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Archive

Edited by: **Alessandro Rippa**

Roadsides is a platinum Open Access journal designated to be a forum devoted to exploring the social, cultural and political life of infrastructure.

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Archive:
An Introduction

Alessandro Rippa

In January 2021 I found myself looking for old postcards inside a large wooden trunk in the empty house of my long-deceased grandparents. I was looking for 1960s or 1970s images of the Italian Alpine village where they grew up, and in which they spent most of their lives. This is the time when most of the fields were being abandoned, as local villagers moved to more comfortable jobs in nearby cities, or relocated abroad. Leading to rapid reforestation, the abandonment of mountain agriculture had left visible signs in the valley's landscape, and I was trying to find a way to visualize it.

Instead of postcards, however, I came across an old picture book from 1925. The book contained eighteen photographs, with no text. It depicted construction work on the valley's first aqueduct, which took place in the years prior to the publication of the booklet, as well as images of the fountains built throughout the villages dotting the valley's landscape. Up until then, as some of the pictures revealed, each village had had its own well, but water was seemingly difficult to get hold of. The aqueduct was thus a major development for the valley, and the small booklet I held in my hands was clearly meant to commend such accomplishment. The people in it were smiling, celebrating the arrival of water.

I immediately asked my father where the picture book came from. All he knew was that his mother had brought it with her when she married my grandfather and moved in with his family. How she got hold of it, he did not know. With my grandmother and all of her siblings and close friends dead, and no written record whatsoever, I quickly realized that there was simply no way to trace the history of this object. Of course, the picture book itself told a particular tale, an *infrastructural* one, through its various images. But the social life of the object itself was lost forever.

I start with this small, inconsequential story, as it speaks to many of the issues that emerge in the contributions to this fifth edition of *Roadsides*. Centred around the theme of the archive, authors approach different infrastructure projects through experiences of loss, hope and belonging, engaging with key concepts of temporality, (dis)connectivity and memory, among others. Experimenting with hybrid narrative forms, the articles illustrate the vast possibilities offered by a creative and open-ended co-exploration of objects, practices and places at the nexus of archive and infrastructure, and which work in multiple temporal and spatial scales, epistemological regimes and conceptual frameworks.

While I hardly need to point out for readers of *Roadsides* the growing interest in infrastructure across the social sciences, the concept of the archive has become an increasingly prominent subject of debate in its own right. Similarly to infrastructure, the archive can be approached as a place, an object of inquiry, as well as a method – and is ultimately caught up in manifold social and material relations. Indeed, several anthropologists have recently troubled commonsensical understandings of the archive as a written and solid past (Stoler 2002; Mueggler 2011) arguing that archives – and archival research – should not be understood merely as sites of knowledge retrieval and extractive activity, but as a locus of engaged critical ethnographic research. Archives, to be sure, are both source and subject, thing and practice, and thus need to be approached "critically and cautiously" (Schwenkel and Rippa, this issue). Infrastructure scholars, on the other hand, are ever more concerned not only with the decaying and the unfinished, but also with the non-built – that which was promised but ultimately put aside. Rather than forgotten, such archived, yet still possible futures are often capable of mobilizing people, resources and ideas. They constitute a "shadow history" (Carse and Kneas 2019: 15-17) that shapes the present through its material absences.

If these sorts of conversations informed the outset of this issue, our authors have further pushed the boundaries by approaching archive and infrastructure in tandem, and in their intertwining. What emerge are multiple and complex understandings of archives as both repositories for specific knowledge, practices and imaginaries, and unsettling points of departure from which to inspire new visions, worlds and futures. Infrastructure and archive do seem to meet and overlap quite frequently, as in the photo book I described at the beginning, with encounters that are brief, disrupting and which can be deeply creative.

In this issue, Allen frames these encounters as *conversations* – with particular places and infrastructure of mobilities and communication, but also with his own visual journey: a personal archive of sorts that opens up reflections over planetary

conversions. Unsurprisingly, urban space – that hyper-built and human landscape par excellence – becomes a privileged location from which to observe the unfolding of archival and infrastructural visions, whether in particular architectural forms and elements (Aragüez), as possible futures unlocked by certain "infrastructural archives" in a process of continuous remaking (Gonzalez), or in how such archives-from-below can help to inform, recast and orientate social critique (Mögenburg). If infrastructure can be approached through its archival qualities, archives are also contentious sites that shape and are shaped by social relations of temporality and belonging. This becomes clear when approaching museums as archive, understood as relational knowledge infrastructures that engage and mobilize – and do not simply display – Indigenous concepts, frameworks and visions of the future (McCarthy, Schorch and Thomas). In turn, such an understanding of the archive can also be appropriated to offer alternative, feminist takes on predominantly masculine infrastructure projects, with the aim to disrupt and reconfigure dominant understandings of development and modernization (Thakur and Tashi Palmo). In this process, the visual approach foregrounded by *Roadsides* is not just a narrative device but a key feature of the encounter between infrastructure and archive. Hence, 360-cameras and binoculars can induce "an archival stretch of the imagination," bringing into focus the out-of-sight and recasting the unfinished, both in the sense of materializing losses and contemplating futures (Clarke and Yazdani). Photographs, here, become entangled with the material records of specific infrastructure projects, and ultimately contribute to their own archive (Rahman and Boyle). Furthermore, as in my grandmother's photo book, pictures are a productive lens through which we can not only think multiple temporalities, but also the materialities that inform these particular objects as archival, ethnographic and artistic devices (Martinez and Agu). This issue of *Roadsides* offers a window onto these different perspectives – one that is sure to be productive for future explorations, critiques and conversations.

Colonial-era and modern buildings in today's Manila. Essays in this issue show how the city infrastructure can be seen as an archive of sorts. Photo: Alessandro Rippa, 2016.

Before this issue of *Roadsides* can be digitally archived for everyone to read and download, I would like to thank the many colleagues who have contributed their invaluable help and support to make it possible. In a difficult pandemic year, with commitments piling up and time shrinking away under the pressure of home-office and home-schooling, I am especially grateful to the reviewers who accepted the task of poring over these wonderful articles and provided important feedback and inspiration. Thank you, William Gardner, Kenny Cupers, Tina Paphitis, AbdouMaliq Simone, Mable Gergan, Mareile Flitsch, Lukas Ley, Christine Moderbacher and Roger Norum. I am likewise indebted to Matthäus Rest for helping with a previous iteration of some of the central themes addressed in this issue, which appeared on the Allegra Lab website in April 2020. I am also extremely grateful to the rest of the *Roadsides* editorial collective, your suggestions and help have been crucial in framing key aspects of the issue, as well as approaching reviewers and discussing the various submissions. All deserving a special mention are David Hawkins for fantastic copyediting, Chantal Hinni to which *Roadsides* owes much of its visual appeal, and Charlotte Huber for managing the production phase so smoothly. Thank you very much. Lastly, none of this would have been possible without our wonderful managing editor, Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi. Her support, commitment and attention are a blessing for anyone lucky enough to work with her.

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Archive Earth: Ambiguous Conversations and Conversions

Jamie Allen

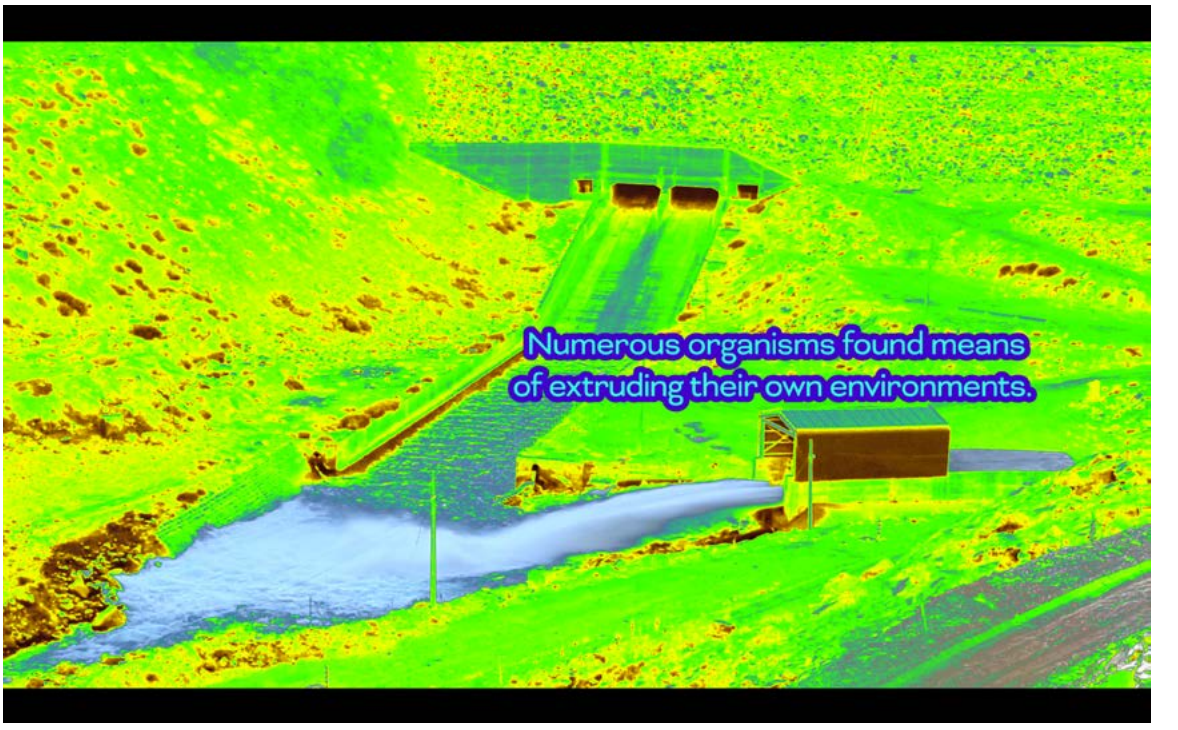
Woman a wail (lead vocals)
di eart is in labour (back-up vocals)
woman a wail (lead vocals)
creation in danger (back-up)
and what shall she bring forth from her travail?
— Afua Cooper (2007)

On 3 September 2014, a tender and mischievous *immortel*[1] angel gave a lecture to a community of people gathered in a church in Utrecht (Serres 1995). Michel Serres' address was a pre-recorded video, spoken in his native French from his kitchen table at home, somehow presaging the 2020 pandemic's necessary preference for disembodied encounters. Serres, then 83 years old, had not been feeling well enough to make the journey to the Netherlands. What he offered that day was a brief and memorable orientation on nature, information and thought, the essence of which, to my memory at least, turned on the phrase: "I have already said that we think like the world; now I am saying that the world thinks like us" (Serres 2017).

The nightmare is that there are two worlds.
The nightmare is that there is only one, this one.
— Susan Sontag (2012)

It would be something of an understatement to say that 'a lot' has happened since the day of that lecture in autumn 2014. Then came an onrushing of interest in nonhuman expressivity, and an inexhaustible succession of '-cenes' (Capitalo-, Anthropo-, Plantationo-, Urbano-, Chthulu-, among other important suggestions [Haraway 2015]) were posited, which affected ideas and practice in scholarship, activism and policy. Numerous excursions, research and artistic field trips, group processions and collaborations by researchers, artists and collectives comprising geographers, geologists and geoscientists have sought to map new terrains of thought and action. 'Terrain', here, offers an apt metaphor for what is always in some way a continuation of the colonial knowledge-grab – extruding information from appropriated regions, extracting value from other ways of thought and life.

Michel Serres passed away in the summer of 2019. The following summer, a coronavirus, spread through acts of respiration, speech and physical contact, caused widespread disruption – restricting lives and, and in far too many cases, ending them. Yet there were awakenings too, as scientific imperatives and material realities once again provoked revisions to our presumptions and practices of proximity, mobility, and social, political and personal life.



All of these changes feel important, and each needs its own registration and recognition. The pandemic response seeks to keep things distant, while sensitivities to contact embroil everyone and everything in intimacies and proximities that go beyond delimitations of spatial geography. The vestiges of each little interaction seem more readily traced, processed and archived than ever before. As in all such moments in which material and infrastructural awareness makes a step-change, recursive, revelatory histories unfurl. We are called to acknowledge the sub-alterity of peoples, their heterogenous labours and alterlives that are both forced and chosen (Murphy 2017). Also acknowledged, in a much different way, are those biological and material subalternates that do the bulk of all work (Wynter 2015). All these subspecies of planetary alterity, still-silenced by the feigned distance of power-biopolitics, Western objectivity and capital-driven abstraction.

Why do I have so many thoughts, they are driving me crazy.
Why am I always going anywhere, instead of somewhere?
Listen to me or not, it hardly matters.
I'm not trying to be wise, that would be foolish.
I'm just chattering.
— Mary Oliver (2014)[2]

These sub-alterities *can* be heard; they grow louder and more tumultuous – unmutable chatterings between Earth and world. A conversation between beings from everywhere, and those from somewhere in particular, creates transfers and frictions, lessons in "how to look around rather than ahead" (Tsing 2015: 22). All-too human, globalist projections become impossible; everything is re-localised, reattached and re-grounded.

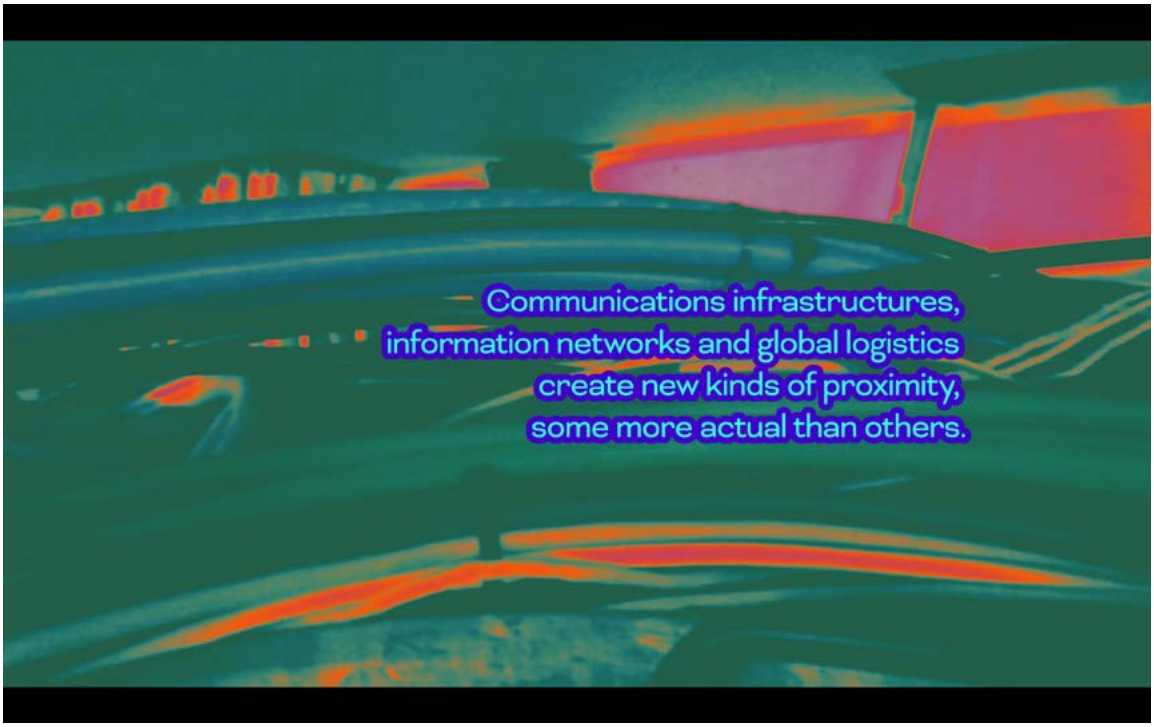
Thompson and Harney (2018: 125) find these touchdowns and touchpoints in the multiple rhythms and arrhythms of the *procession*, a "living archive of the life-giving arts performed together in the ongoing ensemble of blackness." The smallest of interactions, the practical, processional activities of making lives – and of trying to make sense of them – also create worlds (with further gratitude to Anna Tsing).

> *To be human is to be intended toward the other.*
> *We provide for ourselves transcendental figurations*
> *of what we think is the origin of this animating gift:*
> *mother, nation, god, nature.*
> *These are names of alterity,*
> *some more radical than others.*
> — Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2003)

Archive Earth (11m 40s, 2020) is a dialogue between Earth-world positionalities, moving images and material circulations. It acknowledges multiple micro- and deep-times in scattered conversation, given as interchange between 'us' and 'them'. It is not at all certain what this division has ever meant. However, it is very clear that such voicings are constructs – conceits that allow expressions to unfold.

This footage derives from numerous fieldwork excursions that I undertook in the years that followed Serres' provocative Utrecht lecture. Each encounter was a profound worldview-changing privilege… To ride the claustrophobia-inducing elevator up the 213-metre-high guyed meteorological mast in the Meteorological Institute at Cabauw, the Netherlands. To hear family stories intertwine with stories of revolutionary families

over a lunchroom conversation at the Codelco copper smelter outside Valparaiso, Chile. To witness the measuring of wild bird eggshells at Kilpisjärvi, Finland, with their thickness inversely proportional to global warming (Jarvinen 1994). Every such excursion seemed to promise a collective grounding, enacted for different reasons and toward different political, creative, research, personal and social means, ends and media. Each experience of scientific outposts and infrastructural sites reveals places where peculiar worlds meet the Earth we all share, even as they resist such neat contrasts (Spivak 2011). From these meetings people produce archives of alliances and frictions, traces of personal interactions that are rendered public, published and post-produced.

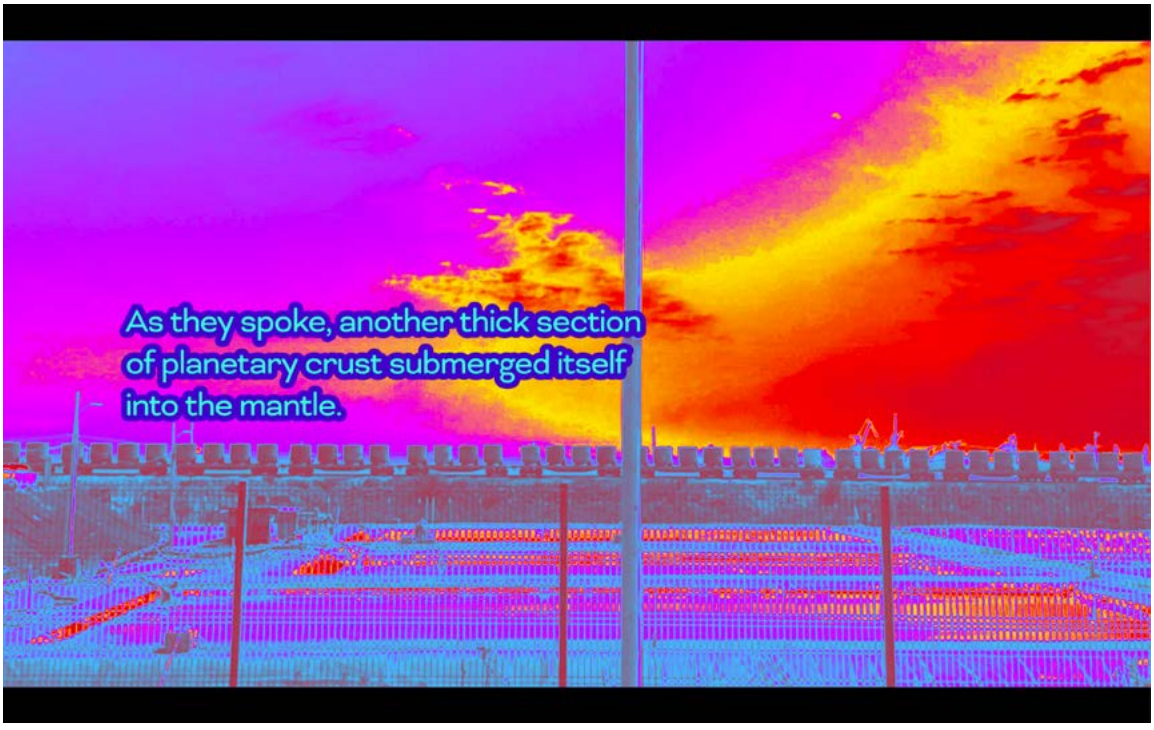


On the various portable hard drives that I have stacked around me, there are reams of media tracing the movement of people through places, places that they transform as they traversed. These sounds and images now seem to me like found footage, captured by someone else, in a bygone era. Here is an archive that traces psychic erosions and decaying memory and, in the way of *fûkeiron* cinema, composing a forensics of anthropocenic landscapes.[3] That is, these landscapes are edited: cut and recomposed first by infrastructural intervention, and then again through the chopping and splicing of a digital timeline.

The Earth is one but the world is not.
— WCED (1984)

If these images were indeed captured in another era, it was one in which attempts at understanding planetarity were made, in part, by going around and trying to introduce ourselves to various parts of the Earth. This bumptious style of inquisition is wrought with contradictory desires for intimacy and forced meetings of substance that may sometimes do more harm than good – reminiscent of the presumptuous and fiercely curious Professor Challenger in Conan Doyle's story "When the World Screamed" (Negarestani 2008; Parikka 2014; Doyle 2015; Allen 2018). Such closeness, between world and Earth, should in any era be enacted as a simpler kind of witnessing, or as moments for listening. We all know that is how you keep a good conversation going.

If the subaltern cannot speak,
he or she is obliged to listen,
and acts of listening and responding
inevitably place us in a condition
of momentary subalterity,
whatever our designated social,
racial, gender, or class position.
— George Lewis (2020)



Notes:

[1] The informal name for the forty members of the Académie Française; the highest honour and office for an intellectual in France.

[2] Thanks to Nell Gehrke of Minneapolis, Minnesota, for a 2019 reading of this poem that continues to mark me deeply.

[3] *Fûkeiron* is a theory of landscape cinema that emerged at the end of the 1960s in Japan. Thanks to Merve Bedir for pointing me to this idea and its framing (Furuhata 2007).

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Making up the Plaza:
An Urban Archive in Osaka ’70

Marcela Aragüez

In December 1963, the Tokyo architectural magazine *Kenchiku bunka* (The Architectural Culture) published a substantial piece of urban research entitled “Nihon no toshi kūkan” [Japanese urban space], chiefly led by young architect Arata Isozaki and architectural historian Teiji Itō. The study was motivated by their shared interest in urban morphology, in an attempt to distance their work from the more technocratic approach adopted at the time by Isozaki’s mentor, Kenzo Tange, whose aim to reshape the existing city was informed by policy, regional economics and national demographics (Yatsuka 2011: 142). Isozaki and Itō’s urban investigations also differed from the proliferation of regional planning proposals and national population movement analysis taking place at the time in Japan.[1] Their focus was rather directed towards urban aspects and phenomena of a smaller scale, producing a kind of archive of urban forms that were categorized into three types: Principles, Methods and Activators.

The first type contains eight so-called Principles of Space Order, which are set forth making use of a combination of diagrams, pictures, plans and texts. These principles – such as Hierarchical Accessibility, Placement due to Circumstances and Process Design – refer to spatial qualities observed in cities, both in terms of the ways in

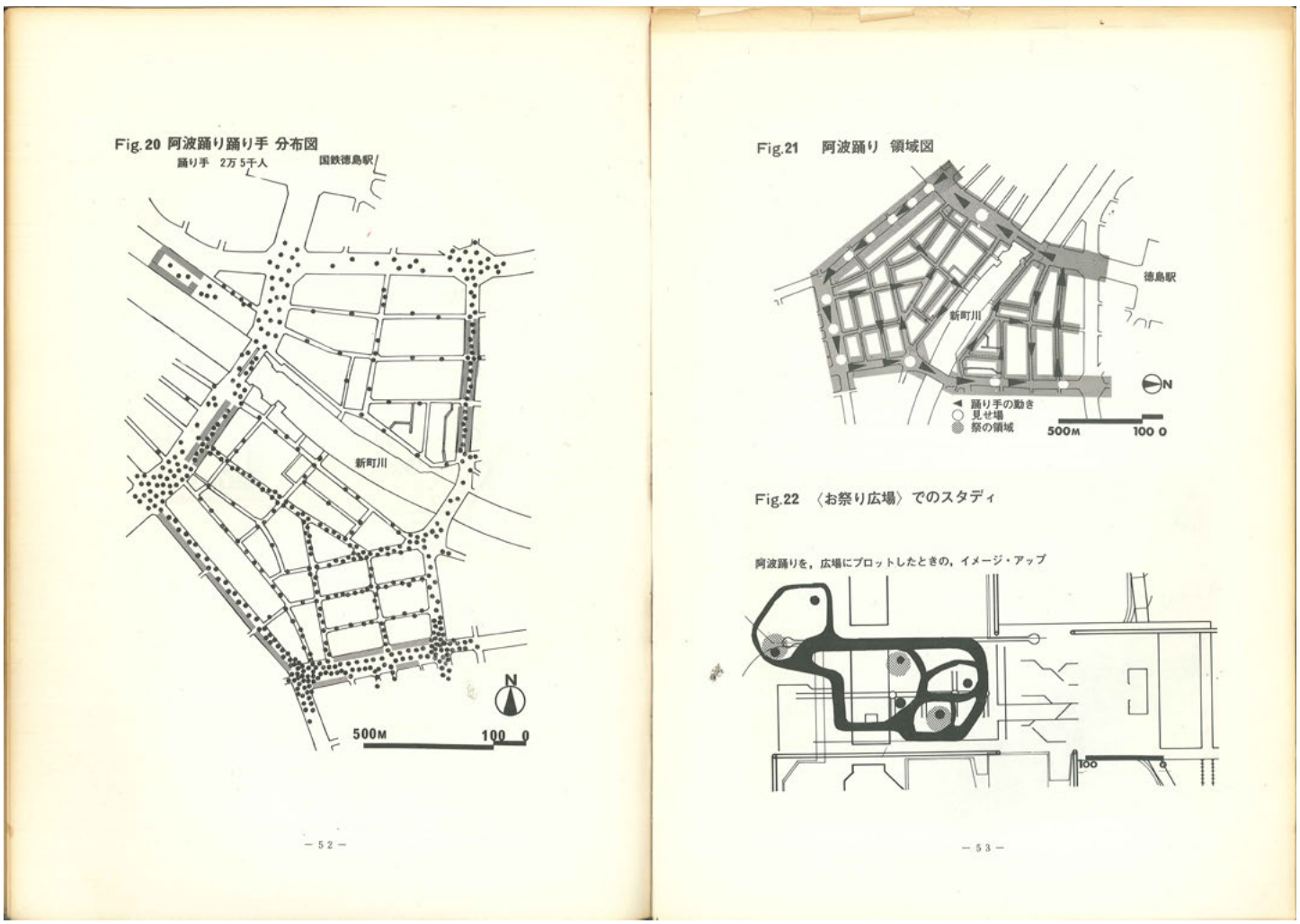
First page of the "Principle of Space Order" and "Placement due to Circumstance" in the special issue "Nihon no toshi kūkan."
Source: Itō, Isozaki *et al.* 1963: 61, 63.

which such spaces would be experienced and how they are organized. The second type reflects on thirteen Methods of Spatial Composition, including the study of a series of spatial arrangements such as By-Chance System, Cluster System and Space-Time Value. The important point at issue among these methods is that none had been theoretically conceived for the purpose of future application, but rather all were already to be found in real Japanese cities. Isozaki and Itō thus proposed to collect and classify these unplanned spatial strategies that are commonly visible in everyday urban spaces and buildings, redefining them as methods for future use.

Finally, the third part contains Activators of Urban Space, focusing on the role of certain elements that when placed in space alter its perception. A series of seven elements were investigated from the point of view of the action that they produced in space (to divide, to enclose, to connect, etc.). Aside from its analytical value, and the production of a collection of morphologies in a sort of archive of forms, the research carried out by Itō and Isozaki for "Nihon no toshi kūkan" was specifically based on addressing the role of spatial configuration and actual phenomena in the city. This implies two important features: that the results of such study could now be easily transposed to an architectural scale from an urban one, since they largely deal with scalable configurational aspects of urban space, and that such findings are also easily transposed even if the architectural language is changed.

It was only three years after the publication of "Nihon no toshi kūkan" that Isozaki was made responsible for the performative concept to be integrated in the Festival Plaza

at Expo Osaka '70, the main space of the exposition (Schaad 2016). Expanding from his investigations on urban forms with Itō, Isozaki and a group of researchers further explored the possibilities of the city as a repository of architectural morphologies by studying the itineraries and flows of circulation at various traditional Japanese festivities. The idea was to extract, synthesize and apply these movement patterns into the changeable configuration of the Festival Plaza. In this research, a discursive analysis of historical street festivals in Japan was followed by the creation of a set of diagrams mapping the movement flows of its participants.[2] For instance, the study mapped the scope, density and movement directions of the dancers in the Awa Odori festival in Tokushima Prefecture – the largest dance festival in the country – to then apply such directions and movements to the layout of the Festival Plaza. In addition, the research included investigations on managing and controlling every element of the multiple performances that would be continually taking place within the parameters of this newly built environment by means of a central computer system. A series of schemes were presented to explain the communication settings between elements in the Plaza, the timeframe of each event and the cybernetic system that would theoretically regulate inputs and outputs between events and mechanisms.



Diagrams of density and movement direction extracted from the Awa Odori Festival, and their translation into the layout of the Festival Plaza.
Source: 'Red Book' 1967: 52–53.

View of the Festival Plaza beneath the space frame, with Isozaki's performative robots in the background.
Credit: *L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 152 (1970).

The Plaza was then materialized as an open area delimited by a walkable space-frame structure 290 metres in length, 108 metres in width and thirty metres in height; this was held up by pillars concealing the elevators and service equipment. The structure was fiercely pierced by the so-called Tower of the Sun, a massive sculpture designed by artist Taro Okamoto. According to Isozaki, the Plaza was designed as a place that the public could potentially appropriate via a spirit of "collective excitement" (Isozaki 1970: 67). This would be possible thanks to the cybernetic system that would change the setting of the layout in response to people's movements, and through the help of two performing robots moving around the space with sound, light and smoke effects. It turned out that the cybernetic system never worked as planned, but the layout of the space, configured as a combination of urban shapes and movement patterns, was indeed modified according to the different performances occurring throughout the day.[3] However, far from generating an interactive atmosphere in which the public and the performers coexisted, the Festival Plaza remained much closer to a unidirectional, traditional, controlled events space.

Although the Festival Plaza failed to operate as interactively as promised, its design process represented an important attempt to formulate an innovative spatial configuration based on an archive of urban forms and movement patterns collected from the city. Drawing upon "Nihon no toshi kūkan" and the extended research elaborated for the

Expo Committee, the design sought to generate multiple urban experiences by means of dissolving boundaries and collapsing traditional notions of building functions and materiality. The Plaza was neither a building nor a square: it was first and foremost an infrastructure, embodying the result of a conversation between city form and architectural space, and encapsulating the vibrancy of street networks into an open urban void. This sort of space is, in fact, very uncommon in Japan. Indeed, public open spaces are scarce in Japanese cities, and the few historical examples, such as Okazaki Park in Kyoto and the acclaimed Hiroshima Peace Memorial, were laid out 'on demand'. They are open spaces initially conceived either to enhance a specific performance or to memorialize an important moment in history.

With no events to celebrate following its six-month duration, soon after the end of the Expo the entire site, and the Festival Plaza with it, was dismantled. But despite

View down onto Kyoto Station Main Hall. Credit: Wikimedia Commons. https://web.archive.org/web/20161027211105/http://www.panoramio.com/photo/92032500

its ephemeral existence and ultimately controlled performance, the Plaza has been interpreted as a symbolic claim for change in the urban planning of Japanese cities at the time, one that would involve innovative morphologies while also adopting a close link with people's practices, as "a physical instrument to give voice to [the city's] living population" (Urushima 2006: 309). In its attempt to become a responsive environment whose layout was grounded in the morphology of the existing city, the Plaza aimed to take a step beyond the normative use of an urban space as the fixed theatre of choreographed festivities. Furthermore, it highlighted the question of whether more public squares were needed in Japanese cities. By translating urban patterns into the singular space of the Plaza, the site became the repository of an archive of urban forms, where multiple movements and potential activities were allowed. Within a single area, and helped by the movable performative objects designed by Isozaki, this urban infrastructure could certainly be understood as a Plaza but also as a cluster of streets or as a ceremonial promenade – ideally allowing people a certain freedom in the way they experienced an open space. Even today, the desire for more public squares in the city seems timely in Japan. Perhaps the closest examples to public squares can be found in the commercial halls of train stations in cities such as Kyoto and Kanazawa: huge, roofed spaces with shops, restaurants and amenities. Controlled, surveilled and covered by spatial structures, these seem to be the 'festival plazas' of the contemporary Japanese city, condensed archives of urban forms raising questions around the meaning of public space in Japan. Whether the citizen has the right to freely make use of such open spaces remains, as happened with the Festival Plaza, a contested territory.

Notes:

[1] As architect Naohiko Hino explains, large-scale urban projects proliferated in Japan in the 1960s as a result of a rapid industrialization and demographic growth in the country.

[2] The research was compiled in a so-called 'Red Book', a report presented to the Expo Committee for their approval. Its official title is "Research report of the integrated production mechanism using water, sound, light, etc. in the external space centered on the Japan World Exposition 'Festival Square'." The research was undertaken in 1967 by the Japan World Exposition Event Investigation Committee, comprising the main members Kuniharu Akiyama, Arata Isozaki, Nobuhiro Sato and Katsuhiro Yamaguchi. The report was issued by the Japan World Exposition Event Research Committee, Japan Science Foundation. This research report was found in the archive of Arata Isozaki, stored at the Misa Shin Gallery in Tokyo.

[3] This was partly due to financial constraints, but most notably because of the lack of technological improvements to make such systems work properly.

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Exposing the Archive, Unlocking the Grid

Cady Gonzalez

"It takes more than implementation to be a hygienic community," the director of Addis Ababa's municipal water and sanitation authority (AAWSA) explained to me over a cup of strong Ethiopian coffee. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the problem of open defecation has typically been attributed to poor urban planning and lack of infrastructure. As of 2014 only sixty-four public toilet facilities were available within the city municipality, and they were rarely used. This is because these facilities "had no life," the sanitation director continued. When a committee of urban planners and development practitioners convened to design public toilets and devise strategies to change people's defecation habits, they thought "Coffee is life…" Noting that the Ethiopian coffee ceremony is a daily ritual as well as a space for relaxation and social exchange, they integrated this into their designs in the hope that the ceremony would improve citizens' sanitary activities by laying out temporal and spatial markers for the day.

Between my fieldwork periods in the summers of 2016 and 2017, AAWSA constructed more than two hundred public toilet parks on small pockets of land repurposed from failed public utility programs, often in areas of high population density and

Historical public toilet in Addis Ababa.
Photo: Cady Gonzalez, 2019.

Addis Ababa's prefabricated public sanitation program, known commonly as AAWSA's "mobile public toilet" parks.
Photo: Cady Gonzalez, 2017.

Café and garden areas centered around a toilet. Photo: Cady Gonzalez, 2018.

near transit hubs. While all the public toilet parks follow the same grid-like design, each iteration also bears the unique material history of the site on which it is built. Here I ask, what does considering urban grid-as-archive reveal about infrastructure in African cities?

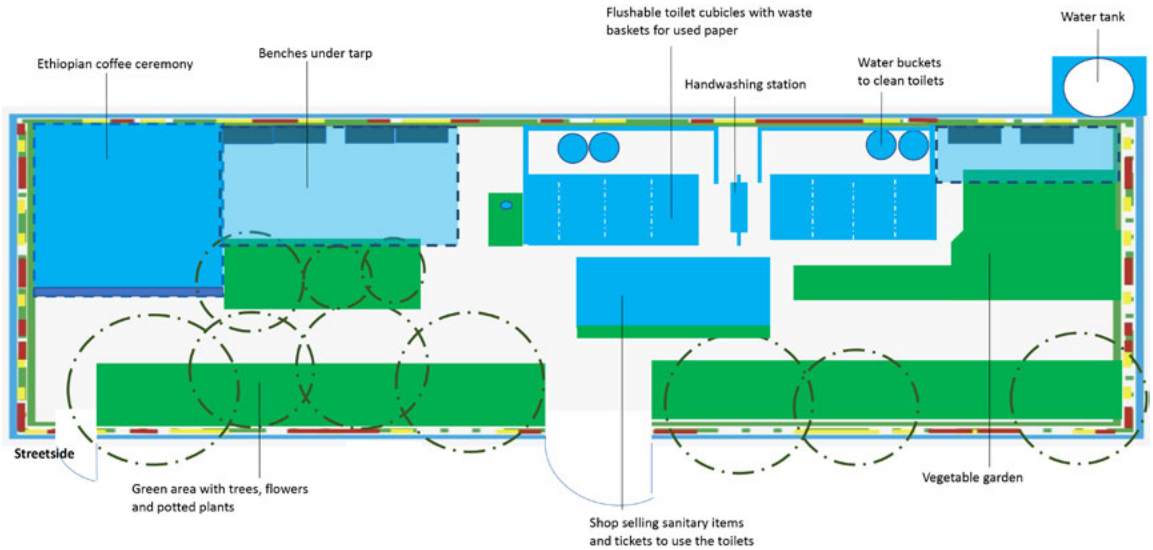
By targeting dirty areas of the city, AAWSA seeks to 'clean' Addis Ababa as much as it aims to 'green' it. With the facilities also functioning as small urban parks, tiled walkways encourage customers to meander throughout the space among flowering shrubs, potted plants and trees – but not to engage with it intimately, as each planter is demarcated by metal-link chains.

Akin to James Scott's (1999) miniaturized forms of perfection, each park is a small island of order and modernity that juxtaposes coffee with pay-per-use latrines housed within modular metal cubicles painted in AAWSA's signature blue. Hemmed in by a fence that reads in Amharic script, "The new town: it is cleaned; it is beautiful," the plan offers a visually complete example of how one possible urban future might look. The rationale of control, planning and spatial order is legible within the confines of each park to anyone who engages with its materialities and rhythms. But the process of miniaturization requires a flattening of topography as if it were a canvas.

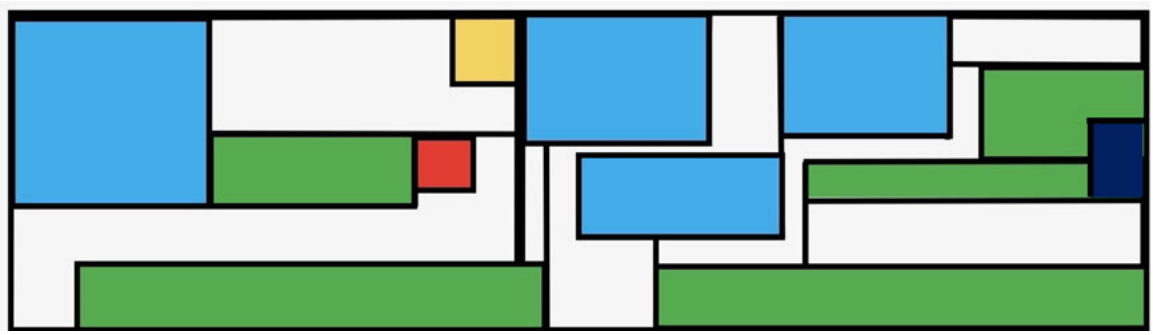
A bird's eye view of the model park shows how the grid is discernable in the consistent compartmentalization and fragmentation of space into discrete components with clearly delineated contours. In addition to the grid enacting a practice of legibility and social engineering (Scott 1999), it also emerged as emblematic of twentieth-century conceptual modern art. Unlike the spontaneous defamiliarization inherent in classic anthropological fieldwork, I tried intentionally to defamiliarize myself from the everyday experience of the park by means of modernist abstraction.

The Dutch abstract painter Piet Mondrian chose to radically distill his representations of the world into their most basic vertical and horizontal elements, using fields of

primary colors to delineate different zones. Inspired by Mondrian's visual regimentation and informed by the field of speculative design where design practices are utilized to "trigger shifts in perspective" and "open spaces for unthought-of possibilities (Dunne and Raby 2013: 43), I reduced and rescaled the plan for the model public toilet park to shed light on the formal, geometric order of urban space. This shift in perspective highlights both the grid's tendency to "extend in all directions to infinity" (Krauss 1978) as well as, in Vyjayanthi Rao's words, how "the city constitutes a messy



Spatial and architectural representation of the model public toilet park. Illustration: Cady Gonzalez.



kind of archive" (2009: 371). As indicated by the red, yellow and dark blue shapes, these sites also archive plotlines of social and political possibility, both past and present. The model park, as Samuel Shearer (2016) describes, is a space where "ruins and afterlives of unrealized and abandoned designs inhabit the present alongside dreams of a better future."

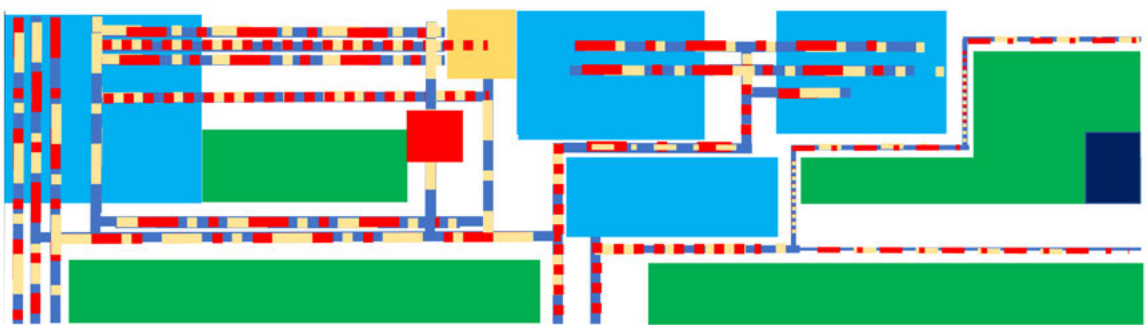
Grid abstraction of the model public toilet park. Required infrastructure is rendered in AAWSA's signature bright blue and prescribed landscaping in green. Zones of red, yellow and dark blue designate unofficial structures. Illustration: Cady Gonzalez.

A telephoneless telephone booth, once part of a failed intervention, is now inscribed within the program's model park, pointing to how layers of state failures become the foundation upon which models of development are then predicated. Similarly, individual managers of the toilet parks use the prescriptive design as a point of departure to construct half-built structures, such as kitchens to prepare food for patrons and water fountains to make their park more inviting. These multiplying built forms fold

Telephone booth in the public toilet park.
Photo: Cady Gonzalez, 2017.

into urban spatial practices of commerce, production and circulation. By flattening the grid, I underscored how the city is a place of continual accumulation as well as destruction and subtraction; a place where design compresses the juxtaposition of materials as well as layering historical breaks, junctures and chronologies.

Continuing this process of translation, I turned to Mondrian once more, and his *Broadway Boogie Woogie* of 1943. Here, Mondrian replaced the black grid that had long governed his canvases with atomized bands of stuttering chromatic pulses to suggest the city's moving traffic, blinking electric lights and rhythmic jazz. While the grid's modernist preoccupation gives place to "matter out of place" (Douglas 2002: 44), the removal of the rigid black lines that fragmented the previous translation foregrounds how the grid is as much about connectivity as it is compartmentalization. Rather, the grid facilitates particular patterns and speeds of movement, or patterns of traffic to the parks, and indicates new rhythms and relations of urban daily life. Modern art thus allowed me to uncover the public utility grid's dual dynamism and expansion – or rather its momentum.



Trajectories of movement within grid abstraction.
Illustration: Cady Gonzalez.

Abandoned public toilet park.
Photo: Cady Gonzalez, 2017.

Unfinished public toilet park repurposed as social hub for construction workers.
Photo: Cady Gonzalez, 2017.

Rhythms of momentum and stagnation apply to the urban grid-as-archive as well. Across town, two parks suffered the same fate as the telephoneless telephone booth when – as the land was repossessed for road development – their construction halted. One remained as a skeletal structure, overtaken by weeds and waste, while the other's cubicles were repurposed as a pool hall for day laborers asphalting the road. Despite fading into the archival record of the city, these parks' abandonment also engendered new enclaves of social and material engagement in the city center.

Drawing together written and visual description can trigger shifts in perspective that shed light on the processes by which infrastructural archives are constituted. Neither the archive nor the urban grid is a site that points merely to "that which happened and that which is said to have happened" (Weld 2013: 12–13). Instead, an archival approach to the urban landscape foregrounds the fact that they both gesture towards that which never happened and that which still could. This exercise in design anthropology demonstrates that, as historical forms of order and reorder, neither the grid nor the archive may be as oppressive as previously conceptualized. They both create and inscribe plotlines of possibility.

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Landmarks of Indignation:
Archiving Urban (Dis)Connectivity at Johannesburg's Margins

Hanno Mögenburg

The fire broke out in the afternoon, when she was not at home but visiting a cousin that had just returned from hospital. This was luck, Lindiwe says – because she had not opened her pub yet, so nobody was there who could have been hurt when the flames took everything on that day in August just two weeks before we met. "My neighbours called to tell me about the fire and I came back right away. I could see the smoke from afar and I hurried. But when I arrived I found everything already burnt down to the ground." As it turned out, the reason for the fire was a defective electricity distribution box outside the pub. Some cables burnt through, eventually sparking the thatch on the roof which quickly escalated the conflagration.

Ironically, the distribution box was the only thing that emerged from the fire completely undamaged. A grey box in front of a crumbling, soot-smeared concrete wall: this is why we came here, what my companion wanted to show me to give an example of what she and other residents of Soweto – South Africa's biggest conglomeration of townships at the margins of Johannesburg – are so outraged about. "You see this now? This is what they do to us! They kill us with their shitty boxes. They don't even care that their old cables put our lives in danger."

Tragically, this box had been an issue in the neighbourhood for quite some time already. Months before, they requested for the electricity company to send out technicians, logging complaints about a loud humming emanating from the box. But nobody came. In fact, as far as my interlocutors could remember, nobody had ever been back here since the late 1980s, during apartheid, when they first put up the distribution boxes in this area, trenched the cable ducts and did the wiring to finally electrify (in very rudimentary fashion) parts of the townships.

Before and after the fire: the owner of the pub is holding up an old picture to show how her establishment used to look inside.
Photo: Hanno Mögenburg, 2019.

Infrastructures are often described as the material substrate of the city, connecting or networking it together and, as the literal translation of the Latin word suggests, underlying and traversing our urban worlds as we pass through them. While for the more privileged, infrastructures only become visible and a public matter at moments of breakdown and disruption (see Bowker and Star 2002), in the world's urban margins they are instead often experienced as systemic abandonment and an accumulation of failure. Here, they are envisaged through a sense of disconnectedness, absence,

partiality or inchoateness, inevitably stimulating a local public's attention – as in the case of Johannesburg's outskirts.

Residents of South Africa's townships have always been well aware of the political materiality of their surroundings. Apartheid's spatial engineering and the historical experience of domination, based to a great degree on "infrastructural modalities of power" (von Schnitzler 2016: 65), are inscribed in people's social memory and the spatial knowledge they inherit.

The electricity distribution box was the only thing undamaged after the fire.
Photo: Hanno Mögenburg, 2019.

Given their material longevity and their material-semiotic quality of connecting citizens of and to the state, infrastructures are key objects in the production of this spatial knowledge as they simultaneously accommodate diachronic and synchronic dimensions of imagining, memorizing and thematising politics in their different temporalities (Carse and Kneas 2019). Hence, infrastructural dis/connectivity – an important factor in the mobilization of the African National Congress's electorate since the first democratic elections in 1994 – continues to inform public negotiation

of post-apartheid state-building today. This is especially so because after years of neoliberal corporatization, mismanagement and corruption, infrastructural governance of the South African postcolony has become exceedingly incoherent and fragmentary in all fields. Just one pertinent example is the case of electricity provision, particularly in urban peripheries, where diverse, coexisting technologies at different stages of implementation, with different rules and de/regulations, and interventions are coupled roughly together.

It has been established in infrastructure studies that perpetual "unfinishedness" (Carse and Kneas 2019), or – borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari – a state of constantly being in the process of becoming, is an inherent feature of infrastructures, as indeed it is to societies, and thus they require permanent maintenance and repair (Graham and Thrift 2007; Jackson 2014; Gupta 2018). It is in this relation between materiality and care, the mediation between construction and decay, where archival qualities of infrastructures also take effect. They are archival in that they conserve the state of political, economic and technological orders in which they are embedded. And their material condition discloses trajectories of political priorities, recording the extent of past support that a given project enjoyed. Their material beginnings and endings, technical adaptations, abandoned construction sites and remnants – all of their material elements and interventions as a whole – eventually manifest the contingency of a state's performance, expressing the quality of its care and the strenuousness of its efforts to deliver equal resources to all citizens. Therefore, infrastructural ruins not only document the non-linear, fragmented and multi-temporal character of large technological systems; they also carry sediments of past and present socio-political ordering.

Consequently, it is not infrastructure's unfinishedness per se that incites urban resistance in South Africa's townships, but its fragmentary condition, which is synonymous both with historical marginalization during apartheid and present, post-liberation neglect. To many residents, residues of infrastructural development represent derelict political projects of post-apartheid state-building: abandoned, switched off, burned out, damaged and dismantled, or broken down once and for all, but nonetheless enshrined in the material-semiotic environment of people's everyday lives.

While 'unfinishedness' suggests being in some sort of state of development with a tendency towards repair, adaptation and betterment – eventually connectivity – the fragments and abandonment of infrastructural objects at the city's periphery in fact convey a definite sense that nothing is to be expected out of them anymore. This represents a terminus of governmental care in several respects. They are like loose threads, where the infrastructural delivery apparatus frays into nothing: dysfunctional, suspended, moribund or defunct.

Another expressive example of this can be found in Thembelihle, an informal settlement outside of Lenasia, a neighbourhood southwest of Johannesburg. In 2017, its residents were finally granted a solar-powered energy supply after years of struggling for their homes to be connected to the grid. In avoidance of formally recognizing their claims to the land that the residents had initially occupied illegally, the city administration

decided to agree on a solar facility as a temporary, removable and cheap solution to Thembelihle's protest for energy justice. But the night after they were finally installed, alongside media-effective appearances by local politicians, the panels were stolen – before they could even be connected to the shacks.

Empty frames of Thembelihle's solar power programme.
Photo: Hanno Mögenburg, 2019.

So, while residents continue to rely on illegal connections of all kinds today, with live wires hanging over their heads, the empty frames and scaffoldings of the solar panel programme for Thembelihle openly decay on a prominent site in the settlement as just one of various dead ends of post-apartheid infrastructuring. They have become well-known landmarks and, along with other ruins in this part of the metropole, are inciting the community's anger and frustration on a daily basis. Hence, for people like my companion, it has been a natural consequence to organize one of the various crisis committees, resident associations and activist grassroots formations, all of which explicitly address infrastructural shortcomings in the living environment. These are infamously known as 'service delivery protests'.

Such protests should not be mistaken for unanimity and cohesion among all residents. There are political reservations and social tensions between various groups and actors regarding infrastructure development, as there are ongoing conflicts over the allocation of local power and economic gains from illicit activities in the shadow of constant undersupply. Nonetheless, it is both the quality and the extent to which these ruins incite the continuing, relentless engagement of people with their surroundings that I want to emphasize. Within these engagements, the ruins of infrastructural development are material signifiers, carrying residents' social critique and being something to point at when illustrating failures in connecting communities to the democratic project. Singling out ruined infrastructural objects and telling their story of failure aims to disentangle them from their quotidian backdrop, and to re-scandalize and de-normalize the political omissions of which they are material evidence.

This is why, along with new materialist reasoning, according to which certain objects bear agential capacity to become central to the formation of political issues (Marres 2012; Barry 2013), I think these remnants of abandoned infrastructure contribute to the emergence of a critical local public registering what is to them post-apartheid debris. Both subliminally and/or in more elaborated form, residents thereby develop some sort of infrastructural history from below. This gains gravity and accrues detail through recurring reference to specific places of infrastructural abandonment, in conjunction with passing on background stories and formulating political accounts – for each other, or a wider public when they take around journalists or anthropologists. This eventually connects these places in a mental map of splintered urbanity (Graham and Marvin 2001), readily retrievable to all those archivists accustomed to residing outside the realm of well-serviced islands of suburban enclaves. Furthermore, the accumulation of such places at Johannesburg's margins, the city set out to be the post-apartheid example for an Afropolitan metropolis, is becoming a serious threat to support of the liberation project.

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Museum – Archive – Infrastructure

Conal McCarthy, Philipp Schorch
and Nicholas Thomas

In this article, we approach the museum as archive and as infrastructure. We do so by introducing two research initiatives that set out to conceptually explore this nexus, and by hinting at methodological approaches and empirical lines of inquiry to be further pursued. The parallels between museums and archives as memory institutions are obvious (Schwartz and Cook 2002). We are interested in the versatile ways in which the museum as archive becomes *enacted*, such as through the revitalization of cultural practices, with implications beyond the realms of the museological and archival. The museum as archive, understood as relational knowledge infrastructure, can be (re)activated for various purposes: from cross-disciplinary renewal to the recovery of Indigenous concepts and frameworks, and as the inspiration for narratives about sustainability and future change.

There is infrastructure that we construct, and there is infrastructure that we inherit. Museum collections constitute *historical* infrastructure: they were assembled and brought into being generations ago. They were, moreover, not one-off creations analogous to old scientific instruments, made at a particular moment; rather they are assemblages formed over time through periodic addition and subtraction. The

distinctiveness of historical infrastructure is that the purpose of a collection has been understood in different ways over time. The rationale for a museum's formation is not generally the same as the rationale for maintaining the collection or the institution today.

Reinhart Koselleck, the historian of ideas, reflected on "the disposability of history." The specific question that concerned him was the sense in which, around the time of the French Revolution, it became possible to see History (in the singular) as both the product of human agency (rather than providence or fate) and historical narrative – and similarly, as something people could "dispose of," that is, define and shape, in ways that suited their purposes in particular contexts. His erudite inquiry prompts us to ask whether and how collections are disposable in analogous respects. Koselleck's argument was not a correlative of what became more or less axiomatic in postmodernist thinking, that history (or the body, gender or the polity) was discursively constructed. His concern was to qualify that thesis, insisting that the "given conditions" of history may "escape disposition, or makeability;" in other words, agency is partial and limited; history is also something that 'happened' (Koselleck 2004: 204).[1]

To tease out the temporalities underlying Koselleck's reasoning, our first research initiative, *The museum as archive: using the past in the present and future*, addresses questions such as: What happens when archival and museum collections are used in the present and mobilized towards the future? And what happens if we approach archives and museums as dynamic-contingent processes, heterotopian spaces and living resources for creative interventions and utopian (re)imaginations? The inherent temporality of museums and archives has been thoroughly unpacked (Derrida 1995). We are interested in how archival and museum holdings feed into extrinsic, versatile temporalities, such as those underpinning Indigenous textualities enacted through weaving, and the genealogies inscribed in material entities.

An example of the way in which versatile archival material collected in the past can be reanimated in the present is furnished by the legacy of the Board of Maori Ethnological Research established in New Zealand in 1923 by lawyer, politician and 'homegrown' anthropologist Āpirana Ngata. Working with tribal partners, Ngata and his colleagues such as Te Rangihīroa (Peter Buck) collected objects, manuscripts, photographs and films – all records that documented visual and material culture and performing arts, which are now housed in museums, libraries and archives. This rich store of knowledge, or *mātauranga Māori*, serves as a resource, stimulus and framework for current revitalization projects in Indigenous language, music, arts and heritage. The versatility of this archival infrastructure is demonstrated by the extraordinary ways in which customary Māori ideas and methods are being applied to contemporary tribal cultural development.

One of these concepts, *whakapapa* or 'relatedness', can be understood as a practical ontology – a set of conceptual frameworks, practices, institutions and technologies (such as museums-archives). Like today's Oceanic scholars, Ngata saw *whakapapa* – a cosmic framework of relatedness between all things – as warp and weft not just of Māori life, but of all his strategic interventions, whether academic, artistic or

Āpirana Ngata and Te Rangihīroa (Peter Buck) weaving a* tukutuku *latticework panel during the Dominion Museum Ethnological expedition to the East Coast in 1923. Courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

political.[2] *Whakapapa* is materialized in a range of artefacts, or *taonga* (treasures): weaving, rafter patterns, carving and netting; from small woven *kete* (bags) to the carved, woven and painted iconography of decorated meeting houses that are the instantiation of ancestral bodies. A contemporary example is the beautiful interior of the house on the marae at Victoria University, which includes numerous *tukutuku* panels, such as the one made by Ngata and Buck above, that along with other decorative elements constitute the body of a tribal ancestor within which descendants meet. The house is called Te Tumu Herenga Waka, or the 'hitching post of canoes,' alluding to its role in giving Māori students a place within the university where they can maintain their cultural identity.

Clues to the interpretation of Māori material culture, often housed in museums, and its regeneration today, can be found in the writings of Māori experts preserved in historical manuscripts.[3] Having discovered Ngata's text, *The Terminology of Whakapapa*, in the archives of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Ngāti Porou artist and researcher Natalie Robertson has employed his "genealogical method" (Lythberg, McCarthy and Salmond 2019: 12) to re-examine the records of the Dominion Museum ethnological expedition of 1923. Her research reveals how the different qualities of relationships, genealogical and otherwise, were acknowledged and maintained during the expedition. These are woven throughout the films, images and archival fragments it produced – the *taonga* that it helped bring into being – offering a rich account of the expedition's exchanges with Robertson's people, then and now.[4]

Our second initiative, *Museum futures: material cultures of ethnography and natural history as archives of environmental knowledge*, builds on the assumption that both 'natural' and 'cultural' holdings constitute archives of environmental knowledge, thus offering distinct repositories that are mostly neglected in the environmental humanities. The relationship between the cultural and natural sciences has a long museological history (Miller 2021). Our interest is twofold: First, the scholarly attitude of critical curiosity will be historically traced to the epoch of eighteenth- and much of nineteenth-century scholarship, an era before the disciplines under scrutiny were taking shape and staking out their ground in the academy. Second, interdisciplinary material-based inquiries will be geared towards de-installing disciplinary divisions by (re)connecting the environmental and the cultural.

Interior of the meeting house Te Tumu Herenga Waka built in 1986 at the marae (ceremonial meeting place) of Victoria University of Wellington. Courtesy Marie Cocker and Image Services, Victoria University of Wellington.

The artefacts brought together in vast numbers in museum collections exemplify the capacity of collectors and curators to present things in ways the original creators (and owners) of those objects did not envisage: this is the decontextualization that commentators have long lamented. If, in the nineteenth century, scholar-curators thought the comparative collections that they assembled would empower a new science of global technology, or of cultural traits that would enable human affinities and migrations to be mapped, this disposition of the material lapsed as anthropology, archaeology and related disciplines shifted their interests towards social relationships, cultural symbols and questions of power and hegemony. Artefact collections can also be reconceived as 'heritage.' This contextualization, increasingly prominent since the 1980s, is at once familiar yet also heterogeneous: the issues that it brings and what it means for different groups varies widely. But in this context Koselleck's

question might be raised: In what ways do collections bear "given conditions" that are not disposable or makeable? Do aspects of their historical formation constrain the versatility that contemporary curators and cultural activists might wish to exploit? Are artefacts 'stuck' in museological regimes that only enable so much remaking?

Mark Adams' large format triptych of the stumps of totara cut down by participants in Cook's voyage in 1773 (*1995. Astronomers' Point. Totara stumps. 1773. *Silver gelatin prints.) Courtesy of the artist.

An optimistic response might foreground the versatility of artefacts and also natural specimens that artistic interventions in museums – themselves extensively debated for over twenty years – have (re)discovered and mobilized. Mark Adams's images, for example, capture and reveal events surrounding the landing of Captain James Cook's *Resolution* at Tamatea (Dusky Sound) in the far south of New Zealand in March–April 1773. The pristine forest on a low hill was cleared, and the location named Astronomers' Point. The naturalist George Forster later eulogized: "The superiority of a state of civilization over that of barbarism could not be more clearly stated, than by the alterations and improvements we had made in this place" (2000, I: 105). In the 1990s, photographer Mark Adams responded with these haunting images of the stumps of the trees cut down 220 years earlier. The images were juxtaposed with photos taken at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, London, of botanical specimens collected during the same voyage, evoking the travels of plants and the global project of economic botany. Together, these visualizations effect what the Indigenous Australian artist Brook Andrew has described as "bringing into the light" the signs of land, culture and history that proliferate in anthropological and other archives, and in museum collections.[5] Notwithstanding the "given conditions," and the painful legacies of colonial violence that collecting institutions unevenly bear, the museum can thus constitute infrastructure; specifically, it can constitute a very particular creative technology.

Mark Adams' photograph of the kidney fern specimens collected by the naturalist Forster and brought back to Britain (*1995. Trichomanes reniforme. Tamatea Dusky Sound. Johann Forster. *Silver gelatin print.) Courtesy of the artist.

Notes:

[1] "On the disposability of history," originally published as a separate essay in German in 1977, is reproduced as chapter 11 in Koselleck 2004.

[2] This draws on Lythberg, McCarthy and Salmond 2019.

[3] See McCarthy 2019.

[4] See Robertson 2019.

[5] Thomas and Andrew 2008; see also Jorgensen and McLean 2017.

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Nicholas Thomas's books on cross-cultural encounters, colonialism, art and museums include *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Harvard University Press, 1991), which influentially contributed to a revival of material culture studies, *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture* (Thames & Hudson, 1999) and *Discoveries:*

The Voyages of Captain Cook (Penguin Press, 2003). His recent writings on museum histories and practice include *The Return of Curiosity: What Museums Are Good for in the Twenty-first Century* (Reaktion Books, 2016). He has been director of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge since 2006, and has curated extensively, often in collaboration with contemporary artists. Over 2018–2019, he co-curated *Oceania* for the Royal Academy of Arts in London and Le musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris.

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Tandal:
A Feminist Archive of an Infrastructure in the Making

Kesang Thakur and Krishna Tashi Palmo

Infrastructures are concrete expressions of desires and aspirations: of what to be and how to be. In the context of the recently inaugurated Atal Rohtang Tunnel in the tribal trans-Himalayan district of Lahul and Spiti, India, infrastructural aspirations have been visibly gendered. This mega-infrastructure deeply embodies a hierarchical and masculine vision – the top composed by engineering and geological expertise and the bottom by the able-bodied male migrant workers corporeally engaged with the infrastructure's making (Sabhlok 2017).

Rohtang, a mountain pass on the Pir Panjal Range at almost 4000 meters, is a defining feature of Lahul's remoteness. This natural infrastructure that demarcates Lahul has been central in imagining the tunnel as a social and geopolitical necessity. Colonial tropes of backwardness and isolation define the tunnel as the driver of development in this trans-Himalayan region. Existing national, regional and vernacular knowledge on this infrastructure are dominated by masculine understandings of geology, technology and geopolitics.

This is the space we are inhabiting and navigating as Lahuli women. Where do the social and political imaginaries of Lahuli women fit in the grand schemes of progress and geopolitical security? We explore some of these feminine imaginations and interpretations of the tunnel in this illustrated essay.

To access the illustrated essay please click here.

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Krishna Tashi Palmo is an artist from Lahul, India. Trained and certified in traditional Buddhist Thangka art from the Tibetan Children's Village Art School in Kullu, she is equally drawn to contemporary forms and mediums of expression. Her experimental work builds radically on the notions of the feminine, spirituality and the self. She has exhibited her paintings in local, national and international artistic platforms, most recently at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi and Asia Society Center, Hong Kong.

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Archiving and Imagination in an Intertidal Zone

Jennifer Clarke and Jvan Yazdani

Introduction

In 1913 the Danish cargo steamer *G. Koch* ran aground on Aberdeen's Girdleness peninsula.[1] The site is listed in the National Record of the Historic Environment,[2] an archival resource that collates data from shipwreck investigations (Oaxley 2001). Her wrecked boiler, caught in the play of intertidal forces, remains intermittently visible in the intertidal zone: plunging into archival oblivion at high tide and resurfacing into view at low tide. This movement reminded us of the liminality of archives as devices for remembering and forgetting (Assmann 2010; Zeitlyn 2012), as just a few metres away is a construction site: Aberdeen's Harbour Expansion. In this brief article, we explore the concurrence of these historically disjointed sites, one under construction, another at the whims of the tide. Our collaboration emerges from everyday conversation, through different methods and across time, mediated by experimentation with visual methodologies and tools such as 360 cameras and optical instruments used for viewing at a distance. One of us has professional experience working with this construction project and researches marine infrastructures, the other is an artist and anthropologist concerned with art and ecology.

On Jvan's first research visit, he shot 360-degree footage of the boiler. Editing this footage involved a failure of sorts, but this became integral: glitchy yet eloquent, conveying a rich soundscape, it called upon the imagination. Later, when visiting the site together, we found the boiler underwater – out of sight, archived. Jen's later visits brought her own imaginative interactions. If the role of the imagination is crucial in apprehending what is not directly experienced (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009: 12), we wanted to explore the role it plays in multisensory video-making (Pink 2009: 89) including the analytical aspect of visual research (Pink 2009, 2013). We set out to share conversation through writing grounded in analyses of our images, created independently, with the hope we might glimpse each other's perspective.

Jvan

Our original ambition was to bring our practices into the light of analysis, hence our recourse to 360-degree cameras, and binoculars, and the choice of a site that elicited visual discovery through imagination, thanks to the concealing/revealing effect of the tide. In the first place, the use of images helped me question the "coevalness" (Fabian, cited in Pandian 2012: 549) and coherence of 'landscape' and, in turn, fieldwork practices. It held in place a sense of time and process, which might have been concealed

Torry Coo, Girdleness, Aberdeen.
Photo: Jen Clarke, 2020.

if technological glitches, or plain miscalculations, had instead been written away. One example was our inability to use 360-degree footage to its full potential (cf. Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 1987); another was neglecting to consult a tide table chart before our first joint fieldwork, so the boiler was caught below sea level.

As it turned out, this was revelatory in another way and our experience that day appealed to the very core of our theoretical commitment: only an archival stretch of the imagination made the 'archived' boiler available to us. Its absence inhabited the material world and demanded our attention (Fowles 2010). For me, the boiler's archival status proceeded from such fugitivity (cf. Smith and Hennessy 2018), engendered by the coastline's functioning as a writing and erasing device (Carpenter 2016: 14; cf. Ingold 2015). My imagination harnessed these elements, and as an object of (cyclical) observation the boiler turned into something akin to a human-made, rusty, derelict satellite.

The* G. Koch *boiler (360-degree camera). Photo: Jvan Yazdani, 2020.

Jen

Working on this project underscored my interest in the messiness of practice and of the ephemeral (Law 2004): I am drawn to failed things, discarded objects, unfinished images, glitches, errors and aberrations, which interrupt ordinary discourse, exposing the fragility of life. They help me think of things as materials in process, gatherings of materials, in movement (Ingold 2011). I am delighted when images I make end up being precisely not what was intended. My response to the 'failed' 360-video reframed my approach to this place, reminding me that sensory ethnography does more than document: "it's not CCTV," as Pink argues (2013: 336). It facilitates thinking, a way of remembering or getting to know – rather like a process of archiving.

The* G. Koch *boiler through binoculars.
Photo: Jen Clarke, 2020.

The images I made at the site were after encountering and viewing Jvan's corrupted and non-visible recordings of the wreck of the ship's boiler. The first photograph is of the new harbour construction, rumbling away behind a foghorn, locally known as the Torry Coo (Scots for 'cow') for its mooing sound – a wail generated by oil-fired engines compressing air, forcing it through a rotating siren. The Coo was built along with the lighthouse after a whaling ship ran aground, killing dozens of men. When I encountered it, it had been silent for decades. The recordings we made here are dominated by the sound of wind, waves lapping on the shore, helicopters overhead.

Another set of images was made in a very different way to Jvan's 'failed' experiments in 360, yet a visual resonance with the fisheye lens intuitively made sense: I took pictures through a pair of binoculars, in the rain, inspired by the revelatory experience of discovering the boiler at low tide. I think this image speaks to your romantic imagination. The dark tunnels shape the direction of sight, echoing the significance of sound in its absence, offering an oneiric quality (Wylie 2009a).

The next image is a memorial bench near the Seafarers Memorial, a simple steel cross set into a cairn overlooking the harbour. I have been fascinated by memorial benches since encountering dozens during fieldwork in Scottish forests, hundreds of names engraved on rusting metal rectangles, thousands of rain-washed messages of sympathy and remembrance, made poignant by faded plastic flowers. Everyday memorializations involve particular kinds of imaginative acts – perhaps, like archiving, this requires processes of selection, as well as the fugitivity of memory, which is prone to slippage. The geographer John Wylie writes about similar coastal benches as "eyes without bodies [...] giving new sites for seeing, re-placing here and prospecting out there too eyes now closed and buried elsewhere" (2009a: 277).

Greyhope Bay Memorial bench, Aberdeen.
Photo: Jen Clarke, 2020.

Andrew Irving's experimental ethnography (2013) suggests that particular infrastructures facilitate certain experiences, pointing to the way that bridges draw people struggling with suicidal thoughts. Seas and coastlines offer places for contemplation and, in the ever-shifting horizon, changing perspective; studies in health call these "blue spaces" (Gascon et al. 2017). Circling the bench in the rain, I wondered not only about how people materialize loss, but also whether forgetting comes here. If (primarily Western) approaches to commemoration tend to attempt a sense of permanence, here, at the edge of the sea, is a space between past and future imaginations. Rather than recovering memory, in the midst of fog and light rain, with the sound of helicopters passing overhead, something more speculative might be possible.

At the construction site, with its constant rumbling of stone, heavy machinery and water displaced by earth and concrete, I sense how materiality exceeds the invocation of ground. This intertidal zone, where the sea meets the sky, where solids become gas and gas becomes liquid, is a place that shows how things could be otherwise. It offers an alternative for thinking about the imbrication of self and world, perhaps even turning this relation inside out, without "disavowing" the excavation of meaning in analysis (Wylie 2009b: 319).

View from a 360-degree camera placed directly on the* G. Koch *boiler.
Photo: Jvan Yazdani, 2020.

Jvan

Imagining what has been lost, hidden or potentially present, then, may be one means to deal with the difficulties inherent in reading space retrospectively (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 113), and a means of including human endeavours, accidents and intertidal forces. Our analysis thus motions between the images, our experiences of the site and archival knowledge of the shipwreck. Surely the boiler of the *G. Koch*, in the intertidal zone, has exercised its "thing power" (Bennet 2010) of attraction on me since I first learned about it through archival entries. Something about its semi-subaqueous, varying perceptibility appealed to a desire to explore other ways of doing fieldwork. When I look at footage taken by the 360 camera that I positioned on the boiler, for example, I see an attempt, clumsy as it was, to displace my own vantage point. Once again, however, our collaborative effort at 'scooping up' the site through a net, loosely interwoven, of technology and observation returned puzzling results: sounds (of wind, waves and a nearby stream), instead of images, standing out. It is by extending this attitude – a receptiveness to ambiguity, to the realization that reality exceeds and eludes our senses – from the sensorial to our very conceptions of the world that I suggest that ruins (Gordillo 2014; Edensor 2015) and construction sites share a condition of 'material becoming'. Something that could be either satisfying or unsettling.

Towards a Conclusion

Artists have long experimented with how to document and archive their work. Indeed, the art critic Hal Foster addressed the 'archival turn' in art in the 1990s, remarking that this was "concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces [suggestive of] unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects [...] that might offer points of departure again" (Foster 2004: 5). In passing, he posits that this archivality might be more accurately described as 'anarchival', which may be the most apt term for this project, too – understanding archives as permanently in process, assemblages that, in chaos, are constitutive of life (Buchanan 2020). Our collaboration might be an archiving rather than an archive – a process of imagination, documentation and reflection that came into being through conversation.

Notes:

[1] https://www.scottishshipwrecks.com/loss-of-the-g-koch/

[2] https://canmore.org.uk/site/312523/g-koch-girdle-ness-aberdeen-north-sea

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Infrastructure as Archive: Recording the State's Materiality along the Brahmaputra

Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman and Edward Kieran Boyle

> *Generally, the highest part of the plain is along the banks of the rivers from where the land slopes almost imperceptibly downwards, the natural drainage being away from the main river towards subsidiary watercourses, which flowing roughly parallel to the Brahmaputra, eventually converge and spill into that great river further along the valley. During the rainy season, the Brahmaputra overflows its banks from time to time, depositing sand and silt on the adjacent land. By this natural process the narrow plain of Assam is continually building itself up.* – W.R. Gawthrop (1951: 1)

This piece introduces the notion of infrastructure as archive in order to think through the manifold ways in which the banks of the Brahmaputra have been built up over time. It analyses the role of infrastructure in the politics of imagination, and it understands the presence of infrastructural projects as an archive, a repository documenting state interventions over time, open to being examined and re-examined, deployed and redeployed in the service of future interventions. The images illustrate the state's infrastructural presence in the life of the Brahmaputra and demonstrate how we

should see the material record of state hydraulic interventions in this borderland region as an archive.

All rivers carry sediments, deposited at various places along their natural course from source to sea. In the case of the Brahmaputra, material eroding from the relatively young and slowly crumbling Eastern Himalayas meanders through the floodplains of Assam and Bangladesh to the deltaic Sundarbans, and eventually empties into the Bay of Bengal. And all rivers are themselves living and active sculptors of the landscapes they shape over time, as well as of the memories of riverine communities who have moved as the river has moved, living and adapting through its flood-cycles, its ebbs and flows. However, it is anthropogenic interventions that constitute the archive on which we focus here – in the form of embankments and dams built by state bureaucracies to channel and control the river, which accumulate over time.

Taking infrastructure as an archive focuses attention on how the embankments, roads, railways and hydropower dams that layer up along the river's course serve as material evidence for technologies of state intervention and the reproduction and replication of the state itself. The profusion of planned, built, unfinished, sun-bleached and "pickled" infrastructures (Rahman 2019) represents an archive of sorts, directing future imaginative possibilities for speculative and spectacular interventions into the Eastern Himalayan landscape. These successive infrastructural interventions into

A freight train running across a causeway through Deepor Beel, a Ramsar wetland site at Guwahati, Assam. Shadowing the Brahmaputra all the way along, rail infrastructure ruptures the riverine landscape.
Photo: Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.

the course and flow of the river have created both "transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves" (Stoler 2009: 20), channelling the bed of the river and future developments along its banks.

Ann Laura Stoler's attention to archiving-as-process provides our point of departure, which emphasizes the continuities between the imperial formation of Northeast India as a colonial site of extraction and the ongoing material presence of this hydraulic archive in the present. Assam transformed into a resource frontier in colonial times, shaped by the extractive economy and political ecology imposed on the region. Infrastructure development of its riverways, railways and roadways was triggered by imperial demands for a series of resources – tea, coal, oil – as well as the region's mobilization in increasingly global conflicts culminating in World War II. It is the first of these resources with which Assam is most readily associated, and the major tea gardens during colonial times were situated close to the Brahmaputra, the riverine transport route through and out of the region. When the Assam Railways and Trading Company Limited built the first railways to transport these resources, it constructed lines running parallel to the main channel of the Brahmaputra, bisecting and rupturing the natural drainage and downward slope away from the main river outlined by Gawthrop (1951) in the epigraph of this article. The recasting of the riverine landscape was overbuilt by an infrastructure of extraction paralleling the Brahmaputra's course, one that is preserved today.

Three years after India's independence, on 15 August 1950, the Great Assam Earthquake struck. The subsequent postcolonial state expansion and building of political legitimacy in this north-eastern frontier region went ahead in the garb of post-earthquake relief and rehabilitation (Guyot-Réchard 2015), re-/ordering spaces of control and accumulation along, rather than against, the colonial grain. Roads, like the earlier railways, followed an alignment parallel to the river, and therefore ruptured the natural flows of numerous southern and northern tributaries of the Brahmaputra. Embankments built by the postcolonial state were to protect the economic interests of tea gardens, oil wells and commercial towns. The first post-earthquake catastrophic flood arrived in Assam during 1954, soon after the passing of the Assam Embankment and Drainage Act of 1953 (DWR 1954), which set in motion the technological lock-in of the river by embankments as the dominant solution to floods (Wasson et al. 2020). The broader riverscape has come to be interpreted through "infrastructural effects" extending far beyond their material sites of construction (Boyle and Shneiderman 2020), which provide the concrete horizon of possibilities for hydraulic intervention.

The infrastructural archive visible along the contemporary river charts the "quiescence and quickened pace of its own production, in the steady and feverish rhythms of repeated incantations, formulae, and frames" (Stoler 2009: 35). Since Indian independence and the ensuing development, the Brahmaputra has oscillated between a season of floods, occasionally catastrophic, and a season of building and/or reinforcing embankments (Rahman 2020). Beyond the technical durability of these interventions and the hubris of the state agencies involved, the infrastructural archive of the Brahmaputra reveals not merely "ruins as memorialized and large-scale monumental 'leftovers' or relics … but what people are 'left with'" (Stoler 2008: 194). For those who reside by and with the watercourse itself, this archive documents a bureaucratic focus on

Concrete porcupines layering up the Brahmaputra's banks at Majuli island, Assam, documenting the path dependency that attends to infrastructural solutions seeking to lock the river into its course. Photo: Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.

Bridge over Maguri Beel, a Ramsar site near the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Tinsukia. Connective and extractive infrastructures operate at cross-purposes with the daily lives of the area's inhabitants. Photo: Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.

ameliorating what Gawthrop understood to be the river's natural rhythm. The state and its interventions become dedicated to smoothing out connectivity along the river, as well as rupturing natural flows, in a manner that frequently bypasses the lives and livelihoods of the communities resident along it. The infrastructural archive is therefore that of the state, not of those living in its shadows.

The infrastructural archive of the Brahmaputra refers to both concrete infrastructure, which is actually constructed and completed, and to the speculatively planned and unfinished infrastructures serving as an important record of social mobilization and community protests in Northeast India. Movements of self-determination and questions of political legitimacy and sovereign presence are defined by resource extraction and control in the Brahmaputra valley, moving through tea, coal, oil, embankments and dams (Kikon 2020). Such protests are mounted on a scaffolding provided by the infrastructural archive and its role in shaping local understandings. However, while half-built dams and abandoned dredging machinery reflect political

Dam tunnel at Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project site. Although subject to ongoing contestation by local residents, here the archive records power channelled from infrastructural site to the political centre. Photo: Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.

and natural currents that flow counter to bureaucratic efforts both to tame the river and harness connectivity, the resultant archive documents the power of the state rather than its opposition.

What remains after the fact is the material expression of the state. The infrastructural archive is a record of that power, rather than an archaeology of intervention; for local residents this power leaves not merely an infrastructure of repeated interventions, but the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus responsible for its emplacement.

The understanding of infrastructure as archive allows us to bring to light the frontier assemblages and ruptures across the riverine landscape of the Brahmaputra, underlining the social and techno-political relations, the negotiations and temporalities that attend to its collective material presence. It lets us grasp the interplay of infrastructural effects and comprehend how entire geographies, especially borderland environments such as Northeast India, are shaped across various domains over time. The Brahmaputra has

Abandoned railway tracks at Lekhapani, Assam. The ruins of these lines, built to transport coal and oil, are the focus of discussions over extending the state's infrastructural reach. Photo: Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman.

been infrastructured with routes, embankments and dams by a series of bureaucratic administrations to underline their state-making and sovereign presence in fragile borderland ecologies, engineering and embedding the state's material presence into riverine communities living on the floodplains.

Treating these interventions as parts of a single archive allows us to emphasize these structures as both relational and components within a dynamic socio-material assemblage (Rippa and Rest 2020), aiding in the analysis of the pace and trajectory of infrastructure development in borderlands, and of how built, unfinished, half-built and zombie infrastructures (Carse and Kneas 2019) play out through contemporary postcolonial history. The materiality and effects of infrastructure that nation-states negotiate across temporalities, geographies, intensities and scales are the sedimentary material that comes to be layered and assembled as its archive. It is the presence and constant invocation of such an archive that has led to the marginalization of traditional community knowledge systems and non-structural alternatives. For infrastructure to offer open-ended and emergent political possibilities in the future, parts of this archive may need to be allowed to fall into ruin.

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Postcards from the Edge: Territorial Sacrifice and Care in Eastern Estonia

Francisco Martínez and Marika Agu

Greetings from Another Time

What if the landscapes that used to give you a sense of belonging have already been sacrificed to modernization, to the point of making many of them unrecognizable? This essay details a multi-source art installation based on archival postcards at the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM) which interrogates questions of belonging, pollution and modernization in the context of eastern Estonia. By exploring the side-effects of modern infrastructures, we also consider the nature of postcards as archival documents and as visual and material culture, in addition to their transformation into ethnographic devices through their display in a contemporary art installation.

In 2019, we prepared an installation for the exhibition "When You Say We Belong to the Light We Belong to the Thunder," curated by Heidi Ballet.[1] Based on archival research, site explorations and practices of contemporary archaeology, we gathered a series of postcards from the early twentieth century that show recognizable landscapes which no longer exist – lost through a combination of intensive human activity and

natural mutations. These issues are extremely relevant in eastern Estonia, a region mostly populated by Russian-speakers, which suffers from a spatial stigma after a century of modern extractivism, pollution and Soviet re-population policy.

The exhibition reflected on the distinction between 'belonging' to and 'owning' a territory, and their implications when it comes to caring for livelihoods longer term (with an emotional attachment to the locality) or as a purely utilitarian approach to natural resources (a form of colonialism which pretends to have no responsibility for the future condition of the area). Estonia's history of land ownership is marked by several periods of occupation by foreign powers – namely, Danes, Germans, Swedes and Russians. In the first Estonian Republic (1918–1940), 1,065 manor houses were expropriated (only fifty-seven of them came from Estonian owners, while Baltic Germans predominantly owned the rest). These farms were then primarily given to those who had fought for the independence of Estonia. In the Soviet period, these farms were collectivized; any local resistance led to deportations to Siberia, and mass inward migration from the Soviet Union was organized.[2]

Research Installation.
Paul Kuimet,
Contemporary Art
Museum of Estonia

Our installation considered these events and processes by placing old postcards from Narva, Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve and Kiviõli in dialogue with the remains left at these sites. Alongside the postcards, we also exhibited modern debris, consisting of objects such as pollution samplers, broken bricks, rotten wood, promotional flyers, security tape aimed at preventing trespassing, borderland rubbish, and detritus such as apples and seashells.

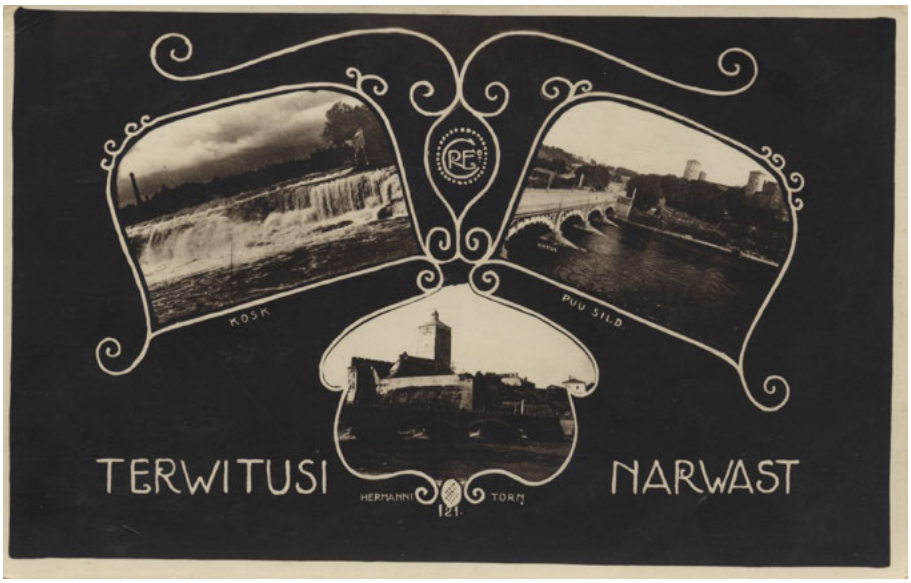
In a vitrine, we positioned the postcards in dialogue with actual remains and documentation from these sites, thus combining visual elements with material culture and political critique. The project also reflected on the nature of postcards as image-objects: they have a particular ontological capacity through their participation in how people imagine the world and with their power to index representations by the very act of selecting certain landscapes and views and putting them into wide circulation.

These postcards were not simply related to tourism; they had been carefully preserved in the Estonian National Library archive, taken out of general use and saved as historical artefacts.[3] In the meantime, they had acquired a documentary-like aura – offering a testimony of territorial sacrifice. Their display in an exhibition setting, however, attributes to postcards a certain transgressive quality, as traces of an infrastructural past that stays silent in an archive. Yet these postcards were not produced to be displayed in museums, not even in their shops – one of the few places where it is possible to buy a postcard nowadays (hence, as commodities). Assembling archival postcards in the novel context of an art installation allowed us to understand the complex relations between modernization, infrastructures and their symbolic representations.

Sacrificed Landscapes

Our installation set out to open up new insights into the relation between modern infrastructures and their representation, the mutation of landscapes and the materiality of extractive economies – here presented as a sacrifice: an irreversible destruction of something based on an expected return (Reinert 2015). For a century, eastern Estonia has hosted power plants, chemical industries, and underground and open-cast mines, all of which have shaped the landscapes into something previously unknown. Energy production is still the most important economic sector in this region, employing thousands of people, but it has also caused Estonia to produce three times as many carbon dioxide emissions as outlined in European Union recommendations. Another feature of Estonia is the significant destruction caused by military battles in World War II. Many of its pre-war inhabitants were not allowed to move back to the country, which was instead repopulated by people arriving from every corner of the USSR.

Narva is a paradigmatic case of this: ninety-eight percent of the town was destroyed during World War II. In the 1960s, under Soviet rule, construction of the Balti and Eesti power plants accompanied the creation of a reservoir, which itself generated a distinct landscape known as Narva Venice (a series of garages accessed via sailing canals, see Martínez and Pikner 2019). In 2011, the Auvere power plant was added in a



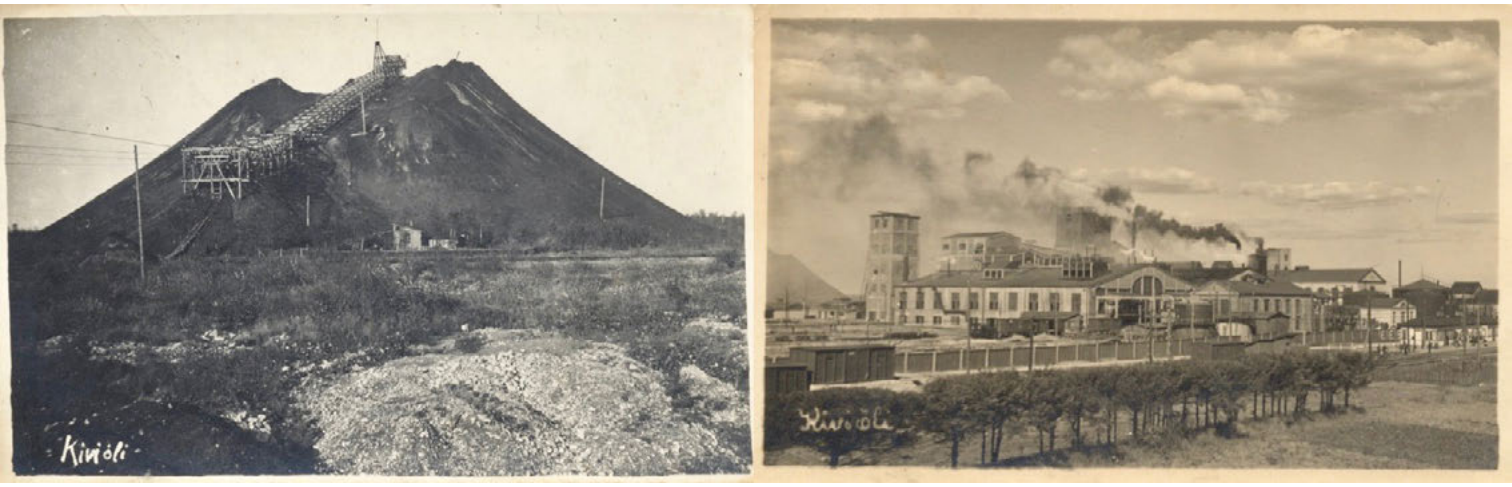
Postcard from Narva. National Library of Estonia

joint-venture with the French company Alstom. These stations produce 4.5 million tons of ash (highly alkaline) a year and have caused the local water supply to be the most polluted in Estonia owing to its high phosphorus, carbon and heavy metal content. Narva is also characterized nowadays by the closure of the Kreenholm textile factory, which used to employ more than ten thousand people. Accordingly, we included in the installation a broken red brick from the debris left behind at Kreenholm.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the beaches of **Sillamäe** were a popular holiday destination among St Petersburg aristocrats and intellectuals. After World War II, however, the area was developed as a secret modernist town (not appearing on any public map due to its production of uranium). In the 1990s, some alarming news about radioactive waste were made public and great part of the industry was closed down or departed after this finding. The main remaining chemical company is Silmet, which currently produces tantalum and niobium. In Sillamäe, we nonetheless saw

Postcards from Sillamäe. National Library of Estonia

impressive architectural heritage, nice beaches and well-arranged flowers and trees, while we also learned that the few tourists who visit this town are more interested in the curiosities of its atomic past than in the local scenic beauty. For the installation, the remains provided are not strictly archaeological but rather discursive. We noticed that the apple crops around the main chemical-producing area were intact, with no-one willing to collect them. We also included a series of attractive seashells found on the (markedly empty) beach located in front of the central promenade, which demonstrate how stigma might last for several decades after atomic activity has ceased, thus preventing tourists from staying any longer than a casual 20-minute walkthrough.



Postcards from Kiviõli. National Library of Estonia

In the case of **Kiviõli**, shale oil activity produced artificial hills which have now been turned into skiing facilities (with occasional surfaces of black snow due to pollution). With financial support from the European Union, an adventure park was created in 2013 in the former industrial area. Contemporary relics from the mine appear in the form of a promotional flyer for the park and an entry ticket. Nearby, in **Kohtla-Järve**, the history of shale oil activity began in ancient times, yet open-cast industrial extraction only started in 1919, when the State Oil Shale Industrial Corporation was formed. When the project began, thousands of miners moved to the area, and processing factories and a railway station were built. Nowadays in Kohtla-Järve, one encounters high unemployment, lunar landscapes, rusting machinery, abandoned houses, pipelines and the debris left behind by the processing of shale oil. Of course, also the ongoingness of the present, as there are dozens of thousands of inhabitants in the area. Here, the leading company is Viru Keemia, which processes two million tons of shale oil rock fragments per year and 250,000 tons of synthetic oil and gas through the Kiviter and Galoter processes. These use large quantities of water, in which the solid polluted residue contains toxic substances that might leach into surrounding areas. For the installation, we provided a sample of the residue that this process produces too.

Postcard from Kohtla-Järve.
National Library of Estonia

Conclusion

It is a fact that people hardly ever send postcards anymore, since communication has become overwhelmingly digital, virtual and multi-sited. Yet as a particular kind of document, postcards possess their own logic and evoke particular affects and responses, presenting a version of the world as the authors of these documents would like to see it (Riles 2006). As with infrastructures and archives, postcards are devices for putting things in order in space and time; and they are also capable of producing social relations, not just of reflecting them. In postcards, knowledge is always in the making, dependent upon use, context and publics. These are knowledge systems for relating and for storytelling, transporting the past into the present and eliciting new forms of relationships. In contrast, the images of the postcards show dehumanized landscapes; humans are implied through the industrial processes depicted but are not actually present in any of the illustrations.

Overall, archives and infrastructures are an intrinsic part of modern technologies, with the capacity to present territories as objects of care or sacrifice. The archival material that we gathered makes corporeal and affective the afterlife of infrastructures and the side-effects of modernization, presenting complex modes of enduring and of representation. Indeed, the archive of postcards where we worked, in the National Library of Estonia, was arranged to embody larger political structures and visions. It followed the Soviet policy dictating that each national library should have at least one copy of everything printed in the USSR. These archives projected themselves into the future, and yet they could not have survived without the maintenance work of many different professionals in diverse political contexts.

Notes:

[1] The exhibition was part of Tallinn Photomonth 2019. The connections that formed elements of our installation ranged from contemporary archaeology to Fluxus's mail art, and Robert Smithson's notions of the non-site, autopography and deltiology.

[2] For more information, see: http://www.estonica.org/en/

[3] In contrast, postcard illustration has traditionally been seen as merely a minor photographic genre.

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Marika Agu is a curator and archive manager at the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art. She has cultivated projects from a wide range of topics, including archives, material culture, typography and urban art. She holds an MA in art history and a BA in semiotics. Since 2012, she has curated a dozen of exhibitions in various galleries and museums. Her projects combine archival research with spatial and material reflections in multiple art formats.

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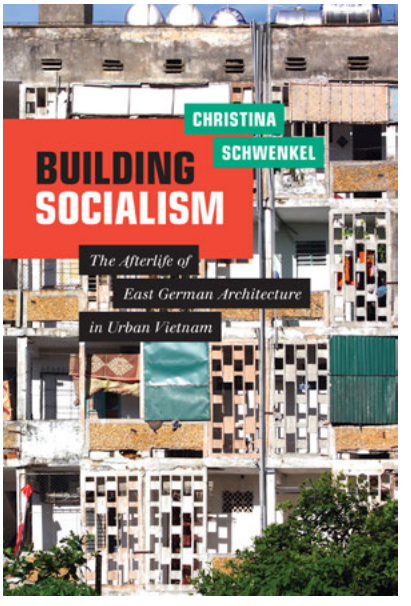
Building Socialism:
A Conversation

Christina Schwenkel and Alessandro Rippa



Two editors of *Roadsides*, Christina Schwenkel and Alessandro Rippa, talk about Christina's new book *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam* (Duke University Press, 2020). Drawing on archival and ethnographic research, *Building Socialism* examines how East German urban planners sought to transform the Vietnamese town of Vinh, destroyed by US bombing, into a model socialist city, and the unintended consequences of this particular vision and encounter that still reverberate today.

AR: *Building Socialism* is about the afterlife of utopian design, and as such it speaks to different temporalities. One way you approach the question of time is through ruins and processes of decay. How do you conceptualize ruins in your work?

CS: Ruins have emerged as a site of much fascination in anthropological studies of infrastructure. At the start of my study, I conceptualized ruins as a vehicle to examine the remains of the extractive and destructive histories of colonialism and imperialism, on the one hand – what Ann Stoler has called "imperial debris" – and the unraveling of modernist dreamworlds to "vanishing materiality," in Svetlana Boym's terms, on the other. Inspired by Benjamin, I thought about ruins as both object, or historical witness, and as process that disrupted the myth of rational progress which sustained utopian aspirations across time, space and political economies – both capitalist and socialist modernities in all their iterations. When I got to the field, I had to rethink this temporal and analytical approach: I immediately saw how the discourse of ruins was deployed as both metaphor and moral characterization to identify spaces, built structures and people deemed 'derelict'. For capitalist triumphalists, the presence of a deteriorated built environment came to visually signify the failure of socialism and its vision of collective betterment, while for Vietnamese investors, ruins became a justification for 'creative destruction' and demolition in the interest of profit.

But residents, I quickly learned, did not necessarily see the urban landscape or the housing blocks in which they lived as ruined. Moreover, the literature on ruins did not adequately address ongoing forms of dwelling, that is, modernist 'ruins' not as static sites of a discarded or discredited past that 'might have been,' but as active,

Beautification and home-making among decay in collective housing in Vietnam, 2011. Photo: Christina Schwenkel.

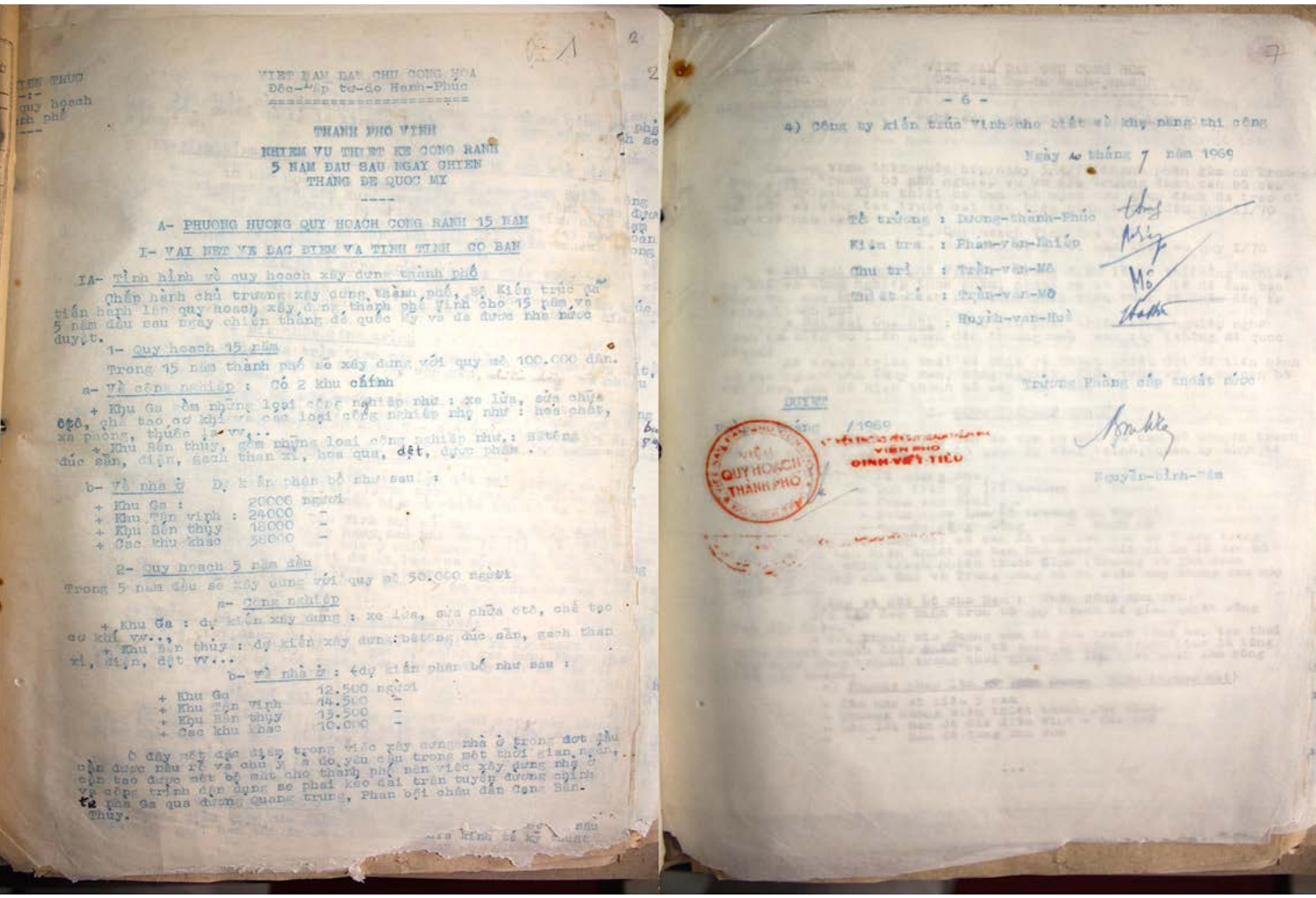
inhabited spaces of potentiality. So while I initially thought about the past as manifest in the present by positioning ruins and ruination in conversation with those grand modernist projects that once sought to radically remake the world, the people I lived with in crumbling collective housing were busy making new claims on the urban future through the remodeling and revaluing of their homes. This caused me to reconsider the temporal association of ruins with decline. My research then shifted to paying more attention to how decay catalyzed social action and formed the bedrock of new political subjectivities as people contested state neglect and the material conditions of urban life. This approach allowed me to reconceptualize ruination not simply as rupture with the past, but also as an opportunity for re-creation of material worlds in an effort to 'make do' and assume some control over the future.

AR: What brought you to study this very particular North–South connection, between the GDR and Vietnam, through an infrastructure lens?

CS: The decade-long mass bombing of northern Vietnam was nothing short of deliberate "defuturing," to borrow Tony Fry's term, through infrastructural warfare that targeted the very sociotechnical systems that were necessary to sustain modern life. It made sense then to focus on infrastructure reconstruction efforts as a means to explore decolonization and questions about how people overcame urban catastrophe to rebuild their social and material worlds, and which models of reconstruction – or re-futuring – were most appealing to postcolonial planners. Socialist planning at the time aspired to lift populations out of poverty through rapid industrial and infrastructural development to secure equitable access to public goods, while collectivizing the means of production and creating modern socialist citizens. The infrastructure lens let me examine the wide range of state and non-state actors – international, national and regional – involved in the remaking of the socialist city and its critical systems and institutions as a global solidarity project, and the power asymmetries that underpinned relations between these groups. This brought into focus the gendered division of infrastructural labor – between the visionaries and builders of socialism, as I call them in the book – the predominantly male architects and the mostly female construction workers, who were subsequently seen as facilitating infrastructure breakdown. This is important because little attention has been paid to the role of women and female agency in decolonization efforts, or to the relationship between critical infrastructure and gender.

AR: As an anthropologist you take a rather long-term perspective, and the book relies on numerous archives as well as visual testimonies from Vietnamese war photographers. How did you approach archival research, and what challenges did you face?

CS: I approached archives critically as both source and subject; that is, as a Foucauldian technology of state power to produce particular claims to historical truth and as a site of ethnographic observation of the exercise of that power. Anthropologists



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NHIEM VU THIET KE CONG RANH
5 NAM DAU SAU NGAY CHIEN
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- 6 -

4) Công ty kiến trúc Vinh cho biết về khả năng thi công

Ngày 4 tháng 7 năm 1969

Thứ trưởng : Dương-thành-Phúc
Kiến trúc : Phạm-văn-Thiệp
Chủ trì : Trần-văn-Mô
Thư ký : Trần-văn-Mô
Huỳnh-văn-Huề

Trưởng Phòng cấp thoát nước

Nguyễn-đình-Tân

DUYỆT

VIỆN QUY HOẠCH THÀNH PHỐ

VIỆN PHÓ
ĐINH VĂN TIỀU

Deteriorating planning documents typed on rice paper during the air war, housed in the Nghệ An Provincial Archives. Photo: Christina Schwenkel.

identified with the 'archival turn' influenced my thinking about the archive as dynamic practice – of organizing, classifying, retrieving and accessing historical records – rather than merely a static repository of neutral, authoritative documents vetted and deemed archive-worthy. My transarchival methodology was multiscalar: across nations and regions – thus the critical role of provincial archives in my study – as well as across state and non-state entities, as personal archives took on great importance in this project. This breadth enabled me to compare documents and their truth claims through text and image, which in turn deepened my understanding of the power dynamics and political stakes at play in the ambitious North–South infrastructure projects at the center of the book. The range of perspectives I gleaned from postcolonial archives – from official records and newspaper articles to comics, maps, poems, blueprints and photographs housed in libraries, museums, state repositories, planning institutes and individual homes – complemented, but not infrequently contradicted, my ethnographic work on the lived experiences of utopian design. Such comparative archival work – for example, reading across national archives in Berlin and Hanoi – also broadened my knowledge of the disconnect between planning aspirations and their outcomes. Likewise, my attention to the

unique textural and sensory qualities of documents as epistemic objects produced under particular historical conditions allowed me to think in new ways about their drafting and circulation, often under duress.

I remain surprised at how few anthropologists consider working in archives as part of their methodological toolkit. A good number of historians, on the other hand, too easily dismiss the postcolonial archive as inaccessible, owing to linguistic barriers and concerns about access. I actually found a lot of flexibility in how these spaces are administered and what documents one might receive on any given day. Like ethnographic work, access to archives takes time: time to learn the system, but also to build social relations. Beyond the posted formalities – the letter of introduction to verify intent – access to information is also about trust, which may allow for some bending of rules at times. It was through differential access to government documents that I grasped the arbitrariness of state power and its claims to national security: classified material in one archive was declassified in another. Beyond the arbitrary claim to control of records was an equally arbitrary claim to their ownership. Who owns the past? So I pondered on discovering how co-produced maps in Germany's Bundesarchiv that I could not circulate were also housed in the national archive in Hanoi, and found in personal collections. This became even more complicated with the copyright of photographs: socialist countries did not subscribe to liberal notions of individual authorship of images, unlike the legal tradition of the photographer 'owning' the work in the capitalist West. Rather, right claims focused on the subject of the photograph, not its creator, reminding me of the socially constructed nature of property.

AR: Do you think that your analysis can be broadened to other cities in the Global South?

CS: Absolutely. This is not an exceptional story of Cold War infrastructure development, though there are exceptional circumstances at work in my book that produced unique outcomes, experiences and material legacies. The transnational history of decolonization and modernization through technology and planning 'transfers' between the so-called Second and Third Worlds – in competition with other development initiatives in the capitalist West – continues to shape the urban fabric of the Global South today in ways that remain to be adequately studied. Even less explored are South–South connections, however.

AR: Your book focuses on Cold War-era connections which remain largely uninvestigated. How would more research into this topic help our understanding of the broader dynamics that inform the Global South today?

CS: These histories of interconnection have much to offer to our ethnographic understanding of what is new and emergent in the Global South, without resorting to a priori assumptions about an all-encompassing neoliberalism that is derivative

of the capitalist West. They allow us to develop a more critical approach to capitalist globalization by rethinking the diversity of social and economic forms, rather than their erasure. That is, to see certain material and cultural practices today as enduring and changing, but with deep roots in an anticolonial, non-capitalist past that continues to shape contemporary subjectivities and social life.

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