

Building Black Against Architecture

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ABSTRACT I propose a Black ethics of architecture as a sealed island space against the expanding, imperial sea of modern urban logics. Beginning with Hamid Dabashi and Walter Dignolo's movements away from the dogma of European philosophy, I then closely read the ways in which Denise Ferreira da Silva takes this movement much further in her radical and difficult ruptures in Kantian spacetime. Da Silva's project is the opening of a form of subjectivity that precedes spacetime. I read this through Pier Vittorio Aureli's idea of the archipelago, arguing that imperial expansion is the inherent process of the city, against which he proposes the island—a station of secluded resistance to urban totalization. I read these propositions together in my local area of London, the Elephant and Castle, where the current redevelopment attempts an expansive homogenization of racialized aesthetics, rendering urban housing complicit in the imperial mode of neoliberal expansion. Against the developers' maps, I analyze the map of activist group the 35% Campaign, which has constructed an archipelagic code of the redevelopment area, separating the housing units from their contexts and essentializing them as possibilities of housing, disconnected from their constitution of the ampliative developers' mode. I propose a Black island mode of thinking the city, and argue for a link in the scholarship of contemporary Black studies and urban activism.

KEYWORDS Black studies, architecture, archipelago, Moten, dance

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I. Composition

Fred Moten is interested in pursuing the Kantian project because its most radical disavowal is the disavowal of Blackness, screwing it tightly into a logic that accesses the depths of that study, which is Black radicalism. Kant, for Moten, builds a city in which the city's own constitutive skeleton is revealed to everyone except the archetypal architect himself. Kant makes a city with eyes that look only outwards, while every other constitutive element of the city can see in. Indeed, it is only Kant who cannot see what he is really revealing, and yet it is only Kant who could reveal it.

In order not to fly off the handle, not to have his hand or head fly off in some anti- and ante-analytic traversal and retraversal of every Königsberg bridge, Kant pulls back from the general impropriety, the general expropriation, that he also gestures toward or opens onto—the dark time or black time of the enlightenment’s commonunderground, the double edge of the fact that modern times have only ever been dark. This *longtemps* of darkness and its black light, its open and general obscurity, is seen by everybody but the overseer in his blindness.¹

The city, in Moten’s reading of Kant, is an ampliative logic that initiates its homogeneous spatiotemporality. The city is a coordinating and regulating authority that marks everything within its borders as an object coded within its own projective logic of spacetime. Darkness, as Moten notes, is seen in this Kantian city as the impossible underside of the city’s pursuit of lightness, forcing a temporal and spatial binary into the complex being of earth that precedes its subsumption into this regulatory grid.

The city in this sense inheres in a logic similar to that of Kant’s rational Subject. According to his ‘transcendental ideality of space,’ geometry is synthetic *a priori*, meaning that the logic of space is ampliative and opens more meaning than the word or judgement itself (*synthetic*, opposed to *analytic*), and that it is known without any appeal to the senses, existing already in the mind (*a priori*, opposed to *empirical*). If geometry is synthetic *a priori*, then space does not exist in the world but rather in the Human mind. Space is not contained within objects themselves; it is projected by Human perception onto objects. Space, then, presupposes the existence of a perceiving subject. There must be someone to perceive the cityness of the city and its ampliative logic of expansion. The faculty that allows the Human to conduct this operation is precisely the faculty of Reason, by which the Human creates and affirms his status as Human (with a capital H).

As many thinkers have shown, Kant’s political and anthropological works clearly assert that the faculty of Reason is inherently European, and that Blackness and non-Europeanness are evidence of a lack of Reason.² The city, for Kant, is a spatiotemporal logic that confirms the universality of European Reason. The city as a coordinated and regulated totality is objective proof of the (European) Human’s ability to regulate the world and nature, which are turned by that operation into the imperial value-productive mechanisms of World and Nature.

2. Decomposition

Through contemporary artistic practice, Denise Ferreira da Silva is looking for a means of signifying without spacetime, a form of meaning that eludes the presuppositions of Kantian forms that pre-inscribe the semantic direction of signifying codes, by moving away from readings and ways

¹ Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. xi.

² Stella Sandford, ‘Kant, Race, and Natural History’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* Vol. 44, Issue 9 (2018), pp. 950-977; David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

of thinking that are ‘critical (formal and analytical),’ and instead engaging in a study that is ‘poetical (material and decompositional).’³

A ‘black feminist poethics’ is ‘the task of unthinking the world, of releasing it from the grips of the abstract forms of modern representation and the violent juridic and economic architectures they support.’⁴ The temporal step that cuts into the global scripture of selfhood and full Subjectivity in this poethics is the resolute severance of the value-form of modernity, removing from the spatiotemporal logic of Human understanding the coordinates of value that ascribe full spatial being to Whiteness and a permanent ontological exile to Blackness. This is practiced by finding the constitution of meaning in ‘the matter of the work and not in the forms in the artist’s mind.’⁵

In da Silva’s formulation of Kantian spacetime, objects in the world are designated as mechanisms of aesthetic power whose value can be expropriated into the accumulative site of the Human mind, which then transforms the object and its divergent coordinates of sensation into accumulated juridical and economic value for the Human. World is set in the Kantian schema of spacetime as a zone for the organized displacement of internal Human movements. The Human mind is the force causing all movement in World, and both World and Human are created by this process. For Kant, the feeling of beauty, da Silva writes, does not come from matter, but rather from its form, ‘which is always already in the subject, since he alone is able to reflect, that is, to consider a representation without referring back to its object, but only to his cognitive faculties (imagination and understanding).’⁶

While the full Human Subject is defined as *affecting*—as producing reality by registering the perception of objects in *a priori* categories—the other being, the non-European external to this continent’s enforced universality, is defined as ‘affectable’; the racialized others are ‘those whose minds have no access to Reason, which is the cognitive capacity necessary for entertaining the idea of a moral law and the attendant conception of Freedom. For the affectable subject (of cultural difference)—the racial/global subaltern—is marked precisely by its lack of the minimum requirements for the judgement of taste, which is the rational core of Kant’s “ideal of humanity.”’⁷

In this schema, it is the Whiteness of the Rational Human that encodes the spatiotemporal situatedness of the city and affords it meaning accordingly. Kant moves away from the climatic and strictly geographical racism of earlier modern thinkers, who continued in the Aristotelian tradition of aligning all Human sensations (and racial difference) as essentially derived from natural and unchangeable categories on earth: cold/hot; wet/dry; soft/hard; top-of-the-world/bottom-of-the-world.⁸ Instead, in opposition to both the dominant traditions of his time (idealism and empiricism), he proposed that World has an existence independent from Humans, and that objects have an internal reason of their own, but it can never be known by Humans. All that Humans can ever know is the Human perception of objects, and the conversion of sensations received from objects into projections of understanding, which is the process of pure Reason.

³ Denise Ferreira da Silva, ‘In the Raw’, *E-flux* no. 93 (2018), p. 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Da Silva, ‘In the Raw’, p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), p. 17ff.

Space and time are the paradigmatic forms imposed on World by this ampliative logic of Human understanding. Universal concepts are formulated by figuring the sensations of unknowable objects in the *a priori* forms of space and time. However, this movement is only possible by full Subjects, by those Humans who are defined as Human by virtue of their ability to perform this fundamentally Human task. The spatiotemporal form that gives meaning to the matter of the city—its buildings, its built environment—is the condition of Whiteness. The city is irreducibly a racist proposition. Since Kant, throughout modernity, urban space is only conceivable through the logics of race. There is no city without Whiteness, and there is no possibility of thinking space otherwise without Blackness. The city composed on these racialized gridlines is what I refer to as the form of ‘Architecture,’ capital A, against the archipelago of enduring matter.

3. Scission

The social and ontological referent that is *race* was only recognizable in the training sights of early modern philosophy by the geographical designation of *territory*. Borders physically manifest in the ideological cartography of a previous pronouncement of modernity (Columbus, Copernicus) were the visible coordinates of race’s global organization. As da Silva writes in her essay ‘No Bodies,’ race was always locked into this prescriptive cartography. This means that what defines the Black person as Black is bound in a stable logic of geography that can be transgressed by the movement of the Black person. If the African moves to Europe, does the African stop being Black? The answer for Kant, of course, is ‘no,’ but he has to prove it. Prior to Kant, external laws had been the condition on which race had referential coherence, marking certain global zones as sites for the extraction of slaves.

How could Locke’s instituted law, which he describes as an exterior (objective) force, become the interior (even if formal) determinant of post-Enlightenment European (political) particularity? The answer requires an account of how universality morphed into the principle actualised and expressed in Enlightenment European bodies and territories.⁹

Kant had to formulate a plan for the internalization of a state of nature that could be grasped and maintained by a racial logic of transcendental reason, allowing a presupposed geographical marker (race) to affirm the internal, ontological supremacy of a certain kind of mind, a certain way of being—and that way is Whiteness; an epistemological framework only accessible, through its continuation of the Columbian notion of internal torrid zones and epidermal cartographies, by inheriting the signifying signs of being European.

When mapping the conditions of possibility of knowledge with certainty, Kant introduces the notion of transcendental reason (pure/formal) as that which provides the understanding with the tools—intuitions and categories—that comprehend the objective and necessary forces at work

⁹ Denise Ferreira da Silva, ‘No Bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence’, *Meritum*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2014), pp. 119-162, p. 135.

in phenomena, the modes through which the extent of things of the world is accessible to scientific knowledge.¹⁰

Universality—in this moment, this utterly World-changing, World-beginning-and-ending moment—becomes synonymous with European and White.

4. Recomposition

I want to think about what the building praxis of the archipelago comes down to when Architecture is withdrawn as its finalizing telos. The emergence of the island is a movement in space. It is an external movement of the interiority of the body. Building becomes the continuous movement of a collective body in space. Building becomes, that is, a dance.

Dance is the manipulation of the lived form(alism) of space; the constant reconstruction and decomposition of formalisms. It sets up an infinite proposition of moral spaces—be *this way*, stand *like this*, because it is *right* for *this* moment, this performance of the movement—but a morality that is always decomposing, reconstituting as something else. The rise is accurate, always, and conforms to the moral proposition of its choreography, but in the next second it changes; a new morality is built and the spatial body is decomposed.

Building after Architecture is dance.

Building after Architecture is the act of bringing Kantian intuition—through sensations received from objects in the world—to concepts, provided by the rational internal faculty for understanding of the Human mind, that are continuously changing dependent on sensations. Building is the endless process of synthetizing the manifold into a decompositional unity that is always in the process of creation, reconstruction, and destruction.

Dance, as building, is the task of always moving, the exhaustion of life, the ever-lasting unity of apperception that breaks the political bonds of causality; nothing came here, nothing made it here—it was here forever and forever is always changing. As Fred Moten riffs,

exhaustion makes life ever
lasting. when I dance with

you I am the moved mover.

baby, you're a solid sender.¹¹

Dance in this congregation of study movements, this 'ceaseless experiment with the futural presence with the forms of life that make [dancing; love of dance] possible'¹² is a spatial force that

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

¹¹ Fred Moten, *The Little Edges* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), p. 4.

¹² Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), pp. 74-75.

moves the *building* of building *inside* buildings; it is, crucially, the act of sealing itself off from World, refusing the ampliative logics of (Kantian) expansion and the (Hegelian) universalization of teleological time. Dancing in this architecture of poethical movement is a decomposition in territory, away from nothing and into itself; dancing architecture—the structure of formal movements—is movement into *earth*, into the form of forms.

Darell Wayne Fields attempts a version of this inwards movement by arriving at such a point of criticism of Hegel that he turns into Hegel. Fields folds into the skin of Hegel, and opens into a form that internally undoes Hegelianism. This begins by moving back to the pre-beginning of the Cartesian *cogito*.

First,
'I think before I am?'
Then,
'Where am I?'
Better yet,
'I think there. I am'

The mind/psyche's I/where?/there formulation speaks for the missing presence preceding the 'I think.' It is akin to the absence of sound in isolation. No thinking can be done without it. It is being inside. [...] The thought recognizes the interior's most significant quality, darkness. This darkness is so vast, ubiquitous, and opaque that 'I think' and 'I am' appear unaware.¹³

What Fields call the 'Black Subject' resides in and emerges from a flat, dark, and endless plain inside the fold of History. To that space, History (and its racializing historian) returns constantly, seeking to withdraw a 'new' original moment to affirm the progress of History; time goes on—a process constantly established by the creation of an origin within the darkness of temporality's internality.

That space is the epistemological sociality of Blackness, where the Black Subject becomes aware of a repeated scene that is not visible to the external subjects in the telos of time's progress. In the mechanism through which the Kantian Subject posits himself as *there* (always implicitly saying, in his *cogito*, *I think [universally], therefore I am [there]*), there is a sociality that exists before and beyond; something precedes the speaking-into-being of the Subject in his act of universal individuation. The antecedent and enduring life of Blackness—in the darkness within, before, and sealed off from Descartes's *cogito*, Kant's transcendental ideality, and Hegel's self-developing *Aufhebung*—is 'this black sign system' that uses 'arbitrariness in the production of language and cultural artifacts (e.g. poetry).'¹⁴ The darkness *within*, which Western philosophy and architecture have feared throughout their history—protected respectively by the obsession with light, Enlightenment, revelation, and outwards movement, and by global urban expansion and the resolute logics of property-ownership—is a means of distorting the signifying function of space. *The space*, however, is not necessarily what Fields seeks to change. Rather, Blackness's poetic sign system

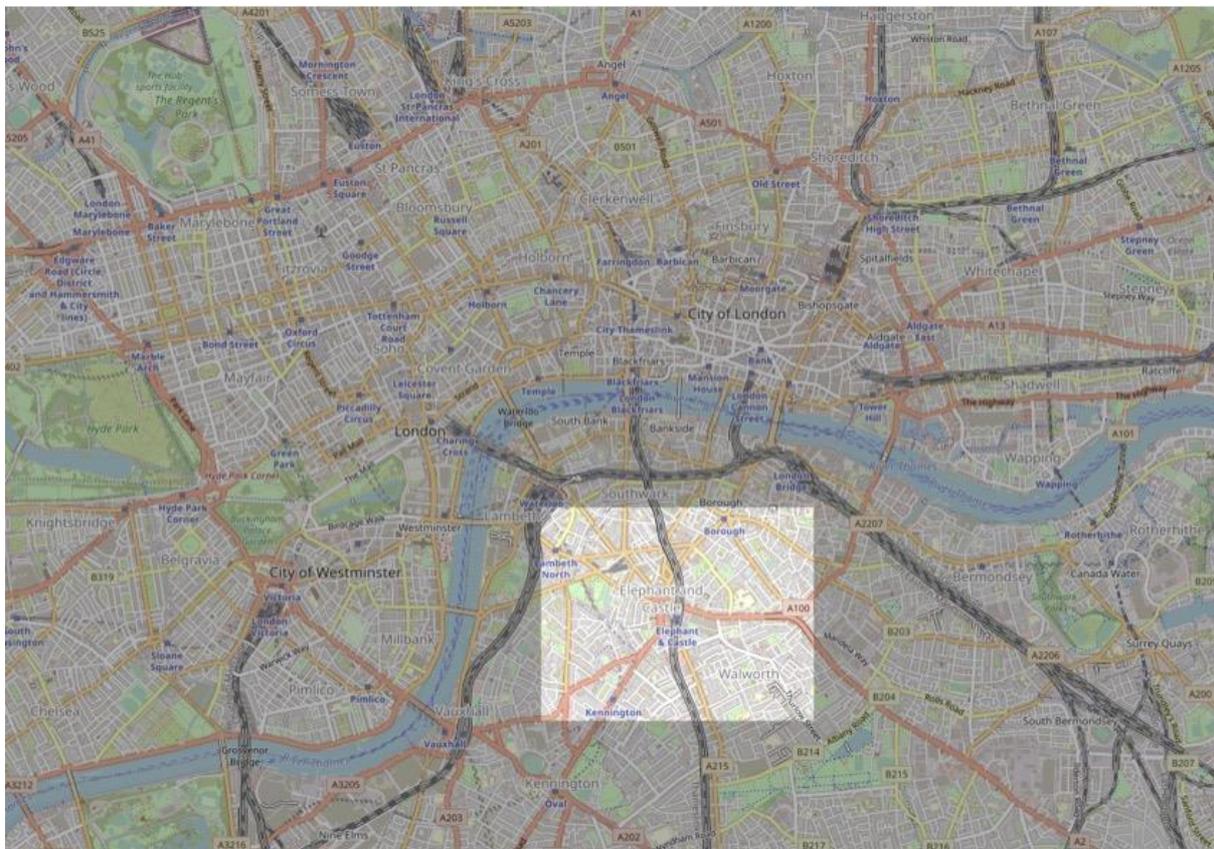
¹³ Darell Wayne Fields, *Architecture in Black* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015 [2000]), pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

of arbitrary distortion collapses the ampliative link between signifier and signified, leaving the building as it is, but closing the possibility of its urban sign.¹⁵ The *meaning* of space falls inside the nodal residue of internal, enduring difference, and the building is no longer signified by the ampliative projection of Kantian space.

5. Elephant Island

The Elephant and Castle (Figure 1) is an area of the London Borough of Southwark, set around a busy junction, with a four-lane road marking out an island. Since the Middle Ages, this area has been an important suburb of London. It was called Newington until a pub was opened in the eighteenth century, named the Elephant and Castle, but locally known, like the area, as the Elephant. When a train line was built right through the suburb in the 1860s, the station was named after the pub. The viaduct remains as the partition between two sides of the Elephant. Up until the mid-twentieth century, the two sides of the viaduct were not entirely distinct, however the area was completely reconstructed after heavy bomb damage during WWII, which initiated a differential partitioning of the east and west sides. On the east side was the Heygate Estate, a huge brutalist housing complex with over 3,000 units and almost 10,000 residents, and—closer to the viaduct—the hub of Latin American sociality in London, with many Colombian shops and cafes. On the west side was the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, and the monumental, neoclassical nineteenth-century church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle.



¹⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

[Figure 1]

Map of London, with Elephant and Castle highlighted. Openstreetmap.org, open license.

Between 2011 and 2014, the Heygate was demolished and sold to the multinational construction company Lendlease for £50 million, despite it costing Southwark Council at least £80 million to demolish and empty the estate of its residents, most of whom were forced to move well out of the area.¹⁶ Local campaign group Southwark Notes have created a displacement map showing the wide dispersal of former Heygate residents, with many displaced to the furthest eastern outskirts of Greater London, and others to Kent.¹⁷ Anna Minton has interviewed these displaced residents, revealing the profundity of personal trauma that results from this enforced exodus and the social redefinition of a residential area.¹⁸ The 35% Campaign—a local Southwark group campaigning for 35% social housing in all developments—record the timeline of the council’s failed promises. In 2000, just after the redevelopment of the estate was first proposed, the council promised 100% replacement of the estate’s 1,000 social housing units, but that was reduced to 50% by 2002, and 28.5% by 2003.¹⁹ By 2011, this had become 25% *affordable* housing, which is far less attainable than social housing. Social housing is rented by the council at a borough average of £90 per week, while affordable housing has a legal limit of 80% of market price, which in Zone 1 London, where the Elephant lies, is still inaccessibly expensive. In Lendlease’s 2012 planning application, there were only 92 social rented homes out of almost 3,000 new properties.

The former Heygate is now called Elephant Park, with Phase 1 complete and the other 4 phases underway.

The shopping centre on the west side was closed in September 2020 and is currently awaiting demolition. After over 1,000 formal objections, the council’s rejection of plans, and three deferments, estate management company Delancey narrowly received approval for their redevelopment plans in July 2018 with a vote of 4 to 3, and one abstention, from the planning committee. The committee explicitly recognized the destructive impact the developments would have on the Elephant, displacing current traders at the shopping centre market, constructing unaffordable housing, and introducing a globalized style of incoming shops with no connection to local life. The housing will be 12% social and 80% ‘affordable,’ at 80% of market rate.

Demolition is currently paused due to an ongoing legal dispute brought forwards by the 35% Campaign, who have challenged Delancey over their failure to provide the minimum standard of social housing. What I am interested in here is the archipelagic formation of the Elephant and the resistance of its island life. I am a resident of the Elephant, on one of the few surviving council estates, at the edge of the Elephant area, and the constant movement against the globalized aesthetic of

¹⁶ Mira Bar-Hillel, ‘Residents of the Heygate estate forced to move out of London’, *Evening Standard* (2013) <<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/residents-of-the-heygate-estate-forced-to-move-out-of-london-8743216.html>>.

¹⁷ Southwark Notes Archive Group, London Tenants Federation, Just Space, and Loretta Lees, ‘Staying Put: An Anti-Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London’ (London: self-published, 2014) <<https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/2014/06/13/staying-put-an-anti-gentrification-handbook-for-council-estates-in-london/>>.

¹⁸ Anna Minton, *Big Capital: Who is London For?* (London: Penguin, 2017), pp. 124-133 of Apple Books edition.

¹⁹ 35% Campaign and the Elephant Amenity Network (2021) <<http://35percent.org/affordable-housing/>>.

redevelopment—its sole motive of profit brandished as the expansive sea against the island of endurance that remains as the Elephant—is remarkable. The island endures, surviving as the life-form of endurance against the homogenizing expansion of the sea.

On the eastern side of Elephant Road, there is a continuous wall erected around the ongoing construction site of Elephant Park’s Phase 5. The wall is filled with prospective marketing images of the area. The self-advertising asks passers-by to ‘support local,’ in the locality of this ongoing regeneration project, and to enjoy ‘National Tree Week at Elephant Park.’ Occasional glimpses open up through holes in the three-metre panelling, revealing no trees, and no date for this national week of celebration. Instead, as Elephant Park’s website states—almost unbelievably—‘every week is National Tree Week for us’.²⁰ What the website fails to mention is the two-metre high iron fence around these green spaces, such as in South Gardens (Phase 1), on Brandon Street. The constant ceremony of National Tree Week, expanded into limitless time, is for the exclusive enjoyment of those who have invested in the tree-builders.

Just north of the construction site, on the corner of the New Kent Road, is Elephant Central, Delancey’s Phase 1 development before the shopping centre in Phase 2. Elephant Central is a series of build-to-rent blocks managed by Get Living, a company set up by Delancey and the Qatari government for its East Village Olympic development. The highest tower has twenty-three residential floors, held on concrete and steel columns over a two-floor restaurant complex. The lower commercial floors have no outer walls, expanding into and as the surrounding life.

The developers see the rising stature of Elephant Central as its gesture of inclusivity. As the Urban Land Institute’s fawning analysis states,

If there is a recurring theme to the Lendlease and Delancey masterplans at Elephant & Castle it is of connectivity—a commitment to the free movement of people through the regeneration area and how the new buildings should fit in—and not stand apart—from the surrounding neighbourhoods.²¹

In Elephants Park and Central, surrounding context is the purpose of building; merging into the surroundings and expanding the logic of redevelopment universally is the explicit and celebrated aim. The architectural intention is to designate a *global* site of gathering, where everything is concentrated in the infinitely expanding space of commercial locality, rendering ‘the surrounding neighbourhoods’ as ‘enhanced restaurant and leisure opportunities’.²² The commands to *shop locally* come from Lendlease, a global construction and property company with an annual revenue of US\$15 billion, which has demolished and redeveloped what was a local traders’ market right beside the train tracks, across the road from Elephant Central, in the heart of the Latin American quarters.

Loretta Lees and Mara Ferreri write that the purpose of neoliberal redevelopment in the Elephant is indeed to retroactively code the functional and communal living of its past as an inferior

²⁰ Elephant Park (no date) <<https://www.elephantpark.co.uk/>>.

²¹ Urban Land Institute, ‘Journey of the Elephant: ULI UK Development Forum’ (2017) <https://ulidigitalmarketing.blob.core.windows.net/ulidcnc/2018/09/InfoBurst-Elephant-Castle_v1f.pdf>, p. 8.

²² Delancey (no date) Elephant & Castle <<https://www.delancey.com/elephant-and-castle-redevelopment.html>>.

space that must be rendered both *aesthetically* and *ethically* more universalizable and beneficial for the global reach of the area. As they write, ‘the state-led gentrification of council estates [...] are “constructed” as “slums” by local councils and the media in order to impose new programmes of urban renewal, that is gentrification, on them.’²³ The narrative of decay justifies the necessity of redevelopment, which is then given a required minimum profit of 20%, and, since developers conduct their own financial surveys and prospective profits, this profit is shown to be impossible to reach if the minimum amount of social housing and space is built.

At the Heygate Estate—which was demolished in 2011-14 and became Elephant Park—there were only 30 years between the area being labelled a ‘slum’ and redeveloped in 1974, and the council’s masterplan for what was again a ‘slum’ in 2004.²⁴ Soon afterwards, the responsibility of the masterplan was given to Lendlease. Neoliberal redevelopment here takes on a more active role in organizing the life and urban plan of an area, commanding with statist authority the coherent general plan of the city, with a similar ubiquity to the borough architects of the midcentury, however this time with an opposing ethics. As Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell write, ‘in this North Atlantic zone at least, there seems to have been a shift from the pattern of deregulation and dismantlement so dominant during the 1980s, which might be characterized as “roll-back neoliberalism,” to an emergent phase of active state-building and regulatory reform—an ascendant moment of “roll-out neoliberalism”.’²⁵ The developers become an authority that spans general citywide coherence, spatially establishing the global project of capital’s accumulation and circulation, through an importantly ‘roll-out’ (i.e. expansive; ampliative) form of redevelopment.

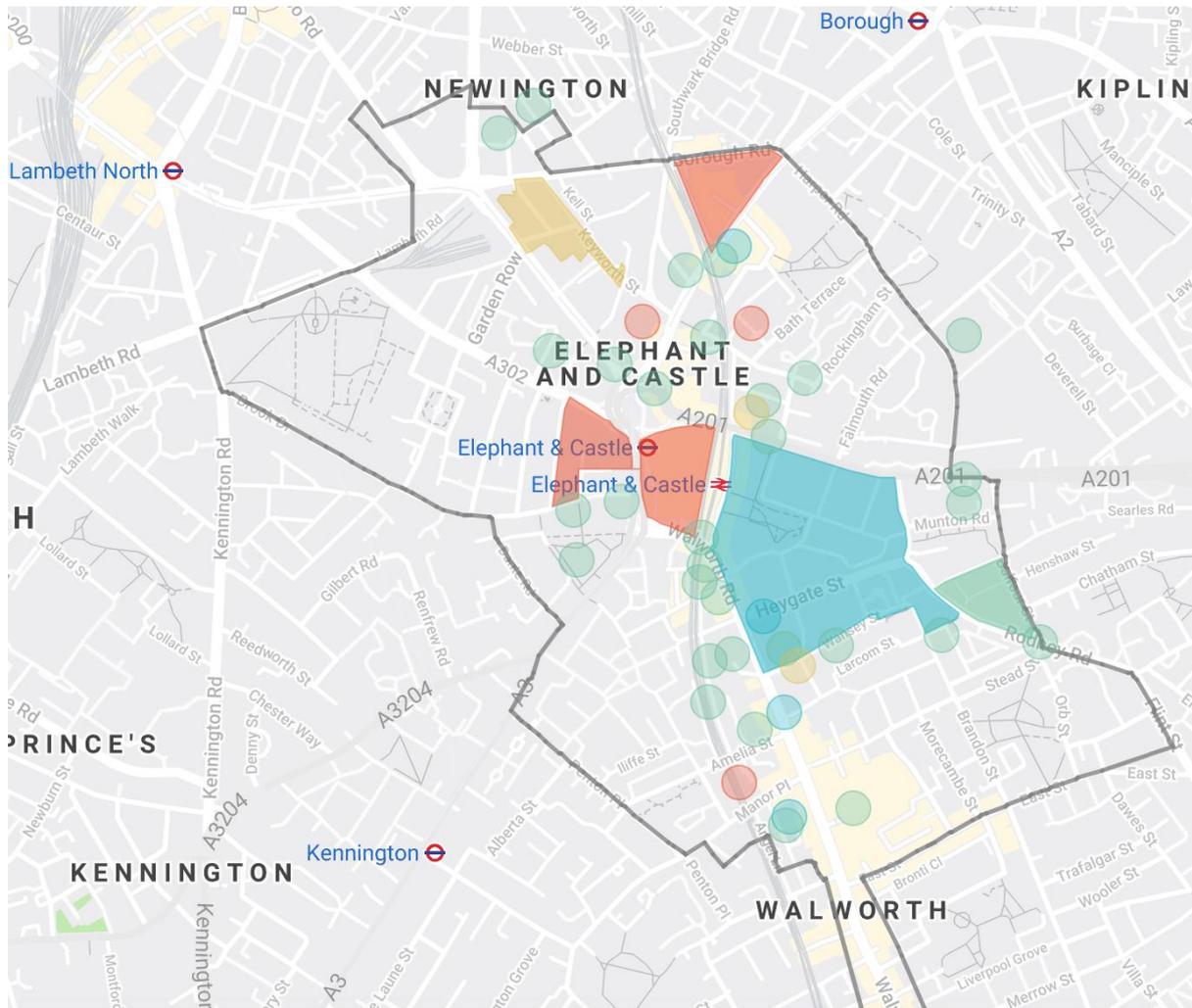
The personal effects of these global movements are documented by Latin Elephant, a local group promoting Latin American life in the Elephant and its local traders. In early 2018, they noted that 130 traders were working in local market between Elephants Park and Central, which was marked as a redevelopment area and soon to be closed. While Delancey and Southwark Council promised to relocate every trader, as of late 2020, 40 had not been granted relocation rights.²⁶ For the Latin Elephant campaigners, ‘local’ means the endurance of a specific tradition and its people—the market, the traders, the customers, and the sociality that develops as a result of their continued practice. For the developers, meanwhile, ‘local’ seems to be defined as the possibility of a locally successful profit-production method being appropriated into a globally expansive framework, making ‘Latin’ and ‘Elephant,’ like ‘urbanity’ and ‘capital,’ synonymous and exchangeable with everything.

²³ Loretta Lees and Mara Ferreri, ‘Resisting gentrification on its final frontiers: learning from the Heygate Estate in London (1974-2013)’, *Cities* Vol. 57 (2016), pp. 14-24, p. 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁵ Jamie Peck, and Adam Tickell, ‘Neoliberalizing Space’, *Antipode* Vol. 34, Issue 3 (2002), pp. 380-404, p. 384.

²⁶ Latin Elephant, ‘Public Statement on Traders Without Relocation’ (2020) <<https://latinelephant.org/public-statement-on-traders-without-relocation/>>.

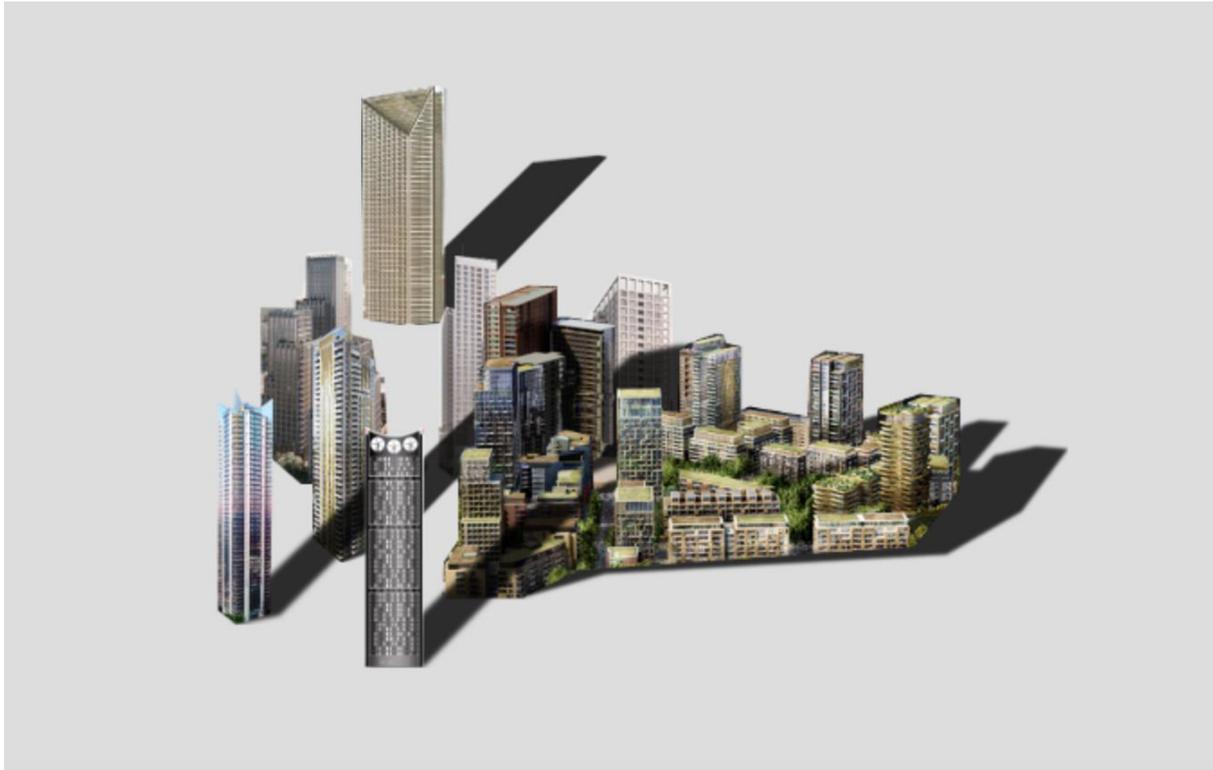


[Figure 2]

The Elephant and Castle Partnership, from Google Maps, 2021. Copyright principle of fair use.

Two maps of the Elephant emphasize the striking difference in representations of redevelopment from the sea of expansion and the island of resistance. The first is by the Elephant and Castle Partnership, whose website celebrates the investment of the redevelopment area and its global reach. The partnership is formed of Southwark Council, Delancey, Lendlease, and nearby universities and other property developers (Figure 2). The second is by the 35% Campaign, and shows the monuments of redevelopment removed from their surrounding urban context (Figure 3).²⁷ The ampliative intention of this redevelopment is cut by the removal of any context, following instead a poetical move that distorts the signifying function of urban space's *a priori* universality.

²⁷ This map has since been removed and replaced with another, containing the same building projects but on a standard map background. However, since my argument is a theoretical proposition towards island thinking, rather than a specific case study, I have maintained my analysis of the old map.



[Figure 3]

The 35% Campaign, *Elephant & Castle Regeneration*, 2020. Reproduced with permission.

Redevelopment as a code in urban social semantics signifies connectivity to a prescribed cartography, marking land as a single project, encapsulating the heterogeneity of earth into the sole pursuit of profit, which is justified by the Kantian operation of Human subjectivity itself: the way one sees the unfolding land, the transcendental dialectic between observer and World, affirms the domination of all earth as manipulable territory. The connectivity of the redeveloped city-plan requires participation and production at every moment. Castle Square—the market-style space of Delancey’s first phase of Elephant Central—is the only usable pseudo-public space, and it is entirely formed of commercial structures, with all seating connected to a bar or restaurant. This form of leisure-labour, in which value-reproductive labour includes shopping and meeting friends, is a constituent feature of the global architecture of the sea, homogenizing the practices of every culture into one mechanism.

Da Silva’s critique of spacetime attempts to study meaning in ‘the matter of the work and not in the forms in the artist’s mind’.²⁸ In 35%’s map, architecture is solely useable matter, entirely subverting the open and ampliative reach of the redevelopment. The Elephant, meanwhile, is presented as fragments of domestic islands, ongoing before and beyond the initiation ceremony of redevelopment. The developers’ map is a mark of beginning, a commanding genesis of new foundations. The radicalism of 35%’s map is the fact that it eradicates beginnings; instead, it opens the ongoing resistance of islands where *housing*—regardless of the architectural forms and codes—is the potential matter and materiality.

²⁸ Da Silva, ‘In the Raw’, p. 1.

6. Island City

Da Silva removes the operation of subjectivity from the appropriative expansion of the Kantian subject and its attendant logic of global spacetime, focusing instead on a poethics of decomposition in which the individual reformulates her relation to earth in every movement, perceiving through a constantly shifting mode that resists any prescriptive lines of meaning in and as the body or World, which Moten poeticizes as a dance. Her radical critique of spacetime allows the subject to be thought without the presupposition of racializing territory, which opens great possibilities for rethinking the signifying function of urbanization in architectural theory.

In my local area, the Elephant and Castle, these struggles are performed daily. In the past decade, a working class and Black local population has been removed and replaced by bourgeois and mostly White residents of neoliberal spaces, built as expansive global gestures in which trade and exchange are the only social mode.

Living in the Elephant, the explicitly racial motive of this redevelopment is clear, having replaced the significant Black population of the Heygate estate with the mostly White population of Elephant Central, although this is difficult to prove beyond empirical experience since, as Jessica Perera writes with the Institute of Race Relations, ‘there currently exists no complete demographic analysis of the residents that have been evicted from council housing as a result of estate regeneration’.²⁹ However, I have not focused on that factor in this essay because I contend that it is not necessary to the redevelopment’s racializing function, which inheres instead in the ampliative logic of its prescriptive cartography, against the residual meaning of housing that is performed in the daily struggle of residents and local activists. This more ontological form of racialization—rooted in the very mechanisms of globalization and subjectivity, rather than the political violence of removing Black residents—is displayed in two maps of the Elephant’s redevelopment, one by developers, the other by activists. The activists’ map shows the meaning of housing itself as a form of spatial organization, holding an enduring notion of housing within the contemporary ruins of neoliberal structures. This poethical map is a radical method of distorting the intended semantics of the new buildings, forcing them to emerge as the decontextualized potential of housing instead of monuments to hold the global capital of billionaire construction companies. The developers’ map, on the other hand, reveals the ampliative operation of territorial expansion, repeating the imperial logics of early cartographers and the racializing transcendental ideality of Kantian space.

Cartography—and its construction of spatial codes—is the structure through which humans understand the meaning of global space. The mutually constitutive violences of expansive cartography, racializing subjectivity, and neoliberal urbanization are being radically undermined by various practices in Black studies, architectural theory, and urban activism. However, the scholarship of Black studies is rarely linked with spatial practices and urban thinking.

Post-script:

²⁹ Jessica Perera, *The London Clearances: Race, Housing and Policing* (London: The Institute of Race Relations, 2019), p. 11.

This essay is an extract from 'Building Black Against Architecture: On Race, Dance, and the Urban Archipelago', upcoming in *Radical Housing Journal*, Vol. 3, Issue 2 (Fall 2021). Both this shorter version and the full essay are, moreover, extracts from the final chapter of my upcoming monograph, *Building Black: Towards Antiracist Architecture* (Punctum Books, late 2021). Punctum is an open-access publisher, so the print version of *Building Black* can be purchased or the PDF version downloaded for free.

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