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A LUNAR PERSPECTIVE (AN EXCERPT)

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ABSTRACT

This is an excerpt from *A Lunar Perspective*: a piece of writing and performance that travels through irregular orbits around Lunar House, a Home Office Visa and Immigration building, to question our practices of mapping, bordering and othering.

Weaving together voices from different writers and thinkers across disciplines and positions, the project steps in to understand the materiality of Lunar House as a site of the enactment of the border and steps out to consider and critique our current politics and practices of othering. *A Lunar Perspective* reflects on the reality of violence at, of, for and with the border, recognising the continued practice of hostile environment policies within the UK.

Understanding a map as a way of situating in relation to others, *A Lunar Perspective* becomes a map of words, taking language as a practice of cartography. Our languages, our words themselves, are maps of their own journeys, travelling through linguistic roots and resurfacing in partially remembered or imagined times and places. This collection of words, growing from and rooted within my own positionality, becomes a tentative, unfixed map, sloshing like water, in a state of continually shifting relations.

endlessly trying to read the immigration acts
getting lost in the words
the order of sections
the text a map of sorts
defining, outlining
*legislation conjuring*¹ the border into being
an attempt at fixity
trying to pin down the earth, the soil, the people

I venture out again
this time protected by google earth
past *lunar house*²
and out to another version of the border
the sea
imagined as a clean line
the bodies of land and sea touching but distinct
the image is quickly disrupted
instead the land
the border
is porous
water weaving through
tentacles entwining with the land

legislation conjuring :

These words come from Felix Bazalgette as he writes about the histories and lives of Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre, ‘sandwiched between an airport and a motorway.’ He writes that ‘legislation conjured the detention centre into being, and gathered people from all around the world inside it.’

From Felix Bazalgette, ‘Home Is Always a Ship’, *Failed States*, no. 3: refuge (March 2019), pp. 14–29 (p. 18).

lunar house :

Lunar House is a Home Office Visa and Immigration building in Croydon, London. Inside, visa applications and asylum screenings take place. As a front line of UK immigration policies, Lunar House is a site where the border is explicitly practiced and performed. Built in 1970, Lunar House was named to celebrate the moon landing the year before. This piece of writing travels through irregular orbits around Lunar House, weaving together voices from different writers and thinkers to create a tentative, unfixing map, sloshing like water, in a state of continually shifting relations.

entranced with the image

I leave my word document and google earth behind

and travel out to stand

feet planted

in the mud³

at the edge where earth touches ocean⁴

my feet slowly sinking into the space
between geographic bodies

the mud a space of *translation and transition⁵*

between water and land

standing here

my body scaled beside the geographic one⁶

looking out to the water

my neck slowly going red under the sun

my skin blushing as I gaze out

in the mud :

This particular mud is on the Isle of Grain, where the Thames and the Medway meet the sea and one of the closest sea/land borders to Lunar House. The Isle of Grain has many histories layered between its marshlands and water edges. The land – through Roman occupation, Saxon settlements, Dutch raids, two world wars – has seen the coming and going of: sea walls to drain the marshes for pastureland; the extraction of its gravel, salt and sand; military batteries and forts; anti-submarine nets; military training, experimental, firing and demolition ranges; seaplane bases; anti-tank sea defences; oil refineries; power stations; landing points for undersea power cables; petrochemical plants; container ports and homes. The remains of these agricultural, industrial and military stories are left behind and imprinted within the muddy land.

at the edge where earth touches ocean :

Standing at a different edge to my own, these words come from Gloria Anzaldúa as she writes:

Wind tugging at my sleeve / feet sinking into the sand / I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean / where the two overlap / a gentle coming together / at other times and places a violent clash.

From Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* (San Francisco: Spinters / Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), p. 1.

translation and transition :

These words are from Adam Kleinman as he uses this phrase to reflect the shifting nature of an intertidal zone ‘between that which was and that which may come next.’ The intertidal zone he speaks to is in the archipelago of Lofoten in Norway and I came to this phrase in reading his review of an art festival taking place there. Although the context of his writing is other than my own, his words resonate with the character of this place between land and water that I find myself in and help me to better understand it.

From Adam Kleinman, ‘Lofoten International Art Festival 2019’, *Art Agenda* (20 September 2019) <<https://www.art-agenda.com/features/288779/lofoten-international-art-festival-2019>>.

my body scaled beside the geographic one :

Karlo Mila’s words travelled through to reach these ones, as she writes:

my throat / an estuary / salt crystallizing / on the tip of my tongue / my veins / become / rivers that flow / straight out to sea

From Karlo Mila, ‘Oceania’, *New Internationalist*, 521 (October 2019), p. 31.

at the amorphous shifting body separating
this territory from that
the water
*a temporal body*⁷

*where borders are difficult to trace, to grasp, to see*⁸

*it confounds attempts at fixity*⁹
looking down at my feet
the geographic border appears a naïve one
at times
the type you might colour in as a child
but that doesn't quite encompass
its hidden complexities
seeping in and around corners
and yet still a physical reality
the waves
dividing you from me

a temporal body :

These words are from Ally Bisshop as she writes:

The wave is a temporal body; a fluid movement – that of waving. It crests in the same gesture in which it falls, scissoring the surface of the ocean body as it quivers its bowels. The wave | waving is the unquiet interval between form and movement, between the push and the suck, between being made and unmade, between all the mirrored pulses of invention and dissolution. And, it is in this interval that all of the atoms of possibility are marbled together into new and unsteady forms.

From Ally Bisshop, *Marble* (A Published Event, Lost Rocks, 2017), p. 72.

where borders are difficult to trace, to grasp, to seen :

These words come from Giuditta Vendrame who speaks to the ‘fluid, circular, universal and unifying element’ of water as she collects 50 litres of international waters from the high seas, defined by the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea as a part of the sea where no state can claim sovereignty.

From Giuditta Vendrame, ‘What Is the Purpose of Your Visit? A Journey towards the High Seas’, *Migrant Journal*, 1: Across Country (September 2016), pp. 88–97 (p. 89).

confounds attempts at fixity :

Andrea Ballestero describes the nature of water, as she writes about aquifers: bodies of underground, permeable, water/rock. She writes:

Inherently multiplicitous and predisposed to vary, water confounds attempts at fixity. Water’s defining traits are a tendency toward form-shifting, an obsession with gravity, and a material inclination to change [...]. Thinking about the materiality of water entails querying, first of all, what its corporeality might be—how something becomes a water body in a particular time and place. It also requires tracing water beyond pipes and dams, and loosening the imagination to grasp its unfamiliar forms and visualize extended techno-scientific landscapes.

From Andrea Ballestero, ‘Living with Aquifers’, *e-flux* (26 July 2019) <<https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/liquid-utility/259651/living-with-aquifers/>>.

I look out

now standing at the feet of lunar house

it's cold and windy

and I am trying to get the right angle
to see the top of the building

the building requires a tilt in the neck

I try to count the floors

but get lost on my way up

she meets me just in front of the rotating doors

and we enter

I show my passport and am given a red lanyard

escorted visitor

printed in bold

we go up in the lift

each floor the same

toilets to the right

office to the left

each with a corridor we couldn't go down

the offices are open plan

computers stacked on books so
necks are at the perfect angle

flexible desk sharing

4,200 people in this building

we read that it's just been refurbished under
the smarter working programme

we sit down in a small room

just big enough for the two of us

the wall a deep purple

strangely sketched with lines of past conversations

drawings and words rubbed off the
wall but never fully gone

we look out the window together

the plastic blinds

twisted between two panes of glass

the windows don't open she told me

we talk about the building

her thoughts

my thoughts

we leave our small cubicle and walk back to the lift

and up

all the way to the top

as we walk out along the corridor

a man in a high vis jacket

a tired smile

pushes a trolley of milk past us

unusually large bottles

green top

we turn the corner and enter the canteen

branded the sky kitchen

it's a thursday so the menu

stuck up on the wall

is chicken curry, basmati rice and side

£4.50

vegetable pasta bake served with
garlic bread and side salad

£4.50

and

carrot cake

£1.20

please note that menu items are subject to change

I look past the menu and out to the view
over london
I can see canary wharf in one direction
the shard in another
houses trace lines through patches of green
a parking lot
its roof empty
apart from a few cars neatly tucked inside yellow boxes

we wonder at the piles of rubbish on the roof opposite
we look down
the view entrancing
seeing from above

I look up
returning to the waves again
my feet in the mud
my eyes blinking against the sun

the salty air
catches in my throat

I stand at the edge of this body
discarded barricades pile up in a hidden corner
no barbed wire here
no fence of steel
no camera
wiping the sea spit off its eye
just the sea
and the words
weaving a web with the water to
stop the other from passing
no barricade needed
the water and the words are enough

together we border
we decide who is we

distancing

we construct illegality

to protect our borders

we question your authenticity

words circling

defining

creating the image

of the other

language shaping

creating boundaries and barriers of its own

constructing the border

*language is also a place of struggle*¹⁰

*enacting its own kind of violence*¹¹

the border seeping inwards

away from the sea

across the undulating land

into hospitals, schools, homes, banks,
businesses, universities

permeating

we practice/perform the border

the border

its lines confused

intricate

*ambiguous*¹²

lost in the clean pencil on paper

language is also a place of struggle :

These words come from bell hooks as she writes that 'we are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle.'

From bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, No. 36 (1989), pp. 15-23 (p. 16).

From Ally Bisshop, *Marble* (A Published Event, Lost Rocks, 2017), p. 72.

enacting its own kind of violence :

These words come from Judith Butler as she writes:

Oppressive language is not a substitute for the experience of violence. It enacts its own kind of violence.

From Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 9.

ambiguous :

This word travels from Ursula K. Le Guin as she writes of a border built between two worlds, Urras and its moon Anarres. She writes:

There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared. An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall. Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on.

From Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Avon Books, 1974), p. 1.

*obscuring its complexity*¹³

I return to the view from above
from the moon
the blue marble
the clean lines invisible
the mess of greens and browns and blues

the skin of the earth

*seamless*¹⁴

all flowing
the complexity exposed

I try to imagine what the sky
the moon
is seeing as it looks down at us

I / we gaze out to space
to find a way back to ourselves
to try and understand
to decode
lost in our own reflection

obscuring its complexity :

Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson write about the ‘complex symbolic and material implications’ of the border and how the ‘modern cartographical representation and institutional arrangement of the border as a line—first in Europe and then globalized through the whirlwind of colonialism, imperialism, and anticolonial struggles—has somehow obscured this complexity and led us to consider the border as literally marginal.’

From Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. vii.

the skin of the earth

seamless : These words return to Gloria Anzaldúa as she writes that ‘the skin of the earth is seamless. / The sea cannot be fenced / *el mar* does not stop at borders.’

From Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* (San Francisco: Spinters / Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), p. 3.

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Eloise Maltby Maland

Eloise is an interdisciplinary artist/researcher whose practice explores relationships between our language/s, bodies (human and non-human) and spaces. Having graduated from MA Situated Practice at the Bartlett School of Architecture, she is curious about how we understand our spaces, how they shape our interactions and the stories they hold. Her recent research and practice explore the relations between soil and border; the histories and futures of maps as practices of defining, categorising and conjuring; and how we engage with practices of queering and muddying the border. Eloise collaborates with others working at the intersections of art and architecture with a focus on the creative research of different spaces and ecosystems. She collaborates with artist/researcher Sara Yaoska Herrera Dixon, most recently through summer pools, an arts and spatial practice summer programme that brings people together to make and share knowledges and skills, responding to the particular landscape of the programme. Eloise is also part of subterranean, a collective with architect/artist Shivani Shah which explores the capacity of movement practice to grow empathy, draw connections and create relations between our bodies and the bodies of others (people, plants, waters). Among others, Eloise has shared work through performances, exhibitions and workshops at Model+ Festival, Barcelona; De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea; Chilean Conexion Festival, Berlin; OmVed Gardens, London; The Floating University, Berlin; School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai; and Glogauair, Berlin.