

University of California, Irvine

Urban Aesthetic Authoritarianism

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Four-story shadows of importance and recognition are cast down over popcorn-riddled walls and congested housing, consuming them indefinitely. These shadows have bodies imbued with monochromatic silver steel and contemporary design, evocating a sense of wealth and lavioussness that could only be creating by and for Irvinian hands and livelihoods. Those to be consumed reeked of under-management and a crumbling infrastructure, dawning pastel oranges and mustard yellows that allowed it, whether intentional or not, to blend and disappear into the seemingly mundane background that is Santa Ana. In the midst of the simultaneous Irvine-lack and Santa Ana-presence of telephone poles and storm drains alike, the most telling was the tale of two bus stops mirroring one another, both physically and symbolically. This tale interestingly had a competitive quality to their individual designs, as Irvine's lack of Santa Ana's rain-roof proposed that this legal separation was indicative of another world, complementary with its own separate climate. In light of these stark disparities between the two, one could see this visual

disorientation congregate on Sunflower Avenue, the legal cross-section of the municipalities of Irvine, Santa Ana, and Costa Mesa.

With the above ethnographic field site at the forefront, I will be investigating the effects of urban design on multi-species relationships. Specifically, I am interested in how the border and its aesthetic aspects redefine ecologies, communities, and the political landscape of its adjacent entities. Drawing upon the deep literary framework established by urban anthropologists such as Setha Low, I will critically analyze their work in order to address the lack of multispecies ethnographic research surrounding the urban environment and its agential effects. This analyzation will, then, help prime the discussion of the border's design as an agent of exclusionary, inclusionary, and re-definitive action in relation to both humans and non-humans. Through this lens, I will also be able to address how those same communities play an agential role in the border's establishment and continued management, as either actors of cooperation or resistance. Ultimately, I come to argue that this space and its "designed-in" ideologies construct the discriminatory actions of racism, classism, and speciesism equivalently, allowing for politically-sided terminology of targeted beings to be directly reflected in policy creation and public discussion.

Framework

The urban anthropologist Setha Low is most well known for their employment of the concept of "spatialized culture", uncovering the intersectionality between design, space, and power relations (Low 2017). More generally, they cite eight key exclusionary systems at play in the creation of an urban environment such as the one above (Low 2011). As exposing as these systems, and Low's extensive research, are of the ideologies surrounding classism, sexism, and

racism that perpetuate power, there seems to be a substantially large gap in the discourse of not only Low but of urban anthropology as a whole concerning the multispecies effect that space and place making has. This is not to say that space and place are not imbued with, and actively recultivated by, classism, sexism, and racism; rather, this is to ask what of speciesism (Noske 1997). As the human comes to know itself through the intimate curation of belonging to space and place, what of the nonhuman growing, knowing, and becoming in the same light?

The Border as Defined and Defining

bor·der /'bôrdər/

(noun): 1. a district near a line separating two political or geographical areas

*2. a strip of ground along the edge of a lawn or path for planting flowers
or shrubs*

Much like “community” and “family”, “border” is inherently based upon a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of objects, spaces, and beings. As “community” is completely built upon both who is and is *not* apart of it, the “border” and its conceptualization requires the knowledge of who is within and without. In the case of the Irvine-Santa Ana border, it seemed that the definers of the nonhuman “within-s and without-s” was the active interplay of the physical and the practical, the structural and the searching.

With the site of interest being a mere ten minute drive from, seemingly, anywhere in Irvine, I had a great opportunity of being able to place myself in the space and to not only feel, but to gain a level of acquaintance with it. During my time there, I spent a lot of it actually *looking* for what I should be looking for, simply strolling and trying to essentially feel for what I should be mindful of in this space. Partly what had helped the most was actually envisioning

myself as a distinct type of nonhuman and asking, “Okay, how would I navigate this street? How would I find a meal for today? Which side has more opportunity for me?” Harkening now to that time spent at this intersection, the answer to nearly all of those questions, all of the time, was the Santa Ana side.

This was not only based on the single inclusivity of the Santa Ana side, but also the tee to which “hostile architecture” was implemented and enforced in the Irvine developments. Beginning with the former, structurally was the notable population of telephone poles and their wires, completely absorbing the Santa Ana street side. Having seen enough advertisements of New York and other large metropolitan areas, my mind went first and foremost to their high association with the pigeon. These wires doubled as communication relays and a haven for a potentially large pigeon population. Storm drains were seen as also having a considerably large Santa Ana presence as well, inviting smaller nonhumans to nest and congregate freely. These architectural aspects, in their purposeful or accidental creation of nonhuman opportunity for flourishing, can be considered “inclusive” in design. I feel it is essential to define inclusivity in these terms, as not to equate “inclusive” with “democratic”, in the planning sense (i.e. a space free from “fear”, of free willing entrance and exit, of communality) (Bollens 2012).

Coming now to the latter, this idea of “hostile architecture” builds itself on the tactical utilization of urban structure and design methods in the creation of inequality, segregation, suppression, and the like. Leaning upon Low (2011), this is essentially the integration of “aesthetic restrictions” that adversely displays who is unwanted, who does not *belong* in the space. This was a well known tactic among Johannesburg city planners seeking to impose and concretize racial order and placement through use of extensive “buffer” zones and the building of “incomplete” shanty towns (Bollens 2012). As famed as this concept was in its application to

human bodies, Irvine's border had now shown me it's one-for-one reimagining onto nonhumans, subjecting them to the same hyper-curation of *belonging*. This cultivated Irvine landscape not only lacked both telephone poles and storm drains completely, but included structural aspects such as: elevated housing units (i.e. no residential on the first floor of any complex); integrated and unexposed waste systems; and large open-air areas both within and around the developments of interest. These installations seem not only to deter opportunity, but are strategically targeting specific nonhumans that have the elusive title of urban "pest" hanging above them. This active nonhuman segregation through structurality seems to remove the human from the physical equation all together, allowing such structures to play twenty-four hour exterminator instead.

As humanly intimate and active as this creation process was for Irvine city planners and developers, continuous discussion surrounding Irvine's "cleanliness" against the "stained" Santa Ana (Douglas 1972) prompted a curiosity of nonhuman "management practices" being conducted across the converging municipalities, imposing an increasingly intimate inclusivity and exclusivity onto select "blacklist" nonhumans. In spirit, nonhuman management and control services equate an urban transition of seasonal game hunting, readjusting listed species to avoid any potentiality of species becoming unavailable through an "endangered" title. With its public renounce, its implementation becomes a key controller in the "war of invasivity" and belonging across both Irvine and Santa Ana (Orion 2015).

With its managed master plan of nearly fifty years, accompanied by its resident's intolerance to the very idea of a "misfit" homeless population inhabiting within its bounds, Irvine has come to define its invasive residents more as a purposeful menace rather than a "by-chance accident" (Do 2018). This operation towards an Irvine "clean" is carried out, then, through a coordination of "naturally built" green spaces, community-managed landscape services, and

publicized calls for “watchful eyes”, solidifying a species’ fate and their eventual eradication. These calls take form in services such as the “Irvine Ranch Conservancy”, employing a “not in my backyard” mentality to their weekly community “weedings” and “invasive competition” information workshops (“Stop the Spread... 2016). This legitimization of invasive decimation for native flourishing not only gets at the politics of nativity and invasivity, but also the instillment of ideological belonging and “place-holding,” prompting their mixing at both the local and national levels (Orion 2015).

Similar to the rest of Orange County, Santa Ana relies significantly on privatized businesses for pest and invasive species management and control, with about eleven in total spread throughout the city. As suggestive as the Santa Ana border’s inclusion of telephone poles and storm drains were, it seems that Santa Ana is, in fact, a potential home for the building of select nonhuman communities, considered popularly as “pests” or “vermin”. These nonhumans and their run-ins with humans have transitioned from urban problem to a city expectation in Santa Ana, with residents and businesses alike accepting the nonhuman frequency in the city as “here to stay”:

*“If you live in Santa Ana California, then there is a good chance that you have or have had a **pest** problem.”*

This in-depth antagonism between the two beings have allowed “nuisances” to become an essential part of a “Santa Ana”-ism, defining Santa Ana-ian identity similar to prairie dogs and their human-contested prairie towns (Hawes-Davis 1998). Interestingly, though, is that these two species will always need one another; without prairie dogs, what *are* prairie towns, what *are* prairies then? In the same breath, this “integrated pest identity” questions what of Santa Ana, what of a “city” without its pests and invasivity? This

becomes a call to Anna Tsing's spotlight on the understanding of a multispecies and companionative history, as nonhumans have played and continuously shape the identity of not only individuals and communities, but of entire cities in this case (Tsing 2012).

At the border, these differentiated practices and active policies concerning nonhuman livelihood and belonging come to play in their most obvious forms. It is at this legal border that the politicization of who is and is not in the consideration of "nuisance" comes into fruition, shaping the political ecologies of the area (Ghertner 2012). This curation of relationships is not only "top-down", in a sense; these acted-upon nonhumans actively and oftenly "act" on humans and other beings based on the influence of such material mentioned above. Essentially, this interaction can be conceptualized as an "agential relationship" had between beings and their fabricated environment (Rotenberg 2015). As the built environment curates who can exist in a space and what actions they can do, those exact same beings become actors themselves by effecting and shaping the environment. A notable example, especially here on the UC Irvine campus, is the creation of established and designated pathways, funneling humans and nonhumans in not only the ways in which they can reach their destination, but also in the actions they can take from that point on.

Race, Class, & Species

As one may have assumed, this curation of space and urban structurality is not without the anthropocentric, embedding exclusionary ideologies of class and race simultaneous to species (Tsing 2012). Through this analysis, the creation of both "white" and "black" spatial imaginaries by developers and communities alike stretch themselves to include the belonging of certain

nonhuman species as well (Feagin 2010). In essence, it is not coincidental that a significantly large population of “vermin”-classified non humans live and cultivate belonging within a city housing a “77.3%” Hispanic / Latino population (“Santa Ana...” 2017); this was, instead, *by design*. Politically, this equativity of vermin and marginalized bodies shows itself in policy creation and implementation, specifically referencing to the “nuisance law” in New Delhi, equating the disenfranchised population to environmental hazards (Ghertner 2012). This is a large reason for the interest in municipal borders, as these crafted spaces dictate not only the livelihood of the communities across the street, but of communities throughout the entire city. Furthermore, it would seem that there is an absolute “city-ness” that Irvine, the Irvine Company, and possibly UC Irvine wishes to instill and keep, which does not include that of the lowly Sahara mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*) or the low-income human of color (*Homo sapien*), accomplishing nonhuman and human exclusivity.

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