

Topography of the Gargantuan Warehouses

Begüm Eser^a

^aIstanbul Technical University (Turkey)

1 Introduction

This essay explores the spatiality of logistics centres through a postcolonial research lens and reflective practice in urban studies. The spatial form and scale of global supply-chain infrastructures are being reconfigured, accelerated by the rise of online shopping. While online consumption habits shape today's trade flows, this process is largely embodied in the massive warehouse structures located on the peripheries of cities. The following text aims to make visible the process in which the city is reproduced according to trade flows and warehouses enter the system as commodities. Its purpose is to initiate a discussion on the ethical dimensions of these invisible infrastructures outside the city – logistics centres – and their complicity in global systems.

Methodologically, the study works with essay films to inquire about logistics centres in cities. It adopts creative, practice-based methods – walking, filming, annotating – to attend to rhythms, scales, and frictions that escape conventional datasets. Within a postcolonial research framework, methods are not *neutral tools* but world-making practices; the researcher's positionality, modes of representation, and prevailing hierarchies of knowledge are therefore continuously questioned. This stance challenges modernity's claim to detached objectivity and insists on asking from where research speaks, on whose behalf, and with whom ([Bhabha 2004](#), [Morris 2010](#)).

Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge is instructive here. In *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), Haraway questions scientific objectivity, which is identified with the myth of the "godlike gaze" that can see from everywhere. She argues that knowledge is always produced from a specific place, body, and network of relationships. Situatedness is not merely a limit but a ground for accountability: it compels us to take responsibility for *the things we learn to see* (Haraway 1988). In this context, the research presented here determines its own perspective rather than looking down from above; it places the researcher within the research itself.

This study combines essay film practice with postcolonial methodologies to situated and accountable knowledge, treating logistics centres not only as technical nodes but also as instruments of corporate accumulation. These centres are strategic spaces where companies commodify land, labour, and circulation to secure their profitability. In this sense, colonisation continues today not through states but through companies: this is the corporate form of colonisation in the present day.

2 Methods: Creative Methods in Postcolonial Spatial Research

Situated knowledge invites methodological plurality – discourse and text analysis, historical comparison, ethnography, and site-specific work – used together to reveal the spatial and institutional traces of power. The aim is not merely to collect data, but to reflect systematically on which knowledges are legitimized and which voices are silenced. This also calls for emergent research modes, such as decolonial research. Postcolonial research aims to disrupt knowledge systems that produce inequality at both theoretical and practical levels (Shakun et al. 2024). For these approaches to matter in practice, method itself must be handled critically and reflexively. Schön (1987) notion of *action-reflection* underscores this move: the act of making becomes the direct object of inquiry. In this framework, every representation produced in research is positioned not merely as an outcome, but as the research itself.

Within this framework, the essay film functions as a creative-reflective tool for research. It short-circuits institutional constraints of written theory and counters objectification by loosening rigid protocols of data collection and representation. As a form, it opens room for the subjective, the playful, even the amateur, the irrational, or the sublime (Almaç et al. 2025). Borrowing from Adorno's conception of the essay as a form of oddity and heresy, which enables

transgressive thought, resists the systematic, and operates as an in-between state defined by the critical position it provokes, the essay film makes visible the everyday and subjective experiences that methodological crises tend to obscure (Adorno et al. 1984, Almaç et al. 2025). In this sense, film is not merely an outcome but a postcolonial research method: methods are approached not as neutral instruments but as world-making practices in which positionality and regimes of representation are continuously interrogated.

Placed within this framework, the essay film structure of *Topography of the Gargantuan Warehouses* reveals the invisible logistics centre and the entanglements of online consumption, labor, and ecology through a poetic montage. The narrative is deliberately fragmented, mirroring the discontinuous experience of encountering these hidden spaces. Inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll & Tenniel 1981), the film guides the viewer through a surreal landscape, where scale and perception continuously shift: as Alice struggles to orient herself in a world that distorts reality and measure, the viewer navigates vast, labyrinthine interiors and edge landscapes.

Here the warehouse is not merely infrastructure, but a spatial knot where the colonial past persists in the present through firm-led extraction and commodification. The essay film is thus both method and argument: it re-trains how we look and what we deem to be evidence, and it invites a stance on complicity, ethics, and spatial inequality.

3 Results: Topography of the Gargantuan Warehouses

For some time I have been thinking about the logistical landscapes behind the excitement of online shopping – warehouses, ramps, queues. The essay film opens on a simple text: I scroll, I click; three days later, the item I ordered online is at my door. A simple, persistent question follows: Where did it come from? Which bodies, which infrastructures, which notes and silences brought this package here?

The receipt becomes a trace. It leads toward a logistics centre in the Marmara region, somewhere between Istanbul and Kocaeli. I follow its path – down the rabbit hole. Along the periphery, faceless façades line up: corrugated metal, cast concrete. Dock doors gape; trucks inhale and exhale; barcodes crackle; hydraulic brakes leave a metallic breath.

Outside the warehouses a thin line of trees, a patch of water-birds, insects. The sound momentarily softens, then the engines return: the sigh of asphalt, a low mechanical tremor. Nature and industry touch; there is no clean edge. The ecology of the periphery keeps time with just-in-time delivery.

Begüm Eser

A bridge appears before me. Feet, decks, spans... The trucks shrink; they become toys. Near and far, human and nonhuman, center and periphery all shift their scales. Scale becomes the subject of the film: how does consumption reconfigure distance?



Figure 1: Topography of the Gargantuan Warehouses, Film Stills

This film is not a report; it is a research itself. An essay film that short-circuits the rigid expectations of written theory, opening space for subjective, playful, and speculative gestures. With Adorno's notion of the essay as an *in-between* mode of thought, it brings into the field the everyday and embodied experiences that conventional method overlooks, exposing the position of the camera-body. The warehouse is not merely infrastructure; it is the spatial crystallization of invisible labor and ecological burden behind the smooth surface of consumption.

The film retraces the receipt and asks the viewer to do so with me, to witness the costs folded into online shopping's excitement. Ultimately, *Topography of the Gargantuan Warehouses* confronts the hidden infrastructures that shape our world. The work asks uncomfortable questions about our complicity in this global system and invites reflection on the ethical and environmental consequences of our consumption habits. By making visible what is usually hidden, it invites a more accountable way of seeing and a deeper engagement with the spaces we inhabit and the systems we sustain.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

This study, as postcolonial research suggests, reads space not merely as a technical infrastructure or a neutral ground, but as the continuations of colonial pasts and global inequalities in the present. Within this framework, the warehouse is not merely a technical node organising the circulation of goods; it is a tool for capital accumulation that reconfigures the city's periphery for capital, renders labour invisible, and externalises environmental costs. The receipt we trace in the essay film makes the warehouses audible and visible.

This reading aligns with Haraway's understanding of situated knowledge: Research is carried out not with a *'god-like gaze' from nowhere*, but with a partial and accountable perspective that discloses the camera's position and embodiment. Thus, what becomes visible and what remains invisible in the film is itself part of the argument; evidence is produced together with position and relationship. The essay film here is not a report, but the method itself: through decisions of montage, sound, and distance, it tests interpretations and opens the study's findings to the viewer's counter-interpretation.

The findings point to a shift from state-centered colonialism to a firm-centered regime of accumulation. Warehouses are not reducible to their use value (storage/distribution) but are large-scale investment assets shaped by exchange value; land, labor, and circulation capacity are commodified and profitability is secured. Thus, colonization today proceeds primarily through corporations, as the colonization of logistical capacity and environmental carrying power.

This picture is not ahistorical. As Mumford (1989) emphasizes, the storage of surplus is an ancient technique of power: controlling excess produces domination over others' lives, and scarcity is constituted from within abundance itself. *The person who managed to control the annual agricultural surplus also wielded power over the lives and deaths of their neighbours. The creation of artificial scarcity amidst increasing natural wealth was one of the characteristic triumphs of the new economy of civilised exploitation; this economy was diametrically opposed to the customs of the village* (Mumford 1989: p. 52). Today, however, this logic is updated through just-in-time regimes and financialized warehouse investments that render environmental and social costs invisible in the name of uninterrupted flow. The warehouse thus becomes the crystallized form of capitalism's process of commodifying space.

The study focuses on a specific logistics corridor on the Marmara route; labour regimes and ecological impacts may vary in different corridors. The essay film is a selective representation; the scope of the screening and feedback sessions is limited. Ultimately, *Topography of the Gargantuan Warehouses* aims for more than an aesthetic revelation of invisible infrastructures: it invites us to spatially trace the question of whose profit, whose cost. It proposes viewing the warehouse not merely as an 'infrastructure' but as a spatial node of corporate-centred colonisation; thus, the labour and ecological debt behind the smooth surface of consumption is opened up for debate in terms of both research and planning ethics.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W., Bob Hullot-Kentor & Frederic Will. 1984. The essay as form. *New German Critique* (32). 151–171. DOI: [10.2307/488160](https://doi.org/10.2307/488160).
- Almaç, B., N. Altunok, O. Y. A. Atacan & N. Giriftinoğlu. 2025. Three disentanglements for the exhausted geographies. *Journal of Architectural Education* 79(1). 268–284. DOI: [10.1080/10464883.2025.2463823](https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2025.2463823).
- Bhabha, Homi K. 2004. *The location of culture*. New. Routledge.
- Carroll, Lewis & John Tenniel. 1981. *Alice's adventures in wonderland*. Konecky & Konecky.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14(3). 575–599. DOI: [10.2307/3178066](https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066).
- Morris, Rosalind C. (ed.). 2010. *Can the subaltern speak? reflections on the history of an idea*. Columbia University Press.

- Mumford, Lewis. 1989. *The city in history: its origins, its transformations, and its prospects*. Harcourt, Inc.
- Schön, Donald A. 1987. *Educating the reflective practitioner: toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Shakun, N., O. Kolievatov, M. Olkhovyk, V. Goletc & N. Shcherbyna. 2024. Postcolonial perspectives in the 21st century: a critical analysis of modern theories and methodologies. *Revista Amazonia Investiga* 13(78). 194–208. DOI: [10.34069/AI/2024.78.06.16](https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2024.78.06.16).