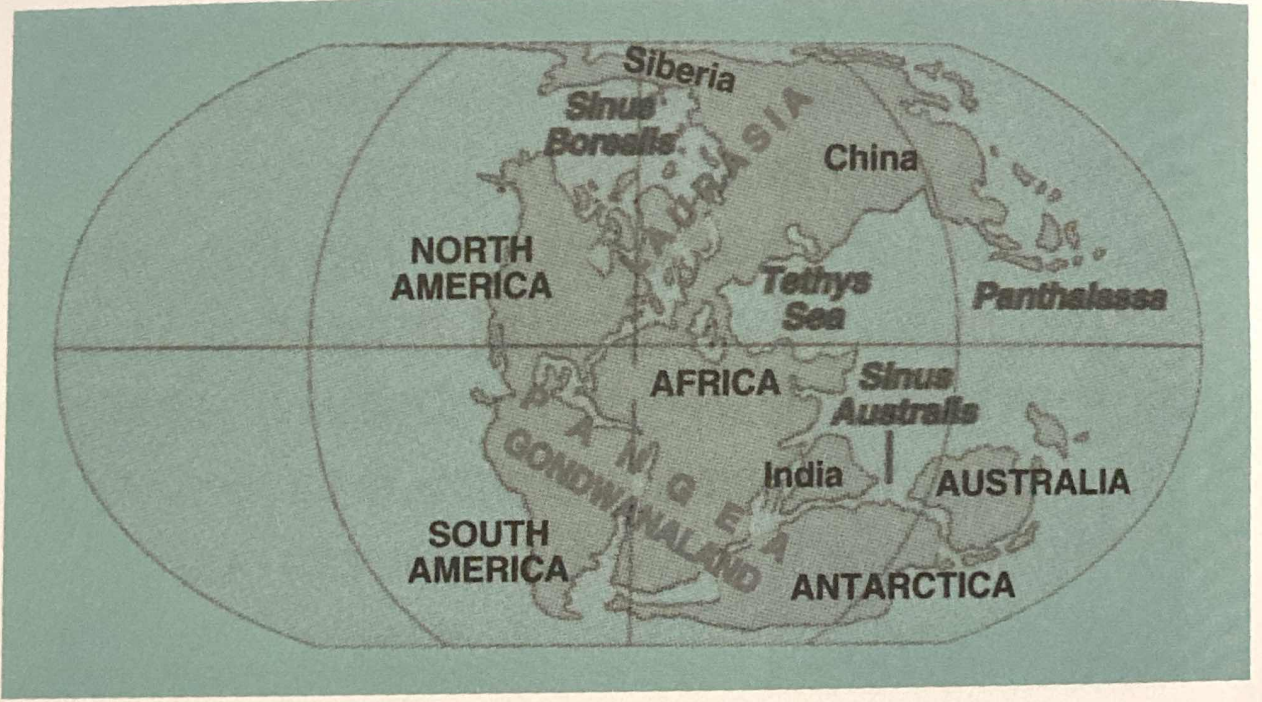


BABEL

A Motion-Picture Written and Directed by Natsuko Uchino

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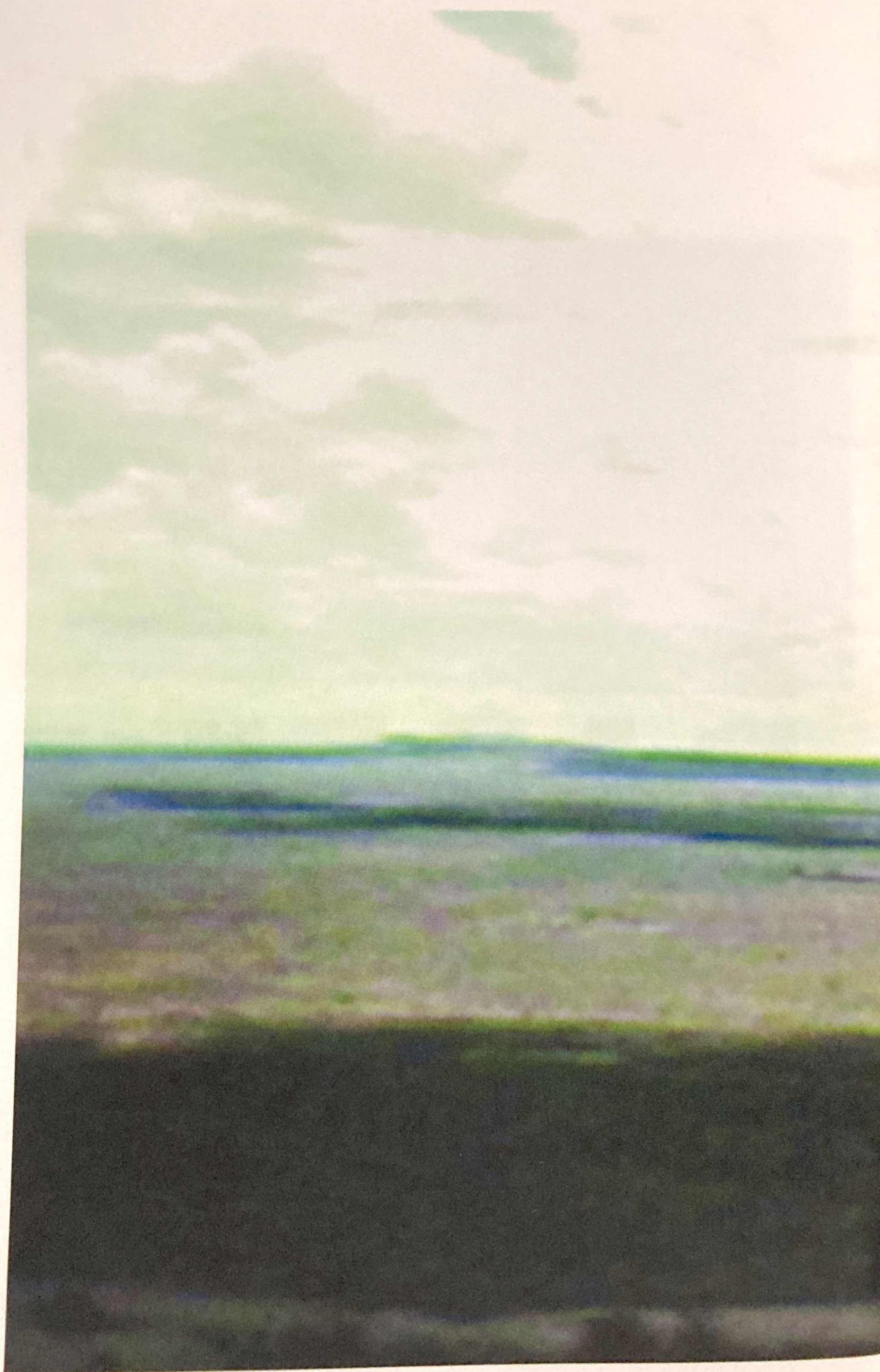
280 Million–225 Million Years Ago



BABEL

A Motion-Picture Written and Directed by Natsuko Uchino

*2006 Benjamin Menschel Fellow
The Cooper Union
for the Advancement
of Science and Art*





On the Origins of the Human Feeling of Other/Outside/Foreign: An Archaeology of North Trans-Atlantic Culture.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

A single group of people, united and speaking the same language, migrates, then finds a land where they can settle. There, they build a city and a tower. In response to this act of human vanity, divine authority confuses their original language and scatters the people geographically.



The story is told in Genesis 11

- 1 And the whole earth was one language, and of one speech.
- 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.
- 3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.
- 4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.
- 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built.
- 6 And the LORD said, Behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.
- 7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.
- 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.
- 9 Therefore the name of it is called Babel; and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.¹

PANGAEA

Five centuries ago, the discovery and conquest of the Americas by the imperial powers of Europe set forth the mapping of the earth as one planet. Less than one century ago, geological science began to explore ideas of continental unity, demonstrating that 280 million years ago, the continents that we know of now formed an united landmass.



EROS

The primordial beings were each made from the united body of two gendered selves in either heterosexual or homosexual combination. Their strength threatened the gods who, in response to their insolence, cut them apart. The resulting halves are bound to each other by an ultimate desire to recover wholeness, a yearning which is now called love.



The story is told in Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*

"...The original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two... Now there were these three sexes because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round like their parents. Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods; and of them is told the tale of Otys and Ephialtes who, as Homer says, dared to scale heaven, and would have laid hands upon the gods. Doubt reigned in the celestial councils. (...) At last, after a good deal of reflection, Zeus discovered a way. He said: 'I have a plan which will humble their pride and mend their manners; they shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two...' After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one, and would have perished from hunger without ever making an effort, because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate, whether the section of an entire man or of an entire woman, which had usurped the name of man and woman, and clung to that. ... so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man."²

The history is told in our modern encyclopedia

"Pangaea or Pangea (derived from Greek meaning 'all earth') is the name given to the supercontinent that is believed to have existed during the Paleozoic and Mesozoic eras, before the process of plate tectonics separated each of the component continents into their current configuration. (...) The name was apparently first used by the German Alfred Wegener, chief proponent of the continental drift theory, in 1920. (...) In configuration, Pangaea is believed to have been a C-shaped landmass that spread across the equator. (...) The large supercontinent would potentially have allowed terrestrial animals to migrate freely all the way from the South Pole to the North Pole."³

¹ *Authorized King James Version, The Holy Bible* (Oxford, Glasgow, New York, Toronto, Melbourne, Wellington, Cape Town, Ibaden, Nairobi, Dar Es Salaam, Lusaka, Addis Ababa, delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Karachi, Lahore, Dacca, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, n.d.).

² Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. B. Jowett (New York, 1993) 15–17.

³ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pangea>).

The movie uses a geological metaphor to tell the story of Babel. The continental unity of Pangaea embodies the unity of the people from Before-Babel. The splitting of the earth into the different continents is the break of the original unified community into different peoples.

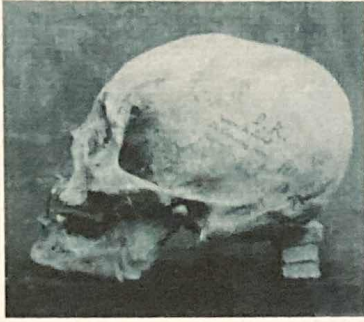
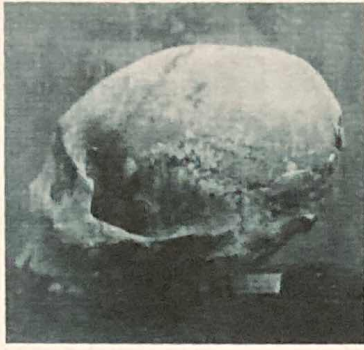
The story of Babel provides a mystical explanation for the present day variety of languages. This Judeo-Christian tradition is less a birth than it is a site of trauma in that the origin of language comes from confusion rather than creation. For humanity, Babel is the site of injury, or what involves rupture, division, and breaking.

This movie explores separation as the origin of plurality in human relations. It considers those moments of fracture and separation as the onset of desire: When there was only one, there was no other to want, but there being another, there is finally someone to desire, precisely because that other is felt as part of the self to be recovered.

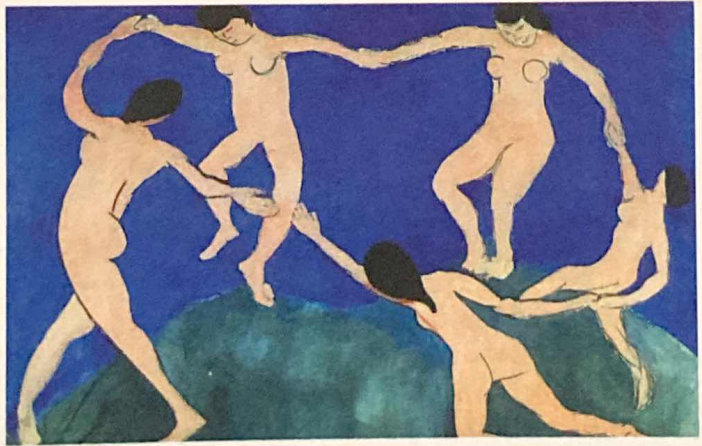
The movie explores the origins of how and what the West (Judeo-Christian, Hellenic, and Modern Scientific

traditions) sees and imagines in the term Alterity. The real histories of conquest, domination, exploitation, and projection that structured the rapports of the West to the non-hegemonic groups remain symptomatic of the Western imagination which positions itself as separated from the Other/Different/Remote. These histories are complex attempts to resolve that same DESIRE which binds all of us to Alterity.





DIRECTOR'S NOTE(S)









The Movie is Structured in 4 Moments.

1. AT DAWN

The people is one. Humanity is united.

There is not yet any notion of the individual; we are here in a place of "partial subjectivity"⁴ before any formation of isolated identity. In fact, there is no notion of the *self* or of the *other*. Humans live completely integrated, all together.

Like its people, the earth is still whole. There is a single continent upon which no nations are formed. The people live all across it, simultaneously and cohesively.

There is only vast, flat land and the land is desert.

And the people speak one language.⁵ Language is a grace innate in all humans. The language they speak is not confined to the level of verbal expression alone but also the corporal,

spatial, and emotional. All expression is sensed equally intact. It takes every form: postures, facial traits, spatial dispositions, and rhythms. Meaning is perpetually renewed and produced in the very act of speech.

Then, the people lived in a true ecology⁶ and speech was a free creation, infinite in resources and composition. And through this process of invention, its speakers grasp their freedom.⁷

2. BABEL

Then, they make a place.

This particular place provides a context to the people who inhabit it. A sense of belonging to this specific shared place gathers the people into a community or what is one together.⁸ The sense of belonging is determined by geography, and development is an enterprise for the entire community.

⁴ "... pre personal, polyphonic, collective, machinic," according to Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992) 21.

⁵ In Genesis 2, when Adam named every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, language was capable of reflecting the true essence of things. Words would just stick onto things. There was no separation between the inside and the outside, the name and the named, the idea and the gesture, the abstract and the real. The world was bathed in true universality. The nature of being was transparent. Theory and praxis were in complete concordance.

⁶ For Guattari, the expanded field of ecology includes social relations, human subjectivity as well as environmental concerns (Felix Guattari, *Three Ecologies* (London and New Brunswick, 2000)).

⁷ Noam Chomsky notes in his essay, "Language and Freedom": "...the abstract Humboltian form of language – its generative grammar, in modern terms. To learn a language is to construct for oneself this abstract system, of course unconsciously." (*Chomsky on Anarchism* (Edinburgh, Oakland and West Virginia, 2005) 115).

⁸ "From *com + unus*: A Sense of community as *organicist* – or where the total organization of an organism, rather than the functioning of individual organs, is the principal or exclusive determinant of every life process." (George Van Den Abbeele, *Community at Loose Ends* (Minneapolis, 1991)).



3. THE WRATH OF GOD

This is the episode of transcendental malediction: clouds so dark and detonations so strident that the Fear of God is embedded in the soul of humankind.

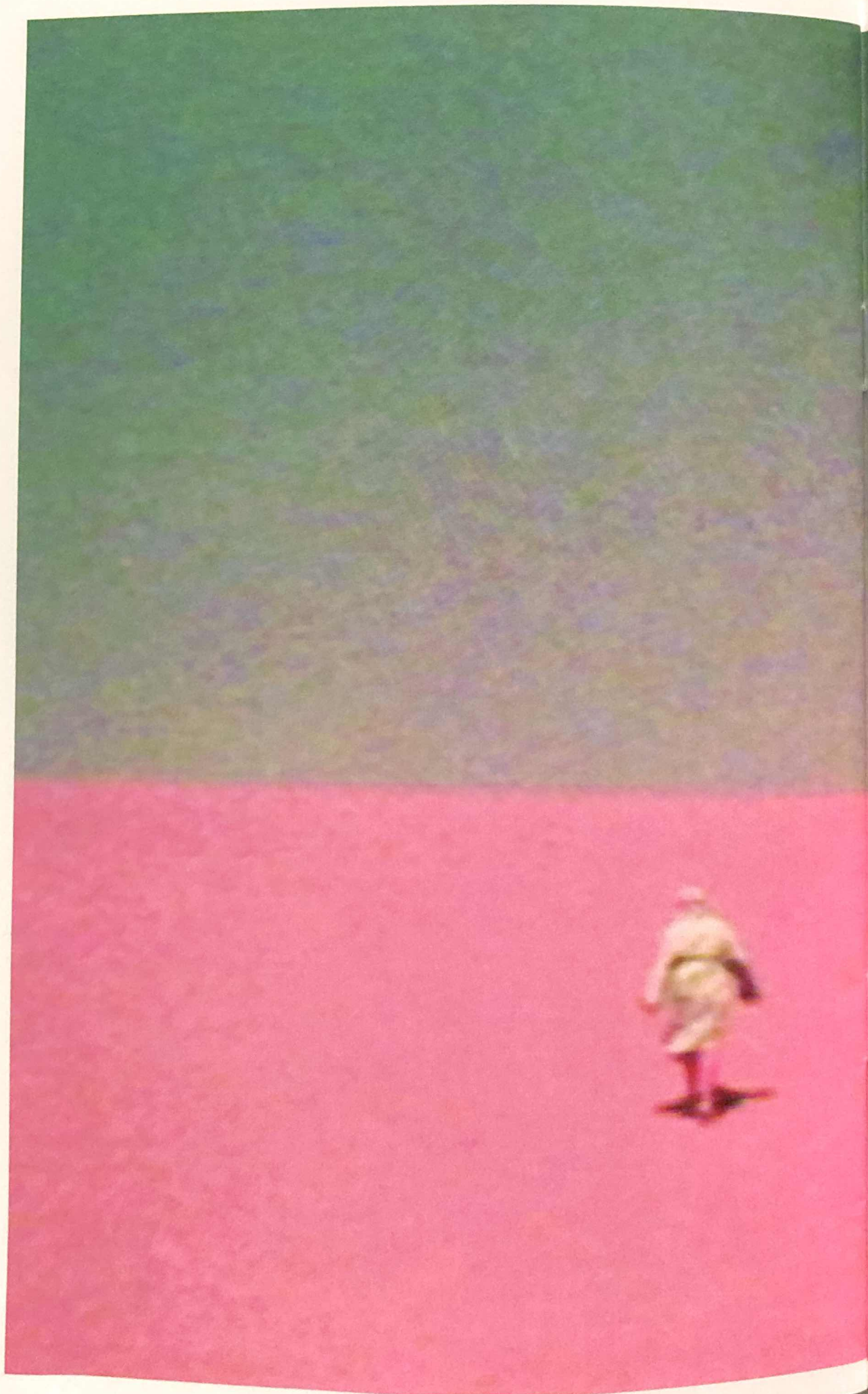
From one, they blast into many others in the divine act of dispersal. There is a massive and multiple diaspora. Humanity is dismembered to a state where, not only 'I' is another, but a multitude of modalities of alterity exist in every individual.

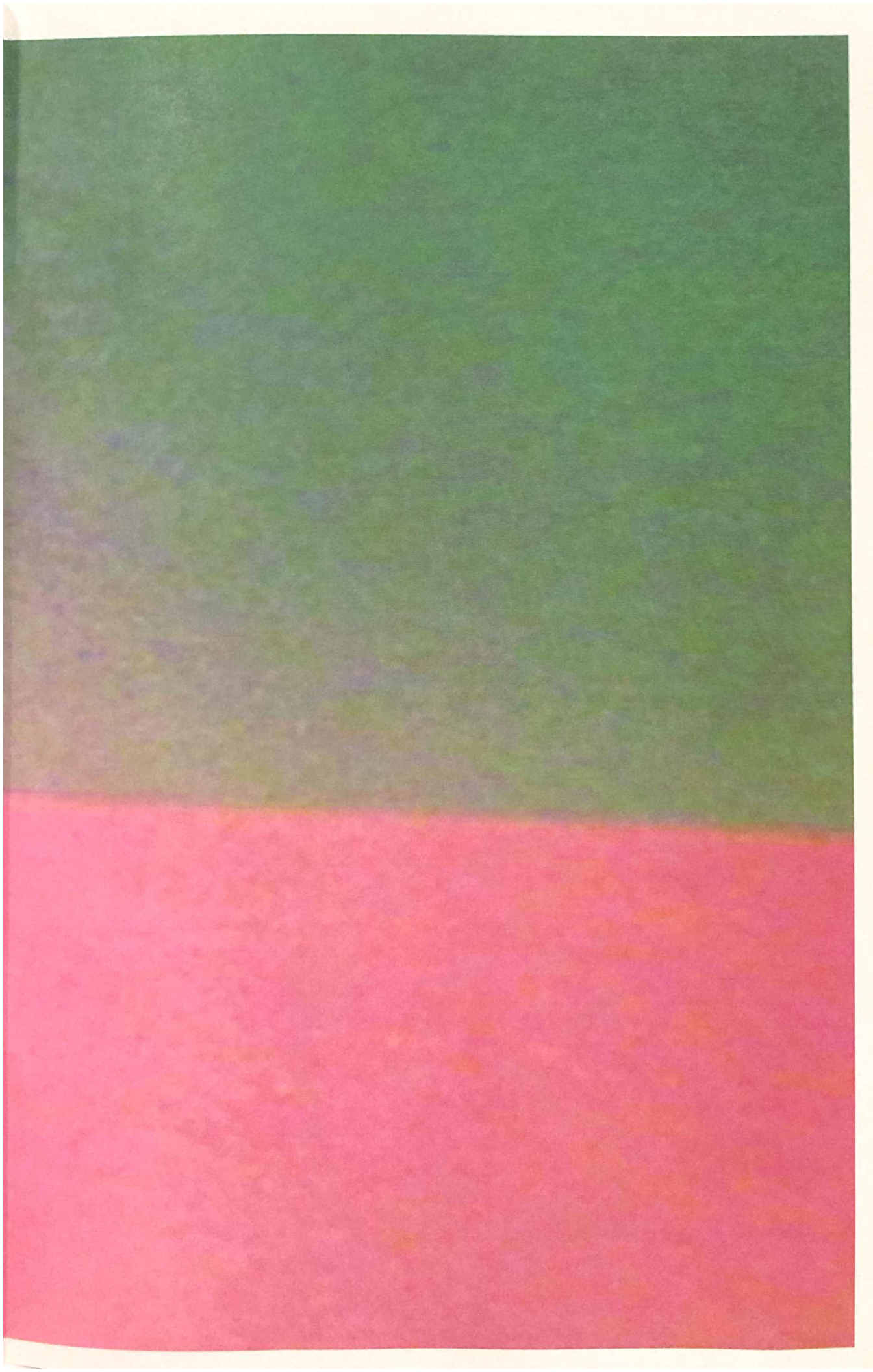
4. THE NEXT DAY

A wound has been inflicted on humankind, and it is now bleeding. The peoples are all estranged from each other and themselves.

Induced from the trauma of the terrifying sight of the collapse of their tower, the people go into a state of confusion. They no longer can understand each other anymore. From what used to be a complete and perfect harmony, there is now only noise around and in between the self and the world. One sees the other as utterly outside of the self, and yet is bound to it by the desire to re-make one with it.

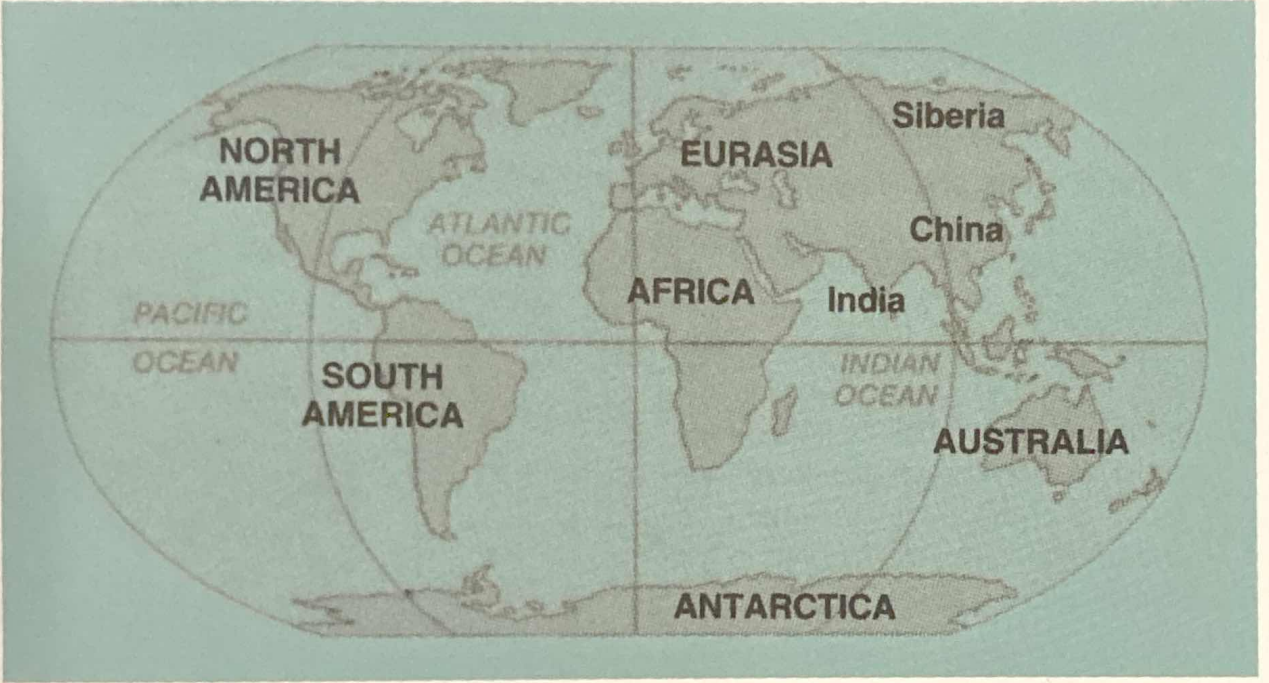
What used to be an unified "we" is now you and I entangled in loss and desire, on either side of the canyon. You are alone; I would like to kiss you, but there is an abyss between you and me, a chasm cut into the earth as a geological testimony to our separation.







Thanks to the Crew,
Christin Ripley and Johannes Kuzmich.



2 Million Years Ago–Present-Day

Babel was shot in August, 2006, in the states of California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico, on 16 millimeter color film, with a Bolex Reflex H16.

Babel is the first part of a two-part film; its sequel is titled *Babylon*. The whole enterprise has as its ultimate consideration the implications and rapports of the West with what it sees and imagines as Alterity both in myth (*Babel*) and in real sites (*Babylon*).

/BABYLON

BABEL / BABYLON, coming out May, 2007, to be released simultaneously and shown sequentially.