

The Art of Dissident Domesticity

*Julian Assange, King Prempeh, and Ethnographic
Conceptualism in the Prison House*

**Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Michał Murawski,
and Jesse Weaver Shipley**

What happens to domestic life when the state turns a troublesome subject's home into a prison, when an outlaw evading custody turns an extra-territorial space, such as an embassy, into a home? How is a foreign sovereign transformed into an imperial citizen-subject through exile, house arrest, and return? Exile and forced domesticity have long linked sovereignty to the power to determine intimate life. Centuries-old practices of house arrest and diplomatic asylum have taken on new forms in recent decades in the wake of emerging surveillance technologies and changing relationships between information, territory, and sovereignty. This article examines two quite distinct, high-profile celebrity instances of what we call dissident domesticity. In the first case, Prempeh I, the last sovereign king of Asante, is exiled by the British from his capital of Kumasi, in what is now Ghana, and placed under house arrest in the Seychelles to end a war of British imperial conquest. In the second case, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, the twenty-first century's iconic dissident, seeks asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London to avoid arrest and extradition. Prempeh's exile on the edge of empire and Assange's confinement at its center show how the fight over the control of information, and those who circulate it, converges with the struggle for the control of territory, and those who police it, transverse it, and are trapped by it.

We draw on ethnographic, archival, and artistic work at both these sites of incarceration to understand how information and surveillance, resistance and coercion are created in the interplay between center and

periphery, inside and outside. Our examinations converge on two key spots: Prempeh's Seychelles veranda and Assange's Knightsbridge balcony, which mediate between intimate inside and public outside, an exchange that molds bodies within and against sovereign logics. As power apprehends dissidents, these figures try, in turn, to reshape the terms of their discipline via mundane, minute, and bombastic tactics.

Our investigations juxtapose subjects caught up in the seemingly disjunctive spatial-historical frames of early twentieth-century British and twenty-first-century American-led imperial worlds and their forms of mobility and control of motion. These two moments have much in common in the persistence of the conditions of incarceration and control of information, but they also show contrasting ways imperial regimes produce and maintain fictions of their contemporary global spatial orders through the ordering of the domestic. We focus on how everyday life inside various prison houses refracts the trajectories of state, military, and commercial interests. These exterior forces converge on the seemingly innocuous terrain of carceral homes and the reshaping of domestic existence. For these two dissidents, their domestication is shaped in markedly gendered terms, as they are drawn to inhabit particularly masculine public stances in ways that seemingly control their political voices.¹ For Prempeh, his responses to imperial confinement remade him in terms of British masculine images of power. For Assange, his public downfall was made in terms of accusations of crimes of masculine violence. In these contexts, the inmates of the prison house deployed their dwellings as sites from which to remake their social bodies to challenge and negotiate external forces. In both cases, the terms of confinement and release hinged, in some measure, upon public and intimate performances of masculinity that define a moral being, which in turn inflects a subject's social legitimacy and political authority.

Dissident domesticity describes how confined subjects respond to the overwhelming spatial and temporal control of confinement; political opposition conducted through domestic forms shows the tensions between creating new, multiple centers of power and practices that denature the structuring principles of the center itself. The home, or proxy home, is a site of dialectical mediation, a pivotal conduit for processes that appear to originate from a macrorealm of the exterior, to shape the microrealm of the interior. In examining these spaces, we follow radical thinkers concerned with the links between place and power—notably Marxist enclave theorists—who aimed to identify noncapitalist unsurveilled spaces of dissidence in the midst of centralized orders of power. But we find a complex blend of technologies in which the terms of freedom and control are often hard to distinguish.² The prison house is a crucial technology of power,

a terrain where sovereign control manifests with exaggerated clarity and where this power is also responded to in a reciprocal process. We are concerned here with the intimate manifestations of the control apparatus of state and empire and with the technological apparatus of the mass media, art, and popular culture.³ Our article provides an anthropology of dissident domesticity focused on the prison house, a terrain of intense, embodied, and materialized centrality in which the everyday intimacies of domestic life converge with the macrodynamics of state power and media.

Our ethnographic and archival investigations of Prempeh and Assange also work in an ethnographic conceptualist vein, in which contemporary art articulates with dissident domesticities.⁴ Developing the relationship between scholarship and art can help unravel the logic of informational discipline at the center of contemporary public life, which emerges in anxieties about the public circulation of information and bodies.⁵ We are concerned with how domesticity is shaped as a form of political control and, conversely, as a space for new forms of embodiment that elude or trick recognition. Dissidence is demarcated not only by struggles over the control of information but also by domestic aesthetics, social habitation, and sabotage of proper forms of sociality. In the following sections, we examine how dissidence is framed in relation to domestic space and domesticated ways of being.

Ethnographic conceptualism is not only a way to use aesthetics to unravel social configurations but also a technique for using ethnographic and archival research to inform artistic practice. Indeed, this article comes out of our multichannel art installation *Investigated*, first presented at Savvy Contemporary in Berlin in 2014, in which we interwove video, sound, live digital feeds, and written archives on Assange and Prempeh that we had gathered through interviews, observation, writing, and archival work in London, Accra, and the Seychelles (fig. 1). Our ethnography of dissident domesticity and our art practice juxtapose these two figures to reveal the relationship between dissidence and domestication, a comparison across time and space that reveals perhaps unexpected similarities.

Furthermore, as we think through art practice, we show how dissidents deploy their domestic spheres in ways that bear a striking resemblance to how various avant-garde artists aim to elide generic categorizations to further their conceptual practice. As avant-garde artists gain recognition, they struggle to elude the forms of discipline and control that come with being ossified within generic representational categorizations of the art world. Similarly, dissidents inhabit and try to remake carceral domesticity for their own conceptual purposes and elude simplistic categorizations.



Figure 1. *Investigated*. Installation by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Jesse Weaver Shipley, Savvy Contemporary Gallery, Berlin, 2014. Photograph by Khadija von Zinnenburg and Jesse Weaver Shipley

Prempeh's Letters: Making the Domestic Gentleman

We argue that the constellation of politics, propaganda, and art—and their interaction with both covert and overt state apparatuses—constitutes the contemporary notion of the dissident. For Foucault, security and legal orders are mechanisms not for the disciplining of unruly subjects but for the control and regulation of life in its seemingly dispersed forms.⁶ As criminal codes aim to rein in extrastate power they create the very category of the dissident that they claim to control.

The contemporary social category of the writer-as-intellectual or artist-as-dissident emerged in mid-eighteenth-century Europe through state anxiety and control. Indeed, the police archives of 1740s Paris reveal a massive collection of documents on the surveillance of writers and intellectuals, and as Robert Darnton observes, the idea of a public intellectual who circulates information is constituted through the process of police surveillance in the early modern period.⁷ The birth of the contemporary order of incarceration has been built on controlling not just prisoners' bodies but also information. Since the rise of early modern European prisons they have been used to control information. Indeed, in eighteenth-century France, dissidents, newspaper writers, pamphleteers, spies, and counterfeiters were arrested to avoid them circulating information. State officials were at times so anxious about how information circulated that

dissidents were regularly removed from Paris to far-flung locations to isolate them.⁸

The link between the dissident and bodily, expressive practices is further elaborated in the making of European colonial rule in the nineteenth century. Control over information circulation has been at the center of an emerging modern global political order and its public and private mechanisms of power. Indeed, European imperialism was made and naturalized through the public management of the intimate and reorganization of the everyday.⁹ European aesthetics, religious doctrines, and commodity logics were normalized in the lives of non-Europeans through a focus on reforming the body and its forms of dwelling.¹⁰ In the context of British conquest, local sovereignty was denied to polities around the world by demarcating sovereign political leaders as unruly subjects. A combination of military force and diplomatic manipulation masked imperial rule in an ambiguous language of extrajudicial policing. Sovereign powers were absorbed not by direct conquest alone but through a logic of their legal disciplining that posited non-Western peoples—as well as Western women, children, and members of peasantries and proletariats—as in need of social and moral reformation.¹¹

Incarceration played a key role in making colonial rule.¹² The story of the capture, exile, and long-term house arrest of Prempeh, the last king of Asante, is a case in point. In the late nineteenth century, the British centralized their control of economic trade routes, formalizing colonial rule across the empire by taking over sovereign territories with which they had maintained trade agreements. Along West Africa's Gold Coast, various European powers had traded with the Asante Empire for centuries, but as the British monopolized the coastal trading centers formerly divided among European powers, they sought to regularize inland trade. The British and Asante fought a series of wars throughout the century. In 1896, the British invaded the Asante capital of Kumasi under the pretext that Asante had violated a treaty and that they were seeking payment from the Asantehene (king of Asante) for an overdue indemnity. They looted the palace and took the young Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh and his court captive. The British military leaders wanted to use Asante rituals of power to show their strength, so they insisted that Prempeh and other chiefs disgrace themselves by placing their heads between the knees of British officials seated on chiefly stools. Prempeh was first marched to the coast and imprisoned in the fort at Cape Coast, a former slave-trading center, and then exiled to their nearby colony of Sierra Leone. In 1900, while no male military leaders dared resist British annexation, the queen mother, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, led a final armed resistance to British rule. To curtail future resistance, the British governor exiled King Prempeh, Yaa Asantewaa, and a number of other chiefs to the faraway Seychelles

Islands. Yaa Asantewaa represented outright rebellion to British rule, while Prempeh was the embodiment of legitimate sovereignty. The logic of exile posited that executing a sovereign would incite outright war with Asante and allow them to install a new king. By keeping him under house arrest, far removed from his territory, the British maintained preexisting Asante social and political orders while taking control of financial and legal orders. This was in line with developing doctrines of indirect rule that shaped the administrative logic of the British colonies. In 1901 the Gold Coast colony formally incorporated the Asante Empire into their administration.¹³

The Seychelles, a thousand miles east of Nairobi in the midst of the Indian Ocean, had long been used for political imprisonment. In 1810, the French sent seventy-seven “terrorists” there. After the British took over in 1810, they sent royal and religious opposition leaders from around the world whom they could neither assassinate nor leave in place. The legal ambiguity of exile was tempered by the facts of isolation and burdens of maintaining enemy elites. Throughout his long imprisonment, the colonial office in Britain, the Gold Coast governor’s office, and Seychelles administration had ongoing internal discussions about practical aspects and the political expediency of Prempeh’s exile.¹⁴

Arriving in Seychelles in 1900, Prempeh was given a large house leased from a *grand blanc* plantation-owning family (fig. 2). He came with a large group of other political dissident chiefs, family, and attendants. Huts were built around the perimeter of the garden for subchiefs, slaves, and children.¹⁵ A school was set up and a police substation built at the bottom of the hill—not initially to restrict the political prisoner’s movements but because, as his complaints to officials show, Prempeh was concerned about his own security. The gardens and house with its wide porch were more than gracious. Indeed, officials complained that the ex-king was living in too much comfort for an exile. The Gold Coast governor wrote on 21 November 1901 to the Seychelles administrator explaining the logic of exile: “This government in no way desires to inflict a vindictive or cruel punishment on the leaders of the rising in Ashanti.” In sending them to Seychelles, the British hoped to destabilize political opposition without destroying Asante social order. They sought “to deter others following their example in the belief that a rebellion if unsuccessful carries with it no serious punishment.”¹⁶ The length and distance of exile provided its own disciplinary logic. Prempeh had the freedom of his new home but could not leave. It became a staging ground for planning his return to rule. The golden cage of his exile gave him the space to reshape his public political self to be legible to British civility. His colonial veranda and living quarters provided the terrain on which he remade himself in the style of an English gentleman legible to the British public and to imperial forms



Figure 2. Prempeh's house in Seychelles in 2009. Photograph by Jesse Weaver Shipley

of control. For Prempeh, adopting the language and modes of communication of British rule was a form of mimesis, incorporating the codes of power of his enemy. Prempeh learned stances of power embedded in the moral rhetoric and bodily affects of an English gentleman. However, this mimesis was also a technique for eluding the imperial gaze, creating a banal image to attract a normative public eye while maintaining private political aspirations.

Read as a body of work, Edward Prempeh's letters from the Seychelles, archived in the Seychelles National Archives in the capital of Mahé, rewrite the history of Anglo-Asante relations as one of Asante past moral failings. In writing letters to colonial officials in the Gold Coast Colony and London, and to the queen herself, Prempeh develops a writerly voice that aims to redeem his political position by creating a narrative of his own self-fashioning as a modern British masculine subject. His writing is a narrative strategy for returning home.¹⁷ British observers in the Seychelles noted that Prempeh was a sharp dresser, "abandoning his leopard skins" for proper attire and formal suits. In converting to Christianity, he purportedly had trouble deciding between Catholicism and the Church of England, choosing the latter because it was the church of King Edward VII and British royalty. He officially married only one wife. Stories in the Seychelles persist that he chose Edward as his Christian name

also because this was the name of the English king. Prempeh mirrored his royal enemy's figuration of power.

The archive reflects Prempeh's increasingly sophisticated attempts to win influence over his captors by showing the process of his learning to write in English. He recognized that the technology of letter writing was crucial to learning the language of his captors and entering into political dialogue with them. The British had refused his initial request to write and correspond in his native Twi language out of fear of his sending political messages. His early letters, scrawled in an uncertain hand, are brief, demonstrating a tentative command of English. Over several decades he developed a sure script and an eloquent, sometimes flowery style of rhetoric and argumentation.

Prempeh was restless. He sent numerous letters asking British administrators to return him home. He requested transfer to another colony on the African continent to be closer to Kumasi and also to visit Britain. He aimed to appease his captors in writing and face-to-face meetings by showing his loyalty to the British crown. On 8 November 1903, Seychelles governor C. Bruce reports to the secretary of state for the colonies that "King Prempeh and the African Political Prisoners . . . assured me of their desire to be considered as loyal and faithful subjects of His Majesty King Edward the seventh."¹⁸ On 16 October 1913 Prempeh wrote perhaps his most eloquent petition on behalf of the queen mother and chiefs "of the Ashanti Political Prisoners." In a ten-page letter to the governor of Seychelles, he states he is "submitting this petition to confess our sin and fault which had led us to this fate; and to humble ourselves lowly and reverently for your Excellency's kind consideration." It is signed, as with all his correspondence, "Edward Prempeh, Ex-King of Ashanti." His plea is in the guise of a moral-religious confession. It is an account of nineteenth-century Anglo-Asante relations, admitting that Asante leaders acted irrationally and violently and did not heed British wisdom. He concludes "that our faults which we have confessed in this letter might not be taken into consideration but that we ask for forgiveness and to be allowed to return to our country where we promise that no similar error will be ever heard of us anymore." Formally, the petition links the language of personal confession to political diplomacy. In Prempeh's confessional, the Asante were the aggressors attacking "without any cause or reason" while the British acted with civility and patience.¹⁹

Over several decades, Prempeh's domestic space in exile was the setting of this intimate form of moral discipline in which the battle for Asante sovereignty was contested in terms of taking on a masculine public persona in line with British notions of a corporal masculinity. It manifested in mundane practices of proper letter-writing etiquette, tea drinking, and dress. Official photographers captured seemingly candid images of him

dressed in elegant suitings, writing letters at a table. Physical escape from the comforts of his Mahé veranda was not possible, but Prempeh's return was debated in how well his gentlemanly exterior reflected an inner moral transformation. The house in the Seychelles was a space of exile, of disempowerment of a sovereign. Prempeh sat on the veranda writing letters, trying to convince the British to return him home based on how well he had learned lessons about his own domestication. He was isolated from his networks and subject positions that had given his words and actions power in relation to his people. The British denied him the right to make legal decisions over his people in Asante and even in his own compound in the Seychelles. Now the veranda—a place of viewing and of being seen that mediates between the intimate and the public—became a space for him to remake himself into a man whose style is so impeccable that it convinces his captors of an inner transformation.

In 1924 Prempeh was allowed to return to his former capital, Kumasi, and with the remnants of his court he went home. He was deemed at first to be a private citizen and then was made the chief of Kumasi, but he could not publicly lay claim to his former role as head of state. He had lived in his Seychelles house of exile for over two decades trying to remake his social power by remaking his public self. It was a space of mediation and experimentation. As Prempeh in the Seychelles—and his Asante peoples in the Gold Coast colony thousands of miles away—accepted colonial rule, at least on a pragmatic level if not in principle, their adopted modes of communication, clothing, and language became signs of British normalcy that mediated social power. They adopted a colonial language and bodily comportment through the coercive power of incarceration that isolated a sovereign leader far from home for over two decades. It appears that Prempeh was forced to adopt the terms of his jailers in order to secure eventual release. Adopting the terms of colonial rule rather than opposing them created a proliferation of nodes of power that over time replicated and dispersed a global network built on the mores and moralities of British domesticity masking the circulation and containment of other types of information.

In this sense, British Empire provides a logic of centrality, widely dispersing control while at the same time tightening its moral and aesthetic registers. As Frantz Fanon and other theorists of postcolonial legacies of colonial power have argued, copying the desires and manners of the colonizer is a fraught and contradictory enterprise.²⁰ Just as sovereignty and conquest were justified through racist assessment of the immorality and cultural backwardness on non-Europeans, mimetic apprehension in the context of British Empire was a way to make bodily claims on prestige and power. Maybe we should see Prempeh as a proto-ethnographic conceptualist, a keen observer of the British—mastering the terms of sov-

ereign power from within its most intimate logic, even while stranded on one of power's remotest islands.

House Arrest: Broadcast and Representation

Julian Assange has spent much of the past few years in different kinds of prison houses in the United Kingdom. Details of each of these sojourns bring home the contradictory logics of centrality—in this case, the simultaneous consolidation and dispersal of control, resistance, and informational apparatuses—converging on these strange, highly exposed, but totally enclosed kinds of domesticated spaces. Following the Swedish prosecutor's leveling of allegations of rape and sexual misconduct against Assange in November 2010—allegations that Assange and his team deny and claim are politically motivated and which were eventually dropped in May 2017—the organization moved its operations to a bail bondsman's home in the Norfolk countryside. In early 2012, WikiLeaks relocated to a smaller home belonging to another bondsman, a cottage on a landed estate on the border between Kent and East Sussex. There was an unremitting stream of visitors to both the Norfolk and Kent houses. The first thing that struck many of them was the aesthetic chasm between the Wellington-boot, floral-print, stone-floored, Aga-heated, shabby coziness of the domestic settings and the apparatuses not only of cyberdissidence but also of sovereign control and surveillance distributed throughout: mountains of USB sticks and burner mobile phones; a painfully slow, encrypted Internet connection, sticker-covered IBM laptops, electronic manacles, and monitoring boxes—objects that moved the WikiLeaks operation from one location to another and that we documented within the Ecuadorian embassy (fig. 3). Novelist and Assange biographer Andrew O'Hagan noted in a rambling 2014 text in the *London Review of Books*, of the political-aesthetic disjuncture emanating from these English country interiors: "It was exciting to think, in that very Jane Austen kind of house, that no novel had ever captured this kind of new history, where military lies on a global scale were revealed by a bunch of sleepy amateurs two foot from an Aga."²¹

Assange's public shaming was a process causally connected to his domestic incarceration and hinged upon accusations of masculinized sexual violence that delegitimized his political stances in the eyes of many. His confinement was also highly gendered but, in contrast, through an excessive replication of normative spatial and daily practices of moral acceptability.

Within the confines of this peculiar, gendered domestic arrangement, WikiLeaks staffers, their visitors, and hosts interacted with an array of surveillance technologies. Assange himself was electronically tagged,

despite being denied business, having first circumambulated the house from front door to conservatory and back garden, bore hallmarks, never confirmed, of a reconnaissance operation. Chatter and warnings were occasionally picked up of an imminent police or security services raid, while visitors traveling to meet Assange were frequently detained or interrogated at airports by immigration staff. The response to these threats also impacted the configuration of space and domestic routines: furniture was constantly rearranged, sensitive material was carefully hidden, taxi drivers and neighbors were misinformed about the real nature of goings-on inside the prison house.

The realities of WikiLeaks' everyday existence under domestic confinement have been subjected to intense outside interest, not merely from cops and spies. Media and mass culture have frequently portrayed Assange as inhabiting a pathological domestic (and moral) sphere, of the sort within which a "creep" suspected of sexual misconduct might be expected to languish. The WikiLeaks editor, like the subject of colonial or modernist social reformers' interventions into domesticity, has been described variously as a bad houseguest, a bag lady, a cat abuser, a mansion-arrest parasite, and a slob afflicted by atrocious personal hygiene.²³ O'Hagan describes the domestic world of WikiLeaks under house arrest in Norfolk as amoral and Assange as a domestic deviant:

He tended to eat pretty much with his hands. . . . I made lunch every day and he'd eat it, often with his hands, and then lick the plate. In all that time he didn't once take his dirty plate to the sink. . . . Julian scorns all attempts at social graces. He eats like a pig. He marches through doors and leaves women in his wake. He talks over everybody. . . . I found his egotism at the dinner table to be a form of madness more striking than anything he said. . . . At home to Julian means he is fully inhabiting his paranoia and fully suspicious about people and things he thinks are out to get him.²⁴

As with Prempeh, British assessments of Assange's public respectability are tied to his moral character and political convictions. His dysfunction around minute, intimate forms of sociality are framed as signs of insanity and asociality—a politicized form of pathologization and dehumanization, not dissimilar from that deployed by colonial administrators against troublesome sovereigns-subjects, such as Prempeh.

To counter the implicit links being made between domestic failure and insanity, table manners and treason, WikiLeaks, an organization focused on exposing the inner secrets of state power to the outside world, has been prompted to confront and stage manage its own interiority. On several occasions, in a tactic reminiscent of fellow domestic inmate Ai Weiwei's 2011 WeiweiCam project,²⁵ WikiLeaks staffers turned their own cameras on visiting, video-recorder-brandishing G4S agents, in the pres-



Figure 4. Julian Assange and Tariq Ali interview Noam Chomsky. Screenshot from *The World Tomorrow*, Julian Assange's TV show, broadcast from within the Kent Prison House on 25 June 2012. Screenshot from the RT YouTube Channel

ence of a team of journalists from the *Daily Telegraph*, who also filmed the whole episode.²⁶ During the production of *The World Tomorrow*, a TV show hosted by Julian Assange in 2012, the show's set (a small room at a Kent rental house not far from the bail surety's home at which Assange resided) was transformed into a hastily assembled material condensation of the aesthetic self-image of dissident domesticity, combining the radical ferment of the ramshackle dissident's study with the cozy asceticism of the twee English cottage (fig. 4). Meanwhile, a satirical statement containing a "preemptive" collection of anticipated media smears released by WikiLeaks in anticipation of the show's debut contained a number of statements relating to Assange's own physical self-presentation, as well as the condition of his domestic environment. Statement 6.1 read, "Assange has tawdry, twee taste. He is an interior designer's nightmare!" (fig. 5).²⁷

Ecuadorian Asylum: Uganda in Knightsbridge

Assange and WikiLeaks continued in their tensely quaint, cyberpastoral existence until July 2012, when Assange skipped bail immediately following an unsuccessful appeal against extradition to Sweden at the UK Supreme Court, the country's highest court of appeal. Since then he has resided within the confines of London's Ecuadorian embassy, a modest ground-floor flat inside a redbrick Edwardian mansion block in London's Knightsbridge district. After Assange's relocation to the Ecuadorian



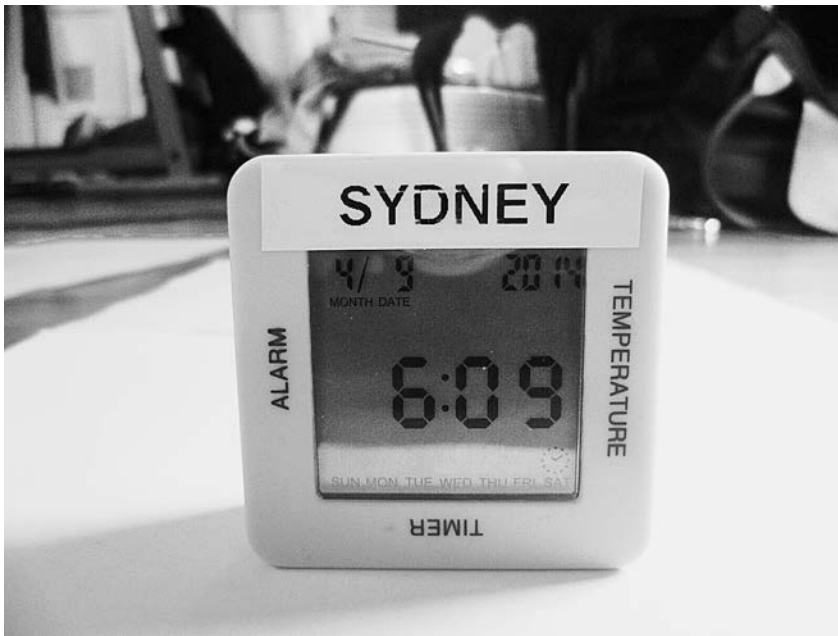


Figure 5. "The Elements of Dissident Domesticity." Photographs by Michał Murawski

embassy, the living conditions within—and their impact on his physical and mental health—became a new topic for ever more intense media speculation, as well as for stage management to the outside world.²⁸

Not only media interest but also the presence and threat of surveillance—as well as potential coercion or apprehension—are aggravated in the context of the Ecuadorian embassy, compared to the more remote surrounds of rural Norfolk and Kent. For a time, visitors would receive “Welcome to Uganda” text messages on their mobile phones upon entering the embassy. The speculation was that MI5 or GCHQ had simply neglected to reconfigure a listening device retrieved from a completed operation in East Africa. Mysterious roadwork would quite frequently take place directly outside the embassy window, and listening devices were occasionally discovered inside electricity sockets. The police, meanwhile, were permanently stationed in large numbers around the embassy, lying in wait to arrest a fleeing fugitive and poised to storm the premises, if given the order from above (fig. 6). Their presence was impossible to ignore and became a source of substantial media controversy when the multimillion-pound cost of the operation was revealed. Policemen’s voices, boorish conversations, and radio communications are constantly audible and visible within each of the embassy’s rooms. Windows are almost always closed and curtains near-permanently drawn in Assange’s living and working quarters, to prevent snooping not only by police and spies but also by journalists and curious passers-by (fig. 7). Music and white-noise recordings are played in an attempt to enable private conversation. The psychological and physiological impact of all the above—highlighted by visiting doctors—is enormous. Assange himself complained of feelings of claustrophobia, vitamin deficiencies, and serious impairment of spatial awareness and sense of balance. In his words, “The brain does not see change, and as the brain is calibrated by moving through space, being in confinement detrains these spatial muscles.”²⁹

In a report evaluating the extent to which Assange’s experience of confinement and police siege induced an effect comparable to torture, his psychiatrist Mike Korzinski outlined how the intellectual under house arrest will abandon the body. The relationship between the Internet and interiority is an experience those confined to their computers voluntarily know well enough. Korzinski presented this psychological retreat from the physical world as a result of incarceration at Assange’s Supreme Court hearing. Assange said he saw his “sense of relation” affected, saying “I used to be a good visual writer,” able to find visual analogies in writing.³⁰

Despite all of this, Assange had conceived of this enforced confinement as possessing an emancipatory as well as a repressive quality, stating that, on one hand, “my spatial conception of the outside world shuts down. . . . On the other hand, it’s a sort of autonomous zone, a sort of



Figure 6. Beyond the curtain: policemen play with their mobile phones in a van parked directly outside the Ecuadorian embassy, 2014. Photograph by Michał Murawski



Figure 7. A curtain inside the Ecuadorian embassy, 2014. Photograph by Michał Murawski

Room of One's Own. There are no police here—not inside at least. There are no subpoenas. And the spying that they're doing on me here, it can't be used in court. All the spying that's done here is illegal, and that provides a little solace.”³¹

Prison Writing and Prison Performance

From Paul the Apostle to the Marquis de Sade, Madame Roland to Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci to Nelson Mandela, across historical contexts and political-economic regimes, the prison has been not only a site of confinement and control but also one for forging political subjectivity through writing.³² Assange's invocation of Virginia Woolf connects him to the work of women writers, anti-imperial dissidents, and political activists, who turned the spaces of domestic confinement they inhabited into terrains of rebellion. From pamphlet writers and organizers in the Spanish American war of independence, via seventeenth-century Puritan English feminists, to Woolf's declaration in *A Room of One's Own*: “Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.”³³ The literature on women's dissident domesticity might be seen as part of a sub-genre of prison writing.

Another category of prison writing refers to work produced specifically under conditions of domestic incarceration. Prempeh's letters and writings belong here, as do the works of such figures as Aung San Suu Kyi, imprisoned in her home by the Burmese junta between 1990 and 2011; and the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty, who lived under diplomatic asylum in the American embassy in Budapest between 1956 and 1971.³⁴ In the words of Ines Weizman and Eyal Weizman, “spatial confinement and isolation may induce a process of creative, imaginative, sometimes spiritual, cultural production,” whereas prison cells themselves, through writing, “acquire a potential subversive content, becoming critical spatial apparatuses.”³⁵

The output produced by Assange and associates from within the confines of the embassy is voluminous. Most conventionally, it can be measured in commercially published books, key among which are three collections of essays: on the cypherpunk movement, on Google, and on the US diplomatic cables.³⁶ Aside from referring to his own space within the embassy in Woolfian terms, Assange has also sometimes expressed the hope that the written output produced by him—often together with staff and associates—might be comparable to “something like Gramsci's *Prison Diaries*, something written from under closed conditions, which can have a seditious effect.”³⁷

WikiLeaks exercises its sedition not only through writing but also in the possibilities and constraints of textual circulation. If in the early twen-

tieth century imperial power relied on attempts to order and contain public modalities of communication, a century later the struggle is over sifting and controlling almost endless data. Dissident subjects form oppositional subject positions in relation to these evolving information regimes.³⁸

Rather like Prempeh's mimetic performance, which embraced bodily decorum and sartorial choice as much as it did the style and content of the letters he wrote, WikiLeaks' dissident domesticity is not just written down; it is quite self-consciously planned, choreographed, broadcast, and performed. This performance takes place through a variety of media, encompassing installation art, photography, documentary film, and agit-prop, all broadcast through a mixture of traditional print- and film-based channels, as well as online social media.

Investigated: The Art of Dissident Domesticity

Working in an ethnographic conceptualist vein, we created *Investigated*, a multimedia installation that includes a juxtaposition of Assange's and Prempeh's domestic dissident comportment and the constraints and possibilities of their textual and bodily circulations. A central element of *Investigated* is a video loop of a digitally rendered architectural flythrough of Assange's room in the Ecuadorian embassy (fig. 8).³⁹ The camera's point of view circles around the room in slow motion, as if we are endlessly pacing at Assange's eye level. The furniture in the model embassy is rendered in all white, stripped of color, making Assange's space appear miniature. The video projection is thrown onto a wall in a small, confined room, accentuating the caged perspective from inside. This image is contrasted with a voiceover by Ghanaian rapper M3nsa reading a text from sections of this essay describing Prempeh's plight in the Seychelles, as well as excerpts from his letters. In an adjacent room, the live WikiLeaks' Twitter feed is displayed on an old laptop that viewers can bend down and scroll through showing its ever-present significance for the online broadcasting of radicalism and irreverence to the organization's multimillion audience of followers. It is contrasted with the intimate and private nature of Prempeh's letters (fig. 9), as hanging above the computer is a giant, blown-up copy of a typed letter from Prempeh in formal, polite language to a colonial official recounting the reasons he should be released. Juxtaposing Assange's angry, hyper-masculine Twitter persona with the gentlemanly mimesis of Prempeh's letters to British colonial authorities within the space of an art gallery amplifies the contrasting modes of writing. Scalar inversions further highlight similarities and difference between the elegantly crafted, oversized letter that is only ever read by a few people, and the voluminous, digital stream of information potentially accessible to anyone with an Internet connection (fig. 10). *Investigated* highlights



Figure 8. “Dissident Domesticity” video still from *Investigated* installation: digital rendering of Assange’s room in the Ecuadorian embassy by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Gustav Düsing with Michał Murawski. Courtesy of Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll

the uncanny parallels of the two cases: through different technologies, utterly distant from each other across time and space, dissident subjects respond to empire and in the process try to reshape their own possibilities and audiences. While Assange relishes his position as outsider even as he remains stranded within the power center of London, Prempeh—stranded at power’s periphery—aims to return to the centers of London to meet directly with the queen to discuss his case, and to Kumasi to return as sovereign of his subjects. In differing ways, they both remain stuck inside and outside of power.

Ethnographically informed conceptual art practices raise questions about intimacy, communicative circulation, and control, both by bringing technologies of information into the gallery-museum and, conversely, by transforming spaces of confinement into artworks. Art and dissidence instrumentalize each other in mutually beneficial ways within the prison house, especially when the manipulation of media in dissident domestic situations leverages intimate space into political theater. Through contrasting the public and private spheres, there emerges a particular kind of representation that mediates what we define here as dissident domesticity. Political activism seems increasingly to take refuge in art.



Figure 9. *Investigated*, by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Jesse Weaver Shipley: close-up of old laptop with WikiLeaks Twitter feed and photocopies of handwritten letter by Premph asking for his release. Photograph by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Jesse Weaver Shipley

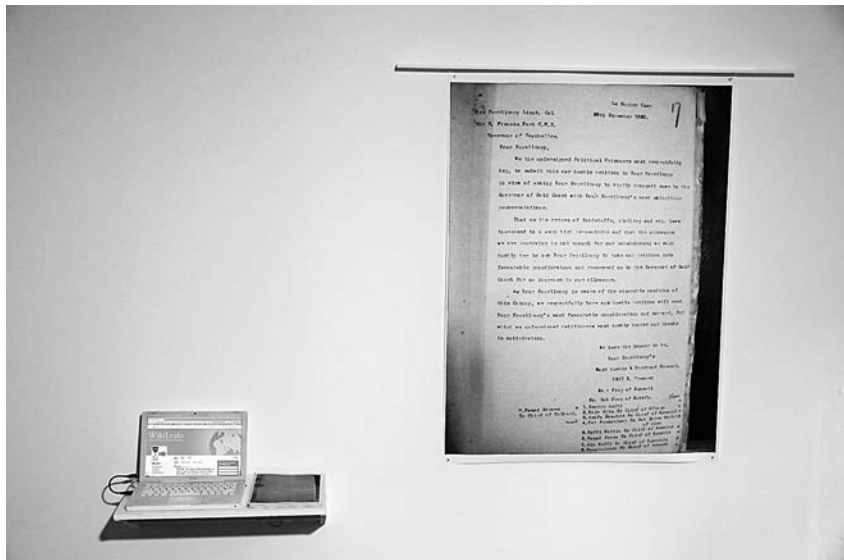


Figure 10. *Investigated*, by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Jesse Weaver Shipley: old laptop with WikiLeaks Twitter feed juxtaposed with blown-up typed letter and photocopies of another handwritten letter both written by Premph asking for his release; the letters are housed in the Seychelles National Archives. Photograph by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Jesse Weaver Shipley

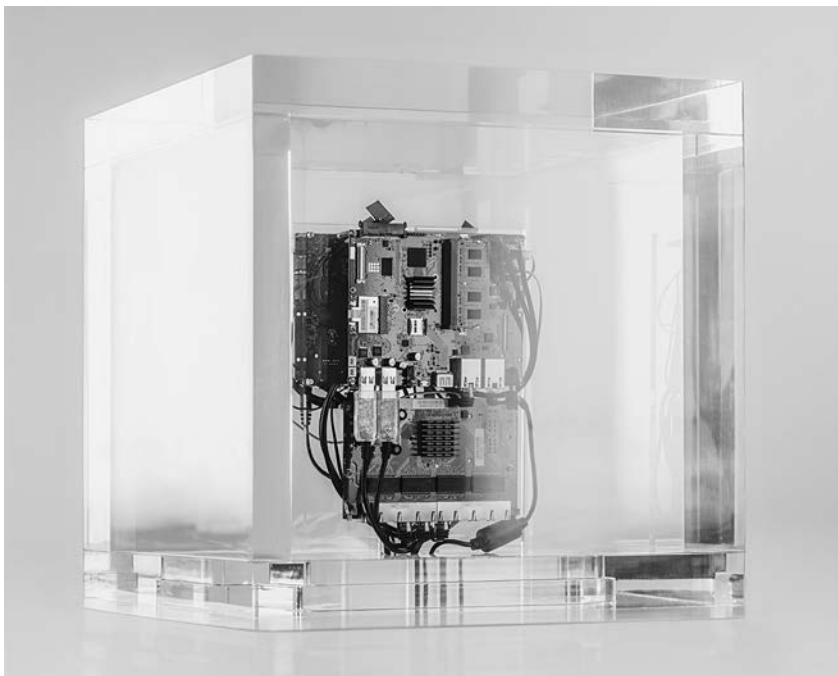


Figure 11. *Autonomy Cube*. Trevor Paglen, 2015–, mixed media

Since 2012, numerous artists have taken up WikiLeaks and information dissidents such as Assange, Edward Snowden, and Chelsea Manning as subjects of their work and inspirational for their practice. For example, *Autonomy Cube*—referencing Hans Haake’s 1965 sculpture *Condensation Cube*—is an encrypted server that is a casing both artistic and political. Trevor Paglin’s collaboration with WikiLeaks on *Autonomy Cube* is a merger of minimalist sculpture and hacktivism (fig. 11). Designed for art museums, galleries, and civic spaces, the sculpture houses an open Wi-Fi hotspot, routed over the Tor network that anonymizes the data of every user. When *Autonomy Cube* is installed, the sculpture, host institution, and users all become part of a privacy-oriented public, built through a volunteer-run Internet infrastructure.⁴⁰

Art, Power, and Co-optation in the Royal Borough

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea—the location of London’s Ecuadorian embassy, Assange’s own “autonomy cube”—is a fraught staging ground for power, as well as dissidence, conceptual art, and ethnographic research. Amid the labyrinth of townhouses clogged by conspicuous consumers and rallied by Saudi supercars, the sudden punctuation of

protesters on a corner just behind Harrods is the first sign of contestation among the ostentation. There are layers of security: a pair of Metropolitan police officers stand as sentinels on either side of the outer door, and a security-firm ninja guards the reception with the embassy itself. This Lycra-clad security goon does a frisk for all recording devices and then leads visitors down the corridor of the pokey first-floor apartment to one of three rooms. It is locked from the inside.

Also in the Royal Borough, just half a mile from the Ecuadorian mission, is London's Victoria and Albert Museum. At the museum's *All of This Belongs to You* exhibit, a glass vitrine houses a smashed up MacBook, a computer-cum-objet trouvé, reconstituted from a machine containing Snowden's National Security Administration files, which *Guardian* journalists themselves—under GCHQ supervision—iconoclastically destroyed at the newspaper's offices in 2013. Like Assange's embassy quarters, these cyberremains form an airless nonplace where the working of dissidence is strangled in an asthmatic container. The aestheticized museum display plays up the demonstrative victimhood on the part of the press.

The destruction of the *Guardian* laptop is even described by the newspaper's editor, Alan Rusbridger, as “a peculiarly pointless piece of symbolism.”⁴¹ It does not function like the data held in multiple copies overseas, on slow release. A performance of iconoclasm against Apple makes myth of the blundering campaign.⁴² The curators call on the art history of “pure matter” and “power of the invisible,” but what is the significance of objects of dissident domesticity?⁴³ Violence on display in the context of beautiful artifacts is what the museum registers as radical.⁴⁴ Why not classify this story of spectacular performance as a conceptual artifact rather than celebrate it is an index for liberal awareness? Can Assange's Ecuadorian embassy room be declared a conceptual work with potential criticality, or is it just another little British house museum in waiting?

Assange thrives on but also disdains commentary on himself. The Ecuadorian embassy as a set for dissident domesticity is a living room salon for hack writers, with Assange as *saloniere*. This is not a self-definition but an analysis of art that thrives on the limits of WikiLeaks' self-portrayal. As site of experiment and proposition, the embassy room is more complex than a singular ideology or practice. Artist friends such as the rapper MIA, film director Laura Poitras, and theatre director Angela Richter visit the embassy. Angela Richter's 2014 theatre piece *Assassinate Assange* uses sound recordings made from the windowsill, under the curtain, of the immediate outside world. What can be made out in the messy sound recordings are loud bangs and footsteps coming from the Harrods loading bay, just beyond the window; the banter of boorish male police officers

talking to each other and passers-by; loud recorded noises of rainfall, played to cover conversation from surveillance.⁴⁵

Sarah Lucas and other celebrity, blue-chip artists made multiple mysterious visits to the Ecuadorian embassy between 2013 and 2017. Fashion designer Vivienne Westwood offered her help, and so did conceptual artists.⁴⁶ The Swiss duo Bitnik, for instance, made an unsolicited representation of the space. Evading the ban on photographs with photographic memory, they re-created Assange's embassy space. Following a mail-art piece that records postal violations and bugging, they made a series of works that turned the embassy into an exhibition in a Zurich gallery. This replica off-site embassy identifies an institutional critique both within its own conceptual art methods and in the sites of activism it appropriates.

The strategic domestication of dissidence in other artworks associates it with femininity, an attribute absent in much of the highly mediated dissidence. The objects inside the embassy that we documented for our research on dissident domesticity and our *Investigated* exhibition included Assange's trainers, used to run on the treadmill given to him by director Ken Loach.⁴⁷ We photographed the bad-boy leather jacket used in the press photos that German newspaper *Die Zeit* cruelly contrasted to a portrait taken of Assange three years later, looking housebroken by the embassy, wearing a crumpled suit and exuding an unhealthy pallor. O'Hagan, furthermore, also wrote in detail about the dishevelment of expensive suits that Assange received from wealthy supporters.⁴⁸ Exposing and articulating the currency of fashioning the political self, the artist Elizabeth Newman made a *WikiLeaks Dress*. Printed with repeated text that reads "Enemy of the State," it plays on the ambiguity between being an enemy and "a dupe of the state in which everyone is a potential enemy."⁴⁹

Inserted into the terms of the other items of clothing around the embassy, *WikiLeaks Dress* is an affirmation of art under the conditions of developed capitalism. As in the avant-garde tension between two opposed movements—the rejection of capitalism and accommodation of it—these works find a social location where this tension is visible and can be acted upon.⁵⁰ The *WikiLeaks Dress* materializes a moment of contradiction that best expresses and articulates the conditions of dissident objects within capitalism. Newman said "the dress is an ironic comment upon fashion that tries to be critical, knowing that it can only be a knot or a contradiction, and never free."⁵¹ Bodily adornments replicate the structural conditions we live in without seeking to escape them. Made in the context of the Australian press's attacks on the WikiLeaks party during its election campaign, calling this the *WikiLeaks Dress* shifts the kind of mainstream attention afforded to WikiLeaks.

Photo opportunities with visiting celebrities, supporters, and radicals—such as a 2013 Lady Gaga house call or a 2015 encounter with



Figure 12. "The Ecuadorian Balcony," from *Investigated* installation. Photograph by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll

former prison house comrade and artist Ai Weiwei—are carefully choreographed, tweeted, press-released, or Instagrammed. Journalists are occasionally invited in for *Hello! Magazine*-esque photo shoots, and the line between artistic explorations—orchestrated by artists working either in collaboration with or independently of WikiLeaks itself—and other aspects of media or propaganda spectacle is not always easy to discern. Artist activists like Weiwei can speak to the fictions of security, can highlight the fictional nature of political rhetoric, and can retreat back into the gallery to appear harmless to the world of politics. An especially unique status, meanwhile, is reserved for rare outings, carefully planned, consulted with public relations consultants and lawyers, on the Ecuadorian embassy's ceremonial, flag-bearing street-corner balcony (fig. 12).

Performing the Political Balcony

While the circulation of information in secret, epistolary, or Twitter forms is one focus of dissident subjects and artworks on their significance, their public display on the visible edge of imperial power is another space of

contestation. The balcony appearance—usually the preserve of queens, kings, and presidents—belongs to an established genre of grand state theater, of “events-that-present,” in Don Handelmann’s typology of political performance.⁵² It grants crowds of ordinary mortals the opportunity for a face-to-face encounter with a sovereign or an otherwise extraordinary personage, and it allows the balcony occupant to stir and channel the affects of the multitude gathered directly below, and of the whole body politic beyond—of *urbi et orbi*, “the city of Rome and the entire world,” in the case of the addresses delivered by Roman Catholic popes from the central loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica. As such, the political balcony is a tremendously effective locus for centrality—a site for the gathering together of different scales, social phenomena, and spheres of life. Tom Avermaete’s Elements of Architecture pavilion at the 2014 Venice Biennale of Architecture featured an installation recreating several real-life political balconies, Assange’s among them. The significance of the balcony is that it functions as an element connecting, with particular clarity and expressiveness, numerous elements of architecture and the social functions it unites. As Avermaete states, “It links up the public and the private, the individual and collective, the indoor and the outdoor.”⁵³

As of October 2017, Julian Assange has so far stepped out onto the stately terrain of London’s Ecuadorian embassy balcony six times. In two speeches, made in August and December 2012, he thanked supporters, the Ecuadorian government, and embassy staff and drew parallels between his own plight and that of other “political prisoners,” including Chelsea Manning and Jeremy Hammond in the United States, Nabeel Rajab in Bahrain, and Pussy Riot in Russia. Over the subsequent three years, Assange ventured onto this intermediary terrain only four times: in November 2014 for a seemingly unplanned outing with Noam Chomsky; in August 2015, arm in arm with Reverend Jesse Jackson; and in February 2016, when dressed in shirt and tie he clutched a printout of a United Nations report ruling that he has been, in fact, “arbitrarily detained” by the Swedish and UK governments since his first arrest in December 2010. The balcony appearance, planned for October 2016—during which Assange was to announce WikiLeaks’ release of the Hilary Clinton campaign e-mails hacked from the Democratic National Convention—was canceled at the last minute, the announcement instead made via video stream at a Berlin technology conference. In May 2017—following Swedish prosecutors’ dropping of the remaining sexual misconduct allegations—Assange stepped out onto the balcony once more, leather jacket clad, with his clenched fist raised. He declared “victory,” but British police remain poised to arrest him for skipping bail and the Trump administration has stated that arresting Assange is a priority.

Assange, in other words, has become reluctant to venture out to

the balcony, onto the terrain that stands most clearly for the mediation between the macro of the political, legal, and surveillance whirlwind outside, and the microdomain of private life inside the prison house within. One explanation is that Assange is simply concerned for his safety. As he told journalists in 2015, “There are security issues with being on the balcony. . . . I’m a public figure and a very controversial one. . . . As a result there have been quite a number of threats from various people.”⁵⁴ WikiLeaks staff, however, dismiss the idea that security is a core concern in this regard. Indeed, Assange’s reluctance to step out onto the intermediary space of the balcony suggests that WikiLeaks’ dissident domestic existence within the prison house is beginning to undergo something like a “crisis of centrality”—all the more so given the eruption of mystery and controversy concerning WikiLeaks’ role in releasing the Clinton e-mails and the ongoing failure to conclusively prove Assange’s innocence of the Swedish sexual abuse allegations.

Toward a Good Centrality (No Meatspace in the Enclave)

Our experiments in ethnographic conceptualism combine archival and ethnographic research with art practice and link disparate times and places through conceptual affinity. We aim to define how domesticity can be a form of political control and conversely a space for developing new forms of embodiment that elude recognition. Dissidence is demarcated by an aesthetics and a morality of inhabiting domestic spaces and domesticated ways of being that are in tension with the public persona of figures of opposition. The relation between dissidence and domestication bears a striking resemblance to how various avant-garde art movements aim to avoid pigeonholing. As the avant-garde gains recognition, it struggles to elude the forms of discipline and control that come with being ossified within generic categorizations. In this vein, scholars, artists, and public figures fetishize a disalienated life and unmediated experience. The search to find the authentic, the real takes myriad forms. Analytically, it leads to a slippage between categories and objects of inquiry. Fictions of security and anxiety over miscegenation underpin orders of control that aim to make bodies, signs, and genres legible and separable. These fictions are hailed and become recognizable in oppositional forms. This recognition and opposition emerge in particularly stark ways through the logic of imperial rule, but the idea of the authentic guarantees its impossibility and produces the world of the mediated. Just as Edward Prempeh, the last sovereign king of Asante, remade himself as a covert, dissident colonial subject by taking on the public practices of a complete gentleman, seeking a return to power in new clothes, Assange is remade as an immoral primitive, a caged animal who necessitates constant surveillance.

Perhaps, contemporary invocations of the idea of an enclave or zone of autonomy can take a lesson from Prempeh's use of his island veranda and colonial interpretations of it. One staging ground for his use of British gentlemanly styles was photography.⁵⁵ Over the years, formal portraits capture Prempeh with his family and retinue in formal poses with his house's veranda as backdrop. In the early years Prempeh and company are dressed in Kente cloth and the regalia of Asante chieftaincy. But as the years go by, they more often dress in Western attire: dapper suits and elegant dresses. These images appear as demonstrations of public civility and Asante pacification meant for consumption by British media and colonial officials. When this author toured Prempeh's former prison house in 2009, the current resident—an elderly descendent of the *grand blanc* family that had leased the house for the purposes of Prempeh's confinement—made a point of stopping on the back edge of the veranda and pointing to an innocuous patch of burned wood in the floorboards (figs. 13 and 14). She explained that the Asante residents had “not used the house properly,” cooking outside and in general acting in ways unfamiliar to European mores; most telling, in her mind, her ancestors had told her this small charred hole in the floor was where Prempeh “burned sacrifices” to his “African gods.” This apocryphal story speaks to the logic of colonial racist notions of how Africans act and the relationship between performance and intimacy among the colonized: no matter how they appear in public—properly dressed and well mannered—there is always a core of inner primitivism that cannot be changed with the trappings of civilization that colonial rule is imagined to bring. In the European imagination, the dread that the Asantehene had African gods and multiple wives, and owned slaves was never really tempered by his public, Christian gentlemanly persona. The veranda is a liminal space situated on the edge of the domestic body and the public eye, perfect for stories about staging and uncertainty, for interpreting performances of self and their sociopolitical implications.

In 1924, the British finally authorized Prempeh's return to Kumasi when they deemed that Asante sovereignty was no longer a threat to British rule in the Gold Coast colony. In the more than two decades since the king's removal, Asante had been reshaped by Western education, missionization, the establishment of cocoa as a cash crop, and developing transportation and civil service infrastructures of a colonial protostate. Furthermore, the British policy of indirect rule that shaped colonial administration from the late nineteenth century was in full effect. It had meant that over time the British had installed cooperative Asante chiefs and ruled with them as political and economic mediators, many becoming wealthy through monopolizing the growing and transportation of cocoa crops for the global market.⁵⁶ British rule of the Gold Coast colony, in



Figure 13. Prempeh's veranda today. Photograph by Jesse Weaver Shipley

effect, operated through, rather than against, the political legitimacy of chieftaincy with its public pageantry and nuanced structures of power.⁵⁷ In this context, Prempeh was allowed to return as a private citizen and later become chief of the city of Kumasi, but never to regain his position as sovereign Asantehene.

The reversals of political imagery were perhaps most visible when, soon after Edward Prempeh's return home, His Royal Highness Edward



Figure 14. The burned floorboards on the veranda in Prempeh's house. Photography by Jesse Weaver Shipley

the Prince of Wales stopped in the Gold Coast colony as part of his tour of the British Empire. In Kumasi, a *durbar*—a spectacular ritual combining Indian royal ceremony, appropriated by the British, with West African chiefly displays—was held in the Prince of Wales's honor. As official photographs show, at the ceremony Edward, Prince of Wales, was dressed in resplendent colonial regalia, a white suit with bejeweled metals and pith helmet with feathered plume, and was seated on the central dais as Asante

chiefs, dressed in royal Kente clothes and gold jewelry, came up, removed their sandals—a sign of obeisance—and pledged their allegiances. Official images show Edward Prempeh standing demurely to the side dressed in a three-piece suit.⁵⁸ Prempeh's fervent desire to escape his island prison, dressed in the suits of British Empire, and to use his newly fashioned persona to reenter the political center raises questions about how oppositional subjects can hide in plain sight in the midst of spectacles of centralized power. Mutual multidirectional copying shapes the political aesthetics of Gold Coast colonial rule as the British inhabit the terms of Asante political legitimacy and Prempeh aims to take on the power of British gentlemanly form. Mimesis as political performance, then, is not a type of emulation or realism but instead a conceptual practice that raises questions about reference and intent in the making of power.⁵⁹

The activities of WikiLeaks arguably have constituted one of the most powerful, conscious political challenges to hegemonic forms of political centrality—especially to the centrality of information—in recent years. Nevertheless, WikiLeaks itself, concentrated around the person of Julian Assange, is far from functioning as an organization devoid of its own forms of centrality, concentration, or hierarchy. WikiLeaks makes no pretense at being organized according to a nonhierarchical, “horizontal” decision-making structure or of constituting a faceless, amorphous mass, like the hackers’ collective Anonymous.⁶⁰ Responding to this centrality, many otherwise sympathetic critics have expressed dismay at the extent to which WikiLeaks—WikiLeakistan, in Bodo Balazs’s phrase—reproduces many features of the sovereignty regimes it claims to confront, or fails to disassemble the political ideology and habitus of liberal individualism, remaining captive to the old heroic liberal “fantasy of individual agency.”⁶¹ Further, it conforms, says Russ Castronovo citing Bruno Latour, to “standard geographies of social space that assume stable centers of fixed points.”⁶²

But must we assess the work of WikiLeaks according to how well it succeeds in achieving the decentralization or decapitation of power or of sovereignty? Is the work of WikiLeaks, and of counterhegemonic, anti-imperial political projects in general, necessarily driven by a centrifugal rather a centripetal dynamic? Is WikiLeaks’ problem really that it has too much centrality? For Henri Lefebvre, radicalism or sedition involve not merely the abolition of the existing power center but, much more important, the constitution of a powerful but substantively alternate centrality in its place: “As long as certain relationships of production and ownership remain unchanged, centrality will be subjected to those who use these relationships and benefit from them.”⁶³ And indeed, “centralities have always eventually disappeared—some displaced, some exploded, some subverted. They have perished sometimes on account of

their excesses—through ‘saturation’—and sometimes on account of their shortcomings, the chief among which, the tendency to expel dissident elements, has a backlash effect.”⁶⁴ Twenty-first-century cyberdissidents, however, are difficult to simply expel in that they challenge the notions of center and periphery, inside and outside, in how they operate and in the techniques of state discipline deployed to contain them. As Bruce Sterling observes:

You can tell that Manning, Assange and Snowden are all the same kind of irritant, because, somehow, amazingly, the planet’s response is to physically squish them. They’re all online big-time, and their digital shadow is huge, so the response is just to squeeze their mortal human bodies, literally, legally, extra-legally, by whatever means available. It’s a wrestling match of virtuality and actuality, an interruption of the physical into the digital. It’s all about Bradley shivering naked in his solitary cage, and Julian diligently typing in his book-lined closet at the embassy, and Ed bagging out behind the plastic seating of some airport. . . . And these tiny, confined, somehow united spaces are the moral high ground. That’s where it is right now, that’s what it looks like these days.⁶⁵

It is the visual evidence of this struggle between virtual and actual control that artists Trevor Paglin, Laura Poitras, and others capture. The whole “solitary cage” remains carefully obscured and mediated only in strategic measures. Exile and political asylum are claustrophobic spaces that force physical retreat. As Snowden’s laptop is evidence to the grand London museum, the body of the dissident becomes in its controlled mediation.

In the later decades of the twentieth century, Marxist spatial thinkers spent a lot of time poring over enclave theory. As long as the reigning global order exists, is it possible—debated Henri Lefebvre, Manfredo Tafuri, and Frederic Jameson—to create noncapitalist, seditious, unmediated terrains within its dominion?⁶⁶ All of them either answered in the negative or failed to come up with very convincing renditions of what these enclaves might consist. Assange, meanwhile, has described his ongoing search for an “openness haven” as a counterpoint to the offshore “secrecy havens” like the Cayman Islands, Liechtenstein, or Guantanamo Bay that underlie government and corporate structures. The Republic of Ecuador functions as a spectral haven for WikiLeaks, but currently this function is performed by the embassy of Ecuador: an ultraenclosed but extraterritorial enclave of dissidence. In prescient fashion, Kumasi functioned as a desired site of return for Prempeh during his decades-long exile in the Seychelles. Prempeh’s eventual return to Kumasi, however, saw the onetime sovereign publicly sidelined, even if the public facsimile of Asante power was retained within an imperial order of British overrule.

So, in the absence of a haven, can sites of domestic incarceration—

these awkward, anaplastic, extrajudicial sites—function as the enclaves of dissidence (or irreverence) that the Marxists sought? Julian Assange’s increasing reluctance to exit onto his balcony might provide a clue. WikiLeaks has for years been practicing a conscious politics of centrality—a centrality that relies on performance as well as writing, and physical (“meatspace,” in geek talk) as well as digital (cyberspace) interaction with the multitudes. Assange’s increasing reluctance to step out onto his balcony—the last vestige of meatspace available to him—showed how WikiLeaks continued to plod on as a stymied, or even compromised, political actor as long as it remained inside the prison house. The more seldom he emerged into the fresh air, the more Assange took on the appearance of a criminal villain holed up in his lair and the less that of a just outcast, receiving sanctuary from prosecution by the powerful.

And when (or if) Assange finally does emerge from his enclave and reaches his next destination (whether it is an Ecuadorian haven, a British or American prison, or another terrain altogether), what will be his own fate and that of the organization that pivots around him? Will they crumple under the weight of the myriad pathologizing associations, real or imagined—from sexual misconduct to unsavory political forces—that have become fixed to them during their long period of incarceration? Or will they be able to capitalize on the rhetoric and aesthetic of irreverence sustained and broadcast to the world during his sojourn in the prison house?

Notes

1. See Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. The production of various European imperial power relied upon the remaking of intimate worlds and how they linked to public life. In doing so, imperial imaginations mapped European gender/sex identities onto non-Western spaces. For examinations of the centrality of gender and sex for the making of colonial worlds in Asante and related West Africa contexts, see Allman and Tashjian, “*I Will Not Eat Stone*”; Hawkins, ““Woman in Question””; Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*; and Mikell, *Cocoa and Chaos in Ghana*.

2. Henri Lefebvre’s notion of dialectical centrality provides a way for thinking through how processes of exclusion and inclusion, gathering and dispersal, control and resistance converge on particular key sites or “spatial factors.” See Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 292–352. For an elaboration on the “political aesthetics and political morphology” of centrality, see Murawski, “Radical Centres.”

3. There is an increasing body of literature on how informational sovereignty regimes make their mark on the material culture and aesthetics of dwelling. See Watters, “Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Domopolitics”; and Brickell, “Geopolitics of Home.”

4. *Ethnographic conceptualism* refers to practices of conceptual art as ethnography, and ethnography as conceptual art. See Ssorin-Chaikov, “Introduction”; Murawski, “Palaceology”; and Carroll, “Fight the Dragon Long.”

5. For example, Fang Chuan Ye paints portraits of British figures of power.

Fang sent his paintings as gifts with letters to plea for release from UK Immigration Detention Centre Campsfield House in 2012. See Bosworth and Carroll, “Art and Criminology of the Border.”

6. See Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*.”

7. Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*.

8. See Ewing, *Rumor, Diplomacy, and War in Enlightenment Paris*; and Soll, *Information Master*.

9. See Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 2*.

10. See Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, 274–323.

11. See Killingray, “Punishment to Fit the Crime?”

12. See Bettie, *Punishment in Paradise*; and Spieler, *Empire and Underworld*.

13. See Rattray, *Ashanti*.

14. Several other high-profile leaders from around the British Empire had been resident in the Seychelles as punishment. Sultan Abdullah Muhammad Shah II was exiled in 1877 from Malaysia for his alleged role in the murder of a British resident and released in 1894. Mwanga II Mukasa the Kabaka of Buganda in present-day Uganda was exiled in 1899 to the Seychelles after fighting against British rule and died in exile in 1903.

15. C/SS/2, vol. 5, Political Exiles: Ashanti-Ex-King Prempeh and Others Additional Papers for Years 1901–21, documents 40 and 41, Seychelles National Archives, Mahé, Seychelles.

16. The governor further expresses concern that the exile has been inadequate to demonstrate British power in the Gold Coast and worried that the prisoners are not given too much concession. “The loyal Ashantis look on the punishment we have inflicted on most of those that were in arms against us as ridiculously weak and inadequate.” C/SS/2, vol. 5, Political Exiles: Ashanti-Ex-King Prempeh and Others Additional Papers for Years 1901–21, documents 40 and 41, Seychelles National Archives, Mahé, Seychelles.

17. An October 1922 correspondence from Downing Street to the officer administering the government of Seychelles approves the petition by several chiefs in exile to return to the Gold Coast on the condition that they will “not allow themselves to be drawn into political affairs.” Prempeh’s petition is rejected, though it is noted that if the political situation in Ashanti is calm and the returning chiefs do not cause trouble, he is invited to reapply in two years. C/SS/2, vol. 5, Political Exiles: Ashanti-Ex-King Prempeh and Others Additional Papers for Years 1901–21, document XX, Seychelles National Archives, Mahé, Seychelles.

18. No. C/SS/2, vol. 1, Political Exiles: Political Exiles—Ashanti-Ex-King Prempeh and Others, 1900–1906, document 66, Seychelles National Archives, Mahé, Seychelles.

19. No. C/SS/2, vol. 1, Political Exiles: Political Exiles—Ashanti-Ex-King Prempeh and Others, 1900–1906, document XX, Seychelles National Archives, Mahé, Seychelles.

20. See Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*; and Shipley, *Living the Hiplife*.

21. O’Hagan. “Ghosting.”

22. See Harding, *Mafia State*.

23. For a description of Assange as bag lady, see Keller, “WikiLeaks, a Postscript.” For a description of Assange as cat abuser, see Domscheit-Berg, *Inside WikiLeaks*, 73.

24. O’Hagan, “Ghosting.”

25. Weiweicam.com (accessed 3 April 2012).
26. Hope, "WikiLeaks."
27. WikiLeaks, "Smear and Joy."
28. Two BBC TV series have featured either single installments or multi-episode plot lines inspired by the Ecuadorian saga: the 2013 teen spy show *By Any Means* and 2014's *Asylum*. An embittered, embassy-bound Assange, furthermore, was portrayed in the final scene of the 2013 Hollywood box office flop *The Fifth Estate*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch.
29. Julian Assange, in conversation with Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Michał Murawski, 29 March 2014, Ecuadorian embassy, London.
30. Ibid. See also Obrist, "In Conversation with Julian Assange."
31. Julian Assange, interview by Michał Murawski, 11 March 2014, Ecuadorian Embassy, London.
32. See Ines Weizman and Eyal Weizman's online collection of prison writing, which started life as an exhibit at the Fondazione Sandretto de Rebaudengo in Turin in 2008: Weizman and Weizman, *Celltexts.com*.
33. Woolf, *Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, 57. See also Brewster, "Women and the Spanish-American Wars of Independence"; Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century*; and Garner, Boynton, and Malin, *Herspace*.
34. Aung San Suu Kyi, *Letters from Burma*; Mindszenty, *Memoirs*.
35. Weizman and Weizman, *Celltexts.com*.
36. See Assange et al., *Cyberpunks*; Assange, *When Google Met WikiLeaks*; and Assange, Introduction.
37. Assange interview.
38. For work on the complex entanglement of technology and subversion, see Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy*.
39. Digital model by architect Gustav Düsing. For more documentation of the *Investigated* exhibition at Savvy Contemporary Berlin in 2014, see www.kdja.org/web/PartialProclamations/index.html (accessed 6 June 2016).
40. Description from artist's description of the work. Paglen, "Work." The name of Paglen's work calls to mind the Soviet idea of the "social condenser," a theory and practice of radical spatiality. For background, see Murawski, "Introduction: Crystallising the Social Condenser."
41. Alan Rusbridger, quoted in Brown, "Guardian's Destroyed Snowden Laptop."
42. Katy Barrett, cited in Higgitt, "Destroyed Snowden Laptop."
43. Higgitt, "Destroyed Snowden Laptop."
44. Victoria and Albert Museum curator Kieran Long speaks of "stories they told rather than the artefact's intrinsic beauty or interest." Higgitt, "Destroyed Snowden Laptop."
45. Sound recordings of the Ecuadorian embassy by Angela Richter for Theater Schauspiel Köln, sent to Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, 5 April 2014.
46. Paglin's previous works such as *Code Names of the Surveillance State* (2014) and *The Other Night Sky* (2007) show precedent strategies. For more on these two works, see Paglin, "Works."
47. *Dissident Domesticity* was developed with the support of Artangel for its 2014 opening and shown in the Urban Laboratory London. See Carroll, *Investigated*.
48. O'Hagan, "Ghosting."
49. Correspondence between Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Elizabeth Newman, February 2015.
50. See Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*.

51. Carroll and Newman correspondence. See also Carroll, "Painting the Political."
52. See Handelman, *Models and Mirrors*.
53. See Avermaete, "'Balcony.'" During a right-wing coup attempt on 30 September 2010, Ecuador's president Rafael Correa proved himself to be a virtuoso of the political balcony. For a detailed account, see Kurtenbach, "Tough Talk, Tear Gas, Tragedy."
54. Press Association, "Julian Assange Fears Assassination Attempt."
55. The Basel Mission Archives have numerous examples; see, e.g., "Ex-King Prempeh of Asante on the Seychelles," www.bmarchives.org/items/show/56896.
56. For other examples of how artists and scholars examine colonial and post-colonial relations of capital to agriculture and land see the discussion of artist Otobong Nkanga's work in the Tropicomania exhibit (2002) in Carroll, *Botanical Drift*.
57. See Shipley, *Trickster Theatre*.
58. Anonymous, *Visit of His Royal Highness*.
59. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*. European artists have since the early twentieth century drawn on African art for inspiration in ways that foreground ideas of copying: African imitations of nature and European theft of African aesthetics because Europeans attribute African artistic expression to skills of observation and culture rather than creativity or political savvy. Jean Rouch's 1955 film *Les Maitres Fous* addresses the powerful contradictions embedded in how African expressive forms remake European styles.
60. On this comparison, see Coleman, "Hacker Politics and Publics."
61. Castronovo, "State Secrets," 431. See also Balázs, "You Have No Sovereignty Where We Gather."
62. *Ibid.*, 440.
63. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 76.
64. *Ibid.*, 303.
65. Sterling, "Ecuadorian Library."
66. See Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*; and Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology."

References

- Allman, Jean, and Victoria Tashjian. 2000. *"I Will Not Eat Stone": A Woman's History of Colonial Asante*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press.
- Anonymous. 1925. *Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to the Gold Coast Colony*. Accra: Gold Coast Information Services.
- Assange, Julian. 2014. *When Google Met WikiLeaks*. London: OR Books.
- Assange, Julian. 2015. Introduction to *The WikiLeaks Files: The World According to US Empire*, 1–19. London: Verso Books.
- Assange, Julian, Jacob Appelbaum, Andy Müller-Maguhn, and Jérémie Zimmermann. 2012. *Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet*. London: OR Books.
- Aung San Suu Kyi. 2010. *Letters from Burma*. London: Penguin.
- Avermaete, Tom. 2014. "'The Balcony', Central Pavilion, Venice Biennale of Architecture 2014." www.bk.tudelft.nl/fileadmin/Faculteit/BK/Actueel/Symposia_en_congressen/Biennale/PressAnnouncement_Balcony_exhibition.pdf (accessed 6 June 2016).
- Balázs, Bodo. 2011. "You Have No Sovereignty Where We Gather—WikiLeaks and

- Freedom, Autonomy and Sovereignty in the Cloud,” SSRN, dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1780519.
- Bettie, Peter M. 2015. *Punishment in Paradise: Race, Slavery, Human Rights, and a Nineteenth Century Brazilian Penal Colony*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bosworth, Mary, and Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll. 2017. “Art and Criminology of the Border: The Immigration Detention Archive.” *Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform* 1. www.oarplatform.com/issue/issue-1/.
- Brewster, Claire. 2005. “Women and the Spanish-American Wars of Independence: An Overview.” *Feminist Review* 79, no. 1: 20–35.
- Brickell, Katherine. 2012. “Geopolitics of Home.” *Geography Compass* 6, no. 10: 575–88.
- Brown, Mark. 2015. “Guardian’s Destroyed Snowden Laptop to Feature in Major V&A Show.” *Guardian*, 28 February. www.theguardian.com/media/2015/feb/27/guardians-destroyed-snowden-laptop-to-feature-in-major-va-show.
- Carroll, Khadija von Zinnenburg. 2013. “Fight the Dragon Long, the Dragon You Become: Performing Viewers in the Graffiti Monument.” *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 1, no. 3: 101–27.
- Carroll, Khadija von Zinnenburg. 2014. *Investigated*. Video installation, SAVVY Contemporary Berlin. www.kdja.org/web/PartialProclamations/index.html.
- Carroll, Khadija von Zinnenburg, ed. 2017. *Botanical Drift: Plant Protagonists of the Invasive Herbarium*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Carroll, Khadija von Zinnenburg. Forthcoming. “Painting the Political in Oceanian Textile Cultures: Collectivity, Syncretism and Globalization.” In *A Companion to Textile Culture*, edited by Jennifer Harris. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Castronovo, Russ. 2013. “State Secrets: Ben Franklin and WikiLeaks.” *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 3: 425–50.
- Coleman, Gabriella. 2011. “Hacker Politics and Publics.” *Public Culture* 23, no. 3: 511–16.
- Coleman, Gabriella. 2015. *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*. London: Verso.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. Vol. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Crow, Thomas E. 1996. *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Darnton, Robert. 1999. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books.
- Domscheit-Berg, Daniel. 2011. *Inside WikiLeaks: My Time with Julian Assange at the World’s Most Dangerous Website*. New York: Random House.
- Ewing, Tabettha Leigh. 2014. *Rumor, Diplomacy, and War in Enlightenment Paris*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. “Society Must Be Defended”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. New York: Picador.
- Garner, J. Dianne, Victoria Boynton, and Jo Malin. 2004. *Herspace: Women, Writing, and Solitude*. London: Routledge.
- Gillespie, Katharine. 2004. *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women Writers and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Handelman, Don. 1998. *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*. London: Berghahn.

- Harding, Luke. 2011. *Mafia State: How One Reporter Became an Enemy of the Brutal New Russia*. New York: Random House.
- Hawkins, Sean. 2002. "'The Woman in Question': Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907–1954." In *Women in African Colonial Histories*, edited by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, 116–43. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Higgitt, Rebekah. 2015. "Destroyed Snowden Laptop: The Curatorial View." *Guardian*, 3 April. www.theguardian.com/science/the-h-word/2015/apr/03/destroyed-snowden-laptop-the-curatorial-view.
- Hope, Christopher. 2011. "WikiLeaks: Government 'Spying' on Julian Assange during House Arrest." *Telegraph*, 16 June. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/wikileaks/8579263/WikiLeaks-Government-spying-on-Julian-Assange-during-house-arrest.html.
- Jameson, Frederic. 1988. "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology." In *The Ideologies of Theory: The Syntax of History*, 35–60. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Keller, Bill. 2011. "WikiLeaks, a Postscript." *New York Times*, 19 February.
- Killingray, David. 2003. "Punishment to Fit the Crime? Penal Policy and Practice in British Colonial Africa." In *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*, edited by Florence Bernault, 97–118. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kurtenbach, Ralf. 2014. "Tough Talk, Tear Gas, Tragedy: The Fight to Frame One Day's Events in Ecuador." MA thesis, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1992. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Miescher, Stephan F. 2005. *Making Men in Ghana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mikell, Gwendolyn. 1991. *Cocoa and Chaos in Ghana*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.
- Mindszenty, József. 1974. *Memoirs*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Murawski, Michał. 2017. "Introduction: Crystallising the Social Condenser." *Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 3: 372–86.
- Murawski, Michał. 2013. "Palaceology, or Palace-as-Methodology: Ethnographic Conceptualism, Total Urbanism, and a Stalinist Skyscraper in Warsaw." *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Science* 1, no. 3: 56–83.
- Murawski, Michał. 2017. "Radical Centres: The Political Morphology of Monumentality in Johannesburg and Warsaw." *Third Text* 31, no. 1: 1–17.
- Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 2016. "In Conversation with Julian Assange." In *Internet Does Not Exist*, edited by Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, 207–45. Berlin: Sternberg.
- O'Hagan, Andrew. 2014. "Ghosting." *London Review of Books*, 6 March.
- Paglen, Trevor. 2016. "Work." www.paglen.com/?l=work (accessed 19 December).
- Press Association. 2015. "Julian Assange Fears Assassination Attempt." *Daily Telegraph*, 29 August.
- Rattray, R. S. (1923) 1969. *Ashanti*. New York: Negro Universities Press.
- Shipley, Jesse Weaver. 2013. *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Shipley, Jesse Weaver. 2015. *Trickster Theatre: The Poetics of Freedom in Urban Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Soll, Jacob. 2012. *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Spieler, Miranda Frances. 2012. *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Ssorin-Chaikov, Nikolai. 2013. "Introduction: Notes on Ethnographic Conceptualism." *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 1, no. 2: 5–18.
- Sterling, Bruce. 2013. "The Ecuadorian Library; or, The Blast Shack after Three Years." *Medium* (blog), 2 August. medium.com/@bruces/the-ecuadorian-library-a1ebd2b4a0e5#.m9awxmdfs.
- Stoler, Ann. 1995. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stoler, Ann. 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tafuri, Manfredo. 1976. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Taussig, Michael. 1992. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. London: Routledge.
- Watters, William. 2004. "Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Domopolitics." *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 3: 237–60.
- Weizman, Ines, and Eyal Weizman. 2008. *Celltexts.com*. celltexts.org/page/about (accessed 6 June 2016).
- WikiLeaks. 2012. "Smear and Joy." Press release, 18 April.
- Woolf, Virginia. 2015. *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.