# 04. FROM PEOPLE’S PARKS TO THE PEOPLE’S ARCHIVE: POWER, IDENTITY, AND THE RIGHT TO REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA SINCE THE 1960S

### KERA LOVELL

## Introduction

The amorphous People’s Park movement was a sporadic chain of more than four dozen protests across the United States in the late Vietnam War era in which activists protested a range of issues including police brutality, gentrification, and systemic racism by taking over vacant lots and insurgently converting those lots into informal parks they often called ‘people’s parks’. Most of these park projects were ephemeral, often being fenced and torn down by police only days or weeks after construction began.[[1]](#footnote-1) Because of their inherently short lifespan as well as the fact that these illegal formations at times ignited violent conversations over spatial power, park creators in the late 1960s and early 1970s created their own informal archives of parks to galvanize support for their movements. In this chapter, I use the People’s Park Movement to explore how activists worked as archivists—creating and compiling their own materials outside the bounds of institutional archives. While scholarship on the relationship between archives and activism has tended to focus on community archives, the People’s Park movement resulted in a disparate constellation of archival materials across the United States that offer a kaleidoscopic view of the movement.[[2]](#footnote-2) From regulated institutions to social media accounts, the People’s Park movement presents an alternative lens through which to explore power and representation in the historical memory of social movements.

Archival materials on largely white male-dominated park creations abound with a wide array of accessible primary sources, including: photography, film, audio recordings, oral history interviews and testimonies, and newsprint media as the basis for galleries, books, and later archival collections, websites, and social media accounts. Since the late 1960s, supporters have used this archival material to not only validate that these spaces and projects existed, but to construct their own historical memories of these protest actions counter to the state. Documenting park protests not only served as a tool for park creators to control their own narrative separate from the mainstream media and the state, but also to create satellite spaces to memorialize them after their demolition. While social media has quickened the pace of building activist movements, an analysis of the social media archives of Berkeley’s People’s Park and more contemporary parks reveals how digital organizing has not changed the tactics of protesters who seek to build ‘an archive of feelings’[[3]](#footnote-3) that connects the personal with the political. Despite the wide variety of parks created by racially diverse groups in this era, an abundance of material on Berkeley’s People’s Park in the late 1960s has contributed to an ‘archival fever’ on this site, which, in turn, has centered white men in the archives and histories of this movement.[[4]](#footnote-4) Putting the archival tactics of people’s parks in conversation with the work of women who participated in contemporary occupations like Occupy Wall Street and the Taksim-Gezi Park protest allows us to creatively explore the racialized and gendered historiographical gaps on these emotional archives.

## The park as an archive

People’s Parks served as archives for the street people, activists, and outliers of their communities. The original callout for Berkeley’s People’s Park offered the parcel as a blank slate with suggested programming that might attract a variety of interested workers: ‘We could have a child care clinic or a crafts commune which would communicate its wares by having medieval style fairs, a baseball diamond, a rock concert, or a place to think and sleep in the sun’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Recorded footage demonstrates how some users brought chairs, car seats, and sleeping bags to both Berkeley’s People’s Park and People’s Park #6, yet otherwise the space had minimal seating.[[6]](#footnote-6) Piecing together the memoirs of those who attended Berkeley’s People’s Park illuminates a landscape of scattered jugs of wine, Band-Aid wrappers, and possibly the crusts of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. At San Diego’s Chicano Park, you would have navigated through leftover tamales and water hoses, likely flyers for the neighborhood’s Chicano Free Clinic featuring the symbolic flag of Aztlán. At Chicago’s Poor People’s Park, as documented by historian Studs Terkel, the park contained flyers in support of various organizations advocating for affordable housing, as well as kids toys and playground equipment.[[7]](#footnote-7) Flexible spaces and objects that created opportunities for work, rest, and play could emerge spontaneously, allowing park goers to explore their own ideas and identities through materiality. Sculptures, stages, and swings became seats and play areas, opportunities for self-reflection and socialization. At Herrick Peace and Freedom Park, park goers hung inspirational signs in newly-planted fruit trees.[[8]](#footnote-8) Later on that same lot that would become Berkeley’s People’s Park, someone dragged four large three-dimensional orange letters spelling ‘KNOW’ where teenagers lounged. Stories like these are celebrated in Terri Compost’s published archive, *People’s Park: Still Blooming*, which features photos, scans of publications, and most importantly, brief oral histories on the various experiences park goers had with objects and spaces within the park.[[9]](#footnote-9) The vast array of objects collected there as well as the laborers and park goers these spaces attracted often resulted in gawking onlookers who were head-scratchingly confused.[[10]](#footnote-10)

When underground reporters (initially park organizers) described Berkeley’s People’s Park as it was being built, they did so by listing an inventory of objects, people, and activities the park manifested: ‘Flower and vegetable gardens were planted…Nursery swings and a sliding board appeared…old benches and newly-made ones were fine for sitting down and being amazed at what was happening’.[[11]](#footnote-11) Wildflower and vegetable gardens as well as new trees, shrubs, and flowers were concentrated in the far west and peripheral edges of the park. Park participants appear to have randomly scattered wooden benches and small scaffolds whose rustic look and feel countered the smooth surfaces of the ‘cheap mass “plastic” accouterments of suburban life’.[[12]](#footnote-12) Seating areas, platforms, and interactive sculptural elements emerged like stalagmites in a sea of dusty gravel-speckled dirt in the far southeast corner. Parks were canvases for collaborative folk art, with users contributing their own artifacts to the landscape that were subsequently moved and reimagined by park goers. Many of these objects and spaces were mentioned by park goers in the underground press and by scholars in subsequent histories of People’s Parks in ways that read like lists—the variety of objects and spaces a metaphor for the diversity of people the park attracted. The park contained a collection of objects—the objects, in turn, serving as ‘proof’ that these spaces were used and enjoyed by many, even loved.

Park objects were most often destroyed when parks were fenced or raided. As bulldozers demolished Herrick Peace and Freedom Park in 1968, park supporters took photos of fledgling trees snapped in two. In one photo, the bulldozer heads toward a folk-art mannequin with a body made of old cans and wood, the mannequin lounging on a twin mattress in the park. Dust clouds the ripper teeth of the bulldozer’s bucket. Photographs represent the demolition as a traumatic event, what park creators described as a double loss of life of both Chuck Herrick and the park they had constructed in his memory after his death in an automobile accident.[[13]](#footnote-13) Because parks were often suddenly demolished in early mornings to take park creators off guard and because park creators resisted these demolitions by doubling down as occupiers, no institutional archive contains objects from the People’s Park movement in the late Vietnam War era. Occupy Wall Street offers a model for what objects park creators might have archived. Like the participants of Berkeley’s People’s Park, Occupiers had emotional connections to certain objects within Zuccotti Park because of experiences they had during the protest. Even Occupy Archivist Amy Roberts, thinking back on her favorite item archived from Occupy, lights up describing a polyester neon orange sign used for the Occupy Kitchen. When police were attempting to use orange mesh fencing to corner and ultimately arrest Occupiers, the activists commandeered it and converted it into a sign for their own use. Roberts was part of a small group that had ventured to the City of New York Department of Sanitation to retrieve the sign after police evicted occupants in a late-night raid. Its safe retrieval after so many items in the park, especially the People’s Library, had been destroyed by trash compactors, was a small victory of symbolic resistance.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Some protesters, like Esen Kara who was a graduate student taking part in the Gezi Park occupation in 2013, cannot recall saving anything from their multi-week experience living in the protest camp. Despite wearing handkerchiefs everyday as quick protection against tear gas attacks, Kara does not recall keeping or reminiscing about any flyers or photos over the past decade. When the Gezi Park occupation started over the proposed demolition of 600 trees to make way for the reconstruction of the former Taksim Military Barracks and a shopping mall, Kara dropped what she was doing and immediately flew to Istanbul to join the protest. Yet as Turkish author Ece Temelkuran argued, ‘it was never just about the trees, but the accumulation of many incidents’. Temelkuran, whose words originally written on Twitter are now archived on the Gezi Park occupation liveblog *Mashallah News*, tweeted, ‘With the world’s highest number of imprisoned journalists, thousands of political prisoners (trade unionists, politicians, activists, students, lawyers), Turkey has been turned into an open-air prison already’.[[15]](#footnote-15) For both Berkeley and Istanbul, the demolition of trees within waning access to urban green space signified lack of control over their country. During the occupation, occupiers replanted seedlings in the park in the shape of a peace symbol, as well as in empty tear gas canisters. Park goers taped signs to the remaining trees with the names of Kurds killed in the Uludere/Roboski massacre.[[16]](#footnote-16) To memorialize her own participation, Esen Kara had a tree tattooed on her upper arm with a ‘swirling trunk…meant to look like a female body, as the symbol of the ‘woman in red’ of the Gezi Park protests’.[[17]](#footnote-17) Ceyda Sungur, an urban planning graduate student at the protest, would become the ‘lady in red’ when police troops sprayed her with pepper spray so forcefully that it sent her hair and red dress into a whirlwind.[[18]](#footnote-18) For Kara, the trees, and by extension the woman protecting them, became a symbol for much larger issues about human rights and the abuse of state power — ’the symbolic figure that started it all’ that shaped her own memories of the protest. At Berkeley’s People’s Park, the site’s old growth redwood trees similarly captivated park goers, and still serve as a symbol for protestors of the capitalist-driven motivations for demolishing the park. Over the past few decades, as the University of California-Berkeley has reignited its campaign to reclaim power over the site, activists continue to argue that protecting the trees is essential to maintaining the free-thinking, spatially-liberated community that the park embodies to them.

## The Press in the early era

The local underground newspaper, the *Berkeley Barb*, serves as one of the first archives and recruitment tools for Berkeley’s People’s Park. Most coverage of the park in its early days is written from the perspective of largely white middle-class journalists and photographers, including Stew Albert, Art Goldberg, Paul Glusmen, Jon Jakobson, and more who wrote for the *Berkeley Tribe*, *Ramparts*, and the *Daily Californian*. Park construction was messy and disorganized, with its ‘contribute what you like’ attitude creating an aura of chaos under the facade of a countercultural ‘happening’. Park coverage mimicked this mindset by focusing on topless women and famous (male) political figures who stopped by the park as a way to promote its popularity.[[19]](#footnote-19) Very few women were able to publish reports on Berkeley’s People’s Park in the white male-dominated *Berkeley Barb*. As tensions escalated and reports on the park’s demolition and defense became headline news, women and people of color were among the photographers whose work was later shown in exhibitions at Berkeley Phoenix Gallery and its printed catalog, including Mitch Ikuta, Jerry Takigawa, Jeanne Raisler, and Ruth Rosen among others. Those names are buried beneath that of the exhibition’s white male curator.[[20]](#footnote-20) Turning over the large, thick photo placards at the Library of Congress where the ‘Alan Copeland’ collection is held, you can see their names faintly written in pencil on the back, written so lightly as if with the intent to ultimately be erased.

As scholar Jarrett Drake has argued, the foundational principles of ownership and authorship structuring archival science—and I would argue by extension print journalism—‘valorize and venerate white western masculinity’, resulting in skewed initial reporting that has produced white and male-dominated archival materials on Berkeley’s People’s Park in particular.[[21]](#footnote-21) While shaped by gendered and racialized mindsets and power structures, the Alternative Press Syndicate worked with the company Bell and Howell to microfilm tens of thousands of newspapers from the postwar era in the 1980s—the base set forming more than 400 microfilm reels that are accessible at more than 100 universities as well as through Interlibrary Loan.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the past decade, open access digitization of thousands of issues of the underground press has allowed scholars to quickly search terms across categorical divides, such as seeing representations of Berkeley’s People’s Park in the campus underground versus its representation in Black Power or feminist periodicals.[[23]](#footnote-23) While digital access to these early reports has increased public knowledge about nearly a dozen activist-created parks created in the Bay area at this time, the initial archive created within the underground press often reiterated sexist stereotypes and racial tropes that reinforced white men as the leaders in alliance with Black male outsiders.[[24]](#footnote-24) In turn, some park creators of color in other cities around the country adapted the tactic of park creation as a method of protest, but positioned their working-class park as oppositional to countercultural back-to-the-land movements with simply ‘hip people fighting for some greenery’.[[25]](#footnote-25)

After Berkeley’s People’s Park was fenced, coverage in the local newspapers revealed mounting antagonism between park defenders and the state—with park supporters threatening to reclaim it and the state arguing it was obligated to protect private property rights violently if necessary. While a group of students and faculty in support of the park attempted to negotiate with university administrators over the course of the week, California Governor Ronald Reagan was outspoken in his critique of leniency. Reagan had been elected on a platform of quieting student unrest after Berkeley’s notorious Free Speech Movement had garnered international attention just a few years earlier. After violence broke out over the park on May 15 known as ‘Bloody Thursday’, Governor Ronald Reagan stationed more than 2000 National Guardsmen in the park and on streets to regulate pedestrian access across nearly eighteen square blocks in the South Berkeley area. The city became a military occupation. Alameda County Sheriff Deputies moved throughout the city, matching frustrations by locals with escalated aggression. Rock throwing and fists held high were met with fixed bayonets, nightsticks, and gas masks. Law enforcement squads guarded vacant lots and parks, enforced an evening curfew, and restricted public gatherings, assemblies, and loitering. By Monday, May 19, groups of protestors began flying kites in vacant lots to keep hovering helicopters preparing to teargas the city at bay.[[26]](#footnote-26) During this period of conflict, hundreds of civilians were arrested in various altercations with police and National Guardsmen while at least a dozen new activist-created parks were planted and at times literally stomped out by police across the city within hours or days.

The *Instant News Service*, the *Berkeley Barb*, and other Left-leaning newspapers began focusing their attention on how the military and police had lacked restraint in regulating the protests, often escalating violence through violent attacks on passersby. Eli Leon, who would later become an important collector of African American quilts in the Bay area, began collecting witness statements on the abuse of police force in an effort to strengthen the defense for those wrongfully arrested or injured and seeking compensation. Cathy Clark’s statement focused on May 15, as she expressed shock at seeing police shoot activists without warning and laughing as victims writhed in pain.[[27]](#footnote-27) After Bloody Thursday, supporters of the park creation immediately responded by attempting to reclaim the park and construct new ‘liberated zones’ or activist-controlled mini parks and encampments throughout the city. In addition, park creators also began creating their own archives of their memories of People’s Park in an effort to acknowledge its existence and confirm its value through shared use and approval. Photographer Alan Copeland collected dozens of negatives, newspapers, and photographs taken by a wide range of photographers of militarized Berkeley that became an exhibition at Berkeley’s Phoenix Gallery in September and October of 1969.[[28]](#footnote-28) Park supporters like Copeland approached their archival work (both material and digital) as forms of activism, seeking to collect audio, visual, and written documentation showing that the parks were being created and that the state was enacting violence against park goers. Yet park advocates and troops returned—this cycle of insurgent gardening and, in response, forced removal created a trail of growth and destruction, celebration and defense, across the city. As park creations became more ephemeral, newspapers became an extension of urban space and allowed for informal parks to be legitimized and memorialized. The underground press continued to serve as a form of ‘information activism’—an accessible technological medium that allowed park supporters to create a diverse movement through shared experiences of displacement and police brutality, as well as shared goals of urban autonomy, ecological design, and communal infrastructures.[[29]](#footnote-29)

## Institutionalized archives versus websites and social media

Due to the widespread media attention directed at Berkeley during altercations between park allies and the police, archival material on Berkeley’s People’s Park is exhaustive, encompassing hundreds of boxes of material across numerous archives from the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The extensive material on Berkeley’s People’s Park contrasts sharply with the dozens of other case studies of activist-created parks as civil disobedient placemaking projects that I have identified in my own research, some of whom only have one folder’s worth of material formally archived.The voices of men—particularly white heterosexual middle-class men in positions of power—are the most well-documented. The papers of white male politicians and university administrators are collected and organized chronologically within university and state archives, making them more accessible for researchers. Additionally, white male political leaders in the New Left who had access to the press as a platform for power have also had their papers collected and stored, while print, microfilm, and digital archives of their writings have reinforced their dominance within 1960s activism. In contrast, some parks created by people of color might have only been documented by one photograph, with the park’s creators now scattered across the United States and, more than fifty years later, with little memory of the park’s development. In a historical moment in which protestors were wary of hierarchical leadership structures and eager to make cross-cultural, transnational connections in anti-racist organizing, the names of white men ironically became fundamental to telling the stories of Berkeley’s People’s Park and the larger People’s Park movement.

However, if the original park creators had thought through the institutionalization of social movement archives, I imagine they would be outraged at the rigidly regulated access to their materials found at archives like the Bancroft Library. Even before Covid, accessing the Bancroft Library’s reading room was nothing short of entering a prison, with an extensive multi-week wait to view refrigerated audio-visual materials, multiple bag checks upon entry, and strict limitations such as the allowance of only five pieces of loose-leaf paper. Likewise, there are many obstacles to access to the Chicago Red Squad Records, hosted by the Chicago Museum, containing hundreds of boxes of surveillance reports produced by the local police as part of the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). These reports include references to activist-created parks in the city. The collection evidences aggressive and illegal policing tactics used to subvert and fragment local social justice organizations. After paying your entry fee to access the archive, you are required to sign a nondisclosure agreement (NDA) that you will never cite anything from the collection. When I asked a Reading Room attendant why the collection required an NDA, the archivist responded that nondisclosure offered privacy to figures in the past. However, I would argue it protects police rather than all historical figures equally. As Jacques Derrida argues, ‘There is no political power without control of the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation’.[[30]](#footnote-30) Through its NDA, the Red Squad Collection’s silencing of scholars, who are unable to write on the interrogation of activists, does more to preserve the power of the police than challenge it. The experience of Jose ‘Cha-Cha’ Jimenez offers a case in point. In an effort to expose systemic police brutality against the Puerto Rican and Chicago-based Young Lords Organization, leader Jose ‘Cha-Cha’ Jimenez requested access to his own arrest records via the Freedom of Information Act and included the police reports he received in the archive he created at Grand Valley State University. The Young Lords had been part of a cross-cultural coalition of activist groups in Chicago protesting urban renewal using a variety of means, including the creation of ‘Poor People’s Park’. The police records Jimenez archived reflect how the Chicago Police Department used informants to monitor urban renewal meetings, court hearings, and press conferences, utilized surveillance to follow attendees and their cars after demonstrations, and relief on police officers to collect business cards and other material on known affiliations from arrestees’ pockets.[[31]](#footnote-31) However, those same records in the Chicago Museum’s Red Squad Collection cannot legally be referenced.

Since the early 1990s, advocates for People’s Parks have used their own published media and the internet to create their own archive and platform in support of the project. Peoplespark.org was organized in 1996 as part of a larger resistance to the University of California, Berkeley’s campaign to reclaim People’s Park to convert it into volleyball courts. Although several public hearings featured raucous critiques from Berkeley’s Landmarks Preservation Commission, the Parks and Rec Commission, and the Peace and Justice Commission, UC Berkeley broke ground on the property in 1991. Protests were held at the lot every weekend, often featuring advocate David Nadel who shared an archive of photos while telling the history of the site.[[32]](#footnote-32) After riots intensified and a woman named Rosebud Denovo was shot attempting to break into the Chancellor’s home to protest the park takeover, park advocates underwent years of negotiation with the Berkeley City Council. By 1996 when PeoplesPark.org was created, the website was poised to serve as the first digitized archive of the protest. Featuring recorded speeches by muralist and homeless advocacy lawyer Osha Newmann, as well as photos of the park creation and park ephemera, over the past decade the website has transitioned to now include more links to other park advocates posting their own primary sources on the park across the internet.

Social media sites have allowed illegal park projects to create somewhat interactive, publicly accessible archives. Instagram in particular has allowed park organizers to recruit workers, solicit donations, and most importantly synthesize their message on a platform that seamlessly allows their political action to blend into the personal lives of their supporters. Twitter’s use of geotagging and hashtags has helped transform protest, allowing protesters like Esen Kara at the Gezi Park Occupation the ability to be able to coordinate logistics and connect with fellow activists immediately.[[33]](#footnote-33) According to reporter Ben Berkowitz, within 24 hours of the Zuccotti Park occupation in 2011, the hashtag #occupywallstreet had become so popular that one of every 500 tweets in the world included that hashtag.[[34]](#footnote-34) Instagram has become an integral tool for contemporary park creations and occupations like Weelaunee People’s Park (@defendatlantaforest) and Plaza del Pueblo (@missiondefence\_sf) to connect with other parks like Berkeley’s People’s Park and build a shared platform with other social justice organizations who are then tagged in stories and posts when they visit the park. While in 1969 it took days if not weeks for different newspapers to travel across the country and for different groups to respond, social media allows for instantaneous connections from a diverse group of perspectives largely outside the bounds of state interference. The speed of global social media, however, still presents new obstacles that 1960s-era park creators did not face, such as digital requirements for account creation, account deletion, institutional censorship through social media companies, and more.

While Twitter is useful for activists to share information about law enforcement and locations quickly, perhaps one of the most important purposes served by social media archives like those on Instagram is to keep energy levels high. On @thepeoples\_park, one of several official and unofficial Instagram accounts for Berkeley’s People’s Park, you can find photos and videos of supporters in the park. Children, the houseless, parents, college students, and neighborhood residents all stop to share their thoughts on the park. In the immediate aftermath of the fencing of Berkeley’s People’s Park in 1969, creating archives felt like essential and yet exhausting work for park supporters. The sheer volume of events, exhibitions, and printed memoirs on the park released during this time is difficult to sort through, and these archives were produced within the context of emotional trauma. In her own recollection of her experience at Occupy Wall Street movement, Amy Roberts described taking a pause from graduate school after Occupy dissipated due to suffering depression culminating from not only the traumatic early-morning police raid that put an end to the movement after months of occupation, but from ‘an accumulation of stress from police brutality, government surveillance, blaming [herself], and at times toxic and abusive behavior’ within the movement.[[35]](#footnote-35) Archiving the protest while weathering the movement was deeply emotional. Frustrations carried through from Zuccotti Park to the archival group listserv, as sharp, bitter disagreements over what and where to archive the collection began to carry a sexist tone with no structure set up to resolve it. The critiques, harassment, constant arrests, and overly sexual poetry sent on the Archives Working Group Listserv by men to a working group of largely women—all of it left a bitter taste in her mouth. Roberts, who is still connected with some of the movement, said that many fellow Occupiers declined an offer to later publish a piece on Michael Bloomberg’s presidential run despite his ardent attack on the Occupy Wall Street People’s Library. Having donated her journals documenting her Occupy work as part of the collection, Roberts is now considering requesting they be returned now that her context and views on social movement archival organizing have shifted. Her own experiences beg the question of how the depression and anxiety park creators felt during the archival process shaped the archives that were produced in this era that largely focus on the trauma of police brutality.

After UC Berkeley swept the park on August 3, 2022, cutting down trees to make way for a new student housing project, social media coverage of the park soared.[[36]](#footnote-36) On Instagram, multiple accounts dedicated to Berkeley’s People’s Park have focused on building camaraderie through celebrations of community support for the park. Arthur tells the camera: ‘I just want to thank everyone who are (sic) protesting who are making a difference for that to stop happening’.[[37]](#footnote-37) In another photo a white man kicks into the air as they swing gleefully on the recently-added makeshift swing hanging from the Caterpillar excavator still on site.[[38]](#footnote-38) More recently the Instagram account @peoplesparkberkeley that posted pictures of their recent park barbecue, followers respond in the comments: ‘The grass is starting to get green again amazing and beautiful it makes me happy to see green grass again (sic)’.[[39]](#footnote-39) Thanks to the workings of Instagram as a social movement archive, People’s Park transforms from a physical site to a nostalgic one—an imagined space where the past and present, park supporters and spectators, can engage with the movement. While social media archives contain many of the same elements as institutionalized archives—photos, videos, graphics, and a digital trail of networking through comments, likes, and shares—one of the most important contributions that digital media archiving offers is the possibility of seeing community reactions to that archived material in real time.

## Conclusion

The underground press became a tool in the pre-internet era for social movement groups to network while creating their own archives of protest outside the bounds of institutionalized repositories. As the work of early archival activists transitioned through the emergence of the digital era, the motivations for preservation adapted from the mimeograph era in the later years of the Vietnam War era through the world wide web from the 1990s to the 2000s, to what some are predicting to be the social media decline of the 2020s. Despite more than fifty years passing since the first known protest park creations in 1967, imagery and other archived materials from the first wave are still popular on park organizing platforms today that help drive the relevance of these issues. From the underground press to Instagram stories, park supporters continue to politicize the archives they socially construct, using historic and contemporary media to create socio-cultural political spaces in ways that continue to claim power long after spatial takeovers are gone. Putting the early underground press and receipt-collecting eras in conversation with new social media tactics of activist archiving illuminates the adaptation of Derrida’s concept of ‘archive fever’ across archival technologies. Bloody Thursday helped ignite an archival fever: ‘a compulsive, repetitive, nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement’.[[40]](#footnote-40) As contests over the lot at the corner of Haste and Bowditch have fluctuated over the years, the fever has shifted, at times spread, and is currently taking new forms through geotagging and reposting on social media by connecting contemporary occupations with historic ones. Examining the archival practices of the People’s Park movement reveals how Vietnam War-era activists used sculptural and print and later digital media to shape discourse about their own political actions and identities. Activist-created parks themselves were archives of objects—layers of plant matter, tools, art, lost items, and waste that all became part of the landscape of protest that shaped how park goers related to the larger movement, bridging the personal with the political. When combined with later oral histories of the park such as those in Terri Compost’s collection, the park itself served as what Ann Cvetkovich has called ‘an archive of feelings’. Feelings and emotions are not only encoded into the contents of the objects and historical reflections on those objects, but ‘in the practices that surround their production and reception‘[[41]](#footnote-41) within the park and within satellite archives and spaces. As trauma escalated at Berkeley’s People’s Park such on and after Bloody Thursday, this trauma has ‘served as a point of entry’ into the archive as a repository of those encoded feelings and histories.As trauma continues to escalate over the right to space such as the recent police murder of Weelaunee People’s Park creator Tortuguita in Atlanta, those emotional entry points into the archive make their way to social media spaces. While social media archives of parks largely remain hopeful, when police brutality and park demolitions cyclically escalate, putting the lives of people and plants at risk, trauma becomes centered in the narrative to catalyze an emotional response from park supporters to rally support during these moments of crisis.

While we do not have a record of the emotional toll of archival work by park supporters in the late Vietnam War era, we do know from activists like Amy Roberts, that the task of documenting a movement can, at times, feel impossible even for archival professionals. Roberts had been in graduate school for library and information sciences at Queen’s College when joining the Archives Working Group for Occupy Wall Street, and knew that her activist organizing experiences could make her helpful to the movement. Yet disagreements within the Archives Working Group were constant, and tension caused by police harassment mounted. How can one ‘loosely’ defined horizontally-structured group with little accountability manage a project that could barely begin to account for the daily production of thousands of signs, art and other printed work, and material culture of the protest itself—let alone daily livestream feeds in addition to tens of thousands of photos and videos? If anyone can transform a pizza delivery cardboard box into a protest sign in the Occupy Sign Garden, which of the thousands of handmade signs do we keep? What is trash and what is a historically significant banner? How do we preserve materials that have been outside and in the rain day after day of encampment or crushed in the trash compactor during a police sweep? How can materials constructed within Zuccotti Park account for the national and international reach of the Occupy Movement? And perhaps most important to the working group, what institution could we trust to preserve Occupy materials and make them accessible to the public? The working group had many questions with little time to resolve them before new challenges arose, but unlike many other protest movements, they had an archival management team to take the lead. Later into the occupation, the United Federation of Teachers offered Occupy an empty space for archival storage, expanding opportunities for archiving. The donation solved the problem of materials being damaged when exposed to the elements within Zuccotti Park while creating another; with a designated archival drop-off site accessible to everyone and plenty of space, any Occupier could designate an item as archivally worthy. Within a horizontal leadership structure, who maintains the responsibility of turning objects away? What is a ‘good’ object to archive? Rather than making administrative choices prioritizing certain materials, the working group accepted as much as they could. In turn, according to Roberts, the Occupy Wall Street Archives Working Group Collection at the [Tamiment Library and Wagner Labor Archives](http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/tamwag/tam_630/) is now home to a large piece of drywall. Looking to Occupy as a contemporary model, what dirty, odd, and even dangerous objects might People’s Park archivists have collected if they had been given the opportunity? And would those objects have reflected more of the park’s functional or ideological sides?

Putting Roberts’s experience at Occupy Wall Street in conversation with Berkeley’s People’s Park and the broader People’s Park movement begs the question of the future of social movement archiving. While the archives retaining the most amount of records for Berkeley’s People Park remain institutionalized, the social media archives these movements are creating continue to be socially constructed—embedded within social, political, and social power structures in a historical context of ‘cancel culture’ that encourages editing as a tool of self-preservation. Watching KRON-TV’s silent footage of Berkeley’s People’s Park in April of 1969 brings photos of the park to life before it was fenced.[[42]](#footnote-42) The swing sets and sandboxes are filled with playful crowds. The coffee percolator boils on a steel beam atop a campfire. Adults pass around jugs of wine and paper grocery bags filled with bread. If given the opportunity to go back in time and archive the movement, what would I choose to preserve? As Cvetkovich has argued, ‘The often ephemeral nature of queer life necessitates a creative approach to archiving, an openness to unusual objects and collections, and an acknowledgment of that which escapes the archive’.[[43]](#footnote-43) Despite Berkeley’s People’s Park serving as a sensory experience, merging visual culture, material culture, and performance, archives on Berkeley’s park and others are very traditional due to the institutionalization of the archives. There are no plant clippings, seeds, nor gardening gloves in the archives. There are no teargas canisters, no gas masks, no bloody shirts torn from buckshot that dominated coverage of Bloody Thursday. There are no wood chips left from the ‘people’s stage’, no food-crusted pieces taken from the aluminum trash can-turned soup cauldron.

Not only would I collect these pieces as the connective tissue that bound the park together, I would build on the work of the Community Soil Collection Project which has been working across the southern United States to gather soil at historical lynching sites to display in large jars at museums like the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.[[44]](#footnote-44) By linking the systemic past murders of African Americans with modern-day soil, this archival work by the Equal Justice Initiative challenges the ephemerality of these experiences. The blood of lynched victims, even a century later, is symbolically embedded in the soil that serves as the bedrock for contemporary societies. People’s Parks too serve as palimpsests of centuries of colonization, histories of immigration, as well as contemporary practices of displacement, police brutality, and resistance. The soil of Berkeley’s People’s Park might contain broken pieces of Ohlone pottery from the area’s indigenous inhabitants, remnants from life on Spanish missions during Mexican rule, bent nails from the affordable housing complex demolished on site in 1967, traces of the mudflat that infuriated locals after construction stalled, ashes of hog roasts, particles of blood, sweat, and urine, and torn bits of flyers and pamphlets that fell from the park’s collective bulletin board on rainy days. The soil will contain histories of the park since its first occupation: the sand of the riot-sparking volleyball courts in 1991, traces of hundreds of vegan food giveaways over the years by Food Not Bombs, as well as vestiges from thousands of people over the past five decades that have made the park their literal home as housing prices in the Bay area have skyrocketed.

While the design of Berkeley’s People’s Park has transformed numerous times over the past five decades, the occupied soil itself maintains its power as an archive of feelings about the relationship between space and power. The insurgency with which parks were created transformed material culture into what political ecologist Jane Bennett calls ‘vital materiality‘, blurring borders between life and matter, human and nonhuman, in ways that became a form of embodied consciousness raising. Park creators often imagined the vacant lots they targeted as dead wastelands—made empty, lifeless, and dangerous from housing demolition. The plants they nourished and the objects they brought to and created within parks were not only for utility, communication, and decoration, but served as ‘vibrant matter‘ that enlivened lots and by extension the communities displaced by demolitions. In this way, the objects placed within parks not only created a politicized landscape entrenched in urban environmental utopianism, but were imbued with their own ‘thing power’ that allowed park goers to imagine their territorial placemaking as procreative. The vitality of park materialities allowed park goers to imagine themselves as biologically and emotionally connected with their liberated landscapes in ways that have shaped the historical memory of these political placemaking projects as childlike play spaces and sacred grounds.

In a chapter on imagining nontraditional archives for queer figures like organic farmer Elisa Gidlow, Greg Youmans dismisses the idea of taking cuttings and seeds from Gidlow’s garden, arguing that removing plant matter would ‘dehistoricize’ them by relocating them from the site to the archive. Instead Youmans suggests using plant matter as a metaphor:

The solstice seeds offer us a concept of history as an experience of generational connection based not on facts and substance but on the impermanence and mutability of matter. Perhaps we can develop an archival practice along similar lines, by understanding the papers stored in our collections not as cold records, or as what remains as and after people pass on, but instead as both recipes and main ingredients of the larger alchemical process that is queer history.[[45]](#footnote-45)

What if similar to Gidlow’s own ‘plant-strewn messages’ that weaved together poetry, letters, and autobiography, the archival materials of people’s parks served as instructions ‘to graft the garden to the archive as another site in which to nurture a connection with the past’?[[46]](#footnote-46) In this light, the seemingly bland paper-filled boxes serving as the archives on people’s parks are not reflections but recipes—carrying the idea that the relationship between space and power can be reimagined in the present and future.

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