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.
AN EXCERPT FROM
A LUNAR PERSPECTIVE

endlessly trying to read the immigration acts
going lost in the words
the order of sections
the text a map of sorts
defining, outlining
legislation conjuring: 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
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
entranced with the image

I leave my word document and google earth behind

and travel out to stand

feet planted

in the mud

at the edge where earth touches ocean:

my feet slowly sinking into the space between geographic bodies

the mud a space of translation and transition:

between water and land

standing here

my body scaled beside the geographic one:

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 fort; 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 mudly land.

at the edge where earth touches ocean:

Standing at a different edge to my own, these words come from Gloria Anzaldua 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 / or other times and places a violent clash.'


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 turn 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.


my body scaled beside the geographic one:

looking out to the water

my neck slowly going red under the sun

my skin blushing as I gaze out
at the amorphous shifting body separating
this territory from that
the water

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

it confounds attempts at fixity

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

These words are from Ally Bishop as she writes:

‘The wave is a temporal body; a fluid movement – that
doing. It crests in the same gesture in which it falls,
shifting the surface of the ocean body as it queues
its bounds. The wave-movement is the unquiet interval
between form and movement; between the push and
the pull, between being made and undone, 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 Bishop, Marble (A Published

These words come from Giuditta Vendrame who
speaks to the ‘fluid, circular, universal and uniting
element’ of water as she collects 50 litres of interna-
tional 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).

Andrea Ballestero describes the nature of water, as she
writes about aquifers: bodies of underground, permeable,
water/rock. She writes: ‘Inherently multiplicitous and
predispersed to vary, water confounds attempts at fixity.
Waters’ 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
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
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

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 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

enacting its own kind of violence

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

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 Ally Bishop, 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.’


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.”

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
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 globalised through the whirlwind of colonialism, imperialism, and anti-colonial struggles—has somehow obscured this complexity and led us to consider the border as literally marginal.'


the skin of the earth
seamless

these words return to Gloria Anzaldua 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 Anzaldua, Borderlands (San Francisco: Spinsters / Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), p.3.
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 Conexcion Festival, Berlin; OmVed Gardens, London; The Floating University, Berlin; School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai; and Glogauair, Berlin.