

OFF LIMITS: ELASTIC BORDER REGIMES AND THE (VISUAL) POLITICS OF MAKING THINGS PUBLIC

by Andreas Oberprantacher

“The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it.”

—Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

“It is, in fact, obvious that monuments inspire social prudence and often even real fear. The taking of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of things: it is hard to explain this crowd movement other than by the animosity of the people against the monuments that are their real masters.”

—Georges Bataille, *Architecture*

Bodies on a Crane

In her seminal essay “We Refugees” first published 1943 in *The Menorah Journal*, Hannah Arendt analyzes the conditions of Jewish *refugees*, who refuse to be called such, by linking the fate of two “sons of the nineteenth century”: that of the “conscious pariahs” and that of the “social parvenus” (Arendt, 1943, p. 77). She concludes that due to the National Socialist persecution, the “status of outlaws” was eventually forced upon both (ibid.). But while the latter, that is, the parvenus, “don’t understand the wild dreams of the former and feel humiliated in sharing their fate,” those “few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of ‘indecent,’ get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles” (ibid.).

Commemorating Arendt’s words, this essay is dedicated to one story in particular (out of the many calling for our critical attention) that is as much “indecent” as it is confirming the insistence of a “few refugees” who contest actual politics in expectation of another history. On Saturday, October 30th, 2010, nine ‘irregular immigrants’ from India,

Pakistan, Senegal, Egypt, and Morocco climbed on a crane located at Piazzale Cesare Battisti, right in the center of the Lombard city of Brescia, and publicly went on hunger strike (see the blog of *Senza Frontiere*, <http://senzafrontiere.noblogs.org/>). In the midst of all those scenes of social unrest, police repression, and the extensive media coverage that followed, four of them held out for sixteen days, until they finally ended their hunger strike on November 15th, descended from the crane, and surrendered to the Italian authorities. As a political act, this hunger strike might not have “reached the decisive point in the political” Carl Schmitt so fervently imagined in his book *Der Begriff des Politischen* (2007, p. 39). Still, it has effectively disturbed the very sense of *location* and *territory* upheld by nationals and may be considered an *incisive* act of emergent politics.



figure 1: Global project—a “few refugees” on a crane in Brescia, <http://www.globalproject.info>

The nine men decided to climb up the crane after it had become clear that there was no intention by the ruling political elite, neither on a provincial nor on a ministerial level, to meet any of the demands made by the local *presidio permanente*, that is, the Permanent Encampment set-up by concerned residents to express their dissent against discriminatory migration policies and demand political change. Especially the vice-mayor of Brescia, Fabio Rolfi, of the infamous political party *Lega Nord* lived up to widespread populist expectations by insulting and threatening the activists of the *presidio permanente* and by making absolutely no concessions on the *sanatoria*, that is, the Italian practice of

occasionally granting an extraordinary residence permit to irregular migrants. In fact, precisely this practice of retroactive legalization, the *sanatoria*, had once again become a major political controversy, because a recent circular letter signed by Italy's chief policeman, Antonio Manganelli, stated that according to article 14:5 of the so-called *legge Bossi-fini*, none of those 'aliens' may be eligible for an extraordinary residence permit that have been frisked twice by the police and—as a consequence—convicted for not having voluntarily left the country. Apart from the blatant and random discrimination of people sharing comparable living conditions, but perhaps not the same skin color or work space—circumstances, which make some of them more susceptible to police operations than others—it soon became clear that the *sanatoria* was nothing but a trap of self-denunciation: those who submitted a request for an extraordinary residence permit and paid their arrears to the ministry of finance without being aware of the exact legal preconditions and their precarious status as formally convicted 'illegal aliens' were put on an index, and it is more than likely that their payments are being used for balancing Italy's direful budget.

What seems to have provoked the local authorities of Brescia to tear down the barracks and *presidio permanente* with heavy equipment was mounting evidence that in the face of a dehumanizing body politic some silenced subalterns neither remain quiet nor comply with the orders given, but instead occupy, irradiate, and transform spaces from which they are legally banned. In this sense, the act of climbing up the crane and going on hunger strike is a confirmation of Rancière's thesis stating that:

Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something "between" them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where there is nothing. (Rancière, 1999, p. 27)

And what better confrontation with the Brescian authorities regulating "the privilege of speech" (ibid.) than by expressing dissent at a square that is dedicated to Cesare Battisti—a prominent figure of Italian *Irredentism*, who was hanged and garroted after an Austro-Hungarian Empire's court martial sentenced him to death in 1916 for high treason?

Fortunately, there is no prospect of high treason in the case of the dissenters on the crane, for such a sentence would already presuppose what people from the association *Diritti per tutti*, Rights for All, are also fighting for: (legal) recognition. What might become possible, however, is anticipated by the activists' own slogan: "Se permesso non

sarà, resteremo sempre qua”—“If no permit is granted, we will always remain here” or, in another reading, “If it won’t be permitted, we will always remain here”—a slogan that announces the fierce disposition of a “few refugees” to challenge the discursive securitization and effective segregation of (urban) spaces by insisting on a counter-hegemonic politicization of their bodies.

In view of this and similar events occurring in the ‘hearts’ of *our* cities, the following question may be raised to introduce what will follow as essay: what if these bodies on a crane in Brescia succeeded in invalidating the aesthetic tradition that was so magnificently framed by Charles C. Ebbets’ photograph *New York Construction Workers Lunching on a Crossbeam* (1932)? And, what if they eventually liberated us from our obsessions with the *splendeur* of the modern metropolis? What are we to discover beneath our feet, in the basements of our supposedly democratic dwellings?



figure 2: Charles C. Ebbets, NY, *Construction Workers Lunching on a Crossbeam* (1932), © Bettmann/CORBIS.

The Problem of Emplacement

Let me turn this story's page for a while and instead refer to the premonition of a "new archivist" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3) who might be of help to uncover what possibly lies beneath. Only one year after the publication of *Les mots et les choses*, Michel Foucault worked on a lecture given on March 14, 1967 to the Cercle d'études architecturales. The lecture notes remained largely unedited for approximately twenty years until they were published in 1984—the very year of Foucault's death—under the title "Des espaces autres." Despite their marginal surface on the fissured oeuvre of Foucault, these notes may nonetheless be crucial for understanding a significant shift occurring in the author's excavation activities at the end of the 1960s: questions of power with regard to the organization of social space gain in importance. Foucault commences his lecture by proclaiming that the

great haunting obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history.... The present epoch would perhaps rather be the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a great life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. One could perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics take place between the pious descendents of time and the fierce inhabitants of space. (Foucault, 2008, p. 14)

With the phrase the "present epoch would perhaps rather be the epoch of space," Foucault is neither insinuating that space had no history until the recent past, nor is he denying that there was or is no "fatal intersection of time with space." Rather, he seems concerned with understanding what he calls the "anxiety of today" which, in his view, "fundamentally concerns space, no doubt much more than time" (Foucault, 2008, p. 15).

While the medieval space may be characterized as a "space of localization"—as a "hierarchic ensemble of places" in which some things "found their emplacement and natural rest" while others "had been violently displaced"—Foucault suggests that the modern age was an "infinitely open space," a space of extension with things in continual movement. As Foucault furthermore argues, the modern space of extension was also superseded, this time by the contemporary effort of organizing space as an *emplacement* "defined by relations of proximity between points or elements" (2008, p. 15).

The embryonic political dimension of Foucault's early archeology of spaces becomes evident when considering his declaration that:

the problem of place or emplacement arises for mankind in terms of demography. This problem of the human emplacement is not simply the question of knowing whether there will be enough space for man in the world—a problem that is certainly quite important—but it is also the problem of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, spotting, and classification of human elements, should be adopted in this or that situation in order to achieve this or that end. We are in an epoch in which space is given to us in the form of relations between emplacements. (Foucault, 2008, p. 15)

And what better emplacement to exemplify these “relations of propinquity” than a crane with irregular migrants on hunger strike on its top?

It has become a cliché to state that the spaces we inhabit are all but flat. Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizomatic studies collected in *Mille Plateaux*, I will further demarcate the problem of emplacement, as drafted by Foucault, by emphasizing the manifold operations and procedures that allowed for “smooth (vectorial, projective, or topological) space” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 399), inhabited by countless people in movement, to become subsequently amalgamated with “striated (metric) space” (ibid.), that is space turned into a grid or, as one may also say, into computable and transferable properties, not least according to the—sometimes persuasive, sometimes militant—logic of capitalism (see Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, pp. 399–430; 523–552).

At the time of writing *Mille Plateaux* in the late 1970s Deleuze and Guattari knew well enough that “smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 551), and thus it would at best correspond to a belated romantic fantasy hoping for the advent of an urban nomad or a “cave dweller” (ibid.) who could solve the spatial riddles of an apparently striated modernity. On a similar note and almost at the same time, Foucault amended his analysis of disciplinary regimes by saying that “it is clear that in the future we must separate ourselves from the society of discipline of today” (in Hardt, 1995, p. 41). And what are we witnessing these days if not a seismic shock running through the very foundation of those institutions that once defined sovereign emplacements and allowed for civil subjectivities to emerge on nationalized terrains? Are *our* states not engulfed by a continual flow of informational capital generated by spectral entities such as the ever-invasive global financial market in alliance with multinational corporations? While pertinent answers to these questions may be found in *The Information Age*, a trilogy authored by Manuel Castells Oliván, it is equally important to remain critically aware that Foucault did by no means argue that the end of “the society of discipline of today” would imply the dissolution of disciplinary practices as such.

All but accidentally, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri cross Deleuze and Guattari’s threads of thought with Foucault’s in their book *Empire* by arguing that:

the collapse of the walls that delimited the institutions and the smoothing of social striation are symptoms of the flattening of these vertical instances toward the horizontality of the circuits of control. The passage of the society of control does not in any way mean the end of discipline. In fact, the immanent exercise of discipline—that is, the self-disciplining of subjects, the incessant whispering of disciplinary logics within subjectivities themselves—is extended even more generally in the society of control. What has changed is that, along with the collapse of institutions, the disciplinary dispositifs have become less limited and bounded spatially in the social field. (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 330)

If it is true, then, that the production of a consumer-oriented, cross-border *normality* results from the comprehensive management and continual folding of smooth and striated, intra- and international, military and civil spaces, then it is at least as true that as a “technique of government” these spatial operations do not target everybody indiscriminately and that they are mostly removed from public scrutiny. On a closer look, in fact, one may even contend that the production of a global semi-militarized economic space is paralleled by the emergence of new forms of extra-legal, ‘abhorrent’ subjectivity: the orange-dressed ‘detainees’ of Guantanamo Bay may well be understood as the exemplary and effectively dehumanized expression of an indefinite extension of “lawless power” as Judith Butler states in her essay “Indefinite Detention” (2006, p. 63), but they are far from the only ones subjected to the biopolitical regime of securing life by discriminating its forms. Put otherwise: blue cards or green cards for the ‘lucky’ few deemed to be valuable *human resources* in the logic of competing economic zones, and a red pill for those who will try to make it across the Mediterranean Sea or the Mexican border with nothing but their hopes and their family’s debt.

It is indeed necessary to extend one’s critical attention to those increasingly outsourced and de-territorialized border regimes and detention centers—termed *reception centers*, *refugee homes*, or *deportation centers*—that have become an almost undisputed or even integral part of most, if not all, social democratic or liberal democracies. All the more disturbing because many of these state practices contradict in general or in part either national or international law, revealing that under biopolitical imperatives the *nomos*, venerated by Schmitt as “the unity of order and orientation” (2003, p. 186), allows for an extra-legal confinement of those considered to be a potential ‘risk’ to the local population. In view of these political transformations, Butler concludes that:

Governmentality is the condition of this new exercise of sovereignty in the sense that it first establishes law as a ‘tactic,’ something of instrumental value, and not ‘binding’ by virtue of its status as law. In a

sense, the self-annulment of law under the condition of a state of emergency revitalizes the anachronistic ‘sovereign’ as the newly invigorated subjects of managerial power. (2006, p. 62)

It is, amongst others, this transformation of ‘exercises’ that is followed up by Giorgio Agamben. In his writings, especially in his books *Homo Sacer*, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* and *Stato di eccezione*, Agamben argues for a comprehensive reconsideration of Foucault’s main theses regarding the advent of modern biopower. By reconnecting to Arendt’s study of the camp and her idea of a “naked natural givenness” (1966, p. 241) and to Walter Benjamin’s understanding of “mere life” (2002, p. 250)—which Agamben combines into *bare life*—on the one hand, and by referring to Schmitt’s *Der Begriff des Politischen* from a critical distance on the other, Agamben tries to leap over the gap ripped open by Foucault’s genealogies by arguing that:

[t]he birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity itself. It is produced at the point at which the political system of the modern nation-state, which was founded on the functional nexus between a determinate localization (land) and a determinate order (the State) and mediated by automatic rules for the inscription of life (birth or the nation), enters into a lasting crisis, and the State decides to assume directly the care of the nation’s biological life as one of its proper tasks....Something can no longer function within the traditional mechanisms that regulated this inscription, and the camp is the new, hidden regulator of the inscription of life in the order—or, rather, the sign of the system’s inability to function without being transformed into a lethal machine. (Agamben, 1998, pp. 174–5)

It is this utterly ambivalent machine, welcoming to some, lethal to others, which has as its primary target the *population*. Not in the sense of a population ‘naturally’ comprising all those residing within or those that are subjected to a determinate sphere of power, but in the sense that the very population—the *People*, *das Volk*, *il Popolo*—is produced by a complex process of incorporation (*normalization*) of life through separation (*exception*) of its forms. As Agamben points out, in exemplary fashion, the ‘vitality’ of the phantasmagoric Aryan body of Nazism was obtained and secured by means of selecting those whose lives were considered ‘worthy’ and by eliminating those identified as ‘unworthy of life’—as both alien and unprofitable. What is important to keep in mind, is the circumstance that the very exclusion did not occur at the outskirts of the Nazi-state, but on its very ground. Thus, Agamben concludes that life “can in the last instance be implicated in the sphere of law only through the presupposition of this inclusive exclusion,

only in an *exceptio*” (Agamben, 1998, p. 27), meaning that the “camp—and not the [Foucauldian] prison—is the space that corresponds to this originary structure of the *nomos*” (Agamben, 1998, p. 20).

Following this line of reasoning further while recollecting some of the previous thoughts, I would like to argue that the very transformation of the ‘society of discipline’ from an institutional arrangement to a flexible, self-centered configuration goes hand in hand with a shift within the biopolitical order of modernity itself. One of the defining traits and dividing lines of the contemporary practice of biopolitical hegemony directly cuts through the ‘veins’ of our national spaces and goes by the name of *detention center*. With due respect to the suffering of those detained, one may well say that such places are truly spaces of exception where ‘valueless’ lives are being kept and administered, more often than not, by private enterprises—like European Homecare—that are favoring a racism without races.

Locative Resistances

I shall be turning pages one more time by first of all expressing a caveat: as much as the proposition of a generalized “state of exception” is a brilliant diagnosis of the contemporary crisis and transformation of sovereignty that allows us to discern the folding and unfolding of various spaces and techniques of exerting power, on a macro- as well as on a micro-level, it holds also the genuine risk of reproducing victimizing procedures by means of their academic reification. Against such a defeatist use of public reason Foucault argued in *La volonté de savoir* that “[w]here there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95), and even though Herbert Marcuse’s “Great Refusal” (Marcuse 2002, p. 66) was no option for him, he nevertheless believed in “a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.” (Foucault 1990, p. 96)

In the sense of this caveat then, I will portray and discuss in the final part of my essay three particular “resistances” that have built up against the *plasticity* of contemporary border regimes and that place in common the passion of engaging in the heterodox politics of generating in/visibility by displacing spatial regimes.

Transborder Immigrant Tool

In the inventors’ words, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* may be referred to as a “border disturbance art project” (Cardenas et al., 2009, p. 1) that consciously reflects but also acts on the shift “from Tactical Media to Tactical Biopolitics in contemporary media art”

(ibid.). In this sense, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* is actually a “locative media” (ibid.) device that was designed and developed by the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a collective of cyberactivists and performance artists that formed in 1997 (see Dominguez, 2002, pp. 379–396).

Against the background of the violence occurring along the United States-Mexican borderlands that might have caused up to 10,000 deaths in the last decade according to the San Diego-Tijuana based humanitarian aid group Border Angels (see Cardenas et al., 2009, p. 2), the project aims at “reappropriating widely available technology to be used as a form of humanitarian aid” (ibid.). It is important to note, however, that even though it is already in use and frequently criticized by exponents of right-wing politics in the United States, the *Transborder Immigration Tool* is still a work in progress.

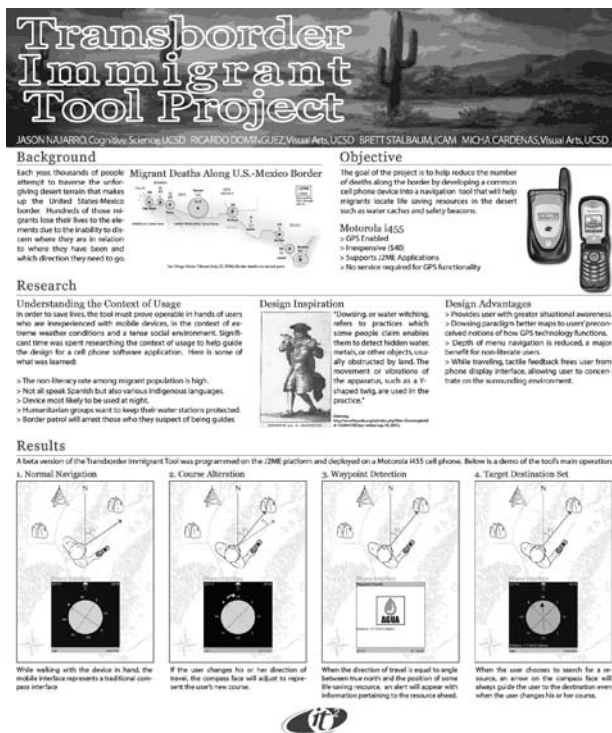


figure 3: Jason Najarro, Ricardo Dominguez, Brett Stalbaum, and Micha Cardenas, *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, <http://va-grad.ucsd.edu>

So how does it work? In a nutshell, one may say that on a technological level the tool combines an inexpensive cell phone—equipped with a GPS chip—with a custom Java-

based software written by Brett Stalbaum. This tool provides important contextual navigational information to the user on his or her journey through the borderlands: such as the exact location of aid or water sites along the route or the positions of law enforcement units. The custom map was developed in close collaboration with the faith group Border Angels who try to organize support for the people moving in the perilous desert terrain along the United States-Mexican border. On a theoretical level the tool stands in the tradition of “Lygia Clark’s performative therapeutic objects” and as such it might on the one hand “serve as a nexus of desire and an unveiling of the logics with which borders are dealt with” (ibid.). On the other hand, it can also “serve as a tactical intervention of distraction and disturbance in the supposed order of transnational corridors” (ibid.). On a performative level the project is far from an individual action: first, the Electronic Disturbance Theater refers to itself as a collective; secondly, the tool exemplifies how a re-imagination of knowledge production on the basis of Boal’s and Sandoval’s Theater of the Oppressed becomes possible when ideas are developed and actions are planned in concert with social movements.

What is important to note, finally, is that the *Transborder Immigration Tool* does not just provide navigational capabilities: it tries to create a “space of hospitality” (Cardenas et al., 2009, p. 3) for those on an arduous journey across no man’s land by playing a few lines of poetry after given temporal intervals. As the collective points out:

Layered as a wish for a post-neoliberal geopolitics (e.g., they “speak” on the lower frequencies of the iconic, the sonic, the vibratory, the concrete, the performative, the poetic), the tool’s algorithm will aid users in tracking sustainable routes, new Nazca lines-of-flight/arco-irises across literal and imaginative post-NAFTA borders. All who utilize this technology will in a sense participate in a larger landscape of the para/literary/aesthetic. In this regard, they will keystone, build a bridge between Thoreau’s foundational fictions: his “Walden pondering” and “civil disobedience” to transcend self-/collective reliance. (ibid.)

zone*interdite

zone*interdite (<http://www.zone-interdite.net>) is an art project stimulated and coordinated by the two Swiss born artists Christoph Wachter and Mathias Jud. The project was started in 2000 when both activist artists came to realize that in contrast to what the mainstream permissivist ideology of consumer capitalism makes us believe—both Marcuse and Slavoj Žižek characterized our present condition as one of Repressive Tolerance (see Žižek 2006, pp. 151–182)—there are genuine biopolitical “blackouts” (Wachter and Jud), that is, strategic omissions and maskings of perceptions in a world that is being rebuilt to first of

all please and appease shoppers' desires. In Wachter and Jud's words: "When observing military restricted areas, our attention got blurred" (ibid.). While the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* was conceived to disturb the hegemonic administration of borderscapes and to incise alternative *parcours* through nationalized territories, zone*interdite serves mainly as a corrective device, as an open 'archive' that allows for reframing a strategically distorted imagery.



figure 4: Christoph Wachter, Mathias Jud, zone*interdite, www.zone-interdite.net

By collecting and assembling data that is sparsely available on the internet or that was provided to them legally, the two have located and marked approximately 1,200 spaces that fit the military designation "restricted area"; and by doing so they made secluded and hidden military zones—at least in part—public again. But the platform zone*interdite does not only list such areas by providing essential information that allows users to "reconstruct the terrain which our reflection has been deprived of" (ibid.), as Jud and Wachter put it, it also grants visual access to particular zones by means of a digital 3D-model that can be explored on PCs. The most notorious "restricted area" that was modeled so far is that of Guantanamo Bay with its prison camps. Wachter and Jud also provide an imagery of the Bagram Airbase, along with its secret prisons, as well as a digital model of an Islamic training camp in Sudan. Doing so, the two explain that:

[t]he power of the project lies in the disarming and lapidary view of a world of military power. Individual imagination and the joy of

discovering occurs, i.e. spotting, replacing the patriotic and pacifistic duty of a knee-jerk avowal, and undermining censorship, as well as the restriction of perception. These virtual tours enable expeditions to take place on a terrain where sovereignty no longer belongs to the national state but to each human being. (ibid.)

In Benjamin's and Agamben's terms one could even speak of an act of *profanation* — military spaces are re-consigned to us without a new or predefined use or trade value (see Agamben, 2007).

An example may help to illustrate how zone*interdite unfolds its interventionist potential by locating, visualizing and reconfiguring some of the “holey spaces” (see Deleuze and Guattari's analyses of the ambivalent superposition of “holey spaces” in the smooth and striated in Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, pp. 456–459) that pervade the internet due to its inherent overdetermination, which can never effectively be checked by controlling powers: the website *The GITMO Days* (see <http://gitmodays.homestead.com/>), run by a United States veteran who was stationed in Guantanamo Bay, documents the life of the military personnel when they were off-duty. Apart from reporting romantic escapades, the site is also using an aerial view of Windmill Beach as a background image, and by doing so, it unknowingly provided the first evidence of the existence of the Camp Iguana, which was allegedly used as a prison for children in 2003. Wachter and Jud used this first photographic evidence of Camp Iguana along with other information they had gathered to interpret an additional picture, which was accidentally provided on the homepage of the US Department of Defense.



figure 5: Christoph Wachter, Mathias Jud, Camp Iguana;
homepage, US Dept. of Defense, <http://german.berkeley.edu>

At first sight, nothing suspect is revealed by this blinding photo, just a happy bunch of ‘boys’ from the United States playing volleyball on Windmill Beach. On closer look, however, one can distinguish the contours of what might be further evidence of Camp Iguana. Not surprisingly, the moment the US Department of Defense realized what it accidentally had on public display, this photo was immediately deleted (see Huszai, 2006).

Machsomwatch

In his book *Hollow Land*, Eyal Weizman further refines his earlier classification of Israel’s politics of occupation as a Politics of Verticality, namely, the authorities’ highly integrated attempt to control three spatial levels at once—the ground, the air, and even the subterranean level—in order to efficiently manage the (settlement and circulation of the) Palestinian population (see Weizman, 2002). One of the most interesting and disturbing findings of Weizman is that the battle over space does not just involve military technology but also a great deal of critical and post-structuralist imagery that is eventually re-contextualized to meet specific tactical purposes. When interacting with Israeli military institutions, Weizman found out for example that they were using reading lists that include writings of theorists such as Guy Debord, Deleuze, and Guattari to refine their military strategies of social and spatial control in territories that are nominally Palestinian. Weizman contends:

[T]he frontiers of the Occupied Territories are not rigid and fixed at all; rather, they are elastic, and in constant transformation. The linear border, a cartographic imaginary inherited from the military and political spatiality of the nation state has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms—*separation walls, barriers, blockades, closures, road blocks, checkpoints, sterile areas, special security zones, closed military areas, and killing zones*—that shrink and expand the territory at will. These borders are dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing and flowing; they creep along, stealthily surrounding Palestinian villages and roads. They may even erupt into Palestinian living rooms, bursting in through the house walls....Elastic territories could thus not be understood as benign environments: highly elastic political space is often more dangerous and deadly than a static, rigid one. (Weizman 2007, pp. 6–7)

If Machsomwatch, which is an “organisation of peace activist Israeli women against the Israeli Occupation of the territories and the systematic repression of the Palestinian nation” (<http://www.machsomwatch.org/en>), has a location, then it is probably a shifting

location: shifting along Israel's highly elastic political space so lucidly framed by Weizman. Strictly speaking, the members of MACHSOMWATCH are monitoring Israel's "boundary regulators" (Hallward, 2008, p. 27), but by doing so they define their work as challenging geographic, political, and social separation and discrimination, that is, their focus on checkpoints as gatekeepers, which are regulating who can cross and how, entails also contesting discourses of state morality. By on the one hand documenting soldiers' actions and on the other hand intervening when necessary "to ensure that the human and civil rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are protected" (MACHSOMWATCH in Hallward, 2008, p. 27), MACHSOMWATCHERS expose themselves physically by showing "Palestinians the face of Israelis who are neither soldiers nor settlers, who work to end the occupation and thereby challenge certain stereotypes" (ibid.). As Maia Carter Hallward points out in her essay "Negotiating Boundaries, Narrating Checkpoints": "The very basic function of MACHSOM WATCH counteracts the territorial tendency of *displacing*; by observing, they very purposefully shift attention back to the relationship between the controller and the controlled and away from the purportedly neutral regulation over who is permitted to cross (those with permits)" (2008, p. 27).

figure 6: Machsomwatch's check, www.machsomwatch.org

that exposes the function of checkpoint procedures as mechanisms of segregation, rather than security. In addition to reporting, Machsomwatchers are conducting and disseminating investigations on the bureaucratic procedures that are necessary to obtain a permit; moreover, they are also speaking to the public by making use of “their own positional power as citizens of the controlling power” (Hallward, 2008, p. 30). But even here, in the heart of peace activism, we encounter a terrible dilemma, as some of the members of Machsomwatch are critically aware: the more humane the checkpoints become, the more difficult it will be to overcome the checkpoint system as such (ibid.).

Learning to Perforate and to Deform

Four people have been holding out for sixteen days on a crane in the city center of Brescia—hungry, cold, weakened and demanding the impossible: a radical revocation of discriminatory practices invested in the very logic of contemporary spatial regimes. I wish this essay would have found a different story to introduce the subsequent argument, but I hope even more so that this particular story will eventually find an ending that is better than the one suspected: at the time of writing these lines, many of the “few refugees” who dared to challenge the Brescian authorities by imaging another history and by practicing a different politics on top of a crane are either facing serious legal charges or have already been sentenced to deportation. The stakes “to be counted as speaking beings” have indeed risen to a stunning height.

Locative media resistances against *our* biopolitical ‘state of things’ are flaring up and new counter-hegemonic devices are persistently developed in the face of the well-known risk of unpredictable oppressive manipulations. What is first and foremost needed though is perhaps not even an unleashed activism, but rather an unprecedented sensibility for imagining a comprehensive decolonization of the spaces we currently inhabit as well as a topology where order and orientation cannot possibly coincide—a sensibility for which Agamben found the following words: “It is only in a land where the spaces of states will have been perforated and topologically deformed, and the citizen will have learned to acknowledge the refugee that he himself is, that man’s political survival today is imaginable” (1995, p. 119).

One may only wish that we will be haunted by such a fierce imagination.

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