

ETERNAL TOUR – JERUSALEM

Standing on the Beach with a Gun in my Hand

sous la direction de Donatella Bernardi et Noémie Etienne

Image de couverture: Emmanuel DuPasquier-Paxon, *Moucharabieh en papier*, installation dans le cadre de l'exposition *Le pèlerinage à Jérusalem*, Donatella Bernardi, Rudy Decelière, Emmanuel DuPasquier-Paxon, Beat Lippert, Marks Blond, Berne, du 28 février au 13 mars 2011, photo David Aebi.

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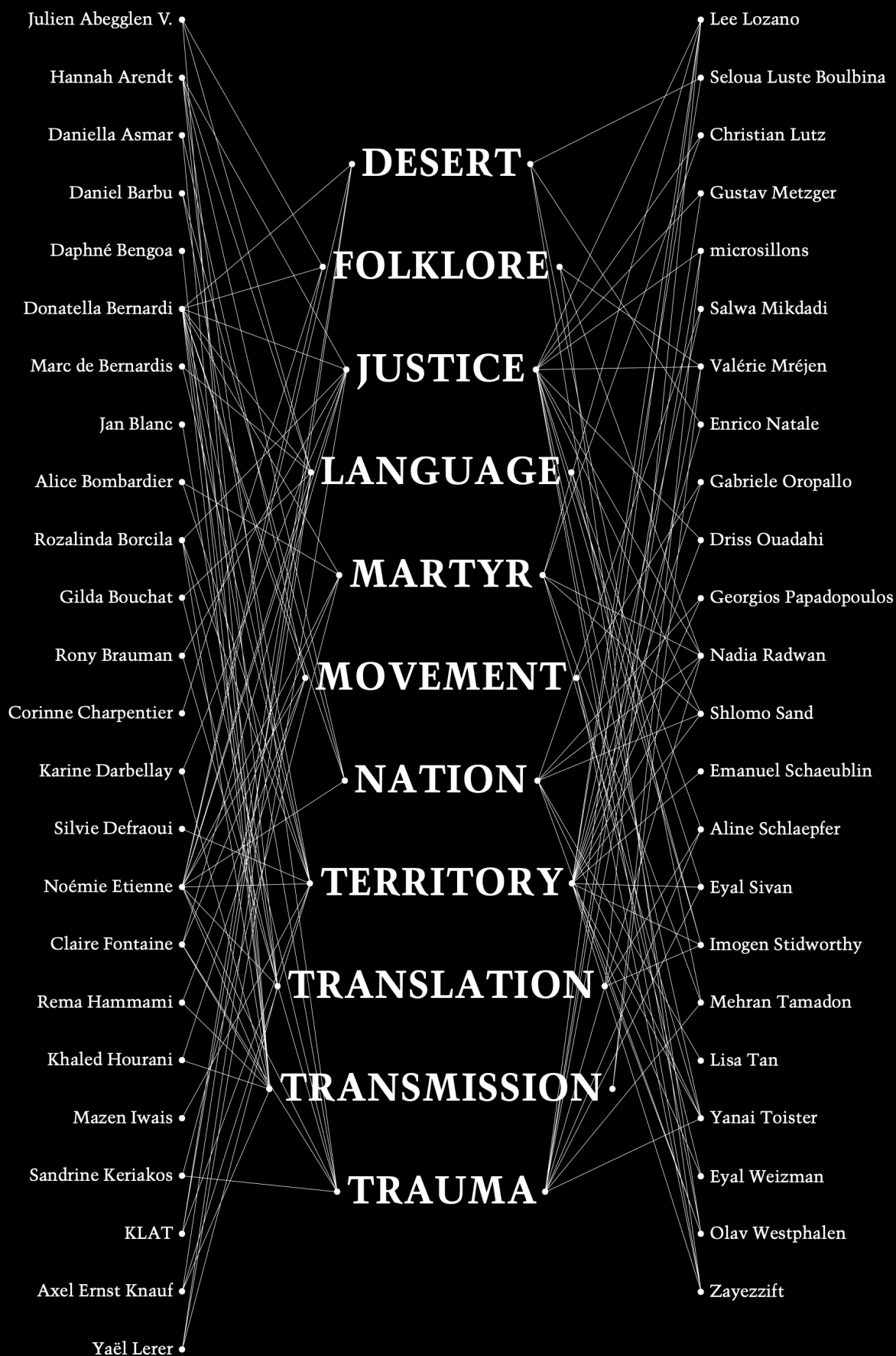
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‘After the Dust Has Settled Over the War, Architecture Turns Into Evidence’

Eyal Weizman is head of Research Architecture at Goldsmiths College, University of London and author of books like *Hollow Land* and *The Least of All Possible Evils*, in which the same meticulous critical methods are used to scrutinise built environments and cultural constructs. He is also the co-founder of Decolonizing Architecture (DAAR), a Palestine-based collective that acts through its interventions on the architectural space and on the space described by international law. This is the transcription of a conversation between Gabriele Oropallo and Eyal Weizman about his current project on forensics. The conversation took place on June 18th, 2011 in the rural setting of the DAAR Architecture Rehab Camp organised by DAAR and Iaspis in the Stockholm Archipelago.

Gabriele Oropallo Eyal, I first encountered your work through *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, which was published by Verso in the UK in 2007 and has since been translated into several languages. *Hollow Land* was a history of the process of transformation by which Palestinian space is constantly redesigned in order to be kept under control – underground, at ground level and in the air above the ground. I translated your book into Italian during the 2008-2009 Gaza crisis, the unilateral attack at the end of which about 15% of the buildings in the strip were left destroyed. This was in many respects an acceleration of the very processes described in the book, which provided me with a continuous memento of the urgency of the project. After taking stock of those events, in the new preface you wrote that in Palestine the spatial conflict “goes beyond a search for a stable and permanent ‘governable’ colonial form”. On the contrary, it is through this very “constant transformation of space that this process of colonisation has played out”. In the Territories, the transformation of space, therefore, rather than being a goal, is the very instrument through which control is articulated, and violence, far from being casual and being the result of a confrontational configuration of space, is actually the tool used to design it.

I am now taking part with you in the Architectural Rehab Camp organised in the Stockholm Archipelago by Decolonizing Architecture, the collective you co-founded with Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, and Iaspis, part of the Swedish Visual Art Fund. Today with Thomas Keenan of Bard College New York you have presented the new book project on which you are working together. The process of negotiation you talked about today does not refer to the construction of factual reality in the Territories, but to the construction of judicial truth. The space on which you are working now is not the contested space in which settlers, natives, international organisations and Israeli military along with a variety of other actors carve their ephemeral niches – it is a twofold space made of court rooms and legal texts.

This shift of perspective initially threw me off balance; can you tell me more about the way your books are connected, and how your background as an architect relates to the new project?

Eyal Weizman The work on forensics started with problems that I encountered in the same field of study of *Hollow Land*. It started with problems posed by international law as it is interpreted by those opposing the Israeli occupation. And it also addresses the question of what it means to oppose the occupation with the language and with the terminology of international law.

I started to be interested in the law, investigating its origin and the way in which it constructs its claims. Then, after the Gaza attacks of winter 2008-2009, I was looking at the Goldstone report, from what I thought was a logical point of view. You know the story of the Goldstone report that has been written by many authors and has been extremely often featured in the news. But then, as I was reading it time and time again, it occurred to me that there was something worth investigating in the methodological section of the report. You know that every human rights report has a methodology section, just like a PhD. One could feel a certain shift occurring when the commission was constructing its report on the basis of testimony and witnesses in order to find evidence. In that section emerged a sort of understanding on the side of the commission that the testimony provided by Palestinian survivors of the attack in Gaza would not be easily, so to say, legally accepted. The international community suspects Palestinians of having a confused, a skewed political subjectivity in favour of Hamas.

So there you can see a shift from relying on living witnesses to relying on dead bodies through autopsy reports. Autopsy reports enter this human rights document and finally claim that Israel has committed crimes against humanity. These autopsies are used to corroborate suspicions of alleged crimes against humanity. But it is not only corpses, the epistemological resource for this report actually also include architecture.

Think about it. Between 15 and 20 % of the buildings in the Gaza strip were destroyed during this attack. About 20,000 buildings were either damaged or destroyed. Most of the people died inside of the buildings because most of the people died inside of their homes. So architecture in this report is not only a reference to the incidental destruction that the attack brought about. Architecture is the means of killing. People are killed by bits of walls flying around, falling or crushing them. People are crushed in their own homes. And then, after the dust settled over the war, architecture turns into evidence. The task of reading the rubble in relation to the given frame of analysis – that of international law – was given to some people that in lack of a better name should be called forensic architects. I was interested in one person in particular, called Marc Garlasco. He used to be an expert for

Human Rights Watch in battle damage assessment. He was in fact a world expert in looking at ruins and reconstructing from the way the ruins fell a narrative or the reason for the ruins being that particular way. A strange story occurred that saw this person as a protagonist. The Goldstone report was published on 15 September 2009. On this very same day, Human Rights Watch announced the suspension of Marc Garlasco from the organisation. Why? The reason was that he was discovered to be a collector of World War Two memorabilia. He was accused of being a Nazi fetishist, and the Israelis were saying that a Nazi fetishist cannot speak on behalf of the rubble. Then I started to think about these issues very seriously. Regardless of whether Garlasco is actually a fetishist or not, is fetishism really an inhibition to speak on behalf of the object? Or is the fetishist in fact the best person to interpret the object and see some excess qualities to it? Therefore, I decided to take his side – and this was a very unlikely coalition. I travelled to New York to speak to him and we discussed the issue of this investigation.

And again, in answer to your question, my interest starts with the legal problem of narrating, with the epistemic problem of uncovering violence as it is registered on architecture.

There are other works that I have done on architecture as evidence in court. Think about this relation: the more violence enters the city, the more architecture will get affected by this violence, and eventually the more architecture will function as evidence. Yet, the whole question of how to interpret architecture in these cases has not yet been written about.

Gabriele Oropallo Have you ever been yourself summoned by a court to act as a forensic expert?

Eyal Weizman Yes, in fact, that was for me one of the main entries to this issue and as an experience it also has some other implications. As you know from *Hollow Land*, the maps that I have produced have been used as forensic evidence in The Hague process against the wall and also in the High Court of Justice in Jerusalem. Working as an expert often involves becoming complicit in the process a judicial or even a historical truth is constructed.

During a trial, the court may be looking at the same pile of rubble after a strike has taken place and be confronted by different accounts for what happened, constructed by different observers. Resorting to scientific methods to establish the judicial truth may involve the development of models to ascertain what happened with a precise degree of probability. This kind of controversies and the questions asked of the forensic experts reveal the role played by data in the way a truth is constructed. When a court examines scientific data, 84% is not good enough to establish a point, the threshold of truth starts with 85%. Was the building destroyed by an international coalition or by local forces, was it an unavoidable military operation or a war crime? All the answers to these questions may

reside in a 1% difference. Also, in the end, the problem how to read the rubble and how to deal with it sometimes has more to do with how history is constructed than with legal matters. When a site finds itself at the border between different narratives, there are sometimes different monuments or memorials that coexist and mutually challenge themselves. In this way, they represent an aesthetic embodiment of a fluid tension between competing narratives.

Gabriele Oropallo Today Thomas Keenan and you showed how “scientific” evidence has increasingly become crucial in determining the judicial truth, even before the use of DNA samples was introduced as an everyday investigative tool. This material turn, based on the assumption that objects are more trustworthy than humans, and that the evidence they can convey is more reliable than human contributions (such as informed deduction and testimony) has placed a great deal of influence in the hands of scientists and specialists – including architects who draw maps and interpret GIS data. However, you also said that scientific truth is more about probability than yes/no answers. It seems to me that empirical science is paradoxically reliable exactly because anyone in principle can criticise, review and change its truth by using experimental methods and is therefore subject to continuous rephrasing. Nevertheless, trials have to end with a definitive answer, this is what human justice is about. Even if the defendant is innocent, this is a clear answer. So, what are the forces that work within that fifteen or twenty per cent of probability left open by forensic experts and that eventually establish the judicial truth? It seems to me that in a way



Forensic science and the production of truth. ‘The only subject that does not lie is the object.’

scientific or technical expertise is simply being exploited to bestow a new aura of correctness to truths that are established in other ways – culturally, socially or politically – and that improbability is functional to other hegemonic forces that are subsequently keen to emphasise it.

Eyal Weizman On the contrary – you will see that in fact it is science that insists on probability here. In fact, all other forms of historical processing, commemorations and actions actually tend to flatten that possibility and are oriented towards certainty of response. If you really look at what empirical science says, you will notice this aspect in great clarity. Every empirical scientific article, from astrophysics to biology typically ends with a kind of balance of probability, in which the reported experiments are processed to reach an order of probability, plus or minus 3%, plus or minus 0.003%, and so on.

The question is: how do we account, in practice, in politics, for probabilistic models? I believe this is a fascinating cultural problem. Our past is not absolutely transparent, it resists staying still and being dependant on us. We cannot just simply put stones on top of it and seal it in some way. How should we aesthetically deal with it in the face of the complicated interaction between deniers of all sorts, revisionists, negationists, deniers of global warming, deniers of Holocaust, deniers of Serb massacres and genocides in Srebrenica and so on? And all the while we should also be keeping the idea of the truth open as a construct. So, this is why it is interesting to look at different kinds of rupture techniques in international law, such as those we discussed yesterday when we studied the case of Jacques Vergès.

Gabriele Oropallo Vergès is a lawyer who dedicated himself to the Algerian anti-colonialist struggle at the very beginning of his career, and who later went on to defend both leftwing and rightwing militants and terrorists, post-colonial dictators and war criminals – including Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy and SS officer Klaus Barbie, also known as the Butcher of Lyon. He was famous for his counter-accusing rupture strategy, which saw him use the trials to show that prosecutors were guilty of the same offences as the defendants.

Eyal Weizman Yes, Vergès was treading a very thin line. On the one hand, he was opening up historical records of massacres, gross violations, murders that were done in colonial times to bring these histories into European history, insisting that all that this kind of denied past enter into the court. On the other hand, you know, he was also quite close to rather gross characters, not only counter-terrorists but also Holocaust deniers and Nazis, like François Genoud, the principal benefactor of the post-war Nazi Diaspora. There is a danger in treading that line, in navigating these kinds of issues while moving between probability and political action, between insisting on the “constructedness” of truth and avoiding political negation.

Gabriele Oropallo In *Hollow Land* there is a chapter that thinking as a historian I found particularly useful as a case study because it is based on consistent research on a great variety of sources: political briefs, legal documents, architecture, even land surveys and construction materials. It is the chapter in which you look at the Jerusalem stone and at the genealogy of its compulsory use as covering material for all buildings erected within the areas that throughout history were at some point or another officially identified as Jerusalem. I found that chapter particularly compelling because it shows how a fairly recent development in law – the stone decree that was originally enforced during the British Mandate on Palestine and then confirmed by all other powers that ruled the city – was used to visually stretch the concept of what Jerusalem is, and along with its concept, its territorial extension. We know that often spatial and material realities are created by language, maybe because language is the only tool we have to interpret a chaotic environment. In fact, the raw material of lawmaking is language, and maybe the only way to escape the frozen hermeneutic space created by law is by establishing the philology of the written word of the law itself. What is the operative purpose of genealogy as a method today? Do you think there are ways to use the knowledge generated by a study such as yours on the Jerusalem stone to have an impact on policy or law making, and if yes, what are they?

Eyal Weizman In the context of our conversation, I think it is useful to look at the treatment I did of the Jerusalem stone as a way to analyse the relation between an architectural detail, some small types of repetitive generic objects and a larger geopolitical transformation.

There is something similar between my study of reality as in the Jerusalem stone chapter and the work of a forensic expert. There is some sort of larger meaning that becomes fossilised, that collapses into all sorts of architectural facts like red roofs, or antennas, or the Jerusalem stone, or holes in walls, or underground smuggling tunnels. This really is the forensic moment. Forensics reads those things as elements of a large scale process in which they are a part, it kind of collapses scales, because the normal kind of urban analysis would take the details, the building, the neighbourhood for what they are. Here you have a direct connection between a type of architectural element and new politics, new legal structures and a new cultural aesthetic perception that are wrapped around it. You can see here that an object is both a source of legal, aesthetic and political debate and a reification of these processes. All is captured and emerges from that material, in that type of stone. The question I always ask myself is how can you actually tease out of those things the politics and history that are saturated in them. Reading it by ferociously investigating the materiality itself is not always sufficient. You have to look at the networks of relations and power relations in which objects are circulating and existing.

You ask a very interesting question, that is: “If this is your mode of analysis, what is your politics? If this is your mode of analysis, do we need now to discuss of geopolitics on a geopolitical scale?” I will reply with another question: “Can we intervene exactly on the level of material things in order to affect politics in a different way? Can we actually intervene on the level of technology, on the level of architecture?” And I think, in fact, that a lot of the work that we do in Decolonizing Architecture is exactly about this. Our projects use micro-scale interventions that work through cracks and fissures in the system and kind of short-circuit the relation between the different scales of action.

Gabriele Oropallo When you introduced the title of your current project, you usefully reminded us of the etymology of the word “forensic”. In the ancient Roman city, the *forum* was the part of the city used for secular activities. Neutral in Latin often referred to categories rather than objects and the word ‘forum’ indeed literally meant “anything that is outdoors”, because it was a space that belonged neither to the private homes nor to the consecrated spaces of the temple. Markets would take place there, candidates wishing to be elected would rally for voter support there. The fora were also the places where public debates and trials would take place, like the Greek agoras. In this, one can see a polarity in those cities between the forum and the temple, the former being the place where truth was constructed or negotiated and the latter the place where truth was received. In other words, there were institutions – and buildings – associated to each kind of truth, and each had its competencies. The word forum eventually became associated with justice and in some languages today it still means court room. Hence, our adjective forensic. The images and the quotations of the forensic anthropologists all intent on reading the truth in human bones you showed us were exhilarating. I especially remember a quotation by Clyde Snow, the forensic anthropologist who talked about human bones as always telling the truth, and of his work as simply giving voice to them. This ideal ventriloquism immediately made me think of the priests who would read sacrificial remains – often human remains – and interpret them only to make divine will apparent. Also, divine will, as scientific truth, was almost unquestionable. Do you think this “objectual turn” in forensics is somehow an attempt to use the same strategy? Do you think we can actually still see these two forms of truth represented or staged by different institutions today – if yes, which ones?

Eyal Weizman You put it very right. In fact, there are all sorts of truth used in the production and structuring of the polity and the polis. These truths constantly govern our understanding of how to conduct ourselves day by day – and also into the future. In rhetoric, for instance, there is also the deliberative mode – a kind of forensic mode – which is the modality through which decisions regarding the future are developed and notified, made public. It seems to me that the production of truth as it happens in the forum, that form of negotiation of truth, is in fact a negotiation of the future. I think that what needs to be shed light upon is the deliberative element in the forensic mode. We need to look at

how that sort of discourse is conducted, in which objects are allowed to speak and participate in all forms of political arrangements.

Then you ask, where is truth received and not deliberated upon today? To answer that I would say that the forums of today are much more diffuse. They do not exist as buildings in acoustic resonating chambers but as network media, assemblages of cultural institutions, where the two modes of truth production are constantly in conflict. This negotiated truth equals science, at least from a certain empiricist perspective. The natural, given, objective truth, on the other hand, is typically separated from anything that has to do with humans: it is subjective, constructive, interest-bound – ultimately political. Bruno Latour makes a point of bringing those two modes together. But I think that, in any given moment and in any given institution today, you simultaneously have the temple and the forum. In the way in which science is discussed, you have the temple and the forum. And sometimes, the temple aspect of a discourse, that kind of received, given, incontestable, transcendent truth seems to come to trump the constructedness of truth. There may be people who insist on scientific truth and say that something is beyond negotiation, that science itself is beyond deliberation. Latour, on the contrary, brings science itself into the field of deliberation. But these two modes of truth are always in tension with each other, not divided into institutions.