Book Review

Review of Weizman, Eyal. 2017. *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*. New York: Zone Books.

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As far as modern history is concerned, forensics is an “art of the police.” Preceding forensics was *forensis*, Latin for “pertaining to the forum”—a multidimensional space of negotiation and fact finding in which humans and objects participated. It was an architecture of public truth (Franke and Weizman 2014), until it was appropriated as an architecture of state truth. Weizman’s goal is to reclaim that architecture, and the reclamation is brilliant. *Forensic Architecture* embodies numerous meanings, trajectories, and practices, and is best understood in three related ways.

The first refers to the investigative practice of producing evidence by scientifically examining architecture for presentation in judicial, legal, and political forums. Through the measurement and examination of material structures and environments, from buildings to landscapes, as well as their representation in media and data, *Forensic Architecture* exposes the otherwise hidden and discrete as a means of pushing back against state and corporate claims, controversies, and atrocities. The book intricately deploys forensic architecture upon historical and ongoing cases involving Israeli advancements upon the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, US and Russian air strikes in Syria, amongst numerous others.

Secondly, forensic architecture refers to a professional organization. Alongside a group of architects, artists, filmmakers, journalists, scientists, and lawyers (9), Weizman established the Forensic Architecture group to undertake independent investigations to represent environmental and human rights organizations. The group Forensic Architecture produces evidence-based cases using surveys, blueprints, computer animations, video analyses, and interactive media to assist its clients in their respective legal and political battles.

Third, forensic architecture is a methodology. The “threshold of detectability,” articulated as things that float somewhere above and along the line of (in)distinguishability (10), foregrounds the book’s targeted tension: the process of scientifically investigating architecture to present or reinforce new/existing claims routinely commits an investigator to not only contend with the epistemic challenges imposed by formal legal frameworks (that are otherwise designed to produce and maintain truth, and often confront the organization’s counter-investigative efforts), but also to contend with the limits of science and scientific investigation. For example, a satellite image, as a piece of evidence or as media for investigation, is only as productive as the extents of its pixel size. Documenting the gradual enhancement of satellite image resolution for public use, Weizman shows that the technological advancements of the twenty-first century did not necessarily continue to improve upon the clarity of satellite images. The “legal regulations that bear upon political and even geopolitical rationalities” (28) abruptly showcase how state and corporate

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technologies play a direct role in constraining pixel sizes. While preventing pixel sizes from producing clarity beyond the approximate size of the human head is certainly to the benefit of a subject's privacy, the "threshold of detectability" works against the counter-forensics of Weizman's group when attempting to identify police officers and victims. To overcome such issues is as much about scientific measurement as it is about the supplementation of alternative scientific methods as well as a conceptual invigoration that motivates creative social scientific inquiry and critique.

As a methodology, Weizman's intention is not to invoke positivism "to overcome language through materiality and to hold reality to be knowable without any intermediaries" (83). Rather, channeling Latour (2017), his intention is to creatively guide the reader through the ways in which the art of making claims unfolds at the intersection of matter/media, code/calculation, narrative/performance. Because testimony, for example, is prone to error, the investigator must animate material evidence through representative interventions such as the reconstruction of a prison. By visually constructing a three-dimensional blueprint of the Saydnaya detention center through the recollection of a prisoner's aural experiences (85-93), Weizman's group re-mapped a space of state violence.

One of the book's primary strengths is thus found in the tension-space of "how" and "what" performs constraints, barriers, and outright foreclosures in evidence-based analysis, and how post-modern intellectual sensibilities seek to overcome lacks and limits through creative wondering and expression. The book is indeed a source of research inspiration for most any reader, especially those seeking to invigorate novel modes and lines of inquiry into challenging, complex objects and issues of concern. Despite the difficulties inherent in works directly intersecting applied investigations with conceptual abstractions, it is accessible and clearly written for both academic and non-academic audiences.

Nevertheless, the book's structure is as engaging as it is unusual. *Forensic Architecture* is comprised of three primary parts. The first is an overview of forensic architecture, laying out a theoretical framework highly reminiscent of Science and Technology Studies, as well as Media Studies; the book is indeed an exposition of complex instruments and formal investigative methods, articulated through the mindset of interdisciplinary (yet predominantly) social scientific criticism. While part one situates and demonstrates the methods, logics, and concepts of forensic architecture across a variety of small and relatively well-known cases, parts two and three are dedicated to two specific geopolitical realms of incident and concern: the government of Israel's interactions with Palestine. From the 2014 Rafah Israel/Gaza conflict to the displacements of the Bedouin Nakba, readers are familiarized with the political history of these conflicts as much as they are with the unique investigative methods of orientalist meteorology, the politics of drought, military archaeology, and the interventionist virtues of Edward Said's counter-cartography.

As the study of architecture continues to burgeon as a subject of academic interest, this work stands out. From the politics of corporatizing urban areas to the demise of public space (Easterling 2016; Lecavalier 2016; Sorkin 1992; Sennett 1992), the politics of the algorithmic structure (Parisi 2013), to the architectures of counterinsurgency (Scott 2016), Palestinian resistance (Lambert 2013), as well as guides on the liberation of architects from the constraints of neoliberalism (Spencer 2016) and capital design (Lahiji 2016), *Forensic Architecture* is certainly situated within studies of the politics of architecture. The work is a progressive compliment to these academic interests, especially so in the case of Muller and Multu's (forthcoming) collected investigation of state security architecture.

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