

**Bloom Projects: Lisa Tan, *Sunsets***  
**September 7, 2014 – January 4, 2015**  
**Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara**

**Sunsets**  
**By Theodor Ringborg**

Sometimes one has to take the long way 'round. Lisa Tan's video *Sunsets* shows parts of an interview between an anonymous reporter and Brazilian author Clarice Lispector. It is, by all accounts, Lispector's last appearance before she passed away December 9, 1977. We see her reclined in a chair, tired, looking almost pissed-off, as if she really doesn't want to be there. But then again, she must have been exhausted. She'd been in chronic pain for more than 10 years, since, in 1966, falling asleep cigarette in hand and setting fire to her mattress. The interview, as we see it, is being translated by someone who communicates it to the artist, who in turn writes it down. A person speaks to another person, seen by a third who tells a fourth, who puts it in writing.

Lispector's first line is, "I think that when I write, I am dead." She says it in response to a question writer Rainer Maria Rilke was once asked, "If you couldn't write anymore, would you die?" Death is brought to Lispector by the act of writing. Whether she anticipates death as she writes, or if she is in fact dead as she writes, matters little. Both being dead and forestalling death is to come face-to-face with death. Both being dead and anticipating death is to be ferried by Charon, the question is how far it is to shore. And though we are all, indeed, in the same boat, here it is by all means a particular kind of death. Given that it hinges on a special propinquity, a kinship between writing and death and death and death, it is perhaps the gift of death, as in Jacques Derrida's second sense when he asked, "How does one give oneself death in that other sense where *se donner la mort* also means to interpret death, to give oneself a representation of it, a figure, a signification or destination for it?" Possibly, it would be to write to think of death. And, perhaps, to write unto death. To write and think about the death of death.

We, the ones that watch the video, don't see the whole interview. We hear it, through its multiple layers—what the reporter asks, Lispector's response, the translator's interpretation and Tan's keyboard clicking, like echoing echoes. What we see in addition to the interview, because it is a film, so we're always faced with something, are scenes filmed in Sweden at either 3 a.m. during the summer, or 3 p.m. during the winter—hours of twilight, hours of darkness and light, hours in-between that allude to both endings and beginnings. We're also faced computer screens that show various planets and stars and universes. They are obviously screensavers, functions of the computer that come into being when it, as it's said, goes to sleep. But is it also a parable to the idea of something's ingredient? Suggesting, in some way, that each pixel is a building block for the impenetrable image of space as it takes more than one pixel to make an image?

Light, when there's a lot of it, and on the contrary when there's almost none, is pivotal perhaps nowhere so much as in the North. This may sound much like the figured thing to say, and might brand me as the expected brooding Swede, but the darkness of the winter contrasted to the light of the summer is something that can seriously damage or confuse someone emotionally. When it's dark, and can get really dark, all some want to do is sleep, and others, even, hibernate. As they seep in throughout the film—light and dark and sleep and death—I don't think I would go too far in saying that it all seems to come from a place of dejection.

The reporter asks Clarice and the translator translates and Tan types, "In what measure does the work of Clarice Lispector and the specific case of Mineirinho ... can alter the order of things?" Clarice responds to the reporter and the translator translates to Tan who types, "It doesn't alter anything. It doesn't alter anything. It doesn't alter anything. Because deep down we're not ... we don't want to ... we don't want to alter anything ... we don't want to alter things, I'm sorry. We are wanting to ... bloom ... in one way or another ... we want to bloom in one way or another." As she replies she lights a cigarette.

Is it possible that twilight is a departure? And is it then a departure toward the flat globes to which we turn unknowing to save our screens and ourselves? A turn to that which is unknown and unlivable, like writing and death? Is it a coupling of the gift of death and not-knowing? Not-knowing what death is? Or, perhaps, thinking, but not being sure, if one is dead while writing? Derrida's second sense of the French expression *la donner la mort*, the gift of death, is preceded, of course, by a first sense, which is only now coming to be relevant. Derrida asks: "How does one give *oneself* death? How does one give it to oneself in the sense that putting oneself to death means dying while assuming responsibility for one's own death, committing suicide but also sacrificing oneself for another, *dying for the other*, thus perhaps giving one's life by giving oneself death such as Socrates, Christ, and others did in so many different ways?"

The final pass that travels through the reporter, Lispector, the translator, and Tan begins with the reporter asking, "Does that still happen that you produce something...and then you tear it?" The exchange, including the words of the translator, that follows is:

Yeah, I put it aside or I tear it apart...yes I tear it apart.

Is this a product of a reflection on something, or is it an emotion, and she interrupts him and says, it's anger, it's anger.

With whom? With myself. Why Clarice? I don't know...I'm a bit tired. Of what? Of myself.

But aren't you reborn or renewed in each new work? Big sigh. Well now, now I died. Let's see if I'll be reborn again. For now I'm dead. I'm talking about my....

I think she says I'm talking about my...tone...? No! No! No...! I'm talking from my...tomb. I'm speaking from my tomb.

It's "túmulo" not "tom" (here, the translator simulates the way Clarice Lispector pronounces "túmulo").

She speaks from the tomb, awaiting signs to come back to life. Waiting to be alive enough to write and be dead again. To recuperate and be so full of life so as to afford giving death to herself and die for the other.