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Populism, art and the city: An interdisciplinary pedagogy for our time

ABSTRACT

Populism on the far left and the far right is reshaping the contemporary city and the urban condition. In this special short-form section, we put forward populism, art and the city as a linked theoretical and methodological framework through the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative. Our conversations brought together new research in urban studies, art, architecture, public policy, and performance studies into what many people described as a decidedly populist age. Following a short introduction, we share a collection of four papers from such conversations that offer 'focus sites' from San Francisco to Palm Springs, Hong Kong to Mexico City, with a diverse set of theoretical proposals that branch from our discussions and shared readings in art, populism, and the city.

KEYWORDS

art
populism
city
humanities
pedagogy
performance
methods
theory

I. POPULISM

Populism is often thought of as the politics of ordinary people whether organizing at a back-yard picnic, or as activists in the streets making known their demands. Working as a hinge that swings across both 'right' and 'left' wing political movements, populism is a mechanism integral to these political movements, and also, as we explore in this section, intrinsic to embodiment and materiality. Following Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau, we began

with a premise that populism can perhaps best be understood as a process and strategy of unification rather than any fixed characteristic or ideology. In this way, the contention over who claims to be ‘the people’ in a democracy reflects a complex set of negotiations that make up the ideas and practice of popular power. We thus became interested in populism as a means of constructing social cohesion in ways that could illuminate the political ideals and failures of democracy.

While clearly in the United States, xenophobia, demagoguery and jingoism seethe in the White House, we know that populism is debated by people all over the political spectrum and has long been a catalyst of the left in both rural and urban environments. From the late nineteenth century to the present day, populism in the United States catapulted reforms in public infrastructure, redefined cities, and often spread through cultural arts to stoke (potentially divisive) unification strategies among different groups of people in both farms and factories. As scholars and educators working on various projects around humanism, education and planetary health, it was also clear that a considerable amount of new attention was directed towards regenerating a populism in a very different direction from what appeared in the spectacle of state. We considered these conditions both urgent and also opportunities to examine further how populism is constructed in ways that are shaped every day by aesthetics and the urban built environment.

In early 2017, we sat down with this premise to build a graduate theory and methods course as part of the core curriculum of the Global Urban Humanities Initiative at the University of California, Berkeley. This meant poking around outside the familiar turf of urban studies, drawing on methods of performance, art and aesthetics, but then gearing them towards questions around how *space, politics and performance* overlap. We asked,

- What political opportunities does urbanism present for those disenfranchised from partisan politics?
- How might embodiment, memory and affect transform urban spaces, and what might we learn to contribute to broad-based social movements?

It was with this spirit that we set out to develop a collection of readings and research methods that opened up new directions in urban studies, architecture and geography towards political analysis and the formation of popular power in uniquely ‘urban’ spaces. We worked with the ideas of scholars such as Jesús Martín Barbero, Ngugi Wa’Thiong’o, Henri Lefebvre, Chinaka Hodge, Doreen Massey, Rosalyn Deutsche and Katherine McKittrick to place urban theory next to populism and populist art production in visual and performing arts, including theatre, radio, film, social media, printmaking, posters and street art.

We used these lenses as springboards for a set of research projects, which were based around urban ‘focus sites’. These projects, which resulted in the set of papers included here in this short-form section, were disciplinarily diverse, reflecting our various academic backgrounds in art, architecture, performance studies, urban planning and geography. However, what bound the projects (and what binds these papers) together was an urban focus, a political focus in which populism is a theoretical framework, and a view towards the way art imbricates the urban environment with meaning. The results were topics such as ‘cardboard citizenry’ (Connie Cheng), performed memory as memorials (Jeff Garnand and Tania Osoro-Harp) and counter-public queer modernisms

built into the desert as secular oasis and a new guise for orientalism (Xander Lenc). Our role was to be theoretical and epistemological curators, pushing these projects towards (and away from) theories and methods across performance studies, political science and urban studies as they approached their case study topics.

In all of these formations, it was interesting that we found *populism* useful to reconstruct the very terms of ‘the people’ and civic belonging. Drawing primarily from Ernesto Laclau’s work in *On Populist Reason* (2005) and Chantal Mouffe’s conversation with one of Spain’s foremost political scientists in the Podemos movement, Iñigo Errejón, we turned away from over-simplistic ideas of crowds being manipulated by coercive leaders to try to understand the production apparatus that supports, upholds and at times masks participation. Yet we also found that a focus on populism from below can redirect questions of ‘management’ into ones of how to take down and build social movements, symbols and yes, even urban spaces with these broader public interests at hand.

II. ART

What became clear very early on in our seminar discussions was how closely linked art was to both populist formation and to the urban environment. Art plays a crucial role as a catalyst for the unifying symbols of populist movements, or as what Ernesto Laclau (2005) refers to as the ‘floating signifier’. This can be a colour; a fashion statement; a slogan or rallying cry; a cartoon; street art; or, in the digital age, a meme, a hashtag or a Tweet. Performance and affect are also inextricably wound into the political, and art and politics can never fully be separate (as Toni Morrison [2008] said, ‘all good art is political! There’s none that isn’t!’). We discussed Cher Krause-Knight’s ideas on how art itself can be populist (in the form of memorials and public displays); the way that art is an interface between and instigator of publics (e.g. Grant Kester); and the way that art is an actor in the processes for and against spatial justice (Rosalyn Deutsche). We took part in a guided walking tour of Works Progress Administration (WPA) art around Berkeley, imbued with political meaning and significance that are relevant to the present day. We read Chinaka Hodge’s play *Chasing Mehserle*, in which the streets of Oakland become a stage and the city itself becomes a performative actor in the tragic police killing of Oscar Grant, a local African American youth.

As research-driven projects, we were interested in expanding methodologies of performance-based practice. We began by rethinking space and power with theatre practitioner Jiwon Chung, who curated a ‘theater of the oppressed’ workshop and took that to our work in ethnography to recognize how physical movements and space hold, hide and co-create. Observing is one step to recognize. Paying attention to how one feels in the space is another. Mapping and redirecting systems of representation to honour that affective space is one way of touching back to memory and truth as popular by virtue of how we are in spatial relation to one another. We discussed in the seminar not only different ways to approach art’s meaning in the urban landscape, but importantly, how to position the observer/researcher within and against art’s meaning and political narrative. These discussions led students to approach art in the Bay Area with a critical gaze and through a political lens, but also, a self-reflexive one. Part of the challenge in approaching art’s significance is to try to deconstruct and decolonize it, but also to link art to the pressing social issues facing

the Bay Area (and everywhere), whether that be homelessness; racism; class divides; police/state brutality; or neo-liberal complacency.

III. CITY

Populism is not necessarily an 'urban' phenomenon; indeed, many populist movements have rural roots and are based on rural ideals. Nevertheless, it is the city where policy-makers are centred, where people encounter one another perhaps most forcefully and where art has always realized its maximum visibility and transformative power. The revolution, most urban theorists agree, will inevitably be an urban one. This bringing forth the city as a keystone in the nexus of art and populism meant that many of our in-class debates were, inevitably, urban ones and Berkeley and the wider Bay Area thereby emerged as an urban laboratory for students to approach focus sites, conduct urban ethnography and collect data. Drawing on the schools of urban sociology and geography, and authors such as Elijah Anderson and David Harvey, we challenged students to approach the city with an open, critical and creative mind and a toolkit of methods (observation, mapping, field notes, photography, film and digital ethnography).

The 'plaza' forms a central referent in both populist theory and performance theory: Jeff Garnand's paper approaches San Francisco's United Nations Plaza as a troubling and *haunted* site of memory and memorial as he attempts to revisit the scenes of a series of protests that he participated in, there, in the 1990s. He finds a contemporary city where the populist demands of his fellow activists remain unanswered, a city deeply divided and structurally unjust.

This approach to cities and urban space, of course, meant a deep reversal from rendering a master view of a human throng in the design of cities and the built environment. It also meant to inherently contest official histories that had obscured the work of activists as producers of equality and justice. Tania Osoro-Harp unravels the layers of the architecture of Mexican national urban fabric to ask pressing questions about hidden narratives of struggle, of racialized myths and representations and imaginaries of urban spaces. She asks whether the Mexican Muralist tradition today obfuscates indigenous demands of the city into an imagined 'mestizaje' idyll, which can be linked to Forensic Architecture's technocratic representation of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa, murdered in acts of state violence during the administration of Peña Nieto.

Connie Cheng also uses the urban scale to follow the material of cardboard in its journey from her backyard in Berkeley (as refuse) across the Pacific to the plazas of Hong Kong. There, Cheng observed foreign domestic workers using cardboard as a place to sit on a hot day, on Sunday, their day of rest. By telling the very material story of cardboard and its global repurposing, Cheng tells a deeper story about the very nature of modern capitalism, in which lives (like cardboard) are repurposed, cast off and yet, display tenacity and an agile form of resilience. She asks whether, through the lens of cardboard, urban theory might consider a flexible citizenry, whole cities or urban worlds, of repurposed cardboard. As such, hers is a story of both hopeful potential and dark realities.

Finally, Xander Lenc also uses an urban case study, the California desert oasis of Palm Springs, to tie together the art of the modernist aesthetic, the populism of different groups in Palm Springs (demanding the city, but in different ways) and the complicated and interwoven micro-politics of Native

American tribes, the LGBTQI+ community and architecture itself (which, indeed, performs). Lenc suggests that competing demands on the urban environment mean that the ubiquitous modernist desert building becomes a sort of populist signifier; on a deeper level, Lenc's study of Palm Springs brings to the surface latent questions of class, race and conceptions of social reproduction and neo-colonial notions of the desert. As such, Lenc's conclusions tell a local, urban story, but also a larger global story about the relationship of land, people, architecture, class and power.

IV. THE GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES AS GENERATIVE THEORY AND METHOD

In conclusion, we share gratitude for the Mellon Foundation's Global Urban Humanities Initiative, and the staff and Principal Investigators who made it possible to develop an interdisciplinary approach to fields traditionally ascribed to a very different set of assumptions, purpose and methods. Where architecture and city planning move from blueprints to structures, art and performance also requires material resources and concrete designs. We knew memory and memorials were at work in both, while ephemerality and transformation were vigorously debated in our respective fields. We also knew that the impact of performance and embodied behaviours could outlive stone walls, built parkways and even the most consolidated memorials of the state. What remained, and how did these common conversations – *populism, art and the city* – draw us towards identifying different strategies of legitimation that moved through each?

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Demanding the city: Traces of the UN 50 protests in San Francisco

ABSTRACT

Events of collective action pass into and then fade from the memory of cities, some leaving little trace in the casual historical archive. Do these events haunt the city as memories, imperfect, yellowing with age, long after the physical traces are gone? Using a mix of methods – urban observation, interview, and autoethnography – I returned in 2018 to the site of several of the actions I was a participant in for the 50th anniversary of the signing of the UN charter in San Francisco in 1995, interrogating the possibility that my presence would haunt the city of a very different present. The city of July 1995 was there, a spectral presence in the sunny world of capital that relentlessly but incompletely bleaches out the traces of its shadow, resistance. The conditions that produced those resistances have only become more pressing, the need for ghosts more urgent in a city that increasingly looks to its future without engaging its pasts.

KEYWORDS

protest
direct action
San Francisco
punitive management
of homelessness
autoethnography
United Nations
human rights

Ghosts flit across space; they cannot be captured or classified. Bearing traces of the past, they cannot explain it, but they allude to forgotten sensations and thoughts. By virtue of their partiality – they are not whole bodies or coherent, solid entities – ghosts are echoes which refuse reconstruction, traces which only lend themselves to speculation and

imagination, fragments which kindle half-remembered understandings, elusive feelings.

(Edensor 2001)

History marks the presence of absences as much as it marks events. Historicist history, official history, terms employed by both Benjamin (1996) and Foucault (2003), is the history of the victors. It is settled, past tense, a curated catalogue of events, people, states that are unchanging. Absences become invisible in the narrative that is produced. Everything makes sense: there is a cause and effect, one thing leads to another.

This article looks at a short period of time: two weeks in 1995 in San Francisco, when many people, myself among them, took up a radical politics and refused the police order figuratively and literally, business as usual, the non-politics of conventional Politics. The demand: *the state must stop harassing the most marginalized members of society simply because they are poor; and the state must stop murdering black men*. The claim: *this is an injustice that we can begin to address ourselves, we do not need the state – will not wait for the state – to do the right thing, because it won't*. These two things, articulated at once through a social demand, became the basis for the kernel of a popular movement. It was only a kernel, not a broad-based movement, but it rippled out from that conjuncture, from those two weeks in San Francisco.

The policing of space in the revanchist city (Smith 1996) is imprecise, at least when it comes to targeting a particular individual or group of individuals. It is quite precise if we consider its target as the urban poor. The vast majority of criminal citations and arrests are of poor people; San Francisco is no different. The group Food Not Bombs, of which I was a part, articulated a radical, confrontational and prefigurative politics, both of refusal and possibility. We had been engaged in the simple act of feeding and organizing homeless and poor people on the steps of the monumental city hall, in the civic plazas, calling attention to the abject failure of one of the wealthiest cities in the world to address the fundamental human rights and the dignity of every person; the city's response to rising homelessness among its residents was rather to criminalize the condition of being poor and the activities that are required to sustain life on the street. Official city policy set forth by the mayor, aptly called 'the Matrix program', was one of eviction through citation and arrest of visibly poor people in the city centre.

Through a mix of methods – autoethnography, interviews and site visits – this article seeks to illuminate the traces of a week of protests in 1995, performed as an urgent drawing of attention to the inhumane and punitive response of the city of Saint Francis to visible poverty and the ever-increasing crisis of homelessness on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco. I ask the question of the city as physical and social space, and also of myself, as a person who was a resident and participant, an autoethnographic subject: are there resonances in the city 23 years later, apparitions of the protests, of the struggles they waged, of the people who participated? Can the barrier be pierced between present-day San Francisco and that city of 1995 to conjure those two weeks, to summon the emotion, the lived city, to evoke DeCerteau's practices of everyday life that diverged radically from the planners' vision of the uses of the city?

In addition to personal reflection, interviews were conducted with fellow protesters from that time, searching for congruence and divergence in recollection, as well as how the intervening years have coloured a reading of the

experience and these individual readings of the city in the present. As Rebecca Solnit observed, the city is actually an infinite site of multiple and radical alterities, a palimpsest of the cities of residents that overflows the city of the planner and the official cartographer, a testament to the 'inexhaustability of the city' (2010: 1). Solnit, and many others, have invoked Borges' 'On Exactitude in Science' as a critique of the idea of a single comprehensive map, of its impossibility: we can extend that critique to singular conceptions of any city. This may be the planners' view of a city, but this utterly fails to grasp the complexity, richness and embedded contradictions of *lived* cities. The intersections of these many cities tell us something about collective experience and collective struggle to interrupt the conceived space of the planned city (Lefebvre 1991), and to instead live vigorously, exuberantly together producing a lived space that is something different and life-affirming.

This is not a linear process. The history takes flight, shelters in place, travels with the people of which it is a part. These scenes are ghosts; I am a ghost haunting the present from that past. A ghost is complex: it too is more than just a subject, it is a conjuncture, a multidimensional intersection. In his essay 'Haunting the ruins', Tim Edensor argues that hauntings disrupt linear time, erupting and irrupting into chronotopes, destabilizing our present, and with it our memories. Hauntings recall something for us, often something we cannot pinpoint: we do not know what was there before, but *we know something was there, something happened*. They are part of the dream factory; we know from their visit that things can be different, that there are other possibilities, that there still is another way to be in the world. They have the potential to recuperate the habitable city, that place of 'stones and legends that haunt the urban space like so many additional or superfluous inhabitants' that is under the threat of extermination by 'the logic of the technostructure' (Certeau 1984: 141–42).

San Francisco in 1995, like many others in the United States, was a city transitioning from a declining industrial economy to a post-industrial, tech-fueled one. Whole processes of reorganization and exclusion were in motion: a time-traveler – or a ghost – from 1995 would see this transition dramatically further along in 2018. According to US Census data, 10.5% of the population of the City and County of San Francisco was African American in 1990, down from 12.5% in 1980. In 2016, that proportion was 5.36%. The cost of living was high in the city in 1995, but in 2018 it gathers national attention as the most expensive in the country: the HUD threshold for a family of four to be considered low-income in the city was adjusted to \$117,400 (Zraick 2018). Homelessness was a condition endured by at least 7500 people in 2017 (Applied Survey Research 2017). Sweeps of homeless camps by the SFPD and the city's Department of Public Works on the streets of San Francisco are now continuous, the out-of-the-way interstitial spaces of the post-industrial era long since occupied by the city's hypertrophied tech sector and its workers.

UN PLAZA, SAN FRANCISCO, 25 JUNE 1995, AROUND 4P.M.

The plaza is strangely free of Matrix cops. Food Not Bombs activists have brought food to share with street people and anyone else who would like to eat. We look around, waiting for SFPD to spring on us. We've all been arrested several times by them in the past week. I learned about the Hunters Point uprising in 1966 a few days earlier while sitting in a cell with a guy who had been picked up with me in a sweep of aggressive

policing, even though he had nothing to do with Food Not Bombs. He kept yelling at the cops through the bars of our holding cell: 'Hey, O__! We're going to do you like they did in Hunters Point! You remember that, homie?' His girlfriend was crying in the women's cell over the wall, terrified – she, like him, had been swept up for no cause.

(Author's recollection, April 2018)

In the remembered vignette above, the woman who was arrested at the same time as we were was so scared that she had urinated involuntarily in her clothes. And why not? She had been walking through UN Plaza having nothing to do with Food Not Bombs or political protest and was suddenly grabbed by police, cuffed, and put into a police van. She was poor, the man she was with was poor, and they had been in the wrong place at the wrong time: United Nations Plaza in broad daylight. Why had they been arrested with us?

United Nations Plaza was, and is, a common practitioners' space lending itself to public protest, which was hardly the intent of the architects Mario Ciampi and John Carl Warnecke when it was completed in 1975. It rests alongside Market Street, the city's main thoroughfare, and is oriented towards City Hall. What better place to call the city's policies into question? The site was platted in an orderly geometric design, its shape a trace of the now invisible eastern terminus of Fulton Street where it used to intersect Market Street. None of the protesters in 1995 were aware of this history – that ghost was hidden from view. The rowdy cacophony of daily protest, of cat and mouse with the police as they sought to arrest the participants in sharing food, of the spatial practices of the 'users', epitomized the 'anthropological, poietik and mystical spatial experiment' that De Certeau (1984: 126) positioned as foreign to geometric space. The plaza was never designed to be slept in, just as sidewalks and doorways are not. The geometric space was interrupted, 'an edge cut out of the visible' (Certeau 1984: 124) of its orderly design by the users.

THE SHANTYTOWN

A few days earlier, I and others had been part of another re-appropriation of official space. The action took the form of a shantytown, which was constructed to call attention to the inability to obtain stable housing for many residents of San Francisco, and to city policy forbidding the construction of any shelter by people living on the streets, however meagre. This was a time when laws that forbade the erecting of shelter in the form of a cardboard structure – maligned as 'cardboard condos' – were adopted in cities across the country (Davis 1992). Perhaps they provoked an anxiety among residents that the prosperity of what was then still popularly termed the 'First World' was much more transitory, ephemeral, and unevenly distributed than promised. With the world's eyes turned towards San Francisco, this seemed the opportune time to call attention to the crisis of housing in one of the world's richest cities.

I pause to take a photo of the stele that marks the signing of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1995, the text seemed a bitter irony, given that we were protesting the punitive response of the city of Saint Francis to poverty and homelessness. The text on the stele, in part, reads:

'Whereas in recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [...].'
(Author's field notes, April 2018)

World leaders descended upon San Francisco on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter there in that city in 1945 when it was 'the center of men's hopes for lasting peace'. The usual suspects attended: excellencies, honorables, misters presidents and prime ministers, secretaries general (C-SPAN 1995). There may have been a few women among this august group of notables; certainly, Maya Angelou was there, delivering her 'second public poem', 'A Brave and Startling Truth', with US President Bill Clinton and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the audience. The speeches were stirring, reminding those present of the solemn mission of the United Nations to bring the people of the world together in comity and brotherhood, upholding the 'universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion' (Article 55[b], UN Charter). The event promised to put San Francisco on the map again, raising its profile as the crucible of humanity's greatest collective effort to serve peace, not war, and to respect and promote the dignity of all people.

Concomitantly, the city of San Francisco was in the midst of an aggressive campaign to remove and exclude its homeless residents from the centre of the city. Mayor Frank Jordan, a former police chief, implemented the Matrix programme in August of 1993, a policing policy which levied criminal sanction on visibly poor people performing life-sustaining activities in public such as panhandling, urinating and defecating, sitting, and sleeping. At the end of 27 months of enforcement, there were 39,200 citations issued for 'quality of life' crimes in the city (Chao and Hatfield 1996): many of these, left unpaid, had gone to warrant and resulted in jail time for offending peoples' sensibility rather than for the commission of any serious crime. The Matrix sought to make life intolerable for homeless and visibly poor residents and was largely successful on this point. The very poor, of course, had nowhere else to go, nowhere to escape from the punitive state. They were forced to tolerate intolerable conditions of harassment and criminalization, the state's engagement in the simultaneous production and elimination of space in the service of capital and cosmopolitanism.

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The shantytown was my first arrest. They were meant to highlight the irony of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights, the irony of these dehumanizing conditions that people in the city and homeless residents living right there had to deal with, and nobody liked the fact that we were bringing that irony out [...]. So we built these shanties – that was really incredible. The idea was to make an invisible problem as visible as possible. It was a really beautiful idea. We built these boxes that were actually pretty durable. So we got plywood and two-by-fours and started building them while they were trying to do their thing. We only got two of them up, and people were chained inside them, sort of a hard blockade, and then a large crowd, maybe as many as 200, all people willing to risk arrest. And that was the first time I was arrested. I didn't set out to do civil disobedience.

It was more 'No, we built these shanties, and we are going to prevent them from taking them down.' It was more direct action than civil disobedience.

I was in the front row, and when the cops came in, they came in swinging crowbars, actually – they brought them to take the shanties apart. It was sort of an Earth First! strategy of people being in harm's way on the inside [...] which was stupid, because the cops couldn't see inside the building, and they're taking them down on top of people on the inside. So they were just swinging the crowbar around in a crowd in incredibly reckless ways, they were so likely to injure someone. It was a shocking episode of violence, that taught me a lot about confrontations with police, that they are willing to use overwhelming state violence if they needed or wanted to.

But it was such a good idea, to make this problem visible while everyone was there patting themselves on the back for the UN 50: human rights violations were happening right outside the door.

(John, interviewed by author, April 2018)

POPULIST DEMANDS

Activists, networked in a mesh in which the group Food Not Bombs was a prominent node, saw an opportunity when the UN celebration was announced. Organizing commenced: a wide range of actions to disrupt business as usual, and to raise the profile of the city's policies as punitive violations of people's dignity and human rights in the absence of economic, political and racial justice, were planned. Cross fertilization of different movements, from forest and environmental activism to coalitions seeking justice for homeless people and police accountability, brought seasoned activists with strong backgrounds in tactical direct action and jail solidarity in touch with people living on the street or those working in that community. While most of the activists that participated in nearly two weeks of direct action and protest were from the city or the surrounding Bay Area, there were many who came from other parts of the United States and North America. In late June 1995, there were two convergences in San Francisco: the official convergence of powerful political, economic and social capital, and its shadow, a critical counter-convergence that sought to destabilize the narrative of progress that attached to the United Nations and the city of San Francisco.

The air of those two weeks was full, at least for the participants, with demands for change, for justice, for a left politics that rejected the domination and oppression of the most marginalized in that city, their city. Less than six months later, Mayor Frank Jordan was replaced by Willie Brown, and the Matrix programme was terminated. While it is debatable whether the protests themselves were instrumental in the defeat of Jordan's reelection bid, the high profile that protestors and Food Not Bombs activists gave to the persecution of homeless people based upon their perceived housing status certainly cast Jordan in an unfavourable light in a city that is known (deservedly or not) for being politically liberal and was at the time unlikely to endorse an explicit full-throated assault on the city's most marginalized residents. The end of the Matrix programme, of course, did not signal an end to the harassment and punitive orientation of the city and its police force towards the homeless and minority communities, but it did occasion a reconfiguration of political

rhetoric and public discourse towards a nominally less revanchist approach to poverty.

* * * * *

I lived there so long, and I walked those streets so many times. There was a time, a friend came to visit, we just walked around, I was pointing out all of these disparities, you know? Like: 'This is the Castro, but it's fucked up because of [...] that place is cool but it's fucked up because of [...]' On and on. I kept pointing to these places, and I thought, hold on, I really wanted this person to enjoy the city, without having to relive all of this with me there, and it's not really fair. I think of the Fillmore, talking to folks there before they were to destroy some projects, same with Valencia Gardens and the forced evictions that were going on there before they were destroyed, the Geneva Towers. [*These were all HUD HOPE VI projects – Author*] All these places, the faces of these places have changed. There are so many people that come in, and they've sort of taken our places, and they've erased the memories of the city. And the people that move in there, I don't get the sense that they're as curious to know – I feel like we were curious, like we wanted to know our neighbors, the Irish that had been there, the Latinos that were our neighbors, the history of the sanctuary city in the 80s and the Salvadorans coming there at that period of time.

For me there's a huge influence from the Zapatistas, how powerful it remains that they took space, not just for themselves, but for their grandparents and their grandchildren. That's kind of how I met you, some overlap in the politics of Latin American solidarity. I maintain these connections to the changing landscape of the city by including it in my performance, and my critique of what I call the neoliberal stage, the performance space where these ideals are heralded, of freedom and expression, but it's just a facade. It's like when people step over homeless people to go see a movie about homeless people. I guess my expectations are unrealistic. You know, when I walk around the city, Landers Street or whatever, I don't expect the same thing, the discourse, anymore, the values have changed. It has changed my experience of, my relationship to the city – definitely.

(Marshall, interviewed by author April 2018)

The march for Mumia's freedom ended in an alley, between two lines of police in riot gear: 'the kettle'. But solidarity erupted at the point of capture: homes were opened to take in marchers, to spirit them away through back yards to freedom. In the crowd, held on the street for hours through the small hours of the morning, people chanted and danced; the energy did not ebb. We did not lie down and wait quietly for our turn to be cuffed. There was a confrontational energy, a solidarity, an *eros effect* where even though we were surely heading to jail, we were buoyed up by each other, most of us strangers who had become comrades on the street. Many of us learned that night, if we did not already know it, that confronting the state, rather than being disempowering, could be deeply transformational and empowering individually and collectively, even if the end result was confinement. This is probably the brightest ghost, the trace left on the negatives of our imagination, the spirit that informs so much other work that people who were part of the

UN 50 protests do today. It is possible to demand the impossible, to engage in real politics, to chart a course towards a real alternative in spite of state and other forms of oppressive power. This is a process, it is not ever finished: the weak messianism (Benjamin 1996) of other struggles – their ghosts, their blues – expose power and open up for us paths towards an impossible that is suddenly possible.

This is the liberatory populist possibility, the spark perhaps ignited by a single person, or by the collective experience of caring for each other in the face of oppression that bonds people together, creates ‘a people’ and exceeds the narrow limits of what has hitherto been possible. This coming together in the crucible of protest and collective action has been dubbed the eros effect by George Katsiaficas (1989). Politics becomes corporeal, literally, in the case of protest and direct action. Bodies are the surface of politics; politics is somatic as much as intellectual or emotional. Perhaps the distinction should be troubled. The bodily experience of oppressive power is the real impetus for much social change, for claims of racial and gender justice or for workplace agitation.

RECALL – A HAUNTING, 2018

The process of recall is an interesting one, particularly when it is assisted by revisiting a site and thinking through an event retrospectively. I realized that there were so many events, memories, emotions, people imbricated within my recollection of that single event that it leaves the whole event murky, even as specific memories dot the landscape of my mind. I remember the grey sky, the cold San Francisco summer; but this was not specific to a single event. The location was deeply familiar, but very strange at the same time. In addition, an interview I conducted a few days prior with an interlocutor further colored the specificity of my memory: how much of the recollection



Figure 1: UN Plaza, April 2018 (Author's Photo).

was borrowed, stitched together from several threads, memories which were partially not my own?

UN Plaza on Sunday is now host to a farmers' market, which radically changes the tenor of the place. In 1995, it was largely empty; in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it had become the almost sole preserve of the street community that lived in SOMA, in the SROs and pavements of Sixth Street, of the residents – housed and unhoused – of the Tenderloin, but by 1993 then-Mayor Frank Jordan's Matrix program had assembled a police presence that was designed to purge mid-Market and the Civic Center area (of which UN Plaza is a major part) of the visibly poor.

* * * * *

I bike the route, more or less, of the 'torchlight march' to demand Mumia Abu Jamal's freedom that same week in 1995. It started at UN Plaza or thereabouts, and proceeded to the Mission, un-acosted by the police. I slow down in the Mission, pausing at the Mission Police Station at 17th and Valencia long enough to notice that the entire building is surrounded by police barricade fencing. I recall someone throwing something – a news box? – at the window at the entrance to the station, a dumpster or two set on fire at that intersection. We turned up 17th Street and headed toward the Castro, then came down Market Street. The vacant lot at 16th and Market we marched by that used to have a mural and various street art installations dedicated to the HIV/AIDS crisis has been replaced by a modern condominium building, doubtless commanding very high prices. At Church and Market, I pause: it was here that someone had suggested that we head to the Western Addition, the site of another police killing two weeks earlier. SFPD had at this point decided that the march could not go on: they were massing across the street. On this Sunday in March of 2018, the scene was anodyne. There were no marchers, just people wandering out of late brunches from nearby restaurants or waiting for Muni. I turned down 14th Street, which is where the police finally established a line and blocked the march from continuing down Market Street. They had formed another line a block away, and the people at the head of the march turned south on Landers Street, a short mid-block street that spans 14th to 16th Streets. We walked – or ran – into a trap, as the police had formed a third line at the south end of the block at 15th Street.

(Author's recollections, upon a re-haunting, April 2018)

As it happened, there was not much healing or tenderness on the part of the city on the streets that night; there was no shortage, however, of hands striking with abandon. This needed to be said and to be witnessed. The protest and direct action was a political act. It was dissensus, an unsettling of the sterile exercise of 'politics', of confronting Rancière's police that patrol the boundary of political action, of what is politically possible (Rancière 2015). The activists were, in a simple, emotional way, articulating a politics of dissatisfaction, of a call for economic and social justice. This was not a far cry from other left movements in the United States that started small and gained traction, such as the Populist and Civil Rights movements of the twentieth century. Laclau writes that populist politics of any stripe has 'the presence of an anti-institutional

dimension, of a certain challenge to “[...] business as usual”, and goes on to say that there is ‘something appealing about any figure who challenges [the institutional system], whatever the reasons for and forms of the challenge’ (Laclau 2005: 123).

There is in any society a reservoir of raw anti-status-quo feelings which crystallize in some symbols quite independently of the forms of their political articulation, and it is their presence we intuitively perceive when we call a discourse or a mobilization ‘populistic’.

(Laclau 2005: 123)

But this reservoir has to be activated somehow. The symbolic is the field upon which this plays out, and symbols require context. It was too much to ask that people who were lined up to watch a black car drive by, hoping to catch a glimpse of a president who would never know their name, would find themselves outraged and activated by the assault of police on a vigorous but nonviolent protest directly in front of hundreds of onlookers, themselves included.

* * * * *

I had visited the street with the purpose of remembering that long night, where I was held on the street for four hours while they arrested 247 people, commandeering a Muni bus to transport some of them to 850 Bryant. I was mid-block, and there was a lot of chanting and yelling and dancing. One of the people I interviewed for this project recalled people crawling under cars to escape (I had forgotten that detail); another was outside the police line, watching and yelling. It was loud, angry, and powerful for much of the night, a real sense of solidarity was in the atmosphere. But on a Sunday afternoon, 23 years later, there was nothing happening. Almost nothing moved.

I scoured the facades for some association with that past: a feminist power symbol hung in one window, the rest seemed unremarkable to an interloper such as myself. I sat down on a step, half waiting to be shooed away by a resident, but no one came. I dreamed back to that night, remembering the names of some of the people I knew, a few faces that were more impressions than images, the image of a man named Chris (he was a Food Not Bombs activist) who walked right up to the line of police in riot gear and asked them to hit him or let us go. They shoved him to the ground, cuffed him, and hauled him away. I looked under a few cars, thinking about the people who had hidden underneath them for hours, waiting for the police to finish with the rest of us. I looked at the doors of the houses, wondering which ones had been the apartments that allowed people to escape the police cordon. Then I noticed the palm trees, which have always felt to me incongruous in San Francisco, like an attempt to graft southern California onto something altogether different, conspicuous on the gray city streets of San Francisco. Were they there in 1995? There was a line of four, tall and trim, sentinels along the west side of the street. Did those trees witness that night? Would they testify to a past that demanded more of the city than it was prepared to deliver? I heaved a sigh, got up, and pedaled away.

(Author’s recollections, on a re-haunting, April 2018)



Figure 2: The former Epicenter building at 475 Valencia Street, San Francisco – now a yoga studio (Author's photo, April 2018).

John: Our history was erased, more than replicated. But there may be other forces at play there, because we were incredibly – unintentionally – a very powerful force in the city. And not necessarily in good ways. We were a flagship for gentrification, there's no doubt about that. We made the Mission cool, and it became trendy because of that. It was those little projects we built, the Epicenter or whatever, and then you get cafes and a whole culture of things, and that brought all of the other people. I think we exerted a tremendous influence in that way, and had a long-lasting effect as a driving force in gentrification. We were aware of the process, but it seemed like a freight train. And by '98, the gentrification cycle was so intensely rapid in the Mission, certainly not just because of us, but that might be why there isn't a more visible ghost of that crowd or that time. It was more of a wrecking ball, we just got run over or steamrolled. There's a whole new image there now. We had a sense, but we had no idea of the force – of the train wreck – of economic forces that would come to bear on housing costs in the Mission.

(Interview by Author, April 2018)

* * * *

CONCLUSION: HAUNTING A 'GONE CITY?'

I have been hunting for ghosts, hoping to catch a glimpse, hoping to recapture something of those three scenes beyond my own fading recollection. But, as Edensor reminds us, ghosts can't be captured. They are fleeting, peripheral, unclear. The ghosts are suspended somewhere between myself and my interlocutors, bridging the linear time from that summer to the present. The spectre of that space-time inhabit our world: Mumia Abu Jamal is no longer on

death row (he was transferred to general population in 2012 with a sentence of life without possibility of parole); the Matrix programme was disbanded six months after the protests; Frank Jordan lost his bid for reelection, which was in many ways a referendum on his handling of the issue of homelessness; the attention paid to the police murder of Aaron Williams was part of a long lineage of vigorous protest against police killings of black men that played a role in the formation of a national movement of dissensus, Black Lives Matter. But they haunt the city in other ways, in the spectacular displacement of lower income people and minorities from San Francisco, in the shrinking activist community there, in the ongoing criminalization of visible poverty and street people.

What had been a zone of relegation in the 1980s became a zone of prosecution and criminalization in the Matrix era, and has now become a collapsing last stand for the city's poor, hemmed in by expensive condominiums and corroded from the inside by city policies such as the Mid-Market tax break of Mayor Lee's administration. The criminalization has continued unabated (40,000 in two and half years of the Matrix programme, 20,796 'quality of life' citations from January to September 2015 [City and County of San Francisco Budget and Legislative Analyst 2015]), housing continues to be a huge challenge for the poor. The transhistorical spectral city, it seems, manifests itself today in the continuation of a precarious existence for the city's most marginal residents that things have gotten no better for them with the passage of time.

As I walked the city, as I stood on those same streets so different many years later, looking for traces, employing autoethnographic method, I realized that I was the subject of the research. Apparitions from the past did not reveal themselves to me: I was haunting these scenes. I haunted, lingering on corners, walking by people engaged in the everyday practice of producing and remembering their infinite cities, like Italo Calvino's narrator in *Invisible Cities*, unnoticed, transient and fleeting, a resident of a city – that city I set out to look for – which was no longer there, but which haunted those other cities.

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Is forensic architecture the new muralism of the Mexican state? A reflection on racialized violence and the construction of Mexican identity

ABSTRACT

*In Mexico, the art of historical representation from the last 100 years has influenced and been influenced by the way we understand ourselves as Mexicans. The racial divisions of our society and the racialized state violence have been part of this process of representation. To me, the arts as a medium and mediator for the state's incessant project of racializing indigenous peoples have intentionally overshadowed racial differences as part of the state's political discourse. This article shows this relationship by taking as examples two case studies: Forensic Architecture's exhibition at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City, which portrays the brutal disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in 2014, and Diego Rivera's mural *The History of Mexico*, commissioned in 1929 by the federal government, located today in the National Palace of Mexico City. Legacies of colonial past, such as racial segregation and oppression, and the influence of international ideas of modernization, liberalism and economic progress in Post-Revolutionary Mexico can be located in the material forms of representation*

KEYWORDS

Mexican identity
mestizaje
racialized violence
Mexican muralism
Ayotzinapa
forensic architecture
representational art

1. The official name of the school is Raúl Isidro Burgos. It was founded in 1926 in the rural town of Tixtla in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. Tixtla is located around 300 km south of Mexico City. It is also the birthplace of the only African descent Mexican president (1 April 1829–17 December 1829) and revolutionary leader of the Independence war: Vicente Guerrero. The state of Guerrero is one of the three Mexican states with a strong Afro-Mexican presence in rural communities.

of these two narratives. By re-problematizing the virtual spaces they represent, and the physical spaces they occupy or come from, my research points out a new layer of hidden racialized violence in the processes of construction of new and old historical narratives.

This is the history of your people, the history of the Mexican people [...]

¡Blood and fire!

Genius of Spain and genius of Cuauhtemotzin.

One marriage that, as cruel as it is, it expresses the fatality that every new life requires in order to build up the roots of a fatherland.

(From the film *Río Escondido* [*Hidden River*] as the narrator gives voice to Diego Rivera's mural *The History of Mexico*)

INTRODUCTION: SOMETHING HIDDEN IN THE ARCHITECTURE

In late September of 2014, 43 students from the rural school for teachers of Ayotzinapa,¹ Guerrero, were *disappeared* in a horrific act of racialized state violence. After two years of the ongoing disappearance of the students' bodies and massive public outcry, an alliance between Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Centro Prodh) and the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF) was formed to commission Forensic Architecture to map out the events that unfolded on the night of 26 and 27 September 2014 in Iguala, Guerrero. The result of this alliance was an online platform and exhibition of Forensic Architecture's work at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City from September to December 2017 titled *Forensic Architecture: Towards an Investigative Aesthetics*.

It was early December of 2017 when I first walked into the wide lobby of the exhibition. I had been aware of the case of the disappeared students of Ayotzinapa for three years. I had seen the news, the masses of people marching and the portraits of the students carried by their parents in rallies throughout the country. I wanted to understand how state agencies had been so colluded in the attacks, and how and why a public institution (MUAC) was so openly displaying the evidence of it. I could not understand how the Mexican state was acting as the promoter and spectator of its own exhibition of violence. The exhibition was not only evidencing the state violence but also the state *silence*, which made the exhibition tremendously cynical and incredibly violent. But as I started watching the exhibition's video projection into an almost empty museum room, I felt another kind of violence in my body, one that I had not felt before. I was shocked by the images displayed in front of me. I shuddered.

A few months after my visit to the museum, I began to wonder what had been the role of Forensic Architecture's *investigative aesthetics* in relation to the exhibition's production of violence? Or at least in relation to the way I felt it. While I was watching for a second time the same video, out of the context of the museum, I did the exercise to write some of my second impressions, thoughts and anxieties. I came to realize that the means used by Forensic Architecture as a method of historical representation were not showing an impartial *truth* of the events, that there was something hidden and even disturbing about the use of the images. I wondered how this form of aesthetics could be related to other forms of aestheticized representation of violence in the history of Mexico, such as the Mexican mural movement.

Forensic Architecture's project emerges as a response to systematic state violence around the world. Their idea is that by providing individuals with the necessary tools to critically question *the truths* articulated by the state, there is a possibility that states will change the ways they police individuals (Weizman 2014: 11). Forensics would then turn 'into a counter-hegemonic practice able to invert the relation between individuals and states, to challenge and resist state and corporate violence and the tyranny of their truth' (Weizman 2014: 11). From this perspective the gaze could be reversed to the state through the presentation of a counter-narrative of the *truth* in a new kind of forum, where the evidence could be made visible.

As architect Eyal Weizman, founder of Forensic Architecture, explains, the very use of the word Forensics comes from the Latin *Forensis*, which means 'pertaining to the forum' as in the *Roman forum*: a multidimensional space of politics, law and economy. But, as he suggests, what used to be the *forum* has now been reduced to the court of law, and the term forensics to the use of medicine and science within this *new forum* (the court), which means that a 'critical dimension of the practice of forensics has been lost in the process of its modernization – namely its potential as a political practice' (Weizman 2014: 9). He argues that there is a political potentiality in the aesthetic dimension of the practice of forensics. But contrary to other forms of aesthetics such as art, photography or film, Forensic Architecture's investigative aesthetics seeks to shift away from the emotional power that is often used as a tool in these other forms of aesthetic practices. Yet, based on my own affected state experiencing the Ayotzinapa case, I would argue that rather than divorcing the *truth* from emotional power, it presumes a more dangerous pretense as the aesthetic medium of the state.

In his book *La Nación Desdibujada: México en Trece Ensayos*, Mexican writer Claudio Lomnitz (2016: 646–47) suggests that today in Mexico there is a profound disconnection between social change and the means for its symbolic and political representation. This crisis of representation is the consequence of the deep fracture of interests – between the state and the marginalized indigenous communities of Mexico – that derived from the partisan policies of a globalizing regime (Lomnitz 2016: 66–67).

I suggest that, by questioning the efficiency and the moderation of nationalist cultural practices of the past, such as muralism, we might be able to understand how racism has played an important role in the process of creating a 'nation', which will open a window to the origins of this crisis of representation.

Why are 'images of "whiteness" in Mexico associated with wealth and privilege (as well as success and happiness), while the "indigenous" aspects are linked to poverty and marginalization (and also to criminality and vice)?' (Navarrete 2016: 28). Second, why does it manifest as racialized practices of state violence or what historian Navarrete (2016: 23) calls 'the necro politics of inequality', implying the ways in which the state can decide which types of bodies have the right to live or die, and how this 'right to live' is intrinsically related to the class, gender, race, ethnicity and/or place of origin (Navarrete 2016: 35). In the case of Mexico, racial and ethnic differences are deeply interconnected with Mexico's geography.²

2. 'The majority of the indigenous population is concentrated in the southern and south-central region of Mexico. Almost 80 per cent of those who speak an indigenous language live in eight of Mexico's 31 states', which include the state of Guerrero. See: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/indigenous-peoples-4/>.

NATIONALISM, MESTIZAJE AND MYTHS

So, how would Forensic Architecture relate to Mexican muralism? To me, the answer has to do with the nature of the arts as a medium and mediator for the state's incessant project of creating a national identity that racializes

3. Other well-documented examples of the cultural initiatives that helped shape the paradigm of *mestizaje* include Mexican films from the so-called Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. One specific example is the 1929 film *Río Escondido* (*Hidden River*). The name of the film supposedly alludes to the name of a rural town in the north of Mexico; however, it is also an allegory of the poor, marginalized, uneducated, rural and indigenous community that lives there. In the film, the invisibilized community sees the light of 'progress' after a *mestizo* female school teacher (represented by light-skinned actress María Félix) arrives in town to 'educate' their children.

indigenous peoples while overshadowing racial differences as part of the political discourse.

By the end of Mexican Revolutionary War in 1920, the new Mexican state was facing the issue of how to rebuild the nation. National unity was seen as a crucial goal that needed to be attended through the identity of the nation. Thus, Mexican nationalism, rather than becoming the formulation of one abstract ideology, was formulated by Mexican government in terms of a cultural construct with the intention to provide an idiom of identity (Lomnitz 2001: 11).

After Mexican Independence (1810), according to Claudio Lomnitz, the *indigenista* ideology that 'attempted to maintain and strengthen indigenous communities within a pluri-racial national order threatened to divide the nation'. Despite the revolutionary desire to incorporate Indians while respecting their own values and traditions, the modernization of post-Revolutionary Mexico was intrinsically related to its economic 'progress', and liberalism was against maintaining a 'multiracial' nation (Lomnitz 2001: 49–50).

Soon after the end of the Mexican Revolutionary War, the state's ideological homogenization of the population seemed to be the easiest way to exert control over the social, cultural and economic order. Thus, racial and ethnic differences needed to be made invisible (at least in political discourse) as part of the process of construction of the nation. The Indian became the object of representation in the arts, seen as the essence of the new Mexican identity that depended on its own transformation to survive in a new progressive world. Thus, *indigenismo* was, for the most part, an exoticizing discourse that depended ultimately on the *disappearance* of indigenous groups as separate ethnic identities by assimilation to the *mestizo* identity.

From a racial and cultural perspective, to be a Mexican, one could only choose to be a *mestizo*. The *mestizo* race became a social and cultural construct to embody 'the supposedly harmonious blending of indigenous and European' (Hill 2009: 14). The race acknowledged the essence of pre-Columbian civilizations, but framed it as part of the symbolic past, while it advocated for the unification through modernization, homogenization and assimilation to the 'Hispanicized Mexico'. 'In order to inculcate this new identity in its citizens and rally support for its projects, the Mexican state fomented a nationalist ethos in the arts, whose most visible representatives were the muralistas and the national cinema' (Hill 2009: 5).

Therefore, early twentieth-century Mexican muralism helped consolidate the nation's project based on the pictorial representation of Mexican history and identity since it was the state itself who acted as the promoter of such cultural practices. These practices materialized particularly in Mexico City. According to Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, 'between 1880 and 1910, Mexico City acquired such political, economic, and cultural centrality [...] that it acted as an autonomous pole of economic attraction for speculation, opportunities, and investment', which explains many of the political, architectural and urban planning decisions of the city's post-Revolutionary years (2012: xviii). A clear example of this,³ as we will see further on, is Diego Rivera's mural *The History of Mexico*, commissioned in 1929 by the federal government, and located at the National Palace, situated at the centre of Mexico City.

Making a connection between the historical legacy of muralism as part of the Mexican state-crafting and the display of Forensic Architecture's *truth-seeking* investigation not only exposes evidence of the state's incessant

practices of racialized violence, and Forensic Architecture's perpetuation of the mythical construction of *mestizaje*, overshadowing racial realities/differences by replacing them with standardized bodies, as I will demonstrate further on. By taking place at MUAC in Mexico City, Forensic Architecture's exhibition also continues to reproduce the old state's practices of cultural centralization to urban elites.

FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE AND THE AYOTZINAPA CASE

Forensic Architecture understands forensic sciences as an aesthetic practice in the sense that it is through aesthetics that people and objects are able to perceive and represent. By using architecture, its materiality and its sensibilities as the means, Forensic Architecture suggests that 'buildings work as sensors that record the impacts and the forces that surround them' (Bois et al. 2017: 33). Their methodology approaches both matter and space as political tools with political agency to question the mediums with which reality can be perceived and the ways in which it is presented to the public. Architecture thus becomes a field of knowledge and 'a mode of interpretation, one concerned not only with buildings but rather with an ever-changing set of relations between people and things, mediated by spaces and structures across multiple scales' (Weizman 2014: 13).

Their practice as forensic architects 'includes both the production of evidence and the querying of the practices of evidence making' (Weizman 2014: 12), that is, a pragmatically constructed *truth* that must face all the problems of its representation. Weizman calls it 'the art of producing evidence' (Bois et al. 2017: 31). But to produce evidence is to defend a claim. Thus, the necessity of taking sides in the arguments presented is a fundamental part of the *Forensis* practice. It is an activist fight. Therefore, the success on the production of the *truth* ends up depending not only on its aesthetics and representation but also on its presentation to the audience.

From this perspective, Ferran Barenblit and Cuauhtémoc Medina (2017: 16–23) suggest in the first chapter of the book published after the exhibition at MUAC that the empowerment provoked by *the reversion of the gaze* in the frame of the museum could become the access to a new collaborative epistemology, and the *forensic truth* the new 'art of memory' –or knowledge – that could offer at the same time a redistribution of political powers, and a strategy for the struggle of the oppressed (Barenblit and Medina 2017: 22).

The night of 26 and 27 September 2014, in the city of Iguala, six people were murdered, 40 wounded and 43 disappeared. The team of Forensic Architecture based their research for the reconstruction of these events on the two reports prepared by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), an extensive compilation of oral histories published in the book *Una Historia Oral de la Infamia: Los Ataques a los Normalistas de Ayotzinapa* (Gibler 2016), and other eyewitness testimonies, phone logs, media stories, photographs and videos. To locate in space and time all the information gathered, Forensic Architecture's work included a digital reconstruction of the entire city of Iguala (a city 200 km south of Mexico City), where the students were seen for the last time in the back of police patrol vehicles. They had been forced to get off the four buses where they were travelling (in separate directions) while trying to get to Mexico City.

Part of the material outcome of this investigation resulted in an online platform where interactive 3D models can be activated through the user

experience, and short videos can be watched. The platform and videos can be accessed through Forensic Architecture's website. In their own words, The Ayotzinapa Case, A Cartography of Violence is:

An active platform which maps the incidents and the relations between them [...] [which describes] the location and the movements of the busses, incidents of attacks, two-way communications between different actors, [and] instances of the mishandling of evidence. [So, the user can] view how the attacks developed with the adjustable timeline, use the play button to animate these events and explore the relationship between violence, coordination and movement, explore different incidents via tagging and filtering system, switch tags on and off to investigate different aspects of the case. [The] interactive 3d models [help] understand the main attacks against the students at the level of the crime scene. [The] short videos unpack particular aspects of the case that were investigated using the platform. These videos are also useful guides to how to use the platform. Overall the project reveals a cartography of violence which expands from the scale of the street corner to cover the entire state of Guerrero.

(Forensic Architecture 2017)

The exhibition of this material at MUAC also included a large mural, physical access to the sources that informed the investigation, a few computers where the visitors could explore the online platform and the projection of an 18-minute-long video that reproduced the sequence of events as shown on the website. This video clearly demonstrated, according to the narrator, 'a high level of coordination and collusion between different government security branches and organized crime, [as well as the] attempts to destroy evidence and the planting of false narratives' (Forensic Architecture 2017).

While the crafting of the video reformulates in space and time the already documented facts to create an alternative truth from the state's narrative, it also perpetuates the much older state's idea of equally racialized identities. In terms of the aesthetics used in Forensic Architecture's investigation of the Ayotzinapa case, it is important to emphasize that, in both the video and the interactive 3D model, the representation of all human bodies suggests that all the people implicated in the events (including the students, police agents and all other civilians) were male, around 6 feet tall, body-abled and strengthened. Their 'clothes' suggest they would all be wearing pants and t-shirts. Therefore, the video implies that all human bodies were physically almost identical.

Coming from an architectural background from Mexico and understanding that Forensic Architecture uses standardized architectural representation techniques and resources to create historical narratives, I understood, or so I assumed, that the bodies used to represent both the victims and their oppressors were probably generic software icons/avatars. These kinds of tools can be found most of the times in 3D modelling software's libraries. Architects commonly use these default human scales to animate their renderings. However, the more I thought about my assumption, the more I became perturbed about the fact that Forensic Architecture would use these standardized architectural tools, defined mostly by the global (elite) architectural market, in an unproblematic manner, which made me think: is it actually possible to generically represent a human body? In what circumstances would it be suitable? And what would be the

basic necessary information to represent a human figure without falling into a misrepresentation? Finally, how did the team of Forensic Architecture think their audience would incorporate to the narrative the representational elements that they decided to use? Or who did they think their audience would be?⁴

During the press conference of Forensic Architecture's exhibition in Mexico City, in September 2017, MUAC's chief curator Cuauhtemoc Medina called for the reflection on the current state of the art of historical representation, which, in the past, according to him, was particularly influenced by the Mexican muralist tradition. Cuauhtemoc Medina's suggestion to understand Forensic Architecture's work as 'an art of historical representation' calls into question how Forensic Architecture's aesthetics are being used as a political tool. How is it different from or similar to the ways in which the Mexican government advocated for aestheticized representations of Mexicanness in the post-Revolutionary Mexico as a measure for state control? To me, the answer to this question has to do with the role that racial constructions played in crafting the identity of the Mexican through muralism.

4. In a 2015 report, the MUAC estimated that the audience of the museum was 'composed mostly of young people between the ages of 18 and 29, primarily women (59%) and students (70%)' http://muac.unam.mx/assets/docs/Folio_NEGRO-MUAC_000-100dpi-dobles.pdf.

MURALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEXICAN IDENTITY

To illustrate my argument, I will take as an example Diego Rivera's mural *The History of Mexico*, which was commissioned in 1929 by the federal government as part of 'an educational and cultural program, a strategy of propaganda' (Folgarait 1991: 18). The mural contains scenes that go from the Aztecs to the Revolutionary War, portraying a variety of characters and situations that are composed in such a complex way that any effort to describe them in a few lines would be insufficient. However, Rivera's intentions unveil a deep sense that 'Mexican history comes to the mural pre-narratized, already textualized as a purely discursive logic to which the images become attached, which they illustrate' (Folgarait 1991: 25). From this perspective, the narrative of the mural is a sort of intangible *truth*.

In these elaborate visual depictions, following the idea of *mestizaje* – what Jose Vasconcelos called the 'cosmic race' – the blood of the Spanish Conquistadors and the blood of the last Aztec emperor seem to blend into a new race of Mexicans, exemplifying Lomintz' argument that 'nations are at once aspects of an international order and the product of local processes of state formation' (Lomnitz 2001: xv).

Leonard Folgarait's description of a small section of Rivera's mural shows evidence of this particularity in relation to the social order of the early twentieth century:

A worker in overalls agitates a crowd, and Mexico City burns in class warfare in the distance. [...] Karl Marx holds a page from The Communist Manifesto, containing: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle [...]'. He addresses directly a trio of worker, soldier, and peasant and points to the left at a perfectly ordered society of the future, with rational cities and thriving agriculture, all in front of a rising sun.

(1991: 23)

This 'perfectly ordered society of the future' located at one of the extremes of the mural is composed of perfectly disciplined individuals representing an apparently 'white' male majority. From my perspective, the mural also addresses

the issue of social and class struggle as a way to obscure the racial structure behind the social segregation. Since colonial times, racist practices divided the country and were able to persist after Independence and Revolution mostly due to the prioritization of pro-capitalist development instead of social reform policies. This explains why, to legitimize these policies, state propaganda was necessary. Indians were supposed to believe that, with some help of the paternal government, they would be able to rise from their condition of extreme poverty and marginalization, and actively participate in national economy. From this perspective, the Indian could not play a role in society as long as the Indian was not part of the apparatus; thus the Indian had to be transformed into a *mestizo* (at least ideologically) to be a part of the system, and many of the times, this process was motivated by the Indian migration to the city, due to the abundance of rural poverty.

From the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors to the Americas, the extraction of value was a constant motivation for the colonization of the lands on the basis of racial segregation and oppression. In a similar way, Frank Wilderson (2003: 229) argues that 'capital was kick-started by the rape of the African continent [and that] this phenomenon is central to neither Gramsci nor Marx'. Both Mexican government's policies and Diego Rivera's pictorial representations assumed that social segregation was structured by capital while ignoring the means by which those capital inequalities were organized by a process of racialized segregation that was buttressed by the state as functionary and mediator of knowledge, where the art of historical representation helped perpetuate and normalize this condition. As Angela Davis (2016: 17–18) suggests, '[r]acism is so dangerous because it does not necessarily depend on individual actors, but rather is deeply embedded in the apparatus [...]'. The danger of racism is the possibility of violence. In the case of Mexico, the intersection of both is embedded in the way dominant narratives, historically centralized, have represented and reproduced a manufactured Mexican identity for the last 100 years.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: IS FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE THE NEW MURALISM OF THE MEXICAN STATE?

Going back to the initial question that motivated this article, I would argue that, in some ways Forensic Architecture could be seen as a new form of muralism. But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Forensic Architecture is a consequence of muralism. As I have explained, the muralist movement represented an idealized identity of the Mexican, portrayed as a supposedly harmonious blending of indigenous and European that praised the essence of pre-Columbian civilizations, while it advocated for modernization and assimilation to the 'Hispanicized Mexico'. This helped perpetuate the paradigm of the *mestizo* race, while it obscured the racial differences of the population and attributed social segregation to class discourse. Structural racialized violence can be traced to the muralist movement of the past in the way muralism advocated for the invisibilization of the Indian subject and replaced it for the *mestizo* subject. But structural racialized violence is also implied in Forensic Architecture's representation of the Ayotzinapa case by obscuring the role of race in the mass disappearance of indigenous students.

In this way, Forensic Architecture is a continuation of the muralist movement, but also a reaction to the state's intentions behind muralist propaganda, which positions the practice in a contradictory space. Even though

the Mexican state seemed to promote muralism as a means for symbolic and political representation, the disconnection between actual social change and political discourse was structurally rooted in the racial marginalization that preceded Mexican Independence from Spain.

Forensic Architecture acts as a reaction to the muralist movement as it exposes the fracture of the cultural hegemony that muralism was supposed to promote, a fracture through which Forensic Architecture was able to leak and reverse the gaze to the oppressive regime from the eyes of an international audience. However, as long as structural racism remains embedded in the pictorial representations of the social, and their exhibition's audience or *forum* remains centralized and limited to an urban elite, Forensic Architecture is prone to act as a continuation of muralism since race is completely ignored in the exposure of systematized state violence and its exposure is limited.

From this perspective, the connection between social change and political discourse in the case of Forensic Architecture's platform of Ayotzinapa remains ambiguous and contradictory to me. It confirms that the current Mexican crisis of representation continues to inform and be informed today by the international (somehow colonizing) gaze. Despite Forensic Architecture's efforts to insert its narrative of *truth* into the national historical narrative, its work remains unescapable from an international condition or what Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis (2002: 301) would refer to as 'life under savage capitalism'. From Monsiváis' perspective, nationalism – therefore muralism – has been used by the Mexican state as a method to internalize this international condition 'without even more serious injuries in the psychic, the moral, the social, or the cultural' (Monsiváis 2002: 301) and Mexican identity has thus ironically become both the place of resistance to the disenchantment of Mexican government and the promoter of the state's narrative of progress, a historical narrative accentuated by the state's intentions to use art as a means for political discourse after Mexican Revolution.

Today, Forensic Architecture's work could be seen as a repetition of muralist dualism (the national vs the international), but, from a less pessimistic perspective, it could also be seen as an external provocation to think of new alternatives to representational modes of nationalism that need to be assessed more critically from an internal point of view to not 'disintegrate into defenselessness' (Monsiváis 2002: 300).

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All that is solid? Movement, repurposed lives and a cardboard citizenry

ABSTRACT

This article situates cardboard as a material lens through which to trace, and make visible, the flows of capital within a Trans-Pacific circuitry of trade, and to point to the political potentials enabled by the reuse and re-imagining of cardboard by groups of people who have been made invisible within the prevailing regime of labour. I argue that tracing the circulation of cardboard through the Bay Area – with a stop in Hong Kong – can become a laboratory for thinking through how the re-visibility of capital and material flows can change the way that we think about the political and how the political is constructed or remade. To take this argument further, I posit that we may use this knowledge and project it into the production of a new symbolic and political space, in which cardboard acts as a potentially unifying material of protest for a new global corpus – a cardboard citizenry. Can a ‘cardboard citizenry’ act as a stateless, dynamic body of protest that oozes out from the circuitry of Trans-Pacific trade to create a new global citizenry, one that is able to make any space inhabitable and subsequently privileges creativity over market efficiency, the informal over the formal, the ephemeral over the permanent?

KEYWORDS

public space
cardboard
new materialism
San Francisco Bay Area
Hong Kong
creative reuse
flexible citizenship

Amazon boxes were left littering my porch in the East Bay of California, wet in the rain and mouldy. These packaging remains that once firmly held a rolled-up futon, an air mattress and bedding now laid limp, waiting to be tied by string and set out on the curb. Whether books or a bed, cardboard protected what made up my home space, transported the things that I call home and seemed to live many lives of otherwise ordinary activity.

This idea of a home space in relation to cardboard again struck me one Sunday afternoon, when I was walking through the ground floor of the HSBC headquarters of Hong Kong. There, on a balmy day in January, Filipina and Indonesian women gathered in space. I am tempted to call them settlements – where Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers assembled in one of many informal gathering sites – that bloom and are then disassembled over the course of one day, the Sunday that these women can claim as their sole day off from what would otherwise be a 24/7 workweek in the home of their local or expatriate employers. When I first encountered one of these gatherings, or assemblies, I found myself struck by an affective response that I later attributed to the sight of *cardboard* being used to demarcate a new informal space directly on top of an existing codified space.

Initially, I wondered whether the women were homeless since I am accustomed to the image of the homeless in the Bay Area sitting or sleeping on flattened cardboard. Closer observation negated this possibility and conjured a competing set of assumptions as the women appeared relatively comfortable and self-sustaining. Many of them carried small shopping bags with them and no one was asking for money. In both cases, however, the cardboard being used as insulation or shelter appeared to be of unknown provenance, occasionally bearing logos that suggested that they migrated from a residence or commercial business. An interrogation of my troubled (and troubling) border-crossing affective response suggested to me that the ubiquitous, utilitarian,



Figure 1: Migrant domestic workers gathered in Central Hong Kong, January 2018 (Author's photo).

seemingly endlessly re-purpose-able material of cardboard possesses not only a particular symbolic force that is linked to class inequality and consumption, but that it may also contain the ability to cross spatial delineations and produce a new kind of public space, possibly upending and redirecting capital-driven power flows themselves. This inquiry led me to the following research question: how does cardboard circulate between public and private spaces, both physically and ontologically, and what is produced in the *moment* when it crosses from one semiotic space into another?

This article situates cardboard as a material lens through which to trace, and make visible, the flows of capital within a Trans-Pacific circuitry of trade, and to point to the political potentials enabled by the reuse and re-imagining of cardboard by groups of people who have been made invisible within the prevailing regime of labour. I argue that tracing the circulation of cardboard through the Bay Area – with a stop in Hong Kong – can become a laboratory for thinking through how the re-visibility of capital and material flows can change the way that we think about the political and how the political is constructed or remade. To take this argument further, I posit that we may use this knowledge and project it into the production of a new symbolic and political space, in which cardboard acts as a potentially unifying material of protest for a new global corpus – a *cardboard citizenry*. Can a ‘cardboard citizenry’ act as a stateless, dynamic body of protest that oozes out from the circuitry of Trans-Pacific trade to create a new global citizenry, one that is able to make any space inhabitable and subsequently privileges creativity over market efficiency, the informal over the formal, the ephemeral over the permanent?

First, I will begin by grounding my analysis within the political ecology of the material of cardboard, calling upon Jane Bennett’s thinking around vital materiality and political ecologies to consider the possibility that a nonhuman *material* might open a field of political action. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett’s endorsement of John Dewey’s articulation of ‘politics as a political *ecology*’ and notion of ‘publics as human-nonhuman collectives that are provoked into existence by a shared experience of harm’ provide a crucial foundation from which my analysis will launch (2010: xix). Drawing upon this notion of a *demos* marked by plurality and contingency, Bennett loops in Jacques Rancière by underscoring how the coherence of a public can be interrupted by the ‘demos’ and that ‘the political act consists in the exclamatory interjection of affective bodies as they enter a preexisting public, or, rather, as they reveal that they have been there all along as an unaccounted-for-part’ (Bennett 2010: 105). Her argument that trash may transgress Rancière’s ‘partition of the sensible’ (Rancière cited in Bennett 2010: 105), repartitioning it into powerful new configurations and spaces for understanding one’s perceptible environment and sociopolitical tableau, provides a frame for this article to consider how cardboard may enter into composition with other bodies, spaces and demands.

Following from the idea that meaning may be produced through material and that materials can circulate within both representational and non-representational modes, I will suggest that cardboard possesses the ability to embody what urban theorist Doreen Massey calls time-space compression within Trans-Pacific articulations of capital. Specifically, I will trace the implication of cardboard within a Trans-Pacific circuitry of trade through the Port of Oakland, the Berkeley Recycling Center, the Creative Packaging factory in Hayward, the International Paper sheet feeder factory in Gilroy, my own backyard in Berkeley, the streets of San Francisco and finally, moving across the Pacific to the plazas of Central Hong Kong (but only on Sundays). For the sake of brevity, I will refer to many of

these sites only in general terms, using these local site visits as a point of departure for an investigation into a symbolic space of capital and power flows.

Through this circuitry of production and reuse, cardboard – or, rather, the re-purposing of cardboard – I argue that a flexible, new urban space is possible. While it still may be a sign of urban consumption and waste, and indeed raises environmental concerns, I approach cardboard as a springboard from which to consider the interrelations between people, places and economy at this moment in time. If a material such as cardboard can allow for a space to become flexible, then perhaps the creative reuse and resuscitation of cardboard in different sites around the world can point to the possibility for creating a transnational, transborder *demos* or *public*, which can contest the demarcations produced by market activity, even while it continues to be a product and vehicle for capital flows and inequality.

CARDBOARD AS MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL

The 'starting point' of a piece of cardboard is often imagined through commerce: middle-class San Francisco families buy goods in person or online, and it arrives in one's hands as a package. During this process, money is exchanged as the cardboard moves from an overseas manufacturer to a distributor, from the distributor to a port or airport, then to another distributor and finally to a business, and from that business to one's home. We may assume that a portion of profit is generated at each stage, converted into fresh capital and then re-invested in the process of growing a business and generating new capital, ad infinitum. Indeed, cardboard is not only a facilitator of this capital extraction – it is a crucial material to contain and move the capital from one place to another.

Yet capital does not stop flowing after we tear open a cardboard container, flatten a box and stuff it into a recycling bin. Once cardboard is conveyed to a recycling centre, it is sorted, compacted, baled and stacked in the back of a 40-foot shipping container bound for a recycled paper processor based locally or in Asia, where it will be sold to buyers of the material. These buyers then pulp this 'recovered fibre', clean it, refine it and shape it into reels of paper, which are then fluted and sandwiched into sheets of corrugated cardboard. At this stage, these sheets of corrugated cardboard are sold to converters, which cut, fold and glue these sheets into boxes, which are *again* sold to a business, which will use them to package its products. These packages are then purchased by other business or consumers, and the whole cycle outlined previously repeats itself, seemingly without end. As we will see, capital flows through each of these sites in what could ostensibly be a never-ending loop, even if the material of cardboard itself is not infinitely recyclable, as waste. As cardboard moves through a Trans-Pacific circuitry, so does capital. *All that is solid*, it seems, is moved by cardboard.

This assertion brings to mind what Marx called the 'annihilation of space by time', or what Massey calls a *time-space compression*, and the following questions: how much does cardboard contribute to a sense of time-space compression? How much is cardboard implicit in the immobilizing qualities of time-space compression, as produced by capital's own ability to 'roam' the planet? For Massey, time-space compression is a 'movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations, and to the geographical stretching-out of all this', a byproduct of the 'actions of capital' and its 'currently-increasing internationalisation' (1991: 24). Massey argues that the ways in which people are situated within this 'time-space compression'

are variegated, with a particular emphasis on how the mobility and control granted to some groups can actively weaken the mobility of others.

If we take Amazon (the consumer goods company) as an example, we can easily see cardboard as embodying part of the process of time-space compression. The expansions of the e-retailing behemoth have long been proclaimed as sounding the death knell for local business: one article from *The Atlantic* even bears the byline 'How can local businesses compete with a company so local it lets people shop from their couches?' (Semuels 2018). This same article notes that online sales accounted for 13 per cent of American retail sales in 2017, with one-third of online purchases made through Amazon. A 2017 study from the coalition Advocates for Independent Business indicated that 90 per cent of the over 850 small businesses surveyed believed that Amazon had a negative impact on their revenue (Institute for Local Self-Reliance 2017). While the explosion of e-commerce has not definitively produced an increased volume of cardboard waste in the United States (Kessler 2017), what remains is that cardboard is a material that *announces* the presence of Amazon and other e-retailers. As a material that is both lightweight and strong, capable of transporting objects big and small, insulating them against wind and rain, shielding them from being crushed as they are moved across oceans and mountains, one could argue that cardboard does not simply emblemize time-space compression: the utilities afforded by its material qualities also hasten the demise of the local and help to make relatively immobile workers obsolete, as factories and corporations increasingly send low-skilled manufacturing and assembly offshore. In this configuration, I argue that cardboard acts as an agent for time-space compression, as an embodiment of capital flows that can move *people* as well.

CARDBOARD AS MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

Cardboard most frequently enters our homes as packaging and exits as recycling, but it can also come and go as we create *new* homes for ourselves and bid adieu to old domiciles. When we move, we carry the physical components of our domestic environments with us encased in cardboard boxes, with labels such as 'kitchen', 'shoes', 'books' and so forth. After moving into a new space, we not only re-assemble these carried-over configurations of home, we frequently build upon them with new goods as well. Perhaps I need a new lamp. Or a new curtain rod over those French windows, which were not present in my former home, and a new set of drapes to cover them? Cardboard accompanies us as we move from place to place. Not only is it a metonym of our peripatetic lifestyles – can one imagine a scene of 'moving' without conjuring images of cardboard boxes in the back of a truck, or stacked like bricks in a living room? It also enables these movements by providing a material sufficiently strong and lightweight for easy packing-up and transportation across distances great and small.

Here I briefly call upon Aihwa Ong and her theory of *flexible citizenship*. Ong uses this term to refer to 'the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions', and she writes, 'in their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes' (1999: 6). In other words, people are moved once again by capital, but rather than *following* the flow of capital, they are *pushed* by the flow of

capital, subject to the regime of the market. Cardboard does not necessarily move people, but is an emblem for their movement, intrinsically linked to the movement of capital.

Now, I bring my attention to those who are pushed by these capital flows but cannot find a home in which to newly land. In 2017, 22 per cent of San Francisco's homeless population of nearly 7500 were those who had become homeless after losing a job (City and County of San Francisco 2017). As low-skilled jobs increasingly disappear on the local level, made obsolete by automation technologies and other mechanisms designed to privilege market efficiency and productivity yield, and real estate speculators evict low-income tenants with an eye towards converting rent-controlled buildings into more lucrative condominium developments, the lure of potential profits often pushes those with little political or economic leverage onto the streets. There, the homeless compose a *demos* that is both visible yet invisibilized within the prevailing market and government regime, criminalized for engaging in activities that one has every right to perform in a home but are considered illegal in public, including sitting and lying down (not permitted on a public sidewalk between the hours of 7 a.m. and 11 p.m.) (City and County of San Francisco Police Department n.d.). The presence of these populations is often accompanied by the sight of cardboard, either in the form of signs or as basic configurations of shelter, flattened into mats on the ground or placed upright as walls blocking the wind.

Homeless populations are not alone in these impromptu productions of inhabitable space, as I remind readers of Filipina and Indonesian maids gathered in Hong Kong on a Sunday. Migrant workers, too, can utilize cardboard as a means of creating a temporary livable space in public when they simply wish to gather and enjoy themselves but are unable or unwilling to do so in an employer's home. Often devoid of rights in their countries or states of



Figure 2: The belongings of a homeless man named Wisdom in the SoMa neighbourhood of San Francisco, March 2018 (Author's photo).

residence but compelled to stay there by the draw of employment opportunities, they are often immobilized in their disenfranchisement. Ong's existing definition of flexible citizenship does not extend to these individuals as they are regulated by practices in relation to markets and governments but lack the resources to respond opportunistically to them.

CARDBOARD AS PRODUCTION OF A NEW SOCIOPOLITICAL SPACE

The homeless of San Francisco and the migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong can begin to demonstrate for the reader how cardboard may be used in a demarcation of space. Cold, hard concrete is made more bearable with even the most rudimentary of insulation, and the boundary between public and private space is troubled when someone uses a piece of cardboard to create a partition between the street and the door of a restaurant, or when someone eats lunch while sitting inside of a box in the middle of a corporate plaza. These sites thus assume an immediate liminality: is it a business, or is it a home, too? Can the deployment of re-used cardboard turn a private space into a public one? The field of scholarship investigating the conception of *public space* is vigorous and well-trod, and this article will touch only cursorily upon these dialectics, solely for the purpose of framing the conversation that will follow. I briefly call upon Rosalyn Deutsche, who cites Claude Lefort when she contends that the public space is

the social space where, in the absence of a foundation, the meaning and unity of the social is negotiated – at once constituted and put at risk. What is recognized in public space is the legitimacy of debate about what is legitimate and what is illegitimate.

(Deutsche 1998: 273)

Indeed, Doreen Massey concurs on this articulation by writing, 'the very fact that [so-called public spaces] are necessarily negotiated, sometimes riven with antagonism, always contoured through the playing out of unequal social relations, is what renders them *genuinely* public' (2005: 153). I argue that the appearance of cardboard in the neoliberal city – particularly on top of, or carving out a new, contested space of potential habitation amidst codified corporate developments – disrupts the hegemony of the private enclosure, and consequently renders these spaces genuinely public. This material palimpsest provides the basis for a new laboratory of political economy and model of global citizenry, an informal site of play for the production of a new kind of trans-border body politic.

We can easily see how cardboard functions as spatial practice, which 'embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation' (Lefebvre 1991: 33). When a homeless person spreads out and falls asleep upon a cardboard mat at the intersection of 7th and Mission in downtown San Francisco, they are using cardboard to produce a perceived space of 'home'. When hundreds of Filipina or Indonesian domestic workers spread out their cardboard pallets and assemble in Central Hong Kong every Sunday, they are imbuing the space with a particular meaning for them – linked to notions of nationhood, belonging and community – and which bear little relation to the purpose for which the plaza was ostensibly originally designed. In this embodiment of 'complex symbolisms [...] linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life'

(Lefebvre 1993: 33), cardboard also enables the production of a representational space. While the city governments of San Francisco and Hong Kong have yet to codify these spatial takeovers, I argue that informal knowledge of which designations of these cities are likely to contain these temporary cardboard settlements – for example, the Tenderloin and SoMa neighbourhoods in San Francisco, in and near the HSBC plaza in Central Hong Kong on Sundays – already pushes us halfway towards a cardboard-centric representation of space, one that is not limited to one particular city but links multiple localities across space and time.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CARDBOARD CITIZENRY

I end by imagining a new global ‘city’ made entirely of discarded cardboard around the world, on the same level of global ‘cities’ of forests, of cardboard pulp, of landfills or recycling centres. I encourage the reader to envision what a map of informal cardboard usage might look like and what the implications of this process of spatial codification might be. What would it look like to create a representation of space around the re-use of cardboard – essentially, centring our perception of space on top of the informal settlement? As an artist interested in practicing theory and creating new poetics of material, the most effective way for me to grapple with these questions is through artistic practice, interventions, engaging with the political through making and creating, bringing questions into and through material.

Here I pause to introduce the kernel of a counter-argument to the utopian possibilities of cardboard by considering the ecological implications of cardboard as a material that consumes large quantities of water in its manufacture and a waste product that may decompose more slowly than its humble appearance may suggest. A 2005 audit of twelve corrugated cardboard manufacturing facilities in California, performed by the San Francisco-based energy efficiency consultancy BASE, found even the smallest facilities to use over 700,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity a year, thanks to the significant amounts of steam required for the corrugating process (Chow et al. 2005: 2). Furthermore, as the composition of different varieties of cardboard may vary to include water-resistant materials such as wax or polyethylene, it is useful to consider how the needs of the ‘market’ have permeated the functionality of cardboard down to its composition, potentially halting it in its ability to spiral out from the flows of power in which it is so deeply embedded. Perhaps, then, one may treat the idea of cardboard citizenry as a point of departure, a symbolic gesture towards an investigation into the combustible imaginaries enabled by configurations of creative reuse, ephemerality, informality and assembly.

In considering my earlier question of cardboard citizenry, I return to the tableau of the domestic workers in Hong Kong, from which this project initially germinated. We embarked on our journey with a photograph that I took surreptitiously, of domestic workers assembled amidst a corporate plaza in Central Hong Kong, sitting in makeshift shelters of cardboard and engaging in prosaic activities such as chatting, playing music and eating. Now I wish to complicate this composition by introducing the following image, a news photograph of migrant domestic workers staging a protest on 5 March 2017, holding protest signs demanding better pay and working conditions.

In this moment, the domestic workers are using the material of cardboard to announce themselves in solidarity with not just migrant workers around the world, but also a broader community of women. I use this moment as an



Figure 3: Caption from The Guardian: 'Migrant domestic workers staged a protest on Sunday 5 March, ahead of International Women's Day' (Moss 2017).

opportunity to suggest that we extend Ong's theory of flexible citizenship – which originally redefined the traditional citizenship view to include how globalization has made economic concerns the major contributing factor in people 'choosing' their citizenship, as opposed to citizenship based on an allegiance to a country's government – to material as well. Can we view cardboard, or any other utilitarian, re-purpose-able material often taken for detritus, as a political actor or actant enabling the formation of a new public across the world? In asking what kind of new space is being claimed by these populations in that moment of their using cardboard for shelter or protest, cardboard re-visualizes or mirrors our current embeddedness within a larger, seemingly infinite circuitry of trade and Trans-Pacific capital flows, and suggests potentials for disrupting these processes by envisioning spaces where these flows must be redirected on a global scale.

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Gay desert modern: Sexuality, architecture and indigeneity in Palm Springs, California

ABSTRACT

While many authors have argued that queerness can interrupt hegemonic conceptions of time, less attention has been paid to the role of queer temporality in settler-colonialism. This article looks to Palm Springs, California, where largely white and gay architecture preservationists have been forced to reckon with the fact that many of the city's celebrated Mid-Century Modernist buildings belong to a local Native American tribe with an ambiguous relationship with modern architecture preservation. I argue that the domestic arrangements of time and space among gay architecture preservationists constitute a radical break from heteronormative spatial-temporality, even as they sustain settler-colonial conceptions of indigenous time.

KEYWORDS

Palm Springs
temporality
queer theory
architecture
modernism
indigeneity

I approach the cashier at the Spa Resort Casino gift shop with a guide to Mid-Century Modern (MM) architecture published by the Palm Springs Preservation Society. As the white woman behind the counter rings me up, a young Native American floor manager spots my purchase and smiles. 'That's one of my favorite books', she says. 'Are you an architecture student? Palm Springs is great for that'. The comment seems innocuous enough, but it flies in the face of what many of the primarily white MM preservationists in town have told me: that members of the local tribe, especially those

affiliated with the native-owned Spa Resort Casino, do not care about architectural history, least of all modernist architecture from the mid-twentieth century. Many of these preservationists are still steaming over what some simply call 'the incident'. Since 1963, the Spa Resort Hotel operated on the reservation of the Agua Caliente band of Cahuilla Indians – it was the tribe's first-even long-term lease to non-tribal tenants. The building was designed by a team of architects who have since become famous (including William Cody, Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison), and later generations of (mostly white) architecture enthusiast had come to regard the building, and especially its concrete-domed entrance colonnade, as one of the region's most important examples of MM. In 2014, tribal authorities ordered the decaying structure demolished over the fierce objections of the city's unusually active preservationist community.

This article begins with the assumption that temporality is often written into the landscape and that the management of space through architectural design and preservation can function as a form of time discipline. This can take at least two different forms, first: through aesthetic expressions of temporal orientation, such as revivalist design that aims to inspire nostalgia (Lowenthal 1985; Snodgrass 1990: 1–2) and second, through material forms that support and are supported by particular temporal rhythms (Massey 1992), such as workplace shading structures that are optimized during the company lunch hour, or commuter town homes with large bedrooms but small living rooms to reflect the lifestyles of its intended inhabitants. This article draws upon a case study of MM building preservation in Palm Springs, CA, to explore the sexual and postcolonial dimensions of these forms of time discipline.

Palm Springs is a resort city of just under 50,000 permanent residents in California's arid Coachella Valley, about 100 miles east of Los Angeles. In addition to being the most developed tourist destination in the California deserts, Palm Springs has become one of the most notable hubs of MM architecture in the world (Lubell 2016; Chavkin 2016; Cygelman 1999). Furthermore, the city is by some measures the gayest cities in the country, if not the world: it has the highest concentration of same-sex households in any American city, with a year-round population over 15,000 people in the 2010 Census (Williams Institute 2011), and as of 2017 it has the first 100 per cent openly LGBTQ city council in the country (Panzar 2017). John Paul LoCascio (2013) has shown that these characteristics developed together: as with Art Deco architecture in Miami Beach (Zebracki 2017) and Victorian architecture San Francisco (Weightman 1981; see also Fellows 2005), gay men played a pivotal and outsized role in establishing institutions that advocated for MM architectural preservation in Palm Springs. But unlike other places where gay men encouraged urban gentrification through preservation, and indeed unlike most American cities, much of Palm Springs sits on federally recognized sovereign Native American land. Over two billion dollars in structural assets sits within the reservation of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (locally referred to simply as 'Agua'), including many MM buildings, giving Agua remarkable autonomy in determining which buildings are built, demolished or preserved. Predictably, this has led to conflict between tribal leadership and the largely white, non-Native preservationist community.

In this article I will draw upon queer and postcolonial theories about time and preservationist testimony about this conflict to probe how time is mobilized to apprehend and territorialize space in Palm Springs. I ask how queer

subjects articulate the temporality of MM preservation and domesticity, and how that temporality operates in the context of a postcolonial disagreement over the fate of MM structures. I will argue that MM preservation in Palm Springs is characterized by queer patterns of temporal asynchrony in which a variety of seemingly contradictory temporal orientations are adopted simultaneously, creating a disjuncture between the heteronormative design of MM and its queer use. This characteristic has offered powerful political possibilities to gay MM preservationists, but it is limited by a hegemonic postcolonial approach to time and space that prevents preservationists from recognizing or valuing indigenous temporal logics beyond colonial stereotypes. To be clear, I do not aim to treat the aesthetics and temporality of buildings commissioned by Agua as a straightforward expression of the temporal epistemology of Cahuilla people living in Palm Springs. This not a study of contemporary Native American epistemologies of time at all, for that matter; rather, it is an attempt to show how mobilizing time can simultaneously offer queer subjects opportunities to resist homonormativity through spatial practice even as it reproduces postcolonial time discipline.

PALM SPRINGS, HOMOSEXUALITY AND MODERNISM

Palm Springs became a popular health resort destination in the early twentieth century, but with the meteoric rise of Hollywood and the repeal of prohibition it became a riotous party city for movie stars on weekend retreats from Los Angeles, especially after World War II. During the 'rat pack' era of the 1950s and the early 1960s, celebrities such as Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra helped cultivate an aesthetics of suave, atomic age sexuality both through their gendered performance and through commissioning chic buildings in what came to be called the MM style of architecture (LoCascio 2013; Chavkin 2016). These buildings reflected and reified mid-century heteronormative conceptions of space and lifestyle: they were 'single-family homes' intended to house an implicitly heterosexual couple, with children in separate rooms and living rooms designed for entertaining guests, where the domestic could be made public for a trusted audience. They were also directly inspired by the surrounding landscape, riffing not only on the desert hues but also the perceived emptiness and simplicity of desert landscapes (Chavkin 2016), a trope that implicitly suggests a lack of history or place.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, tastes in recreation changed significantly and Palm Springs' tourism economy began to fall into decline. High-profile architects were rarely sought out to build new structures, and old MM homes were often left unoccupied for years at a time and fell into disrepair. The fate of these homes shifted when white-collar gay men and women from Los Angeles began relocating to and vacationing in the resort town in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Many of them, especially white gay men, not only bought and repaired these buildings, but soon became outspoken preservationists (LoCascio 2013). By 2010, the city had undergone a dual transformation: it had become one of the world's best-known sites for MM architecture (Chavkin 2016) and home to one of the highest concentrations of same-sex couples in the country by zip code, second only to San Francisco's Castro district (Ghaziani 2014), linking queerness with preservationist politics and retro aesthetics. Not all MM preservationists in Palm Springs today are gay men, and not all gay men in Palm Springs are MM preservationists, but I would not be the first to note the overlap between the two populations (Conrad 2018; Fellows 2005).

Agua and modernism

While the changing aesthetic and sexual identity of Palm Springs has been relatively well documented, the city also offers a unique case study of sovereign tribal urban land populated mostly by non-indigenous people. When President Grant signed an executive order granting land in the region to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (ACB) in 1876, the land was allocated in a 'checkerboard' pattern, with alternating plots given to the ACB and the Southern Pacific Railroad (Ainsworth 1965). While this method of land distribution made it difficult for the ACB to use the land as a traditional large landholder in the West, it had the unintended consequence of making it difficult for non-Native city developers to avoid building on native land. Several ACB-owned squares straddle the town centre and as the town expanded the ACB found themselves in the unlikely position of being large urban landlords in an otherwise-remote corner of California; today, several reservation squares are inhabited by non-tribal members.

In the 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s, Palm Springs real estate developed rapidly as white, upper-middle class, and heterosexual Angelinos and other Southern Californians sought new recreational spaces within driving distance. Like other 'atomic-ranch style houses' in the region, suburban residential architecture of the period was defined by and oriented around the nuclear family (Tongson 2011: 251n1), with separate bedrooms for children and their heterosexual parents, a kitchen with modern appliances for a housewife, a study for a working husband's business, a backyard for child's play and common spaces for rituals that the entire family participates in such as a dining and living room. 'Desert Modern' architecture in Palm Springs retains modernism's heteronormativity while adding characteristics that reflect the use of many of these buildings as vacation homes designed for recreation and pleasure. Kitchens and offices are often fairly small – who has time to cook or work on vacation? Large wet bars were standard features in living rooms or backyards and the backyard is usually accessed through large glass doors through which inhabitants can see one of the most important features of the plot: the swimming pool.

A great deal of MM architecture, including the Spa Resort Hotel, was built on 'Section 14' of the Agua Caliente reservation in an era when the city government and local boosters used various legal and economic tactics to divert Agua's revenue from renting reservation property to white 'guardians' of the land (Culver 2010: 176). The cultural erasure of Cahuilla people from Palm Springs was thorough enough that many historians of the region's MM architecture have ignored the presence of the reservation entirely. In *Palm Springs Modern: Houses in the California Desert*, for instance, we are told that the developers of the Tamarisk Country Club in adjacent Cathedral City benefited from 'an empty desert,' and that 'Palm Springs offered itself as a blank slate' (Cygelman 1999: 19). The fate of the tribe changed dramatically in 1968; President Johnson signed a bill effectively banning the practice of coercive white guardianship, and the state attorney general sought to end the violent removal of minority residents by the city and developers, calling the situation a 'city-engineered holocaust' (Kray 2004: 87).

Today, the small band represents around four hundred Cahuilla members but leases the land to over 20,000 business and individuals, representing an estimated two and a half billion in assets (Murphy 2016). This has given the ACB more influence than most tribes enjoy in predominantly white cities,

thrusting them into the tumultuous politics of city planning; the tribe has in fact had their own development commission since 1989. The Palm Springs city government has long sought to erode tribal sovereignty and challenge the ACB's land claims through legal and extralegal means (Kray 2004), and was in fact quite successful until reforms beginning with the 1959 Equalization Act. In recent years much of the public controversy surrounding preservation in Palm Springs has surrounded the demolition of 'classic' MM buildings, the Spa Resort Hotel being just one notable example.

BACKGROUND: QUEERNESS, TIME AND INDIGENEITY

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman famously argued that all political life is constructed around the figure of The Child, a dynamic that he calls Reproductive Futurism. The desire to defend The Child (a figure that is not strictly limited to but is still informed by actual children) stands behind the desire to affirm and authenticate a social order because The Child represents the future itself, imagined narrowly as the reproduction of structure. Queer people, who are associated with sterility, death and the impossibility of a domestic future, are perceived as both existential and material threats to children and social futures. Edelman argues that queers should an oppositional temporality, one that opposes futurity itself:

By denying our identification with the negativity of this [death] drive, and hence our disidentificaiton from the promise of futurity, those of us inhabiting the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of queerness to someone else. The *structural position* of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain.

(2004: 27, original emphasis)

Other writers such as Angela Jones have insisted that 'crafting utopic spaces is not just intellectually rewarding, but can transform the lives of individuals and society at large', and have attended to 'the everyday acts of resistance and affective forces that create the potentiality for pockets or cleavages of queer utopian space' (2013: 2). In particular, José Esteban Muñoz has argued that 'disidentificaiton' can also include the crafting of utopian spaces by queer people of colour, activity that negates heteronormative signs and forms not through simply standing for or against them, but by appropriating, transforming and redeploying these works for their own ends. He argues that futurity is an essential aspect of survival for queer people, especially queer people of colour. 'We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future', he writes in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009: 1).

The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*.

(2009: 1, original emphasis)

1. All of my informants were gay or bisexual men over 30, and almost all of them were white. This was not because I targeted any particular demographic, but simply because whoever responded to my emails to local organizations fit the same profile.

Futurity is not the only temporality that embodies the ‘then and there’. Elizabeth Freeman acknowledges that many foundational queer theorists (especially Judith Butler) treat queer performativity as implicitly future-oriented (because terms such as *lesbian* are ‘most promising in the ways that it will be taken up later’), but has chosen to attend to a different mode of queer being that is equally focused on moments in the past. *Temporal Drag*, in her usage, is ‘a crossing of time, less in the mode of postmodern pastiche than in the model of stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceeded her own historical moment’ (Freeman 2000: 728).

But the *then and there* remains a troubled temporality in the context of colonialism. Elizabeth Povinelli has argued that the late liberal social imaginary ‘divides human geography and time into two contrasting formations’: the autological subject and the genealogical society. Each has a different temporal orientation: discourse that constructs the autological subject is oriented towards the ‘feeling of freedom and autonomy normatively inflected by the future perfect’, whereas the genealogical society is represented as having ‘the constraint of a past perfect social determination’ (Povinelli 2016: 172). These subjects are mobilized as disciplinary categories that organize time and space according to a dramatic form of eventfulness: ‘[...] that which clearly breaks time and space, creating a new *Here and Now, There and Then*’ (Povinelli 2016: 173, emphasis added). The binary is itself symptomatic of a deeper disciplinary regime that otherizes ‘traditional societies’, especially indigenous societies, as regressive and anachronistic manifestations of the genealogical society; they are *both* prison houses. But if the orientalist gaze treats indigenous society as a fossilized relic of the past, it often simultaneously treats contemporary indigenous epistemology as incoherent or lacking a clear temporal orientation.

In what follows I approach MM preservation in Palm Springs with these concepts in mind. Is MM preservation a form of temporal drag, and do its participants (especially its queer participants) see it that way? And how does the deployment of this temporality (or one like it) operate when discussing Agua’s spatial-temporal politics? Ten interviews lasting one to three hours were conducted over the course of two weeks in the Spring of 2018 over the phone and on two site visits to Palm Springs, primarily taking place in participants’ living rooms. Although I sought out preservationists of all genders, races and sexual orientations, everyone who responded was a gay or a bisexual man, most were married and upper-middle class, and with one exception all were white.

CONVERSATIONS WITH PRESERVATIONISTS

My informants – who formally represented retail business, consulting firms and advocacy groups dedicated to preservation¹ – were adamant that they were not living in the past or re-enacting the mid-century. ‘I don’t have nostalgia for the past, because who wants to go back?’ said one homeowner and activist. ‘Aesthetically it was fun, but culturally it was not so great [...] Growing up, getting called fag and getting rocks thrown at you, nobody wants that again’. Another informant tells me, ‘I have no connection to that period [the mid-century] at all’, and confesses that he chafes when visitors describe his home as museum-like. While one preservation consultant suspected that his clients were drawn to MM homes out of a sense of nostalgia, he also admitted that none of his clients had ever actually identified it as a source of motivation. Preservation was for them entirely consistent with what we might

identify as autological subjecthood: they appreciated desert modernism forms not because they were old, but because they felt they could never *get* old: the standard word used to describe modernism was *timelessness*. 'Great design is timeless', explained the co-owner of a prominent vintage MM furniture retailer. 'It will never be a dated look.'

The de-periodization of MM is important for a few reasons. First, it complicates Lowenthal's canonical and commonsense notion of historic building preservation as an attempt to 'link us with our own and other people's pasts' (1985: 395). Second, it suggests that whether or not MM preservation is seen as a form of temporal drag, its gay practitioners do not see it that way; they do not articulate a domestic epistemology of inhabiting the past, and in fact are frustrated with the common assumption that they are enacting the past. Finally, it points to a disjointedness between the domestic temporality of preservationist homeowners and preservationist advocacy and education, which renders these structures 'historic' by emphasizing their temporal fixedness rather than their transcendence of time itself.

Lending some plasticity to the temporality of the built environment has obvious benefits: disidentifying with the heteronormative space engineered in part by MM architecture for their own needs, turning Frank Sinatra's old salon or swimming pool into a counterpublic space. MM homes are private residences with relative privacy but large indoor and backyard spaces for entertaining, provides inhabitants with the ability to host pseudo-publics such as cocktail parties where interaction is loosely structured but where participants can be individually screened by race or class. Queer people with the necessary privilege and means can use this same approach to forming a space where, in this case, gay and bisexual men can act (to a limited extent) as they might in a world without homophobia. Groups of men can admire male bathers in the swimming pool from the living room without fear of reprisal or outing themselves to the broader public, as they might at a public pool. Wet bars allowed queer partiers to drink (and perhaps retire to one of the children's rooms, repurposed as guest rooms) without the same degree of danger as a gay bar or bathhouse downtown, which have been subject to police raids in Palm Springs even as recently as 2009 (Adams 2011). Considered another way, we might say that although heteronormativity had been designed into MM homes, those sexual politics are not static across time; the built environment of modernism is in some respects a time capsule of mid-century heteronormativity, but it also has afterlives of undetermined sexual meaning that can be seized upon by enterprising queer people with sufficient race and class privilege. The temporal orientation of this activity isn't simply autological, abandoning the past and embracing the future. The ability of gay preservationists to disavow their relationship to the mid-century while nonetheless insisting on restoring and furnishing MM homes to their original design and décor relies on contradictory temporal orientations and an ambiguous relationship with the past and the future.

Attempts to describe tribal land use, however, revealed more troublesome disciplinary forces at work. Agua's spatial-temporality was described as either atavistic and oriented towards the past (the genealogical society) or as incoherent or atemporal. Many described the ACB's indifference to modernism as evidence of 'short-sightedness', an inability to perceive the future from their own autological subjecthood. When asked about the Agua's architectural vision, my informants lamented that the tribe 'does not have a style'. I do not take this as reluctance to essentialize tribal practice, but as a demand for

periodization in design and a claim about the absence of Cahuilla aesthetics. One informant explained,

I don't think they're [Agua] worried about any consistent style that has anything to do with Palm Springs. They're not interested in the mid-century [...] I don't even know what a Cahuilla motif is. I think they lived in temporary structures. I don't know if there was a style, a Cahuilla style. There's no style that I can see. Adobe maybe? A grass roof?

The struggle of settlers to recognize Native American temporality is not specific to Palm Springs. Cheryl Wells writes,

While Europeans continued to refine and develop their temporal worlds, they also sought to temporally colonize American Indians, whom they perceived as having no recognizable or discernable system of time. European and later American observers of Indian life recorded a lingering portrait of 'real Indians,' those in their natural [*sic*] state, as ignorant of time generally.

(Wells 2015)

Related forms of time-discipline emerged even among preservationists who hold more conciliatory attitudes. One activist who prefers MM design in his own home but who works on a broader preservation agenda expressed sympathy for Agua's decision to demolish the Spa Resort Hotel:

Really, this is their land. They have a different vision of what is historic and what should be preserved based on thousands of years of their own culture. I would think that going forward as more of these issues that both sides learn to live together, learn not to mistrust one another. The Spa [Resort] Hotel was on the most sacred spot, it's the heart of the whole region for them [...] It's spiritual preservation, cultural preservation.

Framing Agua's relationship to land in the desert as 'cultural' is characteristic of a late liberal or multicultural approach to non-life. Povinelli writes,

Indeed the demand on Indigenous people to couch their analytics of existence in the form of a cultural belief and obligation to totemic sites [...] is a crucial long-standing tactic wherein settler late liberalism attempts to absorb indigenous analytics [...].

(2016: 33)

As long as Native American temporality remains a 'merely cultural' matter that is merely representative of essential difference, it does not pose an existential threat to settler temporalities, including white queer temporalities.

Following others who have argued that Eurocentric capitalist time discipline are important features of both colonialism (Stern 2003) and heteronormativity (Freeman 2000), I have attempted in this article to show how queer conceptions of time in Palm Springs simultaneously undermine and reproduce hegemonic forms of time discipline. Gay men working on architectural preservation emphasize and enshrine the temporal dimension of the built landscape of MM, but they also disavow the mid-century itself, going so far

as to rearticulate MM domestic artefacts as timeless or temporally transcendent. The privilege to simultaneously periodize the built landscape and strip the landscape of its temporal fixedness is denied to indigenous people in Palm Springs, however. Preservationists either understood the temporality of indigenous built landscapes through an exoticizing lens that defined Agua's architecture entirely in terms of the past or they denied that past entirely, treating Agua's architecture as damnably *atemporal*.

My goal here has not been to suggest that anti-Indigenous temporalities are unique to queer temporalities to not offer liberatory possibilities. But if the disharmonics of queer time are to have truly radical potential as an intersectional praxis, we need to interrogate the slippages between queer interventions in material landscapes of time and the reproduction of colonial time discipline. This would require a meaningful engagement with indigenous temporal epistemology and the explicit framing of queer time within anti-colonial/de-colonial struggle. For queer settler communities in North America, this is not as simple as inviting forms of gendered or sexual variance such as two-spirit to a multi-cultural coalition or acronym, but by considering indigenous temporalities as fundamental contributions to a theory of queer time. 'Straight time', after all, has always implicitly suggested Eurocentric straight time.

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