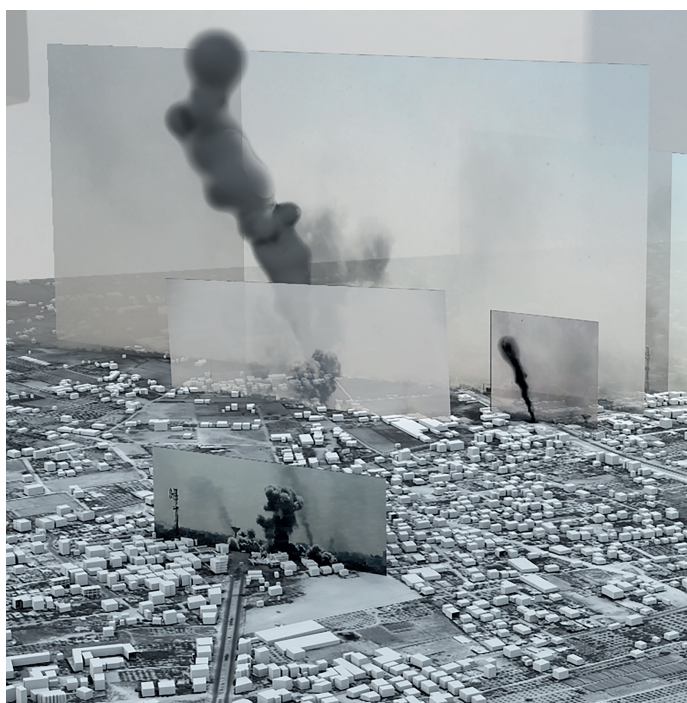


Forensic Architecture

Towards an Investigative Aesthetics

Exhibition from 28 April to 15 October 2017



The Architectural-Image-Complex, Rafah: Black Friday, Forensic Architecture, 2015.

FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE: TOWARDS AN INVESTIGATIVE AESTHETICS presents the work of the architects, artists, filmmakers and investigative-journalists who make up the Forensic Architecture agency at the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London, as well as that of its collaborators and guests. Established in 2010, Forensic Architecture uses architectural analysis, models and animations as investigative tools, primarily for the production and presentation of spatial evidence in the context of armed conflict and political struggles. This evidence is presented in political and legal contexts, including international courts, truth commissions, and human and environmental forums.

Both 'forensics' and 'architecture' refer to well-established disciplinary frames. Brought together, they shift each other's meaning, giving rise to a different mode of practice. While architecture adds an essential method of investigation, forensics demands that architects pay the closest attention to the materiality of the built environment and its media representation.

This exhibition spans part of the museum's second floor. The one-hundred-metre-long back wall, traversing the entire exhibition across three galleries, has been conceived of as an extended essay that echoes the investigations included in the galleries, presenting the kind of theoretical and methodological reflection that contemporary investigative aesthetics demands today. The investigations are arranged according to scale, beginning with the human body and moving through rooms, buildings and cities to territories and oceans, from micro-analysis to the scale of the planet – the ultimate forensic object, which human-induced climate change has transformed into both a construction site and a ruin.

While exploring the development and transformation of the investigative practice that bears its name, the exhibition challenges us to consider how contemporary artistic practices and media technologies can be geared up to engage this reality of post-truth.

Eyal Weizman & Rosario Güiraldes

PROPOSITION

THIS GALLERY UNPACKS the theoretical and historical framework within which the practice of Forensic Architecture operates. It outlines the methods, assumptions and critical vocabulary relevant to the field, while also elaborating its constraints, potential problems and double binds.

The Forensic Turn

In recent decades, forensic exhumations of war victims have become a powerful historical, political and legal resource. Starting in Argentina in the mid-1980s with efforts to identify the disappeared victims of the 'dirty war', the investigative work of forensic anthropology teams spread over to various regions. Yet the turn to forensics did not produce a scenario in which the solid object provided a stable and fixed alternative to human uncertainties and ambiguities. Forensic findings were often inconclusive and the practice itself is invariably politicised. Conviction is contingent on the forces and techniques of presentation and demonstration, as well as on politics and rhetoric. (With Thomas Keenan.)

Surveyors

Forensic architecture usually refers to the practice of building surveyors who assess building damage and structural integrity in legal contexts. For these analysts, a building is not a static entity. Its form is continuously undergoing transformations that register external influences. Surveyors see buildings as matter undergoing complex processes of formation – as matter in-formation, as information. Buildings are media forms because they register environmental conditions around them; they contain or store these forces in material deformations.

Before & After

Before-and-after photographs are the embodiment of forensic time. They frame a missing event by showing the states that preceded and followed it. This form of presentation emerged out of the limitations of the early photographic process. The few seconds required for the exposure of a mid-nineteenth-century photograph was too long to record moving figures and sudden events. The result was that people were usually blurred against the background of the image; only static elements could be registered. The absence of the violent event from representation is analogous to the way in which trauma selectively erases the memory of traumatic events. We must attend not only to what is shown in photographs but also to the matter in which it is registered, an archaeology that relates to the materiality of images. (With Ines Weizman.)

Forensis

Forensis is Latin for 'pertaining to the forum' and is the root of the term forensics. The Roman forum was a multidimensional space of negotiation and truth-finding in which humans and objects participated together in politics, law and the economy. With the advent of modernity, the meaning of forensics shifted to refer increasingly to the domain of law and to the use of medicine in the courts. Today, forensics is central to the ways by which states police and govern their subjects. By returning to the wider concept of *forensis*, Forensic Architecture seeks to unlock the potential of forensics as a counter-political practice. Inverting the direction of the forensic gaze, it seeks to designate a field of action in which individuals and independent organisations can confront abuses of power by states and corporations in situations that have a bearing upon political struggle, violent conflict and climate change.

Investigative Aesthetics

Photographers, filmmakers and artists have collaborated with human rights organisations since the birth of the human rights movement in the mid-1970s. With several important exceptions, artists' work was kept external to and merely illustrative of the actual investigative work. Forensic Architecture seeks to shift away from this use of arts and to employ aesthetic sensibilities as investigation resources.

INVESTIGATIONS

THIS GALLERY FEATURES A DETAILED elaboration of a selection of recent cases undertaken by Forensic Architecture and its collaborators. It includes responses, denials and attacks that the work has engendered.

Threshold of Detectability

A hole is not simply absence. It is more, not less, information than the matter that surrounds it. This is because a hole is information both with regard to the materiality it perforates and to the shape of its absence. Some drone-fired missiles can drill a hole through the roof before burrowing their way deep into buildings, where their warheads explode. The size of the hole the missile leaves is smaller than the size of a single pixel in the highest resolution to which publicly available satellite images are degraded. The hole is thus at the 'threshold of visibility' and might appear as nothing more than a slight colour variation; a single, darker pixel perhaps. This has direct implications for the documentation of drone strikes in satellite imagery, which is often as close to the scene as most investigators can get. When the figure dissolves into the ground of the image, the conditions – legal, political and technical – that degrade the image become relevant material for forensic investigation.

Architecture of Memory

When delivering testimony, victims of extreme violence must recall and reconstruct the worst moments of their lives. Victims might remember what happened before a traumatic incident or after it, but the closer one gets to the essence of a testimony, the more elusive memory can become. Such testimonies are often riddled with memory loss, making them prone to misinterpretation. It is often in the failings and shortcomings of memory – in the silence, confusion or outright terror – that the trauma of the witness is inscribed. Paradoxically, it is testimony's imperfections that bear witness to the fact of violence.

The Architectural Image Complex

The sheer number of images and videos generated around incidents today, means that to view images requires understanding the relation between them. We look at photographs as doorways to other photographs. Most videos that end up being broadcast contain, in a single image frame, both perpetrator and victim. But for every shot that includes both, there are many more that include partial information. Their relation to other images and to the main incident is not obvious. The *architectural image complex* is a method of assembling image evidence in a spatial environment. It can function as an optical device that allows the viewer to see the scene of the crime as a set of relations between images in time and space.

The Sea as Killer and Witness

If geography expresses in its very etymology the possibility to write and therefore read the surface of the Earth for the actions that have been played out on it, the liquid territory of the sea challenges both representation and spatial analysis in maritime spaces. As a result, the sea is often perceived as the ultimate frontier beyond visibility and law. The deaths of illegalised migrants at sea seem to demonstrate this ongoing reality. (Charles Heller & Lorenzo Pezzani.)

Ground Truth

'Ground truth' – a process used by meteorologists, remote sensing or aerial interpreters – refers to the calibration of analysis from the surface of the image to the surface of the terrain. Its necessity stems from the need to establish direct relations between aerial photographs and the reality they capture. To arrive at ground truth, an aerial image interpreter must measure and compare the ground elements with the elements that compose the image. Kite photography, a method for recording a scene by flying a kite at a known height, lends itself to establishing ground truth because the aerial survey is undertaken while the feet of the photographer are firmly on the ground, thereby establishing a known scale.

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY NATURE

THIS GALLERY PRESENTS INVESTIGATIONS that interrogate the threshold between human violence and the environment, especially along the global forest line of the tropics.

Centre for Contemporary Nature

The Centre for Contemporary Nature engages with the relation between culture, politics and the concept of 'nature' today. No longer a cyclical backdrop against which human history unfolds, 'nature' now transforms at the same speed as human history, in an ever-aggravated feedback loop with consequences that have spiralled out of control. This entanglement is what is referred to as 'contemporary nature'. Whereas the post Second World War period has seen a large proliferation of Centres for Contemporary Culture, the challenges of climate change make necessary the emergence of Centres for Contemporary Nature (CCN).

Environmental Violence

Throughout the past century, states, super- and intra-state organisations have conceptualised cases of mass casualties under a more 'familiar' framework of human-on-human violence. As the sources of contemporary calamities are increasingly likely to be a result of environmental destruction and climate change, a set of new categories and tools must be developed to describe forms of destruction that are indirect, diffused and distributed in time and space.

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Guided visits

(from 5 May)

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International Museum Day and Museum Night

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Inaugural conversation

**Evidence, Activism and the
Law in the Age of Post-Truth**
**Baltasar Garzón in
conversation with Yolanda
Álvarez and Manuel Vergara,
with the participation of
Rosario Güiraldes, Christina
Varvia and Eyal Weizman
(Forensic Architecture)**

Thursday 27 April, 5.30 pm.
Meier Auditorium. Free
admission. Limited places.
This activity will be live
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Let's talk about...

**The Role of the Document:
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With Julia Ramirez Blanco

Saturdays 29 April and 3 June,
7 pm. 5 €. Free with Amic card.
Booking required.

Seminar

Forensic Architecture

**With Matthew Fuller, Hannah
Meszaros Martin, Susan
Schuppli and Eyal Weizman**

Wednesday 14 June.

5 €. Free with Amic card.

Booking required. This
activity will be live streamed.

Opening times

Monday, Wednesday,
Thursday and Friday,
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September, 11 am to 8 pm)
Tuesday closed
Saturday, 10 am to 9 pm
Sunday and public holidays,
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