

Anxious Architecture: Sleep, Identity, and Death in the US-Mexico Borderlands

Sam Grabowska

Since its formation in 1848, the US-Mexico border has been a site of conflict and inconstancy. The international boundary was and remains both a delineation and a linkage (economic, cultural, and political) between two nations.¹ This kind of push-and-pull between keeping immigrants out and welcoming their labour has resulted in various waves of immigration.² While policies change, so do the conditions on the border including an increase in militarisation and patrolling tactics.³ Additionally, the modes of crossing and the actors involved in unauthorised migration have changed including cartels, guides, the Border Patrol agency, migrants, and humanitarians.⁴ The constant flux of conditions creates anxiety, as the border and the borderlands are unable to remain stable and unyielding, 'they bring about their own demise as if by a subtle form of self-destruction – of being undermined not from without (that is, from a failure to hold back overt invasions) but from within, on their own terms'.⁵ The overbearing and overcompensating strategies to protect inside from outside, self from other, end up eroding the functionality and proficiency of the border itself. The border begins to undo itself through anxiety.

In the borderlands, 'anxiety' seems to be a particularly useful term when dealing with the landscape, its crossers, and its architecture because there exists a persistent threat (whether of being lost, discovered, displaced, or confronted) and one must continually seek to avoid this threat, whether real or imagined.⁶ Avoidance and escape of a

threat are triggered by a deleterious external condition (a helicopter flying overhead, the heat of the sun, a threatening human...) and thus require the seeking of a protective interior state (rest, shelter, resilience...).

As border-crossers and the border emote and embody this anxiety, so, too, does the architecture they build. Fashioned out of available materials (cactus, shrub, grass, stone, and so forth), the small structures built in the US-Mexico borderlands are an anxious entity born out of a contested terrain. The structures work to mitigate unforgiving terrain, harsh climate, detection by Border Patrol, contested cartel routes, and other threats to personal safety. The characterisation of architecture as an emotive and emotional subject, draws from scholars who have emphasised the life (even agency) of objects.⁷ In a loose sense, the following text performs a 'psychoanalysis of architecture [...] – as if architecture were on the couch so to speak – that would reveal, by implication, and reflection, its relationship with its "subjects"[...] stressing the active role of objects and spaces in anxiety'.⁸ The subjects, in this case, are the physical landscape of the borderlands, the builders of the structures, as well as the other human and non-human actors inhabiting and forming the borderlands.

This article employs the analysis of architectural form, artifacts of material culture, and interviews gathered from two summers of fieldwork in the US and Mexico. This fieldwork was completed under

the guidance and support of Dr. Jason De León's Undocumented Migration Project (UMP). Around 40 structures were documented within a ten-mile radius north of the US-Mexico border in Arizona (part of the Sonoran desert borderlands) and were found using a combination of transect land surveying and exploratory walks around artifact cluster sites identified by the UMP. Approximately 50 one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with migrants, *coyotes* (guides), and *burros* (drug smugglers) in Nogales and Altar, Mexico during the spring and summer of 2012 and the summer of 2013.

Drawing from this fieldwork, this article identifies three modes in which architecture becomes 'anxious' as a spatial tactic to cope with conflict. Framed largely by Jonathan Crary's theorisation of capitalist spaces and sleeplessness, the first mode is an investigation of deprived sleep and the ways in which border-crosser huts both deny and afford physical rejuvenation or counter-surveillance in a landscape of trauma. The second mode, insecure identity, reveals how shape shifting can both mitigate and fall victim to power structures referencing Foucault and De Certeau. The third mode, fear of death, looks at the erasure and exposure of bodies (both carnal and architectural) that cannot rest in peace and draws from Anthony Vidler's exploration of uncanny architecture.

As anxiety is a response born out of duress, it is not the same as a transgressive response born out of a self-conscious desire to rebel against and overcome an oppressive force.⁹ Anxious architecture thus becomes an adaptive spatial tactic arising out of conflict and trauma that can protect, be alert or combative, and aware and responsive.¹⁰ At the same time, a constant state of vigilance also takes a toll, eroding the body (both of the builders and of their structures) and its capacity for endurance and wellbeing.

Lit sleep: interrupted cycles

Currently, the conditions along the US-Mexico border in Arizona are replete with checkpoints up to 50-some miles north of the border, Border Patrol stations, patrol cars, helicopters, infrared cameras, and watch towers, among other modes of surveillance and patrolling. [Fig. 1] The ever-watchful gaze of surveillance lights up the dark, exposing what wishes to remain hidden: 'Full lighting and the eye of the supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.'¹¹ Given the surveillance, it is better to travel at night than the day. However, temperatures in the summer months reach upwards of 49 degrees Celsius as the sun relentlessly blazes, making daytime rest difficult. Whether due to policing or climate, border-crossers and their architecture must capitalise on, or fall victim to, an anxious depletion of sleep.

An architecture that disables rest becomes a far different structure than one that enables rest. In the desert, rest and sleep are strictly regulated activities whether they are controlled by people in power (cartels, humanitarians, Border Patrol) or by the obstacles of the natural environment (the sun, the monsoons, the nearly untraversable steep terrain). The building or inhabitation of structures is equally regulated. In the borderlands, both rest and architecture become contentious and political. Shelters where people do not rest are built for the purpose of vigilance and counter-surveillance, used for watching others as much as for evading detection. In this context, architecture becomes a technological apparatus, much in the way that Jonathan Crary describes the capitalist global labourer or the modern soldier. Just as with 'sleep mode' on a computer, restless architecture and its inhabitants are 'an apparatus in a state of low-power readiness [...] It supersedes an off/on logic, so that nothing is ever fundamentally "off" and there is never an



Fig. 1: The militarised border as visualised by US Customs and Border Protection with various surveillance technologies and tactics to detect and capture border-crossers. Source: United States Customs and Border Protection 2012: 14. Illustration: Author

actual state of rest.¹² At the same time, an anxious architecture can disrupt the surrounding landscape. It provides a refuge by circumscribing the unknown, deflecting surveillance, and limiting vulnerability.

For many of us, sleep is a given; a mundane fact of life. But in the desert borderlands, sleep falls somewhere between desperate bodily need and terrifying vulnerability. To be asleep is to be helplessly unaware of the world around you. Natalia, a woman trying to cross the border, made this clear: 'We didn't see them [Border Patrol]. And when they caught us, we were sleeping.' Sleep is a time when one's guard is down, when one's eyes are closed – the watcher becomes the watched.¹³ Thus, border-crosser architecture's siting responds with multiple tactics. It is built to be big enough to house a small group of people that can warn one another (safety in numbers). Or it is organised in small but separate clusters so people can quickly egress and disperse from multiple locations. Or the architecture becomes a full-body shield to ensure protection from elements, animals, and surveillance at all times.

Some shelters take this latter all-compassing approach, with walls or coverage extending in all directions. This 360-degree coverage suggests that people stay longer in these places, not only because they have protection from the sun at any time of day during any season, but also because this kind of structure takes longer to build and requires more structural ingenuity (it is far easier to build a quick lean-to singular wall than to orchestrate a self-standing enclosure). A less temporary, more advanced and complicated architecture affords more sleep. Border-crosser architecture thus responds to 'a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning', and 'terminal disruption of the cycles and seasons on which ecological integrity depends'.¹⁴ It is a round-the-clock apparatus.

BW-01 was the first structure to be documented during the summer of 2012 in Arizona's borderlands. Located just off a small wash, its overall form is S-shaped with one curve larger than the other. [Fig. 2] Its form, materiality, and siting illustrates how border-crosser architecture strives for an artificial environment of imposed darkness in order to escape the unrelenting and dehydrating sun and to use the darkness as a cloak for movement. In order to keep out the light, BW-01's walls rest upon a mesquite tree's load-bearing tree trunk. These walls protect the border-crosser from on-the-ground reconnaissance as well as the sun while the mesquite's canopy provides cover from helicopters and aerial surveillance as well as sun and precipitation. The vertical, broken-off branches are all Y-shaped and placed carefully, alternating along the circumference: YΛYΛYΛ, like crutches holding up the tree and protecting whomever is inside.

While the structure of BW-01's large room is impressive in its construction and degree of cover, it clearly failed to meet all the needs of subsequent inhabitations and thus the need arose for an extension, an annex, in the form of the smaller curve of the S. Neither structure actually provides full relief from environmental threats. The measured difference in brightness in the large room during the day exhibits a paltry gift of shade (the external light reading in the early morning was 14.9 exposure value (EV), the interior light readings ranged from 10.6–13.8 EV). There are remnants of grass thatching on the walls that suggest the structure was at one point less permeable to light, but even so, these shelters cannot turn day into night. Instead, they do what they can to deflect heat and create a slightly more tolerable space that may allow for a brief nap.

When groups are able to rest in the half shade or unsettling night, there are, of course, no pillows and no beds inside the structures. Most structures are made of thorny flora and claustrophobically envelop the body, often without leaving any room to shift



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 2: Due to the skilled selection and placement of branches, BW-01's walls stand fast. However, due to wind, monsoon season, and the passage of time, there remain few tufts of grass that were used for thatching. Photo: Author

Fig. 3: GP-01 sits atop a ridge and with its dense dome structure and rock wall, is the sturdiest structure found. A small pile of gathered firewood rests just outside the fire pit. A decaying nylon sports jacket rests at the entrance. Photo: Author

postures. To enter BW-01, one must perform a swift series of choreographed gestures comprised of leg lifts and head bobs, torso swerves and arm extensions. Once inside, the bodily maneuvers are not yet complete: squatting, turning, folding-unfolding-refolding appendages, are all necessary just to situate the self awkwardly in the cramped confines of unwieldy, thorny walls. Often it is better not to sit down at all for fear that a mesquite thorn will rudely present itself on your fleshy backside or into vulnerable palms as you set down your hands for balance. In its generous volume, BW-01 is more comfortable than most structures, but even so, sleeping on the desert floor (replete with curious centipedes, displaced cactus needles, unforgiving mesquite thorns, scuttling ants, and so on) is far from luxurious. With only two people inside, body heat begins to raise the interior temperature quickly.

In the desert, this resting space is often adulterated, used instead as a space to fill the body with substances to counter the natural need and desire for sleep. Occasionally there is a blanket or a trash bag left behind as evidence of a moment of rest, but not at BW-01. Across all structures, artifacts of stimulation generally far outweigh the artifacts of sedation, suggesting that while architecture lends a moment of 'down time' to the traveler, this moment is temporary and often hi-jacked by ulterior motives. An empty Red Bull can, a discarded pill package (often containing pain suppressant or caffeine pills), a 'Be Light' water bottle... the border-crosser must stop infrequently, push the body beyond its limits, limit the weight of her own body, and deny herself rest and sleep. When the body's natural sources of adrenaline (generated from fear or excitement or both) wear off, these packaged substances artificially replace the body's chemicals.

In these cases, instead of enabling sleep, architecture enables altered states, intoxication, and concealed consumption of drugs. This place of transgression surrenders the far-too-luxurious privilege

of sleep, rest, and hydration. The energy drink propels aching, otherwise surrendering muscles up and over steep hills and also heightens the senses. One must always be aware of the surroundings; a rustle in the bushes could mean Border Patrol, could mean competing cartel operatives, or could mean a rattlesnake. Felipe, a 22-year old male raised in Arizona and deported after an arrest told us, '[You don't sleep] as good as you would when you're at home but I mean you try. You're kinda... aware during the time you're sleeping you're constantly... any little noise... you wake up, you don't know... it could be an animal or it could be a border agent approaching so... you sleep real... with a lot of conscience [sic]... like... You're not fully asleep.'

Border-crosser architecture is a double-edged paradox: it provides shelter and creates shade in order to enable sleep while also disabling rest and enabling stimulation. It overcomes the border-crosser's physical needs while putting her in greater danger by muting the body's signals for the need for rest or daily cycles. Especially in the context of a constantly threatening natural landscape, border-crosser architecture highlights the violence of sleep deprivation. One woman reported being allowed to build a shelter but not being allowed to speak at all – the entire night was cloaked in silence. At least she was able to sleep soundly. Women more commonly reported issues with sleep, playfully but honestly recounting, 'But the men snored a lot! They all fell into a deep sleep and left me and my friend awake and watching. That night, you hear noises, you start imagining what could be making that sound. Like an animal or something. There were some birds that were making terrifying noises and flapping their wings. In the desert, during the night, when the wind is blowing hard like it's from an approaching helicopter. Light sleepers, like me, we get scared. But yes, you imagine lots of things. And with the fatigue, it would get worse.' Women were also often quick to characterise their coyotes as being surprisingly tireless, hinting that they

may have been on some sort of drugs. If women wanted to stop and rest, their requests were often quickly met with either condescension or brusquely rejected. As Camila, a young woman cheekily relayed,

I wasn't able to sleep... they didn't give us enough time. We were always walking, through the whole night, and the time that they did give us to rest was for only five minutes but it was really cold. They left us on top of the mountain and I couldn't sleep with that cold.

However, when the guide was tired, 'half an hour for him! Because *he* was going to rest, *he* got his rest. But no, we couldn't sleep because of the cold.' These coyotes' rules often keep the group in perpetual motion, disrupting any social bonding or adequate rest for his group. Sleep becomes a commodity regulated by those in power who also control whether shelters are built.

There are thus structures that are more about a destruction of time and sleep cycles, responding less to earthly measures of time and more to political ones such as Border Patrol shifts and the duration of a marijuana high. There are also structures that are more responsive to traditional or classic markings of time such as nocturnal/diurnal and seasonal cycles. The borderlands are inscribed in overlapping and often irregular measures of time – at once an eternal and geological time and a modern fragmented time without cycles. A 48-year old woman, Isabella, relayed how after she and her husband were separated from their coyote and group, they fell asleep near a highway. Sleep took over and then 'it was the funniest thing, it made me laugh, we were sleeping in the desert and my cell phone's alarm clock started going off.' Border-crossers often describe moments that their current state (being in the middle of nowhere with no modern conveniences and with their daily schedule disrupted) is punctured by something – a piece of technology like a cellular phone or a memory of childhood or of

family life back in Mexico. Some migrants begin to hallucinate in the desert and in nearly every interview, details such as number of days or nights spent in the desert were confused and contradictory.

As coyotes are often in full control of time and movement, migrants walk until they are allowed to rest, often only for a minute or two before starting up again. Sometimes people sleep at night, sometimes during the day. Other times people spend days on the Mexican side of the border waiting for Border Patrol presence or the harsh climate to ease up. The patterns of movement are syncopated, irregular, and highly variable across groups and depending on specific conditions. There are dead spaces of waiting followed by hyperactive scurries. Border-crosser architecture is sited amidst these pulses and thus must anxiously sway between permanence and flight as well as territorial strongholds and fearful ephemerality and so can never fully be itself as architecture or shelter.

Insecure identities: self-erasure and shapeshifting

The Sonoran borderlands are not only restlessly anxious but also socially anxious. 'In social anxiety disorder (social phobia), the individual is fearful or anxious about or avoidant of social interactions and situations that involve the possibility of being scrutinized'.¹⁵ This scrutiny is part of what creates the US-Mexico border through a rhetoric of 'illegality', framing the 'illegal alien' as 'someone who is officially out of place in a space where she or he does not belong'.¹⁶ In a shifting boundary condition, the border-crosser's identity can be as ambiguous as the threats to her safety. Is the migrant a welcomed laborer, a perceived terrorist, a hated *other*? Will she pass fairly easily through a tunnel, a port of entry with false documents, or will she walk miles in the desert being swarmed by helicopters or invisibly surveilled with infrared cameras? Where one's status and threat is unclear, a single clear-cut action to secure one's safety is unavailable, if not also

counter-productive and self-exposing. Instead, one must dream of every possible outcome and anticipate every condition, an impossible and taxing feat. Anxiety ensues because 1) things are not always what they seem as outward appearances do not reflect inward states, and 2) someone is always watching and therefore dictating or precipitating an outcome, behaviour, or limit of identity accordingly.

It is often difficult to tell exactly where one is in the borderlands and thus know if one is a citizen or a trespasser. Despite the massive border walls erected through the cities and towns on the border, there are miles of gaps where the only thing separating Mexico from the United States is a thin barbed wire fence. The same fencing is used by ranchers in Arizona to demarcate their land parcels and to keep cattle from roaming. On top of these geographic confusions brought about by homonymic fences, other things are also not quite what they seem. Any human intervention in the desert can mark a cartel territory or be a trap. Many migrants we interviewed relayed that they thought the food and water left by humanitarians were poisoned or wired to a motion sensor. The origin and identity of objects become obscured and untrusted.

In the past twenty years, the roles and identities of those who cross the US-Mexico border have also been mutating and overlapping – migrants carry drugs to pay for their passage, guides begin to work for cartels, and so forth.¹⁷ Border-crossers shift identities by traveling with forged ID cards or having none at all.¹⁸ Their names, countries of origin, and ages become virtually untraceable. This anonymity is both a source of power and subjugation for border-crossers.¹⁹ What results from this is an architecture (like its builder) that shifts identity in its appearance and role in an attempt to respond to perceived and potential threat, as well as an architecture that in a way, loses a singular self with so many repeated maskings of itself.²⁰

Border-crosser structures have insecure identities in that they are trying to be something different than what they are. They try to be anything but architecture; for example, instead, a bush or a space, much like De Certeau's conception of walking as a practice to invent spaces: 'Within the structured space of the text, they thus produce anti-texts, effect of dissimulation and escape, possibilities of moving into other landscapes, like cellars and bushes'.²¹ Anxious architecture must erase itself. It must evade permanence and visibility because for border-crossers, architecture is an exposing trace. Just as people wear 'slippers' made from sanitary pads or carpet to smear their footprints beyond recognition, so, too, this architecture works to create absence where there is presence, to erase the body. Just as the makeshift slippers endanger people's physical wellbeing when crossing slick, rocky terrain, so, too, architecture takes a toll for its masking role. For every reward there is a risk. When one young man (a drug mule and a guide) was asked about building shelters in the desert, he proudly replied that he built them in less than fifteen minutes, stayed in them for as long as necessary, and then immediately destroyed the structures when he was on his way. The building must demand as little time, energy, and space expenditure as possible and then disappear as if it were never there. The destroyed or cloaked structure is the unnamable blur left behind by quick darts and hyper speeds; the anxious vibration of displacement.

Beyond becoming invisible, anxious architecture can also take on different guises, guises which are often heavily influenced by power dynamics. Just as 'at the international border, boundaries that delimit nation and nationhood reflect sociopolitical practices created by established power relations that designate who belongs and who does not', so, too, do social hierarchies among border-crossers begin to dictate when, where, and by whom something can be built.²² The form and location of border-crosser architecture is not just a matter of the material and

site affordances of the landscape or the builder's knowledge of design and craft skills. Luciana, age 22, told us, 'no, we weren't allowed to build anything because it was like leaving a sign behind.' Others told us that when they were left behind by a group, they fashioned a makeshift shelter. Thus making a safe place for oneself is not only about one's personal experience but also contingent on the surrounding social rules.²³ Border-crosser architecture reflects these identities; some structures are arrogant and stalwart while others are timid and haphazard.

Exercising bravado, GP-01 is situated high on a ridge of a steep mountain and was one of the most extensively articulated structures with a rock wall, a small fire pit (hidden from view by the rock wall and also situated so that heat would deflect back into the structure), densely woven walls, and a thin but effectively cushioning layer of dried grass on the floor. [Fig. 3] A Border Patrol helicopter flew overhead during fieldwork and once inside the shelter, one became completely obscured from surveillance. When peering out from the small entrance, a phenomenal view opened to both the access road in the valley, where Border Patrol vehicles could be seen and heard passing below.

Some structures are humble and understated in their prowess while still being alert and insecure. Strategically cradled in a wash in a small valley, TH-01 is S-shaped with two rooms with separate entrances: one toward the north-east and the other south-west. [Fig. 4] The two rooms are scaled similarly but are built out of different materials and thus have quite different identities. The delicate western room gracefully sweeps into a crescent shape, almost completely encircled with long, wispy grasses. [Fig. 5] The rough eastern room is an entangled mass of branches in an over-bearing dome shape. One room seems to have been added on later than the other, perhaps even by a different builder. Border-crosser architecture thus adapts

through reinhabitations and modifications – different builders can reappropriate an existing structure. The origin and identity of the structure is altered and amended, morphed into something different.

A burlap sack, empty bag of tuna, and empty bag of beans in the western room suggest that TH-01 was built by drug mules. Burlap sacks are often used to carry marijuana while food bags are lighter and more compact than cans, suggesting that the border-crosser had previous experience with crossing, selecting more expensive, but more convenient food items. The western room is ideally sited for morning sun, with its entrance toward the west, while the eastern room is ideal for evening sun. This creates a 24-hour shelter with two rooms where the builder or inhabitant could stay in one place continually, perhaps while waiting for further instructions from cartel look-out points on when Border Patrol was no longer sighted.

TH-01's roof is fashioned from velvet ash branches, imported from trees on a nearby ridge – it seems time was taken to not only use immediately available materials from the mesquite shrub but also to bring branches from further away. The builder was patient, focused, and had time to spare. This suggests he was familiar and confident in his surroundings; his identity unwavering. At the same time, TH-01 lacks any rock foundation and instead relies structurally on long, thin, Y-shaped branches that reach out diagonally from the ground. This light footprint on the earth allows the structure to be easily destroyed and erased if needed. The delicate frame of the building suggests it is anxious and itching to disappear at any time, much like its builder.

The size and form of border-crosser architecture indexes the anxieties of the borderlands with regard to social roles and rules. While at times structures like GP-01 can establish a territory or stronghold, it is still anonymously built and no one can legally stake a claim to it as property. While it

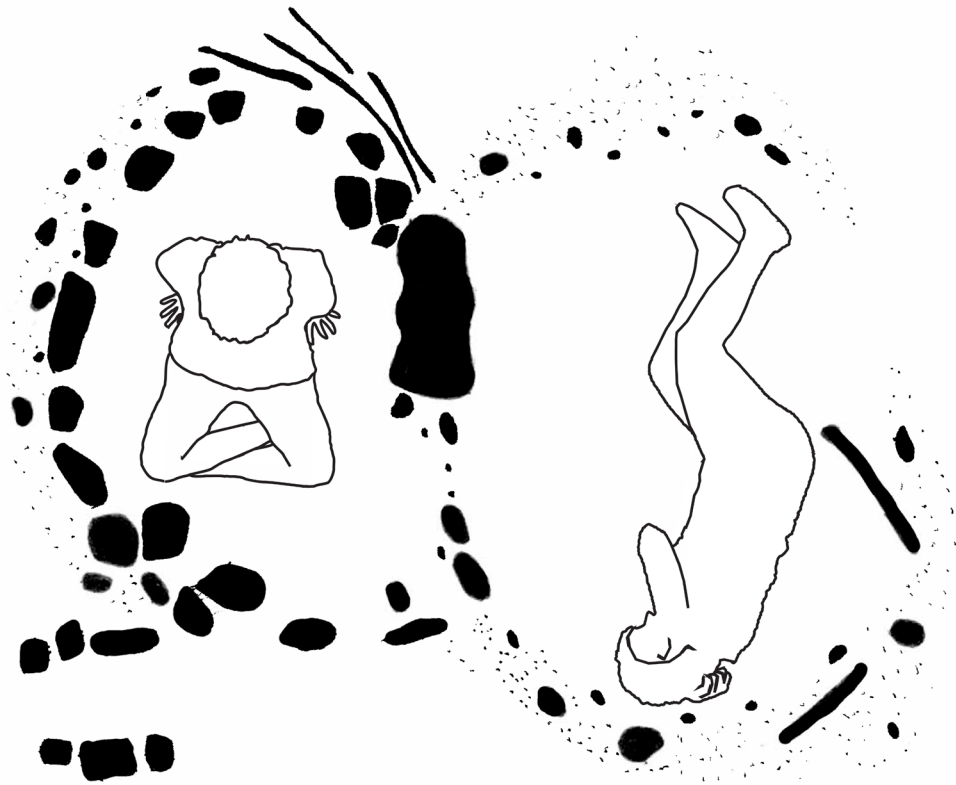


Fig. 4: A rendering of the two rooms of TH-01 where rocks predominantly make up the foundation of the eastern room and branches outline the western room. A human figure has been added to depict scale and possible activities.
Illustration: Author



Fig. 5: The western room of TH-01 delicately curves out from a trunk of a tree. Photo: Author

works to protect its inhabitant and give shelter, it at the same time tries not to look like architecture. Just as migrants are trying to be invisible and anonymous with camouflage or walking at night, anxious architecture tries to be 'not there' while still trying to enclose a space and not get lost in the unknown of the borderlands. It is an architecture that struggles against itself and external forces that undo it into something other than architecture, denying a named author, a touted aesthetic, or a designated use. It constantly encounters the looming death of itself.²⁴

Restless remains: carcasses and haunted space

The number of border-crosser deaths and missing persons in the borderlands is staggering. According to the Border Patrol agency's Sector Profile reports, in the Tucson sector alone, there were 194 recorded deaths in 2013 and 177 recorded deaths in 2012.²⁵ These numbers, however, do not account for the countless missing people or bodies that are never recovered.²⁶ Between 1990 and 2013, the leading cause of death (45 percent) of recovered bodies examined by the Pima County Medical Examiner was exposure to the elements (hyperthermia or hypothermia often coupled with dehydration).²⁷ Since 1993, the border enforcement of the United States has aimed to push border-crossing away from (safer) urban points of entry and into dangerous terrain, thereby instituting violence and masked corporal punishment through policy.²⁸ The desert borderlands are essentially deployed as not only a deterrent, but a weapon to kill those who dare to cross. Indeed, in many of our interviews, border-crossers frequently expressed their greatest fear to be running out of water, being lost, and dying in the desert. In this ominous landscape, the persistent threat of death creates preoccupations and anxieties.

Some of those we interviewed said that during the nights they dreamt of a dead grandmother or

were torn awake by the shrill, terrifying cries of coyotes. But much of the borderland's anxieties of death seem to manifest during the exposure of the day: 'all things are called uncanny which should have remained secret, hidden, latent, but which have come to light'.²⁹ Many migrants whom we interviewed reported seeing bodies or human skeletons when crossing. Camila, age 18, said:

I saw a lot of stacked rocks like when there is a dead body and they put lots of little rocks on it. But I didn't see a cross or anything. I did not know if there was a dead body because I was scared to check. The first time [I crossed], yes, we did see one [a cadaver]. We saw the little feet that were covered, sorry, uncovered, and the clothes next to it. But you could see that there was a corpse.

Arizonan prospectors and ranchers in the borderlands do stack rocks to mark claims or to delineate property boundaries, and yet even these innocuous markers become insidious triggers for an anxiety of death. Isabella, age 48, recalled that when she first saw bodies in the desert, she immediately saw them as people just like her:

There were some small bones. I'm not sure if they were two small boys or two small girls, or a married couple, or a dad and a son, or a mom and a daughter. But yeah, the two were left wrapped up together, nothing but little skeletons... I thought my husband and I were gonna end up like that, because when we were left alone, just the two of us, I had to lay down with him because I couldn't keep going.

Her identity became bound up with the skeletons, anxiously projecting her possible future. When shown photographs of rock cairns or piles of clothing, Isabella immediately asked if it was a photograph of a dead body with no context or prompting. After having seen one pile of rocks covering corpses, she then began to see all piles of rock as markers of dead bodies. As Peter Stallybrass intimates, objects

'take on a ghostly existence, emerging to prominence, or even to consciousness, only at moments of crisis'.³⁰ Thus in a landscape of conflict, things like rock cairns in the borderlands become otherworldly, inciting fear and serving as an unrelenting reminder of one's proximity to death.

Like cairns, border-crosser architecture becomes a kind of spectral marker. The half material, half immaterial structures can at once be a mode of orientation (here is where I am or where I will go), and an unsettling bit of one's own remains (someone used to be here, have I been here before?). Because of this dual nature, an anxiety of being lost, that is, feeling displaced no matter where one is, emerges. Felipe told us: 'Everything seemed the same to me. I felt like I was going in circles', and Mariana, age 25 from Mexico City, said: 'No. It is a very big place, so extensive, it has no end. It has no end. There are no homes, no streets, no freeways, no nothing. No nothing.' Mariana repeats the phrases that underscore infinity and a void, suggesting that migrants and their building become stuck like a ghost in purgatory: 'only to find [oneself] back, sometime later, in almost the exact same spot from which [she] had set off [...] this is the ghostly reproduction of the self'.³¹

While only a few interviewees called the structures they built *casitas*, little homes or houses, there is a certain domesticity about them. At structures such as EA-02 and EA-B, artifacts are organised around the interior. There is a small garbage area where food wrappers, empty tuna cans, and water bottles are placed together and across the way, clothing items are discarded together such as a pair of socks next to a t-shirt.³² Just as a house has a place to sleep, a place for refuse, a place to clothe oneself, so too does border-crosser architecture. Order and organisation is maintained; despite the chaos of the wilderness outside, the interior is domesticated through small gestures. And yet, 'the homely, that which belongs to house and home, a sentiment of

security and freedom from fear, gradually [takes] on the ominous dimensions of its apparent opposite, the unhomely'.³³ Fear finds its way inside.

There are few things that smell as repulsively sweet as a body in decay. At the Pima County Medical Examiner's office, in a room full of body bags, the odor of the unidentified flesh is strong enough to escape the tightly sealed black vinyl, and piercing enough to defy the calming, cooling qualities of the fiercely refrigerated chamber. According to the medical examiner, this was a 'slow month' in 2012, with 'only' 46 bodies waiting to be processed after being extricated from Tucson sector of the desert in various states of decomposition. The morgue smell is also present in the desert. The sickly scent is the very same that emerged from a gel deodorant stick when recovered from inside the shelter of BW-01. Where originally the deodorant was designed to mask the body's ripe sweat, now having undergone the trials of border-crossing it only heightened the smell of rotting flesh. Discarded to the side, the artifact lay half empty and half full, with its cap in place, peaking out from grass that began to reclaim its ground. Even inside the shelter walls, the sun beat down on the black container, heating the contents into a gelatinous state of instability as if abandoning its purpose, no longer owned or needed. In the desert, even the seemingly steadfast object succumbs to the same fate as a mortal body.

Border-crosser architecture haunts the landscape with the restless traces of border-crossers and their abandoned objects. Inside FP-01, two dark blue fading jackets lie limply on the ground. From a distance, it is indiscernible whether the two lumps of fabric are covering a dead body in fetal position or if an almost imperceptible hot breeze, a false breath, is billowing up into the jacket's chest cavity. It is enough to make one approach with caution and a quickened heart. One of the sleeves reaches up from the shallow grave of a few inches



Fig 6: Originally dark blue in color, this nylon sports jacket was recovered at BW-01. Half buried, badly faded, and torn in many places, its condition reflects the dire conditions of border-crossing and the way in which inanimate objects become animate with variable responses and vulnerability to environmental trauma. Photo: Author



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Fig 7: At OJ-01, a butterfly roof fashioned out of bent ocotillo stalks resembles a ribcage in disarray. Photo: Author

Fig 8: TH-03, once thatched to provide more shade, now lays exposed, the bones of a lean-to shelter. Photo: Author

of dirt that accumulated on top from wind and water. The jacket could have been left behind a year ago, or maybe ten. The fabric has been bleached, faded, and cracked by the unrelenting sun. [Fig. 6] The decaying roof, no longer able to withstand its own weight, sheds a few tufts of dry grass and casts strong, geometrical sunbeams that etch the surface of the jackets with discolouration. In the desert borderlands, danger lies *less* in the hidden and the shadows (for darkness actually offers repose and refuge) and more in the light of day and that which is lain bare. Martina, age 27, conveyed this horror: 'It was very hot. The ground is cracked. The rabbits, the deer, everything is dead and you just see their skulls... I was on the edge of my death... That's what's taking me towards death right now, tormenting me a lot...' This torment, the anxiety of being torn between life and death, takes its toll on the body of the border-crosser as well as the body of the architecture.

Structures like OJ-01 and TH-03 are the exposed remains of shelter, their curved walls jutting up like starved and hollowed rib cages. [Figs. 7–8] The thatching of grasses, desiccated by the sun, peels away like mummified skin, exposing the slightly damp interior to the sun's penetrating rays. When migrants or drug mules leave, their architecture stays behind like a shed skin or a gutted carcass, a haunting of a passing life. Sometimes the structures surrender to the climate, other times they are destroyed out of necessity, to erase traces. Either way, the forced destruction of home become restless remains, hovering between life and death. 'This house-cleaning operation produced its own ghosts, the nostalgic shadows of all the "houses" now condemned to history of the demolition site. Once reduced to its bony framework', these skeletons can easily become symbolic stand-ins for the loss of home, for being in transit, being neither of this realm nor completely of another.³⁴ Border-crosser architecture is part of the constant motion of border-crossing, creating shadow selves and

ghostly traces. Just as 'the long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be [...] it creates shadows and ambiguities within them', the structures begin to embody the very limbo (in passing) they and their builders, inhabit.³⁵

The lack of object constancy (knowing something will remain even when one is separated from it), coupled with a lack of official ownership over buildings, creates an anxious architecture, indeterminate and unstable, worried that it will be here one moment and gone the next, while still potentially leaving behind a detectable trace that will expose the builder and lead to their capture, disorientation, or fatality. The spectral traces of others who came before – their scent, their molecular detritus – also linger as though they are still there. Just for a moment. Border-crosser architecture helps to sustain life while also being a constant reminder that death is impending. No matter how effective the intervention of building can be, there remains the persistent, inevitable, insurmountable anxiety of death.

Conclusion

In this situation, any individual attitude is conceivable: flight (back home, elsewhere), fear (of the self, of others), but also intensity of experience (performance) or revolt (against established values). It is no longer possible for a social analysis to dispense with individuals, nor for an analysis of individuals to ignore the spaces through which they are in transit.³⁶

The political rhetoric of the latest United States election was saturated with immigration issues. This year, thousands of migrants and refugees flee from Syria, the Middle-East, and other areas of conflict. It thus seems to be a particularly pressing time to think of ways in which architecture intervenes upon the land across which people move as well as into the lives of those who are crossing borders. The

form, materiality, and siting of border-crosser architecture reveal the complexity of the borderlands, underscoring how even a simple structure must constantly respond to ever-changing and unexpected circumstances. There is never a simple, single solution and even a building that works one moment must be destroyed, reinhabited, or adapted the next. This is the way in which architecture and its makers become anxious, restlessly trying to anticipate every possible future threat. Just like its builders (drug mules, guides, and migrants), and its site (the US-Mexico border), border-crosser architecture exhibits wily adaptation, desperate survival, and everyday banality – self-protecting and self-defeating at the same time.³⁷

In their anxious state, structures cannot sleep and must orient themselves toward a 24-hour cycle, changing day into night. While this can provide some repose to its inhabitants, the extreme exposure of the sun, the endless stretch of a repeating landscape, the penetrating gaze of search lights and infrared sensors, are all part of an unrelenting threat that can never fully be mitigated. Border-crosser architecture is anxious in its constant vigilance and disrupted cycles; responding to Border Patrol routes and cartel territory disputes, its walls are incessantly oscillating with impatience, and its apertures are always wide open, watching and listening. It displays the stubborn countermeasure of looking back. Of staring back. Of leveling the playing field.

Anxious architecture contends with multiple identities, at times even having to completely erase itself through ephemerality. It is here one moment and gone the next, with wind tearing away delicate thatching or drug mules destroying the evidence of their stay. The structures begin to take on characteristics of confrontational bravado or muted shyness and their very existence is predicated on the social roles of those who build them. While formal architecture reveals itself and those who build or inhabit it as well as territorialises and digs into the earth

with a foundation, both of these tendencies are contrary to the need for mobility and invisibility in the borderlands. Thus, border-crosser architecture has no choice but to deny itself the assets of being 'Architecture' (such as notoriety and permanence) while still capitalising on the affordances of being invisible, anonymous, and self-destructive.

The fear of and proximity to death in the desert creates a kind of existential dread. Structures attempt to wall off the great expanse of the unknown while themselves falling victim to unforgiving elements, their carcasses strewn across the landscape. In so doing, they expose the helplessness of architecture to shield against death in spite of the desperate attempt to negate it. The uncanniness of the structures is not only an otherworldly psychological haunting, but a very real artifact of the dire context of border-crossing.

The socio-political and ecological landscape of the US-Mexico borderlands is as anxious as the architecture and the border-crossers within it. An architecture that emerges from this conflict both undermines and underlines itself and so anxiety becomes an adaptive spatial tactic, a survival mechanism, that both works to protect and to erode one's wellbeing.

Notes

All interviewee names are pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and later translated into the English with the exception of Felipe's. The author would like to extend deep gratitude to Dr. Jason De León and the UMP for enabling this research. Many thanks also to the incredibly talented Amelia Frank-Vitale and Rolando Palacio for their help, support, resilience, intellect, and insight during fieldwork. Appreciation to Joern Langhorst and Dr. Joseph Juhasz for being indispensable sounding boards. Gratitude to Annel Diaz, Rene Tovar, Vicky Mogollon Montagne, and Mauricio Gomez for their generosity and assistance with transcription and translation. This article would not

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1. Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).
2. Jorge Durand, Douglas S. Massey and Rene M. Zenteno, 'Mexican Immigration to the United States: Continuities and Changes', *Latin American Research Review* 36 no. 1 (2001): 107–127.
3. Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martinez, Alison Elizabeth Lee, Scott Whiteford, 'The Geography of Border Militarization: Violence, Death and Health in Mexico and the United States', *Journal of Latin American Geography* 15 no. 1 (March 2016): 7–32; Timothy J. Dunn, 'Border Militarization Via Drug and Immigration Enforcement: Human Rights Implications', *Social Justice* 28 no. 2 (2001): 7–30; and Lisa Meierotto, 'A Disciplined Space: The Co-Evolution of Conservation and Militarization on the US-Mexico Border', *Anthropological Quarterly* 87 no. 3 (Summer 2014): 637–664; Peter Andreas *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).
4. These shifts in identities and roles are discussed and referenced in a later section of this article.
5. Edward S. Casey, 'Border Versus Boundary at La Frontera', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29 (2011): 393.
6. 'Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas *anxiety* is anticipation of future threat', in 'Anxiety Disorders' in American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (May 2013). In the borderlands, of course both current threats and future threats are ever-present, and the difficulty to extract one from the other seems to be precisely the indeterminacy that breeds anxiety.
7. In her 'The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter', *Political Theory* 32 no. 3 (June 2004): 347–372, Jane Bennett gives life and power to things by focusing on, not 'the thing as it stands alone, but rather the not-fully-humanized dimension of a thing as it manifests itself amidst other entities and forces' (366) and that thing-power has 'political potential [which] resides in its ability to induce a greater sense of interconnectedness between humanity and nonhumanity', 367. Things thus are not quite fully anthropomorphic, and yet still have a certain kind of agency that is both formed by, and independent of, human and cultural meaning.
8. Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 13. While this article's analysis does not aim to find the Freudian sources of anxiety or otherwise delve formally and disciplinarily into psychology, it does work to frame border-crosser architecture as exhibiting material and emotional qualities that parallel and enable similar anxieties experienced by border-crossers and the borderlands.
9. This distinction is made here to situate border-crosser architecture as something similar to, but still apart from, the various incarnations of transgressive, guerilla, radical, and informal architecture discussed by scholars like Lydon, Villagomez, Crawford, and Sara. These often underline the positively-valued and valiant characteristics of self-built and emergent architecture without necessarily fully addressing the self-harming risks inherent in the endeavor. These risks include, but are not limited to, inadvertently reinforcing the very same power structures against which the architecture is built and the builder as well as the structures themselves suffering the blowback from the conflict. Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, *Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change* (Washington, DC: Island Press/Center for Resource Economics, 2015); Erick Villagomez, 'Claiming Residual Spaces in the Heterogeneous City', in *Insurgent Public Space: Guerilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, ed. Jeffrey Hou (New York: Routledge, 2010):

- 81–95; Margaret Crawford, 'Blurring the Boundaries: Public Space and Private Life', in *Everyday Urbanism*, ed. John Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999) 22–35; Rachel Sara and Jonathan Mosely, 'The Architecture of Transgression: Towards a Destabilising Architecture', *Architectural Design* (January 2014): 14–19.
10. The term tactic borrows from Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 96: 'One can follow the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization.' While De Certeau emphasises spatial tactics in the city as a way to be unconsciously resistant to a system of hegemonic power while still working in it, anxious architecture stresses the ways in which tactics are double-edged modes of retaliating against one's condition, having harmful effects as well as liberating ones.
 11. Michel Foucault, *Discipline And Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 200.
 12. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014), 13.
 13. For a clear and powerful ethnography of anxiety and sleeplessness, please see: Sarah Willen, 'Toward a Critical Phenomenology of "Illegality": State Power, Criminalization, and Abjectivity among Undocumented Migrant Workers in Tel Aviv, Israel', *International Migration*, 45, no.3 (2007): 8–38.
 14. Crary, *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, 10.
 15. American Psychiatric Association, 'Anxiety Disorders'.
 16. Joseph Nevins, 'A Beating Worse than Death: Imagining and Contesting Violence in the US-Mexico Borderlands', *AmeriQuests* 2, 1 (2005) available online www.ameriquests.org. For further discussion of the rhetorical construction of the 'illegal immigrant': Nicholas P. DeGenova, 'Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31 (2002): 419–447; and Juanita Sundberg "'Trash-talk" and the Production of Quotidian Geopolitical Boundaries in the USA-Mexico Borderlands', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9, no.8 (December 2008): 871–890.
 17. Jeremy Slack and Scott Whiteford, 'Violence and Migration on the Arizona-Sonora Border', *Human Organization*, 70, no.1 (2011): 17.
 18. David Spener, *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Jason De León, Cameron Gokee, and Ashley Schubert, "'By the time I get to Arizona": citizenship, materiality, and contested identities along the US-Mexico border/ "Quando eu chegar ao arizona": cidadania, materialidade e identidades contestadas ao longo da Fronteira E.U.A.-Mexico', *Anthropological Quarterly* 88, no.2 (2015): 445ff.
 19. Martha Luz Rojas-Wiesner and Maria Devargas, 'Strategic Invisibility as Everyday Politics for a Life with Dignity: Guatemalan Women Migrants' Experiences of Insecurity at Mexico's Southern Border' in Thanh-Dam Truong, ed. *Migration, Gender and Social Justice: Perspectives on Human Insecurity* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2014), 193–211.
 20. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 752: 'Must I, in order to awaken their attention, show them how to handle a mask that unmask the face it represents only by splitting in two and that represents this face only by remasking it? And then explain to them that it is when the mask is closed that it composes this face, and when it is open that it splits it?' Lacan works to undermine the concept of an authentic face below a mask of false identity and instead, though this passage, reveals the complexity of self, being multiple or fragmented, united through a mask. In a similar fashion, border-crosser architecture displays this anxious projection of multiple identities, masking itself as not-architecture while also being shelter, a political entity, and an artifact of material culture with agency.

21. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 107.
22. Anna Ochoa O'Leary, 'In the Footsteps of Spirits: Migrant Women's Testimonios in a Time of Heightened Border Enforcement', in K. Staudt, ed., *Human Rights Along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gendered Violence and Insecurity*, (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2009), 89.
23. David Canter, 'Putting Situations in Their Place: Foundations for a Bridge Between Social and Environmental Psychology', in A. Furnham, ed., *Social Behaviour in Context*, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1983): 208–239.
24. This kind of paradoxical self-destructive behavior in order to ensure survival, brings to mind Paul De Man's framing of theory as a self-resisting entity in 'The Resistance to Theory', *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982), 20: 'Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance [...] theory is not in danger of going under; it cannot help but flourish, and the more it is resisted, the more it flourishes, since the language it speaks is the language of self-resistance.'
25. 'United States Border Patrol Sector Profile – Fiscal Year 2013 (1 Oct.–30 Sept.)' (2013) www.cbp.gov; 'United States Border Patrol Sector Profile – Fiscal Year 2012 (1 Oct. – 30 Sept.)' (2012); www.cbp.gov.
26. Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, M. Melissa McCormick, et. al., 'The "Funnel Effect" & Recovered Bodies of Unauthorized Migrants processed by the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner, 1990–2005', *BiNational Migration Institute* (October 2006) available online <http://bmi.arizona.edu>; Lynn Stephen, 'Los Nuevos Desaparecidos y Muertos: Immigration, Militarization, Death, and Disappearance on Mexico's Borders', in *Security Disarmed: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Race, and Militarization*, ed. Barbara Sutton, Sandra Morgen, and Julie Novkov (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008).
27. Daniel E. Martinez, Robin Reineke, et. al., 'Structural Violence and Migrant Deaths in Southern Arizona: Data from the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner, 1990-2013', *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 2 no. 4 (2014): 271.
28. Wayne A. Cornelius, 'Death at the Border: Efficacy and Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Control Policy', *Population and Development Review* 27 no. 4 (2001): 661–685.
29. Anthony Vidler, 'The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime', *Assemblage*, 3 (1987): 12.
30. Peter Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things', *The Yale Review* 81 no. 2 (1993): 39.
31. Lisa Hill, 'Archaeologies and Geographies of the Post-Industrial Past: Landscape, Memory and the Spectral', *Cultural Geographies* 20 no. 379 (2013): 392.
32. Leon Battista Alberti posits the ordering and designation of space as the foundational act of domestication and precursor of architecture in *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 8: 'In the beginning, men sought a place of rest in some region safe from danger, having found a place both suitable and agreeable, they settled down and took possession of the site. Not wishing to have all their household and private affairs conducted in the same place, they set aside one space for sleeping, another for the hearth, and allocated other spaces to different uses.'
33. Vidler, 'Architecture of the Uncanny', 11.
34. *Ibid.*, 24.
35. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.
36. Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 120.
37. For an investigation of this conflict between the intent of self-protection and the result of self-harm in the context of border-crossing, please see Jason De León, "'Better to Be Hot Than Caught": Excavating the Conflicting Roles of Migrant Material Culture', *American Anthropologist* 114 no. 3 (September 2012): 477–495. He finds migrant selection of objects and tools to be 'logical within the context of the BCSS [Border Crossing Sociotechnical System] but [that

they] often have conflicting somatic impacts [...] In many instances, migrant material culture is profoundly oppressive and often runs counter to the goals of avoiding detection and surviving the desert,' 492.

Biography

Sam Grabowska is a doctoral candidate at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning with a cognate in cultural anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her work engages the spaces that people seek and build in times of trauma and she has contributed a chapter to the book, *Excavating Memory: Sites of Remembering and Forgetting*.

