

## ***There, Now & Other Stories***

### ***A Contribution to Marko Stojanović's Exterritories***

by Uroš Pajović

The idea of territory—essentially physical space *cum* the mental space of jurisdiction, sovereignty and, ultimately, State—is, without a doubt, determined by relations of Power; it is, as well, *a component of Power*.<sup>1</sup> Extraterritoriality, which Stojanović chooses as the focus of his exhibition, on the other hand, bears contradictions and *weaknesses* that render it a different notion altogether, one freed from *such* a direct dependency on Power, as well as the traps which could entail from its interpretations, giving way to a more direct—if not also more honest—recognition of the hidden, often unexpected potentialities of objects and actions produced by humans.

This might sound false: after all, as well as being a function of territoriality (and territory), extraterritoriality is also seemingly deeper embedded into the legislative and the bureaucratic than territory itself. The state of being exempted from the jurisdiction of local law, usually as the result of diplomatic negotiations, historically it has applied primarily to individuals, as jurisdiction was usually claimed over peoples rather than over lands.<sup>2</sup> So: where lies the freedom?

In the contemporary world—one of a ‘Lawn Closed’ tape;<sup>3</sup> a Canadian company selling canned air to people living in China; luxury housing complexes taking over cities as workers lose their lives building them, the homeless freeze in the streets and tenants are forced to leave their homes of many years due to direct consequences of the whims and actions of AirBnB, Amazon, Google, and other mammoth corporations playing governments; shutting off streetlights and creating walls out of stopped tram-cars so protestors in the streets can’t be seen; privatization of public spaces; fencing-off and concrete casting the river-beds; cutting down trees in cities to make way for the aforementioned and other developments<sup>4</sup> (as is currently taking place in Belgrade); security guards and dogs controlling entrances to squares and plazas; and a non-stop co-option of any and all kinds of struggle and suffering for commercial needs—wild-card moments of defiance can often be surprising, unexpected.

The answer to “where lies the freedom” in extraterritoriality is, then, perhaps—in its very weaknesses: extraterritoriality implies an *exemption from*, a *non-*, an *otherness*, an *ad acta* to its very own (territorial) self. It is not from the top, the powerful, the territorial that this freedom comes, albeit within its framework: it is from the weak points, from the bottom, from the common, the usual, the everyday; from the lived, social space, where, by mistake or by design, we occasionally choose to shutter, question, and ultimately change the given conditions we live in; it is here that we find, and practice, these exemptions, these exterritories we had claimed for ourselves: from small gestures of reappropriation (as in: taking back), all the way to the revolutionary act.

What Stojanović’s *Exterritories* particularly succeeds in is recognizing these instances, and then pairing them, simultaneously emphasizing both their particularities, and their shared,

<sup>1</sup> Elden, Stuart. *The Birth of Territory*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Cassel, Pär. *Grounds of Judgment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Exterritories V*

<sup>4</sup> *Exterritories III*

universal aspects. One of the central pieces of the exhibition, *Exterritories XV*, was shot in Belgrade, only several meters away from the exhibition space. In it, as if through the bars of a golden cage (it is still undetermined which side of those bars we, the viewers are on), we observe Europe and its surroundings at night, as seen from space. Paired with a prescription of “fifty milligrams of Zoloft daily” from *Cards Against Humanity* (to treat, perhaps, Europe’s own ‘humanity?’), the piece not only hints at the false promises of the continent’s politics, felt and faced everyday by the citizens of its peripheries (including the citizens of Serbia, and others, much more unfortunate ones), but also the immediate (and yet, just as universal) saturation of open ‘public’ spaces with imagery, which is more often than not commercial. Another valuable—and closely related—example can be found in *Exterritories XVIII*. The first image shows a picture of a model of ancient Rome, and the second a pile of miniature polypropylene tanks, also a familiar board game artifact (*Risk*); the model of Rome seen in the former was ordered by the fascist leader Benito Mussolini in 1933. Once paired with the tanks, it opens up a whole other layer of interpretation and significance, instantly referring to the global rise of the (‘new,’ ‘alt,’ etc.) right, but also the almost militant takeover of space from positions of Power, be it in Rome, Belgrade, New York, or any other major city in the world.

The reason these pairings work so powerfully is because Stojanović insists on looking at both endpoints and both directions of this struggle, documenting the instances of extraterritoriality from bottom-up, and assertions of power (extraterritoriality in the non-appropriated sense) against it alike. The artist describes these images as “zoomed exterritories” in which “humans have performed unique acts, improvisations or solutions,” and, even though they exude the melancholy of a dead-end, we should choose to believe that is only partly so. With its photographic footnotes, almost celebrating the production of the most mundane, what *Exterritories* undoubtedly provides us with is a way to view the contemporary landscape of production, spatial practice, and potentiality of the everyday, only if we choose to accept it, and keep it in mind.

If so, *Exterritories*, then, offers a whole optician’s store of glasses with different lenses, for different situations and different contexts to anyone who accepts them, thus also accepting the joy and the responsibility of looking for the extraordinary in a reading of the mundane. (I cannot but mention my favorite among the pairs: when it is juxtaposed with a collection of coins tossed into water presumably for a wish-making tradition, a mere mint candy becomes an eerie signifier of imperialism, and all of its cruelties<sup>5</sup>).

We shouldn’t claim that *Exterritories* delves into the production of social space, resistance, defiance—but, it doesn’t attempt to do that, either. What it does is allow and invite to a reading of spaces, actions, and objects of the landscapes of our everyday. With its observations and their superposed footnotes, *Exterritories* also dissects the notions of territory (as a function of power), place (as the point of one’s intervention) and space (as the carrier of the potentiality of the everyday, and beyond). And with that, it does encourage us to recognize and reexamine the exterritories we live in, as well as those we ourselves create.