Creating Sites of Resistance

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> "There is not occupation of territory on the one hand and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing. From this point on, the real values of the occupied quickly tend to acquire a clandestine form of existence. In the presence of the occupier, the occupied learns to dissemble, to resort to trickery." - Franz Fanon, a Dying Colonialism (1994, p.65)

German playwright Bertolt Brecht writes and was later quoted by Cuban Nueva Trova musician Silvio Rodríguez in the opening to his song *Sueño con serpientes*: "There are men[1] who struggle for a day and they are good. There are men who struggle for a year and they are better. There are men who struggle many years, and they are better still. But there are those who struggle all their lives: these are the indispensable ones."[2] Those that struggle all their lives, to borrow Brecht's phrasing, occupy modes of resistance that largely occur clandestinely in relation to dominant discourse. They do not necessarily fit within dominant understandings of what it means to take public action, initiate interventions or call for social change. Creating sites of resistance means to interrogate the usual markers of resistance in relation to social-structural change. The piece seeks to reframe usual readings on what constitutes social change action, in particular from the perspective of the marginal bodies that by the very nature of their structural marginality, necessitate alternative forms of navigation. These differences might even, in some instances, be read by dominant discourse as complacent. In an article on experiential-based refugee campaigns and the performance of humanitarianism (Cañas, 2016) I argued that advocacy campaigns for social change that reconstructed and restaged isolated incidents for temporary occupation of particular socio-political identities (such as 'standing in the shoes of refugees') often relied on the re-centering of the privileged body. These campaigns framed the experience of refugees and others in temporary experiments that actually silenced the voices of those who are really experiencing these conditions on a daily basis. Rather than devaluing (the many communities and peoples with) alternative forms of *change performances*, creating sites of resistance seeks to acknowledge and value the daily, long-term strategic, generational, innovative and resourceful forms of resistance such bodies undertake. This is about how groups must organize and mobilize differently within movements of socio-political change; primarily for the global north resistance struggles of the marginal.

Creating sites of resistance begins with the premise that we exist within historically informed, ongoing unequal sites of representation and interpretation. As Sylvia Wynter (2015) describes, colonialism brought us into a singular, dominant field of representation; crucially however, it didn't position us all equally. These relations form an ongoing set of unequal power-relations which constitute what Aníbal Quijano (2000) and Walter Mignolo (2007)

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[1] Please note the gendered language of the quote.
[2] The song "In praise of Fighters", from the play "The Mother", 1930

describe as a *colonial matrix of power*[3]. This dynamic is further located by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in regards to the invention of Australia as nation-state; along with its associated narratives and mechanisms of control invested in dispossession, domination and a 'white possessive logic' (2015: xii). Therefore, any given exchange exists *within* and because of this matrix of power; and any given exchange is a microcosm of this reality. Despite this, there exists at the site of encounter, even within an oppressive structure, a potentiality for navigational creativity, particularly from the position and place of 'marginality' (hooks, 1990: 342). It is in the marginal, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests, that we might find 'spaces of resistance and hope' (1994: 4).

In *Marginality as a Site of Resistance* (1990) Bell hooks centers lived experience, of those at the margins, as 'a site radical possibility' (1990: 341)[4]. Important to note here is the term 'possibility'. That is to say, though lived experience is essential for a radical possibility in creating sites of resistance, sites of resistance are not created by ontological being alone. Lived experience informs awareness but awareness is not always consciousness[5]. Similarly, not all sites of encounter are sites of resistance. Sites of encounter need to be *made* sites of resistance. They do not happen automatically but consciously, with agency, and in praxis. 'It is a space I choose' writes hooks (1990: 343). In this way, sites of resistance are those that exercise an agency and accountability to our collective selves and community. Those taking up these sites refuse to settle on using the diversity discourse for individual entrepreneurial pursuits that – even in difference and often because of[6]- only serve to validate whiteness. Sites of resistance as a framework, articulates the dangers of limiting discourse to representation and lived-experience, whilst negating fields of interpretation. Sites of resistance assert that there is a difference between not only who can speak, but *how* one can speak. In other words, we can tell our stories, but not theorise about them; we can speak but not translate (to research, stage etc.); we can self-express but not self-determine. "Tell me your story. Only do not speak in the voice of resistance" (hooks, 1990: 343).

Where sites of encounter seek utopian ideals of equal dialogue, sites of resistance are aware that transparent dialogue cannot exist within the matrix of power. "Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged take for granted" (Conquergood, 2013: 34). To understand this is to begin to understand how exchange, as a power-dynamic, must be re-calibrated in order to turn that site of encounter into a site of resistance (Cañas, 2017). In *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud writes, "producing a form is to invent possible encounters, receiving a form is to create the conditions for exchange" (2002: 23). He highlights the limitations in receiving pre-determined forms, yet at the same time the potential to challenge the conditions of that very exchange. It is this agency in navigation, which is what Fanon describes as a 'trickery' (1994: 65), Aída Huardo as a form of 'urban guerrilla' (Hurtado, 1989) and James C. Scott as 'hidden transcripts' (1990: xiii).[7] Interestingly, these descriptors indicate that navigation consists of moments of political activity that, though spoken to power, are not always detectable to dominant consciousness. Trickery, hidden transcripts and urban guerrilla strategies are modalities of resistance that are in continual movement, visible at some points, invisible at others, playful. In this way sites of resistance are not always the most overt or the most obvious. These seemingly smaller, quieter movements mean that such sites do not actively rely or seek validation from dominant consciousness. Sites of resistance offer an understanding of resistance to domination, whilst being implicated within domination. Sites of resistance do not confound adaptability with assimilation nor conflate moments of strategic performative whiteness as internalised whiteness. Code-switching becomes a strategy rather than weakness. As Steve Biko describes, "I think it is possible to adapt to a given situation precisely because you have got to live it, and you have got to live with it every day. But adapting does not mean that you forget" (1987: 114).

Sites of resistance are generative sites. There is no one way to create sites of resistance as there are a multitude of responses in accordance with varying configurations. These changes depending on context, project, time and even shifts in our own socio-positionalities. In the article *Before Dispossession, or Surviving it* Agnie Morill, Eve Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective assert that "resistance is not a consequence to power but simultaneous to power" (2016: 6). They suggest here that resistance does not have to merely be understood as a direct, yet secondary, consequence of existing terms of enunciation; "resistance is not simply bodies or events articulated against power" (2016: 6). Sites of resistance necessitate creativity. They require unconventional approaches, thinking, manoeuvres that speak outside of the terms of enunciation even as we exist within it. Sites of resistance

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[3] As Patrick Wolfe (2006) describes, "settler colonisers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (p.388)

[4] Writers such as Gloria *Anzaldúa (2012) through Borderlands theory and Du Bois (2005) through dual consciousness also describe lived-experience as sites in which to develop thinking, writing and creating.*

[5] A consciousness shaped by social positions (Freire, 1996; *Du Bois, 2005 & Anzaldúa, 2012*).

[6] Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak articulate in *Who Sings the Nation State?: Language, politics, belonging* (2011) in relation to pluralism and statehood"…pluralism which, as we know, reinstalls homogeneity only after a little complexity is admitted into the fold" (p.184). Moreton-Robinson (2015) also warns of the discursive function of differentiation.

[7] James Scott (1990) describes 'hidden transcripts' as contestations to subordination that are "behind the scenes" as a form of "offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations" (p. xi).

create and combine in unexpected, sometimes even joyful ways, towards unique manifestations of resistance. Sites of resistance is a framework that values a holistic, daily, struggle[8] and does not lure one into valuing only those visible to dominant discourse[9]. Furthermore as creative and generative locations, sites of resistance function outside of the entrapments of identity politics as wounded attachments[10] (Brown, 1995). Creativity can dissociate with this dynamic by breaking repetition and seeking alternative configurations with other oppressed, marginalised, and colonised peoples. With every site of encounter comes the simultaneous question, 'how might this become a site of resistance?' even if, for that moment, it means inaction as action, or a refusal methodology (Tuck and Yang, 2014). Sites of resistance presents an ongoing struggle that rethinks protest in the context of colonial and western 'occupied breathing' yet one in which actuates a continuing "site of creativity and power" (hooks, 1990: 343). The sites of resistance framework encompasses direct and indirect, overt and covert, nuanced navigational acts of resistance as part of historical and continual struggle.

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[8] I use the term 'struggle' within the framework of Latin American and diaporic Latinx discourse of lucha. In this sense the term positions itself differently to a passive or fatalistic sense of 'struggle'.

[9] And thus not dependent upon dominant discourse validation, even if it manifests as rejection.

[10] Wendy Brown (1995) describes 'wounded attachments' as an identity which "presents itself as a self-affirmation [but] now appears as the opposite, as predicated on and requiring its sustained rejection by the 'hostile external world'" (1995, p.70).

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