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Digital Geographies and The City: Queer Methodologies of Hope

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Abstract

Critical digital geographies scholarship has a well-developed repertoire for theorizing adverse relations between technology, media, society, and space, setting up an enduring ambivalence in the analysis of minor, small-scale, improvisational efforts to rewrite these relations. At this impasse, I argue for an intentional turn to analytic frames rooted in queer of color critique, such as methodologies of hope. This approach emerges from Jose Esteban Muñoz's writings on queer futurities, which he crafted as an epistemological-political frame for apprehending hope, justice, and life-affirming futures from positions of deep material and ideological exclusion. Muñoz's approach offers vital off-ramps from the theoretical cycles of negation found in much critical digital geography thought. My article demonstrates how orienting to minoritarian digital activisms through a queer methodology of hope illuminates dynamic cycles of critique and creation that transgress accepted limits to urban inhabitations and demonstrate normatively unthinkable, yet already existing, possibilities for being and being in relation in the city. I demonstrate this approach through a close reading of the digital mediations and mediatizations advanced in the social media tactics of Stop the Sweeps Seattle, a local collective fighting the systematic eviction of tent encampments of unsheltered people by municipal authorities. A queer relational analysis of these emplaced politics illuminates the digital, material, and ideological pathways they forge toward staying put and living well in the city against seemingly impossible odds.

Keywords

digital geographies; geomedia; homelessness; hope; queer of color critique; spatial mediation; urban geography

1. Introduction

Digital urbanism is well-theorized as the condensation point of multiple adverse material and ideological relations (MacKinnon et al., 2022). Critical analysis of the so-called geomedia city, platform city, smart city, or computational city have documented the existence and workings of myriad political, economic, institutional, and digital structures of harm. From technocapitalist urban development regimes to the surveillant data collection praxes that enable algorithmic regulation of the city, to digital circulations that mediate sociospatial regimes of elite consumption, digital urbanism is demonstrably replete with domination, dispossession, and stark inequalities (Faxon & Kintzi, 2022; Hartmann & Jansson, 2024; Polson, 2024). Societal consent to these adverse relations has been manufactured through widely circulating technocultural discourses that idealize digitization and computational regulation of the city as an optimization—efficient, orderly, rational, and fair (Leszczynski, 2016; Mattern, 2021). While the digital mediation of these dynamics is more recent, urban development in the US has long relied upon dispossession to literally make space for capital and property, through systematic removal and regulation of impoverished (and often racialized) people via market processes and urban policy that protect propertied persons: the taxpayer, the business owner, the homeowner, the tourist, and the consumer (Harris, 1993; Roy, 2017).

These dynamics are manifest in the prevailing response of US municipalities to a housing crisis that has forced nearly 800,000 people to live outdoors, often in tents, vehicles, and self-built shelters in public places (Soucy et al., 2025). Nationwide, local governments authorize systematic eviction of tent encampments by police and private contractors. Colloquially known as "sweeps," these evictions are authorized by administrative statutes that codify grounds for removal, and they are data-driven, triggered by citizen complaints submitted via municipal customer service interfaces (Elwood, 2025; Sparks, 2017). Encampment sweeps have been fiercely resisted by civil liberties groups, social services agencies, and advocacy groups, and by local collectives organizing under a shared call-to-arms "Stop the Sweeps." Present in cities and towns across the US, Stop the Sweeps collectives are small, voluntary, sometimes short-lived, and minimally resourced. They document and protest removals, mobilize mutual aid to encampment dwellers, and assist them during and after evictions. They also use social media to document sweeps, mobilize allies, and circulate alternative responses to urban homelessness. The theoretical apparatuses of much critical geography scholarship are poised to apprehend these kinds of digital and emplaced activisms as insufficient: Too small, short-lived lived, or loosely organized to scale up to a social movement; neither confronting nor dismantling the technocapitalist computational governance regimes that undergird sweeps.

My article starts from this problematic: Within a theoretical-epistemological status quo in much critical geography that has tended to read these kinds of praxes as holding little potential to transform unjust worlds, what other pathways might we forge to apprehend digital geographies of hope? In the face of these foreclosures of hope in critical digital geography, I argue for deepening our engagement with modes of criticality less commonly deployed in our field, specifically turning to analytic frames from queer of color critique, an approach rooted in the relational turn in queer theory that centers struggles for liberation, self-determination, and social transformation under conditions of seeming impossibility. Within this tradition, I turn to José Esteban Muñoz's (2019) methodology of hope as an analytic orientation to the kinds of minor digital practices that critical geography has tended to situate as insufficient in the face of powerful structural relations. Muñoz's methodology of hope is prescient at this impasse, offering an approach that is not a "naïve or neoliberal faith in the future that everything will get better but rather puts the current and

past negativities into the center of the project of futuring" (Bayramoğlu, 2022, p. 10). This approach offers a double move to exit cycles of negation by exposing normatively obscured harms and illuminating liberated futures, breaching received wisdoms, and cultivating collective desires for other ways of knowing and being.

In Section 2, I situate my argument within critical human and digital geographies' ambivalent encounters with hope. Both arenas have tended to anticipate the reiteration of adverse structural and ideological relations and the swift re-inscription of resistant, liberatory, or insurgent practices into these topologies. In critical digital geography, I argue, these theoretical cycles are also rooted in part in an enduring emphasis on mutually-reinforcing relations of technology, media, and political economy, and the ideologies and modes of governance that uphold these arrangements. While such formulations remain trenchant in the face of technocapitalist urban governance, an unintended consequence of their continual reiteration has been a foreclosure of the possibilities for apprehending hopeful politics enacted through other registers and relations.

In Sections 3 and 4, I demonstrate a methodology of hope in digital geographies through a close reading of digital activism advanced by the Stop the Sweeps collective in Seattle, Washington. Stop the Sweeps activism sits at the wicked crossroads of computational urbanism and liberal poverty governance where the dispossession and dehumanization seem inevitable. Yet as I will show, a queer relational orientation to these digital activisms illuminates their transgressive mediations of normatively unimaginable sociospatial relations, urban inhabitations, and futures. My analysis further traces how these sociospatial politics are crafted through entanglements of digitization and mediatization. Here, mediatization refers to the functioning of mass media as a site of cultural political formation and more specifically to Stops the Sweeps Seattle's enactment of their digital tactics in and through social media platforms. As I will show, the group's activism intervenes into collective sociospatial imaginations regarding homelessness, encampments, and the possibilities for urban inhabitation, making creative use of the powerful semiotic, circulatory, and connective affordances of social media in this effort. My article illustrates the kinds of transformative mediations and mediatizations revealed by orienting to minor digital practices through a queer methodology of hope.

2. Critical Geographies and Hope: A Queer Relational Turn

Despite its emancipatory aspirations, much critical human geography has taken an ambivalent stance in theorizing hope and the possibilities for hopeful politics. Blomley (2007) notes widespread rejection of hope as utopian thinking that is unattainable from within present structures. Some work argues that hope functions politically as a sort of naïve optimism, a softly coercive means of manufacturing consent to status quo inequalities (Braun, 2005; Fuller & Kitchin, 2004; Sparke, 2007). Others sharply delimit hopeful politics as only interventions aimed at dismantling oppressive institutional and political economic arrangements (Harvey, 2000; Sparke, 2007). Marxist feminist analyses more often recognize hopeful potential in micropolitics but typically do so with a strong imperative on demonstrated potential to scale up toward global solidarities and collective action. Fenton's (2008) analysis of social media activism counts as hopeful only those micropolitical mobilizations that accrete toward challenges to global capitalism. Critical geography's ambivalence toward hope is also inscribed by Foucauldian theorizations of power/knowledge, surveillance, governmentality, and biopolitics (Sparke, 2007; Thrift, 2007). These frames offer vital insights into the production of space and power through political-economic and governance structures and through affective and poststructural relations, yet all are poised to find relations of domination, even when orienting toward hope. For instance,

Cloke et al.'s (2017) analysis of small-scale mundane care acts in spaces such as food banks characterizes these actions as hopeful but simultaneously theorizes them as "in the meantime" affective politics that only minimally address neoliberal harms whilst awaiting political-economic transformation.

Critical digital geographies scholarship bears similar theoretical impulses. Accounts of the emancipatory potential of digital technologies of often co-articulated with concepts that anticipate adverse material and ideological relations. In early geographic information systems and society analyses, hope was often coupled to fear, and empowerment to surveillance (Klinkenberg, 2007; Sheppard, 1995)—analytic reflexes that carry forward to contemporary scholarship in what Dalton and Thatcher (2022) identify as a pervasive hope-fear dialectic. Analyses of smart city and open data initiatives reflect these ambivalences, framing hopeful discourses of inclusion as false promises that conceal neoliberal and technoscience logics (Wiig, 2015). Concepts such as shareveillance theorize emancipatory possibilities of open data initiatives as already compromised (Birchall, 2016) while social media activisms have been theorized as technoliberal participation that sharply limits any potential for transformative politics (Dumitrica & Hockin-Boyers, 2023; Salzano, 2021). Other work reiterates skepticism toward micropolitics, exploring whether social media activisms are "slacktivism" and "clicktivism" (Christensen, 2011) or evaluating the hopeful possibilities of communitarian digital innovations such as blockchain and Web3 in terms of demonstrated potential for scaling up (Ettlinger, 2024).

Some analyses of digital geographies depart from hope-fear dialectics and their anticipation of extraction, instrumentality, and quiescence. Studies of urban tech sovereignty collectives (Lynch, 2020), popular economy mobilizations around gig work platforms (Magalhães, 2023), and locally developed freecycling and mutual aid platforms (Kavada, 2020; Santala & McGuirk, 2022) evidence the partiality of supposed technocapitalist domination. Other work examines digital urbanisms beyond economies, reading for the use of digital platforms to mediate interdependent social relations of sharing, collective care, and everyday provisioning (Cenere, 2025; Kavada, 2020; Santala & McGuirk, 2022). These counter-readings of digital geographies are crucial openings. Yet the theoretical status quo in critical digital geographies continues to anticipate the insufficiency of these kinds of minor (Katz, 2017) and minoritarian (Muñoz, 2019) digital praxes. As one example, Dalton and Thatcher (2022, p. 5) frame micropolitical tactics that challenge contemporary digital/data mediations as "lacking the tools with which to confront and contest structural power" and therefore unable to generate broader systemic change.

One source of this skepticism around the transformative potential of minor(itarian) digital praxes can be found in digital geography's strong reliance on Frankfurt School critiques of the structural relations between technology, media, and political economy and the ideologies that make these adverse relations seem normal, inevitable, and necessary. Oft-referenced examples include Weber's (2001) diagnosis of the mutually reinforcements of economy and technology that co-constitute the "iron cage" of capitalist modernity, Heidegger's (1977) tracing of how technologies reflect the social settlements of a particular conjuncture, and Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972) arguments that media and technology uphold social hierarchy at the intersection of consumption and calculation, circulating aesthetic politics that flatten, decontextualize, and rank individuals and social groups. These arrangements are understood to be upheld by ideological projects of governance that manufacture consent to capitalist inequalities and amplified by the thoroughgoing mediatization of societies (Habermas, 1972; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). Within these formulations, the kinds of challenges that can be recognized as most consequential are those that directly mobilize collective

action to dismantle structural relations of technology, media, political economy, or the ideologies that secure them. For instance, Benjamin (2008) predicates the political significance of popular media on the basis of whether it scales up individual experience to create "an aesthetic register capable of directly invoking revolutionary action" (Dalton & Thatcher, 2022, p. 22).

These critiques of the structural relations of technology–media–society remain trenchant in this age of global social media and technocapitalist urban regimes. Yet continual recentering of these formulations has generated traditions of theory less able to apprehend the transformative potential of digital praxes that fight for more just worlds on other terms. As minoritarian feminist and queer theory have underscored, any theoretical status quo unwittingly forecloses alternative theoretical-political lines of flight by reiterating and re-centering the structures and relations of its critiques such as capitalism or white liberalism (Lawson et al., 2023). An exit from such cycles of theory, they contend, can be crafted by "reading for difference"—an intentional epistemological shift to alternative modes of critique and less-traveled theoretical frames (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Muñoz, 2019; within digital geography, see also Carraro, 2023; Cenere, 2025; Vadiati, 2022).

I argue that analytic frames originating in queer of color critique offer critical digital geographies scholarship ways to apprehend a wider range of transformative politics. I turn to Jose Esteban Muñoz's (2019) "methodology of hope," an analytic frame for theorizing hope under conditions of apparent impossibility. Muñoz crafted this approach while wrestling with the limits to subjectivity and politics for racialized queer subjects, specifically the conundrum that for those who exist outside normative categories of inclusion and power (whiteness, heterosexuality, respectability, property), claiming belonging via existing frames only fuels a re-instantiation of the terms of their exclusion and suffering. Further, the concrete asymmetries of power and resources that result from these normative relations often render overt confrontation certain to fail. From such positions of profound material and epistemic exclusion, Muñoz asks, what possibilities exist for exiting these cycles of negation?

Sustained attention to this question is the cornerstone of Muñoz's methodology of hope. He positions hope as a hermeneutic—a critical optic for apprehending the possibility of something beyond present (adverse) relations and the societal settlements that make them appear to be normal, necessary, and common sense. Further, from Ernst Bloch (1954/1995), Muñoz theorizes hope as practices of concrete utopia that envision and demonstrate ways of being and belonging that overspill the normative terms of existence in a society. Queer relationality theorizes such transgressions as generative, as manifesting possibilities for "something else, something better, something dawning…a resource for the political imagination…a flight plan for a collective political becoming" (Muñoz, 2019, p. 189; see also Cohen, 2019; Yep et al., 2022). Importantly, this emphasis on transgression of normativities situates this framework as "queer" in ways that extend its analytic reach beyond the lives of queer subjects. From these foundations, Muñoz's methodology of hope is an analytic orientation to modes of thought and action that mark and transgress accepted scripts for being and being in relation. It reads for practices of critique that call attention to the limits and harms of normativities, and practices of "anticipatory illumination" that demonstrate alternative possibilities that are unimaginable from within prevailing norms—the concrete utopias in Bloch's formulations. This approach offers lines of departure from the cycles of negation in critical analyses of minor practices by and with minoritarian subjects in digital urbanisms. It offers a way of apprehending hopeful politics on terms other than their extensibility, durability, or structural impacts and without engaging in naïve optimism that ignores structural, ideological, or material violences.

A queer methodology of hope in digital geographies requires connecting these ideas to theorizations of space and society. Here, relational theorizations of the interconnections of space, society, and digitality are fruitful, grounded yet non-determinist in their orientation. Leszczynski's (2015) writing on spatial media/tion is key, conceptualizing spatiality "as always-already mediated…the contingent, necessarily incomplete comings-together of technical presences, persons, and space/place" (p. 729). This framing elides problematic distinctions between "virtual" and "real" spaces, keeping their dynamic co-constitutive relations in view and conceives of digital-social-spatial relations in ways that do not anticipate technoscience and technocapitalist logics a priori. Spatial mediation also opens onto explicit theorizations of networked spatial technologies as media—as channels or cultural apparatus for the negotiation and circulation of sociospatial meanings. Further, theorizing geomedia as "the conjuncture of mediated and spatial dimensions of the social world" (Strandlund, 2023) offers a way of accounting for how social media and other media platforms may function as spatial technologies, as the mediatization of sociospatial content becomes consequential in the formation of lived worlds. Together, these contributions illuminate two interrelated registers through which the sociospatial impacts of geomedia unfold: by mediating space and by mediatizing content (Jansson, 2013; Leszczynski, 2015).

3. Stop the Sweeps: Fighting Encampment Removals in Seattle

I demonstrate a methodology of hope in digital geographies through an interpretive analysis of activisms by Stop the Sweeps Seattle (STSS), a local collective engaged in mutual aid to unsheltered people living in tent encampments, direct action against city-sponsored evictions of encampments, and social media tactics that document, signify, and circulate these activities to broader publics. STSS is an ideal case for illuminating the potential of Muñoz's methodology of hope, an archetypal example of the minor/itarian digital praxes that much critical geography theory has anticipated as insufficient. The group's battle against encampment evictions confronts seemingly impossible odds given the mutually-reinforcing dynamics of poverty stigma and blame, liberal governance regimes organized to prioritize and protect property and property owners, and ever-deepening computational regulation of urban life (Elwood, 2025; O'Connor, 2001; Roy, 2017).

Launched in 2021, STSS mobilizes mutual aid to encampment residents, protests evictions, and assists residents during and after evictions. They gather and distribute donated supplies to help encampment residents live as safely and comfortably as possible: Clothing, phone chargers, food, water, sunscreen, cooking equipment, coolers, propane, and books to read. They recruit volunteers to donate and distribute supplies, and help assemble safe injection and Naloxone kits. They mobilize in support of encampment residents when sweeps are expected or underway, gathering to protest and document removal, and to help residents pack and protect their belongings and find alternate shelter. STSS is not institutionalized as a formal organization and does not circulate information about the number or identities of participants, most likely because members have experienced police harassment and criminal prosecution (Oron, 2024a). Based on their self-disclosures in social media content and profiles, STSS participants include people with past or present experience of homelessness, members of other local mutual aid groups, housed members of the public, and people engaged in overlapping work in support of tenants, immigrants, and other structurally vulnerable groups. I am not a direct participant in their work.

STSS is one of many Seattle groups engaged in responding to the shelter crisis and to sweeps. The Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project and its street paper, *Real Change News*, do policy advocacy and

low-barrier employment. The Services Not Sweeps Coalition, comprised of economic and racial justice groups, testifies and protests to elected officials and members of the public. Grassroots and mutual aid groups like SHARE/WHEEL have supported self-governing community-provisioned encampments on public and private sites since the 1990s, while large nonprofits like the Low Income Housing Institute hold contracts to manage city-sanctioned tiny house villages. Groups like Facing Homelessness sponsor photojournalism, podcasts, and other outreach to housed members of the public, aiming to generate compassion through encounters with the lives and experiences of unsheltered people. Within this diverse ecosystem, STSS's approaches are most closely aligned with mutual aid and direct action—they are not seeking solutions within the structures of liberal governance such as policy or funding changes. Their social media work addresses members of the public; they eschew the sympathy and charity frames that anchor much visual and social media work around homelessness.

STSS is also engaged in narrative change around homelessness, encampments, and sweeps. They use social media platforms to mobilize allies, publicly document and critique sweeps and their impacts, and circulate counterclaims about sweeps, unsheltered people, and ways of responding to encampments. Over the past four years, STSS has created a collection of carefully choreographed Instagram posts that are sometimes co-published to other platforms (Facebook, X, TikTok). Most posts are dedicated to documenting encampment removals in Seattle through photographs and observations by STSS mutual aid volunteers present at removals. These posts are typically composed of a series of slides that follow a consistent design, aesthetic, and narrative structure: Documentary photos or video, annotations contextualizing the imagery; a city map showing sweeps carried out the previous week; and an infographic detailing how to join STSS to support encampment residents. Growing week by week, month by month, STSS has built this collection documenting sweeps in Seattle, the violence and destruction enacted in removals, and pervasive violations of statutory requirements for the protection of residents and their belongings.

This content reaches a substantial audience. At the time of writing, STSS's Instagram account had over 10,000 followers, including a mix of individual/personal accounts, Stop the Sweeps collectives in other cities, local mutual aid groups, and groups with allied politics (police abolition, immigrant aid, racial justice, anti-poverty). Platform-level metrics show rising engagement with STSS posts which further boost algorithmic circulation of this content. STSS's earliest posts garnered only a few dozen "likes" whereas more recent posts typically have several hundred likes, and an especially high-impact post generated over 1,600. STSS's content is engaged by diverse audiences in a variety of ways. Some interlocutors add context and detail in their comments, such as comments added by a former mutual aid volunteer detailing logistical barriers unsheltered people face in accessing social services. Others add emojis expressing support or enthusiasm (fire, applause hands) or emotional responses (heartbreak, crying face). Some respondents post content disagreeing with STSS's claims or reiterating stereotypes and hostility toward unsheltered people. One commentator on a post detailing the City's failure to offer shelter during sweeps asserted that unsheltered people refuse shelter because of addiction and choose not to follow shelter requirements. On a post decrying the deployment of police for sweeps, another viewer wrote, "If they would quit committing crime, we wouldn't need so many cops" (Russ, 2024). Such commentary is almost always challenged or debunked by other interlocutors. Responding to the claim about rejecting shelter offers, a commentator responded that many shelters do not accept pets, partners, or belongings. Another responded to this assumption of criminality with the comment, "Nothing is so effective for public safety as guaranteed basic income, housing, and counseling or friendly faces." (AJ, 2024). These responses are notable in their

non-inflammatory tone, calmly rejecting stereotypes and hostility with assertions that redirect the thread back toward STSS's core claims and counternarratives.

In the following section, I read these digital practices through analytic frames of a queer methodology of hope. My analysis is based upon a close reading of STSS's Instagram posts from June 2021 through December 2024, a corpus of nearly 400 posts. Close reading is a type of critical discourse analysis that involves sustained fine-grained attention to phenomena—a way of reading out from evidentiary objects to notice, describe, contextualize, and interpret their details, especially paradoxes and tensions (Lukić & Espinosa, 2012). Often used for literary or other textual analyses, I extend this approach to analysis of textual, photovisual, and cartovisual elements of STSS's social media posts and responses, and STSS's deployments of the connective and circulatory affordances of social media.

4. STSS: A Queer Methodology of Hope

A queer methodology of hope orients to modes of thought and action that mark and transgress normative scripts for being and being in relation, tracing cycles of critique and anticipatory illumination that highlight and overspill these limits. Such an analysis starts from theorizing STSS's activism in relation to the normative sociospatial arrangements they confront. STSS's refusal of sweeps and support for encampments unfolds in relation to long-held societal settlements that delimit understandings of homelessness, unsheltered people, and what should or should not be done. In the US, these cultural politics have long denigrated unsheltered people as lazy, dirty, and dangerous, framed encampments as aesthetic and material threats to the city, and blamed them wholesale for urban decline (Clawson & Trice, 2000; Johnson, 2019; Speer, 2019). Through these discursive frames, removal of encampments appears necessary, even beneficial. Additionally, the regulation of encampment removals through municipal code and digital data taps into a suite of broadly-accepted discourses about administrative and computational governance as fair, unbiased, systematic, orderly, and efficient (Elwood, 2025; Eubanks, 2018). In Seattle, encampment removals are authorized under municipal statutes that delimit criteria for removal, advance notification, offers of alternate shelter and storage of belongings, and are triggered by data on encampments submitted via municipal customer service apps (City of Seattle, 2017). Policy makers and mainstream media cite these practices as evidence that sweeps are systematically undertaken with high levels of support for encampment residents (Westneat, 2024).

STSS's social media activities circulate visual and textual representations that puncture broadly accepted understandings of homelessness, encampments, and removals. Their documentary posts about sweeps in Seattle refuse the pervasive problematization of unsheltered people that dominates public, media, and policy discourses about urban homelessness. STSS's Instagram content instead redirects this problem frame away from encampment dwellers and toward sweeps themselves. Countless images frame sweeps through symbols of physical force and institutional authority: police officers and municipal workers; police cars, contractor trucks, and heavy equipment; blue and black uniforms, orange and yellow safety vests. These images center domination and disproportionality. Photos from May 2023 removals depict seven police officers looming over a single person packing belongings from a tent (STSS, 2023a), and a row of police officers forming a human barrier while a single person carries away a small box (STSS, 2023b). Textual annotations amplify these representations: "How many cops does it take to watch while one mutual aid volunteer packs to move?" (STSS, 2023a).

STSS's social media collection thoroughly punctures the notion that sweeps are carried out in a measured way that protects encampment dwellers, their belongings, and the city itself. Posts about sweeps where STSS witnessed the action and assisted residents in documenting routine ridicule, disregard, and destruction of essential belongings. In one post, an annotated photo of a garbage truck at a site being swept reads, "The…worker directing this sweep commented, 'Nice load!' to the worker driving a truck full of residents' trashed belongings" (STSS, 2023c). In another post, residents' belongings are shown affixed on the grill of a removal contractor's truck like trophies (STSS, 2024c), with another showing a wheelchair being loaded into a truck for disposal (STSS, 2024d). STSS's re-signification of sweeps frames them not just as harms to unsheltered individuals but also as collective harms to place and publics. Multiple posts show public paths and sidewalks blocked by legions of trucks, tractors, and vehicles during sweeps, land gouged and scraped bare afterward, and public spaces filled with concrete blocks. One post records the closure of a public restroom and the destruction of a community garden in repeated sweeps in a city park (STSS, 2023d).

STSS's social media also documents repeated and ongoing violations of the claims that sweeps are orderly and conducted in accordance with the requirements of the administrative statute. Their collection records the chaos of sweeps in photos showing heaps of belongings and still-useful items abandoned after residents were forced away. Textual annotations repeatedly note minimal or no notification for residents to vacate a site and remove their belongings, and document routine violations of the municipal code that supposedly minimizes harm to encampment residents. Despite the provision for advance notification, STSS's Instagram records countless sweeps carried out while residents were at work and unable to remove their belongings. Nearly all the weekly maps of sweeps in their posts include one or more designated as a "surprise" sweep. Oron's (2024b) analysis of the City's own data confirms these claims: In 2022 and 2023, respectively, 83% and 99% of sweeps were classified as "obstructions" under the removal statute criteria, negating the requirement for advance notification. STSS reveals as fiction the claim that residents have an opportunity to move and protect their belongings. As these posts accrete and circulate over time, they evidence pervasive violation of the moral and administrative codes that supposedly minimize harm and maximize support to evicted residents, undercutting the justifications used to make this mode of urban governance broadly acceptable. In these ways, STSS's social media work publicly critiques and marks the limits of normative social and spatial settlements around encampments, sweeps, and urban governance.

Simultaneously, STSS's social media circulates representations of encampments and their residents that are unimaginable from within normative limits—the anticipatory illumination of already-existing alternatives at the heart of Muñoz's formulations. Against prevailing rhetoric and practices that treat encampment residents' dwellings as trash, STSS's posts universally script them as homes. One illustrative annotation of a photo of workers removing a tent and chiminea fireplace during a sweep reads: "Tents are homes. RVs are homes. Structures people build are homes" (STSS, 2024a). Against dominant framings of encampments and their residents as isolated, excluded, and abject, STSS's content resolutely insists that encampments are in community in collectively beneficial ways. Their posts include countless photos framed to show encampment spaces arranged for shared use such as chairs gathered around a table or tents assembled by a canopy-covered gathering space. Many photos and annotations underscore community and collectivity, such as this framing of a photo showing a beautiful mural-covered RV being towed away: "This resident…used her vehicle as a shelter and warming center for others, and kept food, Narcan and other supplies to share with her neighbors" (STSS, 2023c). Another post shows official vehicles assembled for a sweep, noting contractors had arrived to find the encampment already relocated by residents and allies:

"Community members showed up strong for people they had built relationships with and effectively helped them get as much time as they needed to move safely" (STSS, 2024b). STSS's content routinely asserts that encampment dwellers and housed residents can be good neighbors engaged in collective care of people and place—propositions that are wholly unthinkable within prevailing understandings of encampments and unsheltered people.

These representations push back against normative framings of encampments and their residents as imminently and justifiably removable, paving the way for STSS's still more transgressive claim: That collectively-supported encampments could be a legitimate mode of inhabitation. In addition to documenting sweeps, STSS also uses their social media to circulate announcements of weekly distributions ("distros") of donated food, supplies, and harm reduction kits to encampments, and invitations to join mutual aid gatherings assembling these supplies for delivery. Annotations on these photos assert that sustained relationships of active support with encampments are possible and form a foundation for collective care: "Weekly distros and showing up is community care that saves homes and lives." (STSS, 2024b). Some such posts are crafted to function as public pedagogy, explaining principles of harm reduction and mutual aid. Simultaneously, they demonstrate the existence of sociospatial relations more often understood to be impossible: Housed residents living in close proximity and interdependent relations with unsheltered neighbors, and encampments remaining in place as one element of a more life-supporting collective response to the shelter crisis. STSS's emplaced and representational practices, circulated to broad publics, mediate the city otherwise by illuminating already existing yet normatively unimaginable alternatives to the systematic state violence that sweeps policy downloads onto people, place, and community.

STSS relies upon the affordances of social media platforms to rupture a normative knowledge regime that typically allows sweeps to remain unwitnessed by most residents of the city. Encampments are more likely to coalesce and remain in less-traveled locations (Archibald, 2017), and by its very nature, a sweep is an erasure—carried out in a discrete spacetime and likely seen by few people except those directly involved. City of Seattle data on encampment removals is public, yet static and difficult to find, with after-action reports published quarterly as PDF files on a sub-page of the Department of Human Services website. STSS's systematic documentation of sweeps through social media platforms breaks open these dynamics of concealment. Digital representation of a sweep makes it witnessable beyond its specific spacetime and using a social media platform for this digitization renders the collection more knowable to broad publics, creating a timely and public record of these actions. This digitally mediated witnessing is an essential tactic in STSS's efforts to recondition public knowledge about sweeps, encampments, unsheltered people, and possible responses to them.

By mediatizing their content, STSS also renders it dynamic and circulatable, opening possibilities for creative tactics that expand and diversify potential witnesses and alliances. STSS routinely uses hashtags to amplify their critiques and push their content to diverse audiences who are not actively seeking content on homelessness, encampments, or removals. For instance, when Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell's administration resumed encampment removals after a moratorium during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, STSS began applying the hashtag #bruceharrell to posts documenting sweeps. This move connected the violence of sweeps to Harrell's administration while also ensuring that their content would appear in the feed of any Instagram user following or searching on this hashtag, presumably including supporters of Harrell. STSS's interlocutors and allies on Instagram adopted the hashtag in their comments and crosspostings, driving

further circulations. In a related example of such hashtag hacking, when STSS noticed an increase in removals prior to Major League Baseball's 2023 All-Star Weekend in Seattle, they began hashtagging these posts with #MLB and #SeattleMariners. These tactics rupture the social media echo chamber, cuing algorithmic circulations to audiences seeking wholly different content and likely not mobilized around homelessness or sweeps. In these examples, STSS marries their deep knowledge of local actors and events to basic tools for shaping content circulation in the social mediaverse in order to catalyze public witness of sweeps by heterodox audiences.

STSS also uses hashtags to interconnect their activities and political philosophies with closely allied movements. Some hashtags forge connections among local allies and causes, such as their use of #withoutshelterpeopledie, a slogan repeatedly used in protests, memorial events, and policy campaigns around the shelter crisis in Seattle. Deployed as a hashtag, #withoutshelterpeopledie connects these diverse micro-mobilizations to one another with minimal demand on scarce resources and renders them knowable as a broader collective force. Beyond locality, the broad application of #stopthesweeps to posts and reposts by Stop the Sweeps collectives across the US (and a few in Canada) has consolidated this shared mobilizing frame and makes the activities, politics, and digital content of these collectives broadly knowable to one another and to broader publics. When STSS tags its posts with #mutualaid and #wekeepussafe, they signal the philosophies and movements that inform their activism (mutual aid, de-policing, prison abolition), and render their content findable through these frames. All these mediatization tactics are technically simple, yet they interconnect and circulate shared frames and politics in meaningful ways. These circulations testify to the existence of a diverse and wide-reaching ecosystem of cross-resonant justice groups already doing things that popular and media discourses routinely reject as impossible, too small, too radical, and doomed to fail. In so doing, they interrupt the limits of public imagination by circulating normatively unthinkable possibilities for urban inhabitations, politics, and futures, an anticipatory illumination of "hope in the face of heartbreak" (Muñoz, 2019, p. 207).

5. Conclusion

Orienting to STSS's anti-sweeps activism through a queer methodology of hope illuminates interrelated mediations and mediatizations of urban inhabitations that interrupt broadly held sociospatial and political settlements around homelessness in US cities. A close reading of these "microdetails of possibility" (Villarejo, 2014) opens fresh insights into the significance and workings of digital sociospatial practices that prevailing lines of theory in critical digital geography have too often anticipated as insufficient. STSS's social media work is anchored around a generative cycle of critique and creation that challenges the taken-for-granted framings that make the expulsion of impoverished people seem reasonable and necessary and justify encampment removal policies, while also demonstrating alternatives for provisioning, safety, and living as well as possible in place. Digital mediation and mediatization of these politics are essential to their efforts to recondition public imagination around encampments. By documenting and reframing sweeps in social media, STSS builds public witness in ways that interrupt spatiotemporal dynamics that typically obscure encampments and sweeps from a broad view. They rely upon simple circulatory tools of social media to make their content dynamic—pushing it to unexpected audiences, amplifying their critiques, and forging interconnections with allied justice work near and far.

STSS countermediates the city through critique and revelation of the failed scripts that frame sweeps, and by circulating concrete possibilities for sociospatial relations that transgress received wisdom about homelessness, encampments, and urban futures. Orienting to this case through a queer methodology of hope lays plain how such interventions into normative societal imaginations are consequential in making and remaking the city, revealing radical claims to the urban present and future that elude pacification and de-politicization. More broadly, my analysis demonstrates how queer methodologies of hope offer ways to wrestle productively with digital geographies at the intersection of the pragmatic and the prophetic—an honest reckoning with limits and violence of what is, and a sustained epistemological commitment to apprehending the enduring presence of seeds of future freedoms.

Reading these digital activisms for their sociospatial mediations and mediatizations draws on conceptual resources from the overlapping terrains of digital geography and geomedia studies. Attending to digital representational practices as mediation accounts for them as consequential in making and remaking space and society, while attending to their mediatization accounts for multiple mechanisms through which these transformations occur—as interventions into cultural politics through mass media and through tactical deployments of the circulatory and connective capabilities of particular platforms. These formulations help account for how sociospatial change can be wrought through the representational, circulatory, and connective affordances of social media as a locus for intervening into the collective imagination and societal settlements of a particular conjuncture and catalyzing collective desires for other futures. Thinking at the intersection of mediation and mediatization in these ways also highlights an ongoing contribution of geomedia studies: Its generative expansion in understandings of "geographic" technologies. Much digital geographies scholarship remains strongly referential to its roots in GIScience, centering digital technologies with geolocative, cartovisual, or geotagging capabilities. Geomedia studies also considers the representational and communicative affordances of these types of geotechnologies, but from its inception has traced how media platforms that do not have these affordances also produce space and sociospatial relations in consequential ways. Said more simply, the "geo" in geomedia studies has a wider remit, expanding the kinds of digital-spatial apparatuses considered as "geographic" in digital geographies scholarship. My article demonstrates the kinds of analysis and insights that are opened up by cultivating conceptual interchange across these two sub-fields.

Finally, I will emphasize that my argument for queer methodologies of hope in digital geographies is additive, not a call to supplant longstanding conceptual vocabularies theorizing structures and ideologies that produce domination, dispossession, and unjust enrichments through digital technologies and logics. These theoretical-epistemological paths remain trenchant. Yet because the continual reiteration of these frames forecloses other possibilities, embracing alternative modes of criticality is urgent. Queer relationality is rooted in an epistemological-political commitment to apprehending possibility under conditions of impossibility, offering a powerful foundation for challenging the epistemological skepticism characterizing many prior encounters with hope. Methodologies of hope elucidate the world-making potential of politics that transgress normative delimitations of what can be, be known, and be created. Across the breadth of critical scholarship on digital geographies, a queer relational turn stands to illuminate hopeful politics that realize concrete possibilities for more solidaristic urban inhabitations, and in so doing, prefigure radically different futures.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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