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The word *obsession*, like the word *possession*, has its root in histories of war. The Latin *obsessio* and *possessio* were two stages of besieging a city. To obsess the city is to begin to have a stronghold by surrounding it but not to have taken over its center, whereas possessing the city is to have entered and conquered the citadel.

I've been dwelling on the Moon for a while.

An engineer at NASA sent me two containers. One contained a pale beige powder and the other contained a dark gray dust. These materials — a protein derived from cow blood and the other meant to simulate lunar soil — would be the building blocks for a foundation on the Moon.

“I wasn’t made for this planet. I had no idea why I was born here,” the artist Lowry Burgess told me from his wheelchair. I had gone to Florida to interview him shortly before he died, because he loved the Moon more than me. We went to the beach and looked at the curve of the horizon together. I walked down to the sand and collected seashells that looked like the galaxy.

I asked the filmmaker Kevin Jerome Everson why he filmed the moon. “Black people can’t look up?” he said with a smile and a laugh. But he wasn’t joking.

1) *The German Space Mirror*, *Life* magazine, July 23, 1945

Last year, the 50th anniversary of the first Apollo landing brought a slew of exhibitions and texts about the Moon. The Paris Review wrote my favorite headline: *Something We Can All Agree On*.

I can think of no desire quite so widespread in this world as the longing not to live in it — the longing, that is, to live in some other world, one more just, or more interesting, or simply less hostile. Play, religion, reading, drugs: so many forms of human activity, or inactivity, struggle hopefully and tirelessly toward that same elusive goal. But the unfortunate fact of alternative realities is that precisely because they are alternative — they have an uncanny tendency to reproduce the failings of our own world.²

Most obsessions seem to take control against one's will, but I allowed myself to be captured. Of course, I had always admired the Moon, felt its phases affect me like they do the tides, but obsessing over it was sort of a choice. While this attachment I had to the Moon was supposed to be about romance, or queerness, or longing, or even just nighttime — it seemed to encapsulate so many things that mattered to me — whenever I would scratch the surface, the subject would become war, politics, colonization— not, it turns out, something to unite us.

(If I am possessed, the demon has entered me and I am fully taken over, unaware of its sway over me. If I am obsessed, I can see from the outside that something is beginning to take over. To be obsessed is to still have enough perspective to see the situation from the outside.)

Some people say history moves in a spiral, not the line we have come to expect. We travel through time in a circular trajectory, our distance increasing from an epicenter only to return again, one circle removed.³

Trump exults in rocket launch as chaos unfolds around the country.⁴

A crowd carrying pitchforks and torches surrounds a castle in a New Yorker cartoon that all my friends shared for a day. “Can’t you do this in a more polite way that I can completely ignore?” the king asks from his tower.

If I look up, it’s at the Moon. Otherwise I’m probably looking down, at my feet, the sidewalk, my phone.

2) Stump, Jordan, “Introduction,” *On the Ceiling*, Éric Chevillard, Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 2000, p. v.

3) Vuong, Ocean, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*, Penguin Press, New York 2019, p. 27.

4) *Politico* headline, May 30, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/30/trump-rocket-launch-country-in-chaos-290915>

(Horns begin to grow: “You may be hunched over your phone right now, worrying about reports that young people are growing horns on their skulls from spending too much time hunched over smartphones,” the New York Times wrote last year. Some of these horns, these bone spurs, are over an inch long, but not mine yet.)

There’s a story of a man who, to avoid the burden of being seen, started to grow into a spiral. This is dangerous because to grow inward is to disappear. His solution to growing inward is to wear an upside down chair on his head at all times. This will keep his posture upright and prevent him from coiling into oblivion.

Is renewed interest in the Moon an interest in the future or the past? If time is a spiral is it moving inward or outward?

In a Calvin Klein ad targeted to me on Instagram, the company celebrates their 50th anniversary: 25-year old Justin Bieber sits in his white briefs and watches the Moon landing on a small TV, awestruck as if live. It is as if time has completely collapsed and he exists both now and in 1969.

The Stonewall uprising was the same year, when the movement for equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people was catalyzed by a riot led by trans women of color like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera.

In 2016, the New York Times suggested that time had stopped, that there was “a glitch in the system” – because mid-century furniture won’t go away.

That was Earth’s hottest year on record.

In a book of fifty key artifacts from the Apollo missions, item number five is the “Kennedy Debate Chair, 1960”. The chair is a wooden armchair with a leather seat designed by Hans Wegner.⁵

(Should it be mentioned that Richard Nixon sat opposite in an identical chair?)

5) Muir-Harmony, Teasel, *Apollo to the Moon: A History in 50 Objects*, National Geographic, Washington D.C.2018, p. 28-43.

We're closer to the next mid-century than we are to the last one. When scientists say mid-century, it's usually about the future.

(I know it's really Mars everyone is after.)

I just learned that the first proposals for space stations were gigantic mirrors pointed back at the Earth. This seems important enough that someone should have mentioned it to me.

The Moon has always been a kind of mirror. While it reflects light toward us, humans imagine it to have a face like we do, so strange. The Moon embodies a fascinating tension in our culture — beloved by the poets and the corporations, the artists and the politicians, it is a site which reveals a problematic slippage from affection to domination.

The Overview Effect is a phenomenon in which astronauts, upon seeing the Earth at a distance, see it as “a whole system and realize that there is a connection and interdependence of everything on the planet, including human beings.”⁶ It is a paradigm shift so transformative that it has been compared to a religious experience.

*There is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.*⁷

(And the giant mirror was supposed to be a laser.)

6) White, Frank, “The Overview Effect and the Human Implications of Settlements in Space: A Personal Journey of Discovery”, *Planetary Echoes: Exploring the Implications of Human Settlement in Outer Space*, eds. Lukas Feireiss and Michael Najjar, Spector Books, Leipzig 2018, p. 47-57.

7) Sagan, Carl, *Pale Blue Dot*, Random House, New York 1995, p. 7.