

Beny Wagner: Eye Farm (2016)

Transcript of the spoken text

To speak of perception is to speak of the power to see. But perception is equally about that which we protect ourselves from seeing.

When we gaze at the sun, for as long as the violence of light will allow, and then close our eyes, a diaphanous yellow spot emerges at the center of the visual field. That yellow spot emerges to protect the eye from the corrupting power of the sun. This spot is the product of the protective pigments lutein and zeaxanthin. The eye retains lutein from plant matter activated in the process of digestion.

This yellow pigment that appears in our visual field is the same yellow pigment that gives wheat its yellow color.

While we deem vision a sense that does not touch the world, it is in fact, rooted in a process of chemical contamination and digestion stemming from plants. Our organ of sight, the eye, is part of the greater process of photosynthesis, a process used by plants and other organisms to convert light energy, into chemical energy, that is later released to fuel the organisms' activities.

We are what we eat as we see what we eat. Looking at these wheat fields we look at our power to see. We see ourselves seeing.

Vegetation fundamentally configures our ability to see. Our eyes are immersed within a vegetative metabolism of a kind. We look at plants, but plants have already cannibalized our gaze as they become part of us looking back at them.

At some point in a distant past, agriculture created a constant. Agriculture allowed the level of stability that would eventually allow people to pursue those things that distinguish humans from plants or animals.

This wheat would feed eyes that understood their sights to be detached from their surroundings. Sight as power. Sight as ownership of all that seems visible. Sight as the very concept of nature.

But nature is not hidden and so does not need to be unveiled. Nature is that which sees you before you ever knew what you were looking for. Nature can only be its own double - the virtual performance of separation.

Land boundaries were once drawn through the labor that defined a given land. People cultivated crops and ate the land made digestible through their labor. The land ran through their digestive tracts and allowed them to perceive it as their own. Perceptual separations would be formed invisibly between those who digest a crop grown on one land and those who digest a crop grown on another.

Once, there were hundreds of different types of wheat. Many types of wheat differed from each other greatly and each region cultivated its own strands.

I like to think that those versatile strands of wheat not only defined the boundaries between one land and another but between modes of vision that differed from each other ever so slightly.

The line that separated one group from another - the contents of digestion translated into the eye. And these eyes had few tools with which to look back at themselves. They looked outwards at others understanding that the other is the thing one can see and that the self is that which remains invisible.