THE FUNAMBULIST

Politics of Space and Bodies

17 /// May-June 2018

WEAPONIZED INFRASTRUCTURE

ON KNOWLEDGE AND "STEALING"

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Public Library at Gallery Nova, Zagreb (Spring 2014). / Photograph by Ivan Kuharić.

In 2003 artist Jackie Summell started a correspondence with Herman Wallace, who at the time was serving a life sentence in solitary confinement in the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, by asking him "What kind of a house does a man who has lived in a 6' x 9' cell for over thirty years dream of?" The Louisiana State Penitentiary, the largest maximum-security prison in the U.S., besides inmate quarters and among other facilities, includes a prison plantation, Prison View Golf Course, and Angola Airstrip. The nickname Angola comes from the former slave plantation purchased for a prison after the end of the Civil War — and where Herman Wallace became a prisoner in 1971 upon charges of armed robbery. He became politically active in the prison's chapter of the Black Panther and campaigned for better conditions in Angola, organizing petitions and hunger strikes against segregation, rape, and violence. In 1973, together with

Albert Woodfox, he was convicted of murder of a prison guard and both were put in solitary confinement. Together with Robert King, Wallace and Woodfox would become known as the Angola Three, the three prison inmates who served the longest period in solitary confinement — 29, 41, and 43 years respectively. *The House that Herman Built*, Herman's virtual and eventually physical dream house in his birth city of New Orleans grew from the correspondence between Jackie and Herman. At one point, Jackie asked Herman to make a list of the books he would have on the book shelf in his dream house, the books which influenced his political awakening. At the time Jackie was a fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, which supported acquisition of the books and became the foundation of Herman's physical library on its premises, waiting for his dream home to be built to relocate.

In 2013 the conviction against Herman Wallace was thrown out and he was released from jail. Three days later he passed away. He never saw his dream house built, nor took a book from a shelf in his library in Solitude, which remained accessible to fellows and visitors until 2014. In 2014 Public Library/Memory of the World digitized Herman's library to place it online thus making it permanently accessible to everyone with an Internet connection. The spirit of Herman Wallace continued to live through the collection shaping him — works by Marxists, revolutionaries, anarchists, abolitionists, and civil rights activists, some of whom were also prisoners during their lifetime. Many books from Herman's library would not be accessible to those serving time, as access to knowledge for the inmate population in the U.S. is increasingly being regulated. A peak into the list of banned books, which at one point included Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010), reveals the incentive of the ban was to prevent access to knowledge that would allow inmates to understand their position in society and the workings of the prison-industrial complex. It is becoming increasingly difficult for inmates to have chance encounters with a book that could change their lives; given access to knowledge they could see their position in life from another perspective; they could have a moment of revelation like the one Cle Sloan had. Sloan, a member of the Los Angeles gang Bloods encountered his neighborhood Athens Park on a 1972 Los Angeles Police Department "Gang Territories" map in Mike Davis' book *City of Quartz* (2010). It made him understand gang violence in L.A. was a product of institutional violence, structural racism, and systemic dispersal of community support networks put in place by the Black Panther Party.

The books in Herman's library can be seen as a toolbox of "really useful knowledge" for someone who has to conceive the notion of freedom. The term "really useful knowledge" originated with workers' awareness of the need for self-education in the early-19th century. It describes a body of 'unpractical' knowledge such as politics, economics, and philosophy that workers needed to understand and that would change their position in society, in opposition to 'useful knowledge' — knowledge of 'practical' skills which would make them useful to the employer. Like in the 19th century, sustaining the system relies on continued exploitation of a population prevented from accessing, producing and sharing knowledges needed to start to understand the system that is made to oppress and to articulate a position from which they can act. Who controls the networks of production and distribution to knowledge is an important

issue, as it determines which books are made accessible. Self-help and coloring books are allowed and accessible to inmates so as to continue oppression and pacify resistance. **The crisis of access persists outside the prison walls with a continuous decline in the number of public libraries and the books they offer due to the double assault of austerity measures and a growing monopoly of the corporate publishing industry.**

Digital networks have incredible power to widely distribute content, and once the (digital) content is out there, it is relatively easy to share and access. Digital networks can provide a solution for enclosure of knowledge and for the oppressed, easier access to channels of distribution. At least that was the promise — the Internet would enable a democratization of access. However, digital networks have a significant capacity to centralize and control within the realm of knowledge distribution, one look at the oligopoly of academic publishing and its impact on access and independent production shows its contrary.

In June 2015, Elsiver won an injunction against Library Genesis and its subsidiary platform sci-hub.org, making it inaccessible in some countries and via some commercial internet providers. Run by anonymous scientists mostly from Eastern Europe, these voluntary and non-commercial projects are the largest illegal repository of electronic books, journals, and articles on the web. Most of the scientific articles collected in the repository bypassed the paywalls of academic publishers using the solidary network of access provided by those associated with universities rich enough to pay the exuberant subscription fees. The only person named in the court case was Alexandra Elbakyan, who revealed her identity as the creator of sci-hub.org, and explained she was motivated by the lack of access: "When I was working on my research project, I found out that all research papers I needed for work were paywalled. I was a student in Kazakhstan at the time and our university was not subscribed to anything." The creation of sci-hub.org made scientific knowledge accessible to anyone, not just to members of wealthy academic institutions. The act of acknowledging responsibility for sci-hub transformed what was seen as the act of illegality (piracy) into the act of civil disobedience. In the context of sci-hub and Library Genesis, both projects from the periphery of knowledge production, "copyright infringement opens on to larger questions. It questions in particular the legitimacy of the historic compromise — if indeed there ever even was one — between the labor that produces culture and knowledge and its commodification as codified in existing copyright regulations." Here, disobedience and piracy have an equalizing effect on the asymmetries of access to knowledge.

However, the issue of access should not obfuscate the larger problems of access to academia and academic knowledge production intertwined with capitalist and hegemonic interests, which under the guise

of "neutrality" supports the oppression and deepens the rift between the periphery and the core (itself a division from the point of hegemony). Additionally, it is important to distinguish those monetizing access to content to fund another's production — such as the academic publishing oligopoly — from independent small publishers monetizing on access to content to fund their own production. The survival of many smaller, dissenting publications and platforms for production and distribution of the non-hegemonic content is predicated upon charging people to read the content and thus support its production.

In 2008, programmer and hacktivist Aaron Shwartz published *Guerilla Open Access Manifesto* triggered by the enclosure of scientific knowledge production of the past, often already part of public domain, via digitization: "The world's entire scientific and cultural heritage, published over centuries in books and journals, is increasingly being digitized and locked up by a handful private corporations […] We need to download scientific journals and upload them to file sharing networks. We need to fight for Guerilla Open Access." On January 6, 2011, the MIT police and the US Secret Service arrested Aaron Shwartz on charges of having downloaded a large number of scientific articles from one of the most used and paywalled database. The federal prosecution decided to show the increasingly nervous publishing industry the lengths they are willing to go to protect them by indicting Swartz on 13 criminal counts. With a threat of 50 years in prison and U.S. $1 million fine, Aaron committed suicide on January 11, 2013. **But he left us with an assignment — if you have access, you have a responsibility to share with those who do not; "with enough of us, around the world, we'll not just send a strong message opposing the privatization of knowledge — we'll make it a thing of the past. Will you join us?"** He pointed to an important issue — every new cycle of technological development (in this case the move from paper to digital) brings a new threat of enclosure of the knowledge in the public domain.

While "the core and the periphery adopt different strategies of opposition to the inequalities and exclusions [digital] technologies start to reproduce" some technologies used by corporations to enclose can be used to liberate knowledge and make it accessible. The existence of projects such as Library Genesis, sci-hub, Public Library/Memory of the World, aaaarg.org, monoskop, and ubuweb, commonly known as shadow libraries, show how building infrastructure for storing, indexing, and access, as well as supporting digitization, can not only be put to use by the periphery, but used as a challenge to the normalization of enclosure offered by the core. The people building alternative networks of distribution also build networks of support and solidarity. Those on the peripheries need to 'steal' the knowledge behind paywalls in order to fight the asymmetries paywalls enforce — peripheries "steal" in order to advance. Depending on

the vantage point, digitization of a book can be stealing, or liberating it to return the knowledge (from the dusty library closed stacks) back into circulation. "Old" knowledge can teach new tricksters a handful of tricks.

In 2015 I realized none of the architecture students of the major European architecture schools can have a chance encounter with *Architecture and Feminisms* or *Sexuality and Space*, nor with many books on similar topics because they were typically located in the library's closed stacks. Both books were formative and in 2005, as a student I went to great lengths to gain access to them. The library at the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, was starved of books due to permanent financial crisis, and even bestsellers such as Rem Koolhaas' *S, M, L, XL* were not available, let alone books that were focused on feminism and architecture. At the time, the Internet could inform that edited volumes such as *Architecture and Feminism* and *Sexuality and Space* existed but nothing more. To satisfy my curiosity, and help me write a paper, a friend sent — via another friend — her copies from London to Belgrade, which I photocopied, and returned. With time, I graduated to buying my own second hand copies of both books, which I digitized upon realizing access to them still relied on access to a well-stocked specialist library. They became the basis for my growing collection on feminism/gender/space that I maintain as an amateur librarian, tactically digitizing books to contribute to the growing struggle and to make architecture more equitable as both a profession and an effect in space.

To conclude, a confession, and an anecdote — since 2015, I have tried to digitize a book a week and every year, I manage to digitize around 20 books, so one can say I am not particularly good at meeting my goals. **The books I do digitize are related to feminism, space, race, urban riots, and struggle, and I choose them for their (un)availability and urgency.** Most of them are published in the 1970s and 1980s, although some were published in the 1960s and 1990s. Some I bought as former library books, digitized on a DIY book scanner, and uploaded to the usual digital repositories. It takes two to four hours to make a neat and searchable PDF scan of a book. As a PDF, knowledge production usually under the radar or long out of print becomes more accessible. One of the first books I digitized was Robert Goodman's *After the Planners*, a critique of urban planning and the limits of alternate initiatives in cities written in the late 1960s. A few years after I scanned it, online photos from a conference drew my attention: the important, white male professor was showing the front page of *After the Planners* on his slide. I realized fast the image had a light signature of the scanner I had used. While I do not know if this act of digitization made a dent or was co-opted, seeing the image was a small proof that digitization can bring books back into circulation and access to them might make a difference — or that access to knowledge can be a weapon.

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THE FUNAMBULIST MAGAZINE №17

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U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69) transits the Suez Canal during the so-called "Gulf War." / Photograph by Frank A. Marquart (1990).