News from Desolation. Counter-territorial hypotheses for drawing from the territory

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I am not a draughtsman.

This statement is merely the first of several arguments I shall use, which we might describe as counter-territorial. Drawing from the territory is an ambiguous statement which, nevertheless, can open up various meanings. Which territory are we talking about? A real territory, its metaphorical virtualisation, as in the so-called territory of art, and so on. There is one constant that is important to highlight: drawing from territory carries with it certain political connotations that still exert pressure on our daily lives today, above all because drawing from territory has been characterised by invariably self-serving tendencies to demarcate a sense of belonging. In 1884, the English theorist Friedrich Engels wrote a book that is fundamental to understanding these issues. Entitled “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, this book clearly explains that the delineation of territory runs parallel to the emergence of the concepts of class and the state; first, with the (already patriarchal) family drawing the boundaries of its domain; then, with the wealthier classes demarcating the boundaries of their estates; and later still, with the state drawing its own borders. The same could be said of the arts and their disciplinary divisions, which have drawn their own clearly defined boundaries right up to the present day.

Underlying all these examples is a territorial logic which, naturally, has developed the necessary antibodies to counter the emergence of counter-territorial possibilities. These have spread and are, today, a visible feature. In his film “Stalker”, Tarkovsky depicted a metaphysical territory, clearly demarcated and well-guarded. He called it ‘the zone’. Today, within the immense problem of refugee migration (which delineates another kind of territoriality—one that ‘deterritorialises’, as Deleuze and Guattari would say), ‘the zone’—as its inhabitants call it because it is a forbidden territory—has become real and hardly metaphysical at the border between Poland and Belarus. Reality imitating art in a radicalised and violent form.

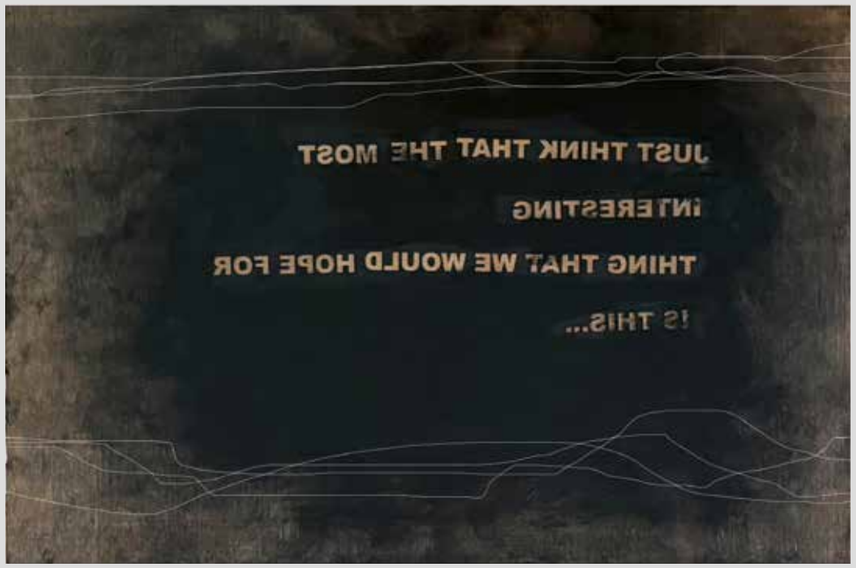
The realm of art has, too, been a ‘zone’ of ‘zones’. The dismantling of borders over the last two centuries has been arduous and protracted, met with more than a fair share of resistance. However, its inherent flexibility facilitated the transformation of impassable borders into porous ones, prior to their contemporary collapse. Drawing from the territory was also one of the cornerstones of Reason in its attempt to control nature and the natural world. Perhaps, therefore, there exists today a kind of ‘retro-utopia’, as Peter Osborne calls it, characterised by a fascination no longer with its representation – the landscape – but with the natural territory itself. A counter-territorial choice, then.

The territory of Gaza is made up of nature hidden beneath the rubble of Israeli bombings. The aggression has invented a yellow line, a drawing traced onto the territory, which, like that of art, is elastic and fluid. Genocide is depicted in satellite images as a faded drawing. The deterritorialisation to which this small strip of land is subjected is a mirror we do not like to look into. Within it, people are crammed together and dying in an ever-shrinking space, defined by the yellow line drawn across the territory. A counter-territorial drawing is therefore needed here too. Will we ever be able to visualise it?

I draw almost every day...

References:

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Fernando José Pereira, 2026
Charcoal, pastel and industrial varnish on marine plywood.