

## OPTICAL TACTICS FOR SPATIAL JUSTICE IN THE WORKS OF FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE AND HITO STEYERL (1)

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### INTRODUCTION

From cartographic mapping to the linear perspective, the technics of geometrical representation of our immediate surroundings, the technics of picturing the world are deeply connected with an urge to give an order to it. The ability to depict the world allows us to understand our agency in its forming and to make it the subject of our actions. While this spatial knowledge enables us to estimate and foresee our acts in a perspective, it also provides a crucial foundation for governing human lives. In this line, the current imaging technologies help us to pursue this deep-seated desire. As the world becomes an object of observation, surveillance, and control, the distinctions between the subject and object, the person at the center of the image, and the world outside wither.

Nonetheless, the technologies that allow us to picture the world is not unbounded. The limit of vision is regulated by a techno-judicial image regime, in which the capacities of the latest image production techniques, as well as the legal protocols (security laws, terror acts, and personal privacy concerns), are decisive. Thus, the images of the world are not only conditioned by the capacity of technology but also by the current order secured by law. Eyal Weizman (2017), the founder of FA, further elaborates how this image regime operates with the support of legal measures. For once, the satellite images that claim to give a complete picture of the world are restricted by personal privacy laws: "The reason for halting the process of improving the resolution of publicly available satellite images was that at 0.5 meters, the pixel resolution corresponds to the dimensions of the human body-an area 0.5 meters by 0.5 meters is roughly the size of the human body as seen from above" (Weizman, 2017, 28). Thus, Weizman remarks that, personal privacy laws determine the visibility threshold for the satellite images available for public use. Even so, the clarity of the image is not only bound to the human body in defense of the personal privacy laws. The images of the world for state use rely on

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different regulations, protected by legal acts in support of national security measures, that vary across different national borders. Thus, the legal limits to the resolution of the images differ when personal and national concerns are at stake.

This asymmetry of visibility manifests an uneven image of the world with significant consequences on the ground reality. In this paper, I aim to reflect on this techno-judicial image regime, and to this end, firstly, I reflect on the firm belief in the truth claims of the technical images as transparent records of reality, based on the assumption that these images are produced without the mediacy of the human agency (Benjamin, 1936). This premise not only oversimplifies the process of mediation but also widely ignores the agency of images in the formation of the world we live in and the fact that the forming of a society is founded “in imagined surfaces, in surfaces that absorb geography and history” (Flusser, 1985, 4). As further discussions in the paper manifest, the images project a world limited by the technical capacities of the optical tools. Moreover the restrictions implemented by an asymmetrical threshold of visibility secured by judiciary acts order this world and its images. In the works of FA and Hito Steyerl, which critically engage with this asymmetrical image regime, I find a potential to reflect on the reciprocal relationship between images and the world that produce one another. Through these works, I explore the tactics operating to revoke the optical strategies that manipulate the spatial order with immediate effects on life on the ground.

### **THE HUMAN BODY AS THE REFERENCE POINT FOR THE OPTICAL TECHNOLOGIES**

In one of the pictures capturing Auschwitz Crematorium 2, Eyal Weizman (2017) observes the coincidental entanglement of the visible silver crystals on the photograph and the dehumanized body of a prisoner. The grain on the photographic image collapses upon the image of a person seen from above, to such an extent that one struggles to separate the grain from the image of the body. By the same token, Weizman observes a correspondence between the image of the human body and the clarity of satellite images available for the public view today. In the former analogue image, the body of the prisoner is concealed in the grain of the silver particle, albeit coincidentally. The granular limits of the image hide the outlines of the human body. The satellite technologies, on the other hand, have a much better resolution quality, thus, in this instance, the visibility of the human body is not limited to the technical capacities of the optical tools (Weizman, 2017,13).

Until the end of the Cold War, the visualization of the world from above remained under state rule and thus, the threshold of visibility was strictly under military control. The commercialization of satellite images allowed the aerial views of the world to become ubiquitous and consequently our perception of the world has shifted (Cosgrove, 1994). From this perspective of the world, the human body is seen in its environmental surroundings, as an element within the spatial matrix. The distinctive features of the individual subjects become less relevant in this perspective. The emphasis is rather on the spatio-temporal being of the human body as an initiator of possible action. Thus, this perspective of the world also informs the way the human body is perceived.

The technical images, provide a particular perception of the body, in as much as they allow us to perceive the world at different registers. As early as 1936, Walter Benjamin gave credit to technical images - be it executed through the medium of photography or cinema- for expanding our knowledge about reality. Benjamin surmised that technical images allowed us to see things beyond our optical consciousness. Unlike the magical images of the painters, the camera worked like a surgeon piercing through the surface of the skin into the depths of the body, into the depths of the world (Benjamin, 1936). As a light-sensitive vestige of the object as well as a copy of its visual likeness, the mechanical image promised a "double-entry bookkeeping of the real" (Mitchell, 2015, 49), and as such, the photographic image was endorsed as a tool for "establishing evidence" (Benjamin, 1936, 27), as a foundation for a "legalistic truth" (Sekula, 1986). Since its inception, technical image production has been cherished for its capacity to provide a transparent and objective view of the world. Henry Fox Talbot, one of the early inventors of the photographic process, not only called the photographic medium the "pencil of nature," but strongly believed in the capacity of the photographs as a "mute testimony," an "evidence of a novel kind" in the service of law (in Sekula, 1986, 6).

Nonetheless, access to reality has never been simply through an indexical relationship or an iconographic likeness. The evidentiary value of this particular form of the image as an unmediated technical process, as well as its defining keywords, "truth, reality, objectivity" (Steyerl, 2009,1) remained under dispute. For once, the images operate within a visual regime, never independent of the socio-political reality they are embedded in (Mitchell, 2010). An image is a part of a "spatiotemporal system" (Ranciere, 2008) and it is a "symbolic form" (Panofsky, 1927), "technique of culture" (Belting, 2009 ) reflecting a certain perception of the world in a particular cultural perspective. As Hans Belting (2009, 21) succinctly observes, "What cultures do with pictures and how they reflect the world on pictures takes us to the center of their way of thinking". The particular perspective on the production of the images of the world creates a sense of reality, that affects the way we perceive the world, project meaning on, and in return, being affected by the operations of this economy of images (Ranciere, 2008, 102). Thus, the technical images that now grow at our fingertips do not simply operate as a window to the world, but rather these images produce a worldview affecting the world. On a more practical end, this view casts the world into the procedures of the prevailing image regime. The reciprocal relation between the world and its images is deeply entangled with the way we experience the world.

When Hito Steyerl (2013) draws our attention to the Malpat military camouflage pattern, as an image of invisibility, we observe the shape of the world mediated by technical images; this time it's the world depicted by computer-generated digital images. The strategy of camouflage relies on one of the oldest principles of concealment: to be invisible, one should blend into space. The boundaries of the world mediated by the images repeat in the camouflage patterns. In this particular case of the pixelated camouflages, the reality one is embedded in, the world one leans one's body against is not that of vast lands shaped by the fluctuations of the seasons anymore but the dominant imaging technologies today, the reality experienced through screens (Mirzoeff, 2011, 16). Dressed in camouflage, the body becomes protected from the technological gaze cast on the world. Like the silver particle seamlessly collapsing on the body of the prisoner, the Marpat military camouflage pattern casts our bodies into its pixelated



Figure 1. Marpat military camouflage pattern

texture. In this pattern, we see an image of the world built by the technical make of the digital image in its pixelated basis. The boundaries of every color field in this pattern follow the structure of the pixel, the smallest element of visibility in the computer-generated image. Thus, the visual perception of the space through screens is at stake. The body of the subject withers within a space mediated by current visualization technologies. The design of this camouflage explicitly manifests our shifting relationship with the world ruled by the new image economy, and the way we relate to the world with our pixelated vision, from a perspective that pictures the world from above. If objects and bodies undergo a sensory and sensible expansion in mimicry, the contours of the body respond to a pixelated space to blend into it. The subject expands toward the space enveloping the body in as much as this pixelated matrix consumes the body, hence, “the world we see has in turn been shaped and ordered by the way we see it” (Mirzoeff, 2016, 91).

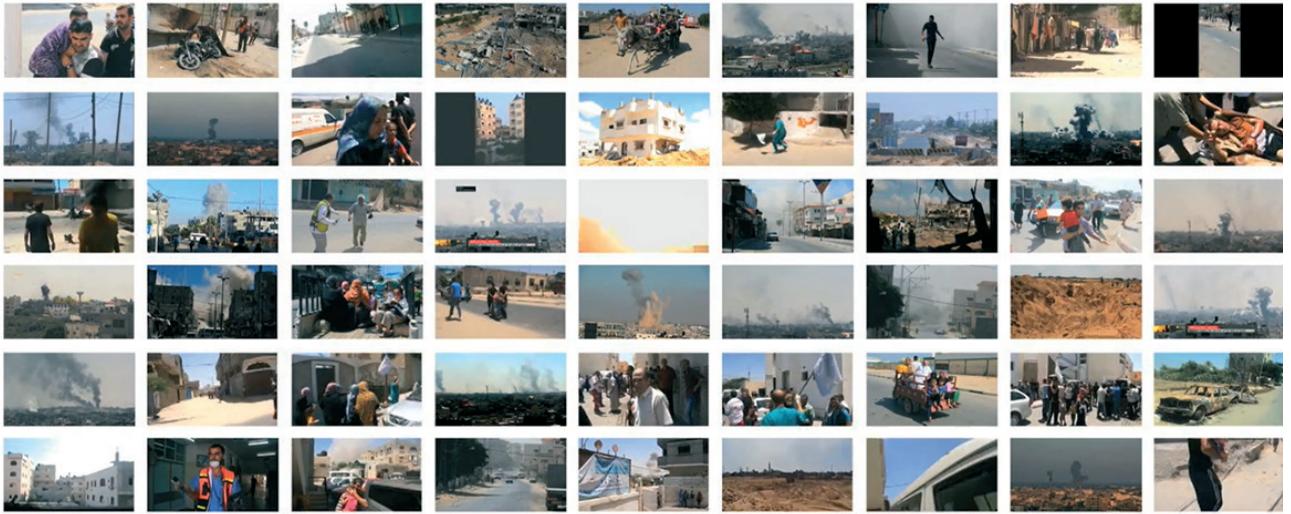
### **Material Aesthetics and the Agency of the Objects of Evidence**

Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that this pixelated look does not simply manifest the technological limitations of the medium. Our vision is also marked by legal acts that limit the threshold of visibility. On this account, the debates over the resolution of aerial images picturing the Israeli-Palestinian region reveal how image resolution is a political issue with an impact on life on the ground. Eyal Weizman underlines that between the Israeli “architecture of occupation” and the Palestinian urban structure defined as “the jihad of building” by the Israeli military forces, the Palestinian/Israeli border is continuously redrawn on the ground (2014). In the region, aerial visualization technologies support the planning of the urban structure as a means to control the territory. The Israeli air forces ensure that its vertical presence surrenders the urban space and the inhabitants, which marks a shift of emphasis from operations on the land to the control from the air (Weizman, 2007, 238). The airborne optical tools play a significant role in drawing new geopolitical maps and with the support of judiciary measures that secure the hierarchy set in the vertical aerial domain, they become powerful tools to redesign life on the ground.

In the instance of the Israeli-Palestinian region, the Kyl-Bingaman Amendment (2) (KBA) is one such judiciary act that regulates the resolution of images for public use and ensures the authority of the Israeli state over the territory. In contrast to the strict limitations imposed on the publicly available images of the region due to the security concerns of the Israeli State, the military gaze is omniscient. Amnon Harari (in Williams, 2020), head of space programs at Israel’s Defence Ministry openly remarks on the power of visibility, and the battle over the resolution of images: “It’s always preferable to be seen blurred, rather than precisely.”

FA addresses the injustices imposed upon individual lives through spatial strategies across the vertical and horizontal axis, through urban as well as optical means. Their work, *Bombing of Rafah* focuses particularly on the asymmetry of vision over the occupied territories, which has an immediate effect on individual lives. Rafah, as one of the most densely populated camps in Gaza (and also one of the most densely populated parts of the world), is redesigned by the Israeli forces through “spatial technologies,” such as the destruction of houses by bulldozers, construction of Israeli settlements, bomb shellings as well as airborne imaging technologies (Weizman, 2007).

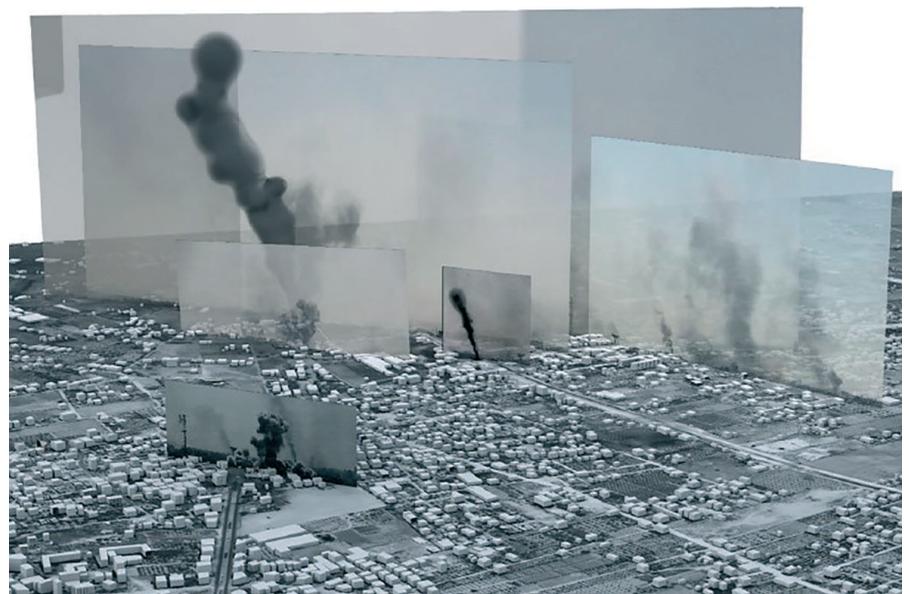
2. “Since 1997, the Kyl-Bingaman Amendment (KBA) to the 1997 U.S. National Defense Authorization Act has limited the availability of high-resolution satellite imagery over Israel and Palestine. Although this law only applies to the United States of America, as this country dominates the commercial market for satellite imagery, its impact is global” (Zerbini and Fradley, 2018).



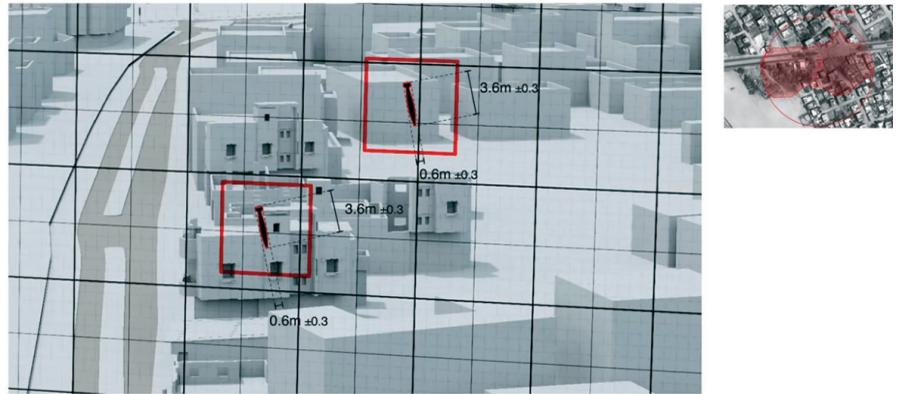
**Figure 2.** Forensic Architecture. Stills from *Bombing of Rafah*, 2014. Footages from the bombing, shot by different witnesses from the ground.

In the analysis of the Rafah bombings, the FA team works through the closely policed regime of visibility under the rule of the Israeli state. Since the asymmetry of vision also renders the atrocities against humanity invisible, the team strives to understand what happened during the bombings, with the help of the low-resolution videos and photographs recorded by people (**Figure 2** **Figure 3**), witness testimonies, news, and media feeds from the ground, as well as material traces left on the urban structure. As such, their surveys combined images of the scene at different resolutions, but due to restrictions on publicly available satellite imagery, all their information was necessarily earthbound.

Tracing the smoke from burning buildings, the sound as it travels across the architectural layout, measuring the holes left by artillery attacks, the team reconstructed the course of events in the 3D modelling of the urban layout (**Figure 3**). Thus, the material traces left on the ground help to overcome the threshold of visibility under the control of the Israeli state. Once this information is registered on the 3D renderings of the built world,



**Figure 3.** Forensic Architecture. Stills from *Bombing of Rafah*, 2014.



**Figure 4.** Forensic Architecture. Stills from *Bombing of Rafah*, 2014.

the architectural rendering becomes a tool to visualize the destruction of the built environment rather than a tool to help us to visualize an architectural plan to be constructed. The technology that serves to envision built environments for housing people is now being turned upside down, showing the destruction of the buildings that used to host human lives. The 3D renderings do not envision a residential area, but witnesses the destruction of it. FA reverses the architectural imagination, starts from the material data reminiscent of destruction, and builds the narrative of events with this data, to unravel what happened at a particular moment in a particular space.

#### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE EXPERT KNOWLEDGE AND THE AGENCY OF THE PUBLIC**

The restrictions over visibility also result in a privilege to be unaccountable for the atrocities committed against humanity. The practice of FA is centred on generating evidence to make the world visible and sensible and thus contribute to the formation of truth by using “all kinds of scientific, rhetorical, theatrical and visual mechanisms” (Keenan and Weizman, 2012). They fill the gap in our vision by tracing the indexical traces left on the urban structure, as well all following the witness accounts. These earthbound tactics rely on the increasing truth value bestowed upon “thing-based evidence” in forensics (Keenan and Weizman, 2012, 94). In the absence of the relevant evidentiary images due to the legal restrictions, the material traces of bomb shelling (smoke caused by fire, the holes left by artillery attacks on the buildings, the sound of the bombs, and its after-effects) replace the high-resolution images and trespass the threshold of visibility. Thus, a bone, as well as an image becomes an information reserve, an “object of evidence” (Steyerl, 2012) at different resolutions. Within this “material aesthetics” (Keenan and Weizman, 2012), things begin to talk in support of images of this material world.

If things gain agency in this new framework, their cryptic language needs an intermediary to clearly deliver its message. While the methods of FA seek to balance the moral overtones of the testimony with more object-oriented evidence, they might risk assuming an expert position that mediates this talk. Raw materials collected from the ground will only form another perspective on events through the expertise of the FA. Even the terminology in the process in which the raw data excavated from the ground turns into a piece of valuable and refined evidence evokes an



**Figure 5.** Forensic Architecture. Stills from *Bombing of Rafah*, 2014.

uneven relationship. In this regard, Hito Steyerl's (2009) remarks on the value of spatial and anthropological knowledge of distant geographies as a colonial strategy is worth noting: "reporting the so-called truth about remote people and locations has been closely linked to their domination". Within this perspective, the hierarchy of expert knowledge bestowed on FA risks building an asymmetrical relationship on another level.

In the context of "surveillant witnessing" in support of the human watch organizations' works, Andrew Herscher (2014) raises similar concerns. In the tactics of "surveillant witnessing", the public is called for monitoring the conflicted areas with the open-access satellite technology, to ward off any threats to human lives. Practically, people are invited to watch the designated area through the satellite images lest there would be any possible violations. Joshua Ewalt (2011) is cautious about the consequences of this tactic both for the participating public behind the screens and the local witnesses on the ground. The satellite witnessing through the secure distance of screens undermines the experience of the local, and at the same time deters the responsibility of "the citizens of the global world" (Ewalt, 2011, 346).

In the different forums FA presents its work, the question of the political agency of the subjects becomes a central topic as well. At the intersection of forensics and the forum, FA's investigations clearly emphasize forming of public forums for the discussion of truth. In the Latin roots of the word forensics, Eyal Weizman traces an intriguing kinship with the word "forum" as a "space of negotiation and truth-finding, in which humans and objects participated together in politics, law, and the economy" (2007, 63). Thus, within this material aesthetics, FA finds the possibility of establishing forums in which human and non-human actors are bestowed with an equal agency to establish the truth. Nevertheless, it is crucial to regard the distinctive subject positions across the various forums FA's work appears. At the diverse venues FA showcases their work, the agency of members establishing forums at each venue is dramatically different every time. In the judicial forums the FA presents its work - such as the International Court of Justice - assuming an unquestioned position of an expert is the standard procedure. In these forums, FA's work is to provide evidence for the judicial decision. On the other hand, for the lay audience, the illegibility of FA's methods as well as their all-knowing attitude risk implementing a domineering tone. In the venues of art or on the world wide web where they publish their work in detail, their sophisticated methods endanger imposing an asymmetry amongst the forum members.



**Figure 6.** Installation view from Forensic Justice at BAK, Utrecht

In one of the installation settings of FA's work, we see the collapsing of the judicial rhetoric onto the language of art in more concrete terms. Facing the light emanating from the video work in the darkness of the exhibition space, the audience is positioned in the setting of a police line-up, where the suspects remain in the light to be identified by the witness (**Figure 6**). Hito Steyerl (2009) cautions about this "aura of the courtroom" in which technical images with their evidentiary quality are supposed to depict the world as it is. Although for FA, the use of such rhetoric is a deliberate decision, outside the judicial forums this manner of articulation brings asymmetry across the subjects involved, which bestows an assumptive position to the producer of images. In the art venues, their interlocutors do not have an agency of executing legal actions, so they become at best second-hand witnesses behind screens. Similar to the "surveillant witnesses," or curious spectators, they watch the FA solving the mystery of the events. In this manner, FA juxtaposes many subject positions; the victim, the witness, the spectator, the judge, the jury. Thus, not only the witnesses on the ground but also the other actors in the forum are displaced in this "aura of the courtroom" (Steyerl, 2007). Nonetheless, these positions cannot be leveled evenly.

In the context of the art venues, this knowledge hierarchy is more pronounced since the focus of the work shifts from what is depicted, towards who is depicting. Thus, the emphasis on the object of observation now yields towards the heroic attitude of the FA and their methods of establishing truth. When the objectivist claims collide with the subjective view related to art, the attention of the audience shifts from the work toward the author of it: "A cult of authorship, an auteurism, takes hold of the image, separating it from the social conditions of its making" (Sekula, 1978, 864). As the voice-over in FA's video explains the process of evidence mining and fact-finding, this rhetoric enacts an omniscient point of view. When the expertise of FA meets the collectively and painfully obtained information (the raw and poor images from the ground), only then, we have meaningful evidence and realistic renderings of the events. The

sophisticated technological evidence remains unreadable except for the experts, and hence this asymmetry of knowledge risks to reinforce the asymmetry of visibility.

### The Disappearance of The Human Body and Shifting Axis of Visibility

On the other hand, Hito Steyerl destabilizes her position as a possible seat of authority through an insistent use of irony as well as her focus on the material structure of visualization technologies. The video work, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.Mov File*, dwells on the capacity of the optical tools to distinguish the law-abiding citizen from the possible threats to state security, thus, the privileged position of the subject from a body as an object of a target. Unlike FA's evident-based methods of visualization that aspires to capture what remains beyond the radar of the omniscient military vision, Steyerl distances herself from the idea of the image as impartial evidence. Rather, she ponders on the cyclical relationship between the physical reality reproduced in the image and the image that produces the world. In her work, Steyerl analyzes the technologies of image-making and lists tactics of survival in this visual regime.



Figure 7. Hito Steyerl. Film still from: *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.Mov File*, 2013.



Figure 8. Hito Steyerl. Film still from: *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.Mov File*, 2013.

As the video focuses on the technical infrastructures at use in the production of images of the world, Steyerl unveils another layer behind the scene of the crime and manifests the image not simply as evidence but rather as an accomplice to that very same crime. In response to the capacity of satellite technologies to displace ourselves globally, Steyerl employs a demilitarized version of this technology at the use of TV broadcasting. She annihilates the overbearing airborne images of the world with the low-key special effects of televisual image-making. The green screen of a television studio or a 3D rendering of an architectural project allows her to trespass the omniscient technological gaze and its complicit surveillance regime. In this world, becoming invisible is a matter of remaining unnoticed, of resisting the imaging technologies under the control of power.

From an auspicious perspective, the screen speed of information withers the distances and draws us closer. The demarcations across the far corners of the worlds fade and the nomadic subjects escape their confines grounded in territorial ideas. In Hito Steyerl's work, we see an alternative view to this rather rosy picture. The video shows figures in their burqas, in martial arts garments, with the garments marking their geographical location, assemble on the screen. The gathering of unlikely figures all at once in a TV studio, in a desert, or a 3D renderings of an architectural project manifests the collapsing of different spaces and time zones. This gathering, on the other hand, does not flatten the distinctive subject positions but rather highlights the invincible differences between them. As we see an affluent resident of a gated community in a 3D architectural rendering next to a figure in a burqa, we recognize once again that the world appears in different dimensions for each. For the former, the world is smaller in comparison to the underprivileged citizens of remote geographies. Outside the fortunate centers of the world, moving across the borders is rather an arduous endeavor.

The gathering on the resolution chart reminds us of the power to see in order to keep the possible threats at bay. Secure and safe life at home requires a vigilant and aggressive gaze at others. Depending on which side of this gaze you are at, the world is either bereft of concrete borders or every movement of your body slows down with the surveillant gaze. Until the reign of satellite technologies, these charts secured the clarity of the aerial images of the world. As the distant figures meet at the resolution targets built in the middle of a Californian desert, the kinship



**Figure 9.** Hito Steyerl. Film still from: *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. Cracked surface of the resolution chart.



**Figure 10.** Hito Steyerl. Film still from: *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. The 3D architectural renderings and the figures in the burqa appear on a Californian desert.

between the physical infrastructures behind the images of reality and the world here and now becomes more pronounced. Hito Steyerl's tactics of invisibility reflect on the power of the technical image to shape the life on the ground. An automated voice-over narrates the lessons in invisibility in five chapters: 1. Make something invisible for a camera, 2. Be invisible in plain sight, 3. Become invisible by becoming a picture, 4. Be invisible by disappearing, and 5. Become invisible by merging into a world made of pictures. Under five chapters, the video lists 54 methods of invisibility. All of these methods are founded on the fact that the world is mediated by a "technologized gaze" (Parks, 2005, 15), in which we are visible without being able to see back. In this regard, Steyerl remarks on the asymmetry of vision from the very beginning and aspires to speculate on how to use the power of images in reverse order. Pixel box heads, martial arts performers, and women wearing hijab ally at the blind spots of power (**Figures 6**) (**Figure 7**). When she transfers a 3D architectural rendering of an idyllic gated community to a resolution chart in a military zone, she looks back from the infrastructural origins of the technological gaze to its promises on another plane.

In another example, three individuals wear black and white boxes on their heads to mimic a pixel calibration target (**Figure 11**) and conceal themselves from the vertical view of power through their anti-technological camouflage. If Malpat pattern confirms the reality of a pixel-mediated world, a world immersed into the technological gaze, this pixel camouflage masks once again highlight the relationship between the world mediated by technical images and its inhabitants. As the figures imitate pixel calibration targets built on the ground, they unravel the visual infrastructures of the spatial images at the service of national security, which renders people not as individual subjects but rather as possible threats, figures of data, or a number of casualties.

As the figures in pixel camouflage masks overlap upon the pixel calibration point seen from above, the conventional view of the subject seen frontally on the horizontal axis becomes levelled with the vertical view of the world. For Steyerl (2011), the ubiquity of the aerial images of the world increasingly displaces our conventional image of the world as well as ourselves. While the view from above eliminates the distinction between objects and subjects, the subject deserts the privileged position as the center of vision. In the horizontal perspective, the threshold of visibility depends on the capacity of the human vision. The image appears at the cross-section between the observer and the vanishing point on the horizon, where the scope of the human eye ends. Hito Steyerl (2011) remarks on the loss of this grounded vision in the vertiginous perspective of the world, in which



**Figure 11.** Hito Steyerl. Film still from: *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*. 2013. Pixel heads against the pixel calibration charts inside restricted military areas.

the vanishing point shifts up to the vertical axis and objectifies life on the ground as a possible threat (Graham, 2016, 30; Vaalho, 2014, 101, Mirzoeff, 2016, 86).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I aimed to analyze the technological and legal restrictions over the visual representations of the world and how this techno-judicial image regime informs the world we live in. While the current visualization techniques that picture the world provide spatial information, they become crucial means to envision the world, govern spatial relations, and determine our position. In this image regime, the threshold of visibility marks the human body as its resistance point. With regard to personal privacy laws, the body is the limit to visibility and when national security concerns are at stake, the law prioritizes the general safety of the public and regards the body as a possible threat and an object to be targeted. The distinction between subject and object, citizen and threat, and us from others is regulated by the visualization techniques that perceive individual bodies as spatial elements within strictly policed territories. In the view captured from above, the individual bodies are perceived in relation to the space, as moving elements, and as possible threats to rupture the order. What is on focus is the body in space, without a face and a name, a spot on the surface of the earth, hence, a human body dehumanized and dismembered into pixels.

Nonetheless, the images that allow us to picture our world are at the same time restricted by the asymmetry of vision at the service of political power. In this framework, I discussed the works of FA and Hito Steyerl, and the means they aspire to overturn the uneven character of this techno-judicial image regime. FA and Steyerl redress the hierarchy of visibility, its immediate impact on spatial order, and the position of individual subjects in this order. In this sense, FA's approach is to unveil atrocities against humanity implemented through spatial control, be it through aerial surveillance or urban design, and counteract against this spatial warfare with the earthbound tactics of alternative imaging. Hito Steyerl, on the other hand, is concerned with making visible things invisible, to escape the objectifying gaze of the power. To this end, she analyses the technological infrastructures of the images and takes the image as a world-forming process. Whereas FA exposes the overseen facts and renders them visible in search of justice, Hito Steyerl reflects on the power of images in mediating and shaping our reality in discrete manners. The tools of technical image production, which should remain off the frame and invisible become the

central concern of Steyerl's work. Thus, Steyerl mainly focuses on the apparatuses of the techno-judicial image, pushes the viewer's gaze back to the operations behind the images, and reflects on how our perception of the world is informed by them.

In both works, the optical tools of spatial control are employed to work against the asymmetry of vision in the service of uneven spatial order. Nonetheless, while the respective works strive to close the gap between the vertical vision of power and the reality on the ground by looking into the disregarded loopholes in the technological gaze, how these works meet us as spectators introduce another layer to the asymmetries of visibility. In Steyerl's ironic tone, we are instructed in how to fight against the regime of visibility by being invisible, while FA establishes forums that bring us to the same eye level as the local witnesses. As such, the various subject positions collapse upon one another in FA's work and eradicate the distinctive experiences within this regime of uneven visibility. Yet, as Steyerl's unlikely assembly manifests, while some lives are bestowed with a privileged position, many others are regarded as disposable, hence, an unquestioned unity across the uneven lines of this visibility regime is a susceptible proposition.

Nonetheless, in the techno-judicial regime, rendering the power visible is still a crucial critical work. Since the representations of space encompass our relation to the world, the overthrowing of the conventional images of the world has a potential to resettle our position. The gaze of power is epitomized in the vertical aerial view. In the practices of FA and Steyerl, this gaze meets earthbound tactics from the ground. Thus, the vertical vision falls onto the ground and meets its subject in person. As in the man's (sic) fall into the world from heaven in search of truth, in this fall the unfathomable authority is left behind in search of a true rendering of the world. In the free fall, the objects look as if they move apart from each other, "as though the ground was splitting open" (Virilio, 2008). Unlike the view from above, which sees the world as its own property (Virilio, 2008), this falling defeats the distinctions between subjects and objects. The fall is a moment of disorientation that obliterates the distinctions between subject and object, human and non-human with a promise of meeting on the same ground. If technological vision not only records but also shapes and produces the world, the works of Steyerl and FA seek a critical resolution for the redistribution of the world, in contrast to the clear-cut mechanisms of optical tools of power. The actual point of emphasis is to consider the act of looking like a political act (Herscher, 2014), and critically analyze the role of the image as a means to connect, capture, transport as well as govern and objectify the individual body.

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## FORENSIC MİMARLIK VE HİTO STEYERL'İN ÇALIŞMALARINDA MEKANSAL ADALET İÇİN OPTİK TAKTİKLERİN KULLANIMI

Görselleştirme teknolojilerinin tarihi, içinde yaşadığımız dünyayı anlamak ve düzene sokmak çabasında dünyayı resmetmek için gösterilen amansız çabaya işaret eder. Dünyayı görselleştirme becerisi, hayatta kalma ve kontrol için önemli bir stratejidir, bununla birlikte bize bu olanağı sağlayan teknolojiler bir görme asimetrisi içinde yönetilir. Zemin gerçekliği üzerinde doğrudan etkileri olan teknik görüntülerin erişilebilirliği yasal düzenlemeler tarafından desteklenen her şeyi gören gücün bakışı tarafından kontrol edilir. Bu anlamda, bir görüntünün sınırları sadece görselleştirme teknolojilerinin kapasitelerinin bir sonucu değildir. Güvenlik önlemlerini ve kişisel mahremiyet haklarını göz önünde bulunduran hukuki düzenlemeler de görünürlüğün sınırlarını belirler. Görülmeden

görme yeteneğinin nihai iktidar biçimi olduğu mevcut görünürlük rejimi altında, bu tekno-yargısal görüntü ekonomisi, özneler ve nesnelere, yasalara saygılı vatandaşlar ve güvenlik tehditleri arasında sınırlar çizer. Bu makale, mevcut tekno-görüntü rejimi içinde sürdürülen güç ilişkilerini tartışmaya ve burada biçimlenen görünürlüğün asimetrik sınırlarını yeniden düzenlemeye çalışan Hito Steyerl ve Forensic Architecture (FA) ekibinin çalışmalarına odaklanmaktadır. FA, politik sınırların biçimlenmesinde şehir planlamasının yöntemlerini bir savaş aracına dönüştüren mekansal stratejilere ve dikey görüş teknolojilerinin sağladığı bakışa odaklanırken, Hito Steyerl teknolojik görüntünün materyal yapısını insan yaşamı üzerindeki etkilerini göz önünde bulundurarak araştırır. Bu çerçevede içerisinde bu makale, ilgili çalışmaların görünürlüğün asimetrisine karşı kullandıkları taktiklerin yakından bir okumasıyla, teknik görüntülerin içinde yaşadığımız dünyayı üretme kapasitesini ve görüntülerin faillliğini inceler.

### **OPTICAL TACTICS FOR SPATIAL JUSTICE IN THE WORKS OF FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE AND HITO STEYERL**

The history of visualization technologies remarks the relentless human endeavor to picture the world we inhabit, in order to understand our surrounding conditions and devise strategies of survival in its unforeseen vagaries. Nonetheless, the technologies that allow us to do so are ruled within an asymmetry of visibility. The accessibility of technical images is governed by the all-seeing gaze of power secured by legal acts with immediate effects on the ground reality. In this sense, the limits of an image are not simply an outcome of the capacities of visualization technologies but also judicial regulations circumscribing the threshold of visibility in regards to security concerns as well as personal privacy rights. Under the current regime of visibility, in which the ability to see without being seen is the ultimate form of power, this techno-judicial image economy establishes an uneven order across subjects and objects, law-abiding citizens, and security threats. This article focuses on the works of Hito Steyerl and the Forensic Architecture (FA) team, which strives to discuss power relations sustained within the current image regime and redress the limit of the visible under the techno-judicial image regime. While FA aims to unravel the spatial strategies of urban warfare and technologies of aerial vision at work in the forming of political borders, Hito Steyerl investigates the materiality of the technological image and its implications on human life. Through a close reading of respective works, in this paper, I analyze the agency of the images in their capacity to produce the world we live in and grounded strategies employed against the asymmetry of visibility.

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