Guarded visions: walls, watchtowers and warped perspectives in the Israeli occupied West Bank Palestinian territory[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between Israel's fortification of physical space and narratives of division in the Israeli occupied Palestinian West Bank Territory. I argue that the fortification and separation of physical space deepens segregation, and increases fear, hostility and disconnection between people living in this context. Furthermore, I suggest that this relationship between narratives of division and insecurity and structural mechanisms of control within the West Bank influences and impacts on individuals such that personal perspectives become guarded and defensive. The mediation of subjects through a defensive lens can prevent individuals from forming connections that acknowledge the permeability of seemingly impenetrable distinctions between inside and outside, or self and an-other. The looking, recording and representation of people in a place that is guarded and framed from a position of insecurity reduces the capacity of individuals to locate openings that traverse restrictive boundaries. In order to contextualise my discussion, I have included personal documentation of defensive structures photographed in the West Bank between 2013 and 2014. I position my observations and analyses in relation to discussions about the Oush Grab Military Base presented by the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) in their recent publication *Architecture after revolution* (2013).

Keywords: Narratives of division; insecurity; fortifications; Israel; Palestine; guarded visions.

Introduction

The Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank Territory that includes the separation barrier-wall,[2] an intricate and unpredictable checkpoint system, separate road systems and a number of fences, warning signs, watchtowers,

surveillance cameras and military personnel, can be read as physical signifiers of a 'logic of partition' in this geography (Weizman 2007:5). This system of classification, separation and control is aestheticised and justified by the Israeli state as a response to the heightened fear of terrorism that escalated in the region after the Zionist colonisation of Historic Palestine in the 1900s, and the establishment of Independent Israel in 1948. Thus, the primary narrative used to validate the aggressive fortification of territory on a national level is connected to the threat of potential harm, damage or death that influences the fear-fuelled imagination. One could argue that this 'logic of partition' mediates and influences the formation of individual (and collective) perspectives, such that social interaction and practices of looking are guarded and defensive (Weizman 2007:15).

If one considers the influence of 'spatiality on thought', it can be suggested that the physical separation, fortification and defensive guarding of one's home, community or state, informs how people living and moving within a place connect with one another (Bachelard 1964:211). The physical segregation of people according to various forms of identification (such as "ethnicity", "nationality", "religion", or "culture") and the way in which these categories are aligned with perceptions of danger and threat spur the imagination to fortify stereotypes and predetermined constructions of an "other" that are demonised and conceptually closed. The mediation of self and "others" through a defensive lens prevents individuals from forming connections that move beyond restrictive boundaries of 'externally alienated and internally homogenous ethno-national enclaves' (Weizman 2007:7).

The selected objects of study for this paper include documentation of defensive structures and fortifications that I photographed whilst conducting doctoral research in the West Bank between 2013 and 2014,[3] as well as certain projects connected to the Oush Grab military base, co-ordinated by the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) based in Beit Sahour in the West Bank OPT. I unpack these examples in relation to Eyal Weizmans' observations regarding a 'logic of partition' and 'elastic geography' in *Hollow land: Israel's architecture of occupation*, (2007) and Nicholas Mirzoeff's discussions of 'visuality' and 'countervisuality' articulated in *The right to look: A counterhistory of visuality* (2011).

The Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) was established in 2007 by Eyal Weizman, Sandi Hilal and Allesandro Petti as an 'architectural practice' and an 'artistic residency programme' (DAAR 2015). As architects and academics, their 'aim was to extend the analytical reach of their respective investigations' and individual projects in order to 'engage with the spatial realities' of colonisation, occupation and *Hafrada* (the Hebrew term for apartheid) in a practical and 'propositional manner' within the context of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (DAAR 2015).

3. I took the photographs included in this paper (with the exception of those that are credited to the Decolonizing Art Architecture Residency) whilst conducting research in Israel and the West Bank OPT over a nine-month period between 2013 and 2014. I lived in Ramallah for the majority of this time, using the city as a base and travelling to Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Jenin for shorter trips to gather material for the doctoral thesis I am currently writing: 'Visual Narratives of Division: South African and Palestinian Intersections'. My discussion of practices of looking and mechanisms of division and control is thus specific to a few observations made in these areas, and should not be mistaken for an overview of Israel Proper and the Occupied Territories as a whole.

Projects which are part of the proposed 'decolonisation' of specific sites such as the Oush Grab Military Base in Beit Sahour (Figure 1) identify and make use of 'cracks and loopholes within existing colonial systems of separation and control' (Hilal *et al.* 2013:31). These projects activate architectural structures such as the Oush Grab military base as 'optical apparatuses' in an ongoing process of 'decolonization' (Hilal *et al.* 2013:32). DAAR offers an example of spatial practice that can potentially perforate the authority of 'visuality' and its divisive privileging of space and perspective within this geography[4] (Mirzoeff 2011:1).

In the West Bank OPT, Palestinian citizens are denied the 'right to look' and the 'right to be seen' (Mirzoeff 2011:4). The red and white signs (Figures 2a and 2b) that discourage Israeli access into the territory designated as Area A (Palestinian towns and villages)[5] prevent Israelis from engaging in practices of 'mutual' looking with Palestinians in an intimate setting (Mirzoeff 2011:1). Instead, interactions between the two binaries play out within a variety of ideological and spatial hierarchies and layered mechanisms of separation and control.

'OPT Palestinians' who hold 'green'[6] ID cards restricting them to the boundaries of the West Bank Territory may not enter Israeli settlements which exist in the West Bank or 'Israel-proper' and are thus prevented from seeing or being seen by their 'Jewish-Israeli' neighbours (Tawil-Souri 2012:159). Walls, fences, checkpoints, no-go zones, buffer zones, watchtowers, warning signs and military personnel prevent 'mutual' looking (Mirzoeff 2011:1). These spatial fortifications reaffirm political and ideological separations and deny citizens the opportunity for 'inventing the other', thus inhibiting moments of embodied connection and 'recognition' (Mirzoeff 2011:1).

As a visitor conducting doctoral research in Israel and the West Bank OPT (bearing a foreign passport), I was permitted more freedom in terms of 'practices of looking' in this context than the Palestinian citizens with whom I shared a home in Ramallah (Mirzoeff 2011:1). I could picture[7] and document parts of the West Bank, such as Jerusalem, whereas those born and raised there could not. I was afforded a perspective denied to most Palestinians and, to a much lesser degree, the Israeli citizens who shared the same geography. My understanding of this particular set of power dynamics was reiterated by a few quotidian moments of personal interaction – a friend's request for a bottle of sand from the beach in Tel Aviv because her Green West Bank Identification Document did not allow her entry into this part of the country; another friend's detailed questions about what the city of Ramallah "looked like" on the inside, because she had never actually been "inside" it, despite being raised in Maale Adumin, a large settlement positioned on a hilltop next door.

4. My use of the term "geography" in this paper can be understood in relation to Edward Said's (2000:182) description of 'geography' as a 'socially constructed and maintained sense of place'.

5. The West Bank OPT is divided into three areas, namely Areas A, B, and C. Area A is designated for Palestinian civilian residency and placed under the government of the Palestinian Authority. Area B refers to the Jewish Israeli Settlements under Israeli civilian and military control, sophisticated bypass roads and public transport systems connect the settlements to "Israel proper" such that they act as convenient extensions of the country, and do not feel like illegal enclaves placed on Palestinian Territory. Area C refers to Palestinian residential areas that are controlled by the Israeli military.

6. The reference to different coloured ID cards is not a reference to the actual ID documents themselves but the plastic sleeves within which they are carried.

7. My use of the term 'picture' in this essay is in reference to WJT Mitchell (2005:xiv), who argues that 'in its most extended sense … a picture refers to the entire situation in which an image has made its appearance'.

FIGURE **Nº 1**   ‹

Documentation of the Watch Tower in Oush Grab, 2008. Photograph by Francesco Mattuzzi.
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While my research is concerned with the analysis of divisive structures and ideologies and their privileging of certain perspectives, I find myself in the position where my own looking, reception and representation of such systems potentially renders me complicit in their normalisation. Meir Wigoder (2010:293) argues that 'pointing the camera at the Israeli Separation Barrier-Wall involves a fundamental paradox: no matter how critical we are of its construction, once we choose to photograph it, we are colluding with its construction and preservation.'

As a possible method to deal with the above concerns, I unpack the metaphor of "looking with the skin" as a way to think through processes of looking, recording, representing and interpreting perceptions of interiority and exteriority within the context of an 'elastic geography', such as the West Bank OPT (Weizman 2007:5). My proposal for "looking with the skin" is an anxious one. It is situated at the border between a desire to articulate a framework for mutual looking and connection, and a fear that my own practices of looking, recording and representation might contribute to the very systems of division that I am attempting to critique. At the same time, I think that this is indeed the reason that these processes should be explored. I want to locate an approach to looking and representation that is conscious, considered, self-reflexive and accountable.

Narratives of division and a 'logic of partition'

Narratives of division can be understood as individual and collective stories (and/or experiences) that relate to geographical and psychological displacement, dislocation, forced removal and segregation. These narratives are fluid and fragmentary; they assist in the construction of state ideology and national identity in addition to individual conceptualisations of self. They also articulate the parameters of inclusion and exclusion within a defined and manageable location, while simultaneously influencing the construction of defensive architecture and a visual language of fear and insecurity.

Narratives of division that are connected to the forced removal, exclusion and division of people, such as the ongoing colonisation and *Hafrada* (the Hebrew term for apartheid) in Israel and The Occupied Palestinian Territories, present evidence of what Eyal Weizman (2007:15) terms a 'logic of partition'. The narratives supporting this 'logic of partition' translate physically into a defensive guarding of territory (Weizman 2007:15). These narratives of division are directly influenced by the policies that establish and monitor state borders, as well as the individual experience of home and security.

In the *Power of inclusive exclusion*, Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni, and Sari Hanafi (2009:15) write that: 'the nature of the Jewish national movement since the end of the nineteenth century and of the Palestinian struggle to counter Jewish immigration to Palestine and later to put an end to Israeli domination in Palestine' has resulted in the geographical displacement of numerous Palestinians, while simultaneously constructing a secure and stable home for Jewish communities. The narratives which confirm Jewish identity and belonging within Israel assist in the negation of Palestinian identity and its claim to the same geographical area once referred to as Palestine.

Skins and walls

According to Weizman (2007:7), the 'logic of partition' in 'frontier zones' (such as the West Bank OPT) 'resembles an incessant sea dotted with multiplying archipelagos of externally alienated and internally homogenous ethno-national enclaves'. This segregated, shifting, and highly contested geography is monitored 'under a blanket of Israeli aerial surveillance' (Weizman 2007:7). Fences, walls, checkpoints, razor wire, metal grids, burglar bars and additional structures that are used to fortify settlements, roads, military zones and designated areas in the West Bank OPT confirm and defend boundaries which have been declared through Israel's on-going occupation and colonisation of land. These structures are

supplemented by sign systems that direct and control the bodies of those who live and move in these areas. Signage systems and physical markers of division are further supplemented by legislation granting individuals with 'full citizenship, weak citizenship or no citizenship at all' (Weizman 2007:5).

Structures of division, such as walls, have the power to articulate the parameters of inside and outside. Physical dividers regularly confirm and validate policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion. According to Bachelard (1964:211), the differentiation between an outside and an inside 'has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no'. He warns that 'unless one is careful, [this] dialectic of division [can be] made into a basis of images that govern[s] all thoughts of positive and negative' (Bachelard 1964:211). That which is included on the "inside" is associated with the desirable, the wanted, the accepted, the clean and "pure", while that which is positioned on the "outside" is framed as the undesirable, the uncivilised and unpredictable threat that must be monitored, controlled, eradicated. The excluded are prevented from mixing with the civilised, preserved entity protected within the inside. Such divisions are arguably unhealthy and unsustainable. Walls, fences and other signifiers of fear and insecurity deepen and solidify imaginary distinctions between people, confirming the idea that there is indeed something of which to be fearful.

The decision to implement and abide by security control measures is based on measurements of risk. One calculates the potential risk of a space or action according to experience, images, stories, signs and signifiers, in conjunction with the subjective imagination, in order to create a picture. This picture influences the behaviour of the individual within a particular place – where one may or may not choose to go and how one engages with other individuals living and moving in a particular area. How one sees and experiences an environment is directly influenced by the constructed image of risk associated with the place. Each picture is interpreted differently by the individual and relies on the 'ground note of the "individual particular" from which all narration begins' (Said in Bhabha 2005:371). Experience, knowledge, perspective, as well as personal and national forms of identification, all influence the individual response and perception of risk in this geography.

The skin is a semi-permeable boundary that provides a metaphorical reference point from which to comprehend ideas of interiority and exteriority. One's understanding of the home (and by extension the community, city or state) as a protective shelter for the body can be related to a perception of the skin as a semi-permeable layer of living tissue that mediates the flow of matter between an inside and an outside. It can be argued that human beings model physical and psychological structures, ideologies and actions on an understanding of the inside and the outside;

separated by the boundary that is the skin. The notion of a metaphorical "looking with the skin" is related to questions of how one can slowly and selectively connect with the lived reality of people in place in a way that engages knowingly and responsibly with 'practices of looking' and representation (Mirzoeff 2011:1).

In the consumption and reception of images, signs and structures, the quantity of visual material and the rate at which it is delivered can prevent one from engaging self-reflexively and critically with people, places and the various forms through which they are mediated and represented. Media, technology and geography can be used (by individuals and groups) to aid connection and communication across physical and ideological distance. These tools can also be manipulated to frame ideas, people and places so that visual perceptions are disconnected from the body. It is easier to demonise a constructed enemy if the representation of a so-called enemy precedes eye contact and frames an image of the other as something to be feared, eradicated or kept at a distance. As Edward Said (2004:71) explains in *Humanism and democratic criticism*, 'we are bombarded by prepackaged and reified representations of the world that usurp consciousness and pre-empt democratic critique'. He asserts the importance of 'maintaining rather than resolving the tension between the aesthetic and the national' as a critical approach to 'modes of reception and understanding' (Said 2004:78).

This paper, and the broader research project within which it is situated, is directly concerned with fear and insecurity. If I were to maintain a safe distance from this subject matter and choose not to situate myself in the discussion, for fear of taking a step in the wrong direction, I would run the risk of looking from behind the security fence, normalising its existence and confirming its ability to sustain division. While I may resist participating in the normalisation and aestheticising of colonisation, occupation, and *Hafrada* in the West Bank OPT, part of "looking with the skin" as a metaphorical approach is about acknowledging that representation is not "pure" or "objective", regardless of one's intentions. In the same way that the lines between the inside and outside of the body and the boundaries of a territory are fluid and permeable, regularly folding in on themselves and not rigid in their separation, the boundaries between resistance and complicity are neither straightforward and well-articulated, nor clearly defined. Instead, they are sites for continuous and conscientious negotiation and tension. As Elizabeth Grosz (2001:65) aptly confirms:

> The boundary between the inside and the outside, just as much as between self and other, and subject and object, must not be regarded as a limit to be transgressed, so much as a boundary to be traversed … boundaries are only produced in the process of passage … boundaries do not so much define the routes of passage; it is movement

that defines and constitutes boundaries. These boundaries, consequently, are more porous and less fixed and rigid than is commonly understood, for there is already an infection by one side of the border of the other; there is a becoming otherwise of each of the terms thus bounded.

Fortifications and fear

Physical divisions reinforce ideological separation and assist in maintaining the prevalence of the fear-fuelled imagination such that looking, seeing and perceiving is mediated by fear, anxiety and insecurity. Charlotte Lemansky (2004:106) confirms that 'fear-management strategies of erecting walls and enclosing neighbourhoods' can have a 'perverse effect [that] … serves to increase fears and deepen segregation'. Warning signs such as the ones depicted in Figures 2a and 2b serve as continuous reminders to citizens and visitors that there is something of which to be fearful, and that the transgression of certain boundaries is dangerous. This particular visual language, comprising objects and devices that are directly related to security, freedom of movement and warning, reinforces the idea that protection from perceived danger is a necessity.

The examples of physical fortification, such as walls (Figure 3), watchtowers (Figures 4a and 4b) and fences (Figure 5), included in this article can be read as symptoms and expressions of fear and insecurity. It can be further suggested that, while these structural and spatial responses to real and imaginary threats in one's environment may reduce immediate anxiety and provide an initial sense of security, they simultaneously reinforce practices of inclusion and exclusion. These security mechanisms reinforce a 'logic of partition' and aid in the authorising of 'visuality' (Weizman 2007:15).

Mirzoeff (2011:3) asserts that 'visuality' does not denote the visible in the sense of that which can be seen, and explains that the visualising 'process is not composed simply of visual perceptions in the physical sense, but is formed by a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight into a rendition of physical and psychic space'. Visuality 'classifies', 'separates' and 'aesthic[izes]' the power of a group or individual with the authority to 'arrange the relations of the visible and the sayable' and thus deny the return of looking by the subjects of 'visualization' (Mirzoeff 2011:3). According to Mirzoeff (2011:3-4), these three operations: 'classifying, separating, and aestheticizing … form … a "complex of visuality"'. This complex of visuality prevents 'mutual' and 'knowing … practices of looking', maintaining a division

FIGURE Nº 2a ‹

Photographic documentation of one of the red and white warning signs positioned at the Qalandia checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. The sign is written in Hebrew, Arabic and English. In English it reads 'This Road leads to Area "A" Under the Palestinian Authority The Entrance for Israeli Citizens is Forbidden, Dangerous to Your Lives And Is Against the Israeli Law'.

FIGURE Nº 2b ‹

Photographic documentation of one of the red and white warning signs positioned at the entrance to a Palestinian village in the West Bank. The sign is written in Hebrew, Arabic and English. In English it reads 'This Road leads to Palestinian Village The Entrance for Israeli Citizens Dangerous'.

FIGURE **Nº 3**   ‹

Documentation of the Separation Wall along route 60 to Jerusalem via Qalandia checkpoint, Iphone August 2013.

between those denied rights (such as the 'right to look') and those endowed with the power to oversee and look (Mirzoeff 2011:1).

Visuality is linked to authority.[8] While it is related to the ability to see or 'oversee' a territory, it is more about that which exists beyond the reach of the eyes and thus has to be imagined and manufactured into a 'visualization' (Mirzoeff 2011:3). Mirzoeff (2011:3) notes that: 'visualizing is the production of visuality, meaning the making of the processes of "history" perceptible to authority'. He argues that visuality 'must be imaginary rather than perceptual, because what is being visualized is too substantial for any one person to see and is created from information, images and ideas' (Mirzoeff 2011:2). Having the means to gather the information required in order to 'assemble a visualization manifests the authority of the visualizer' (Mirzoeff 2011:2).

In the West Bank, 'visuality's aura of authority' is signified and reaffirmed by security and control mechanisms which include surveillance cameras, watchtowers and strategically positioned military personnel, where those with the privilege to look

8. 'Authority' is described by Mirzoeff (2011:7) as 'power over life, or biopower'.

FIGURE **Nº 4a**   ‹

Documentation of a watch tower, photographed along route 60 between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, January 2014.

FIGURE **Nº 4b**   ‹

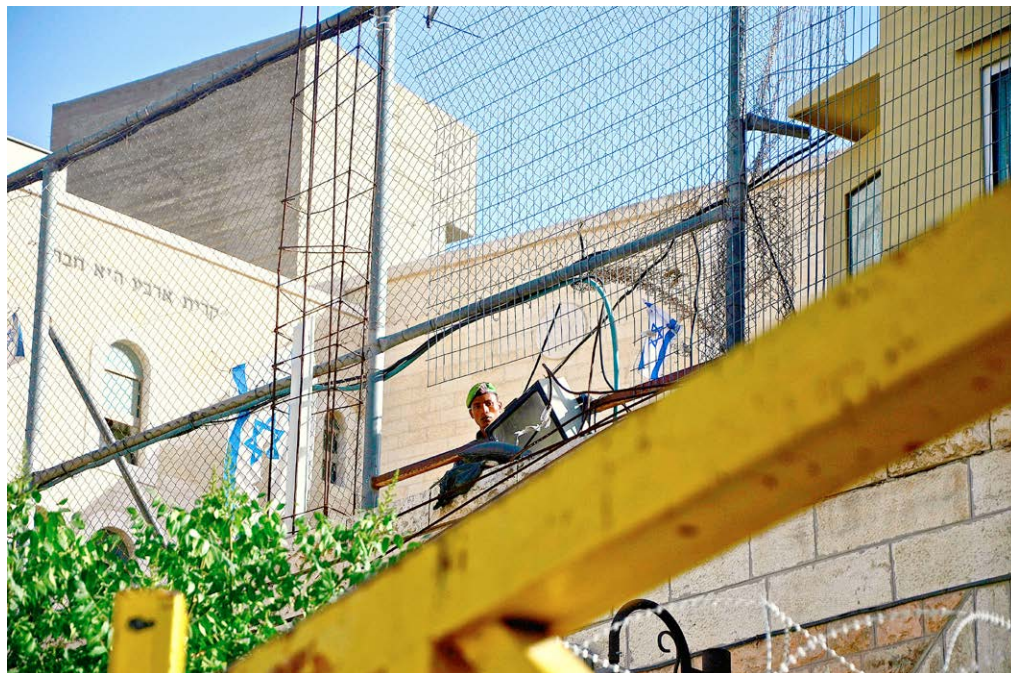Documentation of a watch tower, photographed along route 60 between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, January 2014.

FIGURE **Nº 5** ‹

Photographic documentation of an Israeli defence force soldier positioned behind a fence on top of a building in the Old City of Hebron, September 2013.

cannot be seen by those who are visualised (Mirzoeff 2011:7). These structures and the 'authority' of the 'visualizer' prevent individuals who occupy the same geography, the same "home" from asserting their 'right to look'. According to Mirzoeff (2011:2-3), visuality is the 'opposite of the right to look'. One can argue that the 'right to look' requires eye contact as a starting point (Mirzoeff 2011:1). It is initiated at a 'personal level with the look into someone else's eyes to express friendship, solidarity or love' (Mirzoeff 2011:1). Mirzoeff states (2011:1) that:

> The right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity ... [y]ou, or your group, allow another to find you, and in so doing, you find both the other and yourself. It means requiring the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim rights and to determine what is right. It is the claim to a subjectivity that has the autonomy to arrange the relations of the visible and the sayable.

While there are many sites where Palestinians and Israelis are able to "see" one another (such as Hebron), the spatial and ideological layers that distort one's perspective do not support or encourage 'the right to look' (Mirzoeff 2011:1). An

FIGURE **Nº 6** ‹

Photographic documentation of Israeli Defence Force Soldiers and policeman protecting Jewish Settlers in the Old City.

armed soldier positioned on the rooftop of a house surveying a civilian area through a security fence, like the one visible in Figure 5, is a standard, everyday feature of this area in Hebron. The places documented in Figures 5 and 6 are not war zones or military bases, they are designated Palestinian civilian areas where settler groups have illegally colonised parts of the Old City of Hebron. In response to the claiming of these areas, the Israeli military, supported by the state, have established checkpoints, fences, walls and watchtowers, and allocated four soldiers to each Jewish-Israeli citizen to protect them from the Palestinians living in the area. The desire for security and stability for the illegal settler community in Hebron has resulted in an artificial living environment, where soldiers become almost structural as they take on a similar role to a fence or wall. This form of psychological and physical closure is a perversion of the very idea of safety and security.

The mediation of one's perspective through a makeshift fence, through the bars of a checkpoint turnstile, or from behind the body of an armed soldier does not articulate a safe space for individuals to assert 'the right to look' (Mirzoeff 2011:1). Thus, despite their physical proximity, the way in which the 'other' is filtered and seen in such a context reinforces two homogenous and narrowly rendered binaries. From the

viewpoint of a Palestinian civilian living in Hebron, the individuals who have occupied parts of their town and evicted them from their homes are militant and aggressive 'outsiders' making claims to an inside that they consider home. These 'outsiders' are perceived as a dangerous and unpredictable threat to Palestinian livelihood and security. From the perspective of the Israeli-Jewish settler living in Hebron within the confines of safe zones, permitted to carry firearms for their protection, the Palestinians who were already living in the area prior to their arrival are nomadic, uncivilised, "barbaric Arabs" who do not have the same biblical claim to the land as the Jewish colonies framed within a Zionist discourse of right and return. In places such as Hebron, separation is maintained by ideological narratives of belonging that position one group as the empowered, rightful claimants of an area, while excluding those who fall outside of this narrative and its physical boundaries.

At checkpoints, such as Qalandia, which control the movement of people between parts of the West Bank OPT like Ramallah and the city of Jerusalem (Figure 7a and Figure 7b), the Palestinian body and the property that accompanies that body are inspected and interrogated – at times partially or fully undressed. Palestinians have little to no control over the 'relations of the visible and the sayable' especially when it comes to the policing of their bodies, homes and communities (Mirzoeff 2011:1). Signs, arrows and authorised military personnel direct the body through passages and fences. Paper has more weight than flesh as identification documents are demanded in order to prove that one has permission to move and permission to exist. ID books are requested before eye contact is made (if it is made at all) and the grounds of engagement are shifted and altered without warning or notification. The Israeli body is not policed in this respect. Settlements such as the one visible in Figure 8 and Figure 9 are elevated on hilltops and built to protect the Israeli home and body from harm and humiliation. Curiosity and interest about the lives of one's neighbours is denied in the interests of Israeli citizen protection, and Hafrada is justified by the notion of security.

FIGURE **Nº 7a**   ‹

Documentation of Palestinians waiting in a queue to pass through Qalandia checkpoint, March
2014, photographed with an Iphone.

FIGURE **Nº 7b**   ‹

Documentation of Palestinians waiting in a queue to pass through Qalandia checkpoint, March 2014, photographed with an Iphone.

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Photographic documentation of a settlement in the West Bank, showing the settlement elevated on a hilltop in relatively close proximity to a Palestinian village, October 2013.

FIGURE **Nº 9**   ‹

Photographic documentation of a settlement near Bethlehem positioned behind the Separation-Barrier-Wall, October 2013.

Constructing (in)security

On the surface one may perceive a simple dialectic of the state protecting its citizens from danger. The implementation of security and control mechanisms in the West Bank might seem like a relatively straightforward scenario where the Israeli government and military personnel construct a 'visualization' of the territory they control, and classify the severity of the threat to their citizens, before responding with the implementation of measures to secure and protect the desired members of their nation (Mirzoeff 2011:3). Full citizens included within the parameters of the Israeli nation (who benefit from its resources) accept (and perhaps welcome) the construction of walls, fences and military personnel that separate them from their neighbours, because they fear the demonised "other" they have been warned against. These structures are normalised as a necessity, a basic need for survival, and serve to prevent the utopian existence within its confines from contamination, preserving the purity of the so-called civilised nation – warding off the "uncivilised" demographic threat hidden behind its walls.

Weizman (2007:5) points out that '[u]nder Israel's regime of "erratic occupation", Palestinian life, property and political rights are constantly violated'. The extensive measures taken to ensure that Israeli citizens feel safe and secure in their homes come at the expense of Palestinian insecurity. Weizman (2007:5) explains that, in order to justify the necessity of security narrative, the Israeli government and the military must maintain 'a condition of insecurity and instability'. He notes:

> The spatial organization of the Occupied Territories is a reflection not only of an ordered process of planning and implementation, but … of "structured chaos", in which the – often deliberate – selective absence of government intervention promotes an unregulated process of violent dispossession (Weizman 2007:5).

The maintenance of 'structured chaos' in the West Bank plays a strategic role in ensuring 'security measures … [do] … not bring about absolute security' (Weizman 2007:5). Weizman (2007:5) refers to the Occupied Territories as 'elastic geographies'.[9] He explains that unlike the 'geography of stable, static places … frontiers are deep, shifting, fragmented and elastic territories [where] distinctions between the "inside" and the "outside" cannot be clearly marked' (Weizman 2007:5).

Mirzoeff (2011:21) echoes Weizman (2007:5) regarding 'structured chaos' as working in favour of 'maintaining a permanent state of crisis' in the Occupied Territories. The unstable and 'erratic' nature of borders and boundaries in the West Bank (Weizman 2007:5) adds to the sense of anxiety experienced by people who live and move within its shifting parameters. The group or individual with authority over a territory (such as the Israeli state) relies on this anxiety and insecurity to maintain hegemony and division. Furthermore, one can argue that citizens respond to this unpredictable situation by trying to stabilise or concretise the imaginary constructions of an inside and outside that can never actually be fully separated or permanently fixed as mutually exclusive entities. If one returns to the metaphor of "looking with the skin" and the idea that the skin itself is a semi-permeable boundary of peristaltic tissue that offers one with a point of reference for understanding notions of interiority and exteriority, then it stands to reason that attempts to separate the inseparable can never be fully realised.

In the documentary *Rebel architecture: The architecture of violence* by filmmaker Ana de Sousa (2014), Weizman confirms the strategic role played by architecture and urban planning in this context. The illegal Israeli settlements that have been built on Palestinian Territory are designed with the notion of surveillance, security and spatial control as priorities. Settler groups select mountains and hilltops overlooking Palestinian villages and farms for the construction of housing blocks

9. One can argue that there is a degree to which all geographies are somewhat elastic, but the use of the phrase in this instance is specific to Weizman's discussion of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

and communities. In this particular context, the seemingly 'mundane elements of planning and architecture have become tactical tools and the means of dispossession' (Weizman 2007:5). Furthermore, the selective absence and presence of military control and regulation in this area means that, while Palestinian citizens are heavily policed and prosecuted, the violent and aggressive actions of militant Jewish Israeli settler groups are strategically ignored, and even supported by the state.

Oush Grab and countervisuality

One of the features of an elastic geography such the West Bank is that structures such as watchtowers and military bases can be left unoccupied during periods of relative calm. Located at the entrance to the town of Beit Sahour just outside of Bethlehem, the Oush Grab military base is one example. Oush Grab consistently serves as a strategic military outpost and site for the authorising of visuality as a supplement to colonial and military agendas since the early 1900s.

The base was officially evacuated by the Israeli Defense Force in 2006 and placed under the Beit Sahour municipality. In *Architecture after revolution*, Hilal *et al.* (2013:8) elaborate on some of the projects and events that have taken place on this site. They note that a few years before Oush Grab was abandoned by the IDF, a group of international and local protesters 'broke into the military base and called for its immediate removal' (Hilal *et al*. 2013:8). They explain that the soldiers positioned within the building were 'taken completely by surprise', and 'did nothing but watch' (Hilal et al. 2013:8). Although this action did not result in the immediate evacuation of the base, the response of the soldiers could be viewed in terms of 'countervisuality'. Mirzoeff (2011:24) states that 'the performative claim of a right to look where none exists puts a countervisuality into play'. The protesters who enter the forbidden territory risk their own protection in order to assert the 'right to look' in a designated military zone. Although the action is brief (and arguably insignificant), the surprised response of the soldiers who purportedly did 'nothing but watch' perforates visuality's 'aura of authority' just long enough to disrupt the seemingly impermeable blanket of Israeli surveillance and control. The inability to see into a watchtower such as that of the Oush Grab base (mentioned earlier in Figure 1 or the one depicted in Figures 4a and 4b), means that the person situated on the outside looking in is generally uncertain as to whether there is someone on the inside of the structure looking out.

Since 2006, the Oush Grab military space has been a site of continuous tension. Initially the space was visited by members of the Beit Sahour community and

utilised by DAAR as an 'optical apparatus' from which they initiated a process of 'imaginative speculation' (Hilal *et al.* 2013:9). Documenting the early stages of engagement with the base, shortly after its evacuation, Hilal *et al.* (2013:9) note that 'people experienced the first moment of access to the military outpost differently'. Using the site as an 'optical apparatus' allows for the reversal of viewpoints, such as that depicted in the photograph taken by Francesco Muttuzzi from inside the Oush Grab watchtower (Figure 10). People positioned on the inside looking out had a brief moment to see how they may have been viewed from the 'perspective of the oppressor' (Hilal *et al.* 2013:9). There was a degree to which the structure and those who controlled it were demystified. The abandoning of the Oush Grab military base presented a moment for citizens to look at their space from the position of the visualiser. The perspective offered through this reversal of the direction of looking presented a moment of autonomy and self-determination. From the outside looking in, it is difficult or even impossible to see into the watchtowers or walk around the inside of the base in order to view its building in proximity to one's own body.

According to Hilal *et al.* (2013:9):

> For some, it was a moment of spontaneous transgression. Entering the watchtowers overlooking Beit Sahour, we had the feeling we had accessed the control room in a panopticon prison, sharing for an instant the perspective of the oppressor. Inside we discovered graffiti (of the kind more commonly found in toilets) written by a soldier musing about the sunrise and the atmosphere of the city in the early morning.

In 2008, DAAR and the Beit Sahour community collaborated with the Palestinian Wildlife Society and other activist groups to alter the site's function and turn it into a community park. When news of the park's success circulated in the region, one of the 'settler groups, known as "the Women in Green" proclaimed the establishment of a new Jewish settlement named Shdema and began a process of claiming the base through various forms of vandalism, graffiti and occupation (Hilal *et al.* 2013:135). At the time of writing this article, DAAR reported that the future of the Oush Grab military base remained uncertain. According to Hilal *et al.* (2013:137) 'in the winter of 2013, a permit [had] been given to establish the settlement of Shdema'. If the settlement were to be built and fortified, the area would become the 'last link closing the chain of colonies surrounding and strangling Bethlehem' (Hilal *et al.* 2013:137). The park has been destroyed and the watchtower can no longer be used as an 'optical apparatus' to return the authoritative gaze of the visualiser or subvert the original intentions of its construction. There is speculation that Oush Grab 'might become a military base again' (Hilal *et al.* 2013:137).

FIGURE **Nº 10** ‹

The view from inside the Oush Grab military base overlooking the town of Beit Sahour in the West Bank, reproduction courtesy of the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, Photograph by Francesco Mattuzzi, 2008.
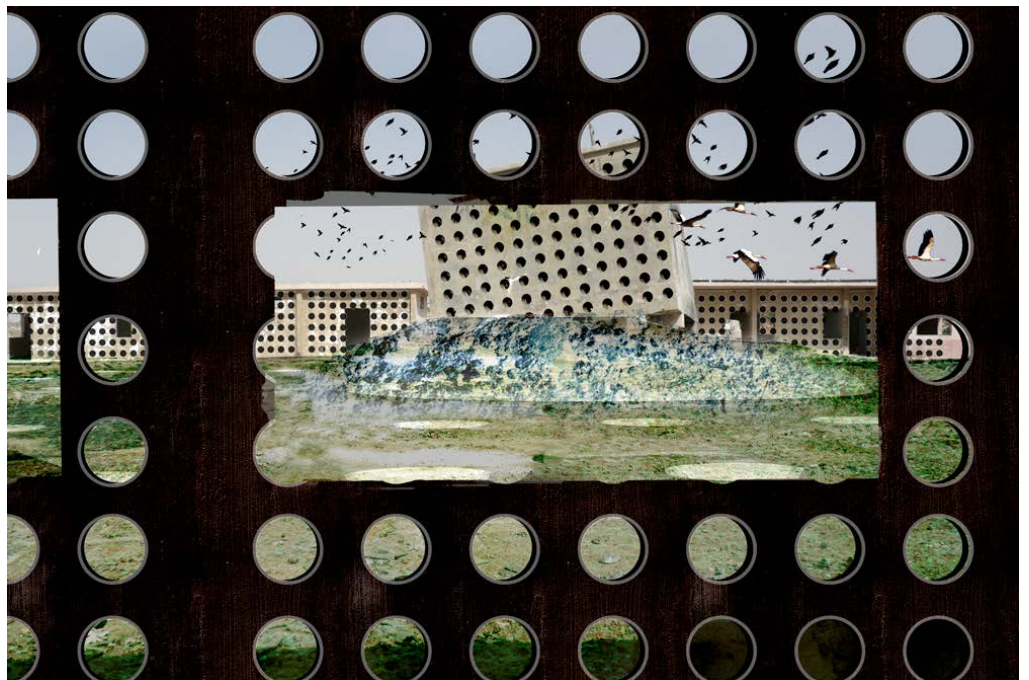

FIGURE **Nº 11a** ‹

Return to nature, Sara Pellegrini and DAAR, 2013.

Return to nature, Sara Pellegrini and DAAR, 2013.

In response to this, DAAR have proposed the project *Return to nature* (Figures 11a and 11b), which suggests that the buildings be rendered inhospitable and uninhabitable to human life. *Return to nature* would involve a 'perforation of all the external walls of the buildings … with a series of equally spaced holes', eroding the division between an inside and outside so that a place like Oush Grab is rendered dysfunctional to a particular purpose. If the proposal were executed, the base would no longer serve as a secure point from which to control and monitor individuals in a hostile and unfriendly scenario.

The authority claimed by visuality relies on the belief that only one group may see while the other may not; it further relies on the notion that those denied the right to look, can never at any point subvert its gaze. Thus, in the briefest moment that the subject of visualisation looks back, the potential to rearrange the relations of the visible and the sayable are set in motion and shifts in perspective are activated. James Elkins points to the potential of creative practice to rearrange how one might see and engage with the world. He states:

> Within limits, I do not want to see things from a single point of view: I hope to be flexible, to think in as liquid a way as I can, and even to risk incoherence. And above all, I want to continue to change – I do not wish to remain the same jaded eye that I was a moment ago. Art is among the experiences that I rely on to alter what I am (Elkins 1996:41).

Conclusion

This article is a self-reflexive attempt to think about modes of looking, connection, mediation and representation with the sensitivity and flexibility of the skin. Architecture and the body are informed by one another, and the way that one constructs and behaves within a place influences one's perspective of the self and others in relation to the self. The skin is scarred, blemished, sensitive and resilient. If we seal its openings, close its pores and prevent all "contaminants", demonised others and "unsavoury" ideas from confronting and negotiating our own, one is likely to be left with something bland, homogenous and fragile.

"Looking with the skin" is a metaphorical attempt at connection and reception that is self-aware and deliberately slow. It encourages one to take the long way around, to consider 'what to connect with', how to connect and how not to connect with the familiar and the foreign in meaningful ways (Said 2004:78). It does not dismiss the lasting influence of narratives of division or the defensive structures that contribute to a guarding of one's vision, and protection of the body, nor is it a suggestion to unrealistically discard fear and insecurity for a new utopia, without walls and boundaries. To subvert the authority of the Israeli hegemonic gaze for even the briefest moment in time might just signify the possibilities for future punctures and perforations of seemingly impermeable distinctions between an inside and an outside.

Practices that challenge the authority of visuality have the potential to offer alternative points of view and directions for looking that may in time result in the facilitation of 'mutual' recognition of the 'right to look' and the right to exist in a context that is regularly deemed hopeless and framed within a circular narrative of conflict, dispossession and division (Mirzoeff 2011:1).

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