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SETTLER-COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

AND THE VISUAL MANAGEMENT OF GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT:
ON THE REPRESENTATION(S) OF SOVEREIGNTY

As an abstraction of space by force, settler colonialism is characterized by the transformation of Indigenous land into private property. This text complicates this understanding by focusing on the extraction of water from the aquifer underneath the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians’ ancestral land, also known as Palm Springs in California. Since water is slippery – much harder to set on a horizontal map of grids and borders – it complicates tribal and colonial sovereignty. Like the tip of a iceberg, architecture becomes, in this case, a signpost for contentious underground hydro-politics.

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Water in the arid regions of North America has always been fundamental for the structuring of different worlds – from multiple Indigenous nations to the overlapping colonial projects of Spain, México, and the U.S. (see, for example, Bean, 1972; Meyer, 1984; Worster, 1992). In Southern California, within the most populated and linguistically diverse region of the northern continent before colonization, water structured Indigenous practices of ecology, politics, and cosmology as a set of relations that far exceeded mere survival or subsistence. Water in places like the Colorado Desert – such as the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians’ ancestral natural spring, in today’s Palm Springs, California – was the linchpin around which spiritual and geopolitical worlds came together and were managed. Indeed, the kishumnawut, or Cahuilla ceremonial house for governance and rituals, was always sited by the water source (Bean et al., 1995). The kishumnawut structured the community internally, but it was also the site of meetings with other Indigenous peoples, serving a distinctly geopolitical purpose as a space of hospitality to make agreements with neighbors and for sharing songs, dance, food, and other collective rites of good diplomacy.

Water, with architecture, allowed for the handling of complex relations of society, property, and territory in the desert. This world was radically transformed and upended with colonization. While Cahuilla Indians were not missionized in great numbers, the ranching economy of Mexican California and later the U.S. progressively affected Cahuilla landscape and territorial patterns (Phillips, 2010). The use of water, in particular, thus stopped serving the explicitly cosmological and geopolitical role that it had for Native peoples, like the Agua Caliente, and began serving a different ‘ontological politics’ (de la Cadena y Blaser, 2018): one rationalized as modern, liberal, and capitalist. In the wake of the U.S. Senate’s secret non-ratification of treaties signed with Southern California’s Native nations (the eighteen treaties of Temecula, 1852), the Native genocide in California after the Gold Rush, and finally, the generalized theft of land sanctioned (and often perpetrated, as in Palm Springs) by the federal ‘Indian Agents’ themselves, one cosmopolitics gradually came to be overwhelmed with another.

This paper traces the long-term effects of the so-called ‘Termination Era’ – when U.S. Congress explicitly returned to the nineteenth-century policy of seeking to assimilate Native Americans into U.S. society. This approach was rampant during the McCarthyist 1950s, attempting to destroy Indian polities as such through ‘de-tribalization’ – the U.S.’s Cold War fought within its borders (Rosier, 2006). Many policies venerated this effort, including the ‘relocation’ of tens of thousands of Native Americans from reservations to cities. But the most expansive and time-tested approach was no doubt the disestablishment of tribal property land bases (often held in common by tribal members) into individually-owned allotments. The Agua Caliente had intense internal disagreements over allotments since the early twentieth century, and it was not until 1959 that Congress passed an “Equalization Act” to parcel out land claims within the reservation. By this point Palm Springs had become an international tourist resort and the Agua Caliente Tribal Council sought to capitalize on this growth by expanding their natural spring, which lay at the center of the city.

Through the new Palm Springs Spa, the tribe and the city briefly aligned their interests, with the Agua Caliente finally reaping some much-needed capital. However, the project also foreshadowed the limitations of this strategic alignment. While horizontal land allotments seemed easily conceptualized – with the tribe hiring Victor Gruen Associates to design an urban plan for the newly-allotted reservation – the deeper (geopolitical-ontological) issue at stake hinged around the vertical axis. Neoclassical economics had theorized the privatization of common property in terms of a perfect competition that made the harmonization of different markets theoretically possible: land, housing, labor, any market could, in theory, be assessed in terms of universal measures of utility and transaction costs. All one needed to do was clearly delineate property rights. Indeed, the Agua Caliente and other Indigenous nations’ land struggles in Southern California and the American Southwest had been privileged subjects for neoclassical theories – and continue to be framed in this way, as model cases for the making of a neoliberal free-market world (for example, see the classic article by Demsetz, 1967; also: Akee, 2009; Frye, 2012).

The liberal focus on property rights was construed over centuries, from the contractual political philosophy of John Locke (whereby Indigenous nations could not in fact contract, since they were deemed ‘savage’ for not ‘inclosing’ their lands) to how land itself came to be viewed as a two-dimensional surface representable as land plats and cadastral maps, thereby erasing centuries of Indigenous oral histories and other modes of construing the relation between land and humans (see, for example, Polanyi, 1957; Pottage, 1994; Pottage, 1995; Kain & Baigent, 1992). More recently, the dominant property rights discourse has continued to wreak havoc on cities and the environment through instruments like Real Estate Investment Trusts (Blackmar, 2006). In other words, we might say that the liberal-capitalist-colonial technology of whiteness that undergirds racial capitalism – producing some subjects who can own property and be regarded as citizens and others who cannot – became ontological (a way of existing) through specific modes of inscription: flattening Indigenous orality and mythology, demarcating racial hierarchies, and mapping land as occupiable, alienable, abstract Cartesian space.

The Palm Springs Spa succeeded, temporarily, in becoming assimilated to this ontology. As we will see, the United States’ Bureau of Indian Affairs sought to harmonize the disjunctive aspects of the Agua Caliente’s spring ‘as capitalist property’ in both administrative terms – requiring multiple coordinations via Congress and other state organizations – and scientifically, through complex coordinations with the U.S. Geological Survey. This worked for a while but, almost as soon as the spa was built, the arrangement began to fray, disclosing not only the different cosmologies and governmental epistemologies that had been temporarily set aside in the 1950s, but also the fractures within the cosmology of whiteness itself, as evidenced by the U.S.’s failed management of the water that fed the spring. Water is more difficult to flatten than ‘abstract space.’ Yet it was important for such water to be treated as ‘abstracted’ – in the double sense of intangible and alienable or commodifiable – to make possible the very reality of Palm Springs as one of the ‘golf capitals of the world,’ right in the middle of a desert.

The Aquifer Under Pax Americana

Palm Springs Spa, as it turned out, offered a uniquely prescient spectacle of the challenges involved with trying to harmonize disjunctive ontologies. Not only is water not land, but also, aquifers are not easily turned into private property. In 2013, the Agua Caliente sued for the rights to the large aquifer that lay under the reservation...
Sunnylands, the former home of philanthropists Walter and Leonore Annenberg, is now a high level retreat. / © Emily Gadek, 2014. CC-BY-SA-3.0

Fig. 02. Rancho Sunnylands en el valle de Coachella. / Sunnylands Estate in the Coachella Valley. Imagery © 2021 Google, Imagery © 2021 Maxar Technologies, USDA Farm Service Agency. Map data © 2021
This aquifer, the Coachella Valley Groundwater Basin, stretches from Palm Springs to the Salton Sea, and supplies almost all the water that allowed the Valley to become one of the world’s largest golf resort areas after World War II. Through a discrete infrastructure of water pump stations, storage reservoirs, and associated pipework, the aquifer was – though largely invisible – a key component of many midcentury modern houses sited along lush golf fairways – spectacular signs of a rising aesthetic uses – and is thus enmeshed in the production of certain geopolitical relations – in this case, between a tribe and the United States. Indeed, one of the first modernist projects to explicitly engage the Coachella aquifer was the Agua Caliente’s own Palm Springs Spa, designed for the tribe by local architects William Cody in collaboration with Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison in the late 1950s. Though the highly complex coordination of myriad technologies and local, state, and federal agencies – from the US Geological Survey to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Department of the Interior, and the US Congress – Cody and his team effectively produced an allocation of water uses between different geopolitical entities, at an architectural scale. To this day, there exists only one recognized transborder aquifer agreement with allocated volumetric water rights, between France and Switzerland. As hydro-diplomacy experts argue, the main impediment to developing these complex transborder agreements lies in the technical and political challenges of governing a subterranean resource across different jurisdictions. The history of midcentury modernism in the Coachella Valley provides an early case study of how these geo-technical and geo-political relations are crafted – how territorial and architectural expertise determines the formation of rights to natural resources. However, the connection between architecture and natural resource allocation – in this case, water – is not just reflective of the institutions of sovereignty in a specific territory: it also constructs that sovereignty through particular techniques of representation. Sovereignies, like ontologies, must be made visible in certain ways for their legitimation and enactment – and architecture is a crucial technology in this process.

### “Fragmented Jurisdiction”

The seemingly ‘virgin land’ that made Palm Springs so attractive as a tourist resort was due to the existence of the Agua Caliente Reservation, which is intermeshed with US land in a checkerboard configuration. This territorial pattern of checkered sovereignty resulted from the juxtaposition of the reservation – established by executive order – and the construction of the transcontinental Southern Pacific Railroad in 1876, which was paid by the US government with a public land grant of alternate square-mile sections. The checkerboard pattern means that the reservation is formally outside of city and state jurisdiction, but the city and the reservation are spatially interlocked, thus creating an inherently complex and contentious territorial condition. The reservation land appeared empty and ‘untouched’ – terra nullius, in legal terms – because tribal development was legally thwarted by what the Agua Caliente Tribal Chairwoman Vyola Olinger called “fragmented jurisdiction.”

Golf courses came to occupy this apparent emptiness in a particular way. The desert golf typology was pioneered by the oil magnate Thomas O’Donnell who in 1926 built a private club in Palm Springs. Later, in the 1940s and 1950s, golf clubs began to appear all over the upper Coachella Valley, directly above the area covered by the aquifer. As a spatial type, the success of the golf club reflected the expanding leisure pursuits of a post-World War II capitalist elite, but it was also the natural counterpart to the development of the ranch-style single-family home as the primary unit of an explosive suburban growth pattern. Golf fairways became glorified front lawns for those who could afford them (Jackson, 1985:231-245). All of these developments were supplied with groundwater by a concealed infrastructure of wells and pumping stations that presented an almost miraculous spectacle of abundance in the desert. This infrastructure contrasted with other hydrologic investments that had made the expansion of Western settlement possible since the mid-1930s. New Deal water infrastructures were all designed to be highly visible – a celebration of what historian David Nye (1996) would later call the “American technological sublime.”

By contrast, the Coachella Valley’s aquifer infrastructures were more vertical than horizontal, and were mostly private rather than public investments – thus enacting a very different politics of perception. By 1964, the Palm Springs Water Company had ten operating wells, tapping the aquifer at depths from 500 to 1000 feet, which together with the surface water supply required a network of 225 miles of distribution piping (Crawford, 1964:76; 1973:D3). The water wells were operated with electric pumps, lifting water and feeding it straight into the system, or storing it in seven large steel and concrete reservoirs with a total storage capacity of 9.5 million gallons. Access to the wells was marked discreetly with covers on the pavement, concealing the square concrete underground vaults beneath. Electrical transformers at pump locations were equally discrete, “installed at ground level and partially hidden by plantings of trees and shrubs” (Crawford, 1964:76). By 1973, the number of wells in the Palm Springs city limits had almost doubled in ten years, increasing from ten to nineteen. The aquifer now supplied over ten times more water than what was collected on the surface (Crawford, 1973:D3).

If New Deal infrastructures had produced a very visible technological sublime which was thus amenable to debates over social policy, the Coachella Valley’s water infrastructures appeared only in their second-order effects – in ostentatious golf clubs and lusciously-landscaped country clubs carpeted over the desert. This was a kind of inverted technological sublime – apparent only by inference or subterfuge – and thus much harder to politicize. Here, the spectacle of abundance appeared without a glorified public apparatus of dams and canals – it just appeared, seemingly gracing selected private estates as if by divine intervention. This politics of invisibility was a critical aspect enabling the proliferation of gated estates in the desert. With the absence of a public infrastructure and a public discourse, the resulting private water infrastructures were intrinsically architectural: their scale and character required articulating the geometrics and geopolitics of extraction as private, rather than public, spectacles; and as domestic, rather than urban, phenomena. In other words, the scale and nature of this water infrastructure served to contain and
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privatize the geopolitical and territorial conflicts over the Agua Caliente’s colonized land and water.

**Palm Springs Spa**

The first public demonstration of what would later become the jurisdictional struggle for the aquifer took place with the design of the Palm Springs Spa in the late 1950s. Built by a developer selected by the Agua Caliente over the original hot springs, right in the center of Palm Springs, this project was one of the first long-term leases of Indian land for recreational uses in the U.S. But it was also the first time that the Coachella Valley’s groundwater infrastructure was opened to public scrutiny by way of Valley’s groundwater infrastructure was opened to public scrutiny by way of the colonial administration’s technical oversight. In this process, the geo-metrics of groundwater measurement, assessment, and administration – carried out by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) on behalf of the Department of Interior – played a direct role in establishing the geopolitical relations that came to dominate the later development of Palm Springs as a whole.

The design of the new spa in 1959, led by William Cody, engaged the natural vertical water supply of the spring and deployed it horizontally, with a colonnade that recalled the Spanish Colonial architecture which first inaugurated Palm Springs’s new status as a leisure resort. [Fig. 04]. The project required a different way of visualizing the tribe’s water, thus shifting how it could be managed. Since the first disputes arose in the late nineteenth century between settlers and the tribe, the issue of water distribution had been adjudicated upon maps and plans. Ratios of water were apportioned according to use and availability, as the fundamental water sources could be seen by all in the creeks, canyons, and the network of engineered canals and open ditches that brought it into the reservation. The mostly horizontal nature of these exchanges and agreements allowed for their direct representation upon maps and diagrams. Quantities could be ascertained by simply dipping measurement tools directly into the flow of the stream or at specific gauge points installed directly on the surface ditches and reservoirs. In other words, while the water’s jurisdiction and distribution were conflictive, the technical instruments used to ascertain them – the sovereignty of the module rather than over the water itself, so to speak – was not.

The ensuing political struggles over water were grounded in the techno-politics of visibility enabled by the surficial quality of these horizontal water infrastructures. This changed when the tribe turned to develop its natural spring. At first, the tribe hired Victor Gruen Associates to develop plans for the reservation. Like earlier projects proposed by federal agencies such as the Indian Irrigation Service and the Mission Indian Agency, Gruen’s proposal had also been conceived primarily in plan – a horizontal distribution of different uses according to significant existing buildings, urban areas, and other desired adjacencies. The result diagrammed the new status of tribal landowners as individual property holders, while also sharply delimiting the potential futures of tribal development to a bounded area of the reservation – a flat, square-edged plane with seemingly no depth. Thus, when the Gruen plan was rejected, the tribe had to return to the drawing board and rethink, in a sense, the very ontology of this flat geopolitics.

The tribe then began to consider a more surgical approach, developing vertically rather than horizontally. The new approach worked, but while providing new potentials, it also reconfigured the terrain on which sovereignty was being exercised. As plans took shape for the new spa, it became apparent that geological expertise would determine the project’s success or failure. While the press noted the “eye-filling manse of artistic décor crafted by the Southland’s best artisans” (The Desert Sun, 1960:2) – including Italian glass, ceramics, and terrazzo – the real challenge, they pointed out, lay in the complex engineering beneath the structure.11

Before construction, a number of hydrological and geological investigations had been undertaken. The water’s origin appeared to lie in a deep splinter of the San Andreas earthquake fault, requiring sophisticated geological mapping to determine its precise nature (Ringwald, 1958) [Fig. 05]. The challenges of coordinating matters of subsurface measurement, testing, and administration, would prove to be as demanding as the purely ‘political’ issue of Native development.12 Indeed, the vertical view opened up by the spa clarified that the tribe’s ‘fragmented jurisdiction’ was not just about horizontal distributions of property, but about the particular kinds of expertise that were available – politically and jurisdictionally – to begin extracting an aesthetically-derived surplus out of the land. Reporters were ecstatic about what they called the ‘giant jigsaw’ of the spa’s...

geotechnical coordination (The Desert Sun, 1960:2). This jigsaw puzzle was simultaneously legal, geological, political, economic, and architectural. In order to solve this techno-jurisdictional, 3D web, the architects had to coordinate with multiple design, engineering, and federal bureaucracies.

Not only was it imperative that any construction tread lightly over the spring, but also the neat, geometric sovereign boundary of the checkerboard—a simple line in plan upon which the spring was located—was much more fuzzy and complex underground13 [Fig. 06]. The Agua Caliente’s sovereignty and culture, always centered around the spring, suddenly depended on the spring’s particular geophysics—internal dynamics and morphology—while, in turn, jurisdiction over such knowledge was monopolized by federal agencies.14 The architects’ coordination resulted in a special report by the U.S. Geological Survey (Dutcher & Bader, 1961), comparing the spring to the artificially-constructed wells managed by the Palm Springs Water Company, providing a detailed description of how these other private wells operated and how they performed on the natural spring [Fig. 07]. Thus, though ostensibly only a geotechnical report, its findings were also deeply geopolitical—publicly exposing, for the first time, the vertical infrastructure of private water wells that fed the growing desert resort.

Once the spring was cleared and its basic natural components were inspected and documented, “it was agreed that a large water-collecting tank should be installed in the ground in a carefully excavated hole at the spring orifice” (Dutcher & Bader, 1961:15). Set directly atop this ‘orifice,’ the new tank collected the entire flow of the spring. Once the rest of the facilities were completed, the tank would allow for specific pressure regulation as desired, providing water supply at higher speeds of flow than the natural spring itself (Dutcher & Bader, 1961:17). The tank, in other words, was designed as the beating heart of the new spa—an apparatus to modulate, regulate, and administer water therapy and relaxation to Palm Springs’ growing numbers of tourists.

Sunnylands

While the Palm Springs Spa gave the tribe a measure of economic relief, the project had required a brutal deployment of federal oversight and control—exposing the geophysical limits of the spring and, by extension, the tribe’s precarious sovereignty. By contrast, the design of nearby Sunnylands Estate, designed by A. Quincy Jones & Frederick Emmons for media magnate (and later ambassador) Walter Annenberg, was an almost entirely private affair. Sunnylands’ architecture was a cross between a modernist embassy and a private ranch with its own golf course that explicitly sought to convey American power in the ideological conflict of the Cold War, and it is still known today as the “Camp David of the West.” The 30,000 square foot house was designed as a series of airy interconnected pavilions to host large parties as well as Annenberg’s sprawling art collection. With commanding views over the estate, the one-story structure was raised above the ground on a massive slanted-concrete pediment sitting directly upon a lake, opening out to the surrounding pool, artificial ponds, and a golf course.

Months before the final design had been agreed with the client, Jones had already begun organizing the extensive waterworks for the project.15 The well had been specified with “a heavy duty casing and a large diameter hole,” thus requiring only one well for the entire development.16 The design and construction of this well was the first action undertaken by the design team, crucially determining the project’s sitting, landscaping, and the stunning views of the golf and desert that would later make it known. Yet, though the project’s horizontal water spectacles—streams and lakes—were very well documented in both the architectural drawings and coordination letters, the nature and functioning of the vertical infrastructure—the well itself—was not. In fact, the particular architecture and performance of the well remained somewhat of a mystifying a priori for the development as a whole.

Part of the reason for this lack of information was no doubt that drilling wells in the Coachella Valley had become such a common aspect of construction—a basic fact of all the golf and swimming pool developments—that the expertise they required was highly distributed, local, and informal. An infrastructure of whiteness—naturalized as the ability of white capitalists to extract water as an implicit right of appropriation—was effectively in place.17 In contrast with the federal geological agency that was called upon to examine the Agua Caliente’s natural spring, which involved a whole network of institutional supervision, these other wells were a matter for the local private market. Knowledge of how to extract the water appeared to be almost entirely customary and assumed—though only accessible as such for white property-owners. Annenberg did not only drill into the aquifer; he also quietly purchased a series of shares in the local water company as a prior condition to the development.

Thus, the vertical water infrastructures of the Coachella Valley were not only opaque in literal visible terms but also economic and political ones. Water provision was technically and socially interconnected but not transparent—allowing investors like Annenberg to operate in the shadow of public scrutiny (The Desert Sun, 1964). This seemingly surreptitious extraction by vertical stealth was, however, codified directly in U.S. law. Though groundwater in California wasn’t formally regulated until 2014, since the early twentieth century state courts had developed the doctrine of ‘correlative rights,’ which allows a private property owner to extract water for ‘reasonable use.’ While this is a use-right, not a property right, the correlation of property in land (at the surface) with the exploitation of water directly below is permitted if “surplus” water may be extracted “safely” (Žižek, 2018).

In other words, though water may (and often does, as with aquifers) literally exceed the bounds of the lot (thus complicating its status as a private property right), an imaginary vertical axis fuses above and below—private right with intensive exploitation—to allow for the commodification of water beyond necessary use. The overexploitation of common resources like aquifers is aided and abetted by the invisibility offered by the correlative rights doctrine. Yet for the Agua Caliente—and others excluded from the privatized white networks of extraction—water provision was panoptically supervised by local, state, and federal authorities. This made their waters—whether from the Canyons or the natural spring—matters of public display and thus technically and politically open to appropriation—but also contestation, debate, and disagreement.

Theorizing ‘Decolonial Modernity’
The quality of sovereignty concerning visibility operates both positively and negatively, depending on the sovereignty that is being upheld. The highly visible nature of the Agua Caliente’s vertical water infrastructure contrasted with the other vertical water infrastructures in the valley—for private golf clubs and estates. Their wells, drilled by local contractors, largely escaped both state and federal regulation, while local water companies were constituted as private enterprises, discretely invested in by the owners of the homes and clubs. In sum, this form of invisibility greatly expanded the autonomy of certain U.S. citizens, posing a new kind of sovereignty—proto-
neoliberal – that appeared not to require any governmental oversight. The upshot, however, was that such apparently ‘private’ water uses and infrastructures progressively undermined the aquifer in general and the Agua Caliente’s sovereignty in particular. Through their design and construction, midcentury modern architectures organized these different modes of visibility and their attendant modes of sovereignty. Understanding how they mediated complex jurisdictional arrangements through techniques of visualization, therefore, suggests the need to rethink midcentury modern architecture’s relation to the landscape. Rather than being technically sophisticated but politically “neutral,” these architectures were, in fact, key tools of geopolitical containment. As a practice predicated on representation, architecture was able to visualize and transform the deeply contested sovereignty of the Agua Caliente into a purely geological problem: an issue of technical functionality rather than jurisdiction. In other words, the sciences and practices of vertical infrastructures – from geology to architecture – are crucial tools of power in the way they articulate certain discursive relations and ways of seeing (Yusoff, 2018).

Apprehending Southern California’s midcentury modern architecture in this way denaturalizes its colonial foundations, showing how it was a tool for settler-colonial control. However, it might also allow us to posit a different perspective on architecture’s relation to landscape: less extractive of natural resources like water and able to represent Indigenous modes of sovereignty and onto-epistemologies. It is this dimension – the interface between space, resources, and alternative models of sovereignty – that a decolonial spatial history of midcentury modern architecture can and should develop. Yet, this prospect, if it is to be taken seriously, needs to negotiate a set of thorny issues that are at the root of the analytical category I am proposing here: ‘decolonial modernity.’ The case studies just discussed are instructive for the dispositions of modern decolonization.

Through different modernist inflections, both projects gestured – semiotically – toward the colonial, yet in specifically inverse directions. While the Palm Springs Spa featured a sweeping colonnade, which explicitly referenced the Spanish colonial architecture that became iconic for California’s development as a tourist economy; Sunnyleands gestured toward the Indigenous. Its celebrated pyramidal roof was designed to symbolize Mayan temple architecture – an explicit request by the Annenbergs which Jones and Emmons dutifully implemented. With its supporting walls sheathed in imported volcanic rock from Mexico, this was a material as well as a formal symbolic investment. Over the years, in fact, the Annenbergs’ conspicuously publicized their friendly relations with a variety of Indigenous peoples. This form of symbolic ‘recognition’ was part and parcel of the weak liberal cosmopolitanism that infused u.s. diplomacy throughout the entire postwar period – a tokenistic mode of representation that was a source of great frustration for Global South countries demanding better terms of trade and other structural material shifts in their relations with the United States. However, it is only by understanding the geopolitical currency of midcentury modern architecture’s visibility – a visibility predicated on the soft power of symbolic representations – that we can come to terms with stronger forms of decolonial modernity. Indeed, sometimes invisibility needs to be met with invisibilization. In 2014, for example, a year after the lawsuit over the aquifer – and against the entrenched opposition of all the local u.s. authorities and modernist architecture associations – the tribe demolished its old spa building to make way for a new cultural center over the original hot spring. It is this material dimension of decolonization, a literal deconstruction that also incorporates geological and design expertise – but on the tribe’s own terms – that is required to make way for new onto-epistemologies of the Indigenous, the architectural, and the modern. ARQ

NOTES

1. Before colonization, Native California contained an estimated 300,000 people speaking between 80 to 100 different languages and dialects. See: Lightfoot, et al. (2015:93).

2. “The spring was a place of power, a sacred place, and sentiment” (Bean et al., 1995:V-94). See also Petronic (1943).

3. These collective rituals of Indigenous international diplomacy were called mutual. They were actively represented by u.s. government ‘Indian Agents’ as politically subversive and morally suspect. See Bean et al. (1995:V-94).

4. For examples of literary and geographic technologies respectively, see Mignolo (2011); Hannah (2000).

5. The Agua Caliente’s lawsuit was infiltrated; the tribe succeeded in the first trial in 2017 while the others are ongoing.

6. U.S. golf courses carpet this area of the Colorado Desert, consuming 37 billion gallons of water annually (Stevens, 2012).

7. “The only international treaty including volumetric allocation of groundwater resources is the 2006 Convention Genesis between France and Switzerland” (Carr, 2004:4). According to UNESCO (2006:37-58), “while over 3,600 treaties relating to the use of the world’s 276 transboundary surface waters have been catalogued since 805 CE, there are only six transboundary aquifers globally with a formal agreement in force out of around 600 transboundary aquifers that have been catalogued to date by UNESCO. Clearly, experience in and knowledge about managing transboundary aquifers is limited. Moreover, many transboundary aquifers are either disconnected from all river basins or lie underneath multiple river basins, resulting in circumstances that are distinct from those found in most transboundary rivers and lakes. As a result, the status of international law for transboundary ground water resources is still in a very early stage of development.”

8. “it actually festered until exploding into the so-called Land Wars of the 1960s and 1970s. This conflict eventually came to legal closure with the historical 1977 agreement between the Agua Caliente Cahuilla and the city of Palm Springs, which stipulated that the tribe has sole authority to zone Indian trust land” (Ortner & du Pont, 2011:62 fn. 142).


10. Native American property leases were restricted to five years until 1955. The Agua Caliente Tribal Council was key in lobbying Congress to pass the Indian Leasing Act in 1959, which extended leases to 99 years.


12. On the political process for the lease approval, Olinger remarked: “A year ago we spent three weeks in Washington and came away with 16 objections from the Secretary of Interior. We got those cleared up and then had 16 objections from the local office. Then we had 16 objections from the area office at Sacramento” (Ringwald, 1959).


17. The doctrine of settler-colonial appropriation to groundwater has been explicitly upheld by u.s. courts since the early twentieth century. See: Sax (2003:73); Perorno (2005:642-66).

18. “GEO-metrics are more than a tool in the service of state and corporate power: the political rationalities which surround resources – rationalities of competition, control, conservation and optimization, for example – are constituted through a way of seeing that has the problem of volume and ‘inner-strucure’ onto-frame” (Bracey, 2013:66).

20. The problem of Indigenous-led modern development is usefully addressed at a much larger scale in Posnett (2011).

21. On this weak liberal mode of recognition, see Coulthard (2014).

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