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Appropriating (Sub)Urban Space: Inhabited Counter-Narratives as Resistant Spatial

Intervention in Contemporary American and German Culture

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in Comparative Literature

by

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iii

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ABSTRACT

Appropriating (Sub)Urban Space: Inhabited Counter-Narratives as Resistant Spatial

Intervention in Contemporary American and German Culture

by

Lacey Nicole Smith

This project is concerned with the concept of urban and suburban space as explored

through mediated narratives in film, television, literature, art, and other visual or narrative

media. Adopting spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre's concepts of differential space and the

right to the city, this project asserts that the hegemonic dominance of capitalist, neoliberal,

and bourgeois ideologies in American and German culture extends to both the material and

psychic production of space in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Concentrating on the way American urban and suburban spaces have been portrayed in the

media, as well as how artists from a variety of media have critiqued or responded to

hegemonic mediated narratives through narratives that center the experience of inhabitance,

this project addresses the way space can be appropriated and mutated to potentiate the

emergence of differential space, understood as space which differs from the hegemonic

norms dictated by the dominated built environment. Using close readings of texts indicative

of the kind of inhabited everyday resistance Lefebvre identifies as necessary for venturing

the right to the city to all who inhabit space, this project considers the concept of spatial

appropriation along multiple planes of resistant spatial intervention. In the process, it articulates an interartistic, transnational, and interdisciplinary methodology for approaching broad spatial questions like that of the planetary right to the city and the way collective practices of spatial appropriation to potentiate the emergence of differential space. The theoretical framework borrows from Lefebvre as well as the likes of theorists like David Harvey, Dolores Hayden, Lynn Mie Itagaki, Tobias Morawski, Jean Baudrillard, and Fredric Jameson. Primary texts investigated in the project include Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, the Duffer Brothers' *Stranger Things*, Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, the music of Vince Staples, David Wagner's *Mauer Park*, Tanja Dücker's *Spielzone*, the photo series *Berlin Wonder Land*, Stih & Schnock's *Orte des Erinnerns*, the squatting actions of Refugee Tent Action in Kreuzberg, Berlin, the citizen campaign to maintain Berlin's Tempelhofer Feld, and music videos by Emus Primus featuring Berlin's ubiquitous graffitial images. The purposes of these and other investigations throughout the project is the illuminate how a collective, planetary form of spatial appropriation might be coupled with individual acts of spatial intervention to slowly mutate the built environment and create counter-narratives about urban and suburban space that potentiate the emergence of a space more conducive to the needs of all who inhabit.

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND CONVENTIONS

Throughout this work, I have capitalized the term Black wherever it denotes a racial identity, following the convention that a term should be capitalized when referring to "a culture, ethnicity, or group of people" and where Black is understood as a politicized identity representing people of the African diaspora. (Lori L. Tharps, "The Case for Black with a Capital B," *The New York Times*, 18 November 2014). I have opted not to capitalize white both because the term does not have the same political import as Black when used as an identity designation and also in defiance of white supremacists, who capitalize the term precisely to politicize white identity. I have avoided substituting the term African American for Black in recognition of the fact that not all Black people living in the United States identify as African or American. Similarly, I follow the convention of using -x to de-gender terms like Latino (Latinx) and Chicano (Chicanx).

Moreover, to avoid perpetuating the same rhetoric of anti-urban racial bias this project critiques, I have preferred the term "people/person of color" or variations thereof (inhabitants of color, populations of color) wherever possible when referring to groups of non-white people that include more than one ethnic or racial identity, rather than using terms like "minorities" or "non-white," though I do use the latter term when referring specifically to the way white populations group all people of color together along racial lines. Where any of these terms appear in cited quotations, I have tended to leave them intact.

For similar reasons, I avoid using the term "ghetto" when referring to impoverished urban neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by people of color, instead using "ghettoized" or "ghettoized neighborhood" so as to highlight that it is the intentional actions of state and economic actors (such as redlining, racially restrictive real estate covenants, and other forms

of segregation) that force certain ethnic and racial populations into restrictive parcels of space. Finally, whenever the N-word appears, including in quotes made by a Black person, I have opted to use asterisks to censor the term out of respect for the convention that white people should never speak this term or put it in print. The asterisks are intended not to censor the original speaker so much as to censor myself as a white academic who is utilizing the speaker's sentiment in my own work. I recognize that many of these terms are fraught and that conventions about preferred terminology may change over time -- I welcome any criticism aimed at making the language in this work more humanizing and inclusive.

Introduction

Towards Differential Space

Henri Lefebvre opens "The Right to the City" (1968) with the observation that urban

society has traditionally catered only to "individual needs" that serve "a bureaucratically

managed society of consumption" without adequately addressing collective needs or

individual anthropological needs that fall outside the logic of capitalist accumulation and

bourgeois hegemony. (147) The problem with this sort of spatial organization is that it gears

all social activity in urbanized society towards labor and consumption, despite the truth that

"the human being has the need to accumulate energies and to spend them, even waste them

in play" (147). From the perspective of capitalist society, play is a counter-productive use of

one's energy, so the logic of consumerism forces the working class into increasingly

precarious forms of labor that bleed into everyday life, expending the laborer's energies

through consumption-based forms of entertainment meant to prevent their "wasting"

energies through non-commodifiable forms of play or worse, active resistance to the

hegemonic mode of production. In refusing to account for those needs that fall outside of

existing "commercial and cultural infrastructures," (Lefebvre, "The Right to the City" 147)

urban space as traditionally conceived fails to serve all who inhabit it. Neither do suburban

and rural space, once parceled off from a center city but now folded into the totalizing urban

fabric Edward Soja described as a form of postmodern geography, account for the needs of

all who inhabit space. In the half-century since Lefebvre conceived of the right to the city,

the spatial politics of urbanized society have transformed alongside the concomitant

ideological thrusts of globalized late capitalism and neoliberal austerity, creating a new

fragmented form of postmodern space that subjects inhabitants ever further while also potentiating the kind of resistant spatial mutations Lefebvre's work theorizes.

Because the postmodern urban fabric does not address all inhabitants' need for play, creative activity, and imagination, Lefebvre suggests that contemporary urban spatial codes tend to ignore a fundamental human desire "of which play, sexuality, physical activities such as sport, creativity, art, and knowledge are particular expressions and moments," which express how such pursuits "can more or less overcome the fragmentary division of tasks" ("Right to the City" 147) that characterizes capitalistic (abstract) space. Lefebvre argues that either through myopic focus on capital or through intentional devaluation of non-elite inhabitants' needs, commercially conceived urban planning typically ignores the inhabitant altogether, opting instead to base development on an "interpretation of inhabiting" that is always determined by economic actors and institutions of power who serve their own interests before those of the inhabited urban collective. ("Right to the City" 152)

As such, the logic of urban space invariably tends towards reinforcement of hegemonic power structures and thus towards oppression, segregation, dispossession, gentrification, and ultimately, the denial of basic rights to those portions of the population most overlooked by commercial interests, a disproportionate number of whom are people of color. Out of this spatial violence arises "a cry and demand" that Lefebvre terms the right to the city, defined as a "transformed and renewed *right to urban life*" that "gathers the interests…of the whole society and firstly of all those who *inhabit*" the urban environment. ("Right to the City" 158)[1] When he refers to inhabitants, he does not mean the bourgeoisie who "are everywhere and nowhere…[who] transcend everyday life, possess nature and

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[1] Emphasis is Lefebvre's.

leave it up to the cops to contrive culture" but rather to "the armies of workers with or without white collars, people from the provinces, the colonized and semi-colonized of all sorts, all those who endure a well-organized daily life" ("Right to the City" 159). Spanning a variety of cultural positions from the "suburban dweller" to the "people who stay in residential ghettos," Lefebvre characterizes the urban inhabitant as anyone who wakes each morning and goes to work only "to return the same way in the evening and come home to recuperate enough to start the next day" (159). The inhabitant is thus defined by their relationship to a work-life routine that requires continued devotion to particular everyday patterns dictated by hegemonic spatial codes that dictate how bodies may navigate urban space. Lefebvre argues that while the bourgeoisie have wealth and luxury enough to relate to the city primarily as consumers, the working classes truly inhabit space through the routine practices of everyday life that shape urban society.

In *Rebel Cities: From The Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (2012), David Harvey updates Lefebvre's concept, describing the right to the city as the collective right of inhabitants to access the city's resources, to determine how the urban environment is produced, and to decide which kinds of social formations urban space ought to facilitate. He calls the right to the city a "collective rather than an individual right" (4) not only because it is expressed collectively but also because its articulation benefits the group over the individual. Harvey elaborates:

> The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than the right of individual or group

access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart's desire. (4)

The right to the city is a call to re-imagine and re-author the urban spatial environment in ways that produce social relations more conducive to collective equity. It is also the right for inhabitant to claim authority over space and craft counter-narratives and counter-images that challenge the dominant narratives expressed through mass-mediated bourgeois hegemony, It is a theoretical model intended to help develop a more equitable urban praxis planned and produced according to the needs of inhabitants rather than economic actors. Moreover, it is a strategy for intervention and appropriation of a built environment already attuned to hegemonic power hierarchies, a survival strategy often undertaken by disadvantaged groups even when where they do not actively intend to do so. Wherever inhabitants use urban space, especially public space, in ways that diverge from their normatively intended use, they tend to do so in order to address anthropological needs that by design, the urban environment refuses to fulfill. Because of this, much of the resistance that embodies the right to the city emerges spontaneously from collective need and is articulated across multiple social registers by a diverse array of social and artistic actors, all of whom appropriate space either materially or symbolically in order to potentiate the emergence of new, more democratically imagined social codes. Consequently, myriad forms of right to the city resistance are embedded in the everyday routines of those urban inhabitants whose claims to the city and its resources are most inhibited by commercial interests.

In the twenty-first century, the revolutionary possibilities of right to the city resistance through collective spatial appropriation are nonetheless complicated by the sheer ubiquity of the transnational power structures that uphold globalized capitalism and

4

neoliberal ideology. Whereas Lefebvre initially conceived of a series of reformist

interventions that might transform urban life, the possibility of intervention alone has since

been cut off by the now-global dimensions of postmodern late capitalism. As Fredric

Jameson explains, late capitalism[2] is characterized by the expansion of globalism on a

planetary scale[3] as well as by a host of "more familiar social consequences, including the

crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global

scale" (xix). All three of these social consequences show how the working classes are

subjugated not just by increasingly alienated forms of labor but also by a globalized form of

spatial dispossession and gentrification that aspires to the eventual displacement of all non-

bourgeois individuals from any commercially viable space. For this reason, late capitalism

can be understood as a paradigm that seeks to use the power of capital to control space itself.

Accompanying this unprecedented expansion of capitalist energies is the rising

dominance of neoliberal ideology, which as Harvey explains posits that "the social good will

be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions" and which

"seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 3).

The twin forces of globalized capital and neoliberalism have helped create a global society

in which the dispossession and displacement of working class populations is considered both

natural and necessary for the continued growth of the global economy as a whole. In *A Brief*

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[2] Lefebvre uses the term *neocapitalism*, but I have adopted Jameson's definition and term.

[3] As to the changes effected by the global expansion of capital, Jameson cites "the new international division of

labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges...new forms of media

interrelationship…computers and automation, [and] the flight of production to advanced Third World

areas" (xix).

Introduction to Neoliberalism (2005), Harvey suggests that since the late 1970s/early 1980s, when world leaders like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher brought the ideals of neoliberalism to the global political and economic theatres, it has expanded to "become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" and "has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (3). Neoliberal thinking supports the elimination of social support for the working classes through privatization of public services and deregulation, assuring that only those with enough power, influence, or economic advantage can participate in shaping society. This ensures that the working classes' already miniscule share of socioeconomic power continually shrinks over time, inflaming the negative effects of social inequality on a planetary scale. What is more, since under neoliberalism, private economic actors are encouraged to seek capital gains at all costs, and since neoliberal state policies are designed to protect the free market at all costs, both politicians and economic actors are given little incentive to act in ways that benefit the greater social good, particularly as concerns the severely impoverished. Additionally, neoliberal effects like the privatization of education and the systematic weakening of labor protections have severely diminished the working classes' traditional means to resist exploitation while strengthening the chokehold that forces of power and economic actors retain over the dissemination of culture and knowledge. The net result is ever-increasing wealth inequality on a now-global scale, coupled with increasing constraint of avenues for proletarian resistance, especially as concerns access to space.

Neoliberal privatization has also meant that mass media channels are less public than they once were, increasing the influence that economic actors and institutions of power exert

over news, politics, education, popular culture, and the general exchange of information in the public domain. This has made it that much easier for the mass media to use innocuous-seeming appeals to the inherent value of free market enterprise as a coded way to deploy harmful ideologies like white supremacy, xenophobia, heteronormativity, and Judeo-Christian patriarchy in ways that intentionally disadvantage people of color, the impoverished, and all manner of itinerant populations. Whereas the progressive changes of the 1960s civil rights era rendered it socially unacceptable to use more overt language to appeal to these base ideological impulses publicly, harmful dichotomous narratives about urban and suburban space offered a way to denigrate the impoverished and populations of color while seemingly only speaking of spatial differences. That is, by coding urban poverty as widespread individual failure to participate meaningfully in a free market enterprise that is popularly perceived as economically equalizing, the systemic disadvantages and racialized segregation that helped create ghettoized urban neighborhoods could be blamed on those who suffered most from them. To name but two examples, even affluent liberals who would undoubtedly oppose overt appeals to educational segregation or job discrimination might fail to recognize the racial and economic bias wrapped up in neoliberal reforms, such as the push to increase private school enrollment through education vouchers or calls to de-emphasize affirmative action hiring programs perceived as unfairly influencing free enterprise. Such capital-serving rhetorical manipulations are reinforced by mass-mediated narratives about urban and suburban space that suggest the former is chaotic and disordered and the latter is orderly and utopian, a tendency which is especially heightened in the United States.[4]

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[4] I do not address rural space much in this work, if only because in the era of sprawl, rural space typically either gets folded into discussions of suburban space or gets included in a general discussion of the urban fabric as metropolitan regions + everything else outside them. However, at least a few theorists have argued

Over the past half century, mediated portrayals of urban and suburban space have habitually gestured to American liberty and the free market as equalizing forces in order to justify the idea that the economic disadvantages faced by working class populations in ghettoized urban neighborhoods are a natural consequence of their individual moral failures compared with bourgeois suburbanites, particularly as concerns the false perception that urban populations lack enough work ethic to get themselves out of poverty without state assistance. The proverbial boot-strap logic of American individualism within neoliberal capitalism is routinely deployed to render invisible the systemic violence of hegemony, creating a mythical narrative in which urban poverty is the result of inadequate entrepreneurial drive rather than a consequence of segregation, state violence, de-industrialization, and wealth inequality. Once extrapolated to a now-global economy, the disadvantages of the global poor are viewed in a similar light, their poverty paraded as evidence of moral failure, natural ineptitude, or an evil necessary to ensure the continued economic comfort and security elites. Because neoliberalism helps advance the idea that the free market assures all inhabitants equal economic opportunity, the failure to actually achieve collective economic stability is rarely if ever attributed to the precarious economic conditions neoliberal late capitalism potentiates. In reducing collective disadvantage to individual moral failure, these narratives also tend to obscure the ways that segregation and displacement are built into hegemonic spatial production as standard operating procedure.

Mediated narratives about urban and suburban space also tend to portray disparities between the two landscapes along racial lines, where suburbia is seen as the proper domain

that because sprawl typically eats up rural space, there is a simultaneous need to address "the right to the rural" alongside the need to address the right to the city.

of whiteness, affluence, and order and the urban is seen as a disordered, impoverished catch-all space for everyone else. Such spatial narratives assure that implications of individual moral failure are all the more potently weaponized against people of color, especially those within economically disadvantaged or ghettoized urban neighborhoods, since these populations were intentionally excluded from the suburbanization process, restricting them to increasingly dense urban neighborhoods. Having been hegemonically authored as the domain of the corrupted, criminal Other, the urban environment is seen as morally corrupt in its own right. Mediated narratives about urban and suburban space are generally controlled by the same economic actors and forces of power that exert law-and-order control over the built material environment, meaning they are an extension of hegemony's attempts to control space generally. Consequently, the fight for the right to the city is a fight to reclaim the right for all inhabitants to exist in and take up space. It is also a fight to restore authority to urban inhabitants' so that they might author and re-author (sub)urban narratives in ways that reconstruct an inhabited history of the city, maintaining cultural memory of inhabited experience while exposing the falsity of dominant mediated narratives.

Lefebvre correctly identified that it was the working class who are uniquely suited to take part in these resistant spatial interventions but he also conceived of the working class at a time prior to the totalizing neoliberal capitalism of today's globalized society. As Harvey asserts, since the late twentieth century, "the important and ever-expanding labor of making and sustaining urban life is increasingly done by insecure, often part-time and disorganized low-paid labor" and as a result, "the so-called 'precariat' has displaced the traditional 'proletariat'" (*Rebe*l xiv). Even more alienated from their labor than the factory workers who preceded them, members of the precariat find themselves in constant danger of

9

displacement by a gentrification-centric mode of urbanization that privileges capital over people. Harvey writes:

> In invoking the 'working class' as the agent of change…Lefebvre was tacitly suggesting that the revolutionary working class was constituted out of urban rather than exclusively factory workers. This, he later observed, is a very different kind of class formation—fragmented and divided, multiple in its aims and needs, more often itinerant, disorganized, and fluid rather than solidly implanted. (Harvey, *Rebel Cities* xiii)

As neoliberalism widened the gap between the economically advantaged and disadvantaged, it also eroded the precariat's ability to consolidate power through traditional, organized forms of opposition, such as labor unions and general strikes. Just as the precariat itself became more fragmented, fluid, and itinerant, so too did their means of resistance. What once may have been accomplished by a single, well-organized demonstration might now require a series of sustained discursive performances across a variety of spatial contexts (both physical and symbolic), generated from a variety of origins, and utilizing a multitude of media both tangible and intangible/digital. The precariat might thus be understood as the masses of urban inhabitants, for whom the collective right to the city can only by achieved through an explicitly anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist model of resistant spatial intervention. Precariat class consciousness must extend from a collective recognition that hegemony's fragmentation of urban space is arbitrary, that the spatial codes that govern how and which bodies may move through certain spaces are often transgressable, and that urban space can be reimagined according to their own inhabited experiences. In short, precariat

revolution must come through nothing less than an intentional re-authoring of space to produce new spatial codes and in turn, new social formations.

In centering resistance with the precariat rather than with the working classes as more generally defined, Harvey emphasizes the fragmented nature of the kind of precariat resistance that will be required to potentiate the emergence of a new kind of urban space. The right to the city offers the potential for this sort of fragmentary resistance because it is an open concept dependent entirely upon the discursive explorations used to define it. Harvey writes:

> The right to the city is an empty signifier. Everything depends on who gets to fill it with meaning. The financiers and developers can claim it, and have every right to do so. But then so can the homeless and the *sans-papiers*. We inevitably have to confront the question of whose rights are being identified, while recognizing, as Marx puts it in *Capital*, that 'between equal rights force decides.' The definition of the right is itself an object of struggle, and that struggle has to proceed concomitantly with the struggle to materialize it. (xv)

If the right to the city must proceed from a struggle to materialize new social conditions, and if force has been traditionally used to limit equal access to urban space, then the fight for the right to the city must also be a fight to produce a new kind of space less susceptible to forces of power. Yet as Lefebvre recognized in 1968, in the absence of a truly blank spatial slate, it would be difficult to imagine a new kind of space at all if one cannot first recognize how the existing built environment is produced to serve the needs of hegemonic power.

In *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre proposes that "(social) space is a (social) product" (26) and that, as with any product, space is produced, or built, according to

society's dominant mode of production. He writes, "every society – and hence every mode of production with its subservients (i.e. all those societies which exemplify the general concept) – produces a space, its own space" which it "offers up…as an 'object' for analysis and overall theoretical explication" (31). Since society is defined according to the mode of production to which it adheres, in a globalized economy, national borders no longer distinguish one society from another in an economic sense. Of course, variations in culture, sovereign power, language, and other means of delineating between parcels of this global society have not been erased, but as neoliberal late capitalism has expanded, the power afforded any one of these variations to influence the economy or the built environment has increasingly diminished. Borrowing a Deleuzian term, global cities like Los Angeles and Berlin, the cities I focus on in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, respectively, are becoming a sort of any-city-whatever, producing the same social behaviors and patterns of everyday life regardless of local variations because they are built according to the same global mode of production, sustained by a global precariat.

Accordingly, under late capitalism, the entire built environment has been rendered abstract space, a term denoting all space built according to the dominant mode of production. Abstract space is "the dominant form of space" linked with capital and wealth, which "endeavors to mold the spaces it dominates" as it "seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there" (49). In practical terms, almost the entirety of the urban and suburban built environment can be categorized as abstract space, which perpetuates the dominance of the capitalist mode of production by dictating the forms social relations may take within space. Lefebvre argues that abstract space "transports and maintains specific social relations, dissolves others, and stands opposed to yet others" (50)

12

so that it doesn't merely reflect existing social relations but actively produces and shapes them by generating, as all space does, spatial codes. These codes dictate which kind of users have access to which kinds of space, how space can be used and by whom, which explicit or implicit laws users of the space must adhere to and, perhaps most importantly, how space may be subdivided from its abstract form into the recognizable spaces and places of the built environment with their normative binary designations (public/private, inside/outside, sacred/secular, etc.).

However, because social relations continuously evolve, so too must abstract space be produced and reproduced to adapt to these evolutions and so, in turn, are spatial codes generated and re-generated. Consequently, abstract space is not static; it transforms over time, and it does so through a process of reproduction that automatically generates incremental differences. Usually these differences are either conducive to the continued dominance of the existing mode of production or easily repressed, but the potential always remains that differences not conducive to hegemonic power could generate a new type of space less beholden to hegemony. If it were possible for forces of power to exert full control over space, they could distinguish potentially subversive differences from those necessary to renew abstract space, and those deviations would be annihilated. But since space can never completely be dominated, power continually reasserts itself through appeals to spatial law and order meant to prevent any non-conducive differences from emerging. Lefebvre explains, "as a product of violence and war, [abstract space] is political; instituted by a state, it is institutional. On first inspection it appears homogenous; and indeed it serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them – in short, of differences" (285). Any seeming homogeneity within abstract space is

13

attributable to attempts by forces of power to exert more control over space. However, since hegemonic control over the social relations of space is actually far more tenuous, the possibility of producing a space that differentiates always already exists as a characteristic of abstract space itself. To this end, Lefebvre notes that abstract space "harbors specific contradictions" which "precipitate [its] downfall" (52). He clarifies:

> The reproduction of the social relations of production within this space inevitably obeys two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other. Thus, despite – or rather because of – its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space 'differential space', because, inasmuch as abstract space tends toward homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. (52)

The reproduction of abstract space always threatens the continued dominance of the very same social and political forces it seeks to uphold, creating a precarious balance of power in which the dominant system could potentially find itself at an uncharacteristic disadvantage. That this precarity is thrust upon the urban masses through increasingly fragmented labor and state-sanctioned law-and-order violence is no surprise, for without such repression it would be easy for the precariat to recognize the revolutionary potential embedded in space itself.

All spatial interventions attuned to the right to the city might thus be understood as attempts to potentiate the emergence of differential space. Scholars like Tobias Morawski recognize this when they characterize the right to the city as a goal to be achieved through collective mutation of the city space by varied means of appropriation. As I expand at length

14

in Chapter Three, Morawski borrows from the "conceptual triad" (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 33) of spatial concepts[5] that Lefebvre articulates in his introduction to identify three planes upon which resistant interventions in abstract space can potentiate the emergence of differential space and thus, of the right to the city. Morawski's tri-plane model advocates spatial mutation by a million pinpricks, metaphorically speaking, wherein no one intervention individually succeeds in transforming space but the collective effects of myriad interventions, on scales large and small, potentiates the emergence of a new urban spatial logic. This is why Morawski speaks of appropriating the city in collective terms, for it requires the collective simultaneous efforts of various types of resistant actors spread out across a *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, or counter-public. The combined efforts of resistant actors contribute to a collective re-authoring of (sub)urban space within which the potential for a new kind of social space is rendered through slow mutation and differentiation of existing spatial codes.

The various works on which I focus in the three chapters feature here might all be considered individual examples of a more broadly conceived collective tendency towards right to the city resistance and collective spatial appropriation across transnational, interartistic, and interdisciplinary lines. Moreover, each work capitalizes on the unique characteristics of its given medium to respond to a particular type of urban or suburban messaging that has become dominant in that medium over the past half century. Just as expanding hegemonic paradigms have re-shaped the urban landscape, resistance-minded writers, musicians, artists, and activists have challenged the dominance hegemony exerts

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[5] Lefebvre mentions spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces as concepts necessary for understanding how space is produced--see section XV in the Introduction to *The Production of Space* for more details. Morawski adapts these three concepts in the titles for his three planes of spatial intervention.

over space in order to expose potential fissures in abstract space and express how the urban environment could be re-shaped differently. Even within commercialized popular culture, the counter-narratives and counter-images that resistant works generate help remind one of the necessity to integrate inhabited experience into our broader cultural narratives about urban space. In focusing on collective spatial intervention as a broad paradigm for evaluating how interdisciplinary approaches to the praxis of right to the city resistance are expressed across a variety of artistic and cultural practices, this work offers an explicitly humanist analysis of the way narratives about space shape the social interactions and norms produced within space. In so doing, it contributes to the push for an interdisciplinary understanding of Spatial Studies as a productive field of inquiry unto itself and in conjunction with the traditional fields of the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Speaking boldly, the present work represents the author's attempt to demonstrate how broad, big-picture thinking about space as a conceptual lens across transnational, interartistic, and interdisciplinary lines can help cinch together seemingly disparate inquiries about culture, art, and society that may prove productive for addressing the kind of systemic issues that no one field of inquiry can address. To that end, I have arranged the three chapters in this work in such an order as to move from an analysis of the hegemonic space of American suburbia in Chapter One to the contested urban fabric of Los Angeles in Chapter Two to the development of potential differential space in post-Wall Berlin in Chapter Three, all of which are grounded by close readings of works from a variety of popular media that express how counter-narratives about urban and suburban space can help potentiate the emergence of differential space and consequently, of the right to the city for all who inhabit.

In Chapter One, I bring Lefebvre's concepts of abstract space into conversation with the historical implications of the American suburbanization process as conceived since the end of World War II, suggesting that contemporary American suburban space exemplifies abstract space. Borrowing from Dolores Hayden's comprehensive history of the suburbanization process in *Building Suburbia* (2003), I argue that all forms of suburbanization since the emergence of the postwar sitcom suburbs have been marked by an aesthetic and ideological fascination with mediated images of perfected suburban utopia that created what I term the *suburbia simulacrum*, following both Fredric Jameson's and Jean Baudrillard's conceptions of the simulacrum, particularly as relates to Baudrillard's conception of simulation in postmodern space. The suburbia simulacrum is a mediated imaginary in which suburban space is idealized, perfected, rendered aesthetically homogenous, and anesthetized of disorder. It is paired with a discourse of urban crisis and disorder (to which I devote the second chapter) that helps reinforce the perceived security of suburban space. In mediated narratives from literature, film, television, and art, the suburbia simulacrum is frequently deployed as a stand-in for the utopian ideals of suburban hegemony, wherein only those with wealth and power enough to participate in mass consumerism are permitted to take part in suburban life. I argue that the ideals communicated through the suburbia simulacrum are explicitly attuned to the social norms of white affluence, intentionally obfuscating the segregation and racialized violence of the suburbanization process so as to render it invisible. The mass-mediated imaginary rendered by the suburbia simulacrum creates an aesthetic ideal by which material suburbs continue to be measured and developed, assuring that white supremacy and bourgeois suburban

hegemony continue to replicate in the reproduction of suburban space even as contemporary sprawl renders the formally clear boundaries of urban and suburban space moot.

In order to evaluate how resistant actors across different cultural media have critiqued, challenged, or otherwise upended the suburbia simulacrum, I engage in close readings of three different exemplary American texts that approach suburban critique in unique ways: Don DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise* (1985), the Duffer Brothers' 2016 television series S*tranger Things*, and Jordan Peele's 2017 film *Get Out*. These three works are united by a common theme identifiable in many suburban counter-narratives surrounding infection and contamination as spectacular forms of crisis that help expose the false security engendered by suburban space. Namely, much like Baudrillard's description of spectacle in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), infection and contamination help render visible the machinations of both law-and-order state power and mass mediated discourses of crisis which help keep suburbanites subjected to the hegemonic spatial codes of suburban abstract space. Though each takes up these themes in a different manner, the three works I analyze all replicate the traditional mediated deployment of the suburbia simulacrum in order to subvert it through the introduction of infectious or contaminating elements into the suburban landscape. *White Noise* offers the idea of simulated infection as a way to expose the simulated nature of suburban abstract space. *Stranger Things* considers suburban space and the suburbia simulacrum more generally as agents of contamination used to manipulate suburban subjects into compliance with hegemonic norms. And *Get Out* offers an inversion of the suburbia simulacrum's tendency to present Black bodies as sources of suburban contamination, flipping this trope on its head to focus on the way suburbanites are themselves infected by hegemony's drive towards violence and the dispossession of Black

18

bodies. All three works represent discursive attempts to re-author suburban space in ways the repressive hegemony that the suburbia simulacrum helps normalize.

In Chapter Two, I draw on Steve Macek's concept of moral panic over the city and the discourse of urban crisis create narratives about racialized urban criminality and chaos that constitute the suburbia simulacrum's antithesis, always portraying the urban environment in negative relation to suburban utopianism. Both Macek and Lynn Mie Itagaki expand on the ways both mass media and popular culture have helped create narratives of urban disorder and incivility that infiltrated rhetoric repeated by politicians, journalists, economic actors, and academics from the mid-1970s onward, persisting in varying forms to this day. These anti-urban narratives are often explicitly racialized, insisting that ghettoized urban neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by people of color became sites of urban crisis due to inhabitants' innate failure to uphold the moral values of civilized society, where the notion of civility is hegemonically conceived and centered on white suburban affluence. In the discourse on urban crisis, these moral failures are considered inherent to both urban space and to the populations of color that inhabit it. Rather than using explicitly racial terms to express these biases, cultural actors who deploy anti-urban sentiment rely on coded language about urban and suburban space to demonize people of color and the impoverished while uplifting white suburbanites (coded as "the middle class") and valorizing the order and security assumed endemic to suburban space. The right of anti-urban rhetoric throughout the latter half of the twentieth century helped legitimate neoliberal divestment in urban social programs and justify the increasing and intentional inequality thrust upon urban populations, all while providing ideological support to ramp up law-and-order policing and further militarize police forces tasked with maintaining spatial security. Consequently, a direct line

can be traced between the rise of the discourse on urban crisis and the excessive police brutality that a number of high profile police shootings of Black men and women as well as the work of contemporary activists like Black Lives Matter have helped highlight in recent years.

In order to explain the tangible consequences of decades of anti-urban crisis rhetoric being normalized in mass media, I compare testimonies by Officer Darren Wilson and Canfield Green resident Dorian Johnson surrounding the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown, Jr., in Ferguson, MO. The disparities between Wilson's and Johnson's descriptions of the neighborhood in which the shooting took place, coupled with the Department of Justice's investigations about racial bias within the Ferguson Police Department, offer a concrete, material example of the potential consequences of widespread cultural acceptance of both the suburbia simulacrum and a discourse of urban crisis. Similarly, the differences in the way Wilson and Johnson were respectively questioned during their testimonies reflect the way that hegemony attempts to prohibit actual urban inhabitants from shaping their own narratives about the neighborhoods they inhabit. Comparing protests in Ferguson in 2014 to the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion in South Central following the acquittal of the police officers that beat Rodney King, I consider the way anti-urban narratives dismiss Black anger as incivil and violent while tolerating the state violence used to control abstract space. With the parallels between Ferguson in 2014 and South Central three decades earlier in mind, I consider gangsta rap as a medium to create inhabited counter-narratives about the city's urban spaces. While the earliest gangsta rap narratives from N.W.A. in the late 1980s and early 1990s established a resistant foundation for the genre, both a tendency to push for profit over discourse and over-reliance on an imaginary, exaggerated version of hip-hop Los

Angeles embodies in the concept of Compton led to the genre's eventual commercialization. As a result of the genre's popularity, proponents of urban crisis narratives instrumentalized gangsta rap's exaggerated Compton narratives as primary sources thought to legitimate the basest suburban assumptions about Black criminality.

However, following Michael Brown's death, gangsta rap re-emerged as a resistant medium for a new generation of rappers who resuscitated the genre's counter-hegemonic potential in order to advance potent critiques of problems faced by Black urban inhabitants including police brutality, the repressive violence of the American justice system, the contemporary prison-industrial complex, and the continued segregation of Black and brown bodies into ghettoized neighborhoods. Offering Compton and North Long Beach-based rapper Vince Staples as an exemplary model for this new era of gangsta rap, the latter half of the chapter contains a close analysis of Staples' 2014 debut EP *Hell Can Wait* and the thematically linked 2015 LP *Summertime '06*. On both records, Staples uses spatially-bounded landmarks and gestures towards the mappable, local history of the two neighborhoods he calls home in order to craft counter-narratives about urban space based on his own experiences growing up as a member of a local gang. Staples' work critiques both mediated panic over the city and the misleading Compton narratives of older gangsta rappers in order to forge a new discursive landscape through which gangsta rap can be as a documentarian art form to narrate the material reality of inhabited urban experience. By using his music to create a sense of place centered in the real-life neighborhoods of Compton and North Long Beach, Staples authors a new kind of narrative about life in the Los Angeles urban fabric, once that centers the Black urban inhabitant to challenge the racialized myth of urban chaos and suburban perfectibility tied up in the discourse of urban

21

crisis. Moreover, since Staples utilizes the cross-racial commercial appeal of gangsta rap to sonically insert his narratives into white suburban ears, his albums can also be considered an appropriation of the channels of communication traditionally used to advance the anti-urban narratives he critiques, thus helping potentiate the emergence of differential space.

In Chapter Three, I move away from the American context in order to offer Berlin in the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as a case study for the way urban and suburban counter-narratives and counter-images can be collectively rendered to potentiate the emergence of differential space. My choice of Berlin stems from the recognition that the unique conditions presented by the city's reunification constituted a potential rupture in the city's spatial codes that made it that much easier for the reunited city to imagine discursive alternative possibilities for how the urban environment could be reproduced. My analysis here begins with the various groups of squatters and artists who squatted abandoned buildings and engaged in other forms of resistant occupations in Berlin's central neighborhoods surrounding Mitte in the days and months immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall, a period also know as the *Wende*. I draw on the photos and interviews from *Wende* squatters published in the 2014 photo series *Berlin Wonder Land* in order to consider how the group drew on influences from Berlin East and West to initiated a series of resistant spatial intervention strategies that helped create a resistant toolkit for future resistance within Berlin's collective of resistant actors. Though the reunited city's development follows a commercial image of the city as a cosmopolitan hub for commercial investment has hastened gentrification of the spaces the squatters once occupied, their contributions to a discursive current of spatially minded resistance helped make the New Berlin into a city

where precariat resistance continues to slowly mutate the spatial codes produced by the urban environment.

Drawing on Lefebvre's and Harvey's concepts of right to the city and Morawski's analysis of collective spatial intervention in the city, I assert that Berlin's status as a global city with a unique contemporary history of spatial resistance makes it a useful starting point for imagining how the precariat can create a global counter-public through a collective tendency towards recurrent spatial intervention. Using Morawski's Lefebvre-inspired three plane conception of collective spatial intervention strategies as a guiding framework, I consider six different artworks or political demonstrations that have contributed to collective spatial appropriation of Berlin's cityspace on both the physical and symbolic planes, all of which expand upon the initial strategies of the *Wende*-era squatters. These six examples include political demonstrations (Refugee Tent Action's squatting occupation in Kreuzberg in 2012-2014 and Demokratische Initiative 100% Tempelhofer Feld's citizens' referendum against development of Tempelhofer Feld in Neukölln in 2011), artistic works (Stih & Schnock's 1992 memorial *Orte Des Erinnerns* and East Cross Project's 2013 graffiti documentary/music video project *Berlin Spricht Wände*), and literary works (Tanja Dücker's 2000 novel *Spielzone* and David Wagner's 2013 essay collection *Mauer Park*), all of which contribute their own counter-narratives that add up to a counter-image of Berlin that supplants the image of the city as commercially conceived. By examining the efforts of the Wende-era squatters in concert with these six works, one identifies how the collective activity of Berlin's counter public (which Morawski calls a *Gegenöffentlichkeit*) makes spatial intervention continuously renewable and expandable in Berlin's cityspace, offering a model that can help support the development of resistant spatial practices in other cities as

23

well. Through the slow mutation of its spatial codes wrought by collective spatial appropriation, Berlin has become a model for the kind of world city where precariat resistance remains possible even within the oppressive tendency towards global gentrification that marks the twenty-first century.

The kinds of spatial questions this work takes up are big ones and much like the overlapping strategies required to potentiate differential space, answering them will require a far more concentrated effort from a far more diverse array of cultural and social perspectives than any one piece of research could provide. Yet by using the vast category of space as a conceptual point of entry to address questions that remain unsolved through more specific modes of inquiry, one may begin to see the lines of connection that help clarify seemingly opposed social tendencies. The academic approach to answering these questions is no more or less flawed and limiting than any other, so the author remains under no illusions that the work at hand constitutes anything more than a single contribution to a broader discursive drive toward searching for a way out of the totalizing and flattening hegemonic power structures that hem the vast majority of the world's population into precarity. Yet as the arguments presented make clear, even one contribution to a wave of critical discourses about space can help potentiate the emergence of something different, something more equitable, something more attuned to the collective needs of all who take up space. May the findings of this work as a whole be considered such a contribution.

Chapter One
Infected Suburb, Perfected Suburbia:
The Suburbia Simulacrum and Counter-Narratives of Contamination

We bulldoze small and inconvenient fields of strawberries
or corn and replace them with the increasing complexity
of everyday life; promised lands, the right of "choice,"
boundaries, color-schemes, paper mills, etc. There are
golf courses, chain restaurants, six brand-new gated
communities, and, in the edge-towns to the north, there is
debate about public housing and how to shift responsibility
for the poor. The book calls it "suburbanizing the conventional
inner city," and argues that it is "excessively conventional."
But this place is a flat surface. This place is distinct from other
places and at the same time isn't. This place is really convenient.
There are all sorts of differences that already exist. The book
tells us we resemble virtual neighborhoods and according to the
experts the virtual is "more compelling" than we are.
                                        -Danielle Dutton*, S P R A W L*

Introduction

Suburbia. The word alone an image--a collection of images, really--evoking the

perfected built environment of late capitalism as made in the likeness of the American

dream. A term indicative of both the urbanist turn of modernity that signaled the postmodern

epoch and the late twentieth century ideological turn towards neoliberal capitalism,

suburban space exists today in a form paradoxically resembling yet fundamentally differing

from the form it took in the years following World War II. A type of space which is always

produced, always planned, always ostensibly engineered to foster a sense of community that

is itself premised on perpetual collective consumption within blissful domesticity, suburban

space ensures its inhabitants operate on a social and cultural level according to patterns of

everyday life dictated for them by the hegemonic demands of the dominant mode of

production. As Guy Debord suggests in *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), "Urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism, which, true to its logical development toward absolute domination, can (and now must) refashion the totality of space into *its own peculiar decor*" (121). By this light, suburbia must be read as the mid-century modern ranch house inside of which this peculiar decor has been arranged.

The overarching goal of this project is to evaluate and re-imagine the role that spatially-minded resistance can play in challenging neoliberal late capitalism and its dominance over space itself. A central concern of the work at end is the degree to which hegemonic narratives about urban and suburban spaces can be challenged, critiqued, or inverted in order to generate resistant counter-narratives. To that end, this chapter focuses on how images of suburbia since WWII came to dominate the American cultural imaginary, and how contemporary narratives of suburban infection challenge the forces of power and capital that rely on the continued prominence of suburbia as idealized image. Embedded in this analysis is consideration for how American suburbanization since WWII contributed to economic and social conditions that helped cement neoliberal late capitalism as the globally dominant mode of production today, a topic to which I will return in subsequent chapters. Neoliberalism, as David Harvey defines it, is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade," all of which is undergirded by state support for "an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (2). In effect, neoliberalization is characterized by a galvanization of the free market wherein it is seen as a self-correcting force that lends itself to progress, even as the more direct political project of

neoliberalization has been "to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (Harvey 19). Given the ubiquity of suburban sprawl in the contemporary American landscape, as well as the integral role played by the private housing market and private lenders in the economic crash of 2008, it is no stretch to suggest that both American consumerism and suburban sprawl are part and parcel of the long-term process of both American neoliberalization over the last half century.

Similarly, given the degree to which today's globalized markets are enmeshed with the creation of wealth in the American private sector, it follows that both the material and symbolic expansion of the wealth gap and other forms of socioeconomic inequality in today's American landscape correspond with a similar expansion of inequity on a now-global scale. Hegemonic bourgeois tendencies connected with the American suburban landscape are thus recognizable in today's globalized expressions of wealth segregation, most notably global gentrification, making an investigation of American suburbia critical for understanding broader global trends of neoliberal spatial dispossession. Thus, while this first chapter leads with an investigation of the role that mediated images of suburbia have played in creating ideological support for American neoliberalization and anti-urbanism, it does so in order to consider the role that American ideals of wealth and whiteness *vis a vis* mediated imaginaries like suburbia play in the development of more globalized expressions of spatial dispossession.

This chapter considers the various ways that contemporary American literary, television, and film texts respond to and critique a mediated imaginary commonly known as suburbia. I term this mediated imaginary the *suburbia simulacrum* following Jean Baudrillard's definition of simulacrum as "a model of a real without origin or reality" (1) as

27

well as Fredric Jameson's conception of simulacrum as an "identical copy for which no real has ever existed" (18). My theoretical approach draws extensively from both Baudrillard's work on simulation and Henri LeFebvre's work on the production of space, particularly the way Lefebvre's concept of abstract space helps clarify how the built environment is produced to foster social interactions that benefit the existing mode of production. Both theorists conceive of material space as the product of complex interconnecting social customs and rules, which Lefebvre terms spatial codes, that dictate how material reality is perceived and understood, as well as who has access to which kinds of spaces and for what purposes. While Lefebvre illustrates how space is produced and reproduced according to spatial codes that inform social practice, Baudrillard demonstrates how such spatial codes rely upon a "simulated generation of differences" (3) that deter individuals from recognizing the contradictions inherent to space. This chapter also borrows further theoretical support from Dolores Hayden's work on suburban architectural history, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of pseudoindividuality, and Edward Soja's theory of postmodern geography, among others, in order to clarify how the suburbia simulacrum functions as a tool for maintaining the hegemonic dominance of ideologies and values most commonly associated with white suburban affluence.

Using an interartistic mode of analysis in order to consider contemporary suburban narratives from various types of media, I identify the recurring theme of suburban infection and/or contamination as a common way of subverting the primacy of the suburbia simulacrum and illuminating the contradictions of American suburban space. While inquiries into the social effects of suburban idealization are prevalent in the social sciences, my close inter-artistic analysis of texts here represents a uniquely humanist investigation of

the role the suburbia simulacrum plays in shaping social codes about suburban and urban space. To this end, this first chapter culminates in a close analysis of three contemporary texts that use infection or contamination of suburban space to critique the suburbia simulacrum: Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise* (1985), which considers simulated suburban infection, the Duffer Brothers television series *Stranger Things* (2016-ongoing), which considers suburbia as the always-already infected, and finally, Jordan Peele's film *Get Out* (2017), which subverts the suburbia simulacrum in order to expose it as a source of infection in its own right. All three of these texts make use of the unique types of suburban imagery and aesthetics traditonally used in their respective medium in order to subvert and critique the ideological assumptions implicit to such imagery. Considered in concert, these three texts offer a model by which the real, material spatial violence of suburbanization that is normally obfuscated by the suburbia simulacrum, such as segregation, displacement, and other forms of dispossession, can be recognized, critiqued, and ultimately resisted. As such, each text also offers a medium-specific model for the artistic appropriation of images of suburban space. As such, each text helps potentiate the emergence of what Lefebvre terms differential space, or, space that resists, rather than upholds, the existing hegemonic order.

Abstract and Differential Space

One of Lefebvre's central arguments in *The Production of Space (*1967) is that all produced space within the built environment can be called abstract space, that is, space built to uphold the dominance of the existing mode of production. In this sense, suburbia represents abstract space *par excellence*. Abstract space, which Lefebvre says is both dominant and where centers of wealth and power are concentrated, produces particular

social codes by which it "endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there" (49). Critical to Lefebvre's argument is the recognition that forces of power can only ever *endeavor* to control space since, like time and energy, space is an expression of material existence itself and thus can never totally be dominated. (Lefebvre 12) Though forces of power continuously attempt to control it, abstract space nonetheless "harbors specific contradictions" which are "liable eventually to precipitate [its] downfall" (52). This is because reproduction of abstract space requires both the "dissolution of old relations" and the simultaneous "generation of new relations," meaning that as it is reproduced, abstract space "carries within itself the seeds for a new kind of space," whichLefebvre terms differential space. (52). While abstract space "tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities" (52), differential space emerges when peculiarities and differences are embraced. Thus, hegemonic dominance over abstract space requires regular systemic repression of any and all naturally occurring contradictions or differences that would potentiate the emergence of a differential space, with different spatial codes. As such, abstract spaces become sites of ideological manipulation and control, where inhabitants and users are shaped by spatial codes that help reproduce existing power hierarchies at the expense of potential change.

Given the nature of abstract space, Lefebvre asks: "Why do ['users' of this space] allow themselves to be manipulated in ways so damaging to their spaces and their daily life without embarking on massive revolts?" (51) His question is important, for it points to some factor outside of basic social relations that carries undue influence on users of abstract space and diverts their collective attention away from their own manipulation. Lefebvre's assertion

is that some part of abstract space "has been usurped by a part of that space endowed with an illusory special status--namely, that part which is concerned with writing and imagery, underpinned by the written text (journalism, literature), and broadcast by the media" (52). He suggests that the illusions which this special part of abstract space produces "[amount] to abstraction wielding awesome reductionistic force *vis-a-vis* 'lived' experience" (52). Here, Lefebvre describes exactly that which I have termed the *suburbia simulacrum*, since it is a mediated imaginary ideal that prevents subjects from recognizing both the "frightening capacity for violence" (52) inherent to suburban abstract space and the undue influence of those private market actors that benefit most from maintaining suburban space as it is. The suburbia simulacrum can thus be considered a tool deployed to reduce the likelihood that abstract space will be wrested from hegemonic control. As a mediated illusion that is nonetheless taken as a reflection (albeit a flattering one) of material reality, the suburbia simulacrum obscures spatial contradictions, the recognition of which might otherwise compel subjects to resist the dominant social order.

Hegemony requires that the dominant order of abstract space remain unchanged because, as Louis Althusser has also claimed in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1969), a primary goal of the various ideological state apparatuses that order abstract space, such as the school and the nuclear family unit, is to reproduce the conditions of labor necessary for the continued success of the existing mode of production, including the reproduction of human labor capital. That is, if suburban children are to become suburban subjects and reproduce the labor of their parents, then both their capacity for resistance as well as their ability to recognize the contradictions of the space they inhabit must be dulled and repressed. Lefebvre similarly suggests that hegemonic control of abstract

space represses adolescents' ability to "challenge either the dominant system's imperious architecture or its deployment of signs" (50), thereby ensuring that abstract spaces produce adolescents who grow into productive adults and form their own equally productive family units. Thus, abstract spaces like the suburbs reproduce both the social order and the human labor capital necessary for the continued dominance of that order, thereby also ensuring the continued dominance of existing spatial codes and the mode of production they are designed to benefit.

Another contradiction of abstract space that Lefebvre highlights is "that between the appearance of security and the constant threat, and indeed the occasional eruption, of violence" (57). This contradiction assumes particular importance within suburban space, since the contradiction between violence and the appearance of security points to some of the most potent material consequences of continued adherence to the suburbia simulacrum, such as the way that pretensions of suburban safety and order were used to justify violence against people of color in places like suburban St Louis (Ferguson, MO and the 2014 shooting of Mike Brown) and suburban Orlando (Sanford, FL and the 2012 shooting of Treyvon Martin). As I will assert in Chapter Two, racially-charged suburban violence in the twenty-first century is a very real consequence of both the way the suburbia simulacrum influences how affluent white suburbanites understand the spatial codes of the suburban spaces they inhabit and also how anti-urban narratives are created in negative relation to the perceived order and security of suburban abstract space. As Lefebvre elaborates, abstract space creates a spatial economy that "valorizes certain relationships between people in particular places (shops, cafés, cinemas, etc.) and thus gives rise to connotative discourses concerning these places; these in turn generate 'consensuses' or conventions according to

which, for example, such and such a place is supposed to be trouble-free" (56). That is, the accepted convention that suburbia is primarily a space of white affluence directly impacts how suburbanites perceive non-affluent people and people of color who enter suburban spaces, namely, by making them appear to residents as potential threats.

Thus, in the abstract space of the suburb, the façade of security requires a spatial consensus that upholds the existing order and hierarchy of power in order to maintain the illusion that the suburban landscape itself keeps the elite economic classes safe from outside threats. Of course, in maintaining suburban spatial codes, the safety of any body seen as Other to suburban space is never implied, and is in fact always threatened. "Naturally enough," Lefebvre writes, "[spatial consensus'] response to class struggle, as to other forms of violence, amounts to a formal and categorical rejection" (57) but the inverse is also true; the repressive violence exerted against class struggle is, through social consensus, perceived as an acceptable and necessary maintenance of order rather than an unacceptable and unnecessary escalation of state violence. In this way, the assumed safety and order of suburban spaces is protected at the expense of those perceived as a threat to suburban hegemony. It is the same logic that undergirds state laws like the so-called castle doctrine, which allows one to use deadly force in defending one's home, as well as stand-your-ground laws, which remove the requirement of exercising any possible safe retreat before deadly force in cases of self-defense.[6] Both legal precedents are premised on the idea that suburban safety and order must be defended at all costs, and both contributed to a society in which a

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[6] For further information, see Mark Randall and Hendrick DeBoer's "The Castle Doctrine and Stand-Your-Ground Laws" (2012).

suburban resident like George Zimmermann[7] could stand in his suburban front lawn and shoot an unarmed person of color like Treyvon Martin with impunity.

As an exemplary abstract space, the suburban environment thus derives its order from spatial consensus, but it is a consensus which is always dictated by those economic elites who exert the greatest control over the means of production. Forces of power in suburban spaces deploy apparatuses of both repressive and ideological force in order to maintain the myth of safety and seclusion to which narratives of infection and contamination act as a mocking and incisive counterpoint. Suburban infection narratives expose the suburbia simulacrum as a camouflage for the very real violence that buttresses all of abstract space, and which, in the case of suburbia, is often quite literally built into that space by material effects of law and order such as walls, gates, and surveillance. As a result of such widespread illusory processes, which are supported by the mediated repetition of simulacra like suburbia in popular culture, collective understanding of material reality in postmodern late capitalism is supplanted by the abstraction of the imaginary, gesturing toward Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulation.

The Suburbia Simulacrum

Jean Baudrillard's central assertion in *Simulacra and Simulaton* (1981) is that within late capitalism, simulation constitutes "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal," which he describes as "a map that precedes [and] engenders the territory" (1). He suggests that simulation has made the real indistinguishable from the

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[7] As I mention in the second chapter, Zimmermann himself does not have a strictly Caucasian background. My assertion here thus relies on the recognition that even as a man with Afro-Peruvian dissident, Zimmermann's attachment to his suburban gated community allowed him to internalize suburban hegemonic ideals that typically center whiteness by portraying people of color as a threat to suburban order.

hyperreal and, in turn, reality indistinguishable from the virtual. In the era of the postmodern hyperreal, Baudrillard argues, all of society has been rendered "not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (6). The concept of suburbia as simulacrum thus reflects how the advent of television, the development of suburban mass production, and all the other attendant societal transformations that accompanied the postwar transition to both late capitalism and postmodernity contributed to a proliferation of mediated images of suburban space that coalesced into an imaginary ideal: suburbia. These media images are continually reinforced through repetition, omnipresence, and a degree of consistency, particularly when they come from television, where images of a single suburban space are reproduced weekly in each episode of a series and where the same commercials offer the same domestic products (and consequently, the same model of consumption-based salvation) regardless of which programming one watches. In the era of the hyperreal, virtual suburban images form as much if not greater a part of one's concept of suburbia as one's own encounters with tangible suburban spaces. The far-reaching nature of mass media images ensures that all individuals who interact with the same types of media are treated to the same types of suburban images, solidifying a collective image shared by a given culture. It is for this reason that I can utter the word *suburbia* and be relatively certain that a room full of Americans will have roughly the same idea in mind (white picket fences, manicured green lawns, houses all in a row, kids playing safely in yards, picture windows), even if individual variations on that image may differ in negligible ways.

As the suburbia ideal became dominant, the very tangible neighborhoods that sprouted up in the last remaining open spaces of the American expanse became paradigmatic

renderings of "generations of a model of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1),

developments built from maps that quite literally preceded their existence, formulated

according to perfected models and ideals dictated and renewed through the suburbia

simulacrum. The unreal nature of suburban development is reflected in Baudrillard's

depiction of Disneyland, and specifically the park's Main Street USA, as a facsimile of

suburban America. Baudrillard claims that "Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the

'real' country, all of 'real' America that *is* Disneyland...Disneyland is represented as

imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and

the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the

order of simulation" (12). While Main Street USA may provide the suggestion of a main

street that could be in any town, anywhere in the United States, a sort of Deleuzian any-

Main Street-whatever,[8] it is nonetheless a tangible imitation of an ideal image. Generic and

non-distinct, it points to its own status as artifice, simply by suggesting that there is a real

space upon which it is based. Where the reality principle is understood as the idea that there

is a distinct material reality one can identify separate from simulation, Baudrillard continues,

"it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the

fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle" (12-13).

Baudrillard calls Disneyland and other simulacra "[deterrence machines] set up in order to

rejuvenate the fiction of the real" (13), which are necessary precisely because hyperreality

threatens to expose the attendant non-reality of the existing order, and in turn the non-reality

of the forces of power that maintain and rely on that order. Though the suburbia simulacrum

does not create a tangible false representation, as with Main Street USA, it nonetheless

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[8] See *Cinema I: The Movement Image* (1983), in which Gilles Deleuze uses "any-space-whatever" to describe
a space without certainty, that "loses its coordinates" and is reduced to pure affect (110).

performs the same function by using perfected aesthetics to gesture toward its own fabricated or fictional nature and reassure the reality principle of the material suburbs on which it is ostensibly based.

Further, the suburbia simulacrum creates a spectacle of showing itself as a false and aesthetically perfected imaginary rendering of suburban utopia in order to conceal the false nature of the various spectacles of law and order used to maintain the illusion of safety in material suburban environments. In so doing, the suburbia simulacrum helps prevent suburban subjects from recognizing their own subjugation and deters any resistance that might otherwise result from recognition that suburban order is merely a facade. To this end, Baudrillard also discusses the concept of scandal as a type of simulacrum, citing it as an example of how forces of power reinforce the illusion of control. Here, spectacle and crisis can be understood as any catastrophe or newsworthy event that requires a responsive show of law and order and dominates a given news cycle, whether the crisis is man-made, as in reports on criminal violence, or occurs naturally, as in coverage about the aftermath of natural disasters. The media circus that surrounds scandals and crises offers forces of power space to respond and, in so doing, to re-establish order, since "denunciation of scandal is always an homage to the law" (Baudrillard 14). Such events introduce an element of chaos to which power is compelled to respond and demonstrate the necessity of its own continued existence, even when and where the media's reporting overstates the degree of danger such spectacles pose. Just as the artifice of Disneyland gestures toward the supposed reality of the world around it, the emergence of chaos in the form of spectacle gestures toward the realness of forces of law and order used to control it.

Thus, the mass media helps continually perpetuate the idea that crisis and spectacle are omnipresent threats to the safety of abstract spaces so that forces of power might continuously establish and reestablish their necessity, reinforcing the reality principle that protects their position. Baudrillard writes:

> The only weapon of power, its only strategy against this defection, is to reinject the real and the referential everywhere, to persuade us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy and the finalities of production. To this end it prefers the discourse of crisis, but also, why not? that of desire. 'Take your desires for reality!' can be understood as the ultimate slogan of power since in a non-referential world, even the confusion of the reality principle and the principle of desire is less dangerous than contagious hyperreality. (22)

In calling hyperreality 'contagious', Baudrillard implies that the hyperreality engendered by simulation is tantamount to an infectious contamination of the reality principle, against which the dominant order seeks collective and continuous inoculation. It is in this compulsion to inoculate that society continues to expand the "production and reproduction of the real" in an attempt to "restore the real that escapes it" (Baudrillard 23). In highlighting the role desire plays in this discourse, Baudrillard gestures simultaneously to the continuous commodity consumption that upholds simulacra and to the utopian nature of expressions of simulacra, in which the fulfillment of desire is offered as a contrast to crisis. Thus, simulacra function simultaneously as models of artifice by which the illusion of the real can be maintained, and as aspirational models for producing a hallucinatory, utopian resemblance to the real. By constantly suggesting that their own perfected models reflect, rather than dictate, the material lived experience, simulacra produce controllable desires which supplant

any spontaneous impulse for change or resistance lying dormant within a society. In the specific case of the suburbia simulacrum, material suburban developments are modelled after a mediated suburban imaginary to which they can never measure up so that their inadequacies in that measuring can stand as proof positive of their own realness; the proverbial white picket fence never materializes, and the reality principle remains intact. So long as these spaces maintain an illusion of realness, they remain subject to the hegemonic forces of law and order employed in their maintenance, and any crisis of infection or contamination that challenges that law and order offers a new opportunity to reassert the illusion and squelch potentially revolutionary resistance.

Here, Baudrillard finds consonance with Lefebvre, specifically Lefebvre's theory of contradictory space. Lefebvre describes contradictory space as a liminal space between the abstract and differential, occuring at a moment in which the usually suppressed contradictions of abstract space somehow make themselves known. This occurs because in abstract space, Lefebvre asserts, "desire and needs are uncoupled, then crudely cobbled back together," (Lefebvre 309) creating a "dialectical link between need and desire" which "generates fresh contradictions – notably that between liberation and repression" (Lefebvre 353). Given abstract space's tendency towards contradictions, Baudrillard's assertion of "Take your desires for reality!" as the ultimate slogan of power reflects the degree to which forces of power exert violence and repress dissent through the manipulation of desires, recasting contradictory impulses as undesirable and non-normative. The middle-classes and economic elites, driven by consumption, becomes the locus of such dialectical processes, and simulacra like suburbia are used to manipulate their desires and hide the more or less constant introduction of new contradictions into abstract space. Since Lefebvre also notes

39

that "abstract space, which is the tool of domination, asphyxiates whatever is conceived within it and then strives to emerge" and since abstract space also "stands opposed to all difference, whether actual or potential" (370), contradictory space can be understood as abstract space within simulated hyperreality, abstract space controlled through to the forced elimination of difference and the inoculation of potentially infectious contradictions. Contradictory space, by these lights, might thus be understood as the simulated space of simulacra, and in particular, the suburbia simulacrum.

Lefebvre's discussion of contradictory space specifically takes aim at the contradictions of "urbanness" (386) and, consequently, of suburbanness. He writes:

> Illegitimate hybrids of country and city in no way escape the domination of space, as some people – particularly those who inhabit such spaces – seem to believe. On the contrary, these bastard forms degrade both urban and rural space. So far from transcending the two, they thrust both into a confusion which would be utterly without form were it not for the 'structure' imposed by the space of the state….Though seemingly secured against any violence, abstract space is in fact inherently violent. The same goes for all spaces promising similar security: residential suburbs, holiday homes, fake countrysides and imitations of nature. (387)

For Lefebvre, the violence of dominated abstract spaces like the suburbs is precisely a product of their imitation of security, and their adherence to a sense of law and order that cannot readily be identified as simulated. Abstract spaces, especially contradictory abstract space, are thus spaces ordered by simulacra. They pacify those who inhabit them into believing they are secure so that inhabitants might become all the more susceptible to the

violence inflicted upon them, but they also reinforce adherence to the existing models of law and order which are purported to produce safety. Further, power protects itself from the exposure of its own contradictory non-reality by means of a discourse of crisis, for crisis produces fear and confusion and provides power an emergency to which it might respond and prove its own necessity. Thus, one can conceive of contradictory abstract space, like suburban space, as space which relies on an illusion of its own purity and security – a security that can only be maintained by the measured and periodic reintroduction of violence in the form of crisis. The violence of contemporary sprawl remains hidden by the shimmering chimera of the suburbia simulacrum, and it is for this reason that I consider how literary and artistic works use the theme of infection to challenge, problematize, or otherwise reconceive contemporary suburban space in ways that confront the primacy of the suburbia simulacrum. However, in order to better understand how the images that comprise the suburbia simulacrum became so dominant in the collective American cultural imagination, it is first necessary to backtrack a bit in order to consider the history of the American suburbanization process, and its role in shaping the suburbia simulacrum.

Historicizing Suburbia

In her comprehensive overview of the history of suburban expansion in the United States, *Building Suburbia* (2003), urban historian Dolores Hayden outlines seven patterns of urban development since the first American suburban developments emerged around 1820, including: (1) early 19th century movement from urban centers to city edges; (2) the planned and designed "picturesque enclaves" of the 1850s; (3) early 20th century development along streetcar lines; (4) pre-WWII mail-order and do-it-yourself house construction kits, which

allowed the average person to buy a suburban lot and build their own home; (5) mass-produced post-WWII housing developments of nearly identical homes, typified in 1950s and 1960s sitcoms; (6) the 1970s and 1980s emergence of "edge nodes" characterized by highway-adjacent outgrowths of commercial space serving a residential consumer base; and (7) current suburban sprawl towards any remaining "rural fringes" outside the reach of existing urban and suburban development. While aspects of all seven patterns contribute to a composite image of American suburban space, the last three patterns (post-WWII sitcom suburbs, 1970s/80s edge nodes, and contemporary sprawl) have historically been afforded aesthetic dominance in the development of the suburbia simulacrum, partially because they all followed the advent of film and television. The repetition of fabricated descriptions and images of suburban space in literature, film, television, and other media, as well as the tendency for architects and developers to build subdivisions according to imagined plans and grand community designs, all contribute to a hyperreal image of suburban space that formed the suburbia imaginary. Further, as Amy Maria Kenyon suggests in *Dreaming Suburbia* (2004), suburbanization was necessary for economic and social recovery immediately following WWII, but also became "an integral part of the postwar imaginary" in which "a white, middle-class suburban lifestyle was commodified and equated with 'America' and with 'American national identity'"(1). In part because they created a temporary economic boom that contributed to post-war recovery and in part because helped valorize the consumer capitalism perceived as America's primary means to resist the influence of Soviet-style socialism, the suburbanization patterns that proliferated from the 1950s onward were touted as integral parts of American identity in ways that previous suburban patterns had not been. The suburbia simulacrum, in being apprehended as a rose-

tinted expression of what was nonetheless considered suburban reality, and in gesturing toward an imagined perfect living environment to which material suburban spaces might aspire but never quite measure up, thus helped obscure the segregation, spatial repression, and urban dispossession endemic to the postwar suburbanization process, all while recasting the glittering ideal image of suburbia as the normative landscape in American everyday life. When the discourse of urban crisis to which I devote the next chapter became concretized through mass media discourse in the 1980's and 1990's, this was possible only because suburbia had already come to be seen as the normative American landscape.

To speak of suburbia means to speak of the multivalent ideas of prosperity and happiness embedded within the so-called American dream, which Hayden characterizes as a longing for "house plus land plus community" (Hayden 8). Ideological maintenance of this dream demands the continued tractability of suburban residents as perpetual consumers who, through their consumption, continually renew and update the aesthetics of a specifically suburban model of American prosperity. As such, suburbia requires mass consumption for both its genesis and its continued renewal; the very consumption that created suburbia in turn continuously sustains it. Within suburbia, there is no need or desire that the market does not attempt to meet and, once met, no shortage of new needs it can create, ensuring cyclical consumption. Suburbia thus functions as both the default backdrop of American consumerism and as a mediated ideal in which happiness stems first and foremost from continuous commodity acquisition. It compels suburban subjects to establish visual proof of their prosperity and ambition in order to affirm their continued suburban belonging, lest that belonging be questioned, leading to their exclusion and an attendant loss of social power. Suburban inhabitants are compelled adhere to the consumption embedded in suburban

43

spatial codes because within its suburban spatial logic, only continuous acquisition can prove one's normativity, happiness, and domestic contentment. In deploying the typically white, upper-middle class, patriarchal space of suburbia as the preferred milieu of the American dream, the suburbia simulacrum offers an ideal version of this dream that is implicitly, when not explicitly, tied to the hegemonic dominance of white supremacy, the patriarchal nuclear family, Judeo-christian heteronormativity, and the bourgeoisie that benefits from the continued idealization of all.

Amplifying this effect is the degree to which private market capital interests were embedded in the postwar suburbanization process. As critics like Kenyon have noted, the private-market interests of realtors, housing manufacturers, banks, and others invested in suburban development were supported and protected by the federal government through laws, codes, and tax subsidies established to facilitate rapid suburbanization (Kenyon 25-27). In Hayden's estimation, "excessive private consumption was not inevitable" but was rather "the result of sustained pressure from real estate interests and their allies in government to marginalize the alternatives to unlimited private suburban growth" (18). While even the earliest forms of suburbanization tended to place profit ahead of the needs and interests of residents, earlier patterns at least attempted to build neighborhoods that might foster community. Postwar suburbanization, by contrast, evolved to follow Fordist models of mass produced and far-flung housing developments overseen by central firms, de-emphasizing models of self-built development like those that had typically benefitted the working class and populations of color at the beginning of the 20th century (Hayden 111). Profits, rather than community, became the central focus of mass-produced suburbs, so developers built as many homes as possible as quickly as possible while spending as little of

44

their own money as they could get away with on establishing the necessary infrastructural and municipal support for developments.

While it is true that part of this housing boom correlated with an unprecedented need for new housing following the end of WWII,[9] this motivation seems less potent when one considers how little was done in this period to address housing needs for impoverished people and people of color. For one, discriminatory practices like redlining and segregation precluded large swaths of the population from participating in suburban expansion. Redlining, a system of property appraisal which designated certain neighborhoods as "unsuited for public and private growth" (Lindstrom xxiii), was introduced with the creation of the Home Owners Loan Corporation in 1933 and endorsed by the Federal Housing Administration in 1934, where it remained standard practice until the Fair Housing Act of 1968, though it continued thereafter in so-called soft forms, such as realtor steering. (Kenyon 26) The rating system was typically justified as a way to protect property values, but in practice meant the forced exclusion of people of color, single women, and the economically disadvantaged from the suburbanization process. This is evident in the FHA's phrasing to describe neighborhoods designated red, or the slightly less harsh designation of yellow, where it characterized such neighborhoods by the "infiltration" of "lower grade" or "undesirable" populations, suggesting that such neighborhoods were less desirable because they "[lacked] homogeneity" (Madrigal). In addition to rendering these neighborhoods undesirable, redlining also made it impossible for those relegated to such neighborhoods to receive mortgage assistance from the federal government.

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[9] As Hayden notes, "1945 was the sixteenth [year] in a row when new construction did not meet the demand for new housing" (131) and "demand for shelter was expected to grow as waves of demobilized veterans, wartime savings at the ready, married and formed new households" (132).

Under a policy of redlining, mere proximity to neighborhoods designated red or yellow was enough to lower perceived property values in surrounding areas, de-incentivizing lenders' desire to approve loans for residents in those neighborhoods. In some cases, lenders financned suburban development only after land was somehow separated from areas inhabited by people of color. For instance, when a developer wanted to create a community near the self-built African-American suburb of Eight Mile-Wyoming outside Detroit in the early 1940s, federal loans for the project were only approved after the construction of a concrete wall to separate the neighborhoods (Hayden 111-12). To this day, the practice continues in less direct forms, such as when banks disproportionately deny mortgage loans for qualified applicants in neighborhoods dominated by people of color. (Badger) But even where redlining has been eradicated, its effects continue to shape whether or not communities of color have been able to accrue as much wealth as their white counterparts. These effects are quantifiably measurable, as Ta-Nehisi Coates observes in his article "The Case for Reparations" from *The Atlantic* (June 2014):

> Black families, regardless of income, are significantly less wealthy than white families. The Pew Research Center estimates that white households are worth roughly 20 times as much as black households, and that whereas only 15 percent of whites have zero or negative wealth, more than a third of blacks do. Effectively, the black family in America is working without a safety net. When financial calamity strikes--a medical emergency, divorce, job loss--the fall is precipitous.

The precarious financial fate to which communities of color have been relegated today can be directly traced to the practice of redlining decades before. The practice precluded Blacks

and other minorities from developing the kind of wealth equity that comes from homeownership, in turn limiting how much wealth could be passed down over generations.

Owing in part to the fact that processes like redlining de-incentivized development in more densely populated urban neighborhoods, private-market, single-family based suburban development became more lucrative for private investors in the postwar years than did development of higher-density spaces, such as public housing. The 1944 GI Bill also incentivized private homeownership, since it provided just enough to make a single-family home in a mass-produced development affordable for the middle class. Consequently, postwar development of single-family homes skyrocketed even as the need for public housing to serve lower-income populations grew. Since the federal government effectively subsidized private market interests at the expense of community-minded development, and since the state made little effort to thwart processes like redlining, the government effectively guaranteed that the most dominant landscape of American culture became synonymous with white affluence. White flight was thus, in effect, a federally supported phenomenon meant to bolster the postwar economy.

The example of Levittown helps illustrate the degree of ideological manipulation that economic actors exerted during the suburbanization process. In *Crabgrass Frontier* (1985), suburban historian Kenneth T. Jackson discusses how the developers Levitt and Sons made their eponymic housing development, Levittown, synonymous with postwar suburbia. The first Levittown was constructed between 1947 and 1951 on Long Island using a Fordist assembly line model.[10] Through mass production, development moved at an unprecedented

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[10] Jackson discusses the degree to which the building process was highly regimented to insure that houses were built quickly, having been "divided into twenty-seven distinct steps" (234). Jackson writes, "Crews were trained to do one job—one day the white-paint men, then the red-paint men, then the tile layers. Every possible

pace, with as many as thirty houses erected daily when production was at its best. (Jackson 235) Levitt and Sons "built thousands of almost identical 800-square-foot houses, with a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, one bath, and a driveway but no garage" (Hayden 134), creating a sparse but easily reproducable model for the suburban single-family dwelling. In so doing, they established an aesthetic of repetition and homogeneity that would become the standard by which a majority of future suburban spaces would be evaluated, for better or worse, since as Jackson writes, "this early Levitt house was as basic to post World War II suburban development as the Model T had been to the automobile" (Jackson 236). Ease of production, the low price point, and the housing demands of the post-WWII period insured that the Levitt model was outlandishly profitable. But perhaps even more importantly, the FHA's preference for mass-market suburban developers like the Levitts, as well as their tacit subsidization of mass development by means of the GI Bill, insured that these developers appreciated greater access to concessionary loans, with little regard for the fact that the Levitts openly stated that their developments would serve Caucasian populations exclusively. (Lambert) Because of its profitability and despite its numerous infrastructural flaws,[11] developers across the country rushed to mimic the Levitts' model, including replicating the Levitts' overt preference for white racial homogeneity. Over time, even as new developers established their own spins on the Levitts' model, a standardized white suburban aesthetic emerged, replacing more diverse images associated with pre-WWII

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part, and especially the most difficult ones, were preassembled in central shops, whereas most builders did it on site. Thus, the Levitts reduced the skilled component to 20-40 percent...Vertical integration also meant that the firm made its own concrete, grew its own timber, and cut its own lumber. It also bought all appliances from wholly owned subsidiaries." (234-235)

[11] Hayden notes that the Levitts "found it convenient to have someone else pay for the infrastructure of the city they were creating" (136), offering one particularly illustrative example about how in Levittown, the Levitts "did not plan for urban-scale sewage disposal" and instead "used individual cesspools—not even septic tanks—attached to each house, rather than building sewers" (137) despite protests from the Nassau County Department of Health.

suburbanization patterns. Thus, Levittown became the base image of suburbia from the mid-twentieth century onward, even as that image was grounded from the outset in white supremacy.

While critics like John Keats, in his 1957 novel *The Crack in the Picture Window*, drew attention to the diminished quality of life many suburbanites associated with postwar development living, such criticism did little to dam the mass exodus of white bodies out of urban spaces from the 1950s onward, in no small part because of the rapid expansion of the "baby boom" population. Moreover, the incredible financial burden placed on both local and state governments to fill in the gaps left by predatory developers, who had avoided building the infrastructure necessary to connect their developments to existing municipalities, diverted funds and resources away from the urban environment to the suburban environment. This tendency, combined with the necessity to establish new local governments to account for communities in what was previously undeveloped space, weakened the political potential of urban populations in the same breath that it robbed those same populations of the tax revenue necessary to assure the continued infrastructural strength and future economic prosperity of urban neighborhoods. When viewed in the context of the discriminatory practices used to prevent populations of color and the impoverished from participation, suburbanization must be read as an intentional and systematic redistribution of wealth and power away from more diverse urban populations to a fleeing white bourgeoisie who sought escape from an urban population they would later cast as violent, chaotic, and morally corrupt in order to retroactively justify their segregation.

The political prominence of the suburban voting bloc today is the result of a concretization of white (and predominantly male) political power following the proliferation of new suburban governing bodies during the suburbanization process, which effectively weakened the political power held by urban populations, especially underrepresented populations of color. For instance, in "Race and Suburban Sprawl" (2003), Ronald Hayduk notes that "suburbanization led to the creation of tens of thousands of new local governments," (144) all primarily serving white populations, meaning "there are over 90,000 governments across the country today, most of which are new suburban political jurisdictions that came into being only in the last fifty years" (153). Political fragmentation is the result, particularly because "many residents who formed such new local governments did so to segregate themselves from racial minorities as much as for economic reasons" resulting in "American public policy—at the federal, state, and local levels—[that] is biased against urban renters in favor of suburban homeowners, urban mass-transit users in favor of suburban car owners, and urban infrastructure of most kinds in favor of exurban and rural development projects" (Hayduk 157). Postwar suburbanization and later, suburban sprawl, insured that the concerns of white suburban residents achieved primacy and political support through targeted dilution of the political power of urban communities of color. This occurred concomittantly with the media's attempts to devalue and demonize urban populations through a spectacular discourse of urban crisis.

White affluence has thus always been both the cause for and the ideological engine that drives postwar suburbanization. Sprawl, which Hayden's *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (2004) defines as "unregulated growth expressed as careless new use of land and other resources as well as abandonment of older built areas" (7), is a direct outgrowth of

unchecked mass consumption and private market housing development from the postwar

years onward. Though the expansion of suburbia certainly stems from the way the suburbia

simulacrum has increased bourgeois demand for suburban housing, it has also sharpened the

effects of white supremacy and bourgeois classism that have always been a part of

suburbanization while making their effects seem more diffuse. As profit margins for

developers increased, so too increased the power of the suburban middle class over

American society, and sprawl proliferated. As sprawl proliferated, so too did the ideological

models that upheld and supported suburban space. As Hayden writes, in becoming "the

dominant American cultural landscape, the place where most households live and vote"

(*Building* 3), suburban space and the hegemonic ideals of white, middle-class American

society became normative components of American identity even as progressive social

change from the Civil Rights era onward pushed the mass media, forces of power, and

economic actors to disavow direct linguistic adherence to these ideals. The creation of the

suburbia simulacrum and its inverse twin, the discourse of urban crisis, were thus both

attempts to obscure white, bourgeois hegemonic ideology through more abstract narratives

of suburban utopia and urban dystopia. Moreover, contemporary sprawl has diminished the

borders between urban and suburban space enough to reverse the initial urban to suburban

direction of white flight, increasing the influence of white affluent suburban interests in

urban spaces. Suburban sprawl, and later, urban gentrification, thus further solidified the

political, social, and economic dominance of predominantly white American suburban

populations over the same urban populations from whence they once fled. Consequently,

sprawl can be regarded as a "socially destructive" expansion of the suburbanization process

to urban and rural space (Hayden, *Field* 11), albeit one which helps highlight how anti-urban

51

rhetorics have always primarily targeted the populations of color that suburbanites associated with urban space more than the urban landscape itself.

Suburbia Televised

While private development and commodity culture certainly helped shape Americans' ideological attachment to suburbanization, it was mass-mediated narratives about suburban space that helped suburbia became the omnipresent American landscape. This effect was heightened all the more when television use became widespread during the 1950s. As the economy boomed and more people could afford televisions, images of American suburban space were beamed into living rooms across the nation, becoming an integral aesthetic component of the very environments they depicted. The culture of mass consumption that television helped facilitate contributed to the proliferation of what critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have called pseudoindividuality. In *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (1944),[12] Adorno and Horkheimer describe pseudoindividuality as an illusion of individuality that masks the domination implicit in mass consumerism. It is a form of subjugation in which "the peculiarity of the self is a socially conditioned monopoly commodity misrepresented as natural" and within which "all such progress of individuation [occurs] at the expense of the individuality in whose name it [takes] place, leaving behind nothing except the individuals' determination to pursue their own purposes alone" (125). Thus, one major contradiction of suburbia regards how it is a landscape produced explicitly to produce malleable subjects, hemming them into

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[12] It is worth noting here that Adorno and Horkheimer based this chapter of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on their experiences in California during their period of American exile, and that the Hollywood entertainment industry informed much of their theory. No surprise then that the theory seems to adequately clarify the role played by consumerism and entertainment in solidifying postwar American late capitalism and mass culture.

the mass-produced and homogenizing consumer culture by which they are dominated while also gesturing toward a veneer of individual freedom in the form of a dizzying array of niche marketing interests, customizable personal styles, perpetually upgradeable commodities, and the mythos of self-determinism implied by homeownership. Adorno and Horkheimer's vision of a consumer culture hypnotized into consumption by the pacifying effects of entertainment was thus realized precisely in the emergence of television, and especially in the advertising it helped disseminate in private, rather than public, spaces.

Echoing Adorno and Horkheimer's assertion that the moviegoer "perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he just left" (99), suburban television images offered both an aspirational model for suburban living as well as reassurance that the existing built environment was both contiguous with and not quite as perfect as the ideal media image. As Lindstrom and Bartling note:

> Corporate interests carefully cultivated a consumerist identity that drew inspiration from and reinforced the suburban landscape. Media representations of American life began to be inundated with images of suburban families equipped with a plethora of consumer items. Television sitcoms such as *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* not only provided normalized versions of the American family but also contributed to the production of patterns of consumption whereby the production sets of network studios became templates for nationwide styles. (xix)

Product placements, as well as the use of television stars as aspirational role models for idealized suburban character types, thus made sitcoms into arbiters of American tastes. What began with the 1950s suburban sitcoms evolved into the creation of the suburban family

53

sitcom as a genre unto itself, with a veritable trove of examples from the 1960s and 1970s (*The Brady Bunch*, *My Three Sons*, *Eight is Enough*, etc.) to the 1980s and 1990s (T*he Wonder Years*, *Growing Pains*, *Home Improvement*, etc.) and well into the new millennium (*Everybody Loves Raymond*, *The Middle*, *Suburgatory*, etc). By and large, sitcom suburbs have remained aspirational, in that they tend to portray versions of suburbia in which affluence and community belonging are givens. Further, though the premises and approaches of suburban sitcoms have varied and evolved over time, the aesthetics of the recognizable suburban setting, particularly the suburban home interior, have remained more or less unchanged throughout, as has the tendency to keep the nuclear family at the center of an array of suburban supplementary characters including extended family, neighbors, coworkers, and schoolmates. Characters orbiting around a central nuclear family thus fulfill a vision of the American dream as home + land + community, where the family is at the center of the home and neighbors are at the center of the community. (Hayden, *Building* 8) Variations in the content of suburban programming over time have done little to change the tendency to focus on the nuclear family suburbanization model.[13]

It is of course true that there have been many sitcoms that present a more diverse version of the suburban model either in economic terms (*Roseanne*, *Married with Children, etc.*) or ethnic/racial terms (*Family Matters*, *The George Lopez Show, Fresh Off the Boat, Black-ish etc.*). Undoubtedly, such shows meaningfully contribute to more widespread

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[13] As if to bolster the universal appeal both of the nuclear family and of the suburban landscape, even supernatural families (*The Munsters*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch)*, anthropomorphic animal families or families blended with anthropomorphic creatures (*Dinosaurs*, *Alf*), cartoon families (*The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *Daria*), and other variations have been integrated into the nuclear family + suburban setting sitcom template. An entire subgenre of suburban sitcoms is of particular interest because it is premised around aliens masquerading as humans (*Mork and Mindy*, *3rd Rock from the Sun*, *The Neighbors*). Here, the alien or alien family adopts the suburban lifestyle precisely because it is the most readily available way to blend in as humans, implying that living in this way is simply what all humans do.

representation of people of color and the working class in television and an investigation of how such shows create suburban counter-narratives would be a worthy expansion of the current research. Aesthetically and thematically, however, many of these more diverse shows are still constrained by the necessity to portray their characters as blending in with or adapting to a suburban setting conceived in the normativized image of the white upper-middle class. Thus, they still may rely on and perpetuate the suburbia simulacrum, even when and where they critique or satirize it. Moreover, since these sitcoms expand the mediated suburban imaginary to visually include those who have historically been barred from suburbanization without necessarily challenging the dominance of white suburban spatial codes, they may inadvertently give the illusion that suburban space has already been de-segregated and become more diverse, a fact that doesn't hold up to quantifiable evidence. For instance, Lorrie Frasure-Yokley notes in *Racial and Ethnic Politics in American Suburbs* (2015) that while racial and ethnic populations have been steadily increasing in the suburbs since the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is also true that whites still make up the largest proportion of suburban residents. In fact, Frasure-Yokley observes that "the contemporary rise in minority representation in U.S. suburbs has not yielded substantial declines in residential segregation" and in some cases has even paradoxically contributed to "increasing minority segregation and isolation rather than racial/ethnic diversity" (5). It seems that even when integrating into the suburbs, white portions of the suburban population still tend to remain separate from suburban populations of color, with white residents even going as far as to re-segregate themselves when they sense processes of integration underway. The proliferation of sitcoms in which families of color successfully

55

integrate with their white suburban neighbors is thus an extension of the suburbia simulacrum's tendency to portray an aspirational ideal rather than a material reality.

The reality of contemporary suburban re-segregation is especially true when it comes to schools. As Jeff Chang points out in *We Gon' Be Alright: Notes on Race and Resegregation* (2016), suburban schools have steadily been resegregating since desegregation reached a peak in 1989. White spatial isolation thus continues to inform urban and suburban spatial politics alike even as mediated portrayals of suburban life gesture towards greater diversity. Chang writes:

> Only 8 percent of white students attend high-poverty schools, while 18 percent of Asians and 48 percent of Black and Latino students do. Eighty percent of Latino and 74 percent of Black K-12 students attend majority-nonwhite schools. But whites remain the most segregated racial group of all. The average white student attends a public school that is 75 percent white. That fact mirrors another: the average white lives in a neighborhood that is 77 percent white--a rate of racial isolation that is at least twice that of all other racial groups. (70-71)

The conclusion that must be drawn is that while populations traditionally barred from suburban life are increasingly finding themselves integrated into the political economy of sprawl, the assumption of increased diversity and suburban integration that such statistics ought to point to has not as of yet been met with an attendant alteration in the ideological and social tendencies that undergird suburban white supremacy. The difference now is that mechanisms of segregation which once relied on exclusion of outsiders from suburban space have morphed into a spatial economy in which affluent whites remove themselves from diversifying neighborhoods and move to economically segregated spaces of affluence,

regardless of the urban or suburban designation. Thus, while representation of people of color in suburban television programming may indeed reflect the increased number of people of color living in suburban space, this increased representation is not necessarily indicative of any real alteration in the whiteness and classism associated with the suburbia simulacrum. Regarding *Modern Family* (2009-ongoing), one of the most popular examples of a contemporary suburban sitcom, Chang observes that it presents "middle-class people of color who [are] just like middle-class white people, except for the color of their skin" since the show merely "[augments] the stock white nuclear family with an extended clan that [features] a gay couple with an adopted Asian American child, and a patriarch with a gorgeous Latina wife and child" (55). To the extent that *Modern Family* can be considered indicative of the contemporary suburbia simulacrum, diverse characters in contemporary suburban sitcoms often act as little more than token gestures to de-emphasize the prominence of liberal, elite Whiteness, and do little to challenge the dominance of the suburbia simulacrum.

Even beyond the dominant role that television narratives[14] play in perpetuating the suburbia simulacrum, the influence of these mediated stories arguably remains ancillary to that of television advertising. Commercials and product placements have always been a part of American television, introducing consumers to the various commodities necessary for a satisfactory suburban life and echoing the promise of the culture industry to produce "a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need" (95) that perpetuates consumption. In fact, since commercials repeat the exact same images and occur even during programming unrelated to

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[14] For all the tendencies of suburban sitcoms I have noted, the reader can surely identify a number of examples I have not included, demonstrating the ubiquity of the suburban imaginary. This is all the more true when considering that for sake of space I have intentionally limited myself to sitcoms, without even considering the numerous examples of television dramas, documentaries, soap operas, game shows, reality programming, etc. that would reinforce the point.

a suburban setting, they offer a greater degree of reinforcement (and hence, normalization) of the suburbia simulacrum. Historically, they have also reinforced oppressive suburban gender roles by making a specific target of the feminine body and its natural biological functions while also promoting beautification, maternal excellence, and domestic homemaking as necessary for women's participation in a normative suburban lifestyle. As such, the advertised feminine ideal reflects and reinforces the patriarchal nuclear family model that is central to the suburbia simulacrum.

As television viewing increased over time, so expanded the ideological manipulation of advertising to include a variety of nuanced market niches, assuring that "something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape" (Adorno and Horkheimer 97). Further, since programming and commercials alike center the patriarchal nuclear family, both programming and advertisements portray the act of television viewing as a normative and beneficial family pastime, increasing the likelihood of continued viewing. Television has played an active role in shaping the values of American society, and in so doing has assured that the American economic model marrying consumerism to suburbanization has continued apace without significant opposition from the very subjects it manipulates. Television helped brand suburbia as the ideal setting for everyday American life, the preferred landscape in which to situate the various commodities required for happiness. As soon as television and advertising rendered it standardized, recognizable, aspirational, and most importantly, purchasable, the idea of the suburb quickly coalesced into the suburbia simulacrum, translating consumer demand for new suburban housing into the concretization of the American landscape as suburban sprawl in the image of suburbia.

Sprawl and the Ideology of Suburbia

To the extent that television and mass consumerism helped contribute to the proliferation of sprawl, they also helped contribute to the kind of consumerism associated with a turn towards postmodernity that occurred over the course of the late twentieth century. In relation to this alteration, and perhaps reflecting Fredric Jameson's assertion that the spatial logic of the simulacrum has altered concepts of time to produce a sort of postmodern nostalgia he calls historicism (18), narratives of suburban life still tend towards nostalgic aesthetic markers associated with the post-WWII sitcom suburbs. One conclusion that might be drawn is that the aesthetics of sitcom suburbia are associated with a simpler time, a sort of new american pastoral, prior to the globalizing effects of postmodern late capitalism. An unintentional effect of this privileging of prior eras is a nostalgic longing for the ideologies that upheld suburbia in that form, colored by the contradictions of suburban space that finally started to become apparent by the end of the twentieth century. Perhaps as a result of these unearther contradictions, but more likely as a response to socioeconomic and technological changes, suburban narratives since the beginnning of the twenty-first century onward have increasingly been integrating nostalgia for the 1970s and 1980s, most notably those years immediately prior to the end of the Cold War, into the aesthetics of the suburbia simulacrum, even as suburbia's base mediated aesthetics remain firmly rooted in the postwar era.

In *SuburbiaNation* (2004), Robert Beuka suggests that the continued prominence of postwar suburban ideology even in the face of cultural change may derive from the way that suburban space acts as the "material counterpart to specific drives and tendencies in American culture apparent from the postwar years onward," which he identifies as "a

massive expansion of the middle class, a heightened valorization of the nuclear family and consequent reification of gender identities, a trend -- both utopian and exclusionary in nature -- toward cultural homogenization, and a collapsing of the distinction between public and private space" (2). Whether the suburbia simulacrum established these cultural tendencies or if the tendencies themselves contributed to the emergence of the suburbia simulacrum, in either case, they cannot be unburdened from their relationship to material suburbs, for it is in the suburbs and through the suburbs that they acquire their specificity. That the suburbia simulacrum is now evolving to account for later eras is less an evolution in suburban ideals themselves so much as an evolution in the decor of America's collective cultural nostalgia, reflecting a culture that can no longer remember the sitcom suburbs as well as it can remember the 1970s and 1980s suburban sprawl that was made in their image.

The suburbia simulacrum thus evolves over time without ever escaping its role as a continuation of a prior pastoral ideal,which Lindstrom and Bartling suggest is connected to "the notion of North America as a space of uncharted settlement that serves as the antidote to the corrupting nature of urbanized civilization," which "with the closing of the frontier in the 1890s…was reenvisioned in suburbia" (xx). When postwar suburbanization evolved into contemporary sprawl, it retained this pastoral characterization, even as the typical geographic distinctions that once defined the suburb in locational relationship to an urban center have disappeared in favor of what can best be described as a regional and totalizing urban fabric[15] of interlinked metropolitan areas that have subsumed prior urban/suburban borders. Further, Lindstrom and Bartling observe, the pastoral ideal was only ever employed as a marketing tool to sell suburbia, creating a discontinuity marked both by "rampant

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[15] To borrow a term from Andy Merrifield's *The New Urban Question* (2014).

development" and the "[widening] gulf between the ideal and suburban reality" (xxi). The result is what spatial theorist Edward Soja has called postmodern geography, a term indicative of the expanded urban fabric in which distinctions between the urban, suburban, and rural become blurred, or disappear entirely.

Using Los Angeles as an illustrative example in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), Soja writes, "for at least fifty years, Los Angeles has been defying conventional categorical description of the urban, of what is city and what is suburb, of what can be identified as community or neighborhood, of what copresence means in the elastic urban context" (245). Soja goes on to reiterate how "underneath this semiotic blanket there remains an economic order, an instrumental nodal structure, an essentially exploitative spatial division of labor" that has been "increasingly obscured from view" so as to conceal the dissolution of geographic borders once considered distinct and which lend the appearance of order to the urban environment. (246) He argues that "when all that is seen is so fragmented and filled with whimsy and pastiche, the hard edges of the capitalist, racist, and patriarchal landscape seem to disappear, melt into air" (246), an idea reflected in the increasingly coded way white hegemony penetrates urban and suburban narratives. Here, Soja's observations on Los Angeles and postmodern geography can be extrapolated to account for the entire American landscape as re-imagined through suburban sprawl. Soja's concepts reveal the degree to which mediated spatial imaginaries like the suburbia simulacrum conceal the spatial violence of segregation and dispossession inherent to the suburbanization process. The continued valorization of suburban ideals tmakes it difficult for seemingly wholesome and American values like the nuclear family and "boot-strap" work ethics to be recognized as

61

indicators of the continued stratification of American society along racial and socioeconomic lines, and within a patriarchal and heteronormative social hierarchy.

Within the postmodern geography of the American twenty-first century, where distinctions such as urban/suburban/rural have lost relevance, the suburbia simulacrum nonetheless remains, ensuring that the illusion of these distinctions stays intact. This is because, as Baudrillard would suggest, the hegemonic powers that most benefit from the continued valorization of the suburbia simulacrum rely on the continued belief in spatial delineation between urban chaos and suburban order to assure suburban elites that they can remain safely removed from dangers perceived as inherently urban. Simultaneously, the expansion of suburbia to the entire urban fabric by means of sprawl has allowed white bourgeois suburbanites and their ideals to penetrate predominantly urban spaces through processes like gentrification, further blurring the social distinction between urban and suburban space without dimishing racial tensions or contributing in meaningful ways to socioeconomic integration. In the postmodern geography of the American twenty-first century, only the suburbia simulacrum remains as a means to define suburban space, but it also remains as a foundational component of white American identity, with vast real-world consequences. As Chang saliently argues:

> Cities are becoming wealthier and whiter. Aging suburbs are becoming poorer and darker. Those suburbs are being abandoned, policed, and contained the way that communities of color in inner cities were for the past century. And all of these problems are interconnected: the fate of Sanford, Florida, where Treyvon Martin was killed, tells us about the fate of San Francisco; the fate of Brooklyn tells us about the fate of Ferguson. (72)

Given this stark reality, it becomes all the more necessary to consider the theoretical implications of the suburbia simulacrum in relationship to the social codes it reinforces, the types of resistance it attempts to preclude, and ultimately, the illusion of a contained and impenetrable suburban space it offers in order to solidify the continued adherence of white suburban subjects to suburban spatial codes and the segregation on which they are based.

It is clear that while the material practices of suburbanization remain objectively repressive and unequal, the persistence of the suburbia simulacrum offers suburban residents an illusion that absolves them of their participation in and reproduction of that repression. So long as the lived environment of suburban space appears to reflect a now-diversified ideal, residents can assume that the potential pitfalls of a segregated, fragmented metropolitan environment remain fundamentally elsewhere to their own lived space, and that their own actions do not contribute to racial and socioeconomic repression. It is an illusion which has contributed to the processes of resegregation that have been intensifying since 1989, a process which Chang argues "relies on the restoration of racial innocence, which absolved generations of their responsibility while allowing inequality to evolve and intensify" (26). By gesturing toward the inherent spatial contradictions and oppressions suburban space continues to uphold and exacerbate, cultural narratives which critique or subvert the suburbia simulacrum play a crucial role in challenging the dominance of white, affluent suburban ideals. To do so, such narratives frequently rely on themes of infection and contamination as forms of crisis which, in their general lack of controllability, directly challenge the assumed safety, order, and perfectability of suburban space, revealing the contradictions of the suburbia simulacrum and the myth of suburban safety it uses to obfuscate systemic racism and classism.

Crisis, Infection, Contamination

If stretched to include a variety of potential permutations, the dual themes of infection and contamination can be identified in part or whole within a vast swath of critical suburban narratives. This is partially attributable to the way the suburbia simulacrum has focused on making suburban space seem fundamentally safe and secluded, existing in a space both geographically and ideologically removed from the potential threats endemic to the urban environment. Recasting the urban and its diverse population as a threat to suburban safety, rhetorical gestures toward the safety of suburbia reveal a thinly veiled preference for adherence to racial purity in what has always been a predominantly white space. Suburban spatial codes and the social practices they produce thus reinforce bourgeois hegemony while simultaneously insuring ideological consensus among the white and affluent. That is, at least from the sitcom suburbs onward, the intentional self-sequestration of the affluent white population from the more racially, economically, and culturally diverse urban core assured the reproduction of later generations of white suburban inhabitants who not only tended to adhere to their parents' ideologies but also remained mostly unexposed to alternative social practices outside suburban environments. This rendered it virtually impossible for even the most revolutionary among suburban inhabitants to meaningfully challenge suburban hegemony.

If the initial intention of suburbanization was to facilitate white flight and to create enclaves of white affluence that could insure the impoverished, non-white, and otherwise non-normative Other was held at a distance from the assumed safety of suburban space, then in the era of neoliberal sprawl, the end result of suburbanization has been the spatial domination of the entire metropolitan landscape by white supremacy. Narratives of infection

and contamination are thus explicitly or implicitly a way of indicting both neoliberal late

capitalism and patriarchal white supremacy by attempting to illuminate how the suburbia

simulcarum creates a myth of suburban spatial purity that masks the violence of

suburbanization. While examples of these tendencies are abundant in contemporary

suburban narratives, the three texts highlighted here -- Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*

(1985), the Duffer Brother's TV series *Stranger Things* (2016-ongoing), and Jordan Peele's

film *Get Out* (2017) -- offer unique perspectives that, taken together, help clarify gow

suburban infection narratives challenge the primacy of the suburbia simulacrum.

Though I focus here on only three illustrative texts, observant readers will recognize

these tendencies in any number of contemporary suburban narratives spanning a variety of

media, ranging from Todd Haynes' 1995 film *Safe* to the haunting suburban landscapes in

the photography of Gregory Crewdson or Todd Hido, to the black metal band Deafheaven

singing of "[coughing] ceaselessly into the night" in "scorching reimagined suburbia" on the

song "Luna" (2015). That these themes seem to repeat across a variety of literary and artistic

media and have become more prominent throughout the past few decades is indicative of

how increasingly recognizable the myth of suburban order has become. These and other

suburban infection narratives perform the dual work of clarifying how suburban space tends

to prevent subjects from being exposed to the contradictions of abstract space (thus

preventing the possibly of their resisting their own subjugation) while at the same time

reinforcing the need to adhere to existing modes of law and order as protection from crises

borne of those same contradictions. If the suburbia simulacrum allows one to believe that

suburban space is controlled, protected, and safe, then narratives of infection expose

suburban space as a site of false security, mediated illusion, and violent hegemonic dominance by means of a simulated spatial unity.

Suburban narratives of infection and contamination support critiques of this sort primarily because infection always has the connotation of being simultaneously temporary and permanent and therefore unpredictable and uncontrollable. In suburbia, the spectre of infection represents an uncontrollable anomaly in a space built precisely to facillitate hegemonic control over abstract space. If a virus can be contained, there is the potential that it can be eradicated, but if it cannot be contained, it is likely to spread, to contaminate, and to multiply in strength. If something becomes contaminated, there is the potential that it can be purified and returned to its original state (or at least close to it), but there is also the potential that it will be forever tainted. Thus, the degree of uncertainty and lack of control implied by infection and contamination signifies the suburban subjects' fear and doubt that suburban space is not as safe as it seems and that forces of law and order do not have as much control over the space as they claim. Because of the way infection and contamination expose the vulnerability of suburban space, subjects within suburban infection narratives often begin to actively look for or recognize heretofore hidden contradictions in the spaces they inhabit, and in response, begin to rebel against the ideologies embedded in suburban spatial codes.

Many suburban infection narratives are part of a genre that literary critic Bernice M. Murphy has referred to as the suburban gothic. In *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (2009), Murphy explicitly ties the sub-genre to narratives which investigate the contradictions of suburban space, which she characterizes as the tension between the suburban dream and the suburban nightmare. She connects this suburban dream/nightmare

66

dichotomy to the discomfort created by multiple suburban binary tensions such as that between the suburb as "a place insulated from the dangers of the outside world" and "a place in which the most dangerous threats come from *within*, not from without" or the opposition between the suburb as "a safe place for children" and as "a hunting ground for pedophiles and child murderers" (Murphy 3). Such narratives proliferate in part because they expose underlying doubts about the safety promised by the suburbia simulacrum. Whether discussing a zombie apocalypse, as in George Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), or a monstrous sexually transmitted infection, as in David Robert Mitchell's film *It Follows* (2014), suburban gothic infection narratives challenge the implied safety of suburbia by presenting it as a space in which danger is always already potentiated by the environment itself, thus "playing upon the lingering suspicion that even the most ordinary-looking neighborhood...is only ever a moment away from dramatic (and generally sinister) incident" (Murphy 2). The suburban gothic focuses predominantly on the horror of living in an environment which can only ever gesture towards its own insulated safety, making infection and contamination a dominant theme throughout the sub-genre.

While more literal infection narratives such as zombie stories are common in the suburban gothic, these same tendencies are also recognizable in texts which focus on a more psychological conception of infection. One such example, Jeffrey Eugenides' novel *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), portrays a suburban neighborhood in which a teenage girl's suicide is regarded as a potential threat to the community, since neighbors fear that their own children will be compelled to commit suicide, too. In this novel, the theme of infection is metaphorically reinforced by a series of scenes focusing on a plague against Elm trees in the neighborhood, all of which must be cut down to prevent the disease from spreading. In Sofia

67

Coppola's 1999 film adaptation of the novel, one shot features a line of trees running the entire length of the street, all tagged for removal, suggesting there won't be any trees left to catch the disease in the end. Here, contamination is preventable only by preemptive destruction of any elements that *could* eventually be contaminated. Aptly, the demolition of the trees as protection from future infection is repeated in the eventual suicides of the remaining Lisbon sisters, whose deaths serve as a form of collective inoculation against the hazards of the presumed suicide epidemic. Ironically, the remaining sisters' suicides are preceded by multiple months of quarantine-like sequestration within their suburban home by their traumatized and fearful parents, and it is this containment that actually infects them with the depressive state that leads to their coordinated suicides. In this case, then, one might argue that it is the suburb that infected them, not the other way around.

However, some of the most successful texts that critique the suburbia simulacrum are those that effectively combine literal and psychological concepts of infection, thus highlighting the anxiety that comes with a lack of certainty surrounding one's spatial safety when faced with infection. Suburban infection narratives that blend literal and psychological concepts of infection often do so in order to critique the suburbia simulacrum along three key axes: (1) by exposing the simulated nature of crisis and infection, as in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*; (2) by suggesting that both suburban infection and the suburbia simulacrum that it masks permanently coexist in suburban space, as in the Duffer Brothers' television series *Stranger Things*; and, (3) by subverting the suburbia simulacrum in order to expose it as a source of infection in and of itself, as in Jordan Peele's film *Get Out*. A common feature of all three of these approaches is their reliance on the aesthetic commonality of the suburbia simulacrum. Each situates their story squarely within

68

suburbia's familiar aesthetics only to then challenge and re-imagine those aesthetic markers as indicative of a sinister superficiality that only those who inadequately conform to suburbia's ideals can recognize as false. But while *White Noise* critiques the veneer of suburbia in light of the impending end of the Cold War, the latter two texts, *Stranger Things* and *Get Out*, reflect a critical moment in the present American zeitgeist corresponding with the decade immediately following the 2008 economic collapse and the suburban sub-prime mortgage crisis that accompanied it. In each case, these texts critique the suburbia simulacrum in the context of a potential and impending/ongoing social, political, and economic rupture in our concepts of and interaction with American ideology and the spaces that inform it. They thus use infection narratives as a lens through which to consider how the suburbia simulacrum has helped poison and contaminate American society with the dual infections of white supremacy and bourgeois hegemony.

Simulated Infection: Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Don DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise* takes place in an unnamed town comprised of non-descript suburban markers. The town surrounds the ambiguously named College-On-The-Hill, where the novel's protagonist, Jack Gladney, works in Hitler Studies, a field of his own design and a satirical nod to the sort of privilege afforded him as a white man in academia. The novel's setting is an unspecific yet undeniably suburban environment that in its non-specific recognizability represents the suburbia simulacrum itself. DeLillo portrays it as a socially sequestered community of affluence and implied racial homogeneity, surrounded by other such communities, within a highway's commute to major metropolitan areas. The events of the plot center primarily on the home, the school, the highway, and the

69

supermarket as focal points of social interaction. Even the novel's title, *White Noise*, points to the suburbanness of the unnamed community by evoking both the whiteness of the space and the way that the mediated images of the suburbia simulacrum create a form of static interference preventing the injection of outside voices.

Towards the beginning of the novel, the safety of this any-suburb-whatever is challenged by the sudden appearance of a large, black, smokey mass in the sky, later dubbed the Airborne Toxic Event. Confident in the infallibility and safety of his town, Jack is at first unconcerned, responding to his daughter Steffie's fears about their safety with the remark, "These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters…We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don't happen [here]" (114). As in Murphy's assertion that the suburban gothic concerns the idea that "things like *that*…simply shouldn't happen in places like this," (Murphy 1) Jack's lack of concern reflects his deep-seated assumptions about the safety he enjoys as a white man in a suburban environment. He believes that suburban belonging precludes the possibility of a threat, going so far as to suggest that the weather will inevitably change and blow the event in a direction opposite their town.

Meanwhile, as in Baudrillard's evaluation of power's response to crisis, the government's response to the event plays out like a circus spectacle. Jack describes planes and helicopters throwing floodlights across the black cloud, circling it, testing it for toxic substances, with an attendant cacophony of sirens and emergency warnings. Having identified that the cloud is composed of a chemical called Nyodene D, but not yet aware of the effects of human contact with the chemical, the government assumes it is a potentially

lethal threat. Workers appear in biohazard suits, signaling to residents their own need to

panic. The potential crisis that the event poses is thus extended to its most spectacular form,

allowing forces of power opportunity to present an equally spectacular display of their

ability to create order from chaos. In *White Noise*, the potential for a real threat and the

certainty of a real threat become indistinguishable from one another, given that both are

addressed in the exact same way.

The role of simulation in facilitating crises that reinforce law and order is embodied

in Jack's encounters with SIMUVAC, the state program tasked with simulating evacuations

for natural disasters. While a SIMUVAC worker checks Jack for signs of Nyodene

contamination, they engage in the following exchange:

- "What does SIMUVAC mean? Sounds important."

- "Short for simulated evacuation. A new state program they're still battling
  over funds for."

- "But this evacuation isn't simulated. It's real."

- "We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model." (139)

The SIMUVAC worker goes on to suggest that the real event is actually not an ideal

simulation, noting, "You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight

is real. There's a lot of polishing we still have to do" (139). Later in the novel, SIMUVAC

will recruit townspeople to participate in a variety of crisis simulations, citing that "the more

we rehearse disaster, the safer we'll be from the real thing" (205). The absurdity of the

simulations is that they are taken more seriously than the real disaster that preceded them.

During one, a man with a megaphone tells participants, "We learned a lot during the night of

the billowing cloud. But there is no substitute for a planned simulation. If reality intrudes in

the form of a car crash or a victim falling off a stretcher, it is important to remember that we

are not here to mend broken bones or put out real fires. We are here to simulate" (206).

Here, the unpredictability of so-called real life is considered a threat to the perfectability of

simulation. SIMUVAC serves as a dynamic metaphor for the spectacle of law and order that

power employs in its own self-defense.

Later, when Jack finds out that his brief exposure to Nyodene D during the

evacuation could have lethally contaminated him, he becomes obsessed with the idea that

death has entered his body and infected him. It does not matter to him that the SIMUVAC

worker estimates the arrival of his impending death at 15-30 years down the line, or that the

consequence of contamination could just as easily be no death at all. Confronted with the

possibility of death, even a far off death, Jack is unable to distinguish between simulated

infection and real infection, thus forcing him to consider the estimation a certainty. For Jack,

death is an infection that has entered his body to lie in wait, but it is a non-real death, for it

offers no tangible proof of its own reality and it cannot be mitigated by any simulated

expression of law and order; no spectacle exists to allow him to exert control over death. As

such, the assumed order of Jack's inhabited suburban environment heightens the contrast

between the implied perfectability of the space he occupies and his own imperfect mind and

body. What makes this narrative interesting from a suburban perspective is the degree to

which all of the events of crisis are contrasted with illustrations of Jack's suburban

surroundings that illuminate the high degree of order imposed upon them. The violence of

the Airborne Toxic Event and Jack's (and his family's) attendant psychological crises is

contrasted with the high degree of predictability and control exhibited in the rest of the

space, as if to prove just how ineffective that suburban order actually was in preventing the family's psychological contamination.

The most telling example of this suburban order is the supermarket, where the Gladney family frequently goes to restore routine to their lives. In the supermarket, everything has a place and a label, and the abundance of consumer capitalism is exhibited through the sheer variety and quantity of available commodities. In *White Noise*, the supermarket acts as a metaphor for the comfort that consumption offers within spaces produced to facilitate and reproduce it. In a suburban environment where order and happiness is premised on consumption, it is only in the supermarket that one evades the fear of death. Early on, Jack writes:

> It seemed to me that Babette and I, in the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plenitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls—it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening.
>
> (20)

The supermarket thus becomes a simulacrum in its own right, reflecting a glittering ideal back at Jack in order to distract him from his own imperfections. Later, after the Airborne Toxic Event, the supermarket is the only reassurance Jack has that things will return to normal, for its predictable aesthetic order mirrors that of his lived environment in general. As an expression of the suburbia simulacrum, the supermarket offers him an ideal space in

which to slip comfortably back into the illusion of safety and order that he had previously

enjoyed, even if only for the brief time he is there. "The supermarket did not change, except

for the better. It was well-stocked, musical and bright. This was the key, it seemed to us.

Everything was fine, would continue to be fine, would eventually get even better so long as

the supermarket did not slip" (170). Contrasted with the unpredictability of the Airborne

Toxic Event as a crisis of contamination, the supermarket signifies the entirety of the

produced space of suburbia and the false sense of security it offers, bolstered by repetition

and consistency, offering contentment and safety in the form of perpetual consumption,

providing the goods necessary to stave off lurking death. In *White Noise*, the supermarket

and the consumption it represents are the spaces where the suburbia simulacrum is most

concentrated, and it is only through re-acceptance of the ideals they represent that the

persistent fear of death can be silenced. Hence *White Noise* as a suburban infection narrative

that exposes both crisis and infection themselves as simulation, tricks played on the mind to

force oneself back into passive consumption and blind faith in the restorative control of

suburban law and order.

Infected Suburbia: *Stranger Things*[16]

Whereas *White Noise* considers the simulated infection of suburban space, *Stranger*

Things does the opposite by showing an always-already infected suburb that is perceived as

uninfected to those whose minds are already contaminated by the suburbia simulacrum. The

first two seasons of the series, which at the time of writing was in production on a third

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[16]Author's Note: Portions of this section were expanded and adapted into an essay entitled "A nice home at the end of the cul-de-sac: Hawkins as Infected Postmodern Suburbia," which was published in the anthology *Uncovering Stranger Things: Essays on Eighties Nostalgia, Cynicism, and Innocence in the Series* by McFarland Books in June 2018.

season, surround the suburban town of Hawkins, Indiana in the early 1980s. While *Stranger Things* premiered in 2016, its setting is a nostalgic mirror of the decade in which *White Noise* is set, creating a parallel between the uncertainty of the late Cold War era and the precarity of the current moment. In season one, the plot centers mostly around the disappearance of a boy named Will Byers, whose close friends and family believe he has been captured by an interdimensional monster they call the Demogorgon, named for a character in Dungeons and Dragons. The protagonists, who are mostly comprised of Will's friends and family, believe the Demogorgon entered Hawkins through a portal to another dimension that they call the Upside Down, a dark otherworldly reflection of Hawkins itself. Throughout season one, a government lab conducting experiments on children with psionic abilities appears mysteriously connected to the opening of the interdimensional gate and spends majority of the time attempting to thwart Will's friends from discovering the truth about it. After encountering Eleven, a young girl who escaped her imprisonment as an experiment in the government lab, Will's friends and family use her psionic abilities to re-establish contact with Will and navigate the Upside Down in order to bring him back to their world. The second season thus concerns the fallout from season one, Will's and Eleven's interactions with the Upside Down, the widening of the interdimensional portal, the spatial expansion of the Upside Down as inverse of Hawkins, and ultimately, the government's complicity in keeping the truth from a seemingly brainwashed suburban community. The series thus uses its large cast of misfit protagonists to illuminate the vast gulf between those who can recognize the contradictions in Hawkins' abstract suburban spaces and see the Upside Down, and those who are too inculcated by the illusion of Hawkin's suburban safety to recognize the sinister reality beneath their very feet. Hawkins thus acts as a potent

75

metaphor for a suburbia ideal that is already infected with the monstrous ideologies that threaten the safety of those who do not conform.

In the first few minutes of episode one of *Stranger Things*, after opening the series with an ambiguous, terror-inducing hint at the horror unfolding at Hawkins Laboratory, the scene immediately smash cuts to a shot of lawn sprinklers in front of a suburban home (ST 1.1).[17] The sprinklers' ticking sound mimics the uncanny clicking of a veiled monster from the shot before, later revealed to be the Demogorgon.[18] As the camera lingers on the Wheelers' suburban home, Will's friend and one of the series' many protagonists, Mike Wheeler, can be heard explaining, "Something is coming—something hungry for blood." Notes for the pilot script's expanded vision of the opening read "We are now in a 1980s SUBURBAN CUL-DE-SAC. Quiet. Calm. A row of uniformed houses wind up the tree-lined street; station wagons and other family cars fill driveways; TV sets flicker behind curtains; a few dogs bark" (Duffer Brothers, "Montauk" 2). In both versions, the Duffers establish the town of Hawkins as a typical expression of the suburbia simulacrum, positioning the Wheelers' suburban home in comforting contrast to the brutality and danger shown before. It's location at the end of the cul-de-sac is a nod to the highly regimented spatial arrangement of suburban neighborhoods into intricately parcelled streets of similar homes, the postmodern labyrinth created by suburban development. When the shot of this nice suburban home appears opposite from the danger seen before, it is supposed to reassure

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[17] For this and all subsequent episodes mentioned, I cite first the season and then episode number, i.e. ST 1.1 = Stranger Things, Season 1, Episode 1.

[18] In the pilot script, the lab scene was supposed to end with fire sprinklers and smash cut to the lawn sprinklers, suggesting that this other form of overlapping sounds in the final edit was a similarly intentional choice. Moreover, this technique repeats throughout the series, as moments of horror frequently smash cut to typical suburban scenes such as popcorn popping on a stove (2.1) or the dinging of the general store cash register (2.3).

viewers that danger remains at a remove, at least for now, and that Mike's ominous warning need only be considered child's play.

For the remainder[19] of the series, *Stranger Things* will repeatedly invoke the implicit safety of suburbia in order to turn it on its head, revealing its quite literal Upside Down. Through its portrayal of both Hawkins and its shadowy inverse, *Stranger Things* offers a critique not only of the dominant ideologies associated with the suburbia simulacrum but also of our collective cultural connection to and nostalgia for the mediated suburban images that continue to sustain it. The series paints the suburban town of Hawkins as simultaneously perfected and infected, simultaneously utopia and dystopia, but in a way that always gestures toward the fallability of its surface perfection and the potency of its dark underbelly. The series uses the Upside Down to present Hawkins as it truly is—an already-infected relic of a prior nostalgic suburban ideal, a mirage of normality hiding a sinister and dark reality that is always already present within it.

For instance, in the first episode of season one, Will's disappearance occurs within minutes of him reaching his home, meaning that the monster captures him in the very space he is supposed to consider most safe. Having somehow figured out how to communicate through radio waves and telephone lines, Will manages to intimate to his mother Joyce that he is effectively trapped inside their house. Joyce, a single mother, significant primarily because of how it automatically designates her as an outsider to suburban norms, immediately trusts her intuitions that her son is trapped in another dimension, despite the entire community's general willingness to dismiss her as crazy. Soon after, as if to confirm

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[19] The author notes that at the time of writing, only two season of *Stranger Things* had premiered, though a third is slated for release in summer 2019. Given the subtlety of the parallelism between Hawkins and the Upside Down in Season One compared with more obvious gestures toward the interwoven nature of the two spaces in Season Two, it is likely that as the series continues, these tendencies will only intensify, though this reading makes no claims beyond the first two seasons.

her suspicions, a monstrous hand attempts to push itself out of the wall in her house. As she watches the walls of her home shift and flex with the danger of the Upside Down, it is the suburban home itself that threatens Joyce, just as it is the suburban home in which Will remains trapped.

Though the danger of the Upside Down is presented as a literal spatial infection of Hawkins' suburbia, it is by no means the only source of danger in Hawkins. Threats from the Upside Down run directly parallel to cruelty, abuse, or neglect inflicted on the show's various protagonists by bullies, exes, parents, neighbors, and the government itself. Similarly, the mysterious government lab at the center of the rift between the two dimensions is presented as a source of danger not just to creatures of the shadow realm but also to those living on the surface world of Hawkins. The case of Will Byers is particularly indicative of the parallels between dangers in the two spaces. After spending the entire first season trapped in the Upside Down, in the second season, Will is unable to stop having episodes in which various places in Hawkins turn into the Upside Down before his eyes. When he is trick-or-treating and gets accosted by bullies, his stunned fear triggers his immediate propulsion back into the Upside Down, though he clearly remains on the same suburban street in which he was seen before. In the shadow realm, a dark figure that Will later names the Shadow Monster locates him and possesses him, but it is Will's encounter with danger in Hawkins when faced with his bullies, not the Shadow Monster and the Upside Down, that triggers this dimensional shift. (ST 2.2) Later, Joyce also sees the monster flicker onto the screen immediately following Will's video-taped encounter with the bullies, offering visual proof of the monster's material reality while also thematically

attaching the monster's appearance to the normative-enforcing bullying Will receives from peers. (ST 2.3)

In this sense, the various monsters that protect the Upside Down, such as the dog-like Demogorgon creatures and their hive mind leader, the Shadow Monster, become a visual metaphor for threats that already exist in suburban space. Further, the threats these interdimensional monsters reflect are threats borne of the suburbia simulacrum itself, for they coincide with other suburban inhabitants' determination to enforce, even if by violent means, social rules about normative behavior. Both the bully that threatens Mike with a switchblade in season one, and the "Demodogs" that pursue Will's friends in season two, present a mortal threat, suggesting that the monstrousness of one is parallel to monstrousness of the other. Like suburban bullies, the Upside Down's monsters pluck victims directly from seemingly safe suburban spaces (the family home, the pool in the backyard, the arcade, the well-lit street) while simultaneously refashioning these spaces into sites of fear and imprisonment, thus reflecting their true nature.

The various outcasts and misfits who comprise the series' protagonists represent those whose view of Hawkins is already attuned to the social ills associated with collective adherence to norms championed by the suburbia simulacrum. While Will's experiences give him direct recognition of the fallibility of Hawkins' illusion of suburban safety, it is the other protagonists' designation as freaks and outsiders that allows them to recognize and trust the truth of Will's experience where others remain skeptical. Will's best friends, Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and in season two, Max, are all social outcasts whose support for one another offers them a buttress against the normativity-enforcing bullying they regularly endure. Both Jonathan Byers (Will's older brother) and Nancy Wheeler (Mike's older sister) also

79

experience bullying and pressure to conform, in Nancy's case from her own boyfriend, Steve, who is also Jonathan's tormenter in season one. While Steve is later transformed into another series protagonist in season two, this transformation only occurs after he himself becomes the target of bullying from the new kid in town, Billy, who also bullies his stepsister Max, thus making her a fitting addition to Will's group as well.

Tellingly, Billy's role as bullying suburban antagonist is also inverted during a harrowing scene in which his father beats him and calls him a faggot, claiming he does so to teach Billy "respect and responsibility" and to ensure he becomes a "good, kind, respecting brother" (ST 2.8). This scene offers a glimpse into the violence that upholds patriarchal suburban ideological values, forcing the viewer to reconsider Billy's own cruel behaviors, such as his violently toxic masculine aggression and his implied racial biases, in light of the ideologically-motivated violence modelled for him within the patriarchal suburban family home. Having internalized the lessons of his father, the violence Billy reproduces towards other is thus a reflection of his being a successful reproduction of the suburban patriarch. In *Stranger Things*, the characters who conform most closely to the ideals of suburban social belonging are those most likely to exert their power in ways that jeopardize the safety of the show's protagonists, such as when Mr. Wheeler unknowingly sends corrupt government agents after his son because of an unquestioned belief that the government is always right. (ST 1.7) In this way, *Stranger Things* re-imagines cultural adherence to the suburbia simulacrum as itself a source of danger, a way of contaminating the mind and leaving it susceptible to further infection by even more sinister powers.

In this context, Nancy Wheeler's target practice monologue in the fifth episode of season one offers a fulcrum around which the rest of the show's narratives turn. In this

scene, Nancy and Jonathan are practicing shooting a gun in anticipation of an encounter with

the Demogorgon. After watching Jonathan try (and fail) to hit an aluminum can, Nancy

takes the gun and points straight ahead, imagining the monster before her. They converse:

- NANCY: I don't think my parents ever loved each other.

- JONATHAN: They must've married for some reason.

- NANCY: My mom was young. My dad was older, but he had a cushy job,
  money, came from a good family. So, they bought a nice house at the end of
  the cul-de- sac, and started their nuclear family.

- JONATHAN: Screw that.

- NANCY: Yeah…screw that. (ST 1.5)

With this pronouncement, Nancy fires and hits her target on the first try. Tellingly, Nancy's

speech invokes the same description of her home as that used in the pilot script's opening

scene, when her home is directly contrasted with the Demogorgon. All along, the fight

against the Upside Down can be understood on some level as a fight against suburban space,

our distrust for the ideologies and forces of power that attempt to control it, and ultimately

our fear that the cultural changes accompanying postmodernity have warped and changed

the spaces we inhabit in ways that render us incapable of navigating them. The misfit

protagonists at the center of the series can only fight the existential threat the Upside Down

poses after they have rejected the illusion of suburban safety that it renders moot. Nancy

sees her parents' adherence to suburban ideologies as an infection of complacency, which

she rejects by refusing to adhere to her proscribed social place. Her speech reveals the

metaphorical suburban danger that the festering expansion of the Upside Down represents,

mirrored all the more by the Shadow Monster's later efforts at both spatial sprawl and

asserting domination as a "master race" (ST 2.8). As the Upside Down is enmeshed with Hawkins as its right-side-up obverse, the suburbia simulacrum that maintains the illusion of safety in the surface realm is presented as a hindrance to one's ability to recognize and resist the danger below. Only those characters able to see past the simulacrum's illusions and recognize Hawkins as an already infected space have a chance of escaping contamination by it.

An important component of the series' larger critique of the suburbia simulacrum is the way it incorporates the aesthetics of the 1980s, re-furnishing the prior 1950s sitcom suburb ideal with constant nostalgic references to popular '80s cultural artifacts ranging from E.T. to Dig Dug to Eggo Waffles. It updates the simulacrum to more properly reflect a new twenty-first century suburban nostalgia embedded in a collective longing for a prior era of technological innovation. In *Stranger Things*, the vast world-altering technologies of the twenty-first century are reduced to their more simplistic '80s counterparts—the ham radio rather than the internet, the walkie talkie rather than cellular phones, and analog cameras in place of digital image-making. Moreover, all technology in *Stranger Things* appears to be connected to the Upside Down, as evidenced by the flickering lights and other electrical anomalies that precede the appearance of inter-dimensional monsters, the way Will uses technologies to communicate with the outside world when he is trapped, and the way Eleven is able to traverse dimensions through radio waves. The result is that even the relatively simplistic technologies of the 1980s appear as potentially sinister harbingers of some other dimension that is outside of human comprehension, excepting for those posthuman figures, Eleven, and in a different manner, Will, who have learned to navigate it. In this way, the show echoes Jameson's warning that postmodernity will require us to "grow new organs, to

expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions" (38-39) in order to navigate spaces which have warped, expanded, and reproduced beyond our human capacities to make sense of them.

If older suburban texts recalled the sitcom suburbs as a way to examine fears surrounding the social changes that accompanied widespread suburban sprawl and the rapid growth of mass-market consumerism under late capitalism, then newer suburban gothic texts like *Stranger Things* seemingly resituate this nostalgia in the 1980s in recognition of the changes wrought by postmodernity and post Cold War technological innovation. In doing so, the series identifies the mid-'80s as the moment in which the ruptures that led to our current situation first became evident, but it also points to the fallacy of the simulated threats of the period. For instance, in Hawkins in the early '80s, the Soviet threat remains persistent, distracting from and offering a foil for the more malevolent reality behind the experiments at Hawkins laboratory, as well as a convenient excuse for the government to demand silence from those who become suspicious of events at the lab. Such a parallel forces one to reconsider the degree to which ambiguous ideas like the Soviet threat might also have been deployed to mask the reality of more subtly violent changes like suburban segregation and urban divestment.

The postmodern theoretical frame for the series is further indicated by the extensive use of '80s nostalgia as a form of pastiche, which Jameson defines as "a neutral practice of [parody's] mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satirical impulse" (Jameson 17). Jameson asserts that pastiche occurs because in postmodernity, "producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past" to satisfy "consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself" (17-18). As a type of pastiche, the

suburbia simulacrum often reflects a historicism that relies on nostalgic longing for a simpler time in order to cast doubt on the viability of social changes in the present, often by making social progress appear less satisfying than tradition. While the Duffer Brothers certainly use *Stranger Things* to create a pastiche of 1980s nostalgia, they seemingly do so less to invoke nostalgic longing than to render a new, postmodern suburban image that invites a self-reflective critique of the way that nostalgic, mediated images like those in their own series so easily become fodder for the perpetuation of the suburbia simulacrum.

The Duffers' '80s-infused adherence to the aesthetics of the suburbia simulacrum is thus not only a commentary on the decade as a new collectively idealized past, but also a self-reflexive indictment of the suburbia simulacrum's tendency to invoke golden-age nostalgia as justification for the continued renewal of antiquated ideologies. As pastiche, Hawkins is not merely a suburb but a representation of suburban-ness, meshed with small town-ness, and Midwest-ness, and other simulacra that coalesce under the guise of a coherent visualization of an ideal American recent past. The series employs pastiche to highlight the constructed nature of the suburban ideals that have always been endemic to the suburbia simulacrum's deployment within American popular culture. Depicting suburbia as a monstrous horror in and of itself[20] is thus a central theme of the series, with the creatures of the Upside Down appearing, much like suburbanites, as mere products of their environment, characterized by their incessant and insatiable consumption as well as their unquestioned drive to conquer all available space in their own image and at the expense of anyone else who might wish to occupy that space.

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[20] Though I avoid diverging here, it bears mentioning that this theme seems itself to be a pastiche of ideas borrowed from existing suburban gothic narratives, such as the *Silent Hill* video game series (1999-2014) and Mark Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves* (2000).

The brainwashed suburbanite thus finds its antithesis in the figure of Eleven. Though

Eleven's psionic abilities are her primary weapon, she becomes the series' hero less for her

abilities than for her extreme outsider status, as her unconventional upbringing makes her

immune to the suburban ideologies that hinder the others. Though both she and Will can be

seen as posthuman figures, Will's relative inability to navigate another dimension outside of

guidance from his Shadow Monster host is contrasted by Eleven's seemingly nuanced and

human control over her interdimensional abilities. In this respect, it is only Eleven who

represents a posthuman mutation along the lines of Jameson's body that grows new organs,

for she possesses new navigational devices that exceed the capacities of her human

companions. That Eleven utilizes technologies like television and radio waves in order to

access her psionic abilities further emphasizes her status as a mutant, in postmodern theorist

Katherine Hayles' sense, as she represents "a coupling with intelligent machines…so intense

and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the

biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed" (35).

As proof of her continued humanity, Eleven's nose bleeds whenever she uses her powers,

but her humanity is contrasted by both her telegraphic speech patterns and her telekinetic

powers, machine-like qualities reflected in her frequent dehumanizing characterization as

either a weapon or a monster. Though her psionic abilities enable her positioning as hero, it

is only through her designation as a mutant freak that she is able to recognize her

capabilities and wield them accordingly.

By the end of Season Two, having proven her devotion to Hawkins by helping to

close the gate to the Upside Down, Eleven is rewarded with the symbolic restoration of her

humanity through her faux-familial relationship with a surrogate father (the detective,

Hopper), her receipt of a proper birth certificate, and her chance to participate in a typical

suburban rite of passage by attending the middle school dance. Were *Stranger Things* a

traditional suburban narrative, Eleven's restoration as a normative suburban teenager would

signal an effective resolution of the danger of the Upside Down. Of course, the final shot of

Hawkins Middle School in the last scene of Season Two prevents the possibility of such a

seamless ending, as the camera slowly flips 180 degrees to reveal the intact Upside Down

version of the school. (ST 2.9) This final shot immediately calls into question the twee,

almost saccharine nature of the school dance scene before, in part because it is a scene that

maps so closely to the disingenuous nostalgia embedded in the suburbia simulacrum. The

ending of Season Two thus makes clear what the series as a whole has writ large, which is

that the Upside Down and Hawkins are two sides of the same coin. Thus, *Stranger Things*

raises the possibility that Hawkins must be read not only as an already-infected relic of a

prior suburban ideal, but also as proof that the danger of adhering to the ideological

imperatives of suburban life is the unending expansion of a poisonous suburban sprawl to all

available space. In presenting suburbia as the infectious monstrosity that it is, *Stranger*

Things challenges ideals of suburban space as utopian and idyllic, prompting re-

consideration of both the latent violence and cruelty that underpins the continued dominance

of American suburban space and the nostalgic mediated images that support and justify it.

Suburbia As Contamination: *Get Out*

      Whereas *Stranger Things* critiques the ideologies of suburbia in a more broad

manner, *Get Out* uses an infection narrative to critique a specific ideological consequence of

the suburbia simulacrum, namely the continued dominance of implicit white supremacy in

suburban imagery and the continued lack of Black voices in popular narratives about suburban space. When *Get Out* was released in 2017, critics rushed to call it an instant classic, a deft commentary on contemporary race issues that also stayed true to classic horror tropes borrowed from older horror films like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and the intrinsically suburban *The Stepford Wives* (1975). Set primarily on a sprawling suburban estate indicative of the earliest and wealthiest suburbanization models, the first half of the film primarily follows its Black protagonist, Chris, through his experiences with his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage, while visiting her parents, Dean and Missy, and her brother, Jeremy, during the weekend of an annual garden party at the Armitages' suburban home. Tellingly, the Armitages are initially portrayed as mostly open-minded albeit awkward on the issue of race, repeatedly invoking their support for Barack Obama and their recognition of racial issues as attempted proof of their own lack of racism. However, over the course the film, a series of plot twists reveals that the Armitages are primarily interested in capturing Chris and using his body for a sinister brain-swapping operation they've been conducting for suburban clients for years. As such, the garden party is merely a front for auctioning off their latest acquisition to the highest suburban bidder. The latter half of the film thus follows Chris through his journey of realization about why he was brought to the suburbs and his eventual escape from the Armitage home.

The film's adherence to the visual hallmarks of the suburbia simulacrum is impeccable throughout, but by centering the narrative around the perspective of a Black man, Peele assures that these aesthetics are never regarded as anything but a mirage for the violence of liberal, elite white affluence. That is, where suburbia's aesthetics have most often been deployed to depict suburban space as intrinsically safe and utopian, suburbia was

87

always ever only a utopia for white people. From the very first shot of *Get Out* onward,

these same aesthetic markers are used to instead give suburbia the appearance of being

ominous, unsafe, and intentionally labyrinthine. Where the film differs from most suburban

gothic narratives, however, is that the danger Peele's suburb presents is not a danger for the

suburbanites who inhabit but for those Black urban dwellers (a nod to the coded cultural

equation of urbanness with blackness) who find themselves entangled in suburbia's web. In

Get Out, suburbia can be viewed through the eyes of those considered Other to suburban

space, for whom the landscape itself poses the danger of contamination by white ideologies

and power structures and for whom the suburban environment always poses a threat.

  Get Out opens on a shot of a suburban street at night, sidewalk extending up the

center of the screen, paralleled on the right by a row of dimly lit street lamps and on the left

by a line of neatly trimmed hedges and a white picket fence. The camera lingers on this shot

for a few beats, just long enough to establish the familiarity of the setting and signal a

suburban sense of place; it is essentially a shot of suburbia as simulacrum. However, when a

Black man, Andre, enters the scene, his very first line upends the utopia associated with this

scenery. Talking on the phone to his girlfriend, he jokes "What kind of sick individual

names a street Edgewood Way and puts it half a block from a street named Edgewood

Lane?," soon after referring to his location as a "creepy, confusing-ass suburb," making his

discomfort within the space immediately apparent. Andre also establishes himself as an

outsider, saying that he "sticks out like a sore thumb." But unlike majority of suburban

narratives in which Black bodies are portrayed as Other to suburban space, here, it is the

suburb which seems dangerous and Other to Andre. Both the shadowy lighting of the scene

and the focus on Andre's discomfort forces a perspective shift that re-paints utopian

suburban aesthetics to make them visual indicators of potential danger for Black bodies. In this way, *Get Out* opens with an explicit subversion of the white suburban ideal,[21] forcing the audience see the space through Andre's (and later Chris') eyes.

When a white car appears and ominously pulls up alongside Andre, there is no question that it poses a threat and Andre's logical response is to turn around and walk the other way, remarking "Not today. Not me. You know how they like to do to motherfuckers out here, man." Andre's suspicions are confirmed moments later when the car's masked driver attacks him and drags his limp body into the trunk of the vehicle. Throughout, the car stereo plays a refrain from the Flanagan and Allen song "Run, Rabbit, Run" (1939): "Run rabbit! Run rabbit! Run! Run! Run!/Don't give the farmer his fun fun fun," a nod to how Andre is undoubtedly being treated as his assailant's prey. Between an early scene in which Rose hits a doe with her vehicle and Dean Armitage's later discussions of his disdain for how the deer seem like a suburban infestation, the song parallels a motif mirrored in the film's frequent use of deer as an analog for hunted Black bodies. This first scene is one of the most critical in the film because it places the Black perspective front and center in the narrative, while also firmly outfitting the scenery with established hallmarks of the suburbia simulacrum. As such, the film de-centers the experience of whiteness from the narrative arc without de-centering outward aesthetics of whiteness *qua* the suburbia simulacrum, allowing Peele to tease out the various ways mediated images of suburban perfection tend to veil the violence of white supremacy, even among otherwise liberal-seeming white elites.

One early indication of the Armitages' desire to assert power over Chris is there frequent obsessions with his body, and with Black athleticism generally. Whereas Dean

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[21] In the director's commentary for the film, Jordan Peele says as much explicitly, stating: "So this first scene, I kind of started with the idea of Halloween, right? [And] subverting the idea of the perfect white suburb."

regales Chris with stories about how his father never got over losing in the Olympic Trials to Jesse Owens and a garden party guest attempts to bond with Chris by referencing a personal relationship with Tiger Woods, it is Jeremy who is most explicit in objectifying Chris, remarking that his "genetic makeup" would lend him advantage in fighting. In other scenes, Rose chastises Chris for smoking, as do Missy and Dean later, even going so far as to insist that he not smoke around Rose so as to avoid contaminating her with the habit. Even without the later reveal that these concerns about Chris' physique stem from their desire to farm his body, they read as explicit attempts to use white ideals to exert control and power over Chris' bodily autonomy.

In one particularly odd encounter, after catching Chris sneaking a cigarette at night, Missy, who works as a hypnotherapist, uses a silver spoon and a white porcelain teacup to deceptively lull Chris into a state of hypnosis, claiming she does so to cure him of his impulse to smoke. During this process, Mindy's suggestion that Chris "sink into the floor" propels him to a state of mind she terms the Sunken Place, visually depicted as a free fall into a sea of darkness where he is unable to interact with Missy except as if from a bottom of a well, looking up, unable to speak. Waking the next day from the encounter, Chris cannot shake the feeling that Missy has somehow contaminated his mind with the hypnosis, making him feel as if he is somehow at odds with his own body. After the film's release, critics wasted no time in drawing parallels between the Sunken Place and the experience of being Black in America, and Peele himself has been clear about the metaphor he imagined it represented, saying in one tweet on March 16th, 2017: "The Sunken Place means we're marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us" (@JordanPeele). The Sunken Place is thus explicitly related to the imprisonment of Black bodies, both literal in

90

the case of the prison-industrial complex and figurative in the sense of suburban segregation, within a system that places the ideals of white suburban elites above the interests of those who are subjugated by that system and denied representation within it. Moreover, as a metaphor for marginalization, the implication of being sunken beneath the surface reflects the tendency of white supremacy to marginalize through continued insistence on idealized spatial narratives that prevent any other voices from coming to the discursive surface. That the hypnotic auditory trigger which propels Chris back into the Sunken Place is a silver spoon clinking against white porcelain is a further metaphor for how his subjugation comes from the continued power of elite bourgeois white suburbia, for both objects are representative of bourgeois whiteness and elite consumerism.

Chris also has multiple uncomfortable encounters with the Armitages' Black house servants, Georgina and Walter, who Dean claims were only brought to the home to help with his ailing parents, explaining, "When they died, I just couldn't bear to let them go." Both Georgina, who works primarily indoors, and Walter, who works the grounds, behave in ways that strike Chris as distinctly odd compared with other Black people, mainly because they are uncannily distant and robotic when speaking with Chris, as if hiding secrets they are unwilling to voice. In one scene, having snuck away from the garden party, Chris confides to Georgina "All I know is, if there's too many white people, I get nervous, you know?" At this moment, aided by a nuanced non-verbal performance by actress Betty Gabriel, Georgina's expression slowly changes from a forced smile to a frightened blank stare, before a trembling gasp in which she starts to speak but stops. Georgina then forces another smile, and responds "Oh no. No no. No no no no no no no!," insisting "the Armitages treat us like family." However, even as she reassures Chris, her body betrays her words, and a

91

single tear rolls down her cheek. Though this moment is meant to foreshadow the later

reveal that Georgina has also been the victim of a brain-swapping operation, it nonetheless

expresses the negotiation of self-presentation required by Black bodies when passing in

white spaces. Georgina's silence as a Black women in a white space thus reflects the way

suburban whiteness robs women and people of color of space to express themselves and

voice their truths authentically.

Shortly thereafter, at the garden party, Chris experiences similar discomfort when

interacting with a man named Logan, recognizable to the audience as Andre from the first

scene, whom Chris also finds disconcerting because of his stereotypically white behavior

and unwillingness to connect over their shared racial identity. When Chris sneaks a picture

of Logan and the flash on his phone goes off, a spark of recognition comes over Logan's

eyes and his nose begins to bleed. He then lunges at Chris, imploring him to "Get out! Get

out! Get the fuck out!" Of course, by this point, the audience is keenly aware that Andre has

been brainwashed in some capacity, just as it is clear that something similar is going on with

Georgina and Walter, though Chris remains at a loss. These two scenes, which are more or

less back to back, thus mark a crucial turning point that sets up the film's remaining twists,

with the latter half of the film following Chris' struggle to fulfill Andre's call to get out of

his would-be suburban prison. But these scenes also perform the important task of re-

attuning the audience's suspicions, recasting Georgina's, Walter's, and Logan's earlier

sinister behaviors in light of the victimization they must have experienced at the hands of the

Armitage family, recentering suburban whiteness as the source of the film's real horrors.

While these odd encounters certainly help build the tension necessary to aid the

film's later twists, they also help show how stilted the normative social behaviors of white

elites seem when thrust upon other bodies, thus exposing how unnatural these same behaviors are in their normative white suburban contexts as well. Georgina, Walter, and Logan all seem odd to Chris because they strike him as foreign to his experience of Blackness, but it is specifically their unnatural repetition of white suburban social norms that make them seem sinister. All three embody different aspects of the forced social niceties expected of suburban elites, behaviors thus primarily endemic to the historical oppressors of Black bodies. Chris echoes this sentiment when he comments to his best friend Rod that all the black people he has encountered in the suburbs seem to have "missed the movement." Even before the hypnosis reveal, their inclusion in elite suburban spaces seems to require the dissolution of all markers of their prior Black American identity, such as familiar gestures (as when Andre responds to Chris' fist bump with a handshake) and ways of speaking (as when Georgina does not understand the word "snitch" and offers "tattletale" as an alternative) that Chris associates with Black belonging. After it becomes clear that the Armitages are running what is essentially a human trafficking scheme, the stunned and trance-like behaviors of Georgina, Walter, and Logan can be retroactively regarded as evidence of the contamination of their bodies and minds by already-infected, brainwashed white suburbanites.

One of the film's major reveals concerns how the Armitages' garden party is actually an auction of Chris' body, a clear nod to the auctioning off of Black bodies during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. After this turning point, the Armitages turn on Chris one by one, with the final reveal being that Rose has been aligned with her family's plan all along. When Chris attempts to physically resist his entrapment, Missy invokes his prior hypnosis trigger (the spoon and teacup) to immobilize him before Dean and Jeremy drag him to the

93

basement. The basement itself is a stereotypical amalgamation of images associated with the suburban den or game room, complete with the mounted head of a buck, repeating the parallels between the deer and Black bodies as hunted game. As Chris sits strapped to a chair, a bullseye dartboard directly above his head, an old film explaining the Armitages' process pops onto the stationary tube television in front of him. Through what they call the Coagula procedure, the film clarifies, Black victims become host bodies for wealthy suburbanites wishing to extend their lives by acquiring a new body. The procedure involves first hypnotic acclimation to the Sunken Place, then preparatory mental torture and further hypnosis in the basement, and finally a transplantation of the client's brain into the body of a Black host, for whom only their spinal cord and vital connections will remain intact. As Jim, the blind art dealer who has purchased Chris' body for his "eye" intimates to Chris through a teleconference on the old television: "You won't be gone, not completely. A sliver of you will still be in there, limited consciousness. You'll be able to see and hear what your body is doing, but your existence will be as a passenger. An audience. You'll live in the Sunken Place." After the procedure, the soul and mind of the Black host body is not entirely snuffed out, but rather, victims become the unwitting prisoners of their own bodies. The Coagula procedure is thus nothing less than the total consumption of Black existence by white suburban ideals, an infection of Black bodies that contaminates them with the thoughts and desires of whiteness through a literal act of Black dispossession.

Hence, Andre's identity as Logan, the husband of an older white woman, and Georgina and Walter's hypnotic occupation by the assumed-deceased Armitage grandparents. Further, Georgina and Andre's respective previous outbursts are immediately rendered proof positive of the struggle that remains between the imprisoned victims and the

body-occupying suburbanites, for it is precisely in the moments when the imprisoned people are able to somehow emit communication from the Sunken Place that these characters seems to act out. This theory is later confirmed by three important moments: first, by Chris' discovery of a box of photos featuring Rose with a series of black romantic partners, including Georgina and Walter; second, by Jim's comment that "Jeremy's wrangling method sounds way less pleasant," identifying him as Andre's captor in the first scene, later verified when Chris steals Jeremy's car and it is the same as that in the opening shot; and third, upon the audience's recognition that in Dean's previous comment about not being able to "bear letting them go," the "them" he was referring to was his parents, not Georgina and Walter. In *Get Out*, the horror of body invasion and mind contamination references various ways in which the survival of white suburban ideals depends first and foremost on the continued denial of Black bodily autonomy and the spatial dispossession of Black bodies, including through violence. Whether the brain-swapping is viewed as a metaphor for the way gentrification attempts to eliminate people of color in order to make room for white elites, or for the continued subjugation of Black bodies to forced labor for the benefit of bourgeois wealth, as in the prison-industrial complex, or even for the way Black bodies are objectified and glorified for their physicality and athleticism while their intellectual contributions are dismissed, all potential analogies that can be drawn from the body-swapping device point to a fundamental power dynamic by which white social power remains possible only through violent subjugation of people of color. That the Sunken Place is a space of silence suggests a fundamental voicelessness brutally thrust upon Black people during the discourses that helped shape American space, though Georgina and Logan's

95

respective interjections show the perseverance of Black people to voice their opposition in spite of the violence done to them.

Crucially, the role infection and contamination play in this narrative works in two directions simultaneously. In one sense, the brain-swapping constitutes an infection of the Black body and a contamination of Black identity by white suburban ideals. But it is also the white people who themselves appear infected and brainwashed, pointing to the suburbia simulacrum and suburban values as their own source of infection, as evidenced by the familial way the Armitages pass their racism from parent to child. Consequently, *Get Out* also repeatedly gestures to the superficiality of the suburbia simulacrum as a hypnotic illusion that hides a structure of social reproduction already contaminated by racism, classism, and other forms of systemic violence. As Peele notes in a Q&A included in the film's special features, *Get Out* was originally written in the Obama era to address what he calls the "post-racial lie," or the idea that the election of a Black president was proof that liberal whiteness had already been drained of its racial issues. In critiquing this post-racial lie, Peele identifies the perfection of white suburbia as but one part of the smoke and mirrors required to believe that liberal tendencies among white elites are proof of their having conquered their racist demons. His characterization of the Armitages mimics the white tendency to hide racism behind claims of colorblindness and reverance for Black cultural contributions, as in Dean Armitage's repeated insistence "I would have voted for Barack Obama a third time if I could" while literally profiting from the trafficking of Black bodies. As Peele remarks, "Racism is very much alive, and it's this monster that was kind of simmering beneath the surface of the country for awhile" (Peele, Q&A), meaning that the

facade of normalcy offered by the suburbia simulacrum is effectively the primary monster driving the horror in *Get Out*.

In commentary for the film's alternative ending, Peele also recalls how the 2016 election of Donald Trump reshaped his vision and inspired him to fashion his protagonist Chris into more of a hero than a martyr. In the film's original ending, Chris is found by white cops crouching over Rose's lifeless body and is immediately arrested for murdering the Armitage family. In the final moments of the film, his Black best friend Rod visits him in prison and Chris intimates that he does not anticipate being exonerated. However, in the theatrical release, the ending has been altered so that Chris is rescued by Rod just before he can choke Rose to death. In the film's commentary, Peele argues that his original ending more accurately reflects the reality of what would truly happen to a Black man if discovered in a white suburb next to the body of a dead white woman -- his guilt would have been assumed, he would have been considered the dangerous element disturbing the suburban peace, and if he was not killed instantaneously, he undoubtedly would have been imprisoned indefinitely. While the new ending offers an alternative vision for the future that in Peele's estimation is more appropriate to the ways Trumpism has brought previously veiled American racism to the surface, it is tellingly less realistic than the initial ending. Instead, Peele creates an ending in which the film's greatest twist comes at the very second that the red and blue police lights flash on Chris, and he raises his arms in subservience to their power, only to reveal an urban savior (Rod, in his TSA vehicle) rather than a could-be suburban executioner (the suburban police officer). The relief at Rod's appearance forces viewers to consider the import of the conclusions one might otherwise draw about Chris' fate had it been the police who arrived, meaning that in the end, the greatest danger Chris

faces is a danger that is never actually portrayed on screen. The new ending is thus a sharper indictment of the existing, material effects of the suburbia simulacrum, for it portrays a fantastical ending that strays from the far more likely scenario of our current social reality. *Get Out* exposes suburbia as a "dream" only to those Americans for whom suburbia is not a space of danger, dispossession, state brutality, and uncertainty, illustrating how for Black Americans, suburbia has been infected from the start.

Conclusion

These three suburban infection narratives together have a common focus on the body and the corporal as an expression of the space that individuals take up. In their own way, all three texts consider the very real ways that our material bodies interact with our conscious experiences, and how both are influenced by the spaces in which they are located. Infection narratives are also always implicitly narratives of the body, and more obliquely, of human mortality, for they consider safety in terms of both which bodies are entitled to access a space and which bodies are offered safety and protection in that space. They question the way abstract space itself dictates or reinforces social codes that designate some bodies safe and some bodies dangerous, some bodies normal and some bodies diseased, some bodies desirable and some bodies undesirable, and in so doing, also gesture towards the dominant power structures that prevent resistance to those spatial codes. Infection thus becomes a locus for a variety of interconnected social critiques concerning suburban space, particularly since the sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2008 revealed the shaky foundation on which suburban development flourished and signalled the futility of continued allegiance to suburban models of growth. Insofar as a recent uptick in white urban gentrification arguably

stems directly from the recognition that suburbia has exhausted its use value, many recognize that such corrections do little more than reverse the tides of an already broken spatial economy within an increasingly blended postmodern geography. What is needed instead is no less than a complete revolution in the way Americans think about the spaces they inhabit, starting with a more nuanced investigation of suburban, the social patterns each was designed to concretize, and ultimately, the way we think about how much space and what kind of space given bodies are allowed to inhabit. Similarly, as the next chapter reveals, this re-evaluation of mediated suburban narratives must also include re-evaluation of the way mediated anti-urban narratives have traditionally been deployed to support the suburbia simulacra.

Pop culture narratives like *White Noise*, *Stranger Things*, and *Get Out* use their respective mass-mediated platforms to confront readers with the often hidden contradictions inherent to suburban space, forcing a re-evaluation not only of suburbia but of all types of abstract space. Each contributes to an alternative suburban discourse, or suburban counter-narrative, that helps stimulate new social dialogues (or resurrect old ones) around the concept of the suburb while appropriating the very same media channels that helped disseminate the dominant images of the suburbia simulacrum in the first place. They reclaim the existing mediated images of the suburbia simulacrum, weaponize them, and turn them back on the simulacrum itself, thus unmasking the white supremacy and bourgeois ideals that have always been endemic to suburban space. This is an absolutely imperative endeavor for continued adherence to the suburbia simulacrum has produced a number of material consequences that range from increased racial and socioeconomic tensions to the violent police brutality that has recently been highlighted by groups like Black Lives Matter. As

these tensions come to a head within American society, it is clear that the urban response to suburbia simulacrum has been nothing short of a widespread collective reappropriation of abstract space, an appropriation that includes not just the suburbs, but expands to re-imagine the entire urban fabric, producing new urban and suburban counter-narratives that challenge the dominance of suburban hegemony in American society.

Chapter Two
From Canfield Green to Ramona Park:
Vince Staples' Norf Long Beach and Inhabited Urban Authorship

Perceived by blind perceptionist giving ignorant opinions in the faces of the biased
Let them tell it all we do is riot
They pick and choose tragedies to politicize
Urban and suburban is day and night
Those with a voice say such by not saying much--about the ghetto's
Promising lives cut short,
But the media refuses to report—live
But hustle to the scene when white kids die
Inner city casualties are assumed acts of gang violence
So governors and heads of state remain silent
Suburban crimes are committed by the quote unquote "looney"
That's an excuse they use to save face in their upstanding communities
What an injustice!
There's no equality in the minds of those we voted for and intrusted

                                            -Haneef Genno Talib, "Ying Yang"

Introduction

On February 26th, 2012, George Zimmerman shot and killed unarmed Black 17-year-old Trayvon Martin on the front lawn of Zimmerman's suburban home in The Retreat at Twin Lakes, a gated community in suburban Sanford, FL. More than a year later, Zimmerman was acquitted of both second degree murder and manslaughter, prompting public backlash and protest that spawned the formation of the now-ubiquitous "movement building project" known as Black Lives Matter. (Black Lives Matter) In the media circus surrounding the acquittal, the question at hand concerned whether or not Zimmerman had racially profiled Martin, despite Zimmerman's own statement to 911 that he trailed and later confronted Martin simply because he looked "like he's up to no good" (Moore). Zimmerman's defense claimed he acted in the capacity of the neighborhood watch (of which Zimmerman was the sole volunteer) for The Retreat at Twin Lakes. Yet the *Miami Herald* reported that neighbors recalled how Zimmerman "took it upon himself to do nightly patrols while he walked his dog" and in the weeks prior to the shooting "went door-to-door asking

101

residents to be on the lookout, specifically referring to young black men who appeared to be outsiders, and warned that some were caught lurking" (Robles). Though Zimmerman's own ethnic background is not strictly Caucasian (his mother is of Afro-Peruvian descent), his internalized commitment to the role of suburban neighborhood watchmen reveals an ideological stance about his neighborhood and his role within it that is steeped in suburban white supremacy. In this context, Zimmerman's commitment to vigilante justice and patrolling his gated community seems a material consequence of internalizing the suburbia simulacrum to which I devoted the chapter prior. Conceiving his perfected suburban neighborhood as besieged by outside threats he associates with a chaotic urban environment, Zimmerman's conflation of urban criminality with the mediated stereotype of the young Black man in a hoodie affected the assumptions he made about Martin. That Zimmerman was acquitted reveals the degree to which this conflation of urban threat with Black men (and with other people of color) has become normative within a political climate and justice system increasingly attuned to first and foremost serve the interests of white suburban populations.

If the suburbia simulacrum represents the apotheosis of a utopian landscape serving capitalistic white supremacy, it has achieved this status in part because of a concentrated, decades-long parallel effort by mass media, politicians, real-estate investors, and other economic actors to depict the urban landscape as suburbia's dystopian and racialized antithesis. In contrast to visions of the suburb as a family-oriented landscape fostering community, security, and wellbeing, depictions of the American city since the 1970s onward have, as Steve Macek writes, "promoted the terrifying figment of city neighborhoods ruled by armies of bloodthirsty criminals, a specter that, in turn, was used to justify a draconian

police crackdown on urban lawlessness that helped to criminalize an entire generation of urban youth" (Macek 103). Political and media support for these narratives has facilitated a rightward movement in American politics bolstered in large part by the ever-increasing voting power of the suburban populations at which urban crisis narratives are aimed. An array of ideological divisions recognizable in the current American political climate can be traced to the potent effects of decades of this mediated urban/suburban binary messaging. As Macek writes in *Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right, and Moral Panic over the City* (2006), a moral panic can be broadly understood as "any sudden upsurge of public concern over, or alarm about, a condition or group socially defined as 'threatening' or 'dangerous'"(Macek xiii) Within moral panic over the city, Black and brown bodies have become totemic symbols of urban chaos, criminality, and moral bankruptcy in contradistinction to the assumed order and civility of the hegemonic (and predominantly white) suburban masses. Police brutality against people of color and suburban vigilante justice like that meted out by Zimmerman thus stem from a similar rhetorical origin wherein suburban order comes at the expense of divestment from urban neighborhoods and dehumanization for the people of color who inhabit them.

Both moral panic over the city and the suburbia simulacrum stem from the same root, since both are mediated depictions of space that help maintain a dominant, white supremacist notion of who is entitled to which types of space, who determines the status quo, and which kinds of law and order can be used to maintain it. As Macek asserts, "the deviant, threatening, or troubling objects of a panic are social constructions, produced by particular social agents in particular social contexts for specific purposes." In the late 20th century, the purpose of constructing anti-urban moral panic narratives was explicitly racist,

because "the panic over the city that permeated American culture in the '80s and '90s...was directed at what turns out to be a very carefully fabricated and grossly inflated 'threat': an urban underclass of working-class blacks and Latinos thought to be so deviant, murderous, and immoral as to constitute a serious danger to the nation's security and well-being" (Macek xiv). Arguably, anti-urban moral panic has used faux concern over suburbia's decaying urban core to mask present-day police brutality, infrastructural inequality, imbalanced justice, mass incarceration, systemic poverty, and racial bias, among other social concerns. (Macek 36) In defiance of anti-urban moral panic narratives, resistant urban actors utilize protest, artistic critique, and appropriation of built space itself to re-author the way the city is conceived in ways that better reflect the experiences of those who actually inhabit urban neighborhoods. Their resistance thus reflects David Harvey's Lefebvrian assertion that the right to the city includes the right for those who actually inhabit space to determine how the city functions and the images that will be associated with it. Resistant acts of urban authoring or re-authoring constitute a demand to tell the story of urban space in ways that counter narratives of chaos and criminality associated with a discourse of urban crisis.[1]

I begin this chapter with a close reading of Darren Wilson's and Dorian Johnson's conflicting Missouri State Grand Jury testimonies surrounding the high-profile 2014 shooting death of Black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. Using the Department of Justice (DOJ) reports surrounding their investigation of both Wilson as an individual and the Ferguson Police Department (FPD) as a whole, I argue that the disparity between Wilson's and Johnson's testimonies offers a useful case study for illustrating how a discourse of urban

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[1] I borrow this phrasing from Macek, who writes that "panic over the city was promoted, at least in part, by a culturally authoritative discourse on the urban crisis...that blamed the urban poor for the deprivation and social isolation they were forced to endure and inflated they danger they posed to the rest of American society" (Macek xv-xvi).

crisis correlates with state violence and suburban hegemony in material urban and suburban spaces. Here I use Macek's conception of moral panic and Lynn Mie Itagaki's conception of civil racism in order to contextualize events in Ferguson within the broader contemporary media landscape through which moral panic narratives proliferate. Following Itagaki's lead, I consider how the climate in South Central Los Angeles in the years surrounding the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion that occurred after the LAPD officers who attacked Rodney King were acquitted[2] reflected the sort of racial tensions wrought by segregation, neoliberal urban divestment, and the proliferation of mediated urban crisis narratives towards the end of the twentieth century. As an art form that emerged from within the uniquely fraught social climate in Los Angeles during this period, I examine gangsta rap's efficacy as a resistant medium intended to create urban counter-narratives that challenged moral panic over the city. Borrowing from hip-hop historians like Brian Cross, Eithne Quinn, and Jeff Chang, I consider the dichotomy between gangsta rap's radical political aims and the eventual commercial reduction of those aims to fodder for moral panic. Focusing in particular on the gangsta rap ground N.W.A. and their creation of Compton as a mediated, imagined LA landscape for gangsta narratives, I consider how the lack of specificity in mediated Compton helped rappers sell records and achieve commercial success at the expense of advancing more inhabited and resistant urban narratives . Comparing early gangsta rap to iterations of the genre that have emerged since events in Ferguson, the last half of the chapter offers a close reading of works by contemporary Long Beach rapper Vince Staples, who re-imagines

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[2] Both the events in Ferguson and the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion were referred to as riots rather than protests. In both cases, the media focused mainly on acts of violence or looting in order to characterize groups of protesters as criminal. Lynn Mie Itagaki, from whom I borrow some of my terminology referring to the events surrounding the 1992 acquittal of the LAPD officers who beat Rodney King, covers the issue of using charged terms like "riot" to refer to anti-racist rebellion at length in her book *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout* (2016).

gangsta rap in a ways that resist appropriation and revive gangsta rap's political force.

Through his music, his visual art, and his public persona, Staples challenges the idea that

Los Angeles' predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhoods are the landscape of a so-

called urban underclass. Staples uses rap to re-author the neighborhoods he inhabits in ways

that document the real social structures that inform life in North Long Beach and in South

Central LA.[3] In the process, Staples projects a vision of these spaces as would-be idyllic

were it not for the socioeconomic and racial inequity by which they are ravaged, summarily

challenging the dichotomy of perfected suburb and corrupted city by which the mainstream

mass media subdivides urban and suburban space.

A Tale of Two Canfield Greens

Around noon on August 9th, 2014, in the street outside the Canfield Green public

housing complex in Ferguson, MO, a suburb of St Louis, white police officer Darren Wilson

fatally shot an unarmed Black 18-year-old named Michael Brown, Jr. The highly publicized

case marked a point of no return for anti-racist activists in the United States, further

galvanizing the broad collective known as the Movement for Black Lives just as Martin's

death had two years before. In Wilson's grand jury testimony for the state of Missouri, he

claimed the encounter began when he confronted Brown and his friend, Dorian Johnson, for

walking in the middle of a public street. Per Wilson's account, the altercation turned

physical when Brown reached into his vehicle and struck him in the head before grabbing at

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[3] South Central LA, now formally called South Los Angeles and including parts of what was formerly both South Central Los Angeles and Southwest Angeles, is often used as a short-hand term to refer to the constellation of neighborhoods in the southern part of Los Angeles populated predominantly by populations of color. While North Long Beach and Compton are not always formally grouped in with South Central LA, they are sometimes unofficially considered part of this spatial bloc due to their demographics.

his firearm.[4] Wilson repeatedly insists that Brown was hostile and confrontational throughout the encounter and that Brown attacked him unprovoked. He claims Brown's intimidation made him earnestly fear for his life, that he was physically or logistically prevented from using non-lethal force to subdue Brown,[5] and ultimately, that the sum of Brown's behaviors justified his fears and all 12 shots he fired. (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. V)

Wilson is especially adamant that Brown's formidable size and demeanor made him fear for his life. He repeatedly mentions Brown's stature and claims the struggle preceding the first shot made him "feel like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan," (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. V 212) despite the fact that while Brown did outweigh Wilson by ~80 pounds, he was only an inch taller.[6] After Wilson show Brown in the hand, Wilson claimed "[Brown] looked up at me and he had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. V 225). After another shot, Brown ran away and Wilson pursued him on foot, at which point Wilson claims Brown turned back toward him while "[making] a grunting, like aggravated sound" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol V. 225). Even though Wilson claims he was himself so anxious that he has no memory of how many shots he fired with his own gun, he again feigns incredulity at Brown's aggressive demeanor, again using a Hulk-like description of Brown, saying "he was almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was

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[4] While I summarize here for brevity, Wilson's and Johnson's respective exhaustive play-by-plays of events can be found in their Missouri State Grand Jury testimonies, included in the works cited for this project.

[5] Wilson claimed to have mace, handcuffs, a baton, a flashlight, and his gun all on him at the time of the altercation. He also admitted that he often refused to carry a taser because he found them too bulky to carry around comfortably. In his testimony, he states that despite having all these alternative weapons, his gun was the only one he could reach from inside his SUV during the physical altercation that preceded the shooting.

[6] It is reported that Darren Wilson is 6'4" and weighs about 210 pounds and was armed whereas Michael Brown, Jr was 6'5", 289 pounds, and unarmed. (Peter Eisley, "Ferguson Case: By the numbers", *USA Today*, 25 November 2014)

making him mad" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. V 228). At that point, Wilson shot Brown in the head, incapacitating him. In Wilson's own words: "When [the last shot] went into him, the demeanor on his face went blank, the aggression was gone, it was gone, I mean, I knew he stopped, the threat was stopped" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. V 229). Wilson called for more officers, but did not call for an ambulance.

As a key eyewitness to events, Dorian Johnson also testified to the Missouri grand jury and his timeline differs in important ways from Wilson's. For one, he asserts that Wilson's initial approach was overtly aggressive and patronizing, that the way Wilson reversed his vehicle to speak to them nearly struck him and Brown, and that Wilson slammed his car door against both men, all before any kind of physical dispute took place. Second, he asserts that the altercation turned physical only when Wilson grabbed Brown by the neck and shirt, escalating into what he describes as a "tug-of-war" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV). Multiple times throughout his testimony, from Wilson's initial demand that the men "get the fuck on the sidewalk" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 45) to the manner in which Wilson drew his firearm, Johnson describes Wilson's attitude as being "like chastisement from a father to a son" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 114). He remembers Wilson being incensed by their refusal to heed his demands about jaywalking but says Wilson never addressed the cigarillos during their encounter. (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 45-49)

Johnson also testifies that he never saw Brown touch Wilson's gun, nor did he see Brown "physically striking" Wilson at any point, only trying to free himself from Wilson's grip, adding that it wouldn't likely have been possible for Brown to reach the firearm based on the angles. (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 107) Here, as at many points in his

108

testimony, Johnson is questioned by the district prosecuting attorneys as to the validity of his

memory, with one (Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Sheila Whirley) implying that Johnson's

5'6" stature would have made it impossible for him to see for sure, though Johnson insists

on the veracity of his memory.[7] Johnson also accurately asserts that Wilson wasn't much

smaller than Brown, calling Wilson a "grown man" with "a little training on him" made of

"solid muscle" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 114), a far cry from Wilson's description

of himself as a child at the mercy of a professional wrestler. He goes on to state that in this

situation, "[Wilson] was the aggressor by initially just the way he reversed and opened his

door, and the grab, it was overaggressive" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 114). Though

Wilson was adamant that the entire encounter started because he recognized the cigarillos in

Brown's hand and connected them to a theft that had just been called in, Johnson asserts that

Wilson never mentioned the theft, only expressed anger that the men didn't immediately

obey his authority.

      When questioned as to why he didn't try to de-escalate the situation before shots

were fired (a task that should have been Wilson's to begin with), Johnson responds: "I felt

victimized because I felt so afraid that I couldn't talk. I couldn't say what was on my mind

because I'm so afraid of, I couldn't calm it down. I don't have the power to calm down the

police officer and obviously Big Mike is bigger than me" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol.

IV 102). Johnson also admits that due to trauma from being shot earlier in life, he entered a

state of shock following the initial gunshot, making it difficult to recall subsequent events in

the kind of detail the grand jury wanted. But while Wilson's admission of shock as an

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[7] Johnson, on his view of the altercation at the car window: "You're not going to have that much ease with just, hey, get over here in this window. No, he's big, he's standing up, and the officer's gun is on his right side, I believe, because that's where he drew from with his right arm. In order for Big Mike to have touched the gun, it is almost like his whole top half of his body had to be inside the vehicle, and that never happened." (Missouri State Grand Jury Volume IV 111)

excuse for not knowing how many shots he fired is met with little skepticism, the

prosecutors regard Johnson's foggy memory dubiously, questioning him down to the finest

detail even as he repeats how the bang of the gunshot triggered a trauma response within

him. (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 116) Later, Johnson's fogginess would be used to

discredit Johnson as a witness. What Johnson does recall is Wilson quickly walking towards

Brown with his weapon drawn and then shooting again, causing Brown to "[jerk] and stop in

his track" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 120). Johnson says Brown then turned toward

Wilson with his hands slightly up "but not so much in the air because he had been struck

already" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 121).[8] He remembers Brown telling Wilson "I

don't have a gun," but "before he can [repeat the] sentence, or before he can get it out, that's

when the several more shots came" (Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 123). Johnson

describes Brown falling in a hail of gunfire: "I can see how many shots this officer is firing,

and it's sickening to my stomach, I'm almost bursting in tears right there. I threw up a little

in my mouth initially...When I see his body hit the ground, in my head I say he's dead"

(Missouri State Grand Jury Vol. IV 120). Johnson says he ran home in fear for his own life

thereafter, and only returned later to see what was happening.

 Various eyewitnesses disputed Wilson's account, but many of these witnesses were

deemed officially unreliable by the Department of Justice (DOJ), who claimed that these

witnesses presented conflicting statements or gave information that couldn't be corroborated

by official evidence. Activists following the case raised suspicions about so many witnesses

being discredited, particularly because most of the accounts deemed unreliable were those

that did not favor Wilson and/or came from Canfield Green residents. In order to indict

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[8] This detail is important because witnesses who claimed Brown had his hands up when he was shot were
discredited, even though Johnson's explanation clarifies why there might have been confusion.

Wilson, the DOJ investigation would have needed evidence enough to prove first that it was "unreasonable" for Wilson to believe Brown posed a mortal threat and second, that at least one of the 12 shots fired constituted a "willful intent" to harm Brown. As the DOJ report states, "although no eyewitness directly corroborates Wilson's account...there is no direct evidence to disprove Wilson's account," and thus, "there is no credible evidence to refute Wilson's subjective belief that he was acting in self-defense" (US DOJ, *Darren Wilson* 12). Yet this statement is only possible if one accepts the investigation's rather subjective judgments about who constitutes a credible witness. Referring to Johnson as Witness 101, the DOJ report asserts that because an autopsy did not reveal bruising on Brown's neck, Johnson's statement about Wilson grabbing Brown cannot be corroborated, even as Johnson states multiple times that Wilson had Brown more the shirt and later by the right arm which, once shot, would not have revealed any physical evidence. Further, Brown's size is again used to discredit Johnson's account,[9] without any acknowledgment of Wilson's similar size or even how a slight strength disparity could account for a lack of bruising on Brown's body. In determining which witnesses can be considered credible and which not, the DOJ report is lenient about inconsistencies in reports by witnesses that support Wilson's account while being all too willing to use even specious evidence to discredit accounts that contradict Wilson, particularly those from residents of Canfield Green.[10] While it would be

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[9] "The private forensic pathologist opined that although the lack of injury does not signify the absence of strangulation, it would be "surprising," given Brown's size, if Wilson attempted to strangle Brown. The private forensic pathologist explained that the act of strangling is often committed by the stronger person, as it is rarely effective if attempted by the person of smaller size or weaker strength." (DOJ Report on Wilson, 20). This quote is especially telling considering the fact that it was based in the forensic pathologist's opinion and speculation and uses unclear terms like "often" and "rarely" rather than stating objective observations about the physical evidence gathered. The DOJ openly assert that they used this rather subjective finding to discredit any witness testimonies to the contrary, such as Johnson's.

[10] See Witness 109 (32), Witness 113 (33), Witness 134 (34), etc. in the Department of Justice Report on Darren Wilson. The most egregious example of this is their decision to mostly ignore biases in the testimony from Wilson's own fiancee, Witness 134, herself a Ferguson police officer who had been Wilson's Field

impossible to prove here that the DOJ's findings reflect anti-Black bias, suspicions that

racial bias were a motivating factor in dismissing witnesses, particularly those whose

inhabited experiences of life in Canfield Green might shed light on the shooting,

undoubtedly contributed to the level of protesters exhibited in Ferguson following Wilson's

acquittal. Further, the disparity in the level of cross-examination between Wilson's

testimony and Johnson's suggests an investigation driven by a narrative in which Wilson

was always considered a more reliable witness and was hence granted far greater benefit of

the doubt.

Even if one takes Wilson at his word, his account is tellingly steeped in language

which dehumanizes Brown. In it, Brown is a hulking mass, a demon, a devil fueled by rage,

but seemingly never a person. His characterization echoes Macek's assertion that within

moral panics, the Other is seen as a sort of "folk devil" who embodies evil and can be used

to amplify fear.[11] At no point does Wilson admit that his training ought to have prepared him

to de-escalate the situation or subdue a larger person peacefully, and his blatant

mischaracterization of the size disparity between him and Brown reads as egregiously

intentional. Wilson is also adamant that Brown's anger and aggression was unjustified, even

after Brown had already been shot.When one contrasts Wilson's hyperbole with the more

neutral account Johnson offers, it seems criminal that Wilson's exaggerated rhetoric was

never questioned. As *New Yorker* journalist Amy Davidson Sorkin suggests, Wilson's

testimony implies that "[Brown's] discontent [made] him presumptively dangerous: scary"

Training Officer and who testified that she knew Wilson had sealed his weapon in an evidence bag even
though her back was to him when it happened. Meanwhile, Johnson (Witness 101) is listed among witnesses
considered not credible on account of his history of "misdemeanor crimes of dishonesty" and the subjective
judgment that his "inability to perceive what happened, or lack thereof" renders his account unviable, despite
the fact Johnson's explanation of his foggy memory is consistent with a trauma response to a gunshot. (47)
[11] Macek is borrowing this term from Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods
and Rockers*. Oxford, 1972: Martin Robertson.

(Sorkin). If the legal question of Wilson's culpability rested so squarely on the reasonableness and intent of all shots fired, then it is galling that no one thought to challenge such outlandishly dehumanizing claims about Brown. Sorkin continues, "In the transcript, there is not really a cross-examination [of Wilson], or any interrogation of the portrait of a young man who would run, enraged and magically indifferent, toward a volley of bullets, as if this were somehow a familiar, easily recognizable character...It's worth asking if [Brown] had a chance" (Sorkin). Sorkin's indignant summation reflects the ire of the protesters who filled Ferguson's streets in the weeks and months after Wilson's acquittal, who saw the failure to indict Wilson as proof of a wider societal trend in which white cops are taken at their word and protected by their own whereas Black men (and other people of color) are uniformly regarded as criminally suspicious and unreliable witnesses, even in death.

In his testimony, Wilson's biases and presumptions extend to the residents of the Canfield Green Apartments, the public low-income housing complex outside of which Brown was shot. When asked if the police have a "volatile" relationship with the residents at Canfield Green, Wilson responded "it is an anti-police area for sure," adding that the neighborhood tended to make him feel like he needed to be "on high alert." He elaborates:

> There's a lot of gangs that reside or associate with that area. There's a lot of violence in that area, there's a lot of gun activity, drug activity, it is just not a very well-liked community. That community doesn't like the police...That's not an area where you can take anything really lightly. Like I said, it is a hostile environment. There are good people over there, there really are, but I mean there is an influx of gang activity in that area. (Missouri State Grand Jury Volume V 238-239)

By contrast, speaking as a resident of Canfield Green, Johnson describes the neighborhood as a welcome escape from a more violent past. He remarks that now that he lives there, he walks his dog a lot and "[lives] a peaceful lifestyle," describing Brown as well-liked and popular with neighborhood kids in Canfield Green as well. He characterizes Canfield Green as a place where residents look out for one another, saying it was common for people Brown's age to come to him for advice precisely because he had managed to get out of a more violent past and establish a comfortable life for himself in Ferguson. (Missouri State Grand Jury Volume IV, 61-63) When both accounts of Canfield Green are evaluated side by side, one would be hard-pressed to identify that Wilson and Johnson are describing the same neighborhood.

Wilson's description of Canfield Green maps to the open hostility residents perceived from police officers in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, hostility corroborated by the DOJ's findings about widespread racial bias within the Ferguson Police Department (FPD) as a whole. Following Brown's death, residents asserted that FPD officers overtly mishandled the crime scene, failing to cover Brown's body with a sheet for hours and desecrating memorials set in the street for him by running them over with their cars and allowing their dogs to urinate on them. (Chang, *We Gon' Be Alright*, 94). This egregious behavior is reflected in the DOJ's finding that the FPD perpetuated a police culture marked by open anti-Black sentiment. Given the DOJ's findings on the department from whence Wilson came, it is galling that like his other exaggerations, his description of Canfield Green is never cross-examined. Even though the shooting took place on a suburban cul-de-sac less than two miles from a country club, Wilson insists that majority-Black

Canfield Green is riddled with threats like gangs, drugs, and guns, all of which commonly come up in anti-urban narratives about the moral failures of urban space.

The DOJ's report on the FPD describes a police culture in which revenues from fines and municipal court sentencing are prioritized over citizen well-being and in which open racial bias is used to justify the FPD's excessively punitive and often unsafe treatment of Ferguson's residents of color. The report identifies that "failure to hold officers accountable for misconduct" had been a known issue in the department "long before Michael Brown's shooting death" (US DOJ, *Ferguson Police Department* 79) but little had ever been done to address it. Part IV of the report focuses specifically on how FPD routinely violated the law and undermined community trust when dealing with Black residents, naming Canfield Green as a specific example of an area for which "FPD has no community policing or community engagement plan" (US DOJ, *Ferguson Police Department* 87). The DOJ further notes that since Brown's death, city and police officials "have realized that there are entire segments of the Ferguson community that they have never made an effort to know, especially African-Americans who live in large apartment complexes, including Canfield Green" and that little has been done to rectify this lack of outreach because officials have been "too quick to presume that outreach to more disconnected segments of the Ferguson community will be futile" (US DOJ, *Ferguson Police Department* 88). Coupled with the fact that despite Ferguson's two-thirds Black population demographics, only four of FPD's 54 officers at the time of the shooting were Black, this refusal to engage large portions of Ferguson's Black community suggests that entire swaths of the population were policed by white officers uninterested in serving or protecting them. FPD officers remained completely

unfamiliar with important parts of Ferguson's urban fabric, allowing them to disregard entire neighborhoods as volatile and anti-police.

The fact that the DOJ could map the FPD's biases to large apartment complexes with mostly Black populations is not immaterial, for it is precisely these complexes that defy the mediated image of suburban spaces like Ferguson as the domain of the white and affluent. Not only do the FPD's biases speak to the racialized way urbanity is conceived by white suburbanites, but also they reveal how FPD officers mentally segregated Ferguson's neighborhoods along color lines, seeing predominantly Black or low-income neighborhoods as separate from the Ferguson community broadly conceived. Given the way the DOJ explicitly identified Canfield Green as a blindspot for the FPD, it would seem that Wilson's description of being "on high alert" when near Canfield Green, his assertion that gangs, drugs, and gun violence were common there, and his description of the neighborhood as anti-police all ought to have been taken into consideration when determining if Wilson's fears about Brown were reasonable, yet his comments about the neighborhood remain a mere blip in his testimony. This suggests that the discourse of urban crisis has become normative enough in American society as to go unchallenged even when the consequences of accepting its rhetoric proves fatal.

Wilson's testimony that Canfield Green was plagued by gangs, guns, and drugs reflects Macek's assertion that "suburban antagonism toward the city manifests itself first of all as an obsessive fear of urban crime" (Macek 29). Wilson's admission that Canfield Green is "not a very well-liked community," the grand jury's willingness to discount Canfield Green residents as witnesses, and FPD's refusal to engage with the neighborhood undoubtedly point to a situation in which Canfield Green's mostly Black residents are

116

regarded first as liars and potential criminals before Ferguson citizens. As Macek argues, this is because when the urban Other is viewed from the perspective of those with power, "no commonality, no communication, no shared experience or struggle is desirable or even possible; the only possible relation decent (white, suburban) people can have to such Others is to exclude, control, and confine them" (Macek 133). It is evident from the DOJ's report on the FPD that this is how the residents of Canfield Green have been treated, revealing the relationship between a discourse of urban crisis and racially biased policing.

Though the DOJ did not find evidence enough to indict Wilson individually, there can be no doubt that his biases about Canfield Green and his assumptions about the types of activities young Black men might be engaged in there contributed to his nervousness in confronting Brown, not to mention the patronizing hostility Johnson recalled from Wilson long before shots were fired. Regardless of whether or not Wilson is culpable for the shooting, these biases assuredly played a role in his characterization of Brown's aggression and physicality, his assumption that Brown was likely to be armed, and ultimately his evaluation that it would be reasonable to discharge his weapon so many times. In failing to indict Wilson, it would seem the DOJ never took these self-admitted biases into account, nor did they consider how Brown's apparent hostility could stem from panic due to his inhabited knowledge of the FPD's racial biases. The gap between the DOJ's respective investigations of Wilson and the FPD reflects a willingness to absolve Wilson's individual spatial bias even after identifying a pattern of racial bias in the department from which he came. Close readings of both DOJ reports as well as Wilson's and Johnson's grand jury testimonies illuminate how a discourse of urban crisis helps normalize white suburban panic about people of color, including people of color who do not live in properly urban neighborhoods.

117

Both Martin's and Brown's death demonstrate that far from existing as purely theoretical

concerns, the consequences of widespread acceptance of both the suburbia simulacrum and

the anti-urban moral panic that upholds it can be fatal.

Moral Panic and the Urban Anti-Suburb

Moral panic over the city recasts both urban space and people of color as inferior,

prone to chaos, inherently dangerous, and in need of increasingly restrictive policing, all in

an effort to assure white suburban residents of the superiority of suburban space and their

security within it. This discourse of urban crisis directly benefits those economic actors who

gain the most from the continued proliferation of suburban sprawl, making it useful for

advancing both right-wing and neoliberal political agendas. Over the last half century in

both the mainstream mass media and within American politics, moral panic narratives have

helped create an urban/suburban dichotomy to which suburbanites have responded, as

Macek clarifies, "with fear and a growing unease about an urban underclass seen as

criminal, degenerate, violent, and a threat to the family-oriented way of life they cherish," a

reaction that is undoubtedly "rooted in suburbia's culture of privatism and anti-urbanism"

(Macek 35). Moral panic over the city--a direct ancillary to the suburbia simulacrum and the

hegemony that attends it--can thus be characterized as an intentional equation of criminality,

disease, and urban decay with all people of color, but especially with those who inhabit

ghettoized urban neighborhoods or any other impoverished space where white people are a

minority.

In the logic of suburban hegemony, the ghettoized inner-city and its predominantly

Black and brown inhabitants are considered infectious agents that perpetually threaten

118

suburban homeostasis. Although Martin was shot by a suburban civilian and Brown by an official state actor, both Zimmerman and Wilson committed violence against young Black men and then justified it by appealing to a social dictum by which law and order in (white) suburban space is exerted through control over a supposed urban Other. Both men operated according to their unquestioned equation of young Black men with urban crime and had those biases deemed legally reasonable. And both benefited from a system of law and order in which Black bodies are preemptively deemed dangerous so as to justify any violence used against them, a system that takes its cues from a society now dominated by white suburban hegemony. Their cases reflect the degree to which the imagined safety and order of suburban spaces--even those suburban spaces, like Ferguson, which are no longer predominantly white--tends to take precedence over the bodily autonomy and basic human rights of people of color. Even where people of color are brutalized in properly urban spaces, they are often brutalized through practices of racial profiling that reflect an implicit drive to keep supposed urban criminality from ever bleeding into the (white) suburban spaces outside the urban core.

The effects of mediated anti-urban narratives are especially harmful to residents of urban neighborhoods that can be considered ghettoized based on their poverty rate, population density, and the intentional segregation historically used to concentrate certain ethnic or racial populations within them. This is in part because the continued prominence of suburbia as a symbol of American prosperity depends on a reciprocal devaluation of the symbolic (non-white) urban inhabitant as Other and it is these ghettoized neighborhoods considered most Other to suburban ideals. Like the suburbia simulacrum, the discourse of urban crisis is also a mediated imaginary, created to reinforce the hegemony of a suburban

119

culture that has been mass-mediated since the onset of contemporary suburbanization. (Macek 34) Macek explains that panic over the city "was neither a simple reflex of the suburban mentality nor a realistic response to a genuine threat" but was instead "created, fueled, and organized by a right-wing discourse on the 'urban crisis' that supplied an ideological framework and a set of ideologically laden concepts for interpreting conditions in the inner city, one which both amplified suburban fears and gave them a decidedly reactionary spin. (Macek 36) He asserts that the ideological framework to which urban panic gave shape created a means by which "suburbia's inchoate anxieties" could "be articulated in public debate, made self-conscious, rationalized, connected to a precise political agenda, woven into the prevailing cultural climate, and given a modicum of intellectual legitimacy" (Macek 36). Following a Foucauldian logic, mediated images of urban crisis were considered reliable knowledge in part because they were often transmitted by official channels that suburban residents trusted.[12] In both fictional and news-based depictions of the city throughout the '80s and '90s in news broadcasts, television, film, and other media, "the neighborhoods housing the urban underclass were almost always depicted as chaotic, ruined, and repellent, the exact inverse of the orderly domestic idyll of the suburbs" (Macek 38). Urban crisis thus became an antithetical foil for the illusions of order and contentment reflected in images of suburbia.

Where the suburb as mediated through the suburbia simulacrum could be seen as hegemonically normative, moral panic over the city redefined urban space in negative relation to suburbia's impossibly utopian characteristics. The suburbia simulacrum rendered

[12] Enumerating the various media channels that perpetuated discourses of urban crisis is the primary focus of Macek's book *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right, and the Moral Panic over the City* (2006), where one can find numerous specific examples of individual broadcasts, speeches, publications, etc. that use its rhetoric. For further reading, I recommend his chapter "Crack Alleys and Killing Zones" for its thorough accounts of the role played by primetime news stations in disseminating anti-urban narratives.

urban space an anti-suburbia, the antithesis of the comfort and order suburbia is supposed to

foster. Like the suburbia simulacrum, moral panic over the city virtually erased the racial

coding undergirding its prominence, replacing it with castigation of the city as an

environment. Macek argues that such racial coding "performs an important socio-

psychological function for the white middle class in that it...permits the expression of deeply

felt anti-black and Latino sentiment with little self-consciousness or embarrassment,"

allowing prominent figures (such as politicians, academics, and journalists) to perpetuate

negative stereotypes about people of color while feigning a neutral distance from explicitly

racist or classist language. (Macek 136) These coded notions of urbanity remain part of

biased media reporting and dog-whistle politics to this day, evolving with the media

landscape and becoming integrated into digital forms of media. As such, perpetrators of

racially motivated violence often attempt to use these code terms to excuse their crimes or

otherwise appeal to the necessity of maintaining law and order over chaotic so-called urban

dangers. Moreover, this coded equation of non-whiteness with urban criminality explains

how even people of color who do not come from urban neighborhoods may still find

themselves subjected to racial discrimination that follows anti-urban sentiments.

Many of the coded terms used in anti-urban narratives are simply negative re-

significations of terms already considered specific to urban space. This includes the word

"urban" itself, but also includes term like "shady," "gangster," "hood," "thug," and "ghetto,"

among many others. Still other terms, such as "underclass," "superpredator," and "welfare

queen" were created by the media explicitly for the purpose of sensationalizing urban crime

and fomenting moral panic. (Macek 136) Even city names can be turned into anti-urban

coding, such as the shorthand use of Chicago or Baltimore to indicate urban space overrun

by criminality. Such terms are most often deployed in ways that offer speakers a modicum of deniability about the racist assumptions underlying their sentiments. Further, while laws against hate speech and social norms of liberal civility often prevent the use of more overtly racist terms,[13] there is far less collective resistance to characterizations of urban residents as welfare queens, vagrants, crack heads, or gangster thugs, despite the way the media has used all four terms to specifically depict people of color.[14] While people of color are the primary targets of this coded messaging, anti-urban bias also extends to single mothers, the severely impoverished, queer and trans people, the homeless, the undocumented, and those forced into illegal or otherwise precarious forms of work, such as prostitution, particularly where any such status intersects with one's non-white racial or ethnic identity.

Though statistics suggest that both ghettoization and economic deprivation of urban neighborhoods with large populations of color have been purposeful and planned, blame for the diminished quality of life residents of these neighborhoods face has too often been heaped upon the landscape itself. The infrastructural, political, and social devaluation of the city is a predictable consequence of any mass urban out-migration as substantial as was white flight, yet idealized characterizations of suburban space have allowed suburban residents to presume that the hardships of contemporary urban life are problems of the city itself, not a result of concentrated anti-urban social and political action. Beyond its clear racial motivation, white flight by means of suburban migration was often marketed as a way for the affluent to escape an urban space perceived as too chaotic and dangerous to raise a family or foster copacetic communities. Consequently, the assumption that urban decay has

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[13] Admittedly, the prevalent public use of overtly racist words has increased due to the rise of Trumpism, though there is not space enough within the current scope of inquiry to make this claim definitively.
[14] See Macek's chapter "Crack Alleys and Killing Zones."

continued unchecked ever since contemporary suburbanization began underpins the discourse on urban crisis, particularly among suburbanites whose interactions with city spaces are limited to mediated narratives of the urban environment. While this assumption does prove true in many cities, the causes of continued urban deprivation often get ignored precisely because moral panic narratives help hide the true social causes or urban decay. The result is that anti-urban narratives continue to portray the city as a crisis space in desperate need of restored social order, an assumption belied by the way affluent white enclaves within urban environments (Beverly Hills, New York's Upper West Side) have continued to fare just fine. When viewed through a suburban lens, the diminished quality of life faced by populations of color who remain in the city seems logical, predictable, inevitable, and perhaps most worryingly, deserved. Coupled with the American tendency towards individualism and the dominant neoliberal belief that economic opportunity is equally meted out among American citizen, the prevailing suburban mindset seems to be that if urban residents wanted a better life, they would work hard and move to the suburbs as well. The blatant fallacy of this logic is of course premised on ignorance about the numerous ways that even affluent urban residents of color have historically been shut out from suburbanization.

Because mainstream media's moral panic narratives throughout the '80s and '90s helped reify images of moral panic over urban space, they also helped support conservative pushes for greater privatization and individualism in American politics. These narratives continue into the present day even as the types of mass media with which people engage have evolved. For this reason, moral panic over the city can be linked to the political foothold afforded neoliberal ideologies over the past half century. Though both neoliberal ideology and the discourse of urban crisis seemingly support conservative more than liberal

123

politics, Macek clarifies that "the discourse on the urban crisis and the moral panic it produced helped forge a new right-wing consensus on the city's ills that reached beyond the right's traditional constituencies and became the ideological common ground of both major political parties" (Macek 131). Consequently, "it has helped to forge hegemony in the Gramscian sense of creating a platform and political vision uniting heterogenous political aspirations and identities" (Macek 131). This rightward political movement also reflects how powerful the suburban voting bloc has become over the same period, especially given that suburban residents of all political persuasions tend to serve their own interests first and foremost.[15] On the academic end during this same period, racist anti-urban political ideologies were advanced by the likes of Charles Murray, Dinesh D'Souza, and William Bennett, all of whom used harmfully unscientific evidence to blame urban decline on the moral decrepitude and assumed natural inadequacy of Black and brown people. Rather than being tossed aside, both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton alike embraced these men's ideas in shaping their urban political policies.[16] By suggesting that the problems ghettoized neighborhoods face are the result of residents of colors' moral failures rather than forced social conditions, such thinkers posited that impoverished urban residents were responsible for their own diminished quality of life. Once policy makers and media outlets embraced these flawed academic ideas as legitimate, their toxic assumptions came to be seen more and more as objective fact.

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[15] "With the exception of their support for programs that aid the elderly like Medicare and Social Security, suburbanites largely oppose 'big government' and favor instead a politics of extreme privatism and atomistic individualism." (Macek 33)

[16] See Macek's second chapter, "Inventing the Savage Urban Other," for in-depth explanations of the ideas published by each of the thinkers mentioned. As Macek elaborates, all three were cited by prominent politicians as influential in shaping their urban policies.

Moral panic narratives often portray urban residents as unmotivated and lazy, an entire underclass generation leeching off a system that suburban residents believe should be serving their own more worthy communities. (Macek 68-70) This line of thinking helped spurn suburban support for neoliberal disinvestment in urban social infrastructures and public services from the 1980s onward. Simultaneously, it "limited the potential for urban/suburban alliances around demands for such common goals as more jobs, a cleaner environment, universal health insurance, affordable housing, higher wages, and better schools" (Macek 133). While there is nothing new about the capitalist strategy of keeping the working poor from coming to class consciousness, the neoliberal turn helped concretize political divisions along urban/suburban and white/non-white lines and then, through coded rhetoric, masked the way the former division was used as a stand-in for the latter. Macek writes that in characterizing the urban poor as "shiftless and lazy," the right-wing discourse of urban crisis "implies that the suburban and the affluent are the opposite--responsible and hard-working," assuring that "the plight of the inner-city residents [can be seen] as self-inflicted," thus reinforcing the type of individualism that so benefited neoliberal policies. (Macek 131) Once individualism came to be seen as the highest American virtue, suburban voters paradoxically viewed anti-urban policies as a kindness that discouraged dependence on the state and created harsher punishments for forms of criminality and disorder perceived as resulting from a lack of discipline. Moral panic over the city provided ideological justification for neoliberal privatization and individualism in ways that made suburban voters believe these policies served the greater good, even when and where such changes proved detrimental to their own interests, let alone those of urban residents.

Divestment in urban infrastructure and social services throughout the Reagan era was matched with increased military spending and an attendant increase and militarization of police forces, all marketed as necessary steps to protect the suburban masses from a poor urban underclass viewed as beyond reform. The moral panic used to rationalize such efforts assured that even as public support for even the most basic social services and needs of urban populations dwindled, these same populations increasingly found themselves the scapegoated targets of a "victim-blaming discourse on the city" that Macek suggests constituted a "Gramscian struggle for hegemony" (Macek 40). Since the funding cut for urban social programs often got diverted to police to support their efforts at maintaining law and order over a supposedly criminal urban underclass, these policies directly contributed to increasingly authoritarian police brutality in ghettoized urban neighborhoods.

To provide but one example, the LAPD utilized the so-called war on drugs to influence voters to support police funding throughout the '80s. Towards the end of the decade, they established a Gang Related Active Trafficker Suppression (GRATS) program and used this new force to profile anyone they suspected might be a gang member, basing their stops ostensibly on "their dress or their use of gang hand signals" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 272). When these efforts failed to curtail gang activity, Police Chief Daryl Gates[17] requested yet more funding to support the LAPD in what he called Operation HAMMER. In 1988, Operation HAMMER engaged in a raid on a group of apartments on Dalton Street in South Central that resulted in only two minor drug arrests. During the raid, residents reported being beat with fists and "long steel flashlights" while the police attempted to render the apartments uninhabitable by "throwing washing machines into bathtubs, pouring

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[17] Daryl Gates would later be at the center of controversy about the demonstrated racial bias of the LAPD surrounding the beating of Rodney King in 1991.

bleach over clothes, smashing walls and furniture with sledgehammers and axes, and ripping an outside stairwell away from one building" while also engaging in petty forms of vandalism like "[spraypainting] the walls with slogans, such as 'LAPD Rules'" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 276). The damage was so extreme that the Red Cross extended disaster relief to displaced residents, yet when confronted, the officers responsible for the raid attempted to claim that the damage was "gang-inflicted" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 276). The Dalton Street episode reflects a particularly egregious example of the way moral panic over the city couples victim-blaming rhetorics with an appeal to law-and-order politics to justify increased policing of urban populations in ways that often increase the likelihood of police brutality.

In *City of Quartz* (1989), Mike Davis describes Los Angeles in the late '80s as a space in which "the contemporary Gang scare has become an imaginary class relationship, a terrain of pseudo-knowledge and fantasy projection" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 270). Within this social climate, suburban fears that gang criminality might escape their ghettoized spatial confines justified harmful misapplication of law-and-order justice not just in Los Angeles, but in cities all over the country. (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 270) Simultaneously, Davis asserts, the mass media routinely used descriptions of gang violence as a "voyeuristic titillation to white suburbanites devouring lurid imagery in their newspapers and on television" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 270). In framing stories of gang violence in ways meant to increase news consumption more than report facts, the mass media benefitted from feeding suburban fears and sensationalizing gang violence while at the same time diminishing the chances that the social issues affecting neighborhoods would be addressed outside of increased application of state violence. When one considers that suburbanites are the target audience of mainstream

127

mass media, it becomes clear that anti-urban fear-mongering was always concerned more with manipulating suburban viewers than with documenting the problems facing urban neighborhoods. It helped secure the continued devotion of suburban residents to the status quo by repeatedly invoking the dangers faced by those Others who lived outside their space, making it that much less likely that suburbanites would question the implied superiority of suburban space.

Where the media portrays suburban space *vis a vis* the suburbia simulacrum as controllable, affluent, morally virtuous, and marked by law and order, mediated portrayals of urban space offer the inverse image: the mediated urban is chaotic, impoverished, morally corrupt, and marked by an unruly disregard for law and order that is above all characterized by a desire to victimize affluent white bodies. While on the one hand such portrayals bias suburban residents against the urban environment, they also discourage suburban interaction with urban residents of color, thereby precluding the possibility of mass recognition of how little urban crisis narratives reflect the everyday lives of urban residents of color. The more the media portrayed urban space in derogatory ways, the less likely it became that suburbanites would even visit, let alone move to, neighborhoods increasingly depicted as the criminal and chaotic domain of populations of color. As a result, few suburban residents developed an understanding of ghettoized urban neighborhoods outside of media portrayals and second-hand knowledge, compounding suburban racial bias while also contributing to greater suburban isolation. Macek writes that "dependence on the media for knowledge of the urban 'Other' by itself generates a psychological distance between the suburbs and the cities…[that is] compounded by the fact that the stories the media tell about urban existence are often alarming or derogatory and tend to feed into and reaffirm the agoraphobic leanings

of the contemporary suburban outlook" (Macek 35). This psychological distance helped

reinforce suburban attachment to a "privatized, home-centered life" that in turn benefitted

the mass media by making television, newspapers, and more recently, social media, the

preferred forms of suburban cultural engagement. (Macek 35) Moreover, by glorifying the

safety of suburban space and ignoring its own dangers, these narratives helped prevent

widespread consideration of new, alternative spatial configurations and living arrangements

outside suburbanization models, thus perpetuating the negative effects of suburban sprawl.[18]

In her book *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial

Burnout* (2016), Lynn Mie Itagaki considers the way the media has historically portrayed

Los Angeles' populations of color as violent and incivil. She posits that the mediated

polarization of urban and suburban space is built into a racialized binary of civility and

incivility, where suburban space is cast as the natural domain of civilized society and urban

space is rendered comparatively wild and uncivilized. One place that Itagaki identifies these

binaries bleeding into mediated racial bias is in mass media coverage of protests and

demonstrations. While protests by white people are generally seen as peaceful and civil even

when they turn violent, even non-violent protests by people of color have historically been

considered incivil and violent. As with moral panic narratives generally, policymakers and

mass media outlets alike help maintain the status quo by characterizing protests by people of

color as "the gateway to destructive violence," and they do so by "[deeming] threatening

even peaceful or non-violent protests for the way they physically or sonically take up shared

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[18] The more that gentrification continues, the more this tendency seems to be inverting, where affluent white residents again feel comfortable returning to gentrified urban spaces, and the urban poor who have been displaced from gentrified urban spaces are increasingly moving to older/cheaper suburbs that had previously been closed off to them. However, this new dynamic does little to change the prominence of media messaging that suggests that spaces predominantly inhabited by people of color ought to be considered off-limits or no-go zones for the affluent white population.

spaces or create a so-called climate of violence" (Itagaki xii). In the case of both the 2014

Ferguson protests following Wilson's acquittal and the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion, reports

of looting, rioting, and violence dominated the media's coverage of events. While in both

instances these reports were not factually untrue, there's evidence to suggest that these

activities only took place within small pockets of much larger non-violent demonstrations.

Moreover, even where violence did occur within these larger demonstrations, it was

violence that responded to a predominant feeling of voicelessness in the face of state

violence against people of color that, unlike looting and rioting, gets dismissed as justified

and normal. Itagaki writes:

> Detractors of protests often fail to acknowledge how peace and civility *require* force
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> and violence. And often, the peace and civility enjoyed by some rests on the force
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> and violence directed at many more others, whether by heavily policing specific
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> communities, imprisoning more people, or transferring resources from the bottom to
>
> the top. In delegitimizing and vilifying protest, its critics cast this violence that
>
> upholds the status quo as just, fair, and democratic. (xii)

Itagaki goes on to argue that since the mainstream media and those with power control the

channels by which news of protests is disseminated, they also dictate public perceptions

about the level of threat a given protest poses. This allows them to admonish the protest

actions of some while uplifting the protest actions of others, even when the actual actions

undertaken are the same.[19] Such racially motivated characterization of protests by people of

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[19] To provide one indicative example, following the 2018 Super Bowl, groups of predominantly white fans of
the victorious Philadelphia Eagles tore through Philadelphia engaging in looting, arson, and destruction of
property. However, unlike in the case of the 2014 Ferguson protests or the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion, media
outlets largely characterized these behaviors as "rowdy celebrations" ("Philadelphia fans set fire, damage
property after Super Bowl win," *Reuters*, 5 February 2018) by "revelers" (Andrew Parent, "Seven more
revelers arrested after Eagles Super Bowl celebration." *Philly Voice*, 7 February 2018).

color as violent and incivil is part and parcel of the depiction of ghettoized spaces as domains of incivility.

Itagaki's focus on the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion is a useful flashpoint for this issue because it constituted one of the earliest examples of a massive demonstration of unrest within urban public space aimed at policies and tensions directly influenced by a discourse of urban crisis. Moreover, the mass media's frequent comparisons of Ferguson in 2014 to Los Angeles in 1992 reflect how prevalent moral panic narratives remain to this day, since the media still uses the 1992 Rebellion as a demonstrative example of the destructive potential of urban populations of color. In City of Quartz, which was published three years before the '92 Rebellion, Los Davis characterized racial tensions in Los Angeles as a situation in which "the spectre of the Black criminal underclass has begun to augment, even replace, the Red Menace as the satanic 'Other' which justifies the trampling of civil liberties" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 289-290). Davis extensively maps the numerous social factors that negatively affected everyday life for Black and Latinx Los Angeles residents at the end of the '80s, noting in particular that LA's ghettoized South Central neighborhoods were unsurprisingly those hit hardest by the de-industrialization of Los Angeles' labor markets during this same period, leaving a generation of urban youth socially isolated with few employment prospects. The militarized policing of the LAPD in the era of Operation HAMMER simultaneously posed a threat to young people of color who attempted to find alternative means of survival within these conditions. "Without the mobilized counterweight of angry protest," Davis writes, "Southcentral LA has been betrayed by virtually every level of government" (Davis, *City of Quartz*, 309). In *City of Quartz*, Davis presciently predicts that police brutality and anti-urban sentiment will only continue to proliferate over time

unless something is done to address the pressing needs of residents in LA's ghettoized South Central neighborhoods. Writing in 1989 that "a whole generation is being shunted towards some impossible Armageddon," Davis read the proverbial tea leaves of the tensions that would find a breaking point in the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion.

In 2012, Davis' essay "A Tale of Two Riots" compared the '92 Rebellion to the 1965 Watts Rebellion, noting that unlike in 1965, there was "no official interest in unpacking the separate but convergent causes of 1992, or looking at the mass repression and violation of civil liberties that followed" (Davis, *A Tale of Two Riots*). He also observes that while most of the people arrested during the rebellion were not Black, the media narrative focused on "black gangs looting the city" and arranged their reporting around this urban spectre. (Davis, *A Tale of Two Riots*). He chastises the media's lackadaisical approach to reporting on events in 1992, noting that they relied either on paraphrased reports from police or on what they could see from news helicopters so as to avoid entering the neighborhoods affected. Recalling his own experiences on the day of the event, Davis notes that while he did see "looting and some arson" there was "no violence" (Davis, *A Tale of Two Riots*). Davis' characterization of the way the police and the media handled the '92 Rebellion resonates with the situation following protests in Ferguson, reflecting Itagaki's conclusion that because racist anti-urban narratives have yet to be eradicated, Americans continue to "rehearse old ways of racist knowing and must struggle for an antiracist becoming" (Itagaki 225). But since even peaceful protest from urban residents of color is seen as violent incivility, this struggle for an antiracist becoming must include an effort to create resistant counter-narratives that dismantle the discourse on urban crisis and the racialized assumptions that underpin it, potentiating new understanding of inhabited urban space. It

stands to reason that such counter-narratives must center the voices of those most demonized

by anti-urban moral panic, for it is only first-hand knowledge of life in ghettoized

neighborhoods that can supplant the wild speculations of second-hand characterization. In

the Los Angeles of which Davis wrote in *City of Quartz*, within the same social conditions

that preempted the '92 Rebellion, at the height of the discourse on urban crisis, one art form

found its cause for genesis precisely in the need to advance first-hand knowledge of

inhabited life in South Central LA. That art form was gangsta rap.

Straight Outta (Mediated) Compton

"You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge." (N.W.A.)[20] So

declares Dr. Dre on the opening to "Straight Outta Compton," the first song on the 1988

N.W.A. (N***az With Attitude) album of the same name. The album is largely considered

the first contribution to the hip-hop subgenre that would later be known as gangsta rap.[21]

Though hip-hop as a whole finds its origins in places ranging from New York City to

Jamaica, the origins of gangsta rap are deeply tied to the experiences of Black and Latinx

residents in Los Angeles' East and South Central neighborhoods from the late '80s onward.

As Jeff Chang illuminates in *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*

(2005), South Central in the 1980s was "the epitome of a growing number of inner-city

nexuses where deindustrialization, devolution, Cold War adventurism, the drug trade, gang

structures and rivalries, arms profiteering, and police brutality were combining to destabilize

poor communities and alienate massive numbers of youths" (Chang, *Can't Stop*, 317).

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[20] For this and subsequent music albums analyzed, I cite the album only on first mention. All subsequent
references to song lyrics from the album come from the initial cited source unless otherwise indicated.
[21] Alternatively, the genre sometimes gets called gangster rap or hardcore rap.

Emerging from within this environment, gangsta rap "captured the feel of the serpentine twists of daily inner-city life on the hair-trigger margin" (Chang, *Can't Stop*, 317) moving from an underground economy of mixtape cassettes and AM radio to become a major force in the mainstream music industry within the course of a decade. From the start, the genre fulfilled Dr. Dre's declaration, acting as a narrative form concerned first and foremost with knowledge of life on the streets of South Central.

The genre likely got its moniker due to the themes investigated on *Straight Outta Compton*, which included the titular track as well as the genre-defining (and conservative-ire inducing) anthems "Boyz-N-the-Hood" and "Fuck Tha Police." The album's unprecedented success made the various members of N.W.A. (Eazy-E, Ice Cube, MC Ren, Dr. Dre, and DJ Yella) founding fathers in Los Angeles' hip-hop legacy. Parting ways with the respectability politics that had characterized Black resistance throughout the 1960's civil rights era, gangsta rap rejected the polite civility required to appeal to white mainstream audiences. A shared tendency among gangsta rappers towards the obscene, the visceral, and the bombastic created a musical aesthetic for gangsta rap that intentionally alienated itself from mainstream media channels, at least initially,[22] so as to create a space for stories of urban street life that was separate from white cultural production. In an interview with hip-hop historian Brian Cross, Dr. Dre cites Richard Pryor and Blowfly, both figures who used shock and obscenity to push the envelope and avoid mainstream radio suitability, as major influences on N.W.A.'s sounds, saying: "I wanted to make people go: 'Oh shit, I can't believe he's sayin' that shit.' I wanted to go all the way left, everybody trying to do this

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[22] Though gangsta rap continues to have an underground scene, its period of being completely underground was relatively short-lived because of the quick rate at which it gained commercial success among youth audiences, including white youth. As soon as mainstream channels recognized gangsta rap as a force for generating income, they altered their propriety standards to integrate the genre, albeit usually by highlighting the tamest tracks and censoring some of the language.

black power and shit, so I was like let's give 'em an alternative, n***er, n***ern***er n***ern***er fuck this fuck that bitch bitch bitch bitch suck my dick, all this kind of shit, you know what I'm saying?" (Cross 197). Driven partially by a desire to entertain and partially by a desire to give gangsta rap "subcultural legitimacy," (Quinn 89) Dr. Dre and the rest of N.W.A. gleefully pushed back against the idea that they must follow the rules of white civility to have their voices heard.[23]

As Itagaki has articulated, civility and incivility are largely dependent on a white hegemonic conception of violence where violence is considered acceptable if it maintains the status quo and unacceptable if it threatens it. In exaggerating Black incivility to its furthest extension through brutal rhetorics of violence and anger, gangsta rap highlighted the disparity between the way urban Black bodies are depicted in moral panic narratives and the way unrepentant Black criminality would look if urban populations actually embraced it. On "Boyz-N-The-Hood," Eazy-E raps about leaving the house with a Mac-10 pistol strapped to his hip, riding around town "jockin' the bitches, slappin' the hoes," getting into deadly skirmishes with members of rival gangs, and enduring violent altercations with hostile cops. The narrative culminates in a courtroom scene in which Eazy's girlfriend shows up with a "sub-machine Uzi," recalling an event in the early 1970s in which a young Black prisoner named Jonathan Jackson showed up to the courtroom in which he was set to testify with an assault rifle. Jackson's actions followed his transfer from Soledad Prison to San Quentin Prison, a move that posed the threat of the gas chamber at a time when even minor

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[23] Though I do not undertake a lengthy investigation of Chicano rap, choosing instead to focus specifically on the relationship between Black Angeleno experience and gangsta rap, it is worth noting that similar pushes for urban counter-narratives were prominent within the Chicanx community in Los Angeles at this time. A more broad investigation of the role Chicanx rap played in re-authoring Los Angeles according to inhabited experience can be found in Pancho McFarland's *Chicano Rap: Gender and Violence in the Postindustrial Barrio* (2008).

altercations with prison guards usually meant harsher punishments for Black inmates. On the day of the trial, Jackson took a judge, multiple jurors and a district attorney hostage before marching all to a van outside. The consequent barrage of gunfire between him and police resulted in multiple deaths, including Jackson's. As Chang argues, whether intentional or not, the lyrics to "Boyz-n-the-Hood" called to mind Jackson's fate and the song "became an anthem for the fatherless, brotherless, state-assaulted, heavily armed West Coast urban youth, a generation of Jonathan Jacksons" (Chang, *Can't Stop* 306). "Boyz-n-the-Hood" was a metaphorical assault on a justice system against which young Black men had little to no power, and its flagrant gestures toward incivility critiqued the concept that a culture that tolerates such injustice can be considered civil at all.

Inverting the courtroom scene in "Boyz-n-the-Hood," "Fuck tha Police" opens with a narrative in which "Judge Dre" presides over the prosecution of the LAPD by his fellow N.W.A. members. As Ice Cube takes the stand, Dre asks: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help your black ass?" Following this oath, the song is fashioned as a series of truth-telling testimonies by N.W.A.'s members, each speaking to the police brutality that has become part of everyday life in Compton. Dre's call to tell nothing but the truth speaks to the testimonial character of gangsta rap as a medium to counter the comparatively false narratives of mediated moral panic over the city; gangsta rap's characteristic gestures toward authenticity and the proverbial imperative to keep it real are outgrowths of this early testimonial drive. On "Fuck tha Police," Ice Cubes asserts "A young n***a got it bad 'cause I'm brown/And not the other color, so police think/They have the authority to kill a minority," observing that even when an officer is Black, "they'll slam you down to the street top" because they're "showing out for a white cop". Later, MC Ren

notes that because "the n***as on the street is a majority," the police fear the urban Other

and use that fear to excuse brutality. Rather than rejecting this fear as bias, Ren instead gives

the police a reason to be afraid, taunting an officer with "But take off the gun so you can see

what's up / And we'll go at it punk, and I'ma fuck you up!" Throughout the song, various

members threaten violence against the police, an aspect of the song that made it seem so

incendiary at the time of its release that it inspired the FBI to create initiatives urging

concert venues to not let the group perform it live. (Quinn 108) The irony, of course, is that

all of the anti-police violence threatened in the song is framed as retaliation against anti-

Black police brutality and a justice system in which Black lives are considered expendable.

Towards the end of the song, Eazy E notes that "my identity by itself causes violence," yet

the violence to which he refers is not that of the criminal or gangster but that of the state.

These two songs, and *Straight Outta Compton* as a whole, became a sonic, aesthetic, and

political ground zero for all gangsta rap that came after.

Chang argues that as a moniker, gangsta rap "[named] the theatrics and the threat,

the liberating wordsound power and the internalized oppression, the coolest rebellion and

the latest pathology, the new Black poetry and the 'new punk rock'" (Chang, *Can't Stop*

320). The obscenity of gangsta rap narratives demonstrated the genre's rejection of white

mainstream culture with an aggressive force that lent itself to making political demands. But

obscenity was also a major selling point of a genre that quickly came to represent youth

rebellion in much the same way that punk rock had done a decade before. Like punk,

gangsta rap helped foment a rebellion grounded in the street knowledge and experiences of

disenchanted Los Angeles youths of color who felt cut off from mainstream society. It also

projected a fantasy of instant gratification for a generation accustomed to being denied.

Chang writes: "If the thing was protest, they would toss the ideology and go straight to the riot. If the thing was sex, they would chuck the seduction and go straight to the fuck" (Chang, *Can't Stop* 318). As such, it helped shape an urban counter-narrative in which gang life was celebrated rather than denigrated. As Dre alludes at the opening of "Straight Outta Compton," gangsta rap became a way to give a voice to all the street knowledge that forces of power would rather keep silent, but it did so within a viscerally satisfying package in which Black urban anger was never silenced. The genre spoke simultaneously of the precarity of life in South Central and the hyper-masculine hardness that life in these spaces seemed to demand of young Black men, becoming a medium for helping explain the interrelatedness of Black anger and urban deprivation.

Despite its obscenities and consequent lack of mainstream promotion, gangsta rap quickly gained traction with mainstream audiences, including young white suburban kids hoping to live vicariously through the rebellion gangsta rap espoused. The more marketable the genre became, the quicker the white-dominated music industry shifted its expectations to carve out room for a genre quickly proving itself to be a financial windfall. While white/bourgeois acceptance of gangsta rap represented a seismic shift in popular musical sensibilities among American youth, it also anesthetized the genre of much of its underground credibility and blunted some of its discursive potential. By the late '90s, Dr. Dre and other gangsta rap figures like Jay-Z and Sean "Diddy" Combs had launched veritable musical empires that beget entire multi-million dollar lifestyle brands, a far cry from the hardened urban poverty about which early gangsta rappers sang. The shift towards gangsta rap mega-wealth evoked all the neoliberal romance of an urban rags-to-riches narrative and these sorts of stories quickly became part of the genre's narrative tradition.

138

Stories of rap prosperity mirrored the individualism of suburban ideals and the patriarchal

capitalism of the very music industry to which gangsta rap had once seemed a dramatic

counterpoint, ultimately limiting some of the genre's discursive force. This was not entirely

unintentional, since the members of N.W.A. were always keenly aware that rebellion sells

record and made music in part because of what rap historian Eithne Quinn describes as "the

increased pressure on impoverished urban places to adopt an entrepreneurial stance" (Quinn

82) As Dr. Dre notes in his interview with Cross: "It ain't about who's the hardest, it's about

who makes the best record, as a matter of fact it ain't even about that, it's about who sells

the most records. It's not about I'm harder than you, it's about record sales" (Cross 197).

Gangsta rap paradoxically rejected the mainstream media and civil white society while

recreating the same capitalist models that upheld both, albeit in ways meant to primarily

benefit a Black populace excluded from traditional commercial channels. As underground

credibility gave way to commercial success, gangsta rap "curiously exaggerated the very

capitalist dynamics that were proving so detrimental to poor urban communities" (Quinn

67). In so doing, they allowed their narratives to be utilized in ways that reinforced some of

the basest and most harmful assumptions about urban Black youth advanced by the

discourse of urban crisis.

In the three decades since its emergence and owing in large part to its continued

marketability with white listeners, gangsta rap has become a medium more often for creating

commercially successful superstars than for voicing dissent: by 2018, Dr. Dre had a net

worth of $770 million (Bowman) and his protege, Snoop Dogg, has become more widely

recognizable for his collaborative television work with white lifestyle icon Martha Stewart

than for his rap. Where dissent persists in gangsta rap today, it is usually driven into the

genre's underground scenes. Gangsta rap's contemporary status as a capitalistic juggernaut makes it is easy for one to lose sight of its original role as a primal scream venting the frustrations of the urban oppressed. No doubt, mass media's early panic about gangsta rap's surging popularity concerned the way it was assumed to be an unabashed confirmation of suburban fears about urban criminality. By engaging in what Quinn has called "ghetto mythologizing" (Quinn 67), gangsta rappers capitalized on the very images intended to harm them, refiguring them as forms of subcultural capital that could be used to authenticate their own claims of gangster criminality. When Ice Cube, a man who had never even been in a gang, claimed that he had a "crime record like Charles Manson" on "Straight Outta Compton," even the exaggerated nature of the statement might have seemed to reflect some degree of truth to suburbanites steeped in moral panic narratives. However, by the 2010s, when figures like Dr. Dre and Ice Cube had proven to be more entrepreneurs than hardcore gangsters, it became easier for suburban audiences to recognize the exaggerations contained within gangsta rap lyrics. As the sensationalism of older gangsta rap narratives became increasingly recognizable, it became harder for gangsta rappers to weave in testimonies of urban truth and have them taken seriously. Ironically, this reduced the capacity for the medium to resist anti-urban moral panic narratives about urban life and gangs, even if this had been one of the original aims of the genre.

Though early gangsta rap's capitalistic commercial models were necessitated by the very social conditions against which gangsta rap narratives staged resistance, it is precisely this devotion to capital gain that by the twenty-first century had blunted its use as resistant art. One reason for this might be the way that commercial success geographically distanced successful rappers from the very neighborhoods they claimed to represent by providing them

the money to move elsewhere. Another reason concerns the way gangsta rap narratives unknowingly bolstered the same anti-urban discourses that helped cement individualism and neoliberal capitalism as hegemonic ideals from the Reagan era onward because, as Chang writes, "with its claims to street authenticity, its teen rebellion, its extension of urban stereotype, and its individualist 'get mine' credo, gangsta rap fit hand-in-glove with a multiculti youth demographic weaned on racism and Reaganism" (Chang, *Can't Stop* 320). Having been denied traditional routes into the music business, artists like N.W.A. simply created their own versions of the same profit-driven mindset that motivated the larger music industry. Knowing full well that their claims to criminal authenticity were exaggerations, N.W.A. recognized the need for a "marketable place-image" (Quinn 72) around which gangsta rappers could stage their claims to authentic belonging. They found it in the mythologization of Compton as a sensationalized catch-all representation for all of South Central LA.

Though N.W.A.'s narratives about Compton did contain elements of the urban truth-telling they claimed was central to their work, their larger-than-life stories were calculated amalgamation of Black entertainment tropes that Cross describes as a "charade" meant to reflect the worst fears and assumptions about urban Black men in a "tragic comedy of everyday life" (Cross 37). Even N.W.A.'s main claim to authenticity was a farce--they weren't so much "straight outta Compton," as from a variety of neighborhoods surrounding Compton, and not one of them was a gang member. Cross suggests that since the figurative landscape of gangsta rap need only serve as a shorthand term for Black LA in general, "Compton was almost an arbitrary choice - it could have been Watts, Long Beach, Lynwood, Downey or Willowbrook," and Compton was likely chosen for the lyricism of the

name more than anything else, since it "was created as a reply to the construction of the south Bronx/Queensbridge nexus in New York...it was an attempt to figure Los Angeles on the map of hiphop" (Cross 37). But gangsta Compton was also what Quinn describes as an "imagined community"[24] in that it could be "transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a wide variety of political and ideological constellations" (Quinn 75-76). The idea of Compton as an imaginary stage upon which gangsta rap narratives could play out is reflected in one of Dr. Dre's statements to Cross: "It's not really a matter of where people come from, it's a matter of talent. I could have been from fuckin' Missouri...Compton exists in many ways in the music to sell records" (Cross 198). Compton became a spatial brand that other rappers could attach to their music to borrow on N.W.A.'s cultural cache. As evidenced by Dr. Dre's 2015 release *Compton: A Soundtrack*, the image of Compton as gangsta rap's home landscape remains a characteristic aspect of the genre.

In taking on the function of a simulated reality, gangsta Compton limited gangsta rap's capacity to distinguish fact from fiction in its narratives. It also made it difficult for the specificity of local space to play a role in humanizing the genre's stories. As Quinn notes in *Nuthin' But A "G" Thang* (2005), while individual rap scenes were characterized by "unique places, personalities, styles, rituals, and sounds drawn from the local environment," in California gangsta rap, specificity of origin was expressed in social terms rather than spatial terms. As such, "what was exportable and reproducible were not the individuated details and local intricacies of place; rather, it was rap's sense of place-based exceptionalism, its rhetoric of emotional attachment to an impoverished locale" (Quinn 76).

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[24] Quinn is borrowing the term "imagined community" from Benedict Anderson's model in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

Gangsta Compton might best be understood as a shorthand for all of Los Angeles'

ghettoized neighborhoods and South Central as a whole, but because N.W.A. "conflated

myth and place," Chang suggests that the specificity and nuance of local place was replaced

with the universal sense that "every 'hood could be Compton" (Chang, *Can't Stop* 321).

Compton helped Los Angeles figure on the map of hip-hop but also limited subsequent

rappers' capacity to author stories about their own inhabited, material spaces, including the

real-life neighborhood called Compton. It allowed the various Black and Latinx

neighborhoods of Los Angeles's impoverished center to be folded into one another and

caricatured as a single spatial image, absolving non-urban listeners of any need to

differentiate meaningfully between the struggles residents faced in different neighborhoods.

Consequently, Compton offered a concrete image that echoed tendencies prominent within

moral panic narratives wherein all urban residents of color are painted in the same broad

brushstrokes.

Moreover, since gangsta rap became one of the few ways that suburban listeners

engaged with urban residents of color and their stories, the image of Compton substituted a

sensationalized facsimile of authenticity for genuine engagement with the contours of

everyday life in inhabited ghettoized urban spaces. Quinn argues that this allowed white

suburban listeners to "consume the ghetto vicariously" and take pleasure in its symbolic

"danger, authenticity, and difference" alongside more traditionally satisfying narratives of

"stylized youth rebellion, entrepreneurial mobility narratives, and masculinist identification"

which reflected their own insecurities within an increasingly precarious economy. (Quinn

85) In this way, gangsta rap "interpellated white/suburban fans" by "[providing] spaces of

ostensible proximity for the virtual consumption of 'no-go' places" like South Central LA.

143

(Quinn 85) However, though hip-hop has by now become the most popular American music genre among all demographics in 2017 (Caulfield), it only took a few years before gangsta rap was "met with ambivalence and hostility from some of the young people actually walking the walk about which gangsta rappers only talked," as evidenced by a quote Quinn cites from a gang member named OG Tweedy Bud Loc: "I'm fed up with the busters [hustlers] like N.W.A. A lot of my homies in the neighborhood died, man, and what the n***as did was market our life and our image. All them n***as in N.W.A. is buster! They never give back to the neighborhood" (Quinn 83). The collective effect of gangsta rap's imagined Compton was an amplification of the very same base assumptions about a Black (and Latinx) urban criminal underclass that were championed by those with societal power, so there is no surprise that gangsta rap was met with some animosity from those for whom it claimed to speak.

Though blame remains squarely with the unjust culture of white supremacist suburban hegemony that consumes Black art while dehumanizing and devaluing Black life, it can be argued that gangsta rap directly contributed to the intensification of the unequal conditions it described, even if unintentionally. This had lasting effects on the way urban neighborhoods of color are popularly conceived to this day. One of the most volatile is the way the media used gangsta rap as concrete proof of the inherent criminality they associated with urban Black residents--in the wake of the '92 Rebellion and the Ferguson protests alike, the media gestured to protestors' use of the phrase "Fuck the Police" as evidence that their aims mapped to the criminality of gangsta rap. But gangsta rap's narratives also only formed one small part of a wider campaign of anti-urban sentiment that would have proliferated with or without the genre's help, so any criticism of the genre for contributing to these

tendencies should be understood in that context. Admittedly, there are also other pitfalls of the genre that limited its capacities as a resistant medium and these cannot be overlooked, such as how gangsta rap historically excludes all but heterosexual male artists and the way it normalizes tropes of misogyny, homophobia, toxic hypermasculinity, and violence. Such tendencies are as worthy of criticism today as they were in 1988. Nonetheless, a number of influential gangsta rap artists have recently begun to re-imagine the confines of the genre in ways that help resuscitate some of its resistant capacity, including many who push back on these other harmful tendencies. Consequently, gangsta rap has re-emerged as a potent medium for venting the frustrations of devalued urban populations in a post-Ferguson era.

Arguably, the similarities between the racial tensions of the pre-Rodney King era in which gangsta rap emerged and the heightened tensions contributing to anti-racist resistance in the Black Lives Matter era contribute to gangsta rap's re-emergence as a potent source of discourse. Further, both the high regard in which the genre is now held and broader awareness of the line between reality and sensationalism in gangsta rap narratives has potentiated the emergence of a more documentarian trend in the genre. Gangsta rap's popular acceptance as a resistant documentarian art form is perhaps most directly evidenced by Compton-based rapper Kendrick Lamar's receipt of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for music in recognition of his album *DAMN.* (2017).[25] Though the genre's tendencies toward vulgarity and tough talk remain, these aspects no longer spark the level of ire they once did and can be read instead as a passionate response to centuries of racial inequality in American space. When Lamar mockingly samples '90s talk-show host Geraldo Rivera saying "This is why I say that hip-hop has done more damage to African Americans than racism in recent years,"

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[25] Lamar was the first musician to receive this award who was not a classical or jazz artist, further demonstrating how well-received gangsta rap has become.

on "DNA.", his resistance to anti-Black urban panic is palpable. (Lamar) Rather than being appropriated as spectacle, Lamar's narratives can be understood in the context of the actual geographic Compton of which he speaks from his experiences as a real-life gang member. But while Lamar has received numerous accolades and attention for his use of gangsta rap as resistance, another gangsta rapper from a similar background remains comparatively lesser known, even though he has become one of the most exemplary figures in this new hip-hop dialectic. That rapper's name is Vince Staples.

Vince Staples' Norf Long Beach

     Just a few months after events in Ferguson pushed the problem of racially biased police brutality to the forefront of the collective American discourse, then 21-year-old North Long Beach rapper Vince Staples dropped his debut EP *Hell Can Wait* in October 2014.[26] (Staples, *Hell Can Wait*) In it, Staples reflects on the childhood he spent splitting time between his parents' home in North Long Beach (which he affectionately calls Norf Long Beach) and his grandmother's home in Compton. The EP contains multiple narratives about how his parents' involvement with drug-dealing and gangs affected him and explores the circumstances surrounding him joining the gang Naughty & Nasty Gangsta Crips (2NGC) in his early teens. A narrative precursor to the double album *Summertime '06* (Staples, *Summertime '06*) which debuted in March 2015, *Hell Can Wait* established Staples as a gangsta rapper for a post-Ferguson generation.[27] In interviews, Staples has described both

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[26] Prior to *Hell Can Wait*, Staples had released a number of unofficial mixtapes, the EP was simply his first major label debut and one of his first projects in collaboration with the well-known producer No-ID.
[27] Staples is not alone in re-imagining gangsta rap around this time period--while the most notable similar figure is Kendrick Lamar, rappers like Danny Brown, Childish Gambino, and Saba have all contributed in unique ways to re-imagining the role of the rap figure in the 21st century. Lamar is of particular note because of the parallels between him and Staples: both are gang-affiliated rappers from the Compton area who use their

Norf Long Beach and Compton as "not necessarily Los Angeles but the places that Los Angeles likes to leave out" (X) often pointing to his music as a way to honor these neighborhoods and generate greater understanding from those who have little direct knowledge of life there. While gangsta rap has always been a political medium, on *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime '06*, Staples strips his narratives of any of the sensationalism or braggadocio that might distract from his unbiased documentation of urban life, thereby revamping the genre's political and social import.

Though his beats and lyrical flow harken back to the sounds of LA gangsta rappers before him, Staples combines these elements with sounds borrowed from electronic, techno and rock music into a sonic melange attuned to the genre-less aesthetics of popular music in the 2010s. His experimental sound has arguably made him less widely known than contemporaries like Kendrick Lamar or Schoolboy Q, but it has also helped him carve a unique space for himself in an industry that until recently has often been driven foremost by commercial demands.[28] His novel approach to the genre is evident on *Hell Can Wait*, but on *Summertime '06* blossoms into a postmodern rap soundscape that helps soundtrack his inhabited authorship of Norf Long Beach and Ramona Park. In addition to sharing a spatial landscape and a narrative thread, both *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime 06'* take place in a similar historical moment between the summers of 2005 and 2006.[29] Diverging from

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lyrics to challenge how South Central LA has traditionally been imagined--Lamar's most notable contribution in this respect is his 2012 album *Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City*. However, Lamar's level of success and fame has pushed him to the front of conversations surrounding the new direction

[28] It is worth noting that part of the reason Staples has been given so much space is as a result of his working relationship with the producer No-ID who helped broker his move to a major label by signing him to his label ARTium in conjunction with his role doing A&R for Def Jam records. No-ID has a long list of hits and a reputation for bringing out the best of young artists, so Staples' affiliation with him likely gave him more elbow room to experiment than he might have otherwise had.

[29] *Hell Can Wait* predominantly covers the summer of 2005, right before Staples was in 9th grade, through the summer of 2006, which as the title suggests is the temporal focus of *Summertime '06*.

N.W.A.'s gangsta Compton, Staples creates a mappable landscape for the two albums that lends specificity to the social politics his narratives highlight. Staples' Norf Long Beach, and the neighborhood of Ramona Park within it, replaces the sensationalism of gangsta rap prior with an inhabited slice of everyday urban life in a specific, mappable neighborhood. In critiquing rap's appropriation by anti-urban narratives, Staples authors a new resistant urban counter-narrative after his own authentic inhabited experiences.

Staples' refusal to fill the role of the sensationalized gangster rapper speaks to his apparent desire to act as a documentarian for his community. In a 2014 interview with *Pitchfork*, Staples rejects the idea that rap should be anesthetized of the social realities of the street, offering a personal anecdote: "It's actually a very real thing. It's not a game. One of my friends just died last month--got shot in his face five times in the back of his mom's house in front of his 5-year-old sister. He was 24 and a good dude, went to work, never really hurt nobody. So if this is what we're rapping about, why do you not feel that?" (Gordon). The idea that rap should inspire empathy for the dispossessed reflects Staples' entire documentarian approach. His narratives can be characterized as testimonials reflecting the experience of being from where he is from, for better or worse. In a 2015 interview for *Complex*'s recurring series "The Neighborhood," in which artists lead camera crews on tours of "the places that helped make them who they are" (Ahmed), Staples begins his tour at his grandmother's house in Compton. He discusses how he shot the music video for "Blue Suede" there with people he already knew in order to integrate his community into his work, but by the time of the *Complex* interview, three of those people had been put in jail and one had died. Later in the interview, Staples points out an alley in North Long Beach where a friend got shot in front of his 10-year-old sister, inspiring most of *Hell Can Wait*. Rather

148

than being hidden from view or alternatively, exaggerated to sensational effect, the realities

that inform Staples' work remain close to the surface of all the work he does.

On both *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime '06*, Staples seems less interested in fame

and bravado than other rappers, focusing instead on his first-hand testimony of life as a

young Black man in an impoverished LA neighborhood. Between his parodic use of

common gangsta rap themes (boisterous criminality, nonchalant violence, gleeful

womanizing) and the experimental production choices he integrates into his sound, his

music plays like a deconstruction of the genre he simultaneously uplifts and critiques. On his

breakout single "Norf Norf" from *Summertime '06*, when Staples declares "I'm a Gangsta

Crip/Fuck gangsta rap," the line plays like a manifesto for his new rap vision. The

identifying label of "Gangsta Crip" means more to Staples than the label "gangsta rapper"

because in his eyes, only the former represents an authentic connection to Norf Long Beach.

Staples' genre-defying musical style complicates gangsta rap's sound while his lyrics, visual

art, and public persona challenge ideas about what gangsta rap can do and the roles a

gangsta rapper can fulfill.[30] In the process, his work calls out and rejects the voyeuristic

moral panic by which gangsta rap has otherwise been instrumentalized and appropriated,

particularly in relationship to the gangster as a bogeyman figure legitimizing the type of

authoritarian law and order policing that affects Canfield Green as much as his own home in

Ramona Park.

On a track like "Norf Norf," in which Staples raps about how being a "Norfside

n***a" who never attended school at "Poly, Wilson, or Cabrillo" separated his life

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[30] One compelling example of a rap stereotype Staples defies is the fact that Staples he abstains from drugs and alcohol and always has. In interviews, this is often mentioned as a surprising fact about him precisely because of how prominently drugs and alcohol feature in most gangster rap--one need only think of the popular gangsta rap song "Gin and Juice" (1993) by fellow Long Beach rapper Snoop Dogg for a well-known example.

experiences from wealthier Long Beach residents, he defies the logic that a gangsta rapper's specific zip code need not have a bearing on the stories they tell. In the chorus of "Norf Norf," Staples' repeated insistence "I ain't never ran from nothing but the police" challenges gangsta rap's tendency to exaggerate gang-on-gang violence over police brutality. At the end of the chorus, when he declares he is from "Norfside Long Beach" and describes it as "the city where the skinny carry strong heat," he emphatically replaces gangsta Compton with the real and specific home landscape he has spent the song describing. Staples thus challenges early gangsta rap's ghetto mythologizing without abandoning its original imperative to speak forcefully, honestly, and unapologetically about the street knowledge accrued through authentic urban experience. On "Norf Norf" and throughout both albums, Staples tugs at the complicated network of knots that bind gang violence and street crime to issues of systemic poverty, racial and socioeconomic segregation, and police brutality. In the music video for the song, Staples extends this critique by stoically rapping about everyday life in Norf Long Beach while being arrested, pushed around, booked, processed, and released by the police, suggesting that the process of being jerked around by the police is also a part of everyday life there. The result of both the song and the video is an effective and deeply personal examination of the way Black and brown bodies in ghettoized neighborhoods are dehumanized, limited, and harmed by the repressive violence of the state--a description that aptly characterizes Staples' entire oeuvre.

Staples' biographical narratives about navigating the urban streets in a world marked by spatial inequality resonate with the post-Ferguson resistant zeitgeist. *Hell Can Wait* is especially informed by the social climate of its release, as directly indicated by the song "Hands Up," which references Ferguson protesters' repeated calls of "Hands Up, Don't

Shoot" in recognition of the raised arm stance some witnesses believed they saw Brown take before his death. Reflecting on a post-Ferguson world, Staples use his documentarian style to speak truth to the exaggerated brutality of racialized police violence against young people of color, recognizing the young Black gangster as a symbolic figure embodying the folk-devil of moral panic narratives. By offering his own life as an example, Staples shows how even the toughest gang members can be better understood as products of their structurally impoverished environments than as mindless thugs predisposed to violence and avarice. His moral panic counter-narrative demonstrates the degree to which a discourse of urban crisis has historically relied on dehumanizing and victim-blaming impoverished urban residents, particularly residents of color. Though Staples rejects many aspects of gangsta rap, he utilizes the commercial cache the genre has accrued over time to create a mass media platform for his de-sensationalized version of events. On both *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime '06*, Staples authors Norf Long Beach as a resistant landscape in ways that sharply contradict both the discourse of urban crisis and the mediated Compton that reflected it, thus demanding the right to the city for those who actually inhabit ghettoized neighborhoods.

The two tracks at the center of *Hell Can Wait* are "Hands Up," a searing indictment of police brutality, and "Blue Suede", a track that satirically critiques gangsta rap's tendency to glamorize gang violence. Heard back to back, the two songs offer complimentary critiques of interrelated forms of violence that map to Staples' parallel critiques of moral panic narratives and older gangsta rap. On "Hands Up", Staples references specific police

divisions[31] that targeted him and his friends in 2NGC, using their acronym forms (LAPD, CCAT) to give them comparable monikers to gangs. But rather than repeating the us vs. them rhetoric of N.W.A.'s "Fuck Tha Police," Staples begins with an acknowledgement that fear fuels violence from cops and gang members alike.[32] He opens: "North Division trying to stop my blackness / I'm watchin' for them badges when out in traffic / Them 9-11's been a tad bit frantic / If lights start flashin' please don't panic." While he recognizes that recent events have heightened anxieties between police and people of color, his plea to not panic is addressed to both parties, a move that humanizes police despite their tendency to dehumanize him. Staples is of course not trying to absolve the police of brutality so much as warn his peers that the police are human beings prone to fear and error as much as the rest of us, but in their capacity as agents of state violence within an unjust system, it is only the police who can panic without consequence.

"Hands Up" also specifically names Deangelo Lopez, a 22-year-old shot by police in Compton in June 2013, and Tyler Woods, who was shot 20 times by police in November 2013, both of whom were killed in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding Staples' home. After mentioning their deaths, he raps: "I guess the pigs split wigs for the greater good / Cause I ain't seen them lock a swine up yet / At the most they reassign 'em to prevent protest / Just your color is enough to get you under arrest." Staples argues that when the cops "split wigs" (a term for shooting someone in the head), the general public absolves this

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[31] These include the "North Division" of the Long Beach Police Department and "CCAT" (Career Criminal Apprehension Team), a special force tasked with tracking the patterns of those with a tendency to complete repeat felonies, such as gang members.
[32] Staples echoes his view that fear affects both police and gang members in interviews surrounding the release of the EP. For instance, in a 2014 interview with Hard Knock TV, Staples discusses how some actors dressed as police officers for a music video of his were told by locals to watch out because cops tend to get shot in the area and that it is sentiments like this that make police scared to come to his neighborhood. He adds: "They're not trying to be rude or tryin' to fuck up my shit, but they're clearly scared" (Hardknocktv)

violence by assuming they must have done so to ensure the safety of those living outside of neighborhoods like his. But this stance is only possible if Staples and his peers are seen as inherently criminal and dangerous, which is why he says his color is considered its own crime. In describing police shootings with a term normally used to signify gang-motivated execution, Staples highlights how the practical effects of police violence are as criminal and threatening as gang violence, even though only the latter seems to get punished. He also mentions how the police target based on color, just as the Crips (blue) and Bloods (red) are assumed to attack those wearing the rival gang's colors. In "Hands Up," the police appear as a rival gang that "[shoots] first without a warning" whenever they see black, a group of thugs who do more to protect their own than the civilians they are tasked with serving. He emphasizes the parallels between gangs and police still further when he says that the LBPD, LAPD, and LASD[33] all "ain't about shit" because residents know all three are "ridin' round these streets givin' out full clips." Here, Staples again uses phrasing borrowed from gang culture to describe police violence; instead of agents of law and order who serve and protect, the police are characterized as the most violent and destabilizing gang in Staples' territory.

On "Hands Up" and throughout his work, Staples uses the landscape of Norf Long Beach to illustrate how police violence has been used to exert control over a given spatially-bounded, material, local community. For instance, though the brutality he addresses is a nationwide phenomenon, Staples doesn't namedrop nationally known victims of police violence like Brown or Eric Garner but instead mentions fallen members of his own community. In so doing, he uses the specificity of the local to show that police brutality is

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[33] Long Beach Police Department, Los Angeles Police Department, and Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, respectively.

not an anomaly so much as a common practice that offers each neighborhood its own martyrs. His approach here aligns with his documentarian aims since his references are specific enough to preclude any counter-argument that the brutality he describes is sensationalized. When Staples raps "And they expect respect and non-violence / I refuse my right to be silent," he highlights how both the song and his body of work constitute a refusal to remain voiceless in the face of the indignities people of color face when battling an asymmetrical system of power, starting with speaking truth to the indignities him and his peers face at home. "Hands Up" strikes a careful balance in which Staples repudiates the senseless violence of both gangs and the police while acknowledging that the former are driven to violence by oppressive circumstances and the latter exert violence under protection of those who create the oppressive circumstances.

"Blue Suede" builds on the narrative of "Hands Up" before it, beginning with the hook: "New shoes with the blue suede / Young graves get the bouquets / Hope I outlive them red roses." The song points to the harsh reality that gang violence is a war fought by the young, a fact that remains just as true when violence occurs between rival gangs as when between police and gang membes. Much of the song mimics gangsta rap's tendency to brag about crime, violence, and the objectification of women and while Staples' bluster seems less obviously satirical here than in later works, verses about "Finna party like it's prom night / Finna kill a n***a walkin' to his mom's tonight" are tempered by the hook's repeated reminder that Staples is hoping to outlive the roses placed on young gangsters' graves. Later, Staples reminds the listener that even for gangsters who do not die young, mass incarceration might still take their lives: "Play this track in Calipat, get it poppin' in the prison / And play this shit in Ironwood where my little brother livin' / Live or die for the

154

whoopin' or the Crippin', pick a side / Death Row, till they put you in the Pikachu to fry / That's life, three strikes, that's life."[34] Referring to two different prisons (Calipatria State Penitentiary and Ironwood State Prison) in California's Sonora desert, Staples expands the spatial territory of Norf Long Beach to include the desert prisons where his brothers[35] are locked up. Though Staples is often open about how his rap success has allowed him to cease criminal activity altogether, the vast majority of his peers cannot consider rap a feasible escape route from poverty. While some may end up in prison for justifiable reasons, many others end up there because of an unequal system, because of strikes accrued through crimes of necessity,[36] because of racial profiling, or any other number of unjust reasons. Staples' spatial extension of his community to include the incarcerated constitutes a refusal to abandon those who were less lucky than he was, and reflects his commitment to using his platform to signal boost the voices of the voiceless.

One track on *Summertime '06* offers an even more fully realized and emotionally affecting extension of the Norf Long Beach landscape to include Ironwood State Prison. The song "Might Be Wrong" is an exemplary case study in the elegant way Staples uses his commercial platform as a rapper to make discursive space for other voices from Norf Long Beach, showcasing how his shrewd deployment of spatialized language helps ground his music in the documentarian truth of first-hand knowledge. "Might Be Wrong" features a hook by Inglewood-based hip-hop collective James Fauntleroy & the Cocaine 80s and majority of the verses are performed as spoken-word poetry by fellow Ramona Park native

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[34] Whoopin' refers to gang-banging (i.e. engaging in gang activity) as a Blood, whereas Crippin' refers to the same activity as a Crip. The term Pikachu is a slang term for the electric chair, since it references the Pokemon character Pikachu, who uses electricity to kill assailants.
[35] It is unclear whether Staples means brother in the biological sense or in the gang sense, and in any event it doesn't matter since he would likely use the same terminology in either case.
[36] The strikes refer to California's Three Strikes law in which defendants automatically receive a life sentence on their third conviction of a serious felony.

Haneef Genno Talib.[37] The poem sounds as if it has been recorded from a phone conversation, confirmed later when Talib describes some background noises as just "another day in Ironwood," proving his words to be a dispatch from within the prison. Significantly, Staples cedes all of the lyrical space in the verses to Talib--in fact, the only time Staples voice can be heard on the track is when he reassures Talib "It don't even matter. You can start from the beginning…" when something interrupts Talib's flow. The sentiment Talib expresses on the track is worth repeating in full:

> Speaking on the unjust way the justice system is justifying crimes against our kind
>
> Justice is supposed to be blind
>
> But continue to cross color lines
>
> Hands up, don't shoot
>
> Shot. Stand your ground?
>
> Blacks don't own no ground to stand on so we stand on our words
>
> Black and hooded is the official probable cause for cops to keep weapons on
>
> I can't breathe through the chokeholds and gunsmoke
>
> These realities drift and appear to inform black boys and men
>
> Of the dangers outside their doors
>
> Slain in society by sworn protectors
>
> Protected by their peers, grand juries full of friends
>
> No charges brought against them
>
> They kill and arrest us, transgress and oppress us…damn, cuz.

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[37] There is little information available about Haneef Genno Talib online beyond links describing his writing credit on the Staples track. However, the cover photo on his Facebook page features the signage for Ramona Park at the corner of 65th & Obisbo Aves. in Ramona Park, North Long Beach. Moreover, the dedications in his self-published book of poetry, *A Way To Say What's On My Mind* (2017), include references to Norf Long Beach and multiple linguistic anomalies that suggest he is also a member of Staples' gang, 2NGC.

Here, something interrupts Talib, prompting Staples' reassurance that he can start over and making it sound like Talib still had more to say. Talib does not mince words, so the political import of his poem is immediately clear. Moreover, the references he makes connect the plight of incarcerated Black men like him to the brutal deaths of Trayvon Martin ("Stand your ground?", "Black and hooded"), Mike Brown ("Hands up, don't shoot"), and Eric Garner ("I can't breathe"). By ceding a track's worth of time to an incarcerated neighborhood comrade, Staples injects *Summertime '06* with a dose of reality that extends even beyond his own direct experiences. Thematically, Talib's poem weaves the plight of highly publicized Black victims into his own experiences with incarceration, voicing a reality about the way Black bodies are controlled through state violence. Talib's sentiment is punctuated by the hook's message about feeling guilt in the face of success, suggesting that Staples sometimes "couldn't sleep at night" because he "took the money" and left his neighborhood behind.

The feeling of guilt in the hook surrounding Talib's poem in "Might Be Wrong" reflects a thread of turmoil that runs throughout Staples' work, turmoil centered on his conflicted feelings about being a rapper in a community where he finds it unrealistic for people to aspire to be rappers. (hardknocktv) Partially because he views rap as an unrealistic means of alleviating poverty and partially because he believes gangsta rap's sensationalism harmed his parents' generation, Staples rejects the idea of the gangsta rapper as a role model, even in his own case. When recalling his gang experiences, he is neither braggadocious nor apologetic, opting instead to neutrally recount actions he engaged in and the social circumstances that necessitated them, such as on "Feelin' the Love" when he contrasts buying a revolver and demanding cash for drugs with the sentiment "I refuse to

157

hear my stomach growl another night." Where other gangster rappers aspired to seem larger

than life, Staples is by contrast understated in the persona he cultivates, insisting in his

Complex interview that all he wants to do is "be the reason that motherfuckers is proud to

be [from Ramona Park] and n***as don't HAVE to leave" (Ahmed). He does not

romanticize fame or success but instead presents himself as someone who wishes only to

live in the neighborhood he loves with the same sense of safety and security afforded white

suburbanites.[38]

Staples' work examines the different ways rap can be a mouthpiece to amplify the

concerns of everyone who inhabits Norf Long Beach. Being real is for Staples a matter of

speaking truthfully about both the positive and negative aspects of life in his neighborhood

and shedding light on how spatial dynamics determine who is and is not afforded

opportunities in American society. To this end, criticism of mainstream mass media's

vampiric obsession with advancing their own self-serving narratives about urban street life

is a recurring theme throughout his work. On "Hands Up," Staples recalls how the media

tends to "blame geography" for the "pride in these n***as" who commit street crimes while

also profiting off of endless fear-mongering about urban space. The media's obsession with

advancing anti-urban narratives thus stokes the fires that "[arouse] attention" and lead to

ever greater police presence within neighborhoods already constricted by social inequity and

biased policing. In other words, Staples castigates the media for fanning the proverbial

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[38] Staples' commitment to use his platform to better his own neighborhood is also reflected in acts of philanthropy, such as a publicity stunt in which he ran a GoFundMe campaign inviting his critics to pay him to retire forever. After a few weeks, Staples shut down the campaign, matched all donations, and gave the proceeds to the Michelle Obama Library, a public library serving the communities of North Long Beach. (Kim, Michelle. "Vince Staples Shuts Down GoFundMe, Donating Money to Michelle Obama Library Instead." *Pitchfork*, 15 March 2018.)

flames of both gang and state violence while criticizing communities affected for not knowing how to put them out.

On both *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime '06*, Staples uses his stories about Ramona Park to author Norf Long Beach as a nuanced and authentic space. Whereas many rappers discuss violence between opposing gangs, Staples rarely mentions gang rivalries, most often bringing up violence in the context of police attempts to impose authoritarian law and order. In other places, he points to gang violence as an inherited survival mechanism wrought by generations of inequality and diminished hope. When asked in a 2017 *NPR* interview about how gang violence relates to his musical landscape, Staples critiques the way interviewers seem so voyeuristically focused on the topic, saying "I don't really feel the need to describe it, for the simple fact that you can go see and ask someone that is there…[because] what it is, is a sense of camaraderie, sense of brotherhood, sense of belonging" (Martin). Staples continues by explaining that the drive that prompts journalists to ask about his gang is indicative of how the media prefers their own narratives about gangs to the truth: "That question isn't 'Oh, why do gangs happen?' It [isn't] like, 'Oh, wow, why do these black and brown and Pacific Islander -- why do these little boys with no structure, no one guiding them, why do they need each other? Why are they trying to figure out life on their own?'" (Martin). To counter the media's gang sensationalism, Staples centers the brotherhood aspect of gang life in his narratives. In Staples' Norf Long Beach (and especially in his description of the park for which his neighborhood is named), bonds of community are forged both in spite of and in response to structural inequalities that force people to do whatever is necessary to keep themselves and their families fed and safe, even if by criminal means. Staples rejects as ludicrous the stance that gang activity and street crime occur

159

because of a disparity between urban and suburban morality or because of different ideals about the importance of kinship, community, and the nuclear family. Rather, gang activity in Staples' narratives is always an outgrowth of social needs, most of which have been intentionally denied through repressive segregation.

Staples' comments to *NPR* reflect an observation Davis makes in *City of Quartz* that forces of power tend to benefit from denying those perceived or portrayed as terrorists a "public voice," as in the case of gang members. Davis argues that "although terrorism is always portrayed precisely as inarticulate male violence, authorities expend enormous energy to protect us from its 'ravings,' even at the cost of censorship and rejection of free speech" (Davis, *City of Quartz* 300). Citing a rare instance when gang leaders in Los Angeles were given room to articulate their perspectives, Davis notes that they collectively outlined a "coherent set of demands" that included "jobs, housing, better schools, recreation facilities, and community control of local institutions" (Davis, *City of Quartz* 300). In short, when pressed to offer a solution that might end the reign of so-called terror gangs exerted over South Central's infrastructurally decrepit and systemically impoverished neighborhoods, gang leaders expressed their view that the impoverishment of these spaces was itself the cause of gang violence. This echoes Staples' sentiment in a spoken word portion of the song "Like It Is" in which he states: "The people that control it don't really come from here, so they can't do nothing but look down on us. We look at them, we see somebody that could help but they look at us and all they see is a n***a." His own experiences challenge the idea that gang violence is an activity undertaken for fun or even for local credibility, as lyrics expressing this motive are virtually non-existent in his own music. In pushing back against the mass media's craving to consume titillating stories of

160

gang violence, Staples draws attentios to the lack of first-hand knowledge behind the media's portrayal of ghettoized urban spaces.

As a complement to his critique of mediated gang narratives, Staples challenges gangsta rap's tendency to celebrate criminality as a claim to authentic gang affiliation. Though he has said in interviews that he has some kind of criminal record, Staples never uses it to stake a greater claim to authenticity as a rapper nor does he glorify the acts by sharing specifics, though he also never apologizes for the things he did out of necessity. Instead, Staples claims authenticity in the one way that older gangster rappers could not: he frequently makes direct and unashamed references to 2NGC and his status as a lifetime "gangster Crip" from a real gang. When he mentions 2NGC, the Crips, or gang activity in general, it is usually to gesture towards the specifically localized bond gangs provide ("Always keep it GC/Ask my homies for the proof" on "Blue Suede") or to emphatically parody the bravado and callousness of the wild claims made by other gangsta rappers ("I shot your child, so what, you know we wildin' after dark/The sun come down and guns come out, you know Ramona Park" on "Birds & Bees"). If the gangsta rappers of Staples' parents' generation claimed authenticity by rapping about crimes they never committed, then Staples' known gang affiliation and criminal past establishes his authenticity at the outset, eliminating the need for him to posture. If gangsta rap's parent generation made claims to local belonging by situating themselves around a commodified simulacra of Compton intended primarily to sell records, then Staples situates himself around a real and material Compton/North Long Beach intended to de-commodify gangsta rap's geography and present gangster reality.

Staples' twin critiques of the media's obsession with gang life and the sensationalism of gangsta rap are interrelated because while the media took the bait on gangster rap narratives, the un-reality of gangsta rappers' tall tales is immediately recognizable to anyone who actually inhabits ghettoized neighborhoods. Though gangsta rap's posturing lent credence to harmful media narratives about spaces like Norf Long Beach, this was only possible because the mass media was created by urban outsiders for urban outsiders-- impoverished urban residents have rarely been afforded an official medium by which to challenge the media's version of events. Having been born in 1993, a few years after both the discourse on urban crisis and gangsta rap's early narratives had become integrated into mainstream culture, Staples is responding to a media landscape in which the truth of his home space has never been part of the mainstream conversation in his lifetime. While it may be true that early gangsta rappers were deploying the bit of cultural capital they had in order to turn a needed profit, Staples seems to echo bell hooks' assertion that gangsta rappers nonetheless became the "dupes" of the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Qtd. in Quinn 40). As Staples states in the interview for Complex's *The Neighborhood*: "Rappers just make shit seem like 'N***a, I'm the hardest ever. It's hard over here. I had to sleep with a bullethole in my pillow!' And nah man, none of that man, we weren't motherfuckin' with y'all man, we ain't over here livin' like animals, bro" (Ahmed). Staples uses his own authentic gangster affiliation as leverage to resist appropriation by a media climate itching to advance anti-urban narratives and counter the lack of authenticity in gangsta rap narratives of his parents' generation. By integrating the specificity of his real and mappable neighborhood, Staples precludes any potential mythologization of his space or experiences.

Staples' repudiation of the spectacle made of gang violence is also a common theme

in his visual work, most notably in the music video for "Señorita" (2015) off of *Summertime*

06' (Jewell). The black-and-white video opens on a tattooed man credited as the "Preacher"

whose appearance codes as a media stereotype of a Chicanx gang member in a specifically

Angeleno context. The preacher leads an assortment of people (credited as "cult members")

as they solemnly march down the street in a V-formation. The various figures seem to

reflect mediated ideas of the different types of people who populate ghettoized urban spaces

in Los Angeles, from Chicanx figures in plaid and Dickies to a young Black man in a

business suit. As the video's director Ian Pons Jewell has explained, "the characters are total

caricatures...they're symbols for the most part," emphasizing that all are "a product of the

outside gaze, representations of the stereotypes held in the minds of those who have no

experience of this world Vince [Staples] talks of" (Munday). Consequently, one's

interpretation of the figures' identities depends largely on the stereotypes a given viewer

brings to the narrative, resulting in a reflexive meta-commentary by which viewers are

forced to examine their own existing assumptions about who belongs in urban space.

As the video continues, the cult-members continue marching as one by one, they get

shot and drop to the ground, earning no reaction from the other marching figures.[39] Much

like the assumptions viewers might attach to the figures' appearances, it is easy to assume

that the random bullets represent gang violence. However, as is revealed halfway through

the video, the invisible bullets are coming from turret guns poised atop high steel towers that

panoptically dwarf the street's rooftops. The turrets pan from left to right and shoot at

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[39] Jewell has stated that he intended the march to resemble a form of protest in which the detached and unaffected cult members exhibit a "sense of pointlessness" in the face of the violence by which they're besieged. When hit, each falls straight to the ground, until a dramatic trail of bodies populates the street behind the now-lone preacher.

seemingly random intervals, a visual metaphor for the type of militarized policing Davis

describes in *City of Quartz* as "a proliferation of new repressions in space and movement,

undergirded by the ubiquitous 'armed response'" (Davis, *City of Quartz* 223). The solemn

resignation of the cult-members/protesters thus reads as martyrdom in the face of violent

spatial repression.

      Towards the end of the video, after all but the preacher, Staples, and a few sideline

figures have been shot, the camera pans to survey the fallen laying on the ground. First the

preacher and then the other figures move forward until they are pressed against a glass

barrier in front of the camera's gaze. The visual effect provides the striking illusion that the

figures are contained within the glass screen of the electronic device on which the video is

being viewed, inviting another self-reflexive critique of the act of mediated urban

voyeurism. Though the figures push forward, they cannot escape their glass cage. They

press their faces and limbs to the glass, staring directly into the camera as if into the

viewer's eyes, illuminating the space that separates the voyeur from the viewed. In the

video's penultimate shot, the preacher heaves forward, grimacing and fogging the glass, just

as the music changes to a classical piece by Haydn.[40] Here, the camera pulls slowly back,

breaking the screen's imagined fourth wall to reveal a rectangular viewing space within a

larger solid wall in what appears to be some sort of exhibit. In front of the glass with their

backs to the camera, a sweater-clad family of blonde white people sits primly on a bench

and views the preacher through the glass, smiling and hugging one another as the preacher

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[40] I was never actually able to find a source identifying this classical piece, but my musically minded friend
Jake Gengler identified it as Haydn's Symphony No. 94 in G Major "Surprise," 4th movement. I trust his ear
and give him all credit for the identification.

grimaces in front of them. Thus, the entire narrative is revealed to take place within an exhibit akin to a human zoo.

Jewell has said he built the idea for the video around an August 2014 *Pitchfork* interview in which Staples suggested that when it comes to urban music by Black artists, "We're all in the zoo, and the listeners are the people outside of the cage" (Gordon). In this interview, Staples says that while rap music allows an outsider to feel that that it's safe to look through the glass, "you're not going to step inside that glass, because you know what'll happen to you" (Gordon) He insists that gangsta rappers have often rendered spaces like Long Beach a sort of "petting zoo," where the social ills of inhabiting neighborhoods affected by poverty, segregation, and gang violence are only mentioned in sensationalized ways. That is, rappers bring up social hardships less to raise social awareness than to provide credibility to what Quinn describes as "the twin autobiographical thrusts of ghettocentric authenticity ("I used to be poor") and survivalist individualism ("I used to deal drugs")" (Quinn 152) that traditionally drove gangster rap. As in most of his narratives on the two albums, the Angeleno human zoo in *Señorita* functions as a critical satire of the type of urban spectacles created by gangsta rap and the media alike.

Ramona Park Legend

Authenticity for Staples is thus a matter of speaking without exaggeration about life within the real material landscapes he inhabits, and it is to this end that Staples fills his work with specific and spatially bounded markers of the neighborhoods he calls home. The material landscapes of Compton/Norf Long Beach permeate both *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime '06* through references to specific addresses, intersections, landmarks, and local

businesses, all of which help contribute to the sense of place he creates for the two

thematically linked works. One of Staples' earliest specific references to his local space

comes from his 2014 mixtape *Shyne Coldchain II*, released a few months before *Hell Can*

Wait. On "Shots," he mentions his own street name ("N***as die off of Poppy Street") to

signpost the specific place where one can find the social conditions he describes: "See you

black 'fore you a man and you a n***a 'fore you that/And that you'll never understand if

you done seen it secondhand" (Staples, "Shots"). Staples' assertion that second-hand

knowledge is useless in understanding his world speaks to the documentarian motive behind

his musical homage to Norf Long Beach and Ramona Park. By claiming ownership over his

neighborhood and experiences, he also claims the authority to narrate Poppy Street, Ramona

Park, and his city on his own terms.

Staples' integration of local landmarks extends to the music videos accompanying

his songs, such as his decision to film the video for "Blue Suede" at his grandmother's house

in Compton and the snapshots of the Long Beach landscape that appear at the opening of the

video for "Lift Me Up." Staples' locatable signposts tie his narratives to the actual, material

places they represent, preventing the possibility of their being mistaken as tall-tales akin to

the gangsta Compton of the past. This is true even when Staples attaches a mythic quality to

some element of his landscape, such as in the case of the small park for which the

neighborhood Ramona Park is named. The cover of *Hell Can Wait* features a single level

house with the address 6500 above the door, a reference to 6500 N. Obispo Avenue, the

entrance to Ramona Park. The park is a symbolic landmark for Staples because of the role it

played as a hangout for him and his fellow gang members; assorted references to Ramona

Park feature prominently throughout Staples' work. A street view glance at 6500 N. Obispo

Avenue on Google Maps suggests that the house on the *Hell Can Wait* cover no longer

exists (if it ever did), but it does reveal the iconic "Ramona Park" signage that appears and

reappears throughout Staples' various visual works. As such, the address fittingly names the

public park itself as Staples' symbolic childhood home.

Ramona Park is the spatial center of Staples' narrative landscape on *Hell Can Wait*,

appearing again as the title of the second track, "65 Hunnid". The EP's cover image features

a blue and white house surrounded by a white picket fence, albeit one made of metal spires

rather than wooden stakes. The house might appear identical to the ideal single family home

of early sitcom suburbia were it not for the flames engulfing it from the inside. As the house

burns, six (presumably gangster) figures sit on the stoop while a black police helicopter

circles above and a child (presumably Staples) stares on from the front gate. Though the

image is striking for its resemblance to mediated images of the suburban home, the house

remains situated within a version of urban chaos that visually re-shapes this ideal. Moreover,

the calmness of the figures in the image contrasts sharply with the chaos of the fire

billowing out to the roof, evoking the idea that chaos has become common in their space.

The effect of the image is one in which urban chaos and suburban utopia seem to collide,

giving the impression that the urban space could be as ideal as suburbia were it not for the

violent disorder thrust upon it. It also reflects the suburban nature of Los Angeles' urban

fabric, wherein the aesthetics of early suburbanization remain a tangible part of

neighborhoods that have since been woven into Los Angeles' totalizing urban space, such as

in North Long Beach and nearby Lakewood.[41]

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[41] Ramona Park is located within 3 miles of Lakewood, CA, which a classic example of a planned sitcom era
suburban development. Aesthetically, homes in Ramona Park appear to have been built during the same period

This contrast of urban disorder with images more often attributed to the suburbia simulacrum seems intentional, since it echoes Staples own sentiments about his home landscape, such as in the interview for *The Neighborhood* when Staples says his childhood in Ramona Park was "just fun...like ghetto *Leave It To Beaver*"(Ahmed). Throughout his body of work, Staples invokes pseudo-suburban aesthetics to show that Ramona Park is less different from suburbia than those on the outside might think, thus highlighting racial inequality, infrastructural divestment, and state violence as the extenuating factors limiting opportunities for urban residents. Such an alternative vision of the ghettoized neighborhood is important for the way it upends discourses that claim the urban space itself is irredeemably inert, decayed, decrepit, and chaotic. Though Staples refuses to gloss over the poverty and crime that affect his environment, he also highlights the amount of community and local connection that the neighborhood fosters in spite of the infrastructural inequities thrust upon it. Any pitfalls of his neighborhood are justifiably attributed to forces of power and state violence against which inhabitants have no choice but to struggle. Staples' work thus pushes back against the idea that the American Dream of home + family + community[42] can only be had by those (mostly white) people who find themselves in a suburban setting. In highlighting not only the inequalities designed to limit quality of life but also the bonds of community that Ramona Park residents foster despite oppression, Staples suggests that the urban environment might even be more conducive to community than the ascetic and isolating suburbs.

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of suburbanization as Lakewood, when both cities would have still been considered suburbs of Los Angeles. Anecdotally, I've driven down Poppy Street and it looks like a pleasant little suburban street.

[42] As I mention in the first chapter, this conception of the American dream comes from Dolores Hayden's *Building Suburbia* (2003).

The interview for *The Neighborhood* is especially insightful about Staples

relationship to Ramona Park itself. In the interview, he sits with some friends on the

bleachers at Ramona Park and describes how the bonds he formed there created a support

network that made life in a dire situation more livable. Of the park, he says "This is Ramona

Park, and in the eyes of the Long Beach Police Department, this is a very violent type of

place full of very violent type of characters. But when I was younger, I had fun over here"

(Ahmed). His statement is especially interesting for its similarity to the disparate

perspectives evident in Johnson's and Wilson's recollections of Ferguson's Canfield Green,

wherein the police ascribe violence to spaces that local residents of color see as friendly and

welcoming. Staples goes on to explain that while there used to be a baseball team at the

park, community-based activities and programs have vanished, leaving only programs that

serve the predominantly white suburban communities in nearby Orange County. "To play

football for [Orange County Junior All American Football], you gotta pay $500. That's $500

your momma don't have but she gonna spend that $500 to try and get you outta trouble,

because that's the whole objective of these parents out here, to get em outta trouble...what

happen if your daddy get incarcerated trying to get that money back?" (Ahmed) With this

one story, Staples demonstrates how the case of Ramona Park reflects local infrastructural

inequity (lack of community-based activities coupled with a form of youth idleness that

lends itself to gang activity), economic and spatial segregation (represented by the high cost

of other nearby youth activity options meant to serve a predominantly wealthy and suburban

populace), poverty (represented by the need for some to turn to criminal means to provide

for their families), and police bias (reflected in the likelihood that one's father could end up

incarcerated). In the context of Staples' anecdote, the social conditions that helped make the

park a gathering place for youth gangs seems clear enough, given the lack of viable alternative uses for the space. But by telling the story of how he and his friends still made the most of the park as a space to call their own, he lays claim to the park and grants himself the authority to tell a different kind of story about its importance than the narrative of violence with which the LBPD affiliates it.

Staples' authorship of Ramona Park and Norf Long Beach dominates *Summertime '06*. Since *Summertime '06* is spread over two distinct parts, the songs "Ramona Park Legend, Pt. 1" and "Ramona Park Legend, Pt. 2" act as brief intro tracks to the two respective halves. "Ramona Park Legend, Pt.1" lays a loose and distorted kick drum beat over the sounds of seagulls and lines hitting the masts of boats, presumably a sample of landscape sounds taken near a dock or marina. While the beat isn't exactly arhythmic, it creates a stilted effect that makes it sound as if it has been distorted to mimic explosions in the distance. The beat eventually piles up on itself in an imitation of gunfire before giving way to the sound of an actual gunshot, all while the soundscape of water, seagulls, and mast lines remains constant. The short instrumental track establishes a clear sense of place in which the simultaneously peaceful and violent acoustics of Staples' Norf Long Beach preface the similarly paradoxical street narratives on *Summertime '06*. Without pause, the gunshot sounds transitions into "Lift Me Up," a song about the struggles of living as an impoverished Black man in a city better known for white affluence, which opens on a provocative truth: "I'm just a n***a until I fill my pockets / And then I'm Mr. N***a, they follow me when shoppin'." The combination of the intro track with this opening sentiment establishes the thematic thrust of *Summertime '06* and its investigation of the struggle

170

required to navigate a segregated and dichotomous landscape in which one's race and one's zip code determine the kind of life one will lead.

Inverting its counterpart, "Ramona Park Legend, Pt. 2" begins with the same gunshot sound before repeating the beat and soundscape from before. However, this time Staples raps over the top of it, calling himself a legend and requesting that someone "build a shrine on [his] part of town" when he dies. As before, the intro immediately transitions into the next song, "3230," a reference to 3230 Poppy Street, one of Staples' former addresses in Norf Long Beach. On this song, Staples describes gang life as a "deadly game of tag the older generations passed to us" within a landscape where "evictions notices go unnoticed" and one is forced to commit "crime that's organized" in order to keep the power and water from being turned off. The song sets up the themes explored in the second half of the album, which is more overtly political than the first and on which Staples shows a greater degree of experimentation in communicating his ideas.

At the very end of the album, the outro song "06" features a faux TV announcer saying "Next time on Poppy Street..." before a brief rap in which Staples demands to be paid for his services as entertainer. When Staples raps "I'm finna bring the gang in the buil--", his words get cut off by static before he can complete the word "building." The effect of this outro is a mocking illustration of the way the media and the music industry welcome the opportunity to be entertained by even the most visceral gangsta rap narratives so long as rappers never bring the real gang in the proverbial building. In satirically referring to both himself and his stories of Ramona Park and Poppy Street as a legend, Staples highlights all the more how realistic the narratives on *Summertime '06* actually seem. By mocking the way

the media might prefer to commodify his experiences, Staples preempts the appropriation of

Ramona Park and Norf Long Beach and strengthens the documentarian aspects of his work.

The remainder of *Summertime '06* is replete with songs that either challenge

dominant anti-urban tropes or that point to urban quality of life issues the media is unwilling

to highlight. On "Birds & Bees," Staples points to the inherited nature of gang violence by

contrasting the observation "they found another dead body in the alley" with the sentiment

"rounds up in that chamber / I'm a gangsta like my daddy." On "Jump Off The Roof,"

Staples raps about wanting to sleep without his lungs "stopping like they used to," gesturing

to the asthma and air pollution levels that affect residents of South Central LA at higher

rates than LA in general. (Huerta) On "C.N.B.", Staples calls himself the "coldest n***a

breathing" in a hook that exaggerates the criminal claims of gangsta rappers, only to contrast

this false bragging with the song's verses, all of which directly address the motivations

behind gangsta posturing: "On 65 I tell the truth no lies / The sheets and crosses turned to

suits and ties / In Black America, can you survive? / They made a nuisance once the noose is

tied / We gentrified, we victimized, we fighting for survival / No hopes and dreams just

leave us be, we leanin' on the Bible / They preyin' on us, prayin' for a better day tomorrow /

Hide the fear behind this here bravado." This verse on "C.N.B." acts as a recursive reminder

of Staples' entire rap philosophy wherein he uses the familiar tropes of gangsta rap to

articulate a new kind of narrative that dignifies and defends his community rather than

contributing to their mischaracterization. Even the gangsta rappers he criticizes get

redeemed through his recognition that fear motivates their outsized claims--the truth Staples

speaks "on 65" (which is to say, in Ramona Park) is the truth of the hopeless and

172

dispossessed urban masses confined to neighborhoods like his, a truth which is rarely granted an official platform.

By the end of *Summertime '06,* Staples has authored a vision of Norf Long Beach as a space where people manage to forge a path towards community and survival in spite of the panoply of repressive forces attempting to make this impossible. On "Like It Is," the last full song on *Summertime '06*, Staples summarizes his rap mission by intimating: "No matter what we grow into we never gonna escape our past/ So in this cage they made for me exactly where you find me at / Whether it's my time to leave or not I never turn my back." The statement serves as a promise to Ramona Park and Norf Long Beach that no matter how successful he becomes as a rapper, he won't abandon the community that made him who he is. He thus inverts the hopelessness associated with the "cage they made" of ghettoized neighborhoods by demonstrating how vibrant his community is. On both *Hell Can Wait* and *Summertime '06*, Staples fashions himself a voice for the voiceless people of color in urban spaces abandoned by a suburban-serving culture and in so doing, authors his own urban counter-narrative that defies those panicked mediated anti-urban narratives that would have the city seen as nothing more than criminality and chaos.

Chapter Three
Claiming the New Berlin:
A Case Study in Collective Spatial Appropriation as Right to the City

Alles nur künftige Ruinen
Material für die nächste Schicht
[Only future ruins all
Materials for the next layer][1]
-Einstürzende Neubauten, "Die Befindlichkeit des Landes"

<u>Introduction</u>

Though Los Angeles and Berlin are a world apart, both cities share a history of late

twentieth century de-industrialization, wealth inequality, and racial and socioeconomic

segregation exacerbated by the effects of neoliberal globalization, allowing one to draw

spatial parallels between them. First, both cities spent the end of the twentieth century

struggling through racial and socioeconomic tensions resulting from authoritarian attempts

to exert control over targeted parcels of the population, tensions which took on spatial form

through the subdivision of each city's space into drastically delineated districts of lower and

higher income residents. Second, American critiques of police brutality and white

supremacy during this period parallel many Berliners' recognition that after the fall of the

Berlin Wall, they would need to create a culture that resisted the fascist, xenophobic, and

authoritarian tendencies that had marked most of the city's history, both East and West. In

both cities, the final decade of the twentieth century was marked by popular efforts to

reshape urban space in ways that better served underrepresented populations who had long

since become the most common targets of forceful state repression. Further, the East/West

cultural and social divide that characterized Berlin's post-Wall transition paralleled the sharp

South/North division created by racialized ghettoization and the discourse of urban crisis in

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[1] My thanks to Tegan Raleigh for lending me her translation prowess to help with a properly poetic English translation of this epigraph.

174

Los Angeles, meaning that both cities experienced the post-Cold War urban landscape as a contentious space in the process of being re-conceived anew.

In the previous chapter, I pointed to Vince Staples as an individual resistant actor who uses his art to author Los Angeles' urban landscape after his own inhabited experiences, countering the commercially mediated discourse of urban crisis. In this chapter, I broaden my scope from the individual actor to the collective actions of all manner of resistant actors, artists, and inhabitants in Berlin to consider how entire urban populations engage in collective spatial appropriation of a given city space. By focusing on a number of individual Berlin artists and activists who appropriate public space in ways that help author urban counter-images or create urban counter-narratives, this chapter considers the resistant efficacy of moving beyond individual action to create a constellation of counter-narratives that add up to what Tobias Morawski has termed a *Gegenöffentlichkeit*,[2] or counter-public. (16) For Morawski, the *Gegenöffentlichkeit* represents the sum actions of all resistant actors engaged in re-imagining a given urban space in contradistinction to its development according to dominant commercial, state-approved image. The *Gegenöffentlichkeit* is a body of loosely related individual nodes of resistance that add up to a de-centered whole. In Berlin, the spirit of counterculture and protest that characterizes the city in the global imagination is largely the product of myriad contributions to this *Gegenöffentlichkeit* from individual groups and actors committed to the appropriation of Berlin's existing built abstract space.

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[2] Morawski only gestures towards Habermas' conception of *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere) but *Gegenöffentlichkeit* is sometimes used to distinguish a non-state public sphere from the type of public sphere that Habermas identifies as administrated by the state.

Berlin's counter-cultural reputation predates the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but the fall represented a seismic shift in the spatial politics of the city at a moment when a political and social vacuum reduced the state's ability to control the built environment. Such a rupture in the city's spatial logic potentiated a new wave of resistant interventions in Berlin's cityspace, interventions that continue to inform the spatial politics of the so-called New Berlin. Berlin serves as a useful case study in the way a *Gegenöffentlichkeit* can collectively re-author a given city's image in ways that counter its dominant commercial characterization, primarily by potentiating new forms of spontaneous spatial intervention and by making it difficult for forces of power to counter all individual nodes of spatial resistance simultaneously. Berlin is particularly attuned to this kind of intervention because even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the city's tumultuous history of destruction and reconstruction made it a model *par excellence* of the kind of continual reinvention to which all world cities now aspire in the age of globalization. The frequent polarizing changes Berlin underwent throughout the twentieth century have made it that much more likely that counter-images from the *Gegenöffentlichkeit* might eventually be integrated into the long-term process of reconceiving the city. In Berlin, resistant actors utilize numerous intersecting strategies to intervene in the built environment, disrupt the commercial urban image, and potentiate the emergence of what Lefebvre has called differential space, that is, space which promotes social codes and norms that differ from the highly controllable and strictly delineated forms of space championed by hegemonic forces of power. Throughout the long-term process of reunification, Berlin's residents have continued to find ways to demand the right to the city, affording the city a global reputation as a locus of countercultural resistance. While it is true that this is often because Berlin's counter-images

176

are appropriated as cultural capital and integrated into the city's commercial image, Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit* continually conceives of new interventions and new resistant strategies to counter this effect. The city's myriad resistant actors keep their strategies malleable, welcome creative new approaches, and ultimately aspire to be adaptable enough to address citizens' shifting concerns as they arise. This assures that no commercial adoption of resistant efforts as cultural capital can ever remain static, for there is always some mutated new counter-image fomenting on Berlin's subcultural margins.

Even with the strength of Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, commercial and state interests have nonetheless remained most dominant in the discourse surrounding what the new Berlin should like and whose interests it should serve. Yet as the strategies I highlight in this chapter make clears, inhabitants' resistant interventions have slowed, altered, and at times even halted development of the city along these purely commercial lines. Some of the artistic efforts I highlight in this chapter seek to preserve the cultural memory of a given space, as in the photos in *Berlin Wonder Land* (2014) or the spatial remembrance art created by Stih & Schnock's *Orte des Erinnerns* (1993). Others seek to directly intervene in the way the city distributes its resources and addresses underrepresented populations, such as the anti-gentrification efforts of the Demokratische Initiative 100% Tempelhofer Feld (2014), or the occupation efforts of Refugee Tent Action (2014). And still others seek to claim ownership over the city by offering inhabitants a greater say in the way the city is seen and interpreted, such as the graffitial images of East Cross Project's *Berlin Spricht Wände* (2013) or in literary interventions such as Tanja Dücker's novel *Spielzone* (2000) and David Wagner's essays in *Mauer Park* (2013). The diverse array of spatial appropriations at the center of this chapter represent a mere cross-section of the prism of unique spatial

interventions resistant actors have adopted in Berlin in the years since the, a sampling of interartistic and interdisciplinary strategies chosen to express the collective needs of Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit*.

Though forces of power have often tried to deny disadvantaged populations a seat at the proverbial table when conceptualizing the future contours of the New Berlin, resistant actors in the city have used the strength of the *Gegenöffentlichkeit* to quite literally make space for themselves. Their efforts help make visible countless subcultural inhabitant populations, many of whom might otherwise remain invisible were it not for the resistant strategies used to remind Berliners of their existence and their need to be considered in the city's development efforts. The effect of so many counter-images is a collective counter-collage that allows even the most dispossessed and itinerant of Berlin's inhabitants to demand the right to the city, often by directly altering the city's material environments to better suit their needs.

Most strategies adopted by Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit* are in no way unique to Berlin, since similar expressions of protest, occupation, and spatial appropriation can be found in any number of global sites since the beginning of the 21st century. To name but a few examples, collective spatial appropriation has played a role in all manner of recent resistant spatial movements throughout the world, including the 2010 Tunisian Revolution that helped launch the Arab Spring, the 2011 occupation of New York City's Zucotti Park by the Occupy Wall Street movement, the 2016 squatting occupation at Standing Rock in North Dakota in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, and Catalonian protests for independence in 2017. Moreover, towards the end of the 1980s, mass protests like the Monday demonstrations at Leipzig's Nikolaikirche helped precipitate the end of the German

Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) at the same time that mass demonstrations like the Singing Revolution in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania helped precipitate the end of the Soviet Union. Just as the individual strategies adopted by Berliners combine to create a constellation of spatial intervention, so too does Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit* represent a singular contribution to a global strategy of collective resistance that seeks to mutate global space in ways more conducive to the needs of a worldwide precariat who themselves form a global counter-public. Given this context, the resistant atmosphere in reunited Berlin should be read more as an exemplary continuation of existing global energies than as a new paradigm unto itself.

Though mass protests and demonstrations have always been an important part of German identity, spatial appropriation in Berlin has become all the more future-minded since the *Wende*,[3] with resistant actors seeking ways to pre-emptively mutate urban spatial codes rather than merely resist authoritarian spatial control after it has already been imposed. Undoubtedly, Berliners' collective memory of the Berlin Wall as a material expression of authoritarian spatial segregation and control helps keep this type of resistance alive in Berlin today. The goal of this chapter is not to focus on Berlin to the exclusion of similarly productive threads in other cities but instead to use Berlin to highlight how collective resistance functions at a city-wide level, with the hope that such observations can be extrapolated to offer constructive ideas that shed light on how a *Gegenöffentlichkeit* can be created on a global scale.

Moreover, as a global city with a history of American intervention in its spatial and commercial planning, Berlin's spatial development has always been influenced by American

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[3] A term meaning "the turn," used to describe the period during and immediately after reunification.

models, either by mirroring American development or pushing back against it. Investigating

where American-style commercialization has seeped into Berlin's spatial politics helps

illuminate the effects of American-style neoliberal commercialization not just in Berlin but

also within the world economy as a whole. Consequently, my analysis of the role of

Gegenöffentlichkeit and counter-image authorship in Berlin resonates with the explicitly

American spatial critiques on which the prior two chapters focused, since all three chapters

can be read as an attempt to uncover how counter-images and counter-narratives help resist

hegemonic spatial control on scales ranging from the local to the global. If one considers the

expansion of globalized neoliberal capital as a sort of worldwide expansion of American

suburbanized consumerism and bourgeois hegemony, then all forms of right to the city

resistance worldwide can be understood as an attempt by the global precariat to construct a

global *Gegenöffentlichkeit*.

One specific way in which the German works considered in this chapter find

consonance with American works considered in the chapters prior is the way that all

highlight the street as a specific type of public space that is especially conducive to

appropriation and spatial resistance. The street is a type of public abstract space that resists

privatization and which can be re-imagined as a space of cultural encounter, affording it a

special type of primacy in considerations of how art and activism help address the right to

the city. The power of the street as raw material for spatial resistance is evident in both

Black Lives Matter's post-Ferguson tendency to stage protest by blocking highways and

public streets in the US and also the way Berlin's club scene organized anti-PEGIDA[4] raves

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[4] PEGIDA stands for Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicization of the West] and they are a nationalist, far-right political movement founded in

on the streets of Berlin in 2018. The valorization of street knowledge as a form of counter-knowledge that upends anti-urban commercial myths is evident in hip-hop by both Black and Chicanx artists in South Central LA and also Turkish and immigrant youth in Berlin-Neukölln. And the idea of white bourgeois space as the antithesis of the right to city is evident in both American anti-suburban narratives and in Berlin's artistic critiques of gentrification, since in both countries, elite classes often attempt to privatize street space so as to counteract its suitability for resistant appropriation. Moreover, in both countries, the bourgeois social codes informing privatization of formerly public spaces correspond with increasingly authoritarian forms of law-and-order policing that map to both racist and xenophobic sentiments that remain palpable in discussions about who deserves the right to the city and its resources. Focusing on the street as a public space that all inhabitants can access also grounds resistance in the local since street-level spatial politics counter the more metro-regional or even nationalistic spatial images championed by commercial strategies. While a city's commercial image subsumes the needs of local inhabitants in favor of a totalizing city image that primarily serves the normative interests of elite populations, resistance at the street level necessarily addresses the nuanced and specific needs of a given swath of a cities inhabitants, no matter their socioeconomic status.

To this end, many of Berlin's resistant spatial interventions deploy the idea of the *Kiez*[5] as an inhabited, micro-level community representing a smaller space within a larger district of neighborhood, usually marked by social interactions surrounding a given street or set of streets. The term is rarely applied to an official designation of space but it instead

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Dresden in 2014 that has recently gained traction in Germany on account of tensions surrounding the country's recent influx of refugees.

[5] *Kiez* is a term that dates back to the Middle Ages and its contemporary use is generally limited to Berlin and specific parts of Hamburg. The term originally referred to somewhat temporary Slavic settlements that formed their own micro-communities within German towns.

socially deployed as a term denoting a particular local community within a broader city quarter. Much like Vince Staples' connection to Ramona Park helped offer specificity to his critiques of Long Beach and of Los Angeles as a whole, so too does the logic of the *Kiez* help ground Berlin resistance in the specificities of given micro-neighborhoods. The borders of the *Kiez* are often unofficial and their designation is heavily dependent on the locality provided by the intersecting of given streets, helping inhabitants situate their local experiences within the wider context of the city and, by extension, the world. The concept helps knit the needs of locals together with the needs of a global precariat since, as Bastian Heinsohn has written, "Berlin's urban transformation affects global space as well as local space" (203). The *Kiez* becomes a key site to address issues like gentrification and dispossession because it integrates aspects of local everyday life and culture that tend to get erased during commercialized development. As Heinsohn writes, "the local *Kiez* struggles between the increasing image-production of a 'yet untouched' part of the urban space and the attempt to resist [a] loss of authenticity by deliberately positioning itself in contrast to global space," (Heinsohn 203) thereby actively offering inhabitants an opportunity to author counter-images that protect against this erasure. Since "local space is destroyed by the increasing uniformity of conventionalized urban space" (Heinsohn 208), *Kiez*-level resistance resurrects what commercialization seeks to destroy, using the local specificity of inhabited knowledge as a weapon against global urban homogenization. By focusing on the intensely local politics of the *Kiez* as a spatial unit, one recognizes how a kaleidoscope of small-scale resistant strategies can help create a rhizomatic global network of heterogenous spatial interventions by which a global *Gegenöffentlichkeit* might resist the totalizing bourgeois ideals of neoliberal twenty-first century global capitalism.

182

The Precariat's Right to the City

      In his 2014 book *Reclaim Your City: Urbane Protestbewegungen am Beispiel Berlins,*[6] Tobias Morawski articulates three possible planes on which to intervene in and appropriate urban space. The first plane he calls "spatial practices" [*räumlichen Praktiken*] which refers to intervention "on the physical plane through appropriation of material spaces."[7] Examples he gives for strategies of city appropriation [*Stadtaneignung*] on this plane include all manner of occupations, such as temporary and long-term squatting, guerilla gardening, free and open-air parties, and street protests/blockades. (Morawski 47) The second plane he calls "spaces of representation' [*Räume der Repräsentation*] which refers to intervention "on the symbolic plane through appropriation of space as communication space."[8] Examples offered for this plane include all manner of street demonstrations, including those that integrate strategies from the first plane, as well as numerous forms of street art such as graffiti, murals, mosaics, urban design projects, posters, banners, and protest flags. To this plane he also ascribes any resistant attempt to infiltrate or manipulate official channels of communication, such as the mutilation of advertisements and grassroots attempts at information distribution, such as flyers. The third plane he calls "representation of space" [*Repräsentation des Raums*] which refers to intervention "on the symbolic plane through appropriation of the media which represent these spaces."[9] (Morawski 46) While Morawski's examples for this plane focus primarily on the creation of alternative city maps as a form of critical geography, he seems to overlook literary, cinematic, and artistic representations of city space as a potential form of alternative space-making. Since he

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[6] *Reclaim Your City: Urban Protest Movements Using the Example of Berlin.* From here onward, all German translations are my own except where otherwise indicated.
[7] "auf der physischen Ebene durch Aneignung von materiellen Räumen"
[8] "auf der symbolischen Ebene durch die Aneignung des Raums als Kommunikationsraum"
[9] "auf der symbolischen Ebene durch die Aneignung der Mittel, die diese Räume repräsentieren"

asserts that "representations of space fundamentally decide how space is perceived, how it is used, and how people meet in it,"[10] (138) it would seem that artistic representations of space contribute a similar form of counter-image authorship informing the way the city is characterized and understood.

In the *Wende*-era New Berlin, resistant counter-image making begins with the squatters who commandeered the abandoned buildings of the formerly East German neighborhood known as Mitte in the days and weeks immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall. For the remainder of this chapter, I employ Tobias Morawski's model for collective physical and symbolic appropriation of urban space as a means to consider six different contemporary forms of resistant practices in Berlin that genealogically trace their interventions to the legacy of the *Wende* squatters' movement (*Hausbesetzerbewegung*).[11] The *Wende* squatters employed numerous artistic and political strategies befitting all three planes of collective spatial appropriation that Morawski maps in *Reclaim Your City*, making them a useful entry point for considering how collective spatial intervention can create a *Gegenöffentlichkeit* that articulates right to the city resistance. Though the *Wende* squatters' movement had no central leadership and was articulated through a variety of individual groups working in concert with one another, their collective legacy of resistance has been adopted in ways large and small by Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit* ever since. For whatever failures might be attributed to the *Wende* squatters, they did successfully prove it was

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[10] "Darstellungen von Raum entscheiden grundsätzlich mit, wie dieser wahrgenommen wird, wie er genutzt wird und wie sich Menschen in ihm begegnen."

[11] For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the totality of actors in this broadly defined movement as "squatters" even though not all who participated were actively involved in the actual act of squatting – the movement also included artists, musicians, students, and political activists, spread out across multiple sub-groups. I use "squatter" as the catch-all definition primarily because of its spatial implications relating to the way the movement as a whole occupied space, though I in no way mean to imply that the physical act of squatting was more important than any of the other resistant performances that occurred within squatted spaces. I also use the modifier *Wende* to distinguish this wave of squatters from those who came before and after them.

possible not only to imagine Berlin's city space in ways outside the scope of the commercial image, but also to transform the social codes guiding how the material urban environment could be used, even if only temporarily. Their experiments in Mitte demonstrated the potential that resistant spatial practices pose for appropriation of the city's built environment, illustrating in the process how social groups concerned with asserting their right to the city can do so by means of subversive spatial re-authoring. It was not until November 1990, when Berlin's police violently attempted to clear a number of squats on Mainzer Strasse, that the state was able to muster a forceful enough display to really challenge the movement's stronghold over Mitte. By that point, the squatters had already generated a discursive presence strong enough to leave blueprints for future models of urban counter-image making in Berlin. They established resistant art and politics as an integral component of the New Berlin's cultural and social landscape, planting the seeds of a broader culture of resistance that would help develop Berlin's reputation as a global hub for counter-cultural energies.

As this introduction to this work explores at length, Henri Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city concerns the rights of all who inhabit the city to have a say in determining how the city functions, how its resources are used, how the city is imagined by those outside of it, and ultimately, how space can be used to govern everyday life. Since wealthy urban inhabitants and social elites interact with the city primarily through consumption, Lefebvre identifies the working class masses as those who actually inhabit and shape the city. The right to the city thus becomes a way for the urban working classes to assert that their more direct and inhabited interaction with the built urban environment ought to afford them to right to determine how urban space is used. Lefebvre describes the right to the city as the

185

need "to reach out towards a new humanism, a new praxis...of urban society" (Lefebvre, "Right to the City" 150) in order to transform the city into what he calls "the act and *ouevre* of a complex thought," one which can only be expressed by "social classes and class factions capable of revolutionary initiative" (Lefebvre, "Right to the City" 154). He insists that the creation of a new urban society requires one to imagine new utopian possibilities without regard for their practical implementation, since the existing built (abstract) space of the city is so confined by existing hegemonic ideologies that interventions which are merely reformist are unlikely to have much effect. Lefebvre suggests that since forces of power use any means necessary to control the built environment, or abstract space, it is difficult for resistant actors to meaningfully appropriate built space in order to re-imagine it. Nonetheless, he writes, "between [society's] sub-systems and the structures consolidated by various means (compulsion, terror, and ideological persuasion), there are holes and chasms. These voids are not there due to chance. They are the places of the possible" (Lefebvre, "Right to the City" 156). Since, Lefebvre continues, "the conditions of the possible can only be realized in the course of a radical metamorphosis," any revolutionary attempts to re-imagine the city can make use of these "holes and chasms" to potentiate a new urban praxis that better expresses the right to the city and restores urban authority to the working class masses. (156)

David Harvey's 21st century expansion of Lefebvre's concepts moves the revolutionary capacity for urban transformation from a general conception of the working class to a global urban precariat marked by "insecure, often part-time, and disorganized low-paid labor" (*Rebel Cities* xiv). While Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city offers a theoretical model for understanding urban resistance, Harvey asserts that since spontaneous

186

precariat resistance has been potentiated by the same processes of urban erasure about which Lefebvre only theorized a few decades prior, "what has been happening in the streets, among the urban social movements, is far more important," (xi-xii, *Rebel Cities*) necessitating a push towards a praxis of the right to the city. Harvey further suggests that without an attendant integration of anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal revolutionary strategies, resistant transformation of urban space will never adequately address the needs of the contemporary urban precariat, since it will inevitably be re-absorbed by the totalizing power of globalized capital. If, as Harvey asserts, the goal is to "imagine and reconstitute a totally different kind of city out of the disgusting mess of a globalizing, urbanizing capital run amok," then "that cannot occur without the creation of a vigorous anti-capitalist movement that focuses on the transformation of daily urban life as its goal" (*Rebel Cities* xvi). In both Lefebvre's and Harvey's estimations, only ruptures, voids, and chasms in the existing social and spatial logic of the urban environment can potentiate such revolutionary transformation, so the goals of any anti-capitalist resistance movement must include a push to either seize spatial ruptures as they occur or to use resistance to potentiate their eventual emergence.

Drawing on both Lefebvre's and Harvey's conception of the right to the city as "a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart's desire" (Harvey, *Rebel Cities* 4), Morawski begins *Reclaim Your City* (2014) with a description of *Recht auf Stadt* as the idea that "all people who live in a city should…be able to decide how city life will be designed, irrespective of their origin or social status"[12] (16). His conception of the right to the city is one in which fissures and chasms can be created in the city's existing spatial logic through

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[12] "Alle Menschen, die in einer Stadt leben, sollen demnach unabhängig von Herkunft und sozialem Status entscheiden können, wie das städtische Leben gestaltet werden soll."

concentrated anti-capitalist efforts re-imagine how the city's public spaces can be used in order to meet the needs of populations cut off from official commercial channels. Morawski emphasizes the right to transform, design, and reinvent urban space because the right to the city is a collective right that can only be engendered through intentional transformation of the social structures that organize the urban environment toward commercial ends, social structures which depend on the spatial codes that help shape them. To express one's right to the city is also to express one's right to have a say in authoring how the city is seen and to modify the way the city is used by all who inhabit it. Since one cannot transform space without creating a new, counter-image after which that transformation could be modeled, the right to the city is expressed first and foremost through the creation of a potentially generative counter-image. The act of authoring or re-authoring urban space in ways that counter the dominance of commercial urban images is thus inherently a form of right to the city resistance.

Like Harvey, Morawski considers the added challenges of staging right to the city resistance under the dual forces of late capitalism and neoliberalism that created the precarity that characterizes present-day globalization. Morawski's model also resonates with Alex Vasudevan's assertion that "the re-emergence of a radical housing politics in Berlin has...placed particular emphasis on the articulation of a right to the city by, with and on behalf of its precarious, vulnerable and often voiceless inhabitants" (190). Vasudevan suggests that the use of squatting in Berlin has resulted in an apparent "re-functioning" of radical spatial practices (191) but, as Harvey illustrates, "to claim the right to the city is, in effect, to claim the right to something that no longer exists (if it ever truly did)." (*Rebel Cities* xv) More than just a "re-functioning" of prior practices, Harvey sees spatial

resistance as an authorial act grounded in the recognition that "the right [to the city] is itself

an object of struggle" in which the powerless ("the homeless and the *sans-papiers*")

articulate continuous resistance against the powerful ("the financiers and developers"), lest

the latter claim the entire city for themselves. (Harvey, *Rebel Cities* xv) The urban precariat,

as the city's proverbial homeless and *sans-papiers*, cannot articulate their right to the city

without first imagining how the city could be conceived to integrate rather than exclude

them, so the process of counter-image making is effectively step one in a larger process of

revolutionary urban transformation. Collective resistance to dominant urban commercial

images and narratives is thus always a struggle to extend the right to the city to those

inhabitants whose lives are most marked by precarity.

Like Lefebvre, Morawski emphasizes the necessity of multivalent spatial

appropriation precisely because he recognizes how much control commercial and state

powers exert over space itself, making it nearly impossible for resistant actors to do anything

more than intervene in or co-opt the existing environment—there is no such thing as a truly

blank urban slate. In contrast to the community-serving spatial interventions of the urban

precariat, "when economic actors control and occupy public spaces, as a general rule their

interest is to direct the behaviors of those present to commercially viable channels"[13]

(Morawski 27). Consequently, economic actors[14] actively resist uses of public space

detached from commercial and consumerist activity, such as uses associated with play,

eroticism, rebellion, creativity, and (non-commercial) leisure, all of which are uses Lefebvre

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[13] "wenn wirtschaftliche Akteure öffentliche Räume kontrollieren und besetzen, ist ihr Interesse in der Regel, das Verhalten der Anwesenden in kommerziell verwertbare Bahnen zu lenken"
[14] I borrow this term from Morawski who uses "wirtschaftliche Akteure" to refer to anyone whose interests in the city space are motivated primarily by financial gain. In German, the term *Akteur* can refer to an actor in a theatrical sense, but can also be used to refer to a stakeholder or used in the sense one might use the word "player" in English as in "a player in the decision-making process." I will thus use the term "economic actor" and the term "actor" more generally in the same sense.

deems necessary to fulfill inhabitant's anthropological needs and extend the right to the city to all who inhabit. (Lefebvre, "Right to the City"147) Moreover, since Morawski suggests that "economic actors decide on both access and use regulations as well as on the exclusion of unwanted social groups"[15] (27), valorization of a commercial image for the city assures that any and all new investment, construction, and development need only benefit economically-advantaged inhabitants, usually exacerbating the corresponding racial and socioeconomic segregation of the disadvantaged and helping maintain abstract space's hegemonic status quo.

Consequently, Morawski argues that "the development of the modern city can be viewed as a continuous struggle around access to and exclusion from public space,"[16] (46) to which one might add the struggle around access to and exclusion from urban spatial resources, including recreation, education, and housing. Resistance to the dominant, commercial image of the city also means resisting uneven development and its attendant negative social effects, namely gentrification and displacement. Notably, Morawski uses the word *Verdrängung* to describe displacement. In German, this word has the added connotation of a repressive squeezing out or crowding out, in which one is slowly but surely robbed of the space one takes up. Thus, the German term emphasizes how displacement constitutes a form of anti-precariat spatial violence commercially touted as necessary for the greater municipal good. Morawski's conception of the right to the city is thus inherently anti-capitalist, for he recognizes that the result of any form of commercially viable urban

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[15] "wirtschaftliche Akteure [bestimmen] sowohl über Zugangs- und Nutzungs-regelungen als auch über den Ausschluss unerwünschter sozialer Gruppen"

[16] "die Entwicklung der modernen Stadt kann…als ein kontinuerlicher Kampf um Zugang zum und Ausschluss vom öffentlichen Raum angesehen werden"

development is always necessarily the *Verdrängung* of the urban precariat and the exacerbation of existing economic inequality.

Towards Lefebvrian Differential Space

If right to the city resistance is ever to effectively resist the *Verdrängung* of the urban precariat, then it must strive to produce what Lefebvre has referred to as differential space, or space that differs from the built environment as conceived in the commercial image. The *Wende* squatters' movement exemplifies this kind of resistance precisely because their embodied occupation of Berlin's central districts coincided with explicit efforts to transform the space to suit their own needs and extend resources to disadvantaged members of the populace. Whereas Lefebvre characterizes the entire built environment as abstract space, differential space occurs when the contradictions inherent to abstract space cannot be suppressed and the space no longer adheres to the expected social/spatial divisions that help forces of power maintain hegemonic control. Potentiating the emergence of differential space is the ideal goal of all spatially motivated resistance because the contradictions inherent to abstract space constitute an exploitable weakness in the otherwise all-encompassing dominance of the capitalist system. Traditionally, the problem with extending Lefebvre's concept of differential space to the actual practice of spatial resistance has been that the mechanisms of spatial control utilized by both state and economic actors are generally rather successful in disguising the contradictions inherent to abstract space. This is mainly because abstract space is rendered apprehensible only by means of its compartmentalization and coding into spaces and places, by its division into designated recognizable segments (i.e. public square, school, park, parking lot, etc.). These spatial

191

delineations and the social behaviors they direct are posited as natural to the social space of the city, even as they are produced alongside the material spaces that engender them. This natural-seeming fragmentation of abstract space often makes it difficult to recognize the contradictions inherent to it.

Harvey echoes this sentiment in "The Political Economy of Space" (2006), stating that the division of abstract space is used to depoliticize space generally, by making binaries like public and private seem natural and inert while implicitly reinforcing social behaviors and rules that privilege those with wealth and power. ("Political Economy" 6) Hence, Lefebvre's own claim:

> …That the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production, it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet, that, as such it escapes in part from those who would make use of it. The social and political (state) forces which engendered this space now seek, but fail, to master it completely; the very agency that has forced spatial reality towards a sort of uncontrollable autonomy now strives to run it into the ground, then shackle and enslave it. (*Production of Space* 26)

Since the division of abstract space into compartmentalized social spaces/places facilitates hegemonic control over social relations, it stands to reason that a given abstract space could be appropriated and the seemingly natural divisions reflected in it challenged. Then, the resistant (and hence, differential) possibilities of the space could be revealed, potentiating the generation of differences that would transform it into differential space. Through their transformative experimentations with the material space of Mitte, the *Wende* squatters attempted this exact type of spatial transformation, and the various resistant actors who

followed in their footsteps have been building on the incremental spatial changes the *Wende* squatters helped potentiate. The New Berlin's entire resistant history might consequently be understood as an attempt to make Berlin itself into a differential space.

For Lefebvre, class struggle and its relationship to the contradictions of abstract space assume primacy in the creation of differential space. In The Production of Space (1974), he writes:

> Today, more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space. Indeed, it is that struggle alone which prevents abstract space from taking over the whole planet and papering over all differences. Only the class struggle has the potential to differentiate, to generate differences that are not intrinsic to economic growth *qua* strategy, 'logic' or 'system' – that is to say, differences which are neither induced by nor acceptable to that growth. (55)

Though Lefebvre sees class struggle as that which inhibits the expansion of abstract space to all available space, he is reticent to grant that differential space could be produced through appropriation of an already produced abstract space, partially because he formed his theories in an era in which globalized capitalism was not yet apparent. He argues that mere appropriation would constitute an "inappropriate spatial morphology" (*Production of Space* 380) which merely "[simulates] existing space, parodying it, and demonstrating its limitations, without for all that escaping its clutches" (*Production of Space* 382). However, he also argues that a body or collective can "inaugurate the project of a different space" by "putting up resistance" to existing abstract space, often by beginning this resistance in the artistic sphere. (*Production of Space* 349) When viewed as the inauguration of a potential future space, even seemingly unsuccessful transformative revolutionary projects like the

193

Wende squatters' attempts to transform Mitte into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be understood as kindling for future resistance project and fuel to fan the flames of a burgeoning *Gegenöffentlichtkeit.*

In *Warped Space* (2001), Anthony Vidler ventures an all the more affirmative claim about the productive potential of spatial appropriation for the precariat. He suggests that in the twenty-first century, "total rebuilding, total demolition, or total revival are all blocked by the inertia of the 'already built' and the 'institutionally confirmed'," suggesting that transformation of space can now only occur through a process of "gradual mutation" (135). Vidler continues:

> Space…is considered to be an already occupied terrain, a territory to be surveyed carefully, invaded silently, and with preparations made for proper retreat. The new avant-garde is no longer a joyful proclaimer of future technological or formal bliss; it is personified instead by the squatter, the panhandler, the vagrant, the unwanted stranger…the squatter appropriates, the homeless refuse to move, the vagabond ignores fixed boundaries…[and all employ spatial shifts as] instruments of insertion, opening rifts and faults in the apparently seamless fabric of the city to let in its new inhabitants. (136)

Vidler sees the precariat and their subversive infection of abstract space as a mutating force that gradually evolves the urban environment. He describes resistance as a wedge that finds potential openings in the seemingly closed logic of abstract space, prying it open to make way for discursive re-consideration. Despite his seeming contestations to the contrary, Lefebvre does not actually exclude the possibility of differential space emerging by means of incremental, fragmentary mutation akin to Vidler's description. He simply suggests that

194

slow mutation cannot generate a differential space unless it is accompanied by a revolutionary moment capable of upending the existing logic of abstract space. As Harvey explains, Lefebvre believes any such revolutionary movement requires a "spontaneous coming together in a moment of 'irruption,' when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something different" (Rebel xvii). Without question, the *Wende* can be characterized as such a moment of irruption, for the fall of the Berlin Wall portended the inevitability of a major upheaval of everyday life in the cityspace. The fact that the process of reunification still cannot be considered complete nearly three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall reinforces the idea that even after a moment of irruption, transformation is more likely to come through slow mutation than full upheaval. Berlin's history of collective resistance is thus a continuous timeline of evolving action that appropriates the city's remaining spatial voids to slowly mutates the city's spaces after its own counter-image. The *Wende* squatters, in being the first to take advantage of the moment of irruption that characterized this irruption, helped inaugurate the emergence of differential space in Berlin.

Image-Making and Post-Wall Berlin

In order to adequately address the legacy of counter-image making in the new Berlin, it is first necessary to take a moment to examine how the commercial image became dominant in debates about Berlin's post-reunification urban renewal. In his 1997 article "The Voids of Berlin," Andreas Huyssen argues that the fall of the Berlin Wall rendered the city a pockmarked landscape, covered in gaps and voids. Consequently, he describes Berlin's long-term reunification project as the process of slowly filling in these voids, a

195

process he describes elsewhere as the development of an urban palimpsest.[17] Huyssen's

argument refers not only to the physical voids left in the city's topography by the demolition

of the Berlin Wall but also to the social, economic, and cultural gaps separating what was

once two ideologically opposed German societies, a separation typified by author Peter

Schneider's concept of the "wall in the head" [*Mauer im Kopf*]. Tellingly, Huyssen's

concept reflects Lefebvre's assertion that an irruption can be characterized by the voids and

fissures it leaves behind. To Huyssen, the process of void-filling is an authorial act that

renders Berlin "a text frantically being written and rewritten" (57). He emphasizes that

scholarly consideration of the city as text had historically been informed by cultural and

literary evaluations of urban space, generally through considerations of "how real and

imaginary spaces commingle in the mind to shape our notions of specific cities" (57).

However, by the end of the twentieth century, Huyssen suggests that the concept of the city

shifted to a more "pictorial and image-related" (58) conception that helped center

commercial urban images to the detriment of inhabited urban narratives.

Whereas prior concepts of city-as-text concerned "a critical discourse involving

architects, literary critics, theorists, and philosophers bent on exploring and creating the new

vocabularies of space after modernism," Huyssen suggests that more recent discourse of

city-as-image involves "'city fathers,' developers, and politicians trying to increase revenue

from mass tourism, conventions, and office or commercial rents" (58). As a result of this

shift, the needs of existing inhabitants have increasingly been minimized in favor of

developing the city into an economic powerhouse focused around "aesthetic spaces for

cultural consumption, megastores and blockbuster museal events, festivals, and spectacles of

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[17] See Huyssen's 2003 book *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*.

all kinds, all intended to lure the new species of city tourist," (58) which Huyssen suggests

has replaced the familiar model of the flâneur. He continues, "the flâneur, even though

something of an outsider in his city, was always figured as a dweller rather than as a traveler

on the move. But today it is the tourist rather than the flâneur to whom the new city culture

wants to appeal, just as it fears the tourist's unwanted double, the displaced migrant"

(Huyssen 59). Even as the flâneur perceived and evaluated the cityspace, their role was still

that of an inhabitant and thus ultimately participatory. The tourist, by contrast, passively

consumes the city as a set of commercial experiences without necessarily participating in

acts of inhabitance. Whereas the flâneur was enmeshed in the city's everyday life, the tourist

remains on the city's surface.

The displaced migrant that Huyssen calls "the tourist's unwanted double" is feared

precisely because their existence signifies not transience but a demand to occupy and inhabit

a space that is perceived as not belonging to them. Considered more permanent than the

ephemeral presence of the tourist, the migrant figure is perceived in negative relation to the

commercial benefits that tourists generate. The migrant challenges the eventual consecration

of the commercial image by insisting upon their inclusion in rather than displacement from

the city's space,[18] a stance that takes on particular import given Germany's recent influx of

refugees, including approximately 1.35 million refugee arrivals since the beginning of 2015.

(Chase) In the commercially imagined neoliberal city, the tourist is privileged and conceived

as enriching the city while the migrant is demonized and conceived as being a drain upon it,

even as both tourist and migrant constitute a type of drain on the city's resources, not the

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[18] Though I do not have the space to do so here, it is worth considering how alternative terms like "ex-patriate" are used to describe more desirable (and often white, Western) migrants whose behavior and/or spending habits generally afford them the ability to blend with the city's existing bourgeoisie. The term migrant is more often affixed to those whose status as Other is noticeably working class, that is, to those whose migration would strengthen the numbers of the city's existing precariat.

least of which includes the space used for housing. When the city is conceived through its commercial image, any use of the public space that cannot be monetized is forced to transform into a consumable attraction/service or is otherwise transformed to better suit the service of commercial interests, barring the few remaining spaces where low-income inhabitants are the majority. Even then, those places face the constant threat of eventual gentrification, and thus of further dispossession and displacement of the urban precariat. In effect, this means the entire city is re-tooled to suit the needs of tourists and the bourgeois classes whose consumption patterns mirror them.

It could be argued, as plenty have, that Berlin's post-reunification commercial renewal allowed the city to generate more cash-flow and create a multitude of necessary short-term economic benefits that stimulated growth, which was ultimately good for a city burdened by the costs of reunification. However, this growth came at the expense of generating long-term sustainable provisions for those residents whose financial access to the city and its resources is most limited. The city's existing bourgeois/elite residents, whose spending habits, social tendencies, and general engagement with the cityspace tend to map more closely to the behavior of tourists, likely noticed very little negative change in their daily routines. As the benefactors of gentrification's capitalistic colonization of the city space, the bourgeois classes are equally enamored with the commercial image of the city, for like the suburbia simulacrum in the US, the cosmopolitan image of commercial Berlin has been crafted to appeal to their tastes explicitly. Meanwhile, having been denied access to increasingly privatized urban public spaces, the displaced and dispossessed urban precariat is forced by necessity to find inventive ways to restore their right to take up space. Class struggle in the age of neoliberal globalization thus necessitates both authorship of a counter-

image for the city and physical and symbolic appropriation of city space in order to re-imagine the urban environment in ways that include the precarious masses too often rendered invisible.

Like the precariat it represents, this counter-image must be fragmented, fluid, and itinerant—not a single image at all but rather a collage of fragmented images coming from a multitude of sources. It is a collective, accumulated image that draws upon varied resistant performances and practices accounting for a diverse number of artistic, political, and social actors working both together and individually. While Anja Kanngieser refers to a "politics of collective appropriation" (1) and Morawski speaks of *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, in both cases the notion of the collective frames the rhetoric of Berlin's contemporary spatial resistance. Thinking of precariat resistance in this collective way helps resurrect the power-in-numbers mentality that has always existed in the proletarian struggle for class consciousness but which has recently been hindered all the more by neoliberalism's drive towards individualism, isolation, and increasingly precarious labor. Accordingly, one of the primary goals of neoliberal urbanization is to limit the possibility that the precariat will ever recognize the strength of their collective resistance, and it is for this reason that forces of power so insistently attempt inoculate resistance by integrating it into the city's commercial image as subcultural capital.

In *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, Harvey offers a concrete illustration of this issue using the example of New York City. By the 1970s, decades of suburbanization had left New York City in a so-called 'urban crisis' characterized by widespread violent crime and poverty. Though the city had been receiving federal assistance to combat these issues, Richard Nixon significantly diminished that assistance in 1975, causing the city to fall into

199

default on loans from local investment bankers and financial institutions.[19] Rather than

forgive the city's debt or work out a more equitable solution for the public good, these

financial institutions used their newfound leverage over the city to stake first claim to all

future municipal revenue while at the same time exerting an unprecedented degree of

influence over city planning efforts, pushing the city to focus on revenue-building at the

expense of all else. (Harvey 44-5) The result was what Harvey calls "a coup by the financial

institutions against the democratically elected government of New York City" (45) during

which investment bankers "seized the opportunity to restructure [the city] in ways that suited

their agenda" (47), robbing the city's inhabitants of their democratic right to help shape the

urban environment. These economic actors prioritized creation of a "good business climate,"

requiring the city to author a new commercial image for itself. "This meant using public

resources to build appropriate infrastructures for business" at the same time that "the city's

elite institutions were mobilized to sell the image of the city as a cultural centre and tourist

destination (inventing the famous logo 'I Love New York')" (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 47).

On the one hand, Harvey reports that this so-called "neoliberalization of culture"

(47) required that "the city elites [accede], though not without a struggle, to the demand for

lifestyle diversification (including those attached to sexual preference and gender) and

increasing consumer niche choices" (47). On the other hand, this increased social diversity

and extension of niche consumerism to subcultural tastes was permitted only because it

served commercial interests, turning formerly denigrated populations into proof of the city's

cosmopolitan, liberal alluere. This allowed economic actors to obfuscate their commercial

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[19] Notably, this is also around the same time that the Nixon administration started using the kind of anti-urban victim-blaming rhetoric about urban over-reliance on the public sector that precipitated the discourse on urban crisis I described in Chapter Two.

intentions behind subcultural capital and assuage elite liberal concerns about the state
repression of and neoliberal divestment from disadvantaged populations. Embracing a few
token progressive social issues allowed New York City to portray itself as a space
welcoming to all while at the same time reorganizing it's infrastructure to support
commercial and corporate investment that benefitted only the city's most wealthy residents.
The city's new commercial image as an open-minded space for creativity and self-
exploration facilitated an increase in tourism and attracted new, wealthier inhabitants,
raising rents and increasing the gap between those who could afford to live in the city and
those who could not. Those who had helped shape New York City's diverse subcultures and
lifestyles but who lacked the financial resources necessary to compete with commercial
interests were relegated to their continued displacement from the city by means of cultural
erasure and systematic gentrification.

    Harvey's description of 1970s New York offers a useful analog to the situation in
today's Berlin, a city that former Mayor Klaus Woworeit famously described as "arm aber
sexy" [poor but sexy] (Huggler). Morawski traces the influence of neoliberal thinking in
Berlin and elsewhere to de-industrialization and privatization following the oil crisis of
1973. He notes, "since then cities have acted as corporations in location-based competition
[*Standortwettbewerb*] for investors, tourists, tax revenue, and large events. Subsequently,
private property ownership and rental income have developed into a lucrative business"[20]
(21). While this is clearly the case in Harvey's example, Huyssen's description of the first
decade of German unification as a frenzy of commercial image-making reflects similar

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[20] "Städte stehen seitdem wie Unternehmen in Standortwettbewerb um Investoren, Touristen, Steuereinnahmen
und Groß-Events. Aus Wohnraumbesitz und Mieteinnahmen entwickelte sich in der Folge ein lukratives
Geschäft."

tendencies. Berlin in the '90s was concerned primarily with a process of becoming, typified

by the 1996 tourism campaign "Berlin wird" [*Berlin becomes*]. Yet at the time of his

article's 1997 publication, Huyssen observed that "nobody seems to know exactly what

Berlin will become" (62). Though "much of central Berlin in the mid-1990s [was] a gigantic

construction site, a hole in the ground, a void," (Huyssen 62) only economic actors were

afforded a chance to fill those voids. Huyssen observes that under neoliberalization, "the

very image of the city itself becomes central to its success in a globally competitive world"

(Huyssen 66). Even beyond the state's preference for commercial interests, pressure from

the global economy to integrate Berlin as a global city, particularly once the nation's capital

was moved from Bonn to Berlin in 1999, also helped valorize the commercial image of the

city. Noting how in 1997 "the political triumphalism of the Free World during the Cold War

has now been replaced by the triumphalism of the free market in the age of corporate

globalization" (71), Huyssen predicts the eventual neoliberal transformation of Berlin's city

infrastructure in a manner akin to New York City's transformation a few decades earlier. He

writes:

> The major concern in developing and rebuilding key sites in the heart of Berlin
>
> seems to be with image rather than use, attractiveness for tourists and official visitors
>
> rather than heterogeneous living space for Berlin's inhabitants, erasure of memory
>
> rather than its imaginative preservation. The new architecture is to enhance the
>
> desired image of Berlin as capital and global metropolis of the twenty-first century;
>
> as a hub between Eastern and Western Europe; and as a center of corporate presence.
>
> (66-7)

Huyssen later suggests that the city's transformation will result in an inevitable "loss of urban life" and "may represent the worst start into the twenty-first century one could imagine for this city" since "many of the major construction projects, it seems, have been designed against the city rather than for it" (72). In the two decades since Huyssen first published his article, it would seem that almost all of his predictions have come to fruition.

Harvey's New York City example also reflects how the efforts of resistant and subcultural actors, like the *Wende* squatters, are always already susceptible to appropriation by economic actors as cultural capital – especially once resistant efforts coalesce in the creation of a so-called lifestyle that can be marketed as youthful, hip, artistic, or rebellious to tourists and would-be residents. This is especially true when a subculture's resistant efforts also make a given space seem more commercially profitable, such as when they generate art or nightlife. But no matter how profitable a subculture may seem to the city, these efforts to appropriate their output tend to displace resistant actors whose race, ethnicity, migration status, or socioeconomic status make them that much more vulnerable to urban precarity. As Vasudevan writes, "the recent history of Berlin is a story indelibly marked by the ongoing neo-liberal transformation of the city" identifiable as "urban regeneration, large-scale modernization, and the advent of a new property regime [that] precipitated the widespread displacement of existing residents who were no longer able to afford rents" (182). Far beyond merely controlling rents and access to property, gentrification efforts attempt the *Verdrängung* of the precariat from all of urban space.

In this context, it is clear why inhabited occupation of urban domestic space formed such a large part of the *Wende* squatters' resistant strategies. When they were still part of the GDR, East Berlin neighborhoods like Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg had been deemed

undesirable due to their peripheral location along the path of the Berlin Wall. Because of this, many buildings within these districts were never even restored after WWII bombs left them in shambles. After reunification, these areas became the city's central districts, meaning that the undesirable, decrepit old buildings the squatters occupied geographically represented the most desirable investment real estate in all of Berlin. Speaking of Prenzlauer Berg, Andrej Holm notes that following reunification, "the price of land spiked to 1,000 Deutsche Mark (DM) per square meter, surpassing by far the price of even the best residential areas within West Berlin" (116). Though the squatters likely occupied these central districts primarily because the abandoned buildings made the area a perfect playground for their experimental re-authoring of everyday life in Berlin, their physical appropriation of the city's now-desirable central real estate was not an insignificant component of their anti-capitalistic resistance.

Ironically, however, the *Wende* squatters' occupation of such highly desirable real estate undoubtedly hastened the speed at which economic actors converted their resistance into cultural capital, thereby hastening their displacement. While early attempts to forcibly evict the squatters generally resulted in pushback from a mostly sympathetic populace, the almost inconspicuously subtle re-branding of the city as hip, subcultural, and artistic ensured that support for or interest in the *Wende* squatters' lifestyle could be quickly monetized. Morawski describes the appeal of artists and subcultures as "soft locational factors" [*weiche Standortfaktoren*] used to market a city, noting that "cultural and artistic creativity within a city establish an ambience that attracts technologically and economically creative people"[21] (25). Since the presence of the squatters and the scene that surrounded them made the

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[21] "Kulturelle und künstleriche Kreativität innerhalb einer Stadt ein Ambiente schafft, das technologisch und ökonomisch kreativ tätige Menschen anzieht."

central districts that much more attractive to culturally minded tourists and investors, the movement's efforts at germinating a counter-image were cut short through their absorption as cultural capital to market the city. As a result, the very districts the *Wende* squatters attempted to claim as their own were the first to be gentrified following their displacement.

By the mid 1990s, the dual forces of violent state-supported eviction efforts and co-optation of the scene as cultural capital had more or less anesthetized the resistant capacities of the squats that remained. Describing how this effect played out in the branding of a rapidly gentrifying Prenzlauer Berg, Holm says the district was "transformed into a code for a specific consumer pattern and lifestyle never before seen in Germany" (120). He continues:

> Portrayals of Prenzlauer Berg do not simply reflect reality, they construe it; they take up old themes, remix, compress, and spatially reorder them. Put crudely, the myth of Prenzlauer Berg arose in the 1990s from a recycling of various basic components that are combined in ever-new variants today: (1) Prenzlauer Berg as the 'new Kreuzberg'; (2) Prenzlauer Berg as Montmartre, Soho, or the Lower East Side of the new 'world-class city' of Berlin; and (3) Prenzlauer Berg as a microcosm of the 'growing together' of East and West…This cultural boosterism increasingly became a foundation for serious investment in a 'cultural' infrastructure in the 1990s. (120)

The first comparison to Kreuzberg explicitly relates the counter-cultural behavior of the *Wende* squatters in the district to the squatting scene that emerged in Kreuzberg during the student movements of the 1960s and again in the 1980s. While "Kreuzberg" serves as one of Berlin's calling cards for subcultural lifestyles, the word "new" points to the gentrifying effects of cultural capital within urban renewal, since the idea of a new Kreuzberg is a

rhetorical extension of commercial image creation. For this and other reasons, Holm suggests that Prenzlauer Berg exemplifies the "neoliberal turn of urban policy" which both "[boosts] a post-Fordist orientation toward sophisticated lifestyles and conspicuous consumption" and "renounces the prior orientation toward welfare" present in prior phases of urban renewal. (114) While the case of Prenzlauer Berg's gentrification is one of the most explicit in Berlin, similar strategies were repeated in the subsequent gentrification of Mitte, Friedrichshain, and later, Neukölln and Kreuzberg. No surprise that these are also the districts where squats were most common.

As reunification efforts matured, Vasudevan writes that "Berlin underwent a period of intense urban restructuring within which the activities of squatters were seen as a major obstacle to be both pacified and proscribed" (Vasudevan 159). Given the relative ease with which economic actors succeeded in removing the *Wende* squatters as an obstacle to development, one might assume that as the movement dispersed, so too did their discursive impact. Vasudevan, however, argues that "the dissolution of the scene as a coherent 'movement' was also accompanied by the emergence of new *experimental geographies* in Berlin that adapted and reworked the tactics and strategies of urban squatting as a means of reclaiming a renewed right to the city" (159). As in Morawski's nod to spatial appropriation as a form of critical geography, Vasudevan's notion of squatting as experimental geography gestures toward the way even temporary spatial appropriation like the *Wende* squatters' movement help build a toolkit of local strategies that can be deployed and adapted over time by a *Gegenöffentlichkeit*. Consequently, "the attempt to re-imagine the city of Berlin as a crucible of political change did not come to an end with the violent clearing of the squatters" (Vasudevan 160) but instead, it created an opportunity for a more diverse, fragmented,

206

collective conception of spatial resistance in the city. As previously discussed, this new way of imagining spatial resistance was necessary to develop a counter-image which might better address the needs of an equally fragmented precariat. Vasudevan argues that "the spatial practices mobilized by squatters thus transformed Berlin into a living 'archive' of alternative knowledges, materials and resources…that continues to play a central role in the struggle for a more radical and socially just urbanism" (Vasudevan 160). One can therefore argue that the fragmented, collective brand of spatial resistance within Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit* today stems in part from a discursive re-imagining of the cityspace that the dissolution of the *Wende* squatters' movement potentiated.

Squatting in a *Wende* Wonder Land

In the 2013 travel guide *Berlin: Kiez für Kiez*, Julia Brodauf introduces Mitte as the representative heart of Berlin. She notes that while squatters and artists occupied the district during the *Wende,* their subculture has since been displaced by investors and new upper-class residents, glossing over this transformation by simply noting "What began in occupied houses, self-organized clubs and small bars has grown over the course of two decades into highly grown-up gastronomy establishments."[22] (11) Yet the displacement of the squatters was in reality the result of bourgeois colonization of the *Wende* squatters' collective efforts to reimagine the space. Piece by piece, Mitte's crumbling squats gave way to opulent apartments, high-end retail establishments, and luxury tourism, a transformation exemplified by Brodauf's closing sentiment: "Die Berliner Mitte ist wieder bürgerlich geworden" ["Berlin Mitte has once again become bourgeois"] (11). Though the adjective *bürgerlich* can

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[22] "Was in besetzen Häusern, selbst organisierten Clubs und kleinen Bars begann, etablierte sich im Laufe von zwei Jahrzehnten zu höchst erwachsenen Gastronomiebetrieben."

also be translated as middle-class, Brodauf's phrasing and use of *geworden* (from *werden*, "to become") also calls to mind the verb *verbürgerlichen*, meaning "to become bourgeois" or "to become gentrified." Accordingly, Brodauf's description of the district today reads like a bourgeois utopia peppered with art galleries and fine dining. Once the chaotic domain of the *Wende* squatters' comparatively un-*bürgerlich* alternative urbanity, Mitte has since been restored to a commercially viable, civilized form that, most importantly for Brodauf's purposes, poses no threat to tourism.

Statements like Brodauf's exemplify how normative Berlin's commercial image has become. If the commercial image refers to the image of the city as a brand that can be marketed to economic actors as a viable space for commercial investment, then a counter-image is any image of the city as a space that resists and repudiates commercial interests. In the decades since reunification, the commercial image of Berlin promoted by both the state and economic actors portrayed New Berlin as a prosperous, urbanized, and cosmopolitan city of the future. This commercial vision for the city often contrasted the views of poor and working-class residents who more often saw the New Berlin as a malleable space to imagine new social configurations, retain collective cultural memory, and correct the imbalance of power that had facilitated the expansion of fascism and authoritarianism in the city's past. Brodauf's evaluation of Mitte as a bourgeois paradise helps clarify how much the city has transformed in the years since the squatters made Mitte their proverbial wonderland, yet the continued prominence of the squatters' legacy in Berlin's collective memory is a testament to the revolutionary spatial mutations they helped inaugurate.

Immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the *Wende* squatters occupied Mitte in order to take advantage of the political vacuum that accompanied the

208

collapse of the GDR. Though the movement lacked central leadership and the various individual groups that comprised it each had their own goals, they were unified by a desire to resist profit-centric urban development and to claim part of the city space to transform after their own image. In *Berlin Wonder Land* (hereafter *BWL*), a 2014 photo series documenting the *Wende* squatters' movement which includes interviews with squatters and artists from the movement, Line Maass[23] remarks, "our idea was to create new space for a kind of culture that we could relate to" (23). The broader project of squatting was approached as an experiment in communal living in which new social relations could be both imagined and tested out. David Wagner echoes this sentiment in his introduction to *BWL*, calling Mitte "the magic city of the in-between…a wish-fulfillment zone [where] everything was possible"[24] (5). Brodauf's description of Mitte in 2013 and *BWL's* depiction of Mitte[25] in the early 90s display the stark contrast between the city as a fully gentrified bourgeois space and the city as *tabula rasa*, raw material for creating a new type of urban life. The artists and activists who comprised the movement used their occupation of Mitte to stave off commercially imagined urban renewal, at least temporarily. Their strategies included artistic modification of buildings, graffiti and street art, musical and theatrical performance, DIY rehabilitation of buildings, open-air parties, temporary art installations, dance clubs, erotic spaces, spaces for drug use, political demonstrations, and myriad other

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[23] Since it is comprised entirely of first-hand anecdotes and photos, I mention the individuals quoted in *Berlin Wonder Land* by name when citing them, with the note that all quotes from squatters come from the this book and are cited as such unless otherwise indicated. Since the series is presented in a dual-language format, I quote the English translations for ease of reading. All translations from *Berlin Wonder Land* are the work of the series' editors.

[24] "Mitte lag im Zwischenraum, wurde die Zauberstadt der Zwischenzeit. Wurde Wünscherfüllungszone, alles war möglich."

[25] Neither the squats nor *BWL*'s photos of them were centered exclusively on Mitte, so it is a little misleading that *BWL* makes it seem that way. Rather, since Mitte also means "center" or "middle," it appears to be used as shorthand for all of Berlin's occupied central districts, which during the *Wende* included Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, and Friedrichshain in the East and Kreuzberg in the West.

creative uses of the city space, all of which explicitly contrasted the potential commercial use of Mitte's city space. Their anti-capitalist resistance during this period of total transformation can be considered an early attempt at authoring a counter-image for the New Berlin. It was also one of the first expressions of *Gegenöffentlichkeit* in the newly unified city, since their models of resistance brought members of the precariat from both East and West Berlin together around a common goal.

Within a few years, the combined power of both state and private economic actors had supplanted the *Wende* squatters' control over the city center. As previously mentioned, the squatters' efforts were eventually used to hasten their evictions since, as Karin Bauer and Jennifer Ruth Hosek write, "subcultures and unique practices both express Berlin and market it, increasing its cultural capital and, over time, its commercial value"(294). It is an effect of what Andrej Holm has called "symbolic gentrification" wherein the potential cultural appeal of resistant actors makes the district appealing to new renters and users with countercultural aspirations. (119) In the case of the *Wende* squatters, it wasn't long before their party-centric lifestyle gave Mitte the reputation of being hip. The labels "alternative" and "creative" were affixed to the district, attracting creative types with money enough to satisfy the higher rents demanded by investors. Parties, concerts, theatrical performances, and other events staged by squatters became a way to sell the appeal of central districts in the same moment that privatization and an increase in governance to protect economic actors limited the squatters' ability to resist eviction efforts. In a manner not significantly different than the one I describe in the previous chapter in which the political aims of Los Angeles' gangsta rappers were subsumed as a form of cultural capital to sell anti-urban narratives and monetize youth rebellion, *Wende* era economic actors used the squatters' art

210

and activism to sell Berlin as a bastion of rebellious, erotic, artistic creative energy. Though pockets of squatters remain to this day, gentrification had effectively killed the *Wende* squatter's movement by the mid 1990s.

Yet far from marking the end of spatial rebellion in Berlin, the mid '90s death of the squatters movement precipitated myriad collective and overlapping uses of Berlin's cityspace that have since contributed to a resistant counter-image for the city. The paradox of Berlin's reputation as hip, alternative, and subcultural is that the same rebellious image of Berlin that commercial investors deploy as cultural capital has also frequently been effectively deployed to stir residents' support for political efforts that resist commercial development. The effect is that sympathy for resistant counterculture effort has become an integral part of many residents' identities as Berliners. Since the *Wende* squatters' movement included artistic and social collaborations between East and West Berliners and borrowed legacies of resistance from both of Berlin's respective histories, the *Wende* squatters became icons of a spirit of reunified collective resistance with which many Berliners continue to identify. Many of the city's present day strains of spatial resistance stem from practices borrowed from the counter-image making associated with the *Wende* squatters, ensuring that while only a few of their squats remain, their ideological aims remain alive in Berlin's streets.

While the Wende squatters were certainly influenced by the efforts of prior squatting movements,[26] they responded to the unique opportunities afforded them by the political

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[26] As Alex Vasudevan's 2015 book *The Spatial Politics of Squatting in Berlin* makes clear, the *Wende* squatters were actually the second or third wave of squatters in Berlin. There is no question that just as contemporary resistance builds on the *Wende* squatters' ideas, they too built upon an already-existing politics of squatting in the city by combining tendencies from prior examples in both East and West Berlin. In the West, this legacy was characterized by attempts at communal living during the student movements of the late 60s and early 70s, whereas in the East, it was characterized by the practice of *Schwarzwohnen*, or illegal living

instability of their era. During the *Wende*, the state's ability to assert spatial control over East Berlin was significantly weakened due to a short-term political vacuum following the dissolution of the GDR. Sensing new possibilities in the face of this heretofore impossible-seeming seismic shift in Berlin, the *Wende* squatters asserted their right to the city at a time "when East German police lacked authority but their West German counterparts had yet to assert theirs" (Falconer 100), allowing them to establish themselves in Mitte before they could arouse much attention. The various squatters interviewed for *BWL* frequently use the term vacuum to describe not just the political situation but also the chaotic cultural and social upheaval unique to the *Wende*. Brad Hwang articulates, "It was like the whole of mankind had simultaneously decided to just take a step back and allow each moment to resonate with whatever it happened to bring. Life had been put on hold. There was a vacuum – a cultural, social, political and economic vacuum. And we were the first people to fill it"[27] (*BWL* 180). Presented with the opportunity to rebuild the city in a completely new image, the *Wende* squatters experimented with alternative possibilities and ventured their own artistic visions of the city's future well before a coherent commercial image for the New Berlin could be established. As a result, the counter-image of Berlin as a playground to investigate alternative and anti-commercial patterns of everyday life persists even as

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in abandoned apartments. As Vasudevan writes, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, "squatting in Berlin formed part of a broader narrative of urban development, dispossession and resistance" in which "squatting and other occupation-based practices re-imagined the city as a space of refuge, gathering, and subversion" (4). Vasudevan suggests such practices contributed to the "making of an alternative urban imagination" (4), akin to the making of a counter-image for the city. In Berlin, "at least 610 separate squats of a broadly political nature [emerged] between 1970 and 2014" (Vasudevan 4), suggesting that while the practice may have occurred in waves, it has remained an integral part of a repertoire of resistant spatial practices and discursive knowledges in Berlin through the present era.

[27] "Es war so, als hätte sich die ganze Menschheit gleichzeitig entscheiden, einfach mal beiseitezutreten und jeden Moment zu erleben, wie er kommt. Das Leben war in der Warteschleife. Es gab ein Vakuum – ein kulturelles Vakuum, ein gesellschaftliches, ein politisches, ein ökonomisches. Und wir haben es als Erste gefüllt."

Berlin's commercial image continually attempts to subsume and supplant the rebellion inherent to it.

Of course, it was not long before the political vacuum filled in enough for the state to take aim at the squatters' collective spatial experiment. When 4000 West German police officers attempted to clear an entire block of squats on Mainzer Strasse in Mitte in November 1990 (Vasudevan 283), it had a "sobering and disenchanting effect" that squatter Uta Rügner says "[cut] a huge gash through the movement both physically and symbolically"[28] (125). Because the event "posed such danger to life and limb" (125), it galvanized some while causing others to abandon their squats or pull away from collective actions. The evictions caused the movement to lose some steam, forcing some residential projects to disperse and yet others to adopt tenancy agreements (125), marking a symbolic end to the movement even as pockets of squatters held out for years after. Yet the Mainzer clearings did little to quell the spirit of resistance that motivated occupation efforts and in fact, they likely helped crystallize the need for a broader effort by a *Gegenöffentlichkeit*. Following the Mainzer Strasse clearings, Heike Stuckert interviewed squatters at Tacheles, one of the *Wende* squatters' movement's most prominent art houses, who said that the targeted police violence only made them more certain of their cause. "They feel that Tacheles will become even more important now," Stuckert writes, because "Tacheles allows for the possibility that something will be created out of a volatile history, a history that the German government may want to censor, presenting instead a polished commodity culture" (176). For the Tacheles squatters, resistance to the creation of a commercial image for Berlin was not only an anti-capitalist stance but also an anti-authoritarian stance, one that

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[28] "…das hat – auch bildlich – eine Schneise in die Bewegung geschlagen"

demanded Berlin's history of authoritarian excesses not be erased to make way for a shiny

new commercial image. The interviews in *BWL* suggest that this mindset is indicative of the

movement as a whole.

Collective Spatial Appropriation – From Tacheles to Mauer Park

The social context of the *Wende* squatters' movement was thus one in which the

immediate revolutionary capacity of the void left in the Berlin Wall's wake was met with the

necessity for a slow but permanent mutation in the city's socio-spatial organization. That the

Wende squatters saw their work as the creation of an experimental *Gesamtkunstwerk* that

might effect this transformation is indicated by their shared desire to imagine new

possibilities for Berlin's cityspace. In *BWL*, Jochen Sandig describes the *Wende* squatters as

"possessed by a collective urge to create something new"[29] (55) at a time when, as Ulrike

Steglich notes, "nothing retained validity, everything was changing"[30] (98) Though the

political import of squatting was never far from sight, creative endeavors and the technical

demands of do-it-yourself infrastructural repair remained the primary focus of day-to day

life for those squatters who actually lived in the squatted buildings. Moreover, all aspects of

everyday life were integrated into the dual political/artistic project constituted by domestic

occupation. As Brad Hwang writes, "the everyday stuff that normally drags you down –

getting the groceries, buying bread, figuring out how the heating works, fetching coal – all

those things became part of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*"[31] (49). By elevating the routines of

domestic life to the level of artistic expression, the *Wende* squatters used their physical

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[29] "Wir waren beseelt davon, gemeinsam Neues zu schaffen"
[30] "Nichts galt mehr, alles änderte sich."
[31] "All das, was einen im Alltag eigentlich nervt – einkaufen, Brot holen, herausfinden, wie man heist, Kohlen finden – all das war Teil eines Gesamtkunstwerks."

214

occupation of space to effect symbolic occupation as well. Their democratic approach to deciding how space should be used and the emphasis they placed on open lines of communication between squatter factions also transformed social relations within the occupied environment. Insofar as their occupation was marked by a completely transformed set of social relations to govern the neighborhood, the squatters did in fact succeed at creating a differential space atop the ruins of abstract space – even if only temporarily -- and thus jumpstarting the slow mutation of Berlin into a collage of counter-images.

Squatter Ines Burdow recalls the movement having an implicit recognition of their right to the city, noting "Our basic feeling was: these are our buildings, this is our city – it all belongs to us"[32] (49). Many of the squatters interviewed for *BWL* say they wanted to transform space itself, usually through disruption of the spatial classification categories used to subdivide abstract space according to hegemonic social relations. Photographs in the series include depictions of: an art gallery where the art is hung on the outside of the building façade; an open air installation with no walls but which simulates an indoor living room; city streets employed as makeshift living rooms/dining rooms; buildings (such as Tacheles) in which entire walls are missing, creating a diorama effect; and a whole host of everyday objects literally turned on their sides to create art, including military equipment and fighter jets stolen from abandoned East German bases. Accompanying all of these projects are a bevy of graffitial images, banners, signs, and other artistic interventions in Mitte's linguistic landscape. Such projects helped the *Wende* squatters transform material space in ways that deconstructed binaries like inside/outside, public/private, work/play, and civic/domestic, all while also challenging norms regarding which kinds of space can be used

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[32] "Unser Gefühl war: Das sind unsere Häuser, das ist unsere Stadt – das ist unseres."

to which ends and who can access which kinds of spaces. Speaking of the RA.M-M theater performances in Tacheles, Arthur Kuggeleyn suggests that this mindset extended to the symbolic aspects of their occupation as well. He writes, "the idea was to touch the audience, to break down barriers using theatre, to perform without a stage – or, conversely, to expand the stage to include everything"[33] (201). The *Wende* squatters saw the entirety of the city space as raw material for their performance of occupation. They used the "empty halls, ruins, and stretches of wasteland" of occupied former East districts as "starting points and integral features of their work"[34] (*BWL*195), but they also imbued material spaces with artistically rendered symbolic meanings that contradicted the commercial narratives associated with the city.

For this reason, the *Wende* squatters forecasted the kinds of twenty-first century resistance which Morawski identifies as necessary for the formation of a city-wide collective of spatial appropriation. Morawski suggests that any successful strategy to create differential space in the city must marry the pursuit and development of an urban counter-image with collectively defined *Gegenöffentlichkeit*'s attempts to appropriate the material city space from numerous points of entry. He sees the right to the city as a right to a renewable [*erneuerbares*] urban life, achievable only through "the collective appropriation of urban space"[35] (16) with the intention of extending the fulfillment of basic human needs [*menschliche Grundbedürfnisse*] to all. Like Huyssen, he also believes that the dominance of neoliberal and capitalistic thinking in Berlin is extension of the way the commercial image has made the city more of a corporate enterprise than a living environment. He writes that as

[33] "Die Idee war, das Publikum zu berühren, durch Theater Grenzen zu sprengen und ohne Bühne zu spielen beziehungsweise alles zur Bühne zu erklären.."
[34] Die leer stehenden Hallen, Ruinenund Brachen wurden Ausgangspunkt und Teil ihrer Inszenierungen.
[35] "die kollektive Aneignung des städtischen Raums"

cities like Berlin attempt to make themselves seem more attractive to economic actors, they "[pursue] similar strategies as economic enterprises: the construction of a brand (for example, "Be Berlin") together with representative modern buildings and the corresponding offer of a lively culture. The appearance and the image of the city becomes [its] calling card"[36] (24). However, whereas Huyssen's discussion of the commercial image described a process still in motion in the late 1990s, by Morawski's account in 2014, the city's commercial image has already resulted in widespread neoliberal urbanization. Resistance can no longer fend off the city's capitalistic transformation but must instead develop new strategies of spatial appropriation based on intervention in an already solidifed commercial environment. Like Vidler, Morawski sees intervention in space as a way to trigger spatial mutation. Rather than a massive overhaul of space, resistant actors must use individual strategies across the city to infect and appropriate the spaces from which they are supposed to be excluded, transforming spatial codes in the process. In the absence of strategies that might slice through the commercial image, this strategy seeks to bleed the commercial image to death through a million tiny pinpricks. Though the *Wende* squatters' transformation of Mitte was relatively brief, it can be considered the catalyst that helped foment broader resistant swells in the decades that followed, helping create the multi-faceted *Gegenöffentlichkeit* of Berlin today.

Returning to Morawski's tri-level framework for spatial appropriation, it is clear that the *Wende* squatters employed strategies befitting all three planes of urban spatial appropriation. On the "spatial practices" plane, the act of squatting is an obvious

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[36] "…[verfolgen] ähnliche Strategien wie Wirtschaftsunternehmen: den Aufbau einer Marke (z.B. "Be Berlin") samt repräsentiver moderner Bauten (z.B. Potsdamer Platz) und entsprechendem 'lebendigem' Kulturangebot. Das Aussehen und das Image der Stadt werden zur Visitenkarte."

appropriation of the material space of the city. However, one might also consider the squatters' do-it-yourself building renovation efforts an extension of this material occupation, since the physical alterations they made also transformed the physical space. Further, since their use of the material environment subverted the classificatory categories used to subdivide abstract space, they reconceived the physical forms that the built environment could take. In *BWL*, photos of the squatters scaling buildings, sitting atop rooftops, erecting their own scaffolding, or jumping into public pools in the middle of the night all suggest that their creative transformation of occupied buildings extended beyond pure aesthetics to include a re-conception of how a given building could be used. This creative re-conception extends to their use of building materials, such as in one photo in which a man has stacked couch cushions atop a pile of bricks in order to create a makeshift couch. Their material subversion is also relevant to the second plane concerned with appropriation of the space of communication [*Kommunikationsraum*], since the squatters' aesthetic transformation of space also re-imagined the places where people socialize, such as their communal approach to meal preparation and dining, or their use of public streets as party plazas.

Many of the types of art the *Wende* squatters made constituted a direct appropriation of the space of communication, especially their use of graffiti, banners, and signage. Morawski points out that generally, channels of communication in public space are limited to the scope of official commercial and state communication, such as advertisements and billboards, signs indicating stores and offices, street signs, and warnings, all of which cannot be erected by anyone without power and money enough to do so. "Communication in

public space is linked to societal positions of power, and thus does not take place equally"[37] (39), he writes, suggesting how the "massive presence" of advertising in the linguistic landscape[38] of the city creates an imbalance of power in the relationship between sender and receiver. (39-40) By employing techniques that inscribe alternative communication in space itself, such as the use of message-bearing graffitial images on both the inside and outside of occupied buildings, the *Wende* squatters replaced commercial channels of public communication with unofficial, transgressive channels of public communication. This allowed them to appropriate Mitte's linguistic landscape and reconfigure the kinds of messages transmitted in and through the material environment. Their use of graffiti also communicated the squatters' ownership of and physical claim to the occupied space, since it physically announced their ownership of walls marked by their tags.

As for appropriation of the "spaces of representation," the *Wende* squatters' contributions to strategies on this plane are more difficult to articulate, at least in part because so much of the artistic work created by the *Wende* squatters was performative and therefore ephemeral. That said, any artistic output about their space, any attempts to archive the history of their cultural moment, any writing or art or photography meant to document the resistant knowledge contained in their history could be considered part of their long-term intervention on this third plane. To that end, I would argue that publications like *BWL* are themselves appropriations of the representation of space, since they restore the history of a transgressive cultural moment that might otherwise have been lost, bringing discussion of the moment back into the public domain. If the clichéd axiom about history being written by

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[37] "Die Kommunikation in öffentlichem Raum [ist] mit gesellschaftlichen Machtpositionen verknüpft und findet damit nicht gleichberechtigt statt"
[38] Sociolinguist Uta Papen defines *linguistic landscape* as all uses of textual communication in a given space, which mark that space as belonging to or being associated with one or multiple population groups (57).

the victors is true, then publications like *BWL* speak to hidden alternative histories and perform the discursive work of demonstrating how space could have been conceived otherwise.

It is not insignificant that BWL was published in 2014, when anti-gentrification sentiments caused occupation-based forms of resistance to again gain steam in Berlin. The photo series situates the *Wende* movement in a new historical context and points to the relevant parallels that can be drawn between the *Wende* squatters and the present *Gegenöffentlichkeit*. In her review of *BWL* journalist Jane Paulick observes, "given [Mitte's] complete transformation over the last two decades into the apogee of cool, looking back at those years is like trying to remember a dream" (Paulick). The photos in the series give present-day readers a comparison point against which to evaluate the gentrified spaces of Berlin today. They contribute to a counter-image of Berlin by reminding the city's inhabitants that the commercial image of urban renewal was not always absolute. In a manner not unlike the genealogical possibilities produced by Foucauldian critique where power-backed societal norms are "associated with a domain of possibility and consequently, of reversibility, of possible reversal," (Foucault 66) representations of appropriated spaces reveal how the commercial image's control of the cityspace is more tenuous than fixed. Projects like *BWL* remind readers that the discursive power of resistant spatial practices resonates long after their tangible staging is complete. As such, any text which attempts to either preserve the city space in its contemporaneous resistant form or to preserve the memory of a form since lost to capitalistic urbanization takes part in the project of appropriating representations of space. Such texts reignite discussion about the right to the city and reveal a Berlin that could have been, still is, or could still be. For the remainder of

this chapter, I outline multiple instances of post-reunification resistance in Berlin that map to each of Morawski's planes of intervention, all of which build upon the legacy of counter-image making about the New Berlin that the *Wende* squatters inaugurated. Moreover, the texts investigated in the remainder of this chapter span numerous media, artistic positions, and disciplines as a reflection of Morawski's observation that a *Gegenöffentlichkeit* must draw from myriad discursive wells in order to create collective city appropriation.

"Spatial Practices": Occupation of Physical Space

Morawski begins his analysis of the type of spatial intervention he calls "spatial practices" with a comprehensive discussion of occupations (*Besetzungen*). He suggests that occupation is a grounding strategy not just for spatial practices, but also for all forms of collective city appropriation (*Stadtaneignung*) since "occupations can temporarily or permanently evade government control and the exploitative interests of the free market economy, thus making alternative forms of encounter, productive debate, and coexistence possible, often for the first time"[39] (48). Since the first plane of intervention, that of "spatial practices," is the only one concerned with the physical, rather than symbolic, appropriation of space, physical occupation of the city's material spaces is its natural expression. Even so, "presence in space forms a good starting point for effective high-publicity communication of protest in the public sphere and thereby also for appropriation of the symbolic plane of space"[40] (48). As an inhabited performance of occupation, squatting might be considered a strategy for interventional occupation *par excellence*, since it integrates the routine practices

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[39] "Besetzungen können Räume temporär oder dauerhaft behördlicher Kontrolle und den Verwertungsinteressen der freien Marktwirtschaft entziehen und damit alternative Formen des Zusammentreffens, der produktiven Auseinandersetzung und des Zusammenlebens oft erst möglich machen."
[40] "Die Präsenz im Raum [schafft] eine gute Ausgangslage für die öffentlichkeitswirksame Kommunikation von Protest im öffentlichen Raum und somit auch für die Aneignung der symbolischen Ebene des Raums."

of everyday life into the act of spatial appropriation and allows for slow mutation of space on both the physical and symbolic planes.

Though a small number of Berlin squats from both the *Wende* era and prior remain, they are few and far between. As one of the most high-profile *Wende*-era squats, Tacheles remained functional for many years but was finally shuttered in 2013. Still, a few smaller squats remain, such as Kopi 137 in Kreuzberg, a punk squat which predates even the *Wende* squatters, and newer squats such as those on Rigaer Strasse, which were the site of violent eviction attempts and contentious social clashes as recently as 2018. (squat.net) Sites like these are a testament to how important squatting remains to Berlin's counter-cultural identity, even if popular criticism of the leftist and often anarchist political leanings of recent squatters has seemingly intensified as the city has gentrified. Following a 2016 raid on Rigaerstrasse 94 aka R94, Feargus O'Sullivan of *CityLab* observed that "Rigaer Strasse is in a gentrifying, well-to-do area that frequently acts as a second choice overspill for people who'd really like to live in the more expensive neighborhood next door," noting that while squats once "[formed] a cornerstone of the city's alternative mythos," the commercial transformation of the city has made it harder and harder for them to sustain popular support as neighborhoods become more desirable. (*CityLab* 2016). In their own blog on *squat.net*, a site where squatters from around the world trade information and news, R94 detail a long-term process of surveillance and state resistance directed at their building, describing the state's actions as a "reality and praxis not only against Islamic fundamentalists or allegedly crazy terrorists but also against resistant, ideological disagreeables, against members of the

opposition, against us…"[41] (Rigaer94). They assert that they are targets of outsized police violence, further evidenced by O'Sullivan's recognition that raids on R94 have had an "almost military" character and that the squat tends to be targeted because "officialdom sees them as an inconvenience" (*CityLab*, 2016). As dangerous as occupation has become in the current climate, squatters generally see the act of inconveniencing the state as productive in its own right, because it forcibly makes visible the state violence required to maintain control over urban space.

Such exposition of state violence was a central focus of one recent use of squatting undertaken by a group of "displaced citizens of Sudan, Uganda, Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan, and other nations" calling themselves Refugee Tent Action. (Landry 399) In the autumn of 2012, Refugee Tent Action's roughly 100-150 members occupied Berlin-Kreuzberg's Oranienplatz for 550 days to protest the dehumanizing conditions[42] they faced as asylum seekers in Germany, eventually relocating to the abandoned Gerhart-Hauptmann School in Kreuzberg after police evictions forced them from the more public Oranienplatz location. On June 24th, 2014, authorities again attempted to evict Refugee Tent Action from the school, resulting in violent clashes not just between police and squatters but also between police and protestors, journalists, and politicians who showed up in support of the refugees, resulting in an eight-day standoff at the Gerhart-Hauptmann School. In their video report on the standoff, *VICE News* got footage of police brutally detaining refugees,

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[41] "All das Beschriebene ist heute Realität und Praxis, nicht nur gegen Islamist*innen oder vermeintlich verrückte Terrorist*innen sondern gegen Widerständige, ideologisch Unliebsame, gegen Oppositionelle, gegen uns…"

[42] Since I am focused on the function of this protest rather than its specific cause, I have not elaborated at length as to the issues the asylum seekers were protesting, but Landry cites "the Dublin II regulation, which stipulates that asylum seekers must apply for asylum in the first European country they enter" as well as "the lack of transparency and the inefficiency in the asylum application process; the labour, education, and subsidized health-care bans; and regular deportations" as just a few of the issues that sparked Refugee Tent Action's occupation. (Landry 402)

assaulting high school students who staged a sit-in to support the refugees, and denying the press access to the school and the refugees within it. In one shot, a refugee woman passionately shouts in German through the fence to the press, "They will be deported! Single [document] inspection means death [for] these people! When the people come here, what happens to us? They want to evict us forcibly!"[43] (*Vice News*, "Evicting the Unwanted," 2014). Her use of German highlights the degree to which her status as perceived Other has nothing to do with any lack of willingness to adjust to Berlin's local spatial codes. The video also shows refugees who have climbed onto the roof, claiming they will jump if they are forcibly evicted. The life-or-death stakes of Refugee Tent Action's occupation amplifies the violence required to deny them asylum. In the *Vice* video, it is clear that Refugee Tent Action actively places their own bodies on the line in order to defend the right for all refugees to stay.

As a precursor to the massive influx of refugees into Germany from 2015 onward, the demands made by Refugee Tent Action spoke to the pitfalls of Germany's asylum process and the changes that would be necessary to treat asylum applicants with more human dignity, exposing issues that would reach a fever pitch a few years later when the city was flooded with refugees as a result of the crisis in Syria. In contrast to the generally more creatively-minded occupations of most *Wende* squatters, Refugee Tent Action was an explicitly political squatting movement, concerned foremost with asserting their right to take up space within Germany and within the global society. To this end, they also disseminated information as a form of grassroots public education, using their occupation to spurn political action from Berlin's citizen inhabitants. As Olivia Landry observes, Refugee Tent

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[43] "Sie würden abgeschoben! Einzel Verprüfung bedeutet tot dieser Menschen! Wenn die Leute hier kommen, was passieren mit uns, man? Sie wollen uns mit Gewalt räumen!"

Action included asylum seekers "with no home, no resources, and sometimes even no documents" who would have been cut off from more official forms of political action, meaning that "the collective power of bodies and voices in a public space became their only means of redress against what is for many an unjust and debilitating asylum system" (399). Resisting state powers that rendered them invisible, Refugee Tent Action used their corporeal occupation of a high profile public square[44] to insist upon recognition of their existence and their need for integration into German society. In this way, they not only asserted their right to the city but also their right to take up space at all.

Refugee Tent Action extended the notion of the urban inhabitant to include itinerant populations in ways that Landry argues "transcend the narrow limits of nation and ethnicity and open up broader communities of inclusion" (Landry 409). Their demand for the right to the city illuminated the parallels between the struggles of itinerant and displaced migrants and Berlin's existing displaced and homeless inhabitants, particularly when compared with the rapid gentrification of historically working-class Kreuzberg and nearby districts. Landry compares the group to the Kreuzberg-based anti-gentrification renter's collective, Kotti & Co., saying "just as the protesters of Refugee Tent Action have been fighting for their existence and their human and civil rights, on a smaller scale the members of Kotti & Co. have been fighting for their homes and their right to social participation in the urban space" (407). She explains that Refugee Tent Action "forged an ideational solidarity and coalition with Berlin-Kreuzberg residents" that "contested both the devastating and exclusionary politics of ghettoization that has shaped the neighborhood's recent history and the

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[44] The refugees initially tried to occupy the even higher profile Pariser Platz near Brandenburg Gate but, in a move that will shock no one who has been following along, they were quickly displaced to Kreuzberg so as to avoid bothering tourists.

commodification of urban space in Berlin-Kreuzberg" (408). Refugee Tent Action's material appropriation of the public space of Oranienplatz included a symbolic occupation of Kreuzberg at a time when the effects of gentrification were increasingly contributing to the displacement of many Kreuzberg residents, something with Kotti & Co. had already been protesting in their own right. Tellingly, Marowski also mentions both groups in his discussion of the second plane of spatial intervention as well, since both used "occupation as a communications strategy," heightening squatting to the level of political demonstration and educational campaign. By mapping their own cause to that of the rest of Kreuzberg's precariat, Refugee Tent Action signal-boosted the political needs of all of the district's displaced inhabitants, forging solidarity with their local *Kieze* and attuning their actions to a city-wide resistant collective bonded through the experience of urban precarity.

Just as the *Wende* squatters challenged binary designations used to exert control over abstract space, Refugee Tent Action subverted binary designations such as citizen/non-citizen, belonging/exclusion and legal/illegal, reconfiguring the idea of the urban inhabitant to respond to still greater modes of precarity. As Landry argues, Refugee Tent Action's public outreach proclaimed "We are global citizens in search of basic human and civil rights, and the city – especially Berlin-Kreuzberg – as *the* space of global practices and processes is our medium." (411) Given Germany's recent influx of refugees and the country-wide rise in xenophobic sentiments that has attended it, concerns raised by Refugee Tent Action have only become that much more pressing. Consequently, Refugee Tent Action's discourses surrounding citizenship and urban belonging remain a salient part of collective occupation processes in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany. Further, Refugee Tent Action's occupation resulted in a few immediate successes, including an easing of residence

requirements for asylum seekers and the right for asylum seekers to work following a designated waiting period. (Landry 410) By adopting a locally preferred strategy for spatial intervention, Refugee Tent Action embedded themselves in Berlin's unique local protest climate. However, they also expanded the city's squatting history by extending its scope in a global way and demonstrating how disparate forms of occupation can address collective precarity.

Less direct but no less salient a form of contemporary spatial appropriation in Berlin is the collective mostly unplanned reconstitution of the Tempelhofer Feld (Tempelhof Airfield) as a mixed-use public space. When Tempelhof Airport was closed in 2008 it left roughly 940 acres of de-commissioned airstrips and open space in the center of Berlin's Neukölln neighborhood. Rather than letting the space fall into complete disuse, city officials temporarily opened it up to the public in 2010, at which point Berlin's citizens more or less spontaneously put it to use as an open-air park replete with community gardens and recreational activities. As Yuma Shinohara writes in *DEMO:POLIS--The Right To Public Space* (2016), the success of Tempelhofer Feld as a park "seems to lie in its anti-programmatic character: (almost) every activity is allowed, and decisions on how to appropriate the space are left open to individual users" (210), meaning that portions of the parks are devoted to uses as varied as political demonstration, instructional programs, public performances, and all manner of recreational activities, especially those that make unique use of the airport tarmac, such as cycling and kiteboarding.

As Neukölln gentrified, the prospect of such a vast empty space tantalized real estate developers and the state alike. Worries that the space would eventually be sold off to investors prompted concerned citizens to form the group Demokratische Initiative 100%

227

Tempelhofer Feld e.V., who have began campaigning in 2011 for "the full preservation of the field as an open landscape in the middle of city" (210). Their citizen's referendum (*Volksbegehren*) referenced the need not only for open, recreational space to counteract the demands of urban life, but also the need to preserve the historical and cultural memory of the airfield and its relics, including memorialization of the concentration camp labor the Third Reich used to build it. Using a website, a carefully outlined YouTube video, a strong social media presence, and a volunteer-based street campaign, the club engaged in a variety of grassroots techniques to disseminate information and amass signatures supporting their referendum, such as "self-made and distributed clipboards and signature lists; a mobile 'bicycle table' in the form of a board that could be carried on a cyclist's back and converted into a table by laying it across a bicycle; and a campaign newspaper, which parodied the style and tone of the German tabloid *Bild*." As a consequence of this highly-coordinated and multi-dimensional effort, the referendum to prohibit any further construction on Tempelhofer Feld passed with a 64% majority of votes, defying "the majority opinion in Berlin's house of representatives" and assuring that the park remained open to all citizens. (Shinohara, 210)

One of the club's primary arguments against development on the field specifically concerned the commercial image of the city. They suggested that private investors intentionally mislead citizens by paying lip service to a desire to increase housing opportunities for all while advancing development plans that ultimately only served elite interests. The group asserted that even if initial development were pursued equitably, the increased commercial interest in the area would exacerbate the displacement of poorer residents from historically working-class Neukölln. Though the Tempelhofer Feld citizen's

campaign was arguably more polished and professional in its approach than most squatting-based occupations, it constituted a similar symbolic re-authoring of the field's importance to match the spontaneous material appropriation the space had undergone through its popular use by Berliners of all persuasions. As Shinohara notes, through their reclamation of Tempelhofer Feld, "the citizens of Berlin...claimed their right to have a say in urban development," thereby also claiming their right to the field as one of the city's most valuable spatial resources. Since 2015, Refugee Tent Action's cause has become linked to Tempelhofer Feld's—the airport building at Tempelhofer has become a so-called "Container Village" [*Containerdorf*] after the state designated it as a refugee accommodation [*Flüchtlingsunterkunft*] for refugees awaiting housing in Berlin. In addition to an open space where citizens can escape the chaos of urban life, Tempelhofer Feld has also become the largest temporary housing site for refugees in Berlin. (Haak, *Berliner Zeitung*, May 2018)

"Spaces of Representation": Graffiti and Street Art

Graffiti and street art are a ubiquitous part of Berlin's contemporary culture, so it is no surprise that both have been integrated into collective spatial resistance in the city. Both Stih & Schnock's *Orte des Erinnerns* [Places of Remembrance] (1992) and East Cross Project's *Berlin Spricht Wände* [Berlin Speaks Walls] (2013) showcase techniques that appropriate the space of representation, Morawski's second plane concerned with channels of communication in public space. *Orte des Erinnerns*, a public art installation that acts as a sort of counter-monument was created in Berlin's Bayerisches Viertel (Bavarian Quarter) in 1992, following a 1991 contest for project ideas concerning a memorial to the cultural history of Jewish life in the quarter and to the atrocities Jewish residents suffered there under

the Nazi regime. In the catalog for the 2016 Berlin art show *DEMO:POLIS*, which brought together projects from around the globe concerned with the right to public space, Renata Stih reflects on the evolution of public art in Berlin since the *Wende*. She observes that after reunification, remembrance art like *Orte des Erinnerns* helped Berliners forge their identity in a new Berlin, acting as a "constant" (49) amid the chaotic changes of the period. During the *Wende*, "topics of cultural politics, like the artistic confrontation of the German past, the Third Reich, and especially the Holocaust" achieved primacy as Germans found themselves questioning what should be retained in a reunited German identity. Within this social climate, public space became a sort of "democratic soapbox" where citizens could collectively imagine the meaning of German identity and what role it ought to play in shaping Berlin anew. (Stih 50) It was in this context that Stih and her partner Frieder Schnock presented their "radical concept for a decentralized memorial" that could "situate the memorial in close proximity to the local residents" and become an integral part of the neighborhood's linguistic landscape. (Stih 50-51)

To accomplish this, Stih & Schnock interviewed local residents to "find out how much of these historical events was still present in people's memory" and then built the project around their findings, thus creating a physical manifestation of the district's collective cultural memory. As Stih describes:

Eighty double-sided signs, a colorful image on one side, revised paragraphs of anti-Jewish legislation from the years 1933-1945 in black and white on the other, confront the passersby with the almost forgotten history of this neighborhood and accompany them throughout their day-to-day routines...By distributing the signs all

over the streets of the neighborhood, we created a kind of walk-through

documentation and interlocked the memorial with the urban environment. (51)

Though the project was officially commissioned and thus may be considered a more

commercial use of space than other forms of spatial intervention, its critical content and

radical positioning penetrate the project's commercial use. By adding these snippets of text

and photo into the official signage of the neighborhood, cultural memory is integrated into

the neighborhood's official linguistic landscape, albeit in ways that restore a voice to the

neighborhoods historical inhabitants. Because of the way the memorial periodically

confronts residents and visitors as they go about their daily routines and move through the

neighborhood, it serves as "a metaphor for the daily hardships, the deprivation, and

ultimately, the deportation and murder of Jewish citizens during the Third Reich" (51). *Orte

des Erinnerns* thereby creates the sort of "active remembrance" (52) that Stih suggests is a

necessary to potentiate a more "conscious and animated" public space. (53)

  Orte des Erinnerns is a testament to Stih's observation that "art, zeitgeist, and social

and urban space are all part of a symbiosis," and that public art and installations must "be in

tune with the psychological quality of [their] location" (Stih 48). But it is also a permanent

alteration of the spatial logic of an entire neighborhood in ways that actively refuse to erase

the authoritarian violence historically used to control the space of said neighborhood. In a

manner not unlike the embodied demonstrations by Refugee Tent Action, *Orte des

Erinnerns* renders visible the state violence used to control which bodies have access to the

city space and its resources. By highlighting the laws once used to control Jewish citizens

(One example: "Jews in Berlin may only shop for groceries afternoons between 4 and 5pm,

4.7.1940[45]), the signs force a reflexive consideration of the space one occupies and the

forces of power once used to control its inhabitants. The memorial's spatial situated-ness

thus contributes to its discursive critique in manners mirrored by other Berlin memorials,

such as the vast swath of central real estate afforded the *Denkmal für die ermorderten Juden*

Europas [Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe] in Mitte or the ubiquity of the small

square *Stolpersteine* [Stepping Stones] that can be found throughout the city embedded in

the ground outside the former residences of those who died in concentration camps. Like

these and many other forms of remembrance art in Berlin, *Orte des Erinnerns* renders

visible a history that might otherwise be erased by the constant reproduction of the city as

abstract space. Though all three memorials I mention have been easily integrated into

Berlin's commercial image through the cultural value of dark tourism, they also echo the

way many counter-images of Berlin use collective memory to contribute to the slow

mutation of space along anti-authoritarian lines.

Yet official memorials and state-sanctioned art are by no means as omnipresent an

appropriation of Berlin's communication space as is the ubiquity of graffitial images, a term

I use to designate any non-commissioned use of graffiti or street art (pictorial, textual, or

otherwise) on public-facing buildings or surfaces. *Berlin Spricht Wände* is a multimedia

documentary composed of multiple smaller film and music video projects made over the

course of a few years that focuses on the diversity of Berlin's graffitial images. The first two

parts of the film, "Berlin spricht" [Berlin Speaks] (2010) and "Berlin spricht…für sich"

[Berlin Speaks…for itself] (2012) were both made by a rapper named Emus Primus, who

filmed various depictions of mostly textual graffitial images in Berlin, then combined the

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[45] "Lebensmittel dürfen Juden in Berlin nur nachmittags von 4 bis 5 Uhr einkaufen. 4.7.1940."

mixed German and English text of the images into rap songs. After the first two Emus

Primus videos gained popularity on social media platforms like Vimeo and YouTube, the

project was expanded into *Berlin spricht Wände* [Berlin speaks walls] (2012), a

documentary which included a third text/rap video of the same title in addition to footage

from various events in Berlin's street art scene and live footage of street artists at work.

The titles for the three Emus Primus music videos make it sound as if Berlin's walls

speak for themselves on behalf of the city as a whole, which is an apt description of the

impression the project gives. The title "Berlin spricht…für sich" also uses the reflexive *sich*

to demonstrate how graffitial messages communicate collective resistance on behalf of the

city's *Gegenöffentlichkeit*. It suggests that ownership of Berlin's "voice" (and thus of Berlin

itself) rests with the precariat who control the graffitial messages, rather than with those who

have access to more official channels of communication. Though the longer documentary

features footage of artists in action, the music videos more or less remove the presence of

the artists to focus on a series of textual snapshots. Even when artists are seen, their faces are

obscured, leaving the graffitial images to form their own narrative. In the sense that they

offer a visible, public voice to an otherwise muted precariat, graffitial images do in fact

enable a city's walls to speak on behalf of the city, where the city is understood as the sum

total of all of its inhabitants. In this way, graffiti can be considered a primary

communication channel of the *Gegenöffentlichkeit*. Graffitial images make interaction with

public space itself a form of communication, as graffitied walls enter into conversation with

public viewers of all stripes, inserting discursive possibilities into the city's linguistic

landscape. What is more, even where the specific message of a given graffitial image cannot

be apprehended by a given viewer, it's material location within the built environment

communicates spatial transgression nonetheless, since graffiti is always a violation of hegemonic spatial codes.

The supplemental footage in the longer documentary features many of Berlin's most famous street artists, including Phos4, B52 Crew, Feliks Stift, and Bosso Fataka. In a blatant nod to the legacy of the *Wende* squatters, the film also includes footage from the proverbial end days at Tacheles before they lost their lease in 2013. While the amalgamation of graffitial messages in the project highlight numerous issues central to contemporary resistance movements in Berlin, the supplemental documentary footage expands the purview of the original music videos by revealing the collective ways in which street art is created and passed on to new artistic generations in Berlin. As an appropriation of the space of communication, the graffitial images used in the film mutate the built environment by altering Berlin's material aesthetics and forcefully inserting an alternative voice into the linguistic landscape of the city. Moreover, the film's worldwide dissemination through social channels like Vimeo and YouTube extends the scope of spatial appropriation to insert itself into digital representations of Berlin as space.

Majority of the graffitial images Emus Primus filmed for the music videos are explicitly resistant or transgressive, even when meant purely as jokes or deployed for sheer shock value. A large portion are infused with anti-capitalist messages such as "Freude hat mit Autos nix zu tun" [Joy has nothing to do with cars]; "Good things in life are not things"; "Shoot the bank"; "Eat the rich!"; and "Kauf um den Leben" [Buy for life]. Of these, many highlight anti-gentrification sentiments, such as "Gentrifick dich!" [Gentri-fuck you!], "Luxus für Alle!" [Luxury for all!], "Diese Stadt is aufgekauft" [This city is sold out], "Die reich'n wern ärmer und die andern auch" [The rich get poorer and the others too]; and

234

"Welcome to Schwabylon," a reference to the widespread belief that an influx of new higher income residents from Schwabia is a driving force of gentrification. Related to these are those with anti-tourism messages , such as "U Touri kill our Kiez"; "Stop being a tourist"; and "Hässlich Willkomen" ["ugly welcome"], a play on the traditional German greeting "Herzlich Willkommen" ["Affectionate Welcome"]. Tellingly, anti-gentrification and anti-tourism messages seem to opt for English over German at a higher frequency than other messages do, suggesting that they are intended for an international audience that includes tourists and other itinerants.[46] Such targeted messaging highlights how graffitial images can be used as a unidirectional form of messaging that addresses an intended discursive target. What is more, anti-gentrification and anti-tourist sentiments appeared less frequently in the first music video, made in 2010, and at a much higher frequency in the third music video, made in 2012. This suggests that collective anti-gentrification resistance gained momentum in the time between films, a sentiment reflected by the dual concerns of Refugee Tent Action and Kotti & Co. in the same year.[47] Viewed together, the evolution in graffitial messages across Emus Primus' three rap videos creates a timeline demonstrating how quickly resistance movements in Berlin shift focus to respond to present need, and how easily these shifting focuses can be integrated into subversive communication in the city.

A number of the graffitial messages in the videos are spatially-bounded to communities or *Kieze* in Berlin, making reference either to well-known squatting projects,

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[46] That said, the use of English in Berlin is by no means uncommon--since so much of the existing populace comes from outside of Germany, even German-born Berliners are generally comfortable conversing in English, and a large swath of the city's linguistic landscape includes the use of English. For this reason, the use of English in so much of Berlin's street art can also be considered an accurate reflection of the city's current culture.

[47] Anecdotally, I can confirm this with my experience in Berlin doing research in 2014. Nearly every piece of graffiti I saw, particularly in the Neukölln area, contained either an anti-gentrification or anti-tourism message. The preponderance of these kinds of messages was actually so obvious that it was the exact observation that put me on the research path that eventually brought me to the present chapter.

such as "I support Tacheles" and "Deutschland verrecke – Kopi bleibt" [Germany kicks the bucket – Kopi remains], or commenting on particular neighborhoods, as in "F'hain ist risiko" [Friedrichshain is danger/risk]; "Ostkreuz Superhelden" [Ostkreuz superheroes]; "Happy X-berg [Kreuzberg] & Happy Neukölln! and "This is not Kreuzberg". Place names are used not only to claim those spaces as occupied territory but also to center locality in way's less broad than the Berlin-wide rhetoric of the commercial image. This also includes frequent reference to the *Kiez* as a micro-local spatial designation, appearing frequently in messages like "der Kiez schwart über" [the Kiez is swarming over]; "I love my Kiez"; and "Kiez statt Kies" [Kiez instead of money][48]. In addition to claiming the city's spaces for themselves, street artists also claim authority over Berlin's alternative history by referencing slogans of local resistance movements past and present like "Wir bleiben Alle" ["We are all staying"], a rallying cry of both East Germans and squatting movements since the 70s; "Reclaim your city"; and "Fuck der Media Spree" [Fuck the Media Spree], referring to occupations and demonstrations against corporate and commercial development of the Spree riverfront. Unsurprisingly given the medium, there are also a number of anti-police/anti-authority messages in the videos, such as "Love art, hate cops" and "Cops ruin everything around me", as well as calls to riot or rebellion such as a park and ride sign transformed into "Park & Riot!" and "Steine sind zum werfen da" [Stones are there to be thrown]. A few also contain general declarations of love for the street, such as "Home street Home" and "The street never ends, the art never dies." All of these types of graffitial images serve an explicitly politicized, resistant function and appropriate public space as a medium for communicating political or ideological opposition to urban commercialization.

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[48] "Kiez statt Kies" is not actually included in the *Berlin Spricht Wände* project, but is a message on the side of a building in Neukölln that I passed frequently during my time in Berlin in 2014.

Yet another set of graffitial messages from *Berlin Spricht Wände* perform a different function, since they are intended to alter the appeal of the material environment for investors and elites. These messages include curse words, drug references, sexual innuendo or crass humor. Some are deployed for shock value, as in "Broke on coke but that's okay"; "Happy-go-fucky"; "Fickt euch alle" [Fuck all of you]; "Team Kokain"; and "Cocaine 4 free" accompanied by a surface painted with three white lines to mimic the drug. Others are merely an effect of subversive humor, such as "Fuck the Fuck"; "Smells like street (f)art"; and "Die Kinder vom Bahnhofs Klo" [The children from the train station toilet], a reference to the 1981 film *Die Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* about the drug scene in West Berlin in the 1970s. Such messages subvert official and acceptable forms of public communication within the linguistic landscape in ways that intentionally desecrate hegemonic ideals of politeness. Considering the prominence of anti-gentrification and anti-tourism messages in Berlin's graffitial landscape, shock-centric or otherwise impolite messages may also use such magnified displays of urban moral decay to make the city seem more dangerous, criminal, and chaotic than wealthier prospective inhabitants and visitors might prefer. Such crass graffitial images are intentionally unappealing if not outright hostile to bourgeois sensibilities.

Still other graffitial images are defacements of existing messages in the commercial linguistic landscape, especially advertisements. One section of *Berlin Spricht Wände* shows an artist defacing an advertisement featuring a crying baby. Atop the existing advertising image, he affixes images of a bottle of beer and a pack of cigarettes, both cut from other advertisements, positioning the beer like a baby bottle and painting a suited arm offering the cigarettes to the baby. After, he uses white paint to erase the existing advertising text. This

sort of defacement is a particularly clever appropriation of the space of public

communication, since the amended advertisement remains in the space designated for

advertisements and would likely be viewed as such, at least on first glance. A passerby

apprehending the image might briefly mistake it for real, and their resulting shock would

assumedly spark critical thought about the content of the message. Moreover, defacement

removes the original advertisement from the linguistic landscape, thereby appropriating the

commercial value attached to the space that the ad once occupied

In this way, graffiti and street art constitute collective communication within Berlin's

public sphere, discursively linking disparate parts of a fragmented *Gegenöffentlichkeit* and

even becoming a space for anonymous call and response between different factions of

resistance movements. Graffitial messages are integrated into the physical landscape of the

city, helping to transform material space and halting the one-way communication of

advertising and other official or commercial language. Graffitial images resist the

commercial image of the city by quite literally defacing it, authoring a counter-image in the

process. This counter-image is concrete in so far as it reshapes the physical environment, but

it is also discursively apprehended through the frequent anti-commercial content of

individual messages. Whereas the *Wende* squatters used graffiti as a means to claim

ownership of their own linguistic landscape, street art in Berlin today has expanded to cover

the vast majority of the city's abstract space, making it one of the more salient forms of

continuous counter-image making in the city.

Appropriating "Representation of Space": Berlin Stories

Morawski's explanation of the third plane concerning representations of space considers representation in a very literal sense, focusing primarily on map-making and other forms of critical cartography. Yet the power of literary texts to shape counter-images of the city cannot be underestimated, particularly where literary narratives center alternative urban spaces and experiences and highlight the everyday routines of the types of Berlin inhabitants who often get overlooked by commercial interests. Admittedly, symbolic, literary appropriation of city space is generally less transgressive than spatial interventions from the first two planes and is thus all the more likely to be easily subsumed by commercial interests than some other media. Nonetheless, literature has always had the capacity to penetrate the veneer of commercial images and re-author the city. Moreover, Berliners' comparative willingness to use online publishing, alternative presses, literary zines and art books to boost the dissemination of counter-imaginary texts deepens their discursive potential.[49] Yet even commercially-produced texts can challenge the commercial image of the city by focusing on the inhabited experiences of precariat inhabitants. While street art and graffiti communicate via transgression, textual representations perform a more subtle infiltration of the cultural imaginary surrounding the city by using narratives of inhabited experience to encourage readers to consider the variety of perspectives that comprise urban experience. Both Tanja Dücker in *Spielzone* (1999) and David Wagner in *Mauer Park* (2013) offer spatialized representations of the New Berlin as a subcultural playground where the city's history and

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[49] Speaking anecdotally, there is no shortage of independent Berlin bookstores that help disseminate these kinds of alternative texts. To provide one example, the *Comicbibliothek* (Comics Library) at Renate 91 on Tucholskystrasse in Mitte includes not only a library of comics from Berlin and elsewhere, but also sells a number of locally produced comics and art books created by Berlin artists. If memory serves, it was also originally founded by one of the Wende era artist's squats and has remained in operation since, though I am admittedly relying on a conversation I had with a store clerk four years ago for that knowledge.

239

existing traditions combine with an influx of imaginative new approaches to space, allowing

Berliners to creatively re-imagine and re-author their city in ways that better suit them.

In "Play Zones: The Erotics of the New Berlin" (2003), Katharina Gerstenberger

suggests that "despite its short history, the textual construction of unified Berlin can be

divided into two phases: the fall of the wall and its immediate aftermath, and, toward the end

of the 1990s, the search for the 'New Berlin'" (260). She notes that "by the end of the 1990s

Berlin's longing to count among the great metropolises of the world has turned the city into

its own *Sehnsuchtsort*,[50] yielding narratives that celebrate Berlin as a utopian if problematic

home to a diverse population of people and their desires" (260). Gerstenberger cites

Dücker's *Spielzone* as an example of a novel in which Berlin is explored as an "erotic

topography" (260) wherein the (generally feminine) body becomes "the surface on which

the contradictions and the tensions of the New Berlin become visible" (260). While erotic

play permeates the novel, Dücker's depiction of Berlin as a play zone (*Spielzone*) also hints

at the way city spaces are appropriated and mutated through the playful explorations of the

city's youngest inhabitants along axes of identity, gender, and sexuality. In *Spielzone*,

creative exploration of the self is mapped to inventive exploration of the city as space. For

instance, 15-year-old Laura and her friends use the Thomasstrasse graveyard in Neukölln as

a social hangout and place to smoke weed whereas one night, two of Laura's neighbors use

it as a place to have sex in public, neither of which are hegemonically intended uses of a

graveyard. Creative reinvention of urban spaces extends to various characters' material

transformation of spaces, such as Laura's 19-year-old cousin Ada's artistic explorations of

the squatted houses on Sonnenburger Strasse in Prenzlauer Berg. Dücker's young

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[50] This term is difficult to translate into English, but "dream destination" is a close approximation.

protagonists re-imagine and creatively alter the spaces of their everyday lives in Berlin as a way to break away from their parents, but also as a way to evolve past the east/west divisions of their parents' generation. Consequently, this sense of east/west divisions appears more palpable with Dücker's older protagaonists, such as the widow who spends her free time reading and picnicking at the foot of her husband's grave because she cannot bring herself to change her routine. Interactions between older and younger protagonists in *Spielzone* read as a metaphorical examination of the myriad overlapping perspectives helping shape the New Berlin.

Dücker mirrors the overlapping identities that comprise urban community at the *Kiez* level by constructing her novel as a series of overlapping and intersecting short stories that focus on one or two given characters at a time, all of whom live on the same Berlin street for which the novels two sections are named. The first section, "Die Thomasstrasse," focuses on the residents of the titular street in West Berlin's Neukölln neighborhood that faces the graveyard surrounding the St. Thomas Kirche. The second half, "Die Sonnenburger Strasse," focuses on the residents of a street in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood where new development, artist squats, and still-decaying older buildings coincide. The stories of Thomasstrasse are marked by the death and stagnancy of the graveyard at the center of their narratives, frequently evoking the graveyard wall as a stand-in for the wall that once divided the two parts of the city. As Gerstenberger observes, "Dücker's Neukölln remains unchanged by the fall of the wall, its state of paralysis made painfully clear by the 'new' districts and the lure they exert," (261) such as Laura's intense longing to move to Prenzlauer Berg like her cousin Ada. In "Kobaltblau," an un-named protagonist laments that they can't understand the new English-language graffiti on the *Friedhofsmauer* [graveyard

wall], noting "if it were something nice, I wouldn't have anything against the fact that walls and underground stations are smeared"[51] (13). In "Frühlingssalat," an older character suggests that the commercial order of the food aisles at the department store Karstadt are the only place where she feels relief from the chaos of the world outside. (39) The older or wealthier residents of the neighborhood remain attached to the austerity of the pre-unification world, seeing the city's transformations as a threat to their sense of comfort and routine.

By contrast, both the neighborhood's youth and its most precarious residents engage in active transformation of the built environment in Neukölln. In "Laura," when Laura's parents express concern that their teen daughter spends her evenings hanging around a graveyard where she could be murdered, Laura retorts "I don't think about death or stuff like that, it's just a freaky party spot"[52] (21). In "Walkman," a homeless punk named Rainer with a rose tattooed onto his face and a dog named Yesterday transforms the graveyard into his open-air livingroom. For Rainer, the graveyard is part of a constellation of appropriated urban sites through which he continuously passes, including junkyards, playgrounds, construction sites, and parties, allowing him to "drift through life [and] through Neukölln"[53] (46). The contrast between Thomasstrasse's older residents' desire to maintain things as they are and Laura and Rainer's inventive new uses of the neighborhood's spaces reflects the role that artistic rebellion and precariat necessity alike play in creating the counter-images that drive the slow mutation of urban space. The role that spatial appropriation plays in

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[51] "Wenn's was Schönes wäre, hätte ich ja gar nichts dagegen, dass Wände und U-Bahnhöfe beschmiert werden."
[52] Ich denke überhaupt nicht an Tod oder solche Sachen, es ist einfach nur eine abgefahrene Party-Location.
[53] Beim Laufen geht es ihn immer gut, seit drei Monaten, seit Julia, läuft er ununterbrochen herum, hängt auf Schröttplatzen, Baustellen, Friedhöfen und Partys ab, sammelt Dinge und wirft sie weg, lässt sich treiben. Durch sein Leben, durch Neukölln.

reconstructing the city is heightened in the second half of the book, with Sonnenburger Strasse reflecting the idea that East Berlin's ruinous old neighborhoods potentiated numerous forms of spatial intervention. The stories in this section highlight the transformative power of art, parties, and eroticism for creating spaces less beholden to the demands of labor and consumerism. Even the body becomes a space for experimentation on Sonnenburger Strasse, with Ada and her friends engaging in open relationships, gender experimentation, public sex, group sex, and all manner of drug experimentation as a way to explore the city and their identities outside the confines of hegemonic norms.

Katharina, the 27 year-old student whose move from Thomasstrasse to Sonnenburger Strasse marks the transition from the first to the second half of the novel, sees Prenzlauer Berg as a *Brachland* [fallow land] and *Grauzone* [grey zone] where experimentation can help cultivate something new that is not quite west or east (107-108). By contrast, the neighborhood's native East German residents, such as 18-year-old musician Benno, use experimentation within the neighborhood's artistic spaces to look for ways to preserve the cultural memory of the East and protect it against the "unteachable Wessis" who see the East as "their new adventure playground"[54] (165). Dücker's portrait of Prenzlauer Berg emphasizes the duality of the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood, simultaneously glorifying the experimentation of the neighborhood's countercultural residents and recognizing how their parties were appropriated as cultural capital to help sell the district. Dückers especially emphasizes the dynamic this created between East and West Berliners, since West Berliners often had more economic opportunity to move East than East Berliners did to move West, meaning that hip West Germans looking to make a break from their parent generation often

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[54] Solche Höfe hat er sein Leben lang gesehen, da wächst kein Baum und nichts, nur ein paar unbelehrbare Wessis halten die für ihre neuen Abenteuerspielplatz.

displaced Prenzlauer Berg's long-term residents. The effect of Dücker's Sonnenburger Strasse stories is that Prenzlauer Berg's gentrification seems inevitable, even as the city's precariat continue to find subversive ways to carve spaces for themselves and resist the city's commercial future form.

Presaging the eventual real-life transformation of Neukölln into the new Prenzlauer Berg, Katharina compares the two neighborhoods after her move to Prenzlauer Berg, concluding that there isn't much difference between the two. To her, the working class *Kieze* surrounding both Thomasstrasse and Sonnenburger Strasse are equally in flux because "both districts are like stomping grounds for hyped up and displaced existences...terms like East and West do not work anymore."[55] (156) Alongside this reflection, Katherina ponders how Tacheles has become a place where American tourists gather to marvel at the subculture. "Poor squatters, the Amis photograph you half to death,"[56] she laments, joking that the Americans read the graffiti on the walls of the building "as if it were the inscription on Schinkel's Alte Museum"[57] (155). Towards the end of the book, Katharina sits with Ada and Laura, talking to them about how things were before the *Wende*. At this point, she parts ways with her former West German identity, saying "I am not even really a dyed-in-the-wool Wessi bride, I'm just from Berlin, this is a country unto itself"[58] (192). Neither Laura nor Ada retain memories of the Berlin Wall the way Katharina does, so she regales them with a story about going to a crazy party near a watch tower along the wall before falling asleep with a group of friends in some nearby apartment. While she is sleeping the apartment catches fire, setting her blouse and hair on fire as she tries to escape. The story

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[55] "Beide Bezirke sind so etwas wie Tummelplätze für überdrehte und verschrobene Existenzen...Begriffe wie "Ost" und "West" greifen doch längst nicht mehr."
[56] "Arme Hausbesetzer. Die Amis knipsen sich halbtot."
[57] "...als sei es die Inschrift auf Schinkels Altem Museum."
[58] "...bin naemlich keine wasch-echte Wessi-Braut, bin ja aus Berlin, das ist ein eigenes Land."

reads as a metaphor for Berlin itself, punctuated by the conclusion in which Ada laments that Katharina must spend the rest of her life "charred" and Katharina coyly responds "Charred…Not really."[59] The story suggests that while the two older Berlins may have burned when the wall fell, unified Berlin has emerged from the flames in a new formation, none the worse for wear. *Spielzone* thus offers a portrait of a city still in transition, constantly influenced by the subcultural energies that help its residents re-negotiate their own identities as they re-author the cities spaces towards new creative capacities.

While *Spielzone* exemplifies Gerstenberger's assertion that Berlin literature of the late 1990s and early 2000s concerned the search for the reunified city's identity, a new phase of literary inquiry gained momentum from the beginning of the twenty-first century onward, one which focused less on the search for the New Berlin and more on cataloguing the evolution of the city in real time. Berlin stories of this type use local and spatially-bounded narratives to preserve particular "moments" of a given Berlin space and pose them as counter-images to the city's current or future commercial transformation. What sets these more recent pieces of literature apart is how the city and its spaces become almost protagonists in the story, the central figure around which all other characters' narratives turn. This allows authors to elucidate how everyday life is affected by the slow mutation of Berlin's spaces and places. As with Dücker's use of interlocking narratives to author a kaleidoscope of Berlin identities, much of this new literature utilizes the short story or essay form to present the city through a series of fragmented images that add up to a collective, mirroring the fragmented nature of contemporary urban precarity. By presenting a series of related stories together in one text, such texts offer a layered approach to urban narration

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[59] "Verkohlt nun nicht."

that reflects the way the city must be reconsidered as the product of a collective process of re-authoring.

One text that exemplifies this trend is David Wagner's 2013 essay collection *Mauer Park*. It is adapted from an earlier collection, *In Berlin* (2001), which represented Wagner's attempts to make sense of the concept of the New Berlin at the turning point of the century in a way not dissimilar to Dückers' use of literary short stories in *Spielzone*. In each essay, Wagner went to particular spaces and places in the city in order to write essays illustrating the mood produced by each given environment. Roughly ten years later, Wagner went back to the exact same places to see how they have changed in the interim. He then republished all of the stories from *In Berlin* in *Mauer Park*, with each of the new "update" essays tacked onto the ends of the earlier versions, adding a few new essays in the process. In *Mauer Park*, Wagner authors and re-authors the spaces of Berlin in a manner that forces the reader to acknowledge how the city has changed. His essays display an acute awareness of the ephemerality of the spaces he writes about, sensing how commercially imagined urban renewal in the New Berlin has attempted to stamp out many of the city's most lively spaces and subcultures. In so doing, Wagner continues the *Wende* squatters' goal of providing a means by which Berliners might author, re-imagine, and influence the city in order to assert their right to it. No surprise, then, that Wagner also wrote the introduction to *BWL* when it was published in 2014, where he also commented on the rapidity with which Mitte has changed and will continue to change.

Wagner's work preserves in literature that which cannot be preserved in the physical space of the rapidly developing metropolis. He offers his Berlin stories as a differential literary space for an alternative Berlin-that-was or a potential Berlin-that-could-have-been,

while nonetheless attempting to capture the specificity of the current moment. In the story

"Schutzgebiet Nikolaiviertel," Wagner criticizes the illusion of historical preservation in a

city that has so often been demolished and reconstructed. Nikolaiviertel is considered the

origin point for the entire city of Berlin and was the site of a massive GDR-backed historical

reconstruction project in the 1980s (Brodauf 19). Wagner describes it as a tourist-oriented

place where visitors "are pleased with the idea that Berlin could have been that way"[60] (187)

but which offers little more than an artificial history, lamenting "Disneyland is better, lots in

Disneyland appears far more real than the Nikolaiviertel"[61] (191). While the reconstruction

of Nikolaiviertel was ostensibly an attempt to preserve the city's historical memory, Wagner

suggests that the commercial nature of the space renders it a mere simulation of an idea of

old Berlin. In his update essay, he notes that these commercial tendencies have only

intensified as Berlin became more tourist-centric. At the end he declares, "Berlin does not

need an artificial old town [*Altstadt*], Berlin does not need a new Old-Berlin. Old-Berlin is

very far away, Old-Berlin has burnt down"[62] (192). Implicit in this declaration is Wagner's

criticism of both misguided reconstructionist urban renewal as well as of the anesthetized

use of the city's history as a tourist trap. In Nikolaiviertel, he sees the confluence of both

commercial tendencies and rejects the vision it portends.

This sentiment is reflected in many other essays in the series: in "Wo Die Kompassnadel

Zitiert," Wagner mourns the loss of beloved Berliner staples like Café Adler which have

been replaced by Starbucks and McDonalds franchises; in "Die Netzspinne," he bemoans

the way U-Bahn and S-Bahn stations have been renamed to erase the memory of the GDR

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[60] "Sie erfreuen sich an der Idee, dass Berlin so gewesen sein könnte."
[61] "Disneyland ist besser, vieles in Disneyland wirkt sehr viel echter als das Nikolaiviertel."
[62] "Berlin braucht keine künstliche Altstadt, Berlin braucht kein neues Alt-Berlin. Alt-Berlin ist sehr weit weg, Alt-Berlin ist abgebrannt."

and disorient the city's long-time inhabitants; in "Wagenburg", he laments how the once extensive squatter scene has been reduced to a mere fraction of what it once was, jokingly saying that the occupied caravan camp Wagenburg has since become "Wagendorf."[63] While the 2001 version of his "Fanta Mädchen küsst man nicht" offers a colorful portrait of the club scene in the city's central districts, his far briefer update summarizes how much of that scene has since disappeared. He mentions how a restaurant has replaced the famous squat Eimer, then adds "henceforth, it will often be described, how Mitte was. I don't actually know it anymore…"[64] (123). The inclusion of the essays from *In Berlin* make it apparent that such changes took place more rapidly between 2000-2010 after gaining some steam than they did in the decade immediately following reunification. Wagner prefers to act as an observer of phenomena so he rarely outright criticizes these changes, but *Mauer Park* as a whole makes it nonetheless obvious how commercially imagined urban renewal has altered Berlin's landscape and in turn, the social relations produced within the city. Reading Wagner's stories together, his sense of loss for the potential social configurations cut off by commercial change is almost painfully palpable.

It is fitting, then, that he ends the collection with the titular essay "Mauer Park." One of only a few new essays in the collection, "Mauer Park" contains no updated addendum; instead, it is a snapshot of Berlin's contemporary moment that offers a potential counter-image for Berlin's future. Mauer Park is located in Prenzlauer Berg on a former stretch of the Berlin Wall's no-man's-land and is named for the long stretch of *Hinterlandmauer*[65] that still stands along the Eastern end of the park. Every Sunday, when most stores in the city

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[63] A "dorf" is generally a small village, in contrast with "burg" which is usually attached to towns/cities.
[64] Es wird nun oft beschrieben, wie Mitte war. Ich weiss es eigentlich nicht mehr…"
[65] The term *Hinterlandmauer* refers to the second wall behind the Berlin Wall. This is the part of the wall that would have been visible from the Eastern side, and was separate from the Berlin Wall proper by a well-patrolled no-mans-land.

are closed, the Mauer Park features a flea market, food trucks, street musicians, artists, and a beloved grassroots-organized public karaoke gathering that has come to be one of the park's most famous offerings. For a long time, none of the activities in Mauer Park were sanctioned by the city, and its use as a flea market more or less evolved from its spontaneous collective use in this way, similar to the way spontaneous citizen actions transformed Tempelhofer Feld. Mauer Park is a dirty, dusty, unpaved open space, and it is one of the most beloved destinations in contemporary Berlin.

Wagner's essay reads like a love letter to the park. Its content, as well as its location at the end of the series and its demarcation as the series' titular essay, portrays Mauer Park as a counter-image for New Berlin in its current evolution. Coming at the end of the book, the essay reads as the afterthought addendum to the entire essay collection, in much the same way that Wagner's update essays amended the works that came before them. In his introduction to the collection, Wagner says his aim has always been to answer the question "What does the New Berlin look like?" and by the end of the collection, it is clear that the titular essay is his answer. Using the Berliner dialect, he opens with "Oh, Mauerpark, I love you. Even though you're often so ugly"[66] (224), going on to describe how the park's ugliness and utter lack of traditional commercial appeal is precisely its anti-bourgeois charm. Throughout, he mockingly borrows the rhetoric of the commercial image, describing the people who gather empty bottles to exchange for Pfand[67] money "entrepreneurs" and the hula-hooping dancers who accompany street musicians "Promoters." He suggests that Joe Hatchiban, who established the Mauer Park karaoke events, ought to be compensated by the

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[66] "Ach, Mauerpark, ick liebe dir. Obwohl du oft so hässlich bist."
[67] A pfand is a small tax charged when purchasing bottled drinks in Germany, and is given back when bottles are returned. The practice of collecting bottles discarded in public in order to exchange them for pfand is very common among the economically disadvantaged in Germany.

senate for his contributions to tourism in the city, because "one couldn't think up a better Berlin promotional film"[68] (227).

Interestingly, Wagner's counter-image is not overtly anti-tourist, so much as a rejection of the idea that Berlin ought to be reduced to a tourist attraction, as in the Nikolaiviertel. Unlike with other destinations in the city, Wagner suggests that tourists who come to Mauer Park experience Berlin as Berliners, as part of the community. "Yes, I like the teeming picture portrait [*Wimmelbild*] of Mauerpark und how Berlin plays out here, and it doesn't matter that most who come to act out Berlin here perhaps don't live in Berlin at all, no big deal, here they are also Berlin"[69] (227). He portrays Mauer Park as a type of proto-differential space, since it challenges the social formations of the built environment surrounding the empty space of the park. Unlike the Huyssenian voids long since filled in by commercial urban renewal, Mauer Park retains the emptiness of no-mans-land by transforming it into an every-mans-land, a gathering space for the urban masses. Wagner explicitly praises the newly established "Welt-bürger-park" foundation for "fighting for a Mauerpark without development"[70] (228) and makes a joke about hot-wiring a hydraulic shovel from a luxury loft construction site in order to "complete the years-overdue expansion of the park in a single night"[71] (228). Symbolically extending his metaphor, Wagner argues for a citywide extension of Mauer Park that would steamroll the city's luxury apartments (and the gentrification they represent) out of existence.

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[68] "…ein Berlin-Werbefilm könnte sich kein besseres Bild ausdenken, Veranstalter Joe Hatchiban sollte vom Senat bezahlt werden."
[69] "Ja, mir gefällt das Wimmelbild Mauerpark und wie hier Berlin gespielt wird, und es macht nichts, dass die meisten, die hier Berlin spielen, vielleicht gar nicht in Berlin wohnen, egal, hier sind auch sie Berlin."
[70] "…für einen Mauerpark ohne Bebauung kämpft."
[71] "…die seit Jahren überfällige Parkerweiterung in einer Nacht erledigen würde."

Where *BWL* appropriated the representation of space through photographic texts that restore the memory of a historical urban counter-image prior to the commercial image's transformation og the city, both *Spielzone* and *Mauer Park* author inhabited narratives of Berlin's post-*Wende* spaces to illuminate how the commercial image has altered the landscape. Their works both present a portrait of the city that makes it possible to search for fissures and gaps in the commercial logic of the city as space, teasing out narrative threads that reflect the struggles of precariat urbanity. Both authors use their respective literary examinations of Berlin as space to investigate where resistance can still be articulated and which aspects of the city's history and collective memory ought to be retained in the process. In both literary representations, the image of Berlin as sophisticated profit-driven metropolis is collapsed and replaced by inhabitant-centric collective re-imaginations of the city as a text awaiting re-authorship.

Conclusion

In December 2014, the graffiti artist Blu and his co-creators painted over two of their own well-known murals at Cuvry Brache in Kreuzberg, a long-occupied open space for tents and squatters that is frequented by the homeless. One mural depicted two figures unmasking one another, representing the city East and West, and the other featured a businessman whose gold watches had become his shackles. Both murals have become iconic Berlin images that are frequently employed as cultural capital to promote Berlin's thriving artistic counterculture. After the night in December 2014 when the murals were covered by black paint, the widespread popular assumption was that some investment group had defaced them in preparation for new development. However, in the editorial that collaborator Lutz Henker

251

released to *The Guardian* explaining his group's decision to paint over their murals, he writes:

> Unintentionally, we had created an ideal visual representation of the imaginary Berlin of the noughties and its promises: a city full of wasteland offering plenty of space for affordable living and creative experimentation among the ruins of its recent history… The murals took their involuntary place in this reality as a pilgrimage site of guided street art tours, as a photo opportunity for countless greeting cards, book covers and record sleeves. The city started to use the aesthetics of resistance for its marketing campaigns. (Henke)

Blu and collaborators had come to the same conclusion as the *Wende* squatters before them – even their resistance could be used against them. But it is telling that in 2014, they were no longer content to resign themselves to the fate of being fodder for cultural capital, opting instead to destroy their own art. Their act of defiance re-asserted their ownership over the space by un-creating that which capital had co-opted. Henke notes how Berlin's policies in reunification "squandered much of the city's rare spatial potential, and thereby also jeopardized the existence of its main attraction—the artists" who then unknowingly "[contributed] to their own displacement." Painting over the murals was a bold declaration that the city's inhabitants would no longer be compliant in their own displacement, and the collective response was to see the act as a rallying cry for future resistance.

The destruction of the murals at Cuvry Brache serves as an illustrative example of multiple concepts foregrounded throughout this chapter. As an expression of the right to the city, it rejects the dominance of the commercial image. As an act of counter-image making, it both refuses appropriation as cultural capital and asserts the artist's power to retain control

252

over his or her own counter-images. It is an intervention on both a physical and a symbolic plane, indicative of a broader *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, which stimulates a critical public discourse about the city's development. In short, the Cuvry Brache mural destruction is a *mise en abyme* of the state of spatial resistance in contemporary Berlin. It reflects how resistance in today's Berlin builds upon both the failures and successes of resistant movements that came before, adapting to the cities shifting needs and, like the *Wende* squatters before, seeking out new avenues for discursive engagement with the city environment. Bolstered by the irruptive moment of reunification, resistant slow mutation of Berlin continues apace, continuously resisting the commercial image and the dominance of abstract space and forging in the process an alternative cultural memory for Berlin's *Gegenöffentlichkeit*. It becomes clear in evaluating the resistant strategies presented here that in a neoliberal, globalized world, class struggle via the precariat must address and make use of the resistant potential offered by space itself. Today, revolution will only come by means of a transformation of the built environment. For all intents and purposes, the revolution can be and will be spatialized.

Conclusion
Towards a Differential Spatial Studies

Lefebvre's grand theory of differential space as potential space-that-could-be is a

useful grounding concept for all manner of analysis that concerns itself with excavating the

contours of contemporary culture in order to imagine a more equitable future. While most

academic disciplines have undergone some version of the so-called spatial turn since the

mid-twentieth century (or even earlier, depending on who you ask), shifts towards spatially-

minded inquiry have often remained entrenched within the confines of single fields of study.

And while various disciplines have undergone their own unique spatial turns, their efforts at

spatial inquiry have only sporadically resulted in a push for spatial studies as an

interdisciplinary, cross-national and interartistic field to generate broader conversations

about society as understood in and through space. The consequence of considering spatial

issues in relative academic isolation has been a proliferation of recent research that dances

around common cultural questions without ever managing to forge cross-disciplinary

connections that might actually help address them—a tendency that even the current work

fails at times to avoid. This effect is magnified by the fact that traditionally quantitative

forms of analysis are rarely considered alongside traditionally qualitative forms of analysis,

leaving blindspots for both, especially when the two confront similar topics.[1] The work at

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[1] Speaking anecdotally, I was recently reminded how absurd this seems by a conversation I had with my friend Dr. Stefan Berteau after he completed his dissertation in computational/theoretical neuroscience, wherein he lamented that it had been difficult if not impossible to integrate more qualitative forms of analysis into his work on the neural effects of "twist-endings" in narrative storytelling, even as doing so might have strengthened his findings. I was struck by the realization that the exact kind of analysis I was conducting in comparative literature on the assumptions about race and criminality that attend suburban narratives suffered from the inverse issue, in that it was proving difficult to substantiate my claims without quantitative support about the neural effects of consuming particular narrative tropes. While he and I immediately discussed finding a way to collaborate on exactly this type of research later, our conversation made it apparent how infrequent these types of cross-disciplinary approaches to cultural concerns remain, even as collaboration of this type would undoubtedly prove fruitful in helping address numerous cultural concerns that traditional academic inquiry have as of yet not been able to adequately confront.

hand proceeds from an intense desire to imagine how spatial studies might look within the context of a given existing academic discipline. It is a broad comparative analysis that extends from the traditional forms of literaryinquiry championed in comparative literature while also integrating threads from more far-flung disciplines (geography, sociology, political science, musicology, to name but a few) in an effort to render the research project itself a potential differential space.

Yet if academia is considered as a type of social space produced towards certain ends to facilitate certain types of social interaction, and if each of the disciplines comprising academia are considered symbolic sub-spaces within it, then it stands to reason that both types of produced space can be subjected to the same strategies of spatial appropriation that Lefebvre, Morawski, and others have argued potentiate the emergence of a new type of differential space. It is my home that the preceding work demonstrates how the emerging field of spatial studies could become precisely this kind of differential academic discipline, since all human interaction is constituted in and through space, making it a lens through which to apprehend all manner of human behavior. Of course, some may argue that if nearly anything can be reduced to its spatial expression and thereby subjected to discursive analysis then the purpose of analysis would become too diluted or the specificities of individual disciplines would be erased, both of which unlikely in an academy increasingly pushing towards niche and nuance. One might counter such an argument by arguing that the non-specificity of spatial studies is precisely its appeal—if all social formations can be considered through a spatial lens, then spatial studies would be an interdisciplinary field *par excellence*, a grand framework within which anomalous or disconnected analyses might be able to interact. A differential spatial studies could become a space of confluence for the

intellectual pursuits of academics and non-academics alike, a space of connection between heretofore disparate approaches to addressing some of the most difficult social problems and –isms, a space of discursive re-imagination that undoes the traditional power structures of the proverbial ivory tower. Spatial studies could become the field that challenges academia to re-imagine its own contours and come up with something different, something that can be more equitably shared among all who aspire to knowledge. It could inaugurate an approach to knowledge acquisition grounded in a sort of right to the academy and to academic space that proceeds from the right to the city as a concept for allowing those who actually inhabit a space to access its resources and shape how its spaces are used. More practical than utopian an imperative, a push towards a differential spatial studies represents an attempt to reconceive the possibilities of academic research, particularly as relates to advancing progressive change in society.

While these ideas may seem overly grand, they are the very ideas that grounded my approach to all of the research and analysis I have laid out in this work. It would have been very easy to choose to analyze canonically accepted pieces of literature and theory and produce a dissertation that more directly aligned with the traditional expectations of comparative literature as a discipline, but by integrating non-traditional texts and forms of inquiry, the present work attempts re-imagines the space of the doctoral dissertation in a new way. Moreover, it is precisely this same kind of push towards interdisciplinary, boundary-transgressing modes of analysis that makes comparative literature attractive to begin with. The strength of comparative literature as a field lies in its tendency to see quite literally anything that can be read or analyzed as a text, rendering the entirety of the material world fodder for analysis. In this context, my passionate plea for a differential spatial studies does

not so much part ways with the traditional academic approach to literary research so much

as push for more analytical experimentation of the kind championed in fields like

comparative literature. It is a passionate plea that challenges the academy to re-imagine its

contours in ways that make more room for the precariat voices and inhabited experiences

that I have attempted to center in the work at hand. So long as the demographics of

academia remain wedded to the same affluent white hegemony that governs the urban fabric

and society more generally, and so long as access to academic knowledge is constrained by

financial requirements that limit first and foremost those whose lives are already marked by

precarity,[2] it will never be possible to access new ways of apprehending, perceiving, and

knowing the world around us.

   All manner of reading and analysis and careful, meticulous research about inhabited

spaces can produce a given set of findings, but too often those findings reflect common

sense understanding accessible to certain types of inhabited experience—to use the present

work as an example, as a white academic who spent most of my life in suburban Colorado, I

can analyze what Vince Staples says about how police brutality affects people living in

ghettoized urban neighborhoods all I want, but I won't be saying anything that the average

inhabitant of a ghettoized urban neighborhood could not tell you based on their own

everyday experiences. Though this work represents a concentrated effort to imagine how

spatial theory and analysis of material culture can help one understand the effects of

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[2] Given that this conclusion is a departure from tradition already, I suppose it is relevant enough to add that I myself grew up in quite severe poverty. Finishing this dissertation, I couldn't stop thinking about how I represent a demographic that hegemony attempts to render impossible: the impoverished first generation doctoral candidate. Achieving academic success would not have been possible for most in my position and even in my own case has required me to go into a crippling amount of debt despite the numerous forms of outside support I received, many of which I might not have been able to receive without my relative privilege as a white person. A call to de-monetize academic knowledge must also include a call to make secondary education pursuable for even the most impoverished as well as a reduce the financial burden required of all students, especially students of color, the already impoverished, and those needing student loans.

hegemony in popular culture, especially as relates to racial and socioeconomic segregation, almost nothing I present here is shocking, novel, or even that useful for those whose everyday lives are marked by the kind of precarity that necessitates a broader push for the right to the city. Effectively, the work you hold in your hand is an attempt to lend academic credence to a type of common sense knowledge that is obvious to huge swaths of the population who may or may not ever get the chance to step foot on a college campus but whose knowledge of urban space is no less salient for it. Given these recognitions, how might those of us currently engaged in traditional academic inquiry use our work to create voids and chasms in the existing logic of academia that allow for slow mutation of academic spaces and potentiate the emergence of a differential space for producing differential forms of knowledge? How might the unique work conducted by academics be re-tooled as an instrument for potentiating the emergence of a world-wide counter-public, given the resistant necessity Morawski and others identity to mutate abstract space across all manner of points of entry and create a collective form of spatial appropriation? What might a differential academia look like and how can spatial studies help potentiate it?

These are big questions, but they reflect increasingly important concerns within the current decade marked by seismic shifts in global power, increasing planetary precarity, unprecedented climate change, vast wealth inequality, and an array of dizzying backslides towards overt fascism, xenophobia, racism, and misogyny. The 2016 election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States, to provide but one example of the changes that have taken place in the few years since I began this project, represents but one of numerous violent contemporary alterations in the spatial logic of American culture and by extension, given the power of the American presidency, in the spatial logic of world culture as well.

258

From the start, Trump's presidency has been marked by numerous attempts to redefine the

spatial logic of the United States in ways the reinforce American white hegemony,

including, but in no way limited to: calls to erect a massive border wall separating the

United States from Mexico; detention of immigrants, especially the forced spatial separation

of children from their parents with little regard for the logistics of later reuniting families;

attempts to institute travel restrictions on those from countries with large Muslim

populations; the promotion of a nationalistic, "America first" rhetoric that threatens

diplomatic relations; and, a general willingness to denigrate urban populations of color in a

manner akin to the moral panic rhetoric I referenced in the second chapter. Approaching

Trump's violent attempts at state repression through a spatial lens cannot and should not be

the only way these issues are approached, but an analysis of the spatial implications of such

policies might prove useful in helping resistant actors of all stripes forge new forms of

resistance that oppose the hegemonic power structures such changes are meant to bolster.

Far more than an idealistic, kumbaya-esque call for greater cross-cultural and cross-

disciplinary understanding, a push for spatial studies as a possible point of entry to a

differential academic space reflects a need to fundamentally alter the way we think about

knowledge and power in ways that consider space as the raw material through which both

are situated.

Seen this way, space becomes a malleable conceptual playing field for imagining

new resistant strategies, a concrete material form around which resistant knowledge can be

expressed and counter-narratives can be articulated. Within the context of contemporary

literature and culture, especially texts from popular culture, spatially-minded narratives and

analysis reflect a postmodern tendency to re-value material culture in a world increasingly

apprehended through digital, non-tangible spaces and experiences. As a material component

of everyday experience, urban space broadly conceived[3] interacts with the mediated

narratives that represent it in ways that, when analyzed, highlight the inequalities and

imbalances of neoliberal late capitalist culture. If social revolution must proceed from a

recognition that the right to the city (which is, in effect, the right to space) must be extended

to all who inhabit, then it is high time that all manner of inhabitants and the spaces they

inhabit become the center of cultural, literary, and scientific inquiries geared towards

creating greater social equality.

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[3] That is, as conceived to include the suburban and rural spaces folded into the larger urban fabric as described in Edward Soja's concept of postmodern geography.

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