

# Rear View Time

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In June this year I went on a two-day hike in Iceland with my students from the Institut für Raumexperimente, Berlin. On the first day, our journey was charted out by yellow, wooden sticks, which, placed as they were at regular intervals in the landscape, amounted to a mostly linear path. Our feet effortlessly followed the already semi-trodden trail, leaving our senses and brains free from major orientation-concerned tasks. Our feeling of time was broken down into morsels spanning from one stick to the next, while we enjoyed the views passing by on either side.

To walk is to generate space and a physical sense of time. Armed with Claude mirrors, eighteenth-century walkers, especially in England, would take to nature, seeking sites particularly suited for landscape painting. This mirror, convex in form and tinted black, took its name from the French painter Claude Lorrain. Its effect – of unifying and idealising – helped both amateur and professional artists to transform their surroundings into an abstracted, picturesque whole. A few of these mirrors were made of the more rare material obsidian, a volcanic glass whose name derives, as recounted by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, from the Roman Obsius, who is supposed to have brought the first known example of the stone from Ethiopia to Rome.

On the second day of walking, we let the topography, the rolling hills and mountains, guide us as we embarked on a journey without a trail. Distance had to be estimated and negotiated. Navigation became a concern. We set out in the morning across the obsidian fields called Hrafninnusker, west of the volcano Hekla. The black glass reflected our bodies, movement, and the sky like mirrors scattered all over the ground. It generated a sense of fragility in us when we walked, causing every little step to be tentative rather than confident. To walk is to produce an instant future. Here the future was rich with uncertainty. As we walked through the fields of shiny surfaces, the obsidian deflected our gaze from what lay ahead, constructing a sense of the space we had just left behind. Like a rear-view mirror, the black stones gave a 'then' to our 'now' and 'soon'. Time was given space. Immediate futures were produced through fragmented images of the past.