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Publication date

2020

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts

Citation (APA)

Pilav, A., Schoonderbeek, M. G. H., Sohn, H., & Staničić, A. (2020). Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts. In A. Pilav, M. Schoonderbeek, H. Sohn, & A. Stanicic (Eds.), *Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts: International Conference Proceedings* (pp. 17-24). BK Books.

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable). Please check the document version above.

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Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts

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Conflicts are real events located in space. Yet, they are also explanations of carefully constructed, ‘seductive’ images of destruction and its consequences disseminated by popular and mainstream media: ravished landscapes, ruined architectures, lifeless bodies, involuntary migratory movements, impermanent infrastructures and temporary settlements. These types of images of conflict contribute in enabling and justifying geo-political transformations through the tracing and (re) construction of borders, fuelling in its wake a host of related post-conflict processes that range from socio-spatial displacements, real-estate driven urban reconstruction to mass tourism. But when dislodged from the conventional understandings as politico-economic processes, or as State-led military systems of war and destruction, conflicts reveal dimensions that unlock other inherent potentials latent in their agency. In this light, conflict produces more than turmoil, destruction and the eradication of (the possibility of) life and its supporting structures. It generates transitional (and other) spaces across different scales and domains, fosters the emergence of differentiated material

ecologies, as well as of the production of site-specific meanings in relation to their global position. The agency of conflict thus fulfils a mediatic role through which, and by which, it is possible to approximate the spatiality of its expressions; in other words, it allows us to read its ‘symptomatology’. Thus, the mediatic — and mediating — potentials and agency of conflict may be apprehended as experimental methods for analysis and synthesis, as potent resources for pedagogy across disciplines, as tools for disruptive design, as well as a means for the production of theory.

In this sense, the emphasis on the mediatic aspect of conflict opens up a space of negotiation between conditions of violence and innovative forms of everyday life. In this, artistic mediations are arguably as effective in resolving conflicts as violence itself. Yet, they do so by other means and through different channels, thus enabling new subjectivities to emerge, and establishing new power-relations that foster other forms of political struggle. Exposing conflict and violence through artistic and intellectual work is an ethico-aesthetic endeavour that supports an activist practice rooted in artistic and technological

mediation. The agency of artistic work in terms of conflict is situated in the capacity of visualising the conflict at hand and its spatiality, creating awareness of its causes and the impact of its consequences. But perhaps more importantly, it aids in the creation of fertile grounds and spaces of possibility from where productive forms of protest, contestation and change might emerge, and thus, it is key in the creation of alternative and new realities. Here, the role of space as a relational product of social action and material transformation is equally significant, as it provides a common ground, or shared problematic, across a broad range of disciplinary fields and practices, which would otherwise remain distant. These inter- and transdisciplinary encounters (in general, but also in relation to the ‘symptomatology’ of conflict mentioned earlier) around a shared problematic produce more than the exchange of knowledge and critical thought. Together, they hold the potential to form the contours of a critical cartography of the spatiality of conflicts.

It is along these lines that the Borders & Territories research group, in collaboration with the Architecture Theory group of the Faculty of Architecture of the TU Delft, and the Department of Landscape Architecture of Sheffield University, organised the international conference ‘Mediating the Spatiality of Conflicts’ held in November 2019. In response to the conceptual framework, the conference organisers received an impressive amount of diverse reactions and thematic proposals that attested to the far-reaching interest and relevance of the problématique of the spatiality of conflicts. Given that the conference focused on media, the organisers decided to move beyond the conventional standard of paper presentations at conferences, and offered a wide range of other venues in which the mediation of conflicts could be addressed and expressed in other modalities. From the submitted proposals, the organisers

selected a series of abstracts and other forms of contributions in different media that addressed the concerns of the conference thematic, namely the relationships between spatiality, mediation and conflict, and its two main lines: spaces of conflict (as transitional spaces of material interactions between violence and everyday life), and spaces of memory (as transformative spaces of violence).

In this way, the conference program organised a series of events and eight paper presentation sessions in the Faculty of Architecture, as well as in the centre of Delft. During three intensive days the conference participants presented a rich variety of advanced research papers that addressed the thematic of the conference from surprisingly diverse and fresh angles. These were enriched and complemented with presentations in other modalities of media and mediatic tools, ranging from electronic waves, sound, photography to installations and film, as well other experimental artistic approaches to the thematic of space, media and conflict. The conference program included keynote lectures and paper presentations, round table discussions; two parallel workshop sessions on photogrammetry (led by Ariel Caine of Forensic Architecture) and 3D semantic data modelling (led by Paola Ronzino and Nicola Amico of ARIADNEplus Project); a cross-media exhibition with contributions by several artists, and the film screening session ‘The Temperature of the War’ (curated by Ilona Jurkonyt ).

The conference opened with a welcoming and introductory note by Marc Schoonderbeek on behalf of the conference organisers and the Borders & Territories research group. In line with the initial considerations leading up to the conference as outlined above the introductory note started with a provocative appreciation for the agency of disagreement and conflict in architecture (using references to Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto and COOP

Himmelblau). Arguing that architecture is the discourse of spatial demarcation, and that conflict deals with — or emerges from — territorial disagreement, the mediated response to conflict through material means is precisely what relates architecture to other artistic disciplines. The artistic internalisation of dis-agreement, located within a medium and through the use of material means, it was suggested, could thus potentially be linked to the distinction between modes of enagement, modes of operation and modes of agency in all the conference's contributions. After the opening of the conference, the Borders & Territories research group then presented two ongoing PhD research projects in a public peer-review session. Grazia Tona and Nama'a Qudah presented their first-year research progress. This PhD research session was moderated by Andrej Radman, and supported by Caren Kaplan and Adam Ramadan as guest peer reviewers.

Simultaneously, the conference program offered two three-day workshop programs on innovative mediatic tools applied in cutting-edge architectural investigations. The Photogrammetry workshop led by Ariel Caine from Forensic Architecture research agency focused on methods of photography and computational processes for three-dimensional scanning. During the three days of the workshop participants worked in the campus of the TU Delft, and aided with simple cameras exercised photogrammetry methods from a variety of scales: from a small object to entire environments comprised of multiple scans. In addition to understanding these specific tools, participants learned from existing examples, investigating how methods of photogrammetry in combination with research may have civic applications and implications. Further, the workshop investigated the ways in which this specific mode of recording may be mobilised within wider constellations of aesthetic and political production.

The second workshop on 3D

Semantic Data Modelling dealt with the basics of developing a semantic model for large databases using CIDOC-CRM ontology as a tool for data systematisation, description of fundamental concepts and their relationships, and creating new knowledge in the area of cultural heritage. In particular, the workshop focused on the potentiality of semantic data modelling in addressing issues related to the virtual reconstruction of damaged architectural heritage. The workshop was carried out under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship [Project *Transurbicide*, ID 798115], led by Aleksandar Staničić, whose goal is to develop new research protocols for management and interpretation of the big collections of architectural documents related to reconstruction of Belgrade after the 1999 NATO bombing.

On the evening of the first conference day keynote Prof. Caren Kaplan presented an inter-scale spatial analysis of conflict, as well as a series of critical reflections of the visualisation power of technological devices used in conflict — drones in particular — relying on media studies and feminist theory as a means to discuss the impact of popular media image on life in actual conflict zones. Kaplan examined a variety of everyday and domestic application of drones (as 'toys' and hobby machines, but also as powerful military automated drone-technology as the ultimate war weapons in trans-territorial war zones) and the related processes of image-making. Following Kaplan's keynote, the special film-screening program 'The Temperature of the War' curated by Ilona Jurkonytė was presented in Filmhuis Lumen, located in downtown Delft. The screening included the short films 'Sunstone' (35 min) by Filipa Cesar and Louis Henderson, 'Sirenomelia' (12 min) by Emilija Škarnulytė, and 'Iroojrilik' (21 min) by Julian Charrière.

The second conference day included four sessions of paper

presentations organised according to the two thematic lines: spaces of conflict, and spaces of memory. The first two sessions presented research work from the perspective of the political agency of images: 'Spaces of Conflict: The Political Agency of Photography' (Session 1), and 'Spaces of Conflict: Moving Image' (Session 2). In Session 1 ('Photography') Jeffrey Kruth presented an investigation of the typology of church-architecture in rural Louisiana, USA in relation to the mediating role of photography between spatial and racial issues. Christopher Chen addressed the problematic role of news and journalistic photography in the erosion and eradication of autochthonous traditions of the Uyghur culture led by Chinese media, resulting in the folklorisation and 're-writing' of Uyghur history. Emine Görgül presented the photographic work of Ara Güler and the depiction of Istanbul in the 1950s and 1980s, arguing that the camera eye of the photographer plays an important role in the reformation of the 'event-space' of public space.

In Session 2 ('Moving Image') the contributions focused on the different agencies of the moving image. Katarina Anđelković investigated the interplay between the making of the moving image and space itself through an analysis of Gordon Matta-Clark's intervention 'Splitting' (1974). Noa Roei presentation focused on filmic narrative as an exposure to the military fantasies and strategies exposed in the construction of an actual military training camp based on a 1:1 simulation of a Palestinian village. Aikaterini Antonopoulou analysed the space of conflict in YouTube videos, investigating how the staging and re-staging of three different processions of far-right groups are mobilized against immigrants in the public spaces of Agios Panteleimon neighbourhood in Athens.

The third and fourth sessions during the afternoon program focused on a series of practices that create the

memory — or conversely — the non-memory of conflict: 'Spaces of Memory: Critical Cartographies' (Session 3) and 'Spaces of Memory: Media Traces and the Non-memorial' (Session 4). In Session 3 ('Critical Cartographies') the paper addressed the forms and consequences of traditional digital mappings and their intersections in mediatic environments, including virtual reality environments. Liat Savin Ben Shoshan and Sigal Barnir showed the historical and cultural value of the Palestinian village Lifta dating from the sixteenth century, discussing the ways in which images and mapping can disrupt the activities of the Israeli military and settlers' occupation, countering destruction and recent real estate developments produced by the colonial spatial strategy of the state of Israel. Siobhan Barry explored how spatiality and memory construct a personal experience reflective of the time of conflict from a historical distance by presenting a sculptural design studio intervention exhibited in the 'Sanctuary from the Trenches' exhibition at Dunham Massey in Cheshire, UK. Nela Milić dealt with so-called 'radical artefacts' — a compilation of apparently random artefacts and memorabilia found at specific homes, as well as images and interviews, investigating their role in the narrative unfolding of the Serbian uprisings and the attempt to overthrow Milošević's dictatorship in 1996-97.

Session 4 ('Media Traces and the Non-memorial') looked into the complex representations of conflict and the 'remembering' processes, from the analysis and collection of images of conflicts, to the use of these images in the generation of digital environments of memory, physical sculptures, performative representations, and so on. Ahmad Beydoun showed the production of complex digital environments from the experiences and narratives of detainees in Khiam Detention Centre (KDC), a military camp and prison that was established by the Israeli Army during

the occupation of South Lebanon from 1985 to 2000. Ecem Saricayir examined three artworks strategically placed on the Turkish territory along its borders, arguing that in different degrees these artworks engage with the legacy of Armenian cultural heritage in relation to memory and commemoration. Faye Mullen presented her performative lecture remotely mediated via Skype. In it, she craftfully entangled and disentangled notions of object, metaphor and violence using the trope of the 'wall' as a Leitmotif.

The afternoon sessions were concluded with the keynote Pelin Tan, who discussed a series of transversal methodologies and narratives of decolonising practices through field research and case studies in southeastern Turkey, while elaborating on Karen Barad's concept of 'intra-action', and Kathryn Yusoff's approach to colonialism and the Anthropocene.

The evening program was dedicated to the opening of the conference exhibition in the Faculty of Architecture, which included a series of installations, photographic material, video and other forms of media that highlighted the multidimensional and transdisciplinary character inherent in the spatiality of conflicts. Along the second-floor corridor, CLUI (Centre for Land-Use Interpretation) based in Los Angeles, USA, contributed with the project 'On Targets: Dropping in on American Bombing Ranges'. The CLUI exhibition included a series of fourteen photographs exposing an inventory of training ranges around the US, which offered the opportunity of reflection on the act of 'looking' and ways of seeing. Nicolás Kísic Aguirre presented his 'Speaker Tower', an ingenious sonic device that stands in as an instrument of protest. The 'Speaker Tower' claims sonic space from a public perspective. The device is designed to effect a visual, sonic and psychological impact throughout public space. Omar Mismar presented his work 'I will not find

this image beautiful' to bring awareness of the aesthetics of the clouds after the Israeli bombing of Gaza. His piece intervenes on the image script-code by inserting the names of victims, thus altering the beauty of the images of violence and presenting them as the event of the glitch and mediatic mistake. Faye Mullen's 8:18" video art-work 'AASAMISAG' starts with a meditation on the wall characterized by a sustained interest in failure, body, materiality in which her studio practice acknowledges weight as it bears as much what is physical as what is immaterial. At the end it arrives at silence and encourages the artistic creation of a space of resistance. Eliyahu Keller and Eytan Mann's VR installation 'Digital Archaeology / Virtual Narratives' studies and represent the contested history of the Palestinian village of Lifta using advanced simulation techniques, 3D scanning, and real-time rendering. Katarina Anđelković's piece 'The Generalštab Building as Image: A history decomposed' focuses on the representation of time in the case of the damaged Generalštab building, the Serbian Military HQ in Belgrade, bombed in the international military intervention led by NATO against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. Katarina's work shows the filmic atmosphere of the building that is perceived as 'the monument' to conflictual histories with parallel narratives: one about the final dissolution of what was left of Socialist Yugoslavia, and the other about the NATO 'aggression' against the notorious regime of Slobodan Milošević.

The third and last day of the conference included four sessions of paper presentations organised again under the conference themes, spaces of conflict and spaces of memory. The first two sessions delved into the notions of conflict from two different, but interrelated perspectives: 'Critical Cartographies' (Session 5) and the role of place in the negotiation of conflicts (Session 6). Session 5 ('Spaces of Conflict: Critical Cartographies') looked into literal and conceptual forms of mapping and

cartographic practice through which to visualise, explore and critique different positionalities and emergent subjectivities in zones of conflict. Corine van Emmerik discussed artistic practices in Palestine that blend traditional crafts such as embroidery and leather-work with contemporary design, enabling processes of becoming and spaces of emancipation within contexts of occupation and colonisation. Melina Philippou presented a stunning cartographic project that maps the informal migration and refugee routes (EMR) spanning from Greece to Germany, while simultaneously investigating the interconnections of policies and international agreements in diagrammatic ways. Socrates Stratis presented research based on critical urban pedagogies as a hybrid form of crossed action between architectural interventions, landscape design, international law in the design studio work conducted in Cyprus. It takes examples of 'agonistic' architectural projects in zones of exception as a means to deliberate on conceptual, political and pedagogical practices geared towards critical cartographies.

Session 6 ('Spaces of Conflict: Place in Conflict Negotiation') dealt with different artistic practices aimed at mediating conflict through material negotiation of cause and purpose. Margarethe Mueller showed a series of works from the research collective on urbanism and architecture 'Transbanana'. The work is situated in Gorizia/Nova Gorica (Italy/ Slovenia), a city divided until 2004 by the EU-external border. The creation of a Ping-Pong network and Common Ground as urban design strategy across both sides of the border, initiated research initiatives geared towards the production of knowledge, as well as to direct processes of change both in social imagination about the actual and past spatial reality of the division. Lutz Robbers took the experimental film 'Trop Tôt, Trop Tard' (1980) by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet as a point of departure,

arguing that the mediation of Straub/Huillet offers a theory of the built environment as a 'matter of contention' in which the past revolution marked by the Place de la Bastille is hidden and finally lost by the correct flow of cars, avoiding possible congestions. Francesca Zanotto focused on the conflict related to urban solid waste while relating it to the other film works on ecological dangers and pollution. Zanotto presented the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles (1977) as an analysis of the oblivion around waste and the awareness and the involvement of citizens in the social pact of public metabolism, focusing on the spatial dimension of the urban environment and its infrastructures as the essential media triggering this pact.

The afternoon paper sessions 'Spaces of Memory' discussed the issues of 'Mediated Activism' (Session 7) and 'Memory and the Spectacle' (Session 8). In Session 7 ('Mediated Activism') Eliza Culea-Hong attempted to re-contextualise Lebbeus Woods's work on the destruction of Sarajevo and his visit to the city in 1993, arguing that, in spite of the criticism to which Woods's work has been subjected, when seen as a strategy of salvation (of the Balkans) there exist in it the possibility of redemption. Daniella Maamari presented her research on Jocelyne Saab, the unacknowledged pioneering woman of Lebanese documentary film-making. Saab's important contribution to Lebanese memory stored in films contributes to the creation of an archive of footage from Lebanon from the 1930s to the 1990s in a collage that is meant to show how different cinematic projects viewed Lebanon throughout history. Gökçe Önal's paper analysed the digital image as a dynamic, three-dimensional process rather than as a photographic surface phenomenon, demonstrating how media ecologies can inform theories of urbanisation through an examination of extractive views, thus offering a framework to study spatial representations beyond visual

modalities.

In the final session of the conference, Session 8 ('Memory and the Spectacle') Mariacristina D'Oria focused on the relationship between past war zones, related infrastructures and the production of culture and tourism. D'Oria analysed contemporary post-Yugoslav space in the construction works of traditional villages for film and tourism (by Emir Kusturica) in relation to the remnants of the infrastructures of the nuclear testing sites in Nevada National Security Site in the US, infamous for the mushroom clouds result of nuclear explosions. Eliyahu Keller and Eytan Mann discussed the pedagogical and design values of immersive technologies and digital representations, including visual installations, advanced simulation techniques, 3D scanning, and real-time rendering using the village of Lifta as a case study. Delia Duong Ba Wendel joined the session remotely, and reflected on the traces of an intimate and horrific history of genocide memory and its curation in Rwanda.

The conference closed with a round-table discussion moderated by Heidi Sohn and Marc Schoonderbeek in which the conference attendees and presenters reflected on the many fruitful relationships and connections that were established during the conference days between not only fields of study and academic traditions, but also between discursive and conceptual production and research, various media formats and technologies, as well as artistic practices and 'disciplined' and 'undisciplined' approaches to the issues of spatial conflicts. Over the three intense conference days a rich patch-work of textured materials, ideas, tools, attitudes and awareness emerged: a cartography of the spatiality of conflicts and its mediation. In recognising both, the multifarious and rich positionalities and expertise that converged at the conference, as well as the formation of a shared common ground around the problematics of conflict, its

spatiality and its mediation, the conference participants reflected on the importance of thinking through these matters together, that is, collectively and with a transdisciplinary engagement. The round-table discussion united an energetic group of involved individuals who recognised the theoretical gap that exists both in media studies and in conflict studies and that is yet to be filled; a gap that may be narrowed with the enormous potential latent in media tools in the exploration and production of spatial conflicts, and which begs for the continuation of our efforts and investigations. The conference concluded with the proposal to organise another conference in the near future, making this event the first one in a line of many more to come.

Acknowledgements

The editors wish to thank the Faculty of Architecture and the Department of Architecture of the TU Delft for their generous support in hosting the conference. The event was partly funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship [Project *Transurbicide*, ID 798115], which we gratefully acknowledge. We thank the Department of Landscape Architecture, The University of Sheffield, UK for their cooperation via Armina Pilav. Nathalie Kooijmans for her secretarial professionalism and tireless dedication before, during and after the conference. Gabriel Schwake for his role as conference organiser and his input in the production of the conference exhibition. Andrej Radman for his kind contribution as moderator of the PhD research presentations. The conference volunteers Emily Aquilina, Charlotte Middelveld, Natasha Lüth, and Jan Fries for their versatility and dedication. Our gratitude to the Harun Farocki Institute for making the cover photo of these proceedings available from their archives. CLUI for their willingness to share their work with us. Filmhuis Lumen for their continuous cooperation in making the

film-screening program possible. A special thank you to our fantastic layout and design assistant editor Lucija Grofelnik, who also assisted us greatly during and after the conference, especially in the production of these Conference Proceedings. And

finally, to all the conference attendees and contributors without whom the conference would not have been possible, we thank you, and look forward to more fruitful encounters and exchanges in the near future.