Beyond the Master's Tools: In Conversation with Keller Easterling

Endriana Audisho, Keller Easterling & Jasper Ludewig

Published online: 11 Sep 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 29

View related articles

View Crossmark data

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS

Check for updates

Beyond the Master's Tools: In Conversation with Keller Easterling

Endriana Audisho[a], Keller Easterling[b] and Jasper Ludewig[a]

[a]University of Technology Sydney; [b]Yale University

ABSTRACT

Keller Easterling is an unconventional thinker. Spanning writing, creative practice and teaching, her work draws on disparate sources and intellectual traditions: from media theory to the philosophy of ecology; economic geography to game theory; anarchisms to feminisms; and from decolonisation to political discourse analysis. Infrastructure, mutualism, reparations, freedom, fugitivity, indeterminacy, whiteness, failure and solidarity emerge as core concerns in her wider attempts to develop an artistic approach capable of contending with contemporary forms of violence and power. In late 2023, *Architectural Theory Review* (*ATR*), in conjunction with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), invited Easterling to discuss her recent work on the civil rights movement in the US. Easterling sat down with Endriana Audisho (UTS) and Jasper Ludewig (*ATR*) to elaborate on the themes and questions that emerged from this work, discussing their relevance to her scholarship, pedagogy and broader spatial practice.

KEYWORDS

Land; infrastructure; reparations; Keller Easterling; activism

Keller Easterling is best known for the influential monographs in which she has developed a distinctive analytical approach for understanding diverse forms of spatial production—highways, houses, hotels, golf courses, free zones, campuses and cities—commonly termed "infrastructure space."[1] Notable titles include *Organization Space* (2001), *Enduring Innocence* (2007), *Extrastatecraft* (2014) and *Medium Design* (2021). Running alongside these more visible works, however, is a shadow archive of material: shorter articles, public lectures, interviews, syllabuses, creative projects, podcasts and works of fiction. This material not only extends the arguments presented in the books but also tests new thinking and frameworks for design scholarship. The following interview delves into Easterling's shadow archive, seeking connections across her expansive and varied body of work (fig. 1). The conversation is grounded in two ongoing projects—Trust Land and ATTTNT, a large-scale mapping project conceived as an infrastructure for reparations—approaching them not only as discrete pieces of work but as recent iterations of Easterling's sustained scholarship spanning more than two decades.

Figure 1. Keller Easterling delivering her lecture, "Trust Land," at the University of Technology Sydney, November 21, 2023. Photograph by Endriana Audisho.

Map, Script, Lexicon

Endriana Audisho (EA): In recent years you have become interested in a lesser-known chapter of the civil rights movement in the US focused on Albany, Georgia—a project you have written about for *Public Culture* in a recent article titled "Trust Land."[2] Can you situate this project in its historical context and outline the nature of your interest in it?

Keller Easterling (KE): Sure. Well, the project has grown a little bit since the *Public Culture* article was published, but Albany is one of those places where you can go to conjure a history of activism's long game. It's not a place associated with the red-letter dates of the civil rights movement. Rather, it's a place, like a number of others in the South, that is the subject of my current book project. Places like Albany and the people who attended to them will, I hope, constitute a kind of diary of ideas about land activism. The book will take people through a series of events and places and people in and around Albany, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; Lafayette, Louisiana; and Epes, Alabama.

Albany has a cluster of sites where one can immediately encounter these activist histories. It's a place that had the first community land trust in the US. It has a Nation of Islam farm and an early biracial communal farm. And that's typical of the other places I'm looking at as well. It's as if you can go to these places and use them as a mnemonic to conjure an undertold history or an archive of land activism. I also

want to show how these people and places figured in global networks just as a wave of former colonies were gaining independence.

EA: You have also developed the mapping project, ATTTNT, which stitches together sites of historical interest, including the Appalachian Trail (AT), the Trail of Tears (TT) and the Natchez Trace (NT) (fig. 2). Could you begin by describing ATTTNT as a document—what it looks like, what it's composed of, how it was produced, etc.—before clarifying in what ways it should be understood as an extension of Trust Land?

KE: I see it as an extension of Trust Land. In 1993, I worked on a project called ATTVA that was looking at these strips of land along the Appalachian Trail and within the holdings of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) [the largest public utility in the country built during the New Deal of the 1930s. ATTVA produced counterfeit maps and aerial photographs superimposing all the public land in the US with the waysides of the interstate highway] (fig. 3). But last year, with ATTTNT, I started looking for completely different continuities in this land—looking at it as a spine for a national infrastructure of reparations land trusts. The project does not turn away from the ugliness and lumpiness of this historical line in the landscape that's scripted by modernist and white supremacist narratives (fig. 4). The line is composed of strips of land 800 to 1,000 feet wide, spanning almost 3,000 miles in length. ATTTNT assesses the 6,000-mile surface area of this long ribbon, looking for land that is ripe for reparations and land trusts. The project's graphics—generated from GPS data and post-produced in Adobe Illustrator—treat this line like an ugly scar. The ATTTNT delivers another reckoning with the hundreds of years of Black and Indigenous resistance and survival. It highlights and celebrates these geographies while also looking for sites that thicken the line with reparations land.
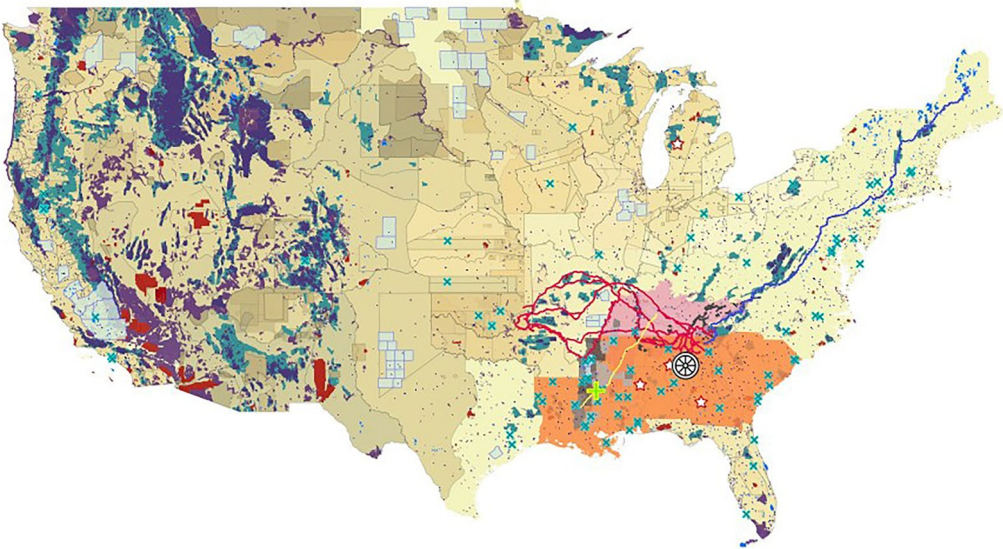

Figure 2. ATTTNT—A Planetary Line for Reparations, 2024. Courtesy of Keller Easterling.

Figure 3. ATTVA, Project Proposal, 1993. Courtesy of Keller Easterling.

In collaboration with a consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the US, we are currently designing a website that will be an archive of all this work. And the graphics for the website are similar to those in ATTTNT, although they're even more like a scar.

EA: In Trust Land and ATTTNT we see that your work is often focused on questions of spatial history in which, as you've stated elsewhere, "space is a stage" or a player for enacting alternative forms of knowledge and resistance.[3] To what extent do you see ATTTNT as a historiographic project, or is it primarily propositional? And how do you understand this relationship between history and design in your work more broadly?

KE: Well, since we are all impatient for change, the project is getting to work with whatever we have in our hands right now. One thing we can work on is a cultural imagination. It doesn't take much money or resources to do that, other than time. The project makes a case for another conception of infrastructure and it is definitely pointing towards real, practical outcomes. It is an unapologetically ambitious scheme. Benton MacKaye made the Appalachian Trail—a 2,000-plus-mile-long line—in about twelve years. Drawing on this precedent, we are insisting that the project isn't just rhetorical—it's not just programming for a biennale, or for the art world. Rather, it actually intends to deliver reparations land trusts.
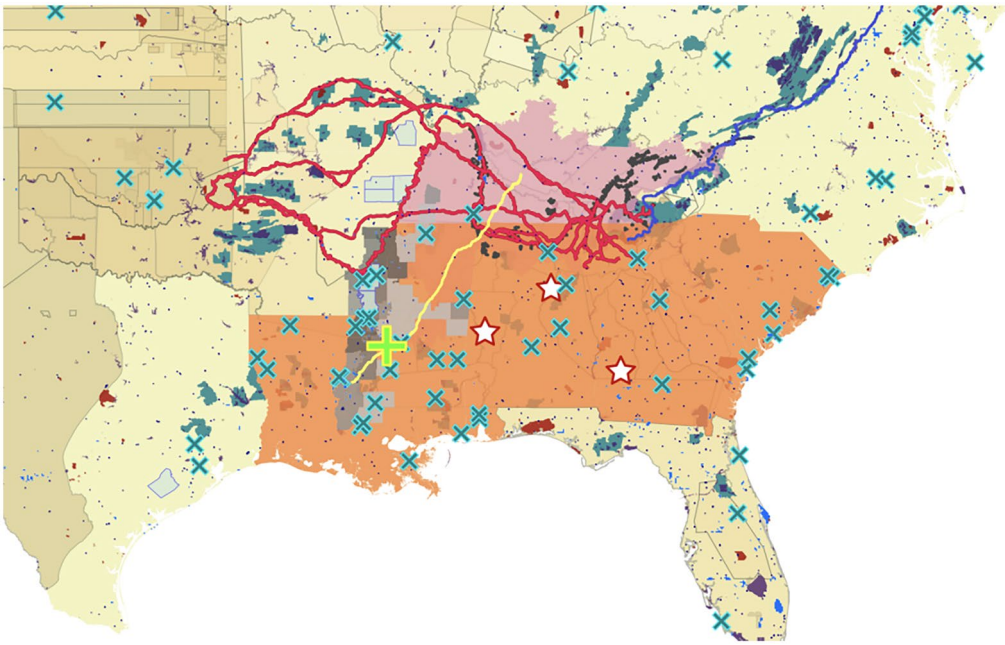
Figure 4. Detail: ATTTNT—A Planetary Line for Reparations, 2024. Courtesy of Keller Easterling.

Jasper Ludewig (JL): In the past, you've described a spatial practice of resistance as "not working with the master's tools but working on them."[4] You've also spoken about design as a means of reckoning with existing systems–of governance, production, financial abstraction, etc. Is this how we should understand your use of cartography in ATTTNT? As opposed to its historical role as a tool of conquest, explication, transparency and so on, the map instead serves as a tool for representing and enacting a different kind of order? And how do you measure its success? How do you know if the map has worked?

KE: Yes, exactly. It's using cartography, using the master's tools, but one uses the master's tools to decommission them, to find a way to put them aside, or to create something else that overwhelms them. There are ways to abuse GIS and ways to reconceive what constitutes infrastructure and cartography. An infrastructure of reparations is as worthy of public funding as an infrastructure of concrete and conduit. For me, this project will be going in a productive direction when multiple hands start working on it—in other words, when the idea gets out of my hands and goes somewhere else, like the consortium of HBCUs I mentioned earlier. We hope to establish this as a platform that many people can generate through multiple contributions. They each add the sites that make up this tangle of history and information. I hope it will become slightly contagious in that way. And then you would have to shift focus to the next phase: turning this momentum into tangible actions that actually deliver land to a reparations land bank.

JL: "Superbugs," "scripts," "lumpiness," "an overabundance of value," etc. Your work often deploys a consistent and unconventional terminology, which you have sometimes called a "lexicon." To what extent is your use of language deliberate

and strategic? Is it primarily a question of conceptual efficiency, or do you view language itself as a tool for your expanded model of spatial practice?

KE: I'm not consciously aware of the strangeness of the language, which may be a problem. I'm not deliberately trying to make a language that is startling or poetic or stepping out in some way. I'm just struggling to say something. I definitely want to reach beyond an academic audience—to break out of the stiffness of academic locutions. I want to provide the rigours and respectful citations of an academic community without the ticks and cadences of an authoritative tone. But you do look for forms of language that might help people defamiliarise or break a habit of mind. So, in that sense, yes, I suppose language is instrumental in my work.

Universality, Politics, Failure

JL: You've often described your work as belonging to the intellectual tradition of the left, while also advocating non-traditional forms of leftist practice, of which ATTTNT and Trust Land are perhaps the most recent examples. How has your work been received by the left? Has this reception surprised you at times?

KE: For me, the political spectrum is not tied only to ideology. So, what is more conservative and what is more radical may diverge from the orthodox. And I am using the word radical not to associate with utopian, absolute or solutionist thinking, but rather, as Angela Davis suggests, to get at the root of something. Sometimes it is considered more radical to follow a specific ideology to the letter. But if that ideology reproduces the dispositions or habits of mind of white, modern, Enlightenment thinking, I would regard it to be not radical but conservative. I'm concerned not just with the ideology of politics, but also with its disposition—its potentials for supporting rich information, lumpiness and inconsistency rather than binaries, singularities, singular solutions and violence. I can't help but see a left-right ideological spectrum together with a dispositional and temperamental spectrum. For instance, when the leftist work becomes especially binary, or monistic, or violent, I consider it more conservative, even though it might register as radical on the ideological spectrum. The work is more conservative when it reduces information. It becomes violent when it becomes information-poor. Whereas the more radical work is more robust and information-rich. Rather than reproducing the temperaments and structures of five hundred years of colonising, capitalising and globalising, this previously eclipsed superabundance has the capacity to displace it.

Most activists would think now that the thing they should do is be consistent, "be *consistent*," and decide who's in and who's out. But I would argue that the cleverest, and maybe most effective, political action relies on inconsistency and dissensus. The more consistent the activism—the more solutionist and singular and righteous and binary and so on—the easier it is for political superbugs to run rings around it and make easy targets of it. So, it's better to keep them guessing, better to keep them starved and disoriented. But that's sometimes a tough case to make among our comrades.

JL: In a similar sense, you've often stated that "messy is smarter than new," which we see reflected in your interest in information-rich systems, incremental processes of spatial change and disciplinary and professional fluency.[5] What has been

your experience in advocating for your design philosophy in the institutional settings in which architecture is taught, given how much they continue to adhere to techno-solutionism and celebrate innovation? What kinds of institutional resistance have you come up against? And where has your work found most traction?

KE: I hasten to add that what I was saying before is a synthesis of many other people's ideas: Black feminists, abolitionists, anarchists and Indigenous thinkers. Meanwhile, in the university, techno-solutionist thinking continues to be most rewarded, as it is in the wider world. The pursuit of quantifiable solutions continues to galvanise support and endorsement. In this framework, the innovative moment is the moment when things become pasteurised, homogenised, Turing-complete and so on. But maybe the moment of innovation is the moment when things get messy, when things get curdled, when things get complicated, when things can't be parsed with a single elementary particle. The documents for describing different kinds of processes and protocols that unfold over time are harder to communicate. Society has become more fluent in digital and network architecture, which works on the principle that messy, simultaneous, parallel environments are more information-rich, robust and intelligent. But ironically, the cultural habits still return to the singular, the unified, or the whole, so that even the smartest people embrace things like blockchain in a solutionist way. It's very strange that the meta-modelling of intelligence inherent in digital architecture doesn't alter these habits. There remains a desire for newness and singularity that is wearing an old modernist toupee.

EA: In contrast, you've described your recent work as a search for resources in the failures of capital and governance: loopholes, errors, ambivalences and so on that reveal opportunities to practise, organise and ultimately live differently. Can you elaborate on the importance of failure to the political project of your work; the types of knowledge and ways of working that architects and spatial practitioners need to develop in order to exploit failure to the ends you describe?

KE: Think of a moment when a financial abstraction fails or when a mortgage product returns to being dirt and a tree and a house, positioned in a community. When it sheds the financial abstraction, this object suddenly reveals an abundance of information that's been obstructed or eclipsed. So that's one graphic example. Errors and failures also introduce information, even though you often try to control them or eliminate them. So, I suppose this is all going back to some kind of information model.

EA: This relates to your claim that "solutions are weak positions" and that embracing "problems, errors, risks, and failures" can prompt "alternative ways to register the design imagination."[6] In this context, what does a pedagogy of failure look like?

KE: With students we are often looking at a form of matchmaking between problems and needs. A need or a problem is not a deficit, something completely zeroed-out. Rather, a need is filled with information. We're looking for combinative possibilities: the potential for things to transform through needs, problems and differences. Again, an anarchist like Peter Kropotkin did not see a world composed of self-same elementary particles. He valued the difference that generates interplay. The richness comes from the difference between what I can do and what you can do and how elements

interact in combination. We are always trying to get the world to sit still as if it were a periodic table, but really the only interesting thing is how it's tumbling together. And so back to your question: I suppose you're always trying, hoping that the match-making between problems is igniting something between students. And now, more than ever, I'm trying to make classes that are mixing chambers of different disciplines in a university and trying to put spatial studies at that crossroads. Space is often not considered to be necessarily part of a general education—an education that tends to prioritise technical, legal, econometric languages. But I'm trying to position space as a language around which students can build coalitions. I don't think they will survive without that coalition building.

Whiteness, Violence, Planetarity

EA: This process of shifting our way of thinking away from techno-solutionism is also grounded in your critique of whiteness and violence. You have highlighted, for example, that "whiteness is intertwined with a residual modern Enlightenment mind,"[7] characterised by an obsession with declarations, demands, manifestos and new solutions. If the goal is to move away from this mindset and ultimately "exit whiteness," how can the architectural profession–deeply rooted as it is in an Enlightenment framework–actively participate in this process of undoing and unlearning?[8]

KE: I was talking about a lecture class in the last question but, in a studio, the same pedagogical approach applies: we rehearse that kind of matchmaking between problems and we set up structures so that students can interfere with each other. I would liken it to an improv class in a school of drama. We often treat research as a solitary endeavour resulting in a monument or a masterpiece. Students never get a chance to rehearse their reactivity to changing conditions. In studios I have organised more recently, a letter appears on your desk that's slightly singed, or some other detail requires you to change your approach. This encourages students to learn with and against each other and, as a result, produce much, much more architecture than if they were just focused on their singular outcome.

What we are often rehearsing is what I would call active forms—forms that, of course, use measure, shape, outline, geometry. But they also unfold over time as protocols rather than rigid master plans. The studio work results in highly skilled, very explicit, very practical work, albeit in a slightly different register. So many of the changes in the world are happening in the medium of space. And yet our profession often stays in a cul-de-sac of its own self-imposed irrelevance. I'm trying to find a way to put our skills at a broader cultural crossroads. That work may exist outside of a client-based profession, but it doesn't take a position against the profession. I'm trying to serve students who want to use their skills in additional ways, to imagine a different field of play in which to work and build collaborations and coalitions.

EA: Staying with the question of whiteness, you've stated that "the victims of whiteness" have developed some of the most powerful "counter-logics" to disrupt the white Enlightenment project, often articulated through spatial languages and by drawing on concepts like mutualism, care, maintenance and kinship.[9] As you've

said, these ideas resonate strongly with Indigenous and Black feminist perspectives, among others.[10] How does this project you're describing draw on these perspectives? On a more personal note, as a white woman, how have you felt navigating and narrating a Black history? And how has the public responded to your engagement with this history?

KE: We are lucky to be in a moment where there has been a kind of sea change. I don't know how it feels in Australia. But in the United States, and in many places around the world, so much of the intelligence that has been eclipsed is flooding back in and it's thrilling. And that is what's on our plate in seminars and in studios. Again, it's about an abundance of things that are alive. The dominant histories and structures that we've been rehearsing are strangely not able to accommodate things that are alive. And so, it's wonderful to be in this moment and to be teaching in this moment and to be able to indulge that energy in class while also identifying the whiteness that has perennially obstructed this abundance. By whiteness, I mean the same white, modern, Enlightenment habits of mind we were talking about earlier in relation to the Trust Land and ATTTNT projects.

Some people might question whether a white person should be telling the stories of Black leaders in the South. But in my view, these leaders—who, after the civil rights movement, continued work on another movement for economic justice—provided a roadmap for reparations and also rehearsed the means to manage those resources. This is material that the white world is privileged to study. Finally, reparations is white work. *How could it be anything but white work?* It is not the job of Black and Indigenous people to wrest the land and other resources from a white establishment. It is the job of white institutions to release their often-criminal hold on these resources. Also, these stories go back to a moment around 1966 when the leaders of the Student Nonviolent Organising Committee (SNCC) turned to their white partners in SNCC and other activist organisations and said, "you need to work on your own community. More than your (often patronising) allyship, we need you to build a beachhead in your own white community. We can't do anything about the guys standing around at the gas station. You are the ones who have to work on that." The white activists thought that working on other white people was too hard, but it had certainly not been easy for Black leaders to come to the South and ask people to risk their lives to vote and stand up for desegregation. There were some white activists who made efforts along these lines, but the work often failed largely because of quarrels over ideological orthodoxies. There is nothing stopping the white left from working on whiteness, but it is a job that is continually avoided.

JL: We are focusing here on the civil rights movement in the US, but this work also has planetary implications. You have often dealt with planetary phenomena—planetary infrastructures, commons, communities, etc. More recently, you have focused on forms of "solidarity." What does planetary solidarity look like to you, and how do we avoid the planetary itself becoming a way of thinking that reproduces the underlying conditions of whiteness?

KE: Yes. I think about Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard who contrast the "world-ending" politics of the last five hundred years with the "worldmaking" activism of the late sixties—activism reflecting solidarities between Non-Aligned,

Pan-African, Tricontinental and civil rights movements.[11] Olúf̣ẹmi O. Táíwò also invokes that moment of worldmaking activism to inspire the planetary political solidarity necessary to address climate issues. Climate issues go hand in hand with reparations to address patterns of harm that caused the problem and that will otherwise only continue.[12] These solidarities offer special sovereignties. They essentially say, "you forced us into this diaspora, but now we have you surrounded. Now we are everywhere, and we have another way of seeing this planet." That elegant leadership is exciting. ATTTNT marks these special sovereignties. It recognises Indigenous worlds. It recognises the New Republic of Africa—the 1968 proposal for a separate nation created from five southern states and based on Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere's principles of Ujamaa.

Maybe thinking about the planetary involves thinking differently. Nations are not the building blocks because that would only reproduce the same patterns of whiteness. Instead, after Anna Tsing, maybe the planetary values the power of inconsistency and patchiness—partial organisations and multiple, overlapping, messy organisations.[13] I failed to mention Tsing before, when we were talking about inconsistency. Planetary solidarities may take the shape of an archipelago surrounded by hostility that is nevertheless able to form a diasporic network of allies that reaches around the world.

It's also interesting to consider the world's various forms of lethality together—those from military campaigns to climate chaos. You can imagine the tinny rat-a-tat-tat explosions of war becoming more and more faint against the roar of climate change. Or as we strengthen planetary political solidarities, what are the self-destructing waves of hot water and fire that might engulf the relatively puny campaigns of stupid political superbugs like Trump, Netanyahu or Putin?

Object, Interplay, Overwhelm

JL: What does this mean for the actual design of objects? Your work critiques rigid planning systems and instead advocates for the "protocols of interplay" you've been describing, capable of adapting to evolving conditions. What role can objects play within this framework and what criteria should guide their design and production? Or is the question itself already the product of a solutionist way of thinking?
KE: Many of the design students I work with are definitely bringing knowledge of materials, geometry and more to their work—designing structures, details, landscapes and so on. But these are components of unfolding organisations. We keep thinking of ultimates, singular solutions, or the succession of supposedly superior ideas, thus inadvertently reproducing the very modern habits we hope to shed. Rather than solutions, there is richness in the abundance of interplay, of matchmaking between problems in organisations that are alive. Rather than shutting down information by saying, "I have a solution for the problem your building presents; I'm going to replace it with another building," it's about seeing design ecologies. Most good designers have always operated this way, seeing an ecology of parts. They adjust an ongoing ecology and fortify its interplay. Beyond things with shapes and outline that interplay is itself the object of design. I find students are not only capable of working in this way but are also quite eager to do so. If they're makers at all, they only want someone to indulge this talent

of being able to see connections between things. This approach might mean that you're not just completing a building and taking a photograph, but rather working on multiple projects that, over many years, bring about real and ongoing transformations.

EA: You have also explained that these protocols of interplay you're describing—which in the case of the Albany movement manifested through community infrastructures—can "overwhelm dominant capital."[14] Can you elaborate on what you mean by "overwhelm" here and how it translates spatially? Is it always attached to alternative ways of holding land through the spatial apparatus of communities, collectives and cooperatives? Or is it something less concrete?

KE: Again, rather than saying we will replace this political system with the next superior thing, it's simply getting those abstractions and that whiteness out of the way of live organisations that have their own abundance. It is about allowing the ecologies and exchanges to occur rather than making boundaries between what's mine and what's yours—"whiteness as property," and so on.[15] Organisations that facilitate community often generate a superabundance of value that can dwarf the thin abstractions of capital. Capital is pretty dumb or information-poor. With something so dumb, is it stronger simply to overwhelm it rather than draw swords against it as a singular evil? Capitalism only joins forces with a whole raft of evils that deserve our attention—fascism, racism, whiteness, caste, femicide, xenophobia, psychotic leadership and on and on. Let it be as puny as it is, starve it of attention, displace it with something much more information-rich. Sometimes, you have to stand up, link arms and name an opponent. Some activists are especially compelled in this direction. But maybe you don't always have to tip-off your opponents by showing your cards. It is sneakier to wither some political forces (like superbugs) by starving them of the attention they crave. Far from a betrayal of classic activist techniques, this is an attempt to strengthen the activist repertoire to go beyond rhetorical stances and towards more direct actions.

EA: Without showing your cards, what is next for Keller Easterling? Where does your work go from here? And are you hopeful for the future?

KE: Right now, I'm working quite hard on both these projects: the ATTTNT reparations project and the diary of land activism in the South. I can't read enough, can't visit enough archives, can't do enough interviews. I'm just trying to prepare myself to be able to write. I'm also writing other things, which exercise similar habits of mind, but they are more in the realm of fiction. These things are on my horizon right now. I'm hopeful if only because this is all work that only hopes to clear obstructions to the existing abundance we've been speaking about.

Notes on Contributors

Endriana Audisho is a Lecturer and Public Programs Director in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research and teaching practice are deeply rooted in postcolonial and decolonial frameworks, aiming to uncover spatial and social injustices while proposing alternative architectural and urban narratives, fictions, and imaginaries.

Keller Easterling is an architect, writer and professor at Yale University.

Jasper Ludewig is Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology Sydney and Associate Editor at Architectural Theory Review. His research focuses on the role of architecture within systems of organisational governance and ecological imperialism.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London: Verso, 2014).
2. Keller Easterling, "Trust Land," *Public Culture* 35, no. 2 (May 2023): 177–89.
3. The concept of "space is a stage" emphasises the significant role of spatial environments in the enactment of social movements and resistance. In the context of the Albany movement, Easterling illustrates how diverse spaces—houses, churches, streets and government buildings, among others—actively shaped interactions and fostered alliances among participants. See Easterling, "Trust Land," 178; Keller Easterling, "Trust Land," video, *e-flux Architecture*, June 6, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/events/539345/keller-easterling-trust-land/; and "Design as Counter-Mechanism to Monocultures and Inequality," keynote lecture, Living Cities Forum, Narrm/Melbourne, YouTube video, 42:50, November 15, 2023; MPavilion, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vimhzl_CX0.
4. In "Design as Counter-Mechanism to Monocultures and Inequality," Easterling outlined a series of alternative infrastructures aimed at addressing societal inequalities and environmental risks (22:20). Her position can be contrasted with the civil rights activist Audre Lorde: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." See Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches,* ed. Audre Lorde (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 110–14.
5. "Messy is smarter than new" is Easterling's challenge to the Enlightenment logics of uniformity, universality and whiteness. See Easterling, "Design as Counter-Mechanism to Monocultures and Inequality," 41:12. See also, Keller Easterling, "No You're Not," *e-flux Architecture* (September 2016), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/66720/no-you-re-not/; "Going Wrong," *e-flux Architecture* (December 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/collectivity/304220/going-wrong/; and "Old New Deal," in *Non Extractive Architectures: On Designing Without Depletion*, ed. Space Caviar (London: Sternberg Press, 2021), 147–55.
6. Easterling, "Design as Counter-Mechanism to Monocultures and Inequality," 7:55; Easterling encourages embracing the messy, nonlinear dimensions of problem-solving and design, proposing that navigating these inherent uncertainties and contradictions can foster alternative design perspectives. See Easterling, "Going Wrong," 1.
7. Easterling, "Old New Deal," 148.
8. Easterling emphasises the need to liberate ourselves from the entrenched influence of the modern Enlightenment framework and, ultimately, to exit the "stranglehold" of whiteness, which often prioritises comfort and conformity. See Keller Easterling, interviewed by Markus Miessen and César Reyes, "Medium Design with Keller Easterling," *Cultures of Assembly*, produced by Markus Miessen, podcast, September 12, 2022, MP3 audio, 46:32, https://culturesofassembly.org/projects/cultures-of-assembly?active=coa7-keller-easterling.
9. For further insight, see Easterling, "Design as Counter-Mechanism to Monocultures and Inequality," 12:25; Easterling, "Trust Lands," 177; Keller Easterling, "ATTTNT_A Planetary Line for Reparations," https://www.kellereasterling.com/design/at-tva.

10. In her lectures, Easterling routinely draws on work by Katherine McKittrick, Tiffany Lethabo King, Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, Mariame Kaba, Shira Hassan, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Silvia Federici, J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, Stephen Healy, Sylvia Wynter, Peter Linebaugh, Arturo Escobar, A.M. Simone, James C. Scott, Peter Kropotkin, Katherine Franke, Dean Spade, Jessica Gordon Nembhard, Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, Edward Onaci, Adom Getachew, Robin D.G. Kelley, Monica M. White, Greta de Jong, Amílcar Cabra, Thulani Davis, Dan Berger, Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Mindy Thompson Fullilove.

11. See Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).

12. See Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

13. See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Anna Tsing, "Indigenous Voice," in *Indigenous Experience Today*, ed. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (New York: Routledge, 2007), 57; Anna Tsing, Andrew S. Mathews, and Nils Bubandt, "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology, An Introduction to Supplement 20," *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 20 (August 2019): 186–97.

14. Easterling, "Trust Land," 188.

15. Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 134 (1993): 1707–91.