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react/review: a responsive journal for art & architecture

Title

Introduction: fields of force

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Journal

react/review: a responsive journal for art & architecture, 3(0)

Authors

Sheard, Megan J.

Salty, Iman

Publication Date

2023

DOI

10.5070/R53061220

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Peer reviewed



react/review

a responsive journal for art & architecture

Introduction

Fields of Force: Navigating Power in Space, Place, and Landscape

Megan J. Sheard & Iman Salty

What are the force fields we hold up?

What are the force fields we fight against?

- *FORCE/FIELDS*, Perennial Press, 2021

In a recent zine of short stories, poems, and artwork entitled *FORCE/FIELDS* published by feminist micropress Perennial Press, the editors asked readers to interrogate the “force fields” that exist around and within us, defining a force field as “a barrier that protects someone or something from attacks or intrusions.”¹ While “force” can be interpreted as a physically tangible or more abstracted form of power at work, “fields” denotes a spatial, geographical, and temporal demarcation of such forces’ claim to authority. These might manifest in visible, concealed, or transitory forms, such as the materiality of architecture that shapes and constrains action, less visible infrastructures of surveillance, or more ephemeral strategies of performance and practice that resist or transform existing spaces. Whether fixed or fleeting, we are

¹ *FORCE/FIELDS*, ed. Isalina Chow, Madi Giovina, and Tiffany Niles (San Francisco: Perennial Press, 2021).

attuned to the gaps and malleability of fields of force that offer opportunities to reconstitute how power is embedded in space, place, and landscape.

A poignant historical example of the multivalent, flexible quality of such fields of force is the so-called Rabbit Proof Fence, constructed in Western Australia between 1901 and 1907 and appearing on the cover of this volume. Stretching northward across the landscape from the state's south coast for an astonishing 1,139 miles, the fence was designed to exclude rabbits imported by the British, which had become a major pest in the eastern states of Australia. The fence was to become a laughing stock of Australian history: wooden posts stretched with wire netting are not especially effective against rabbits. By 1904, rabbits were inside the first segment of fence, necessitating the construction of a second and then a third fence, which finally stretched a total distance of 2,023 miles. In a reminder that resistance to spatial controls is not restricted to human beings, this enormous infrastructural effort ultimately failed to stem the tide of rabbits into the state.

In 2002, the Rabbit Proof Fence gathered new associations in the Australian popular imagination, when a film by the same name dramatized the story of three Martu girls who escaped from the Moore River Native Settlement and walked 1,500 miles along the fence to return to their home in the Western Desert.² The settlement at Moore River was one of a network of sites to which the Western Australian government sent stolen Aboriginal children of mixed descent. This was part of a genocidal policy of forced child removals known as the Stolen Generations, enacted across the country between 1905 and the 1970s.³ The purpose of such separate "settlements" was to facilitate biological absorption of mixed-descent Aboriginal children into white society: the film was set in the 1930s during the appointment of A.O. Neville as Chief Protector [sic] of Aborigines in Western Australia, whose commitment to eugenics made him infamously aggressive in enacting abductions. The success of the film initiated new cultural attention to the role of the Missions and Native Settlements in the Stolen Generations, making the fence a cultural marker of child removals. Thus the fence, a field of force enacted by authorities to protect agricultural areas from ruin, underwent two key imaginative transformations: becoming first a marker of the colonial government's failure to stop the spread of a pest introduced via its own activities, and

² *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, directed by Philip Noyce (2002: Western Australia, Becker Entertainment), DVD. The film is loosely based on author Doris Pilkington Garimara's account in *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, whose mother, Molly, was one of the escaping children. See Doris Pilkington Garimara, *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, New ed. (St Lucia, Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2002).

³ Patrick Wolfe argues that child removals are genocidal in the sense that they are about reducing births within a group, a criterium explicitly addressed under Article II of the UN Convention on Genocide, and thus designed to diminish the Aboriginal population. See Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, (London: Verso Books, 2016), 58.

second of abductions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, and their confinement in government institutions.⁴

Such symbolic interpretations might obscure another reading of the fence suggested by the film itself: its significance in facilitating spatial practices directly contrary to the intentions of the colonial government that built it. Historian and archaeologist Denis Byrne has discussed how Aboriginal people refused the grid of colonial property in early colonial Australia, jumping fences and cutting through paddocks to access sites required for subsistence and continuing cultural obligations to the land.⁵ Refusing the fence is one way to assert continuing sovereignty; in the case of the Rabbit Proof Fence, rather than being ignored, it becomes a navigation device for Aboriginal children returning to their country. Both jumping and following fences are engagements with colonial infrastructure that assert the continuity of a different spatial order: the priority of sacred places, country, home, over the recent interventions of colonial infrastructure and institutions.

Such spatial practices can be understood as “alternative” tactics that can puncture the apparent totalities of structures of domination.⁶ These tactics arise from embodied, spatial forms of knowledge, a powerful category of examination increasingly being acknowledged in the field of art and architectural history. That is, without overdetermining the capacity for resistance, there is a certain privileging of counter-hegemonic engagements, as scholars investigate how people navigate institutional and discursive constraints in art and architectural structures. In the U.S. context, for example, Rebecca Ginsburg’s scholarship on “slave landscapes” examines how enslaved people developed a “geographic intelligence” of plantation landscapes, allowing them to navigate gaps in surveillance and find sites of refuge. Such spatial intelligence, when shared within a trusted community, may create possibilities for refuge in environments of near-total constraint.

In the context of art objects and artifacts, the museum offers another instance of an institutional field of force through which objects acquired in collections establish institutional identity, reinforcing legacies of colonial collecting by claiming ownership over heritage from other places. The social, economic, and affective value of objects and artifacts in museums are reconfigured by their identities as objects subject to

⁴ For the report usually considered authoritative on this issue in Australia, see Meredith Wilkie, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

⁵ Denis R. Byrne, “Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2003): 169–193.

⁶ We might consider here Michel de Certeau’s idea of tactics as “belong[ing] to the other.” Michel de Certeau, “General Introduction,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 19.

exhibition displays. Activists and organizations like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act increasingly contest the geographic reach of museum networks and their authority over artifacts, drawing attention to the cultural significance of objects and their extraction from particular lifeworlds.

In this volume, “fields of force” becomes a concept for not only resisting boundaries, limitations, and positions of forced constraint, but also questioning and reconstituting the forces at play. The theoretical framework of this volume expanded upon ideas presented in contributing papers at the University of California, Santa Barbara’s Art History Graduate Student Association’s 46th annual symposium: “Objects of Affection: Itineraries, Sensations, and ‘Thingness.’” The symposium was broadly inspired by the power of affect, mobility, and ephemera, asking presenters to consider the affective and sensorial aspects of material culture, spaces, and landscapes, and investigated how the circulation of objects inform human relations with them. In creating the third volume of *react/review*, we as managing editors inflected themes raised by symposium papers in an explicitly spatial direction into the theme “Fields of Force: Navigating Power in Space, Place, and Landscape.” We asked contributing authors to consider the following questions: How is power embedded in the spaces, places, and landscapes people move across and inhabit? What are the modes or strategies through which it operates?

While each volume is organized around a central theme, *react/review* is a responsive journal which aims to cultivate a spirit of dialogue and exchange. Authors engage with both topics within their fields, and with issues and arguments posed by each other throughout the journal’s content. The volume is divided into three sections: feature articles, spotlights, and reviews. Feature articles engage with the volume’s central theme and emerge from select papers presented at the 46th symposium, and in response to the call for papers that followed. In keeping with the discursive model of the journal, each feature article is followed by a short-form response from graduate students and emerging scholars in art history, architectural history, visual studies, and related disciplines. Responses consider authors’ arguments’ corollaries and implications, using them as points of departure for new discussions, comparisons, and other creative engagements. In our spotlight section, scholars currently engaged in research highlight new findings, speculate on pressing questions, or address methodological issues encountered in their fieldwork. These articles are more open-ended by design, and perhaps offer more reflection and hypotheses than definitive conclusions. Reviews examine both recent books and exhibitions touching on the theme of the current volume.

Feature articles in the third volume are grouped into two broad categories which emerged as thematic throughlines in the papers. The first set of articles explores issues of surveillance, spatial production, and representation “from above”: that is, as shaped

by dominant or at least privileged social institutions. In “Skyscraper Churches and Material Disestablishment at the Fifth Churches of Christ Scientist,” Alexander Luckmann explores how religious buildings negotiate their relationship to the changing real estate market and urban fabrics of New York and San Francisco. Inverting Sally M. Promey’s concept of “material establishment” into “material disestablishment” to capture the shedding of overtly religious architectural signifiers and the separation of business strategy from religious mission, Luckmann considers the way religious organizations negotiate identity to protect their presence in contemporary U.S. cities. Ben Jameson-Ellsmore responds by reading “skyscraper churches” against the history of gentrification in both cities, arguing that the real estate strategies Luckmann discusses implicate church organizations in exacerbating economic disparities in major urban centers.

In “All Along the Bell Tower: An Analysis of Surveillance and Affect on the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Campus,” Sophia-Rose Diodati examines the presence of cupolas and the emergency Blue Light system at Johns Hopkins to demonstrate the everyday violence of Black and Brown students’ experiences of surveillance. Drawing on affect theory, architectural analysis, and art-making practices, Diodati proposes the concept of “affect arrays”—imagined as emanating from bell tower cupolas and blue orbs—to spatialize the emotional impact of surveillance. Reading such structures in relation to Johns Hopkins’ establishment of a private police force and its location in a hypersegregated area of Baltimore, Diodati argues for the need to recognize the disproportionate impact of surveillance architecture on Black and Brown bodies, rather than focusing on spectacularized episodes of racial violence. Samira Fathi’s response draws out the implications of Diodati’s “affect arrays” for an analysis of gendered surveillance in nineteenth-century Iran, describing how the king’s palatial towers privileged the male ruler’s gaze in the Eshratabad Palace of the Qajar king Naser al-Din Shah.

Emine Seda Kayim continues the theme of state surveillance in “Surveillant Movements: Policing and Spatial Production in East German Housing,” which investigates the methods through which the German Democratic Republic’s Ministry of State Security, or *Stasi*, conducted an orchestrated system of surveillance over its citizens. Focusing on East German housing complexes as predominant sites of state-powered surveillance, Kayim examines how the *Stasi* used housing surveys that reproduced the built environment through various media to perform their observations. Kayim positions the *Stasi*’s surveillance methods alongside Michel Foucault’s discussion of the Panopticon to demonstrate how his interrogation of architecture and surveillance is complicated and challenged by illuminating surveillance in the GDR context. Iman Salty responds by discussing the 1979 Doors Exhibition that took place in Dresden, where eight non-official artists exhibited works that incorporated the door as a symbol

for expressing feelings of spatial, cultural, and ideological constraint in their geopolitical positions of East Germany.

Thomas Busciglio-Ritter's "At Home in the Wild: Race, Power, and Domesticity in the Transatlantic Wallpapers of Zuber & Co." concludes our first grouping of articles with an examination of how dominant racial ideologies in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century France and North America influenced the visual production of wallpaper designs distributed throughout the Euro-American Atlantic. These contributed to the construction of an imagined white American landscape, and obscured the exploitation of natural resources and of Black and Indigenous populations. Busciglio-Ritter discusses the impact of Zuber & Co.'s business expansion into the U.S., arguing that wallpapers such as the 1834 *Views of North America* were increasingly displayed in domestic spaces of the antebellum Midwest and South to validate racialized regional identities, while maintaining a superficial depiction of "harmony" among diverse populations. Sylvia Faichney expands upon Busciglio-Ritter's discussion of the Zuber & Co. wallpaper by examining how it employs strategic fragmentation to establish a visual heritage for U.S. national identity, revealing its longevity through more recent installments in White House interiors.

The second group of articles explores spatial and artistic negotiations with fields of force "from below," investigating spatialities and practices of resistance, and venturing counternarratives for spaces traditionally read through the archives of power. Nathan Shui's analysis of queer spatial strategies in "In/Visibility: Beijing Queer Film Festival and Alternative Queer Space" challenges the dominance of liberationist accounts of queer countercultural space, which rely on the imperative of "coming out" and strategies of hypervisibility. Instead, Shui links the spatial strategies deployed by queer activists with their specific socio-political conditions. Through examining the requirement for flexible and adaptive strategies that may ultimately survive interventions by state censorship in China—such as opening the film festival on laptops in a train carriage at a specified time—Shui argues that activists develop an ambivalent mode of visibility "that oscillates between the states of concealment and disclosure," carving "guerilla" spaces for expression that avoid confrontational tactics. Bringing Shui's discussion of a queer "remapping" of Beijing into conversation with British colonial surveys of Egypt, Alex Schultz draws attention to the discursive nature of both official and activist cartographies, emphasizing the ambivalence between disclosure and concealment as fundamental to the project of geographic representation itself.

Ashleigh Deosaran's "Confection and the Aesthetic of Collapse: Luis Vasquez La Roche's Sugar Cane Field Performances" analyzes the sculptural and performance works of Trinidad-based artist Luis Vasquez La Roche through the lens of collapse and post-collapse. Collapse is engaged in Vasquez La Roche's work as a visual strategy for recalling, and reclaiming, the extractive colonial histories of Trinidad, and is positioned

by Deosaran as a counternarrative to the idealized depictions of Caribbean sugar cane plantations produced in nineteenth-century British colonial prints. Using historically charged, site-specific materials like sugar to reference legacies of violence, exploitation, and ecological devastation embedded in the remains of the island's plantations, Vasquez La Roche's work performs collapse on three levels as examined by Deosaran: a literal collapse of his sugar-based work, a spatio-temporal collapse in the convergence of colonial historical and contemporary continuities of labor, exploitation, and violence, and a collapse that envisions the dismantling of colonial and capitalist systems. In response, Letícia Cobra Lima explores how Latin American artist Feliza Bursztyn embraces an aesthetic of collapse in her junk metal sculptures sourced from junkyards and auto shops, materials that perform the decay of an unsustainable capitalist "autopia."

In "Black Magnolia: Counter-Narrating a Plantation Tourist Site," Connor Hamm draws on scholarship reconstructing subaltern histories of sites usually narrated through perspectives of the colonial archive. Tracing the transformation of the Magnolia Plantation in Charleston, South Carolina, from a rice plantation and site of Black enslavement into an elaborately planned garden catering to white tourists, Hamm sketches an outline for a Black history of its early days as a tourist destination by examining how formerly-enslaved Black "gardener-guides" mediated the plantation's physical transformation and relationship with visitors. Reading pictorial and textual representations of such laborers "against the grain," Hamm tries to reimagine their experiences within the spaces of the plantation site, and the forms of creative solidarity that helped them navigate this new form of subjugated labor. Megan J. Sheard responds by considering the different narrative strategies pursued by plantation sites in the U.S. and Australian convict sites transformed into tourist destinations, querying the place of white ethnonationalist identification with involuntary laborers in the spectacularization of violence.

The second part of the journal is designated to a research spotlight by Alex Schultz, who discusses how restrictions affecting her ability to travel to archives during the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to look outside the official state archive for information on the urban history of water in colonial Cairo, changing her interpretive approach. Working extensively with scanned materials, Schultz notes how people making the scans chose to exclude pages assumed to be unimportant, particularly plans and maps. These scans and missing pages become a point of departure for a reflection on the exclusions and "slippages" in British cartographic, numerical and textual representations of Cairo. Schultz considers how quantification allowed British records to represent machines as more efficient than people in managing Cairo's drainage: meanwhile, as Schultz shows, these archives also contain evidence of Cairene resistance to the implementation of sanitation practices that supplant social forms of labor.

Concluding our volume is a review by Rachel Winter of the exhibition "From Palestine with Art," featuring the work of nineteen contemporary Palestinian artists in the recent 59th Venice Biennale. Using an unsanctioned intervention in the co-located U.S. and Israel pavilions as a point of departure, Winter reflects upon the significance of the exhibition's inclusion as a "Collateral Event" on the periphery of the main Biennale, reading its position as a spatial iteration of the politics of the nation state which block Palestinian statehood. However, the peripheral status of the exhibition allows it to challenge colonial politics and boldly proclaim Palestinian sovereignty, with works contained in the exhibition asserting presence, resistance, radicality, and joy amidst the unjust occupation of Palestinian lands.

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