**Shoe: Towards a Promiscuous Politics of Emergency Evacuation Mobility**

The paper works against the articulation of emergency politics within an Agambenian framework of a ‘state of exception’ which has heretofore dominated writing about emergencies. Instead it develops a more hopeful albeit agonistic politics of emergency evacuation mobilities. By way of Elaine Scarry, Bonnie Honig, Ben Anderson and the writings of gay rights and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp, the paper explores the promise of a ‘politics of promiscuity’, alighting on the role of shoes in emergency evacuation mobilities in two cases. Through detailed analysis of the evacuation of the World Trade Centre during 9/11, and the debacle of the evacuation of Australian PM Julia Gillard during ‘Australia Day’ protests in 2012, the paper teases out the concept of promiscuity through feminist and queer reworkings of emergency politics.

Keywords: evacuation, mobilities, emergency, promiscuous politics

**I Introduction**

In the 9/11 Memorial Museum in Manhattan, New York, can be found several curious see-through cabinets within which the shoes of survivors of the Twin Towers are exhibited. The shoes, as the museum describes, allows visitors to the museum to ‘walk in the same shoes’ of the survivors (Jackson, 2015). In their banality and apparent closeness to their former wearers, the shoes are intended to render an imaginative and empathetic embodiment.

There are many pairs of shoes in the museum which have been donated by survivors and several are paired with stories or narratives. Footsteps, echoing down the stairs of the buildings in smoke and semi-darkness; the press of congested bodies in the midst of escaping, of evacuating. Shoes are often used like this, populating projects of remembrance to signify loss, catastrophic circumstances and as warnings of history. But they also point to ordinariness, of banal things and objects. They are most powerfully metonymic and corporeal ‘contact points’ between witnesses and absent subjects (Feldman, 2006; Landsberg, 1997). The shoes in the memorial museum are portrayed as mournful *and* hopeful objects, a testament to a form of human resilience and something more because some shoes travelled. Shoes were shared between those attempting to evacuate the buildings. Although shoes could reinforce the heroic ‘ruptural’ models of action which feminist philosopher Bonnie Honig sees have ‘bewitched’ (Honig, 2013: 154) progressive politics, narratives around 9/11 - and even some emergency imaginations around climate change rooted in settler-colonial imaginations of endurance and wildness (Rickards et al., 2017) – might they also express an alternative politics of emergency?

This paper follows two pairs of shoes to interrogate a politics of promiscuity as shoes are given but also left behind and reclaimed in emergency evacuation. Promiscuity is taken as a form of embodied affective politics. The shoes, their mobility, and waning monogamy to their owners, seems to precipitate just this. Promiscuity valorises and moralises –sometimes very negatively - new and risky relations and solidaristic encounters which may cut across difference. An exploration of two emergency evacuations will hinge in two main ways. Firstly, these shoes open up an important and under explored geography of evacuation mobility (Cutter, 2006; Graham, 2005). It is a geography and genealogy within which shoes, the steps they took, the bodies that fill them, and the ways they are shared, permit insight into an intimate geography of mobility and its governance in advance of, during, and after emergency. And secondly, by way of feminist and queer approaches towards the politics of emergency, the shoes and the relations they animate bristle against the over-determining narratives of emergency and disaster which have seemed to have been dominated by Giorgio Agamben’s (1998; 2005) theorisations of emergency and exception (for a critique see Adey et al., 2015; Anderson, 2017).

An alternative can be found in the work of Bonnie Honig (2009; 2014) who has furthered, by way of AIDS and Gay rights activist and scholar Douglas Crimp, and feminist examinations of Sophocles’ *Antigone* as a key to moral and ethical political action (see also Butler, 2002), a ‘promiscuous politics’ of emergency. The paper explores promiscuity as a critique, as well as a more hopeful if agonistic perspective from which to understand evacuation mobilities and emergency politics. The paper suggests that a promiscuous politics helps us to re-evaluate emergencies not simply as moments of exception, biopolitical governance, or even ‘heroism, sacrifice and agency’, but where intimate solidarities, collectives formed and marked by what Honig calls ‘natal and promiscuous traits’ (Honig, 2015: 46), may cohere. Such a politics could repel against individualising, divisive and dehumanising forms of governance and sovereignty.

First, it sets out two neglected geographies, one of evacuation mobility and the material geographies of shoes, and queries how they might engage dominant approaches to emergency politics within the wider literature differently by dwelling on promiscuity. Then, in the main empirical parts of the paper an alternative and affirmative politics of emergency emerges in two very different accounts of shoes in evacuation.[[1]](#endnote-1) In conclusion the paper develops the promise of thinking ‘promiscuity’ and shoes in emergency politics and mobility.

**II Approaching Evacuation Mobilities:**

Geography’s engagement with evacuation mobilities are quite uneven, as are understandings of the term, concept or practice of evacuation itself. First, by identifying something of an absence of geographical scholarship on the topic, the section highlights how geography and wider scholarship has alighted on extreme events like Hurricane Katrina from which evacuation emerges as a catastrophic, singular and primary form of mobility privilege and exclusion. Secondly, it argues that this tends to follow suit with a politics resembling Agamben’s understanding of a ‘state of emergency’, its conditions and consequences, before offering alternative, affirmative, democratic and an embodied politics of emergency. Lastly, it opens up a wider geography and mobility of shoes.

**Evacuation mobilities**

Evacuation: the act of leaving, and being told or helped to leave, before, during and in the aftermath of an emergency or disaster. For Zelinsky and Kosinski (1991) writing in the context of their monograph on urban evacuations, evacuation has a ‘polymorphous character’, often moving over the ground of the concern of transport geographers or migration scholars. Within the history of geography, evacuations have tended to have been pursued within both urban and historical geography, the former seeking to decentre an attentiveness to the geographies of aerial conflict through the view ‘from below’ (Hewitt, 1994). Derek Gregory also locates war as a key site of evacuation mobilities (Gregory, 2015) in a medical-military nexus.

Perhaps our more immediate imagination of evacuation comes from quite a different place. From the 1980’s Geography has more closely aligned with fields such as disaster studies (Cutter and Barnes, 1982; Zeigler et al., 1981), following a Cold War interest in a combined and analogical understanding of social response to emergencies and disasters from flooding to nuclear war (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2013). These approaches took far more sustained attention to the causes of vulnerability, and to the social experience of evacuation measures (Cutter et al., 2000). And yet, it was Hurricane Katrina and what proved to be the deadly and inadequate preparations and plans to protect and evacuate New Orleans and Louisiana in 2005, which was to sharpen and broaden interest in these perspectives. Katrina is almost the *leitmotif* of contemporary evacuation research in human geography (Cresswell, 2006, 2008; Cutter et al., 2014; Cutter and Smith, 2009). A wider social science approach to Katrina’s social, political and environmental impact upon New Orleans (understandingkatrina.org), saw the critical address of an urban evacuation plan premised upon assumptions of mobility privilege hardwired into the historical development of the city, its circulations (Bartling, 2006; Graham, 2005; Lloyd, 2014), and its natures (Kelman, 2003).

As Sheller (2013, 2018) has shown elsewhere through what she calls ‘mobility justice’, the inability to evacuate New Orleans was taken to its extreme in the differentiated and bifurcated (im)mobilities experienced in the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Indeed, a variety of mobilities researchers have begun to open out the ‘emergency’ or ‘crisis mobilities’ (Adey, 2016; Sodero, 2018) that compose governmental and non-state actors’ response to emergencies. Returning to New Orleans from evacuation has also been identified as a emotionally rupturing process in family life, personal and community memory (Morrice, 2012).

The evacuation of New Orleans has become something of a trope from which emergency governance can be understood. ‘Katrina’ is a common moniker with which to badge the late, poor or innate government handling of emergencies and disasters, as well as a justification for an urgency of action – common to emergency response (Anderson 2012, 2017). It also has been used to characterize the neoliberal governance of emergencies by critics and the Left (Gotham and Greenberg, 2014; Klein and Smith, 2008). As Taylor and Levine (2015) argue, there has been a palpable ‘Katrina Effect’.

**Emergency politics**

Scholarship evaluating Hurricane Katrina has sustained the contention that the events in New Orleans bear the signature of Giorgio Agamben’s ‘state of exception’, and the abandonment of the population of the city to the status of ‘bare life’. The local, state and federal governments, and the military’s, response, did see various forms of constitutional legal exceptions actually happen within procedure of law and the separation of powers. Police, military force, and even armed militia, were apt expressions of ‘the *fictio juris* par excellence, which claims to maintain the law in its very suspension to force-of-law’ (Agamben 2005: 57). This meant the lack of due process and habeas corpus (Metzger, 2006) within the criminal justice system. It also meant racialised violence attributed to pseudo armed militias, and de-facto suspensions of civility. The residents of the city were effectively abandoned by an absence *and* excess of law (Ferrara et al., 2012), reduced to ‘feral’ subhuman like ‘bare lives’ (Giroux, 2015), more poorly protected than animals (Brown, 2017), and stripped of legal and political protections by a racist, suspicious and violent state.

While I do not want to deny the relevance of Agamben’s perspectives on emergency evacuation especially within this setting, in this paper I want to show the possibility of alternatives. Outside of Katrina and a politics of emergency exception which has dominated so much academic enquiry, there are other political framings we might use to make sense of emergency evacuations and their mobilities. Just as there are other geographies and genealogies to evacuation as an underexplored process of mobility which merit further enquiry.

Several entwining bodies of work are significant here. First, but more briefly, postcolonial scholarship reevaluates the imbrication of exception and emergency powers within colonial biopolitical projects from which colonial subjects have been governed (Morton, 2013; Svirsky, 2012, see especially Stoler 2006). A focus on temporal urgency and newness subtends the slower and less visible but everyday, structural and ‘slow emergencies’ that are so present for colonial lives (Anderson et al., 2019). Moreover, by attending to the ‘ongoing and persistent’ durable features within the evacuation of New Orleans we might be reminded of how black writers, advocates and scholars have written not only about the legacy of ‘not evacuating’ New Orleans (Ward 2008), but the wider structural framing of the evacuation and decisions not to evacuate within the context of what Christina Sharpe (2016) has labeled ‘in the wake’ of slavery’s ‘afterlives’ (see also Cresswell, 2016). Manzella makes this comparison most directly between laws governing slave mobility and the mandatory evacuations during Katrina, noting that while: ‘the commands are the contradictory, the overall configuration of authority is the same’ (Manzella, 2018: 195).

Second, Elaine Scarry (2011), Bonnie Honig (2014) and Ben Anderson (2017) have begun to advance forms of emergency politics which we might call affirmative, democratic and even activist or grassroots performances. The narratives and language of emergency can advance more diverse and civil political ends. Honig (2014) examines Elaine Scarry’s exploration of the politics of emergency during 9/11 through hijacked US Airlines Flight 93 which was eventually brought down by its passengers in a field in Pennsylvania. Scarry understands the event as a signal of egalitarian decision making and distributed sacrifice. Within a wider understanding of Honig’s (2009) corpus of work, there are other democratic potentials and energies in Scarry’s analysis, which help move beyond the ‘law-centred or rights centred resistance to emergency politics’ which struggle to surpass an antagonistic partnership with ‘the mechanisms of state sovereignty’ (2009: 66), and from relatively closed spaces of administrative bureaucracies, courts and legislatures, mapped both by proceduralism *and* discretion. Honig instead seeks out ‘new sites of power in emergency settings [….] propulsive generative powers of political action’ (10). Ben Anderson (2017a) also emphasizes the reclamation of emergency through what Honig has called exception’s ‘vulnerability to democratic action and resistance’ (Honig, 2009). In particular, Anderson turns to the annunciation of an emergency state of affairs by one of the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Cullors in 2015. The activist’s declaration highlights an urgent civil call to action in the midst of the violences experienced by Black Americans. It acts as an important reminder, ‘that emergency has never only been a technique of the state, even if critical inquiry has, in the main, focused on intensifications of sovereign power in emergency situations’ (Anderson 2017: 465).

We see rendered other versions of emergency politics that are local, democratic, deliberative and distributed, where emergency is claimed as a radical political act. But Honig also outlines a second form of emergency politics, a politics of promiscuity developed through the giving, sharing and loss of intimate relations. In Gay activist and scholar Douglas Crimp (2004) Honig finds a celebration of not the deliberation of Scarry’s democratic emergency, but instead an embodied politics of promiscuity as a way to counter the emergency legislation, policy and practices designed to limit AIDS in the 1980’s. This tended to moralise and regulate queer practices of pleasure, being and belonging according to institutionalized and heteronormative ideals of sexual and familial relations. Crimp’s politics, as avowed in his role in the Act Up movement, was born in celebrating and preserving the spontaneity of relations. As opposed to the ‘sacrifice’ of promiscuity within emergency politics, Crimp valued the, ‘excess, sharing, risk, seeking out new relations and realities, creating new forms of life’ – precisely the encounters and encountering that gay and queer lives were meant to deny. What was at threat was a ‘world that had come into existence by way of queer practices of pleasure: promiscuity, intimacy, communality, and risk’ (Honig 2014: 54). For Crimp, the cultures, relations and ways of life that inhabited promiscuous sex, were precisely what had led the Gay community to survive HIV, as opposed to the messages of safety through abstinence or monogamy promulgated within heterosexual ideals. Safe sex perpetuated norms that blamed promiscuity as the cause of AIDS and stigmatized queer lives. As Honig summarises,

‘promiscuous and collective sex practices built the communal ties and solidarities that could combat AIDS and help save lives by providing the routes and relationships that allowed people to share information and care for each other. Promiscuity was not life threatening, he argued, it was life supporting’ (2015: 55).

For Honig, and in many ways furthered by Rebecca Solnit’s (2010) work on disasters and communities, a promiscuous politics of emergency can be a form of embrace and excess, and simultaneously a critique of the ‘risk averse and the defensive’.

In the end of Honig’s essay, she somewhat moves away from bodies and intimate promiscuities to a form of politics that emphasizes thinking, in the ‘circulatory promiscuities of democratic thought […] switching alliances and allegiances, taking up new partners, staying on the move, and courting risk’ (2015: 57). Instead I would like to stay with Crimp’s more embodied politics and experiment with it in the case of the sharing and passing on of shoe(s).

**Shoe Geographies**

An attention to shoes in emergency might seem like an unlikely way to further alternatives to emergency politics. The material culture of shoes (Riello and McNeil, 2006) is now well trodden (Hockey et al., 2014). While a great deal of attention has been spent on the mobile practices that inhabit shoes, from walking, jogging and running (Cook et al., 2016; Hitchings and Latham, 2016; Middleton, 2010), the shoe itself has been somewhat marginalized within these studies. Cultural studies, and even classical economic theory has had more to tell us (Rothschild and Sen, 2006). Moves towards accounting for a more-than-human material geography are prescient. For Richardson-Ngwenya (2014), the muddy boot is an important vital material agent in the performance of fieldwork activities in sugar production in Barbados. Equally, Middleton reminds us of the indispensable role of shoes as a technology for walking, while Latham has explored the rise of jogging as a mass social practice in 1960’s America, requiring ‘‘nothing more than that the jogger ‘wear a pair of comfortable shoes with thick, moderately soft soles’’ (Latham, 2015: 103).

Shoes have been understood as a prosthesis of mediation between landscape, surface, body, subject and community (Michael, 2000), leading Latham and McCormack to describe the running shoe as one of the ‘key interfaces through which urban space is imagined, engineered, and experienced’ (2016: 372). The shoe is a thoroughly social and personal medium, for, as Robinson argues, our footwear has molded how ‘gender, ethnicity, age and class-based identities are reproduced and resisted’ (Robinson, 2014: 152)

Thus, shoes work on bodies discursively and affectively. Shoes and shoe choice can be risky both for ideas of femininity, but potentially even more so for ideals of masculinity, revealing social, gender and even sexual status through social norms. The shoe contorts and comports our bodies into different forms of movement and posture. For Gibson, the paraphernalia around shoes and shoe selling work to measure bodies against physiological-social norms from which the consuming subject is compared as ‘neither human nor consumer but calculable entity’ (2012: 355) for the purpose of serving capital.

This *wearing*-on bodies by shoes is highlighted even more recently by Kaya Barry (2018) who explicates the material-assemblages which have become so significant in their ability to encase, protect, and be adapted by people in moments of migrant crisis. For Barry, the shoes and muddy boots – as featured in Ai Wei Wei’s *Human Flow* - are particularly significant. Shoes seem to hold the promise to connect us with ourselves and in more ethical relations to each other. It is perhaps ironic that the shoe, as an intimate tissue of the personal and the social, seems to become somewhat problematic in emergency evacuation.

**III Shoe 1: Brown Oxfords**

A pair of brown Oxford leather shoes, once owned by IT recruiter and WTC office worker Fred Segro, were donated to the 9/11 Memorial Museum in Manhattan in February 2015 and form part of an exhibit. The museum is dominated by parts of the buildings that have become artifacts: the slurry wall; roof antennae; steel columns encrusted with rust and graffiti; fossil-like remnants of the building’s box columns fixed to the bedrock. Along with the shoes are the ‘Survivor’s Stairs’, a concrete staircase which had led from the Plaza to the street level below it, ending on Vesey Street. Visitors to the museum descend in parallel to the eroded staircase. Alongside these hard objects of memory the softer shoes stand out.

The exhibit caption and a guide for parents to assist their children’s learning, describes the evacuation of the towers as ‘successful’. A pamphlet claims that many people were able to leave because of the ‘*orderliness* of those evacuating and the courage of the first responders who helped direct their escape’ (my emphasis) (Museum, 2015a). This emphasis is important and speaks to two endemic but problematic assumptions in both the development of the World Trade Centre buildings and the history of evacuation planning more generally. Mobile bodies, with all their proclivities, passions, expressions and adornments are not just highly simplified but also coded with moralistic and normative assumptions of what is efficient, ‘orderly’ (a common concern for mobility Cresswell, 2006), and courageous.

Fred Segro’s shoes were special not only because they, like him, survived, but for something more. With a few office workers Segro evacuated the North tower with a pregnant receptionist Julie, who was harmed by shattering glass on the 77th floor. Walking with her down the stairs, slippery with water, Julie was encouraged to discard her shoes in the stairwell – as many other women did. Reaching the lobby, Julie found it difficult to leave the building from the glass and the sharp debris that promised to lacerate her unprotected feet. Julie’s companion Fred, gave her his shoes - a pair of brown Oxfords - before they exited the building together. On their walk to a nearby hospital, Julie found a pair of abandoned women’s shoes along the way and claimed them for her own, giving Fred his Oxfords back.

While this was one successful story of survival through evacuation, after the fall of the Twin Towers, planners and engineers were examining how the 14,000 people that were evacuated from the towers did not move as fast as they were expected to. Simulations of different evacuation models used to plan and regulate the emptying of the buildings had them going faster. They also had them going earlier – given that there was some delay before the building’s occupants actually made their way to leave. Billiard ball-like models equated people with atoms, spilling down stairways in a cascade of humanity. Other models were much more detailed. Although not quite at the level of footwear, they were fine-tuned to the fidelity of human bodies. The building’s structure was painstakingly modelled, reflecting nuances of stairwell design according to core walls and mechanical apparatus, even the design and size of stair risers that altered in different parts of the building were reproduced. One such system is *buildingExodus*. Evacuation simulations are meant to find gaps with reality. For WTC1, the North Tower, it took almost 2.6 times longer for the 7,500 people who did leave the building safely to evacuate compared to the simulated models. Experts predict that had the buildings been full, around 25,000 people at capacity, a lot more people would have perished. Surveys of the evacuation mention the time it look people to shut down computers and perform mundane tasks before they decided to go – like changing shoes.

In the aftermath of the building’s collapse, engineers, security experts, public commentators and members of the press would soon pin the slow speed of the evacuation on a number of factors, but notably the apparently corpulent bodies of the high number of office workers who were seen to be obese or overweight by their standards (NIST, 2005). Others would make wider claims for so-called ‘fitness’ to improving one’s survival in emergency (Parker-Poe, 2008). According to the Greenwich 9/11 evacuation survey who used a sample of interviewed evacuees to assess the average Body Mass Index of the evacuee population, 69% fell in to the category of obese or overweight (Galea et al., 2011). The long term health of survivors of the Twin Towers and other emergencies are still narrativised within a medicalised discourse of obesity (Spearpoint and MacLennan, 2012).

A wide variety of perspectives tend to imply that evacuations – like those of the WTC - appear to demand particularly streamlined and asocial kinds of mobile bodies. As Lauren Berlant writes so cogently, this reproduces the tendency to render particular bodies and particular body-subjects as problematic:

‘Biopower operates when a hegemonic bloc organizes the preproduction of life in ways that allow political crises to be cast as conditions of specific bodies and their competence of at maintaining health or other conditions of social belonging.: thus this bloc gets to judge the problematic body’s subjects, whose agency is deemed to be fundamentally destructive’ (Berlant, 2011: 105–106).

Recently, the notion of ‘obsogenic environments’ has achieved particular purchase in public policy and planning discourses. The concept positions bodies in relation to structural or environmental conditions that may induce or shape the potential for people to become obese. Colls and Evans make a crucial and critical re-reading of the idea. Instead, they suggest that ‘obsogenic environments’ might be transformed to mean those ‘particular social, cultural, political and economic environments’ which can make ‘living as a fat body problematic’ (Colls and Evans 2013: 735). The question should not be how the world makes us fat, but how our buildings, streets, town centres, modes of mobility and transportation, or, for our purposes – emergency conditions - how these worlds make fat bodies a problem? The World Trade Centre’s towers, in this moment of heightened emergency, apparently made big or fat bodies problematic and susceptible not to a ‘slow death’ (Berlant 2011) but a fast one.

The decreasing speed of egress was also tied to the increasing density of occupants, who the models see encountering one another as a form of behavioural ‘conflict resolution’. A person or ‘node’ cannot occupy the same space as another. Should one node wish to move into another node’s space, a conflict resolution ‘time’ is added to their total evacuation time. And yet, the Greenwich study, while looking hard for the correlation of body mass or size with evacuation speed actually found none. A heavier or unfit person was just as likely to stop as anyone else. Indeed, one of the major causes of this slowdown was congestion due to togetherness not body size. People were evacuating together perhaps because they needed help, were injured, because they wanted to evacuate with friends and colleagues, hardly surprising given the events going on around them, and because they needed to allow a counterflow of firemen and women ascending the tower. Such behavior is somewhat anomalous in the history of understandings of egress, escape and evacuation, especially down stairs. Histories of stairway mobility and egress, like their software and modeling counterparts, tend to perceive the mobile subject as a singular and territorial animal. John Templer’s (1992) monumental history of the staircase – referenced within the NIST report - sees individuals marked by an elipse of body-space within which the body will rock and sway. Little atomistic packages of flesh and movement are characterized as in competition with others, penetrating an envelope of interpersonal space (Templer, 1992: 69).

While big bodies might have been one direction in which to reproach the building’s evacuees, panic is a common refrain that positions fault, ‘that the dead or injured were victims of their own maladaptive or panic behaviour’ (Paulsen, 1984: 19; Orr, 2006). In many senses, this tendency could be seen as a continuation of what Berlant calls the ‘epidemics of the failing will and body’ expressed in obesity discourse (2011: 109). Of course, people are not so ready to perform like their modeled counterparts either. They are encumbered by attachments to one another, the new ones they seek out and make, but also to their things and bodily accouterments or prosthesis that are not so easily discarded, even in emergency. Shoes mark one of the most interesting forms of social intimacy in the evacuation.

For evacuation planners, the decision to change shoes was important in delaying the initial evacuation. The apparent ‘inappropriate footwear’ of high heels, slip-ons and new shoes, not only in the World Trade Centre but in other evacuations and evacuation drills, have been proven to slowdown egress through difficulty or pain (Fauzi et al., 2014; Gershon et al., 2007). Several of the Trade Centre’s stairways became congested with discarded shoes (NIST, 2005), causing people to trip or fall as they maneuvered round them. The gender politics of this are interesting (Margolies, 2003). Office and corporate life have meant the high-heel is an established and sometimes rigidly enforced gendered norm of footwear women are obliged to wear in order to inhabit these settings. Yet they appear ‘inappropriate’ for emergency planners, who use blood stained high heels to attest this in the different collections of material artifacts recovered. As Rebecca Solnit has commented in connection to the World Trade Centre evacuation:

Not a little of the stuff women wore, and still wear, is an impediment and a confinement. […] What is it like to spend a lot of your life in shoes in which you’re less steady and swift than the people around you? (Solnit, 2017)

Solnit’s wider contribution to communities in disaster (2010, 2017), hints at how a shoe’s promiscuity might work to flip our understandings of disaster and emergency. In an ‘intensified present’ minor communities and solidarities are able to powerfully emerge (Solnit, 2010). The 9/11 Memorial Museum exhibits shoes like Segro’s with the purpose that they symbolize ‘acts of compassion and kindness’ extended to others, because not only were shoes discarded but they were shared, loaned or given (Museum, 2015b). When receiving the shoes in 2015, the museum compared them to others in the collection, some of which showed signs of extreme trauma. As opposed to a story of individual struggle, an assistant curator stated: ‘they represent one person’s commitment to the survival and safety of whoever was wearing them, and that is extraordinary’ (Museum, 2015b). As Alison Landsberg (1997) argues, museums (like the 9/11 memorial museum) are able to leverage visitors’ ‘prosthetic relationship to those objects’:

For at the same moment that we experience the shoes as their shoes - which could very well be our shoes - we feel our own shoes on our feet.

In short, shoes like Segro’s appear intimately relatable. They are meant to show some kind of personal resilience or strength to survive even if they are also identified as objects of selfish encumbrance. Following the events, evacuation experts now advise on not discarding shoes on stairwells because they may impede the departure of others, and even harm them. Women’s footwear are often a ‘poor’ choice, so regards the official NIST report (NIST, 2005). At the same time they are recovered as testament to togetherness, the kindness of strangers giving, swapping or lending shoes.

Along with shoes, shoe giving and swapping, there are countless moments of altruistic acts and mobilities in leaving the World Trade Centre towers *with* others (Solnit, 2010). But this moment of mobility, down through the stairwells of the building tells us about a peculiar but utterly normal kind of movement around which an emergency politics coalesced. What the building assumptions and simulation models founds as anomalous was the product of people moving together, organizing and caring about each other, which took a bit more time, which even meant disobeying the direct orders office and building managers were giving which told workers to return to their seats (Alert, 2018). This solidarity slowed them down but ultimately let most of them leave the building.

What was happening within the Twin Towers - how the evacuees acted and decided in emergency in their little collectives - shares something more in common with the promiscuous form of emergency politics Honig defined earlier. Even if the promiscuity of the evacuating shoe and its wearers might have slowed lives, it saved others; it was a politics of living – what Honig has elsewhere called a ‘promiscuous natality’ (Honig, 2015). It relied not on orderly movement but help and sharing in lesser stories of spontaneous relations, with subjects who refused to move in the ways that were predicted, who found pockets of togetherness, intimacy and solidarity within a moment of crisis and encounter, maybe with friends or complete strangers. Within the longer genealogy of ideas, infrastructures, practices and regulations around evacuation, these shoes moved with and in some ways against them.

And yet, one of the shoe stories the 9/11 Museum uses to characterize just this kind of promiscuous politics slightly antagonizes this perspective. It reinforces just as it runs against dominant narratives of living through an emergency. The Segro story, which sees him gallantly offering his shoe to ensure the comfort and survival of a pregnant woman avoiding lacerated feet and impeded mobility, simultaneously reproduces individualistic and gendered narratives of ‘sacrifice, heroism and agency’ common to emergency politics and wider tropes of 9/11. As writers like Lorraine Dowler (2002) have explored, these have consistently excluded women and other people of colour, as well as of diverse nationalities and religions, from masculine imaginations of a heroic agent acting in emergency (Thurnell-Read and Parker, 2008).

**IV Shoe 2: blue suede Midas wedge-pump**

Our second pair of shoes, size 36 blue suede Midas pumps belonged to former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard. The shoe’s movement, circulation and restitution in a peculiar event of evacuation, opens up another possibility of promiscuity in evacuation and emergency. On the 26th January 2012 Gillard was attending an ‘Australia Day’ remembrance event at the restaurant ‘The Lobby’ – a glass walled restaurant, which happened to be located a hundred meters from the iconic Aboriginal Tent Embassy – the site of continued presence of Aboriginal political activism and protest in Canberra’s parliamentary triangle. The two sites were separated in distance only by a flower garden, but miles apart within the history and politics of Australia’s race relations. Gillard was attending a medal presentation to reward emergency responders during the Victorian bushfires of 2009 and the Queensland floods and cyclone of December 2010 and January 2011 respectively. The tent embassy protestors and activists were attending a meeting to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the aboriginal tent embassy site and its “Corrobee for Sovereignty”. They would also protest what have been seen as a both a continuation and intensification of the ‘durability’ (Stoler, 2008) of apartheid-style emergency politics in the Northern Territory through the Northern Territory National Emergency Response – also known as the ‘Intervention’ (Lea, 2012).

The tent embassy protestors, hearing of Gillard’s and opposition leader Tony Abbott’s presence at the restaurant, were tipped off by one of Gillard’s advisors, Tony Hodges. Hodges, who resigned following the events, had alerted Kim Sattler (who was secretary of the UnionsACT, the representative organization of trade unions in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)) to a public statement Abbott had made earlier that morning in Sydney about ‘moving on‘ the nature of indigenous political action. Sattler had, in-turn - informed Barb Shaw, an Aboriginal Elder, of Abbott’s comments either during or before Shaw addressed the crowd and suggested that they confront Abbott immediately about his position of ‘tearing down’ the Tent Embassy.

A large number of protestors moved from the ‘Tent Embassy’ site to the Lobby, surrounding the venue and began chanting and pounding on the glass, shouting “Shame”. Gillard’s security and police escort, bolstered by Australian Federal Police officers, were unnerved by the events which they described as ‘deteriorating’. They decided to evacuate their VIP Gillard from the location to a waiting car. While these moments are relatively powerful signal of the sovereignty and exclusivity of executive power, Gillard’s is different. She is not simply rushed or bundled, but in one moment, literally carried off her feet and out of one of her shoes.

Within the public media the spectacle of evacuation became a demeaning signal of the excessiveness of security, the separation of a political elite escaping a questionably risky protest, and in the fall-out, a continuation of a gender politics Gillard endured for most of her premiership. Within Australian political life, Gillard’s lost shoe was particularly symbolic, reminding some of the lost red shoe of the Evdokia Petrova, an officer in the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs who, in 1954 after her husband had defected to Australian intelligence services, was put onto a plane back to the Soviet Union by armed Soviet officers at Sydney airport, only to lose her red shoe on the runway in the struggle. Another shoe, wrote a commentator, ‘slipped off the foot of a woman under duress’ (Kile, 2012).

It seems almost the perfect opposite of the promiscuity of the WTC evacuation. Close protection security shout orders, part and push protestors back. Gillard’s body is pulled and carried and, for these seconds, transformed into an apparently empty vessel of political autonomy and authority. An aboriginal elder, Michael Anderson – who was one of the co-founders of the tent embassy - loses balance in the wake of the evacuation. Anderson is forced to grip the restaurant entrance’s stair-rail to avoid falling as Gillard and her security guards storm by in probably the most bifurcated image published. Anderson holds the stair-rail in the crush while Gillard is stowed in the arms of a bodyguard, wearing a single shoe.

In the wake of the evacuation, and the protest at the restaurant, the shoe that was left on the pavement starts to move again. The shoe is reclaimed by the activists, shared and contested, galvanizing the fraught meanings and politics over the protest.

The activists suggested it could put into economic exchange, and it soon starts moving between different figureheads. While the Embassy hold the shoe, Coe – addressing the press - is keen that they are not to be perceived as ‘thieves’, a common refrain leveled at the historical conflict over indigenous land rights which the state has taken away. For others, such as the late indigenous activist and academic Pat Eatock stated, “She can't have it, this is going on eBay, We are going to see if we can get some money for the (tent) embassy”. The shoe is even imagined, by Eatock, as becoming a future museum exhibit, just like the 9/11 memorial, “I see it sitting like Cinderella's shoe in a glass case in a museum 10 years from now as this is part of the history of race relations in Australia”. Amidst all the Cinderella connotations, the event is crystallized into a hermetically sealed memory of race relations. For the protestors, the glass-walls surrounding the restaurant signal deafness of the political leadership to aboriginal voices.

The lost shoe becomes a vehicle for political solidarity. The protestors hold onto the shoe and offer it back as if was an item of sovereign property through a ceremony performed by Gwenda Stanley – aboriginal activist and performer - returning the shoe to a Australian Capital Territory police officer the following day. The activists mock the practices the Australian state has forced on aboriginal communities through land claims, blood rights and more.

Julia will be eligible to make a shoe title claim which will take approximately twenty years or more before this is seriously considered. This will be dependent on Julia being able to show continuous connection with the shoe. This may be difficult to prove as she will not have had the shoe for 20 years.

Julia will also have to provide evidence she is a full-blooded shoe owner(Johnson, M., 2012)*.*

Stanley, along with several others, pose with the shoe, pretending to try it on like Cinderella’s glass slipper, mocking the pretense and symbolism of power held in the shoe in a form of what Honig might call a ‘sororal bond’ of promiscuous ‘disobedience’. Activists and protestors hailed the event as a crucial signal of political resistance to the long durabilities of Aboriginal abandonment. Stop the Intervention Collective Sydney also declare their support for the direct action (STIC, 2012).

And yet, while opening up an affirmative politics that steeled aboriginal and civil protest through the promiscuities of the shoe, controversy over the lost shoe in the evacuation reinforces already existing social and political boundaries (Donaghue, 2015; Sawer, 2013). This was purportedly Gillard’s ‘Cinderella moment’ when her shoes, and the lack of them in emergency, become a pivot in the maligning of her premiership. Midas, the shoe’s manufacturer, even named the model after Gillard. Mocking video edits overlay the Skynews video with Whitney Houston’s (1992) version of ‘I will always love you’, famous from the 90’s movie *The Bodyguard*. Another statement on the Tent Embassy’s Facebook page alluded to Cinderella: ''Gillard we have your shoe, please return by midnight to get it or you will turn into a red pumpkin.''

So this is a different form of promiscuous politics we saw earlier, as the evacuation links some bodies intimately, it promises affirmation and a critique of state policy, it also pushes others apart. The lost shoe becomes a key affective move and racially divisive wedge as the evacuation is scrutinized by multiple actors.

The affective promiscuities of the shoe and the evacuation begin to work in another direction. They served as a point from which to reexamine the events that led up to the protest and the premier’s evacuation from the restaurant - both by the press but also federal committees and even a court case. Promiscuity, and what Judith Butler and Honig have called ‘promiscuous (dis)obedience’ (Butler, 2002; Honig, 2015) in their analysis of Sophocles’ *Antigone*,could be seen to reinforce *and* undermine the collectivity and the perceived legitimacy of the protestors’ actions. Antigone is often regarded as a model of a ‘lone heroine, a rogue resistor (Honig 2015: 704). Honig, instead, finds alternatives to this reading, seeing potential solidaristic and sororal agency between Antigone and her sister Ismene. Moreover, she identifies a manner of ‘promiscuous disobedience’, a ‘kind of action that responds to constraint with subversion’ (Honig 2015: 43). Butler (2000), by contrast, focuses more on Antigone’s speech acts, and the manner in which her agency is subverted and in other moments reasserted by the repetition of her father’s voice.

In the aftermath of the protest, it was admitted by the actors involved that some misinterpretation of Abbott’s actual words had occurred. The affective freight of ‘moving on’ the embassy and its historical analogue with moving on indigenous communities, over-determined the meaning of seeking to ‘move on’ political debate. Hodges’ leak, the government’s comments, and the police response to public criticism, would result in the Australian Federal Police’s investigation of the events (Brandis, 2012). Claims circulated around whether Hodges’ words, not Abbott’s, were precipitously affective, running away with themselves with unintended consequences. Hodges words were believed to be ‘precipitating’ of a security breach, given the comments disclosed the location of the opposition leader and the Prime Minister, which amounted to ‘inciting a riot’. The Prime Minister’s office was accused of trying to cover up both possibilities. We could see that Gillard actually re-asserts a more heroic model of emergency that overlapped the event “for it to be insinuated that I would play some role in disrupting an event to recognize Australians who performed miracles during a natural disaster is deeply offensive” (Peatling, 2012).

The union representative Kim Sattler was blamed as the vehicle for Hodges and Abbott’s words to get to the tent embassy protest. Inundated by press and media interviews, how Sattler was presumed to have exaggerated or distorted both Hodges and Abbott’s original words was key, as she claimed to have simply repeated what Hodges had told her Abbott had said. How promiscuity plays out in Sattler is really interesting. In relation to Butler’s (2000) interpretation of Antigone, her speech and voice perform particular relations of sovereign power. Antigone is ‘propelled by the words that are upon her […] with a promiscuity she cannot contain’ (77), but they are also appropriative and defiant, transmitting her father’s words in aberrant form, ‘sending them in directions they were never intended to travel’ (88). Similarly, Sattler is not perceived as some sort of helpless vessel through which Abbot or Hodges spoke, but a more active agent. And yet, Sattler has to defend herself by trying to play down her own agency in the events. Promiscuous ‘obedience’ (Honig 2015) is her measure of protection – she was just the messenger. Sattler’s retorts expose what is an assumption of her culpability in passing on inflammatory information in an affectively volatile situation, “I didn’t spread it” Sattler responds in an interview on ABC Radio Canberra. And where she is accused of inciting the crowd, Sattler explains “Look, I’m not responsible for what other people’s intentions or beliefs were […]”. The host responds “But, Kim Sattler, you were there on the ground. You felt the mood that day. You could feel the mood” (ABC, 2012).

The government condemned the event as an overreaction of the indigenous minority, and the evacuation a rational response to a threatened premier. Security magazines would evaluate the evacuation and the decisions by close protection officers on the day as a rational approach in the face of incomplete information (Schneider, 2012). The media resort to reporting which reproduced racialised and colonial derogations of indigenous people and conspiratorial female autonomy and solidarity – absent of the positive associations Honig espouses. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* Sheehan wrote that the “the shoe was acquired during an act of collective hysteria, hate speech and menace” (2012). *Channel 7* led with the headline ‘Australian Prime Minister Attacked by Protestors!’, with other news outlets following suit including the headline ‘Day of Shame’ by the *Sydney Morning Herald* whose Paul Bolt declared that Gillard had been ‘monstered’ and was made to ‘run for her life’ (2012).[[2]](#endnote-2)

Declarations of shame and shamefulness dominated much of the commentary. Several reports described the protestors as inciting a ‘violentriot’ and as an ‘arriving mob’. They also took to mocking one of the leaders of the action when Marianne Mackay threw rose petals through the doors of the lobby. Mackay and another protestor, Selina Davey-Newry, are referred to as ‘two 30something’ women, and ‘the pair’, as ‘enraged’ and ‘proud’ culprits for the ‘riot’. Here we see that the ‘sororal bond’, powerful in the posturing around Gillard’s shoe while flipping the notion of political agency from an ‘individualistic, heroic and explicit’ (Honig 2015) version, become a popular strategy to malign the protestors who were cast as in a conspiracy to drive racial political tension.

The ‘shame’ articulated by the protestors in chants was reused by the more skeptical press to describe the protestors’ actions, while others see the measures employed police force as themselves shameful and shambolic, overwrought for both embarrassing the Prime Minister and antagonizing the protestors with police violence. More interestingly, the critique of the protestors did not only come from the Right, journalists, or law enforcement, but the aboriginal community too. Warren Mundine, a critic of the current tent embassy, saw the protest as giving in to ‘aggressive and disrespectful actions’. Michael Anderson, not going so far as to denounce the protest, felt convinced that even while their methods of protest had been defensible, they had probably, in fact, been “set up” by the promiscuous distortion and inflammation of Abbott’s words.

Such a diagnosis of emergency promiscuity continued into late 2013. A defamation case was overseen in the Northern Territory supreme court between the plaintiff Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, President of the Northern Territory Barkly Shire council, and the defendants Rebecca Healy, who was nominee for a Barkly council seat and Young Australian of the Year, and Australia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), who interviewed Healy during the Australia Day protests. The plaintiff brought the case that her character had been defamed by an interview Healy gave to the press which implied that she was the cause of the resultant evacuation (Kunoth-Monks, Rosalie v HEALY, 2013). The court concluded that the ‘plaintiff got caught up in the moment’. And, even when finding for Kunoth-Monks, it concluded that Ms Healy, even if truthful, was ‘excitable, foolish, filled with unreasoning prejudices, prone to exaggeration to make a point, and prone to draw inferences which are unreasonable’. Both women, *because* of their promiscuous affectivity, were drawn – just like others - as untrustworthy nodes in a network of complicity in the Australia Day events.

**V Conclusion**

Shoes are not alien to emergency. Kevin Grove (2018) has recently accounted for his shoe’s poor material protection in Miami rainfall as ‘waterlogged, blister-generating machines’ and ‘definitely not resilient’ (1). The shoe helps us ground evacuation mobility into a more tortuous place between plans, and planners and protocols meeting fleshy, feeling bodies and subjects. It helps us move evacuation away from a politics of exception, or from the relatively hidden and technical domains of emergency planners or architects, towards a politics of promiscuity, of risky, promising and intimate relations exceeding the assumptions of those who plan and seek to govern them.

There is political potential in the *excesses of promiscuity*, but just as equally, a warning from the accusatory politics which agonizes the promiscuous. This paper concludes that we must try to stay with the promises of promiscuity.

There is promise in the stairwells of the World Trade Centre, and the activist response to Gillard’s evacuation around these shoes. Led by feminist and queer theory, this paper has identified a more generous, diverse, solidaristic, hopeful and promiscuous politics to evacuation. In this sense, promiscuity can be a form of *promise* of how social relations might flourish in the most exceptional and violent of times. Staying with promiscuity might help foreground the little practices and resistances that enable those to survive emergencies better. It may crucially, urge an awareness of the relations and experiences that have so far exceeded the presumptions of planners. These are not only the relations that enable people to cope in emergency or disaster, but those that might very visibly contest the narrow and discriminatory assumptions around emergencies and planning in the first place, that have tended to decontextualize the social and historical production of bodies and their fashions. These have tended to individualise as designers conceive of particularly streamlined and able bodies, and try to close down human, non-human and passionate relations in a version of elite fear, rather than letting them flourish (see Solnit 2010).

Might we stay with how promiscuity is so agonistic through the forms of what we could call (dis)obedient promiscuities. Between the shoes in this paper have been two emergency evacuations – one apparently plural – the other marked by the lost shoe – singular. One which is promiscuous and generative, the other is initially antagonistic, aggressive, parting people, but becomes more in the evacuation’s wake (Sharpe, 2016). Perhaps contrary to the affective relations and bonds it seems to imply, promiscuity provokes diagnosis, analysis and blame. The shoe, in both cases, is a spatio-temporal and affective marker; a site of memory and narrative; a flash-point for social and journalistic commentary on culpability in evacuation, and an active agent in several federal, scientific, police and state investigations. The given, lost and retrieved shoe of evacuation unfolds past events and re-articulates the political relations that constitute them in a way that has inflamed and ruptured governmental, state, media and civil society relations. The 9/11 shoes might retreat to masculine modes of emergency action too. In the context of Aboriginal land and sovereignty disputes, a promiscuous politics is even more agonistic. It becomes a target of culpability in highly charged gendered and racial power geometries that positions some bodies as affectively susceptible political trouble makers. This longer wake of Gillard’s shoe seems to *evacuate a moment of its promiscuous promise by culpability through disobedience, by the search for causality that very same promiscuity precipitated*.

Honig has warned of the dangers of a ‘politics of emergency, in which citizens are re-impressed into the logic of sovereignty and obedience’ (Rossello, 2015: 704). The (dis)obedient promiscuities evident here offer forms of togetherness in moments and causes of civil resistance. They help upset and humiliate a display of sovereign power through evacuation and police force. And in so doing they support a platform for indigenous protest through playfulness and creativity. At the same time, (dis)obedient promiscuities also prove as a warning for the ways in which sovereign and masculine emergency logics are re-impressed upon bodies that do not seem to fit or challenge them.

Let us not evacuate promiscuities from emergency. Let us stay with them instead.

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1. The paper builds on fieldwork carried out at the 9/11 memorial museum in 2015 as part of the Leverhulme funded Governing Emergencies network; fieldwork and a site visit to the location of the Tent Embassy and the Lobby Restaurant in Canberra in January 2018; extensive archival work on the history of evacuation in tall buildings; and a detailed reading of the media furore surrounding Gillard’s evacuation. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ironically, Abbott would reuse the phrase ‘Day of Shame’ to describe Gillard’s handling of the sexist comments made by the speaker of the house later that year. This is what prompted Gillard’s famous ‘misogyny speech’. The speaker, who later resigned, was Peter Slipper. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)