Bearing Witness? Forensic Architecture and the Evidentiary Power of Art

Fiona Allen and Luisa Lorenza Corna

In the days following the death of Mark Duggan, a series of riots broke out across London. Beginning in Tottenham, in the north of the city, the violence quickly spread throughout the capital, dominating news cycles for much of August 2011. Duggan, a twenty-nine-year-old Black man, was shot and killed by the Metropolitan police after the taxi he was travelling in was forced to pull over. Conducted as part of Operation Trident, the hard stop was authorized on the grounds that there was an illegal firearm in the vehicle.[1] Although a handgun was later retrieved from a grassy area near the scene, no DNA evidence connecting it to Duggan was ever found. Nevertheless, an inquest into his death in January 2013 ruled the killing to be lawful; a conclusion that was reaffirmed a year later when the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) agreed that Duggan had been in the process of disposing of the weapon when he was shot.

The initial coverage of these events was particularly egregious, with the *Daily Mail* describ-ing Duggan as a "gangsta" and *The Guardian* mistakenly claiming that "an exchange of fire" had occurred at the scene—a claim which they later retracted.[2] However, the shooting was also framed as the latest manifestation of the institutional racism at the heart of the Met. Although this prejudice was formally acknowledged in the Macpherson Report following the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the narrative surrounding Duggan's death spanned a much broader history, from the discrimination faced by the Windrush generation to the shooting of Azelle Rodney in 2005.[3] Intended to highlight the extent of the violence in question, this

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[1] For more information on Operation Trident, see Karim Murji, "It's Not a Black Thing," *Criminal Justice Matters* 47 (2002), 32-33.

[2] Rebecca Camber, "Pictured: The 'gangsta' gunman whose death sparked riots," *Daily Mail*, August 5, 2011. https://www.daily mail.co.uk/news/article-2022670/The-gangsta-gunman-death-sparked-riots.html; Sandra Laville, "Man shot dead by police in north London during attempted arrest," *Guardian*, 5 August 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/05/man-shot-police-london-arrest.

[3] Stephen Lawrence, a Black British teenager, was murdered on 22 April 1993 whilst waiting for a bus in Eltham, southeast London. After the initial investigation into Lawrence's killing, two suspects were arrested but not charged. A 1998 public enquiry, headed by Sir William Macpherson, concluded that the case had been grossly mishandled and that the Metropolitan Police was

framing was adopted by a range of parties, including community groups, think tanks and racial justice organizations.[4] Yet this was not the only temporal register in which the shooting was addressed. In the years following the riots, it was also reimagined in the present. Following the aforementioned investigations, a civil case was brought against the Metropolitan police by the Duggan family. As part of this process, their legal team commissioned a digital reconstruction of the crime scene from the London-based research agency Forensic Architecture. Comprised of a series of virtual reality environments, the resulting "investigation," to use Forensic Architecture's term, sought to reveal the different vantage points available to the officers on the scene. Combining photographs and witness testimony with material from the previous inquests and a new biomechanical report, the environments sought to show the stop and subsequent shooting in real time, thus interrogating the testimonies of those involved in the incident.

Before the material could be used, however, an out of court settlement was reached. As a result, the footage remained unseen until it was presented at an event hosted by Tottenham Rights founder, Stafford Scott, in November 2019.[5] Accompanied by a panel discussion with the agency, the screening sought to reemphasize the consequences of institutional racism. The decision to address this topic is, of course, not a new one. From Emory Douglas' satirical illustrations for *The Black Panther* to Languid Hands' recent film *Towards a Black Testimony: Prayer/Protest/Peace*, reflections on the racially motivated nature of police brutality have been a recurring theme in visual culture since the 1960s, if not before. Rather than simply highlighting this violence, Forensic Architecture's project actively sought to hold the authori-ties in question to account. Speaking in 2019, the agency's founder, Eyal Weizman, described their practice as follows:

> Our investigation demonstrates that independent civil society groups, empowered by new media technologies, are capable of holding the police and their oversight bodies to account [...] Events in the US and elsewhere show that this is more necessary than ever. As our work on police violence around the world has shown us, long histories of systemic and structural racism all too often become visible in the split-second actions of police officers, and in the subsequent efforts by the institutions around those officers to explain and justify their actions.[6]

"institutionally racist." The report also recommended that the "double jeopardy" rule be repealed in murder cases to allow for retrial on the production of new evidence. A copy of the Macpherson Report can be viewed at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry.

[4] See Nadine El-Enany and Eddie Bruce-Jones, eds., *Justice, Resistance and Solidarity: Race and Policing in England and Wales* (London: The Runnymede Trust, 2015) for more information on this point.

[5] Forensic Architecture, "Investigation: The Killing of Mark Duggan," https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-mark-duggan.

[6] Eyal Weizman as quoted in: Günseli Yalcinkaya, "Forensic Architecture to Exhibit New Evidence on the Mark Duggan Killing," *Dazed Digital*, June 15, 2020, https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-

Given the focus of Weizman's remarks, it might be tempting to suggest that Forensic Archi-tecture was founded for the purpose of curtailing police violence, and, indeed, such a claim would be a relatively fitting summary of some of their more recent work. In addition to their case against the Met, they have also conducted investigations in actions of the Chicago Police Department and the Hellenic Police in Athens, as well as the violence faced by Black Lives Matters protestors across the United States. The project began life, however, as a research seminar at Goldsmiths, University of London a decade earlier. In its initial manifestation, Forensic Architecture sought to explore the relationship between a number of recent pheno-mena, including the urbanization of warfare; the development of open-source media and a distrust in evidence pertaining to state-sanctioned crimes: topics that also informed their early work as an agency.

Focusing on Pakistan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, their first investiga-tions sought to "reconstruct instances of violence, give voice to survivors and find new ways of accessing memories of trauma."[7] Whereas *The Killing of Bassem Abu Rahma* revisited the death of an unarmed protestor in the West Bank, *Stopping the Wall in Bettir* sought to halt the destruction of Palestinian farmland. Combining audio recordings and written testimonies with smartphone footage and photographs, the resulting materials were presented at the Israeli High Court in 2014 and 2015, respectively. Although their current work continues to draw upon these technologies, as their recent output demonstrates, the project has expanded significantly in scope, both geographically and in terms of subject matter. The agency has now conducted over sixty investigations on behalf of humanitarian organizations, private citizens and communities impacted by violence. From the unauthorized use of tear gas in Santiago to the destruction of Yazidi cultural heritage, these materials have been submitted as evidence to an equally broad range of forums, including the Chilean Human Rights Commission, the Greek Ombudsman and the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights.

As well as operating in the legal sphere, Forensic Architecture's investigations also circulate within the artworld. Consequently, their work can be read alongside a series of artists who have chosen to explore the politics of image production and circulation within their work, including Hito Steyerl and Trevor Paglen, as well as a previous generation of filmmakers and photographers, such as Harun Farocki and Allan Sekula. Indeed, as Thomas Keenan reminds us, it was Sekula who popularized the term counter-forensic, using it as a theoretical grounding for those practices that, like his own, sought to challenge existing uses of photography.[8] "Forensic methods (detective methods focusing on evidence and the body),"

photography/article/49526/1/forensic-architecture-to-exhibit-new-evidence-on-the-mark-duggan-killing.

[7] Forensic Architecture, "About: What we do?" https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency. Similar themes also informed Weizman's work prior to founding Forensic Architecture. See, for example, Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

[8] Keenan writes: "I owe this strange formulation, *counter-forensic*, to Sekula, a master neologistic of inversion [...] Counter-forensics is almost surely a notion of Sekula's invention, although since he first published it in 1993 it has become a term of art for something else." Thomas Keenan, "Counter-forensics and Photography," *Grey Room* 55 (2014), 58-77 (here, p. 68).

Sekula writes, "offer a tool for oppressive states, but [they] have also become tools of opposition."[9] If the forensic can be used to typify, and, as a last resort, annihilate the memories of a group, the counter-forensic serves to exhume the "anonymized [...] bodies," thus enabling a process of political resistance and mourning.[10] In an apparent response to Sekula's call, the London-based agency also take their lead from the truth-content of images, expanding the scope of their investigations to include the digital technologies deployed in contemporary warfare and surveillance capitalism. It is this gesture that will serve as the starting point for the following essay. More specifically, it will explore the possibility of placing Forensic Architecture in dialogue with a series of artists who have also chosen to address the evidentiary power of images within their work. But what, exactly, is the purpose of evidence? Where and how does it operate? And to what extent can it be read as synonymous with the broader themes of truth and justice?

A possible starting point from which to address these questions can be found in discussions of the relationship between video and anti-Black violence, specifically the consequences of disseminating this material via the media whilst also admitting it into evidence. For Louis-Georges Schwartz, one of the earliest instances of this duality occurred when footage of the attack on Rodney King was shown on KTLA in March 1991. Whilst the material sparked a national outcry (and later the 1992 Los Angeles riots), it ultimately failed to secure a conviction.[11] For Schwartz, "the profound divide between the impact of these images in a courtroom and their effects in the media [...] has altered the ways that videos are produced and disseminated."[12] Most significantly, he continues, "these changes have made the policing of poor black and brown communities publicly visible as war."[13] When understood in these terms, the framework that surrounds this material—and, by extension, the category of evidence—undergoes a shift, from questions of representation to the role of ideology. Rather than simply depicting the event in question, if indeed such a gesture is even possible, it reinforces the role of evidence in legitimizing (or challenging) resistance to anti-Black violence. But what happens when instances of violence are brought to public attention via the artworld rather than the news? Do they shape our perception of evidence in a similar manner to their media counterparts? Or are there other factors to be taken into consideration?

In order to answer these questions, this essay will begin by situating Weizman's writings in relation to a series of broader debates on photography's indexicality, staging a dialogue with Sekula's interventions in the field. The following sections will then turn to consider the agency's response to the limits of photography and their liminal position between the art world, academia, and the juridical sphere, pausing on the potential problems that this status poses to their political efficacy. Finally, it will consider the question of situated testimony,

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[9] Allan Sekula, "Photography and the Limits of National Identity," *Grey Room* 55 (2014), 28-33 (here, p. 30). The article was originally published in *Culturefront*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1993), 54-55 (here, p. 30).

[10] Sekula, "SPhotography and the Limits of National Identity," 30.

[11] Louis-Georges Schwartz, "In Plain Sight: Video Evidence," *Artforum*, vol. 54, no. 10 (2016), 363-367 (here, p. 363)

[12] Schwartz, "In Plain Sight," 364.

[13] Schwartz, "In Plain Sight," 364.

juxtaposing Weizman's formulation with a series of contemporary practices that have brought the issue to bear on notions of Blackness and Black death. In bringing together these lines of inquiry, we will seek to demonstrate that, whilst the decision to operate across multiple sites allows for a greater awareness of the causes and consequences of racially motivated violence, such a gesture also reveals the limits of the agency's practice, albeit unintentionally.

Indexicality in the Expanded Field

In addition to investigations and exhibitions, Forensic Architecture's practice also includes a substantial body of theoretical research. Whilst this work is published under the names of individual members, it serves to enhance the research profile of the group as a whole.[14] Of these publications, the writings of Eyal Weizman have been granted a particularly foundational status; one that stems from their attempts to provide the agency with a coherent narrative and a critical interpretive framework. Such an approach is particularly visible in *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*, an ambitious publication that chronicles almost a decade of activity and lays the ground for the agency's definition of the counter-forensic, picking up where Sekula left off. It is this coupling that will serve as the focal point for the following section. Rather than focusing on questions of social justice and accountability, which underpin much of the existing literature on Forensic Architecture, it will take its lead from Weizman's intervention in the debate on the evidentiary power of photography. Beginning with a close reading of the opening chapter of his monograph, it will then juxtapose his argument with Sekula's 1975 essay "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War."

The opening chapter of Weizman's monograph takes its lead from David Irving v Penguin Books Limited and Deborah E. Lipstadt, a libel suit brought against the historian Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher for describing Irving as "one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial."[15] Of the material presented during the trial, a series of documents relating to the presence of a gas chamber in Auschwitz-Birkenau's Crematorium II are deemed to be particularly noteworthy—specifically, footage shot by a US reconnaissance mission in 1944, in which four holes can be seen in the roof of the building. According to survivors, the holes were connected to chimney shafts which allowed Zyklon B canisters containing cyanide to be introduced into the room. After Irving rejected the proof, arguing that the film was either a fake or had been altered, the court was presented with a report compiled by experts from NASA. Using state-of-the-art digital magnification to examine the molecular structure of the negatives, the document offered a series of insights into the

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[14] Consider, for example, Susan Schuppli, *MATERIAL WITNESS: Media, Forensics, Evidence* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2020) or Lorenzo Pezzani's work on Forensic Oceanography. For his most recent contribution to the field, see: Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller, "Intervention: Forensic Oceanography—Tracing Violence Within and Against the Mediterranean Frontier's Aesthetic Regime," in Peter Adey et al., eds., *The Handbook of Displacement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 453-458.

[15] Ian Buruma, "Blood Libel: Hitler and History in the Dock," *The New Yorker*, April 8, 2001, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/04/16/blood-libel.

photographic process, revealing that objects close to the size of silver halide crystals, which make up the chemical composition of the film, remain impressed as an inference pattern. This discovery shed a new light on the footage, confirming Irving's hypothesis that the traces dismissed as a moiré effect could be the holes in the roof of the former gas chamber.

It is this condition that Weizman termed the "threshold of detectability," a category which has since become a cornerstone of Forensic Architecture's practice.[16] More specifically, it refers to the ambiguities that arise during processes of image reading, particularly when the interpreter is confronted with things which "leave a chemical signature on the negative but cannot be verified."[17] It also calls for a new approach to reading photography; one that gives equal weight to the object represented and the surface of the negative. Rather than functioning as a secondary support, for Weizman, the negative should be viewed as an object in its own right.[18] In the case of the Irving trial, this approach required the film and the roof to be considered as repositories for historical facts, but also objects with material characteristics which inform their legibility, a coupling that Weizman has since extended to digital imagery.

The notion of indexicality is frequently understood as a baseline question in photography scholarship, one that gave rise to a series of debates on the ontology of the medium.[19] For C.S. Peirce, indexical signs can be distinguished from other types of signs due to their physical connection to the real. Whereas symbols and icons possess a degree of distance from their original source (a discrepancy between the signifier and signified, to speak in semiotic terms), photographs are "forced" to "correspond point by point to nature" due to "the circumstances under which they [are] produce[d]."[20] The word "forced" is particularly significant here as it suggests a view of photography as an imprint of the world, thereby downplaying its artefactual status. The dogma of photographic objectivity remained largely unchallenged until the first half of the twentieth century, when questions of materialism began to seep into the field. Under the influence of figures such as Walter Benjamin, the photograph was recast as a mechanical replica of the world, bearing traces of the means of reproduction as well as those of its subject.[21] Soon after, structuralism and poststructuralism delivered the final blow. By placing photography in a vast arena of signs, which determine

[16] The term "threshold for detectability" first appeared in Weizman's article of the same name. Eyal Weizman, "Violence at the Threshold of Detectability," *e-flux* 64 (2015), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/64/60861/violence-at-the-threshold-of-detectability/.

[17] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 20.

[18] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 20.

[19] This homological relationship received its ultimate sanction in André Bazin's essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Medium." "The photographic image"—we read—"is the object itself." André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Medium," in *What is Cinema*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), S13.

[20] Charles Sanders Peirce, "What Is a Sign?" (1894), https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/peirce1.htm.

[21] For further details on this point, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn and ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-244.

each other's meaning through the mediation of language, structuralist-inflected criticism offered a further challenge to its status as a bearer of "truth content."[22]

Within this body of literature, the writings of Allan Sekula are of particular significance. Although ultimately loyal to documentary photography, they also acknowledge its instability of meaning; or, to use Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's words, "its discursively and institutionally determined fiction." [23] In making this claim, Sekula invites the viewer to interrogate the medium, asking how photography legitimates—and thus reinforces—existing power relations. For this and other reasons, his work has been influential for a generation of artists and researchers exploring the implications of photography for both capitalism and war, from Harun Farocki to Forensic Architecture. To this end, we now want to turn to Sekula's "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War," a text that shares a number of points of overlap with Weizman's monograph.[24]

The article offers a critical re-reading of aerial reconnaissance photographs in World War I, with a focus on Steichen's work for the American army's photographic division. The point of departure for Sekula's analysis is an impasse in the relationship between text and images. "Literary descriptions of [...] [Steichen's] photographs," we read, "fail to explain how their meaning relates to the ways they have been used, or how meaning and use have shifted together over time."[25] In response to this apparent "muteness," Sekula delves into the discourse which surround the image, incorporating the reportage into a larger project of rationalizing warfare—the same gesture that would later guide Farocki's and Weizman's investigations. More specifically, he explores how such a project seeps into the very fabric of the images, transforming their production and subsequent interpretation into an attempt to kill the enemy. For Sekula, "[t]he problem [faced by Steichen] was to decide what was there and to act on that decision before 'whatever it was' moved."[26] Not only did this minimize the possibility for interpretation; it also reduced the objects on the ground to a handful of categories deemed relevant to the operation. Whilst this gesture could be read as an attempt to rob the image of its rhetorical structure (and return it to its indexical state), here, Sekula argues, indexicality is contingent on the need for efficiency rather than inherent to the medium.[27] In this respect, his analysis work undermines the possibility of assigning a purely indexical status to photography, revealing how even the mutest pictures are wrapped in a specific discourse.

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[22] It is worth recalling Krauss' essay "Notes on the Index" on this point. However, she is less interested in exploring the "ontology of the photographic medium" and more in using "photographical categories" to explore the reduction of semantic possibility in post-Minimalist art. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October*, 3 (1977), 68-81.

[23] Benjamin B. Buchloh, "Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document," in *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2002), 194.

[24] Allan Sekula, "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War," *Artforum*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1975), 26-34. This text would later be essential for Farocki's research on "operational images."

[25] Sekula, "The Instrumental Image," 33.

[26] Sekula, "The Instrumental Image," 34.

[27] Sekula, "The Instrumental Image," 34.

Thirty years after Sekula penned his essay, photography's truth claims crumbled once again, this time between Weizman's hands. His contribution to the debate on the index, however, adopts a somewhat more counterintuitive approach. By advocating for a type of analysis that would account for both "the object represented" and "the surface representing it," Weizman extends its scope to include the urban landscape, turning it into a "sensor."[28] In doing so, he claims that the relationship at the heart of the image is twofold: first, between the film and the architectural landscape and, secondly, between the architectural landscape and the events that occurred against it. When viewed from this standpoint, photography ceases to be a trace of the world and instead becomes an indirect mark, a trace of trace left by historical events on the surface of the earth. This shift also has implications for its hermeneutics, obliging the interpreter to set images against the landscape-sensor upon which these events were impressed to begin with.

In an attempt to expand the scope of his analysis, Weizman brings these questions to bear on digital imagery, specifically material shot by members of the public. What happens, he asks, when crystals give way to pixels? In contrast to those narratives that seek to align technological advancement with visual precision, for Weizman and the Forensic Architecture team, these types of footage fail to fully record the traces of contemporary warfare. Like the grain of analogue photography, the grid of pixels "filters reality like a sieve or a fishing net," releasing all those objects which are too small to be caught.[29] The problem here, however, is not a distaste for technology, but differential access to it. Whilst the resolution of publicly accessible satellite imagery is limited to 0.5 meters per pixel, the visibility afforded to intelligence agencies reaches up to 15 centimetres per digital unit.[30] Not only do these figures reveal a stark disparity in access to technology, they also indicate the presence of a resolution limit for aerial images shot by members of the public, one that corresponds to the dimensions of the human body when viewed from above. Although popular wisdom suggests that this discrepancy exists in order "to bypass risks of privacy infringement when recording people in public space," Weizman chooses to foreground the "security rationale" that underpins the number instead.[31] In addition to human bodies, the lower resolution also erases the impact of civilian causalities on the environment—for example, the destruction of domestic buildings by illicit drone strikes.

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[28] The term "sensor" is used by Forensic Architecture to describe a building's ability to register historical facts: "If material deformations are a building's response to changing environmental force fields, then, inversely, the formal mutations a building undergoes are processes of recording: *deformations* as matter *in formation* are also *information*. From this perspective, buildings are not only objects to be repaired, restored, and lived in, but also sensors of the environment outside themselves (and this before and regardless of the digital computerized sensors of smart buildings that might be placed within them). Every material object can be read as a sensor, but buildings might be among the best sensors of societal and political change." Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 52.

[29] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 27.

[30] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 28-30.

[31] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 29.

Despite being written over thirty years apart, a number of commonalities exist between Weizman's and Sekula's texts.[32] Whereas Sekula addresses the first signs of the eradication of human skill from the image-reading process (what Farocki would later term "operational images"), Weizman presents us with a scenario in which recording devices are programmed to dismiss bodies entirely. When combined, their research suggests a trajectory marked by increasing levels of violence and capitalist abstraction, in which earlier forms of anti-hermeneutics culminate in a planned excision of human presence from photographic images. That being said, both figures articulate their interest in the effects of warfare on representation differently, a distinction that comes to fore in the relationship between the theorical and practical components of their work. Whereas Sekula's critique of photographic indexicality coexists with an artistic practice that seeks to destabilize the seemingly unequivocal meaning of images, for Forensic Architecture, the acknowledgment of the medium's limits serves as a starting point for a series of investigations intended to restore truth, in which photography is but one of many media involved. If the former occurs within the space of constructive criticism, working within—and against—the grain of photography, the latter takes the form of a reparative strategy in which other media are used to amend the photograph's distortions.

The Architectural Image Complex

In order to facilitate this process, Forensic Architecture launched PATTRN, a piece of open-source software, in 2014. Initially conceived as a tool for crowdsourcing, the program allows data to be collected in a range of formats, including photographs, films and audio files, allowing users to share their accounts of a given event. In addition to collecting images of police violence from the recent Black Lives Matter protests, the software has also been used to map Israeli attacks during the 2014 Gaza conflict and chart "pushbacks"—"the cross-border expulsion of refugees and migrants"—at the Spanish-Moroccan border in Melilla.[33] In bringing together these resources, PATTRN also functions as an anonymous database which can be explored via an online visualization platform. Whereas the map provides access to details of each event, interactive charts and search criteria allow the user to search for patterns within the data.[34] Rather than attributing each piece of evidence to an individual user, verification occurs through a process of peer editing and, consequently, minimal external intervention: a feature intended to protect both the identity of the contributor and the integrity of the material, particularly when used within a legal setting.[35]

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[32] For further details on this point, see: Alberto Toscano, "The Mirror of Circulation: Allan Sekula and the Logistical Image," *Society & Space*, July 31, 2018, https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/the-mirror-of-circulation-allan-sekula-and-the-logistical-image.

[33] Forensic Architecture, "Pushbacks in Melilla: ND and NT v. Spain." https://forensicarchitecture.org/investigation/pushbacks-in-melilla-nd-and-nt-vs-spain.

[34] Further information about PATTRN can be found at: http://pattrn.co.

[35] ICA, "The Image-Data Complex: A Short Course in Forensic Architecture," https://www.ica.art/the-image-data-complex.

Yet this is not the only way that the agency collects material for their investigations. Whilst *The Killing of Harith Augustus* combined CCTV and footage from police body cameras, the material used in *The Killing of Nadeem Nawara and Mohammed Abu Daher* was shot by a producer for CNN and shown on television. Like much of the material submitted to PATTRN, in each of these cases, the victim and perpetrator can be seen within a single shot, a pairing that serves to cement their status as evidence. For every source that manages to achieve this, however, there are numerous others which only capture fragments of an event or the moments on either side. When viewed in isolation, the relationship between these sources and the incident in question is not always immediately obvious.[36] But how else might we read those images that otherwise risk being labeled irrelevant? For Weizman, the answer to this question lies in "the construction of a navigable three-dimensional space, and the composition within this space of all possible relations between images—thus, architecture."[37] Dubbed the architectural image complex, this approach allows the viewer to navigate between multiple images and videos as part of a 3D model of the built environment. Rather than focusing on specific details, it takes its lead from the "visual hinges" which exist between images.[38] The benefits of this approach, Weizman contends, are as follows:

> Seeing with the 'image complex' is an active practice that requires construction. Assembling, archiving and composing the time-space relation between individual images can only be undertaken within virtual 3D models of the spaces in which the photographs or videos were taken. Architecture thus becomes useful not only as primary evidence, the object of analysis, but rather as an optical device, and as a way of seeing.[39]

On first encounter, the decision to adopt this methodology could be read as the latest manifestation of a body of work which includes Mark Lombardi, KP Brehmer and Walid Raad/the Atlas Group, all of whom have chosen to rework the diagram as part of their practice, albeit in different ways and for different purposes. Drawing upon a series of everyday information systems—including maps, charts and graphics from sociological studies—Brehmer, for example, used the diagram to explore the link between capitalism and data management. Yet due to its use of painterly elements, his practice also departs from the established scientific tools of representation, a decision that is distancing and defamiliarizing, but ultimately intentional. When asked to explain this decision, Brehmer noted that his figures "are not intended to convey any exact scientific data. What interests me are dividends, and

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[36] Vincent Bernard and Ellen Policinski, "Interview with Eyal Weizman," *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 98, no. 1 (2016), 21-35 (here, p. 24)

[37] Bernard and Policinski, "Interview with Eyal Weizman," 24.

[38] Bernard and Policinski, "Interview with Eyal Weizman," 24.

[39] Eyal Weizman, "Before and After Images: Eyal Weizman's The Image Complex," *Loose Associations* 1 (2015), https://thesandpitdotorg1.wordpress.com/2016/05/22/the-image-complex/.

the aggressive form they develop under the various conditions that exist between production and real capital."[40]

On closer examination, however, such a comparison is less fruitful than it might first appear. Though the act of reframing is also key to Forensic Architecture's practice, the afore-mentioned practices offer little explanation as to why Weizman's "complex" exists to begin with. Since their formation in 2010, the agency has used a range of technologies to raise awareness of human rights violations across the globe, a paring that is brought to the fore in their mission statement:

> We investigate state and corporate violence, human rights violations and environ-mental destruction all over the world. Our work often involves open-source investi-gation, the construction of digital and physical models, 3D animations, virtual reality environments and cartographic platforms [...] We also use our digital models as tools for interviewing survivors of violence, finding new ways to access and explore mem-ories of trauma.[41]

Rather than presenting them as separate entities, here, the two are aspects of their practice—that is, the legal and the artistic—are presented as inextricably linked. Not only do the aforementioned violations form the core of their practice, they also shape the platforms by which these events are made visible. When viewed through this lens, an alternative visual parallel begins to emerge: one that takes its lead from the actions, but also the opacities, of the modern state—a line enquiry epitomized by the work of Trevor Paglen and Jill Magid. Though their work is not architectural in any simple sense, Paglen and Magid both challenge the viewer to determine where the line between transparency and secrecy currently lies.[42] Paglen's *Limit Telephotography*, for example, takes its lead from military bases and "black spots" across the United States, the majority of which are either hidden in the desert or surrounded by vast areas of restricted land. Magid, in contrast, adopts a more performative approach to the topic, a strategy epitomized by her 2009 exhibition *Authority to Remove.* Here, she documented her involvement with the Dutch secret service in *Becoming Tarden*, a novel structed around a series of interviews with intelligence agents. The text was then heavily redacted before being shown to the public.

For Pamela M. Lee, these practices can be read as a type of "open secret," "a visible invisibility [...] that functions less to reveal than to declare the prerogatives of those who conceal."[43] A similar argument, we want to suggest, can also be made about Forensic Archi-tecture. In pursuing this line of enquiry, it is not our intention to suggest that the agency fails

[40] KP Brehmer, cited in: "Review: KP Brehmer, Raven Row," *Frieze D/E* 18 (2015), https://www.frieze.com/article/kp-brehmer.

[41] Forensic Architecture, "About."

[42] Pamela M. Lee, "Open Secret: The Work of Art Between Disclosure and Redaction," *Artforum*, vol. 49, no. 9 (May 2011). For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of Paglen's and Magid's work, see: Pamela M. Lee, *Think Tank Aesthetics: Mid Century Modernism, the Cold War and the Neoliberal Present* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 223-259.

[43] Lee, "Open Secret."

to give voice to their clients. Such a proposal would be disingenuous at best. Rather, the channels by which they produce these accounts are ultimately shaped by, and thus reveal the limits of, a series of external parameters—specifically, the law. Although platforms such as PATTRN allow for a wider range of audio-visual materials to be taken into consideration, the manner in which they combine and present these accounts is ultimately informed by the agency's decision to operate within the legal sphere. Weizman writes:

> In addition to investigating the means of state investigations, forensic activists must also examine the politics of the forums in which evidence is presented. No forum is neutral. Each is a product of and situated within a specific political reality, and each operates according to different sets of protocols. Each forum differently frames evidence's conditions of visibility—what can be said, shown, and heard.[44]

As a result of the international nature of their practice, the agency not only invites the viewer to consider what constitutes evidence, but also how this definition varies across the globe. Although many of their investigations relate to established state jurisdictions and their respective criminal justice systems, others relate to sites in which this framework is unclear, from the Mediterranean Sea to the West Bank. By undertaking these investigations, they also invite the viewer to consider how, but also the extent to which, the laws that establish these definitions are implemented. In many respects, this line of enquiry is not a new one. As Charles Stankievech notes, visual evidence that appears irrefutable to the public has failed to secure convictions on numerous occasions—for example, Eric Garner's asphyxiation by a member of the NYPD.[45] Similar instances of judicial error are peppered across the agency's website, as well as in Weizman's own writings. "Merely insisting on normative regulation," he writes, "can end up reinforcing the status quo [...] The legal cases are only as good as the political process of which they are a part."[46] Despite these reservations, however, Forensic Architecture not only continue to work within this domain. They present themselves as active participants within in. As such, the question becomes: why?

The Artist as Consultant

Due to its liminal position between the artworld and the legal sphere, as well as its seemingly journalistic aesthetic, the work of Forensic Architecture opens up a new chapter in the relationship between art and politics. Whilst the decision to operate between these domains is a recurring theme within contemporary art, the agency departs from the established norms of socially engaged practice in favor of a type of engagement more closely aligned with consultancy. In order to pursue this line of enquiry, Forensic Architecture operate across a number of sites: the field, where evidence is collected; the laboratory or the academic

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[44] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 68-69.

[45] Charles Stankievech, "Exhibit A: Notes on a Forensic Turn in Contemporary Art," *Afterall*, 47 (2019), 42-55 (here, p. 54).

[46] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 69.

institution in which the materials are processed; and the forum, where the results of the research are presented.[47] Of the three, the latter is given a particularly capricious definition. In its most immediate sense, the term refers to the national tribunals and international courts in which the group acts as consultants for private clients and humanitarian organizations. However, it also includes a "wide spectrum of channels and media form[s]," galleries and museums, as well as spaces "yet to be assembled" in the absence of satisfying alternatives.[48]

In her 2012 study of participatory art, *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop addresses the difficulty of judging socially engaged practice. Through a discussion of the ways in which contemporary criticism responded to the social turn in the early 2000s, she reveals an implicit hierarchy between aesthetic experience as "'simply' offered" and the "implicitly more worthwhile task of 'real efficacy'."[49] In other words, the desire to make an impact beyond the artworld also shaped the critical evaluation of more aesthetic concerns. On first encounter, this shift might be read as a sign of criticism's acknowledgment of the heteronomy of art. Yet, as Bishop observes, "social achievements are never compared with actual (and innovative) social projects taking place outside the realm of art," causing art's concrete impact to "remain on the level of an emblematic ideal."[50] A similar line of argument can also be found in the work of Stewart Martin, who coined the term social autonomy to describe a dynamic akin to the one addressed by Bishop, albeit in relation to more obviously "artistic" works. With reference to the relational practices of Rirkrit Tiravanija and Philippe Parreno, Martin argued that artistic autonomy was not simply fading away, but rather "secur[ing] its relevance precisely by its appeal to the social."[51]

Though over a decade has passed since Bishop first questioned art's desire for social impact, aspects of her analysis remain useful for grasping the stakes of Forensic Architecture's practice. Unsurprisingly, their engagement with the "real world" cannot simply be mapped onto the art of the early 2000s. The direct, often voluntaristic actions of a single artist have given way to a series of mediated interventions, carried out by a multidisciplinary team acting primarily in the legal domain. When understood in these terms, Bishop's criticisms would appear to be of little relevance to their work: Forensic Architecture adopt the role of the consultant, conducting investigations on behalf a portfolio of external clients. How, then, might we then read their practice within the parameters of the debate on autonomy and heteronomy established by Bishop? To what extent can we relate their presence in the

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[47] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 68-69.

[48] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 67.

[49] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 19.

[50] Ibid., 19.

[51] Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Third Text*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2007), 369-86. Although Bishop and Martin share aspects of this diagnosis, their conclusions remain distinct. Whereas Bishop tries to resolve the broader issues surrounding "fear of heteronomy" by making recourse to Jacques Rancière's distribution of the sensible, Martin adopts an Adornian position. On this topic, see also Gail Day "Fear of Heteronomy," *Third Text*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2009), 393-406, from which the above phrasing is borrowed.

artworld to their role as consultants? And why might it be beneficial to pursue such a line of inquiry today?

One possible answer to these questions would be to suggest that Bishop's warning about the enduring division between autonomy and heteronomy occurs under a different guise, one that would appear to reverse the distinction which characterizes participatory practice. Whereas the latter returns to art as "the point of comparison and reference," deriving credit from their extra-artistic components, the work of Forensic Architecture operates according to a different logic, using the artworld as an echo chamber for professional achievements attained elsewhere.[52] As such, it will be our claim that their status is that of a legal consultancy for whom the artworld serves as a space to promote the forensic methodology deployed in their (largely commissioned) investigations. In making this claim, it is not our intention to downplay the significance of Forensic Architecture's commitment to justice, but rather to underline how their decision to operate both inside and outside the artworld should not be read as a critique of art's autonomy. If anything, such a position requires art's autonomy to remain in place as it grants the agency a level of cultural prestige and mass visibility that would be impossible to achieve by operating solely within the legal sphere. Given the agency's claim to offer an expanded notion of "forum," a proposal that would have allowed for the erasure of disciplinary borders and a rethinking of the role of contemporary art spaces, such a realization is a disappointing one.[53]

A similar critique can also be levelled at their status as a research agency in academia. Whilst aspects of their practice could be read through the lens of social engagement, a more critical approach would raise concerns about the intersection between consultancy and research. In many respects, their work complies with the neoliberal university's demand for "impact," a category that has recently expanded to include consultancy work, altering the culture of research in academia.[54] Moreover, the financial sustenance of private clients and

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[52] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19.

[53] A similar problem is also addressed in Stankevech's "Exhibit A." Stankevech's, however, does not focus on the legacy of debates on art and politics, but the emergence of a forensic "turn" within the arts. More specifically, he asks whether forensic art risks instrumentalizing art in the political arena or "resonat[ing] as an ambiguous aesthetic object in the art world." Writing in a similar vein to Bishop, Daniel Neofetou notes that Forensic Architecture's role as a disseminator of truth and knowledge in art—a role reinforced by their seemingly "neutral" aesthetic—hampers the possibility for a properly critical response. As a result, the critical literature available remains "exegetic" in its scope, ventriloquizing "the meanings implanted [in the works] by the artists." Daniel Neofetou, "Political Art Criticism and the Need for Theory," *Arts*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2021), https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/10/1/1/htm.

[54] The majority of Russell Group universities in the United Kingdom now present "consultancy and services" as a means by which staff can make themselves available to government and private businesses. See, for example, the University of Manchester: https://www.manchester.ac.uk/collaborate/business-engagement/consultancy/; Oxford University: https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/innovation/consultancy; and UCL: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise/staff/offer-consultancy-services.

funding bodies grants the centre a relative independence from the university, which accords with the latter's plan for increasing disinvestment and outsourcing.[55]

The multiple "sites" of Forensic Architecture practice (the field, the laboratory, the forum) should also read in conjunction with their attempts to exceed "the procedural limitations [...] of the legal forums" and counter the progressive narrowing of the term "forensics."[56] Used to describe the blending of political and juridical activities within the public forum in ancient Rome, the term now refers to a branch of the criminal justice system, one synonymous with police investigations and the courts.[57] In response to the "loss of the critical dimension of forensics,"[58] the agency adopts a two-pronged approach: as well as presenting their work in a range of different forums, the art world being one of them, they also intervene in the site of the laboratory, changing the way evidentiary material is gathered and processed.[59] Of these gestures, the latter can be read as an attempt to deflect an obvious criticism. If the use of multiple forums is intended to free evidence from the constrains of state and interstate institutions, thereby expanding public access, the opacity surrounding the criteria used to processes the material ultimately hinders these democratic aspirations. Whilst this approach shows a certain awareness of the flaws in the organization of their practice, Forensic Architecture's attempts to counter this issue are ultimately flawed.

The first of these responses consists of opening up the various stages of the investigative process, replacing expert-led field work and laboratory analysis with crowdsourced data. This method, they argue, allows the "classic terms of verification, expertise, provenance and chain of custody" to be replaced with "multiple checks on truth and accuracy provided by the crowd," assisted by software such as PATTRN.[60] Although visible elsewhere in their practice, this methodology was brought to the fore in the agency's investigation into the

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[55] The literature on the neoliberalization of British higher education in the last ten years is vast and, under pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous UK universities are facing a further wave of cuts. For an overview of government's cuts and market-driven reforms on higher education since from 2010, see: Andrew McGettigan, *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education* (London: Pluto Press, 2013). On the most recent wave of restructuring, see: Anna Fazackerley, "'Despicable in a Pandemic': Fury as UK Universities Plan Job Cuts," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/22/despicable-in-a-pandemic-fury-as-10-uk-universities-plan-job-cuts.

[56] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 9.

[57] Eyal Weizman, "Introduction," in Forensic Architecture, ed., *Forensis. The Architecture of Public Truth* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 9.

[58] Ibid.

[59] On this point see J.J. Charlesworth's review of Forensic Architecture's 2012 show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Contrary to the collective's ambition to restore an expanded understanding of the forum by reaching out to a broader audience, Charlesworth contends that the exhibition simply "reveal[ed] to an audience of liberal-minded gallerygoers that there are innumerable injustices around the world." J.J. Charlesworth, "Forensic Architecture at ICA, London," *Art Review*, April 26,, 2018, https://artreview.com/ar-may-2018-review-forensic-architecture/.

[60] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 67

Grenfell Tower fire.[61] Here, they created a platform where witnesses could upload videos of the event, creating a collective visual archive of the disaster which sought to acknowledge the scale of a tragedy downplayed by politicians. However, such an approach ultimately places too much faith in the possibility of reducing bias by adopting more inclusive methods of data gathering, disregarding the systemic and unconscious nature of ideological mechanisms.[62] Indeed, even if evidence could be gathered collectively, the question of who will process the data—and how—still remains. A similar critique can also be levelled at their choice of a methodology, which privileges material evidence over human witnesses in a manner akin to Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), a line of enquiry that began to percolate into the artworld at roughly the same time that Forensic Architecture refashioned themselves as an artistic collective.

Drawing on the work of Michel Fehr, Weizman presents this turn to material evidence as a response to the decision to emphasise the testimony of survivors which occurred with the advent of humanitarianism in the late 1960s.[63] Situating the agency's practice within this "soft" anti-humanist lineage, he sets forwards an approach which complements and corrects the hypertropia of the witness, calling for an alliance between human and evidentiary objects. Though cautious not to endow objects with agency, openly denying them any ability to "speak for themselves," Weizman also equates the forensic with a blurring of the subject-object relationship, alluding to object oriented ontologies without ever fully engaging with the stakes of the debate.[64] Despite Forensic Architecture's claim to counter the centrality of human testimony, a series of key ontological and political questions relating to this theme remain largely unanswered in the theorization of their practice.[65] If the revaluation of the

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[61] The Grenfell Tower disaster occurred on 14 June 2017 when a fire broke out in a kitchen of the west London tower block. The fire quickly spread due the cladding system attached to the building, trapping residents inside and eventually claiming the lives of 72 people. See: https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk for further details.

[62] In making this claim, we refer to the vast body of Marxist literature on ideology, particularly the work of Louis Althusser, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton.

[63] This point is explored in: Eyal Weizman and Thomas Keenan, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of Forensic Aesthetics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).

[64] On the last page of *Mengele's Skull* we read: "If what might seem like a mere expansion is in fact a transformation, then the shift also implies a blurring. The shift in focus from the living to the dead, from the witness to the bones or the missing person, from memory and trauma to a forensic aesthetics, also erodes the otherwise clear distinction between subjects and things. Human remains are, as we have seen, the kind of things from which the trace of the living subject cannot be easily erased-it lingers and haunts it. Bones are thus different from other forms of evidence, but Mengele's skull is no different than other bones. When it made its appearance, on the stand and on the screen, as object and as image, it became a hinge, and on it our political aesthetics turned." Weizman and Keenan, *Mengele's Skull*, 70.

[65] We should also consider that most of *Forensic Architecture*'s investigations still focus on violations of *human* rights rather than those of nature or things (of the projects listed on their website, only 6 out of 69 fall under the category of "environmental violence"). Although they may

status of physical evidence was initially a response to the ethical turn and emphasis on the witness in the 1960s, what are Forensic Architecture reacting to now that this emphasis on the victim has run its course? Or to put it another way, the writings that define the contours of their practice fail to establish an underling *raison d'être*—that is, a connection between their projects and their broader political goals.

Such a realization allows for a return to the debate between art and politics which opened this section and the implications of Forensic Architecture's decision to operate within a "professional" political realm. Not only does their position as professional legal consultants risk curbing the political scope of their work, it also positions it squarely within the realm of liberal rights discourse: whose rights are their investigations defending? What notion of freedom is ultimately at stake? How do they position themselves in relation to the broader histories of international human rights institutions? Not only do their attempts to challenge human rights discourse by reframing the "forum" through the deployment of open-source software and appealing to material evidence remain largely insufficient. They fail to fully account to universalistic nature of the aforementioned discourse. But how else might these themes be accounted for?

Testament or Testimony?

Over the past few years, a number of British artists have begun to explore the question of testimony through the lens of Black aesthetics. In the work of Luton-based artist R.I.P. Germain and the collective Languid Hands (Rabz Lansiquot and Imani Robinson), to give but two examples, the language of the forensic is combined with the theme of social death. Coined by Orlando Patterson in the 1980s, the term initially referred to the annihilation of enslaved Africans following the denial of their culture and human rights.[66] However, it has since been used to describe contemporary forms of social ordering, gaining new currency in both academic and artistic debates due to the recent spate of police brutality and ensuing waves of mobilization.

As we mentioned in our introductory remarks to this piece, Forensic Architecture have also turned their attention to this issue: first, through their investigation into the killing of Mark Duggan and, more recently, via a web platform intended to map instances of police brutality at Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Rather than focusing on the thematic commonalities between the aforementioned artists and the agency's recent work, what inter-ests us is the distinct notions of testimony and justice at stake in their respective projects. In order to explore this difference in greater detail, this section will take its lead from a series of works by the agency which adopt a situated testimony methodology. Here, architecture functions not as material evidence, but as medium for testimony, helping witnesses of drone attacks and police brutality to reconstruct the event. The witness's point of view is positioned

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belong to a "soft anti-humanist" lineage, there's a baseline humanism built into the choice of which injustices to focus on (admittedly an entirely defensible choice, we feel).

[66] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

within the digital model of the original site and turned into "a stage on which memories are accessed and performed."[67]

In *Drone Strike in Mir Ali*, for example, we see a woman who survived the attack digitally reconstructing her now-demolished home with the help of a programmer and a lawyer.[68] Following a handful of stills showing the logistics of the operation, the video cuts to an aerial shot of the city, where a white rectangle signals the proximity of the house to other sensitive targets. The camera then swiftly zooms in and cross fades into an image of the plan of the house sketched by the witness. Once finally indoors, we see the woman in front of the screen, restoring the house to its original condition by choosing pieces of furniture and positioning them in their "correct" place. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the furniture is not chosen from the software's default library, but from a pre-selected group of objects located just outside the house. Though seemingly trivial, this detail reveals that some degree of planning predated the filming, casting doubt on its real-time aesthetic.

Alongside this footage, we hear snippets of the figures' conversation. Whereas the programmer adds and moves elements in response to the survivor's recollections, albeit without asking for specific details, the lawyer poses a set of simple questions intended to do little more that retrieve the original domestic setting. As a result, the witness's answers are limited to a primarily descriptive register. When the lawyer asks "Did the plan help you to remember?," however, she breaks with this tone and expresses a favorable judgment on the agency's methodology: "Without the plan I couldn't have remembered it like that." At this point, the film's deadpan style gives way to a moment of self-congratulations. Whilst we can most likely trust the sincerity of the witness's response, the question that provokes it is a loaded one.

In addition to this lack of transparency, *the video also fails to address the* content of the witness' recollections and their relevance to the agency's broader investigative aims. If the purpose of an investigation is to learn from past events, to evince a deeper truth that extends beyond the seemingly trivial, the video of the drone strike does not appear to belong to this category. The information retrieved by inviting the witness to reconstruct the space of the house says very little about contemporary strategies of warfare and, as a result, is of little benefit to posterity. Indeed, as Carlo Ginzburg notes, memory and historiography are not necessarily convergent.[69] Yet if we adhere to Forensic Architecture's analysis of their practice, what is at stake is the process of remembering rather than historical reconstruction. Such a reading, however, has a number of limitations. Not only is the figure of witness restored to its original sacrality, despite the agency's claims to the contrary, but the notion of memory is also left largely unexplored. Whilst Forensic Architecture admit memory's fallibility, praising the instructiveness of what is "is missing, distorted, or obscured," they fail to mention how these dysfunctionalities are dealt with, if at all.[70] The healing effect of remembering traumatic

[67] Forensic Architecture, "Investigation: Drone Strike in Mir Ali," https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drone-strike-in-mir-ali.

[68] Forensic Architecture, "Investigation: Drone Strike in Mir Ali."

[69] This theme is explored at length in Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[70] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 82.

experiences is invoked without any acknowledgement of the psychoanalytic complexity of the process.

Questions of trauma, testimony and death also lie at the heart of R.I.P. Germain's and Languid Hands' recent work. However, both approach them in a way that inadvertently over-turns Forensic Architecture's optics. In his recent show *Dead Yard* at Cubitt in London, R.I.P. Germain created a space to mourn the death of his loved ones.[71] Whilst individual works were named after friends and relatives (*Lloyd*, *Imarl*, *Sonny*), when combined, they transcend the personal, turning the show into a commemorative space for all Black lives lost. Comprised primarily of sculpture and installation, *Dead Yard* adopted a liminal space between the dom-estic and the macabre. *Sonny*, for example, invited the public to traverse a perimeter marked by a beaded curtain and take a seat around a table intended to resemble a funeral scene. Under the glass-topped table, an assortment of items were displayed without any real taxo-nomic intention, an arrangement that informed the status of the objects, lending them the appearance of talismans still emanating their force rather than traces of a bygone life. To accompany this, voices from a series of hidden speakers could also be heard at the table. These formed part of a three-hour sound installation in which the artist spoke with friends and acquaintances about death: how would they like to die and be remembered? What would be their last meal? What song they would listen to right before dying? Whilst this line of questioning might appear disconcerting to anyone with the privilege (racial, physical and psychic) to banish the thought of death, it is here where the piece strikes a chord with the audience—that is, by acknowledging that death can also exist within the confines of life, not in the form of a remote accident, but as a permanent state of dehumanization.[72]

Languid Hand's *Towards a Black Testimony: Prayer/Protest/Peace* attends to similar themes, but adopts the form of the video essay. Here, the interviews of R.I.P. Germain's sound piece give way to Imani Robinson's voiceover, which blends poetic interventions with references to contemporary texts on Black ontology, death and testimony. In the foreground, footage of the Notting Hill Carnival alternates with archival images of the Freedom Riders and the Washington March for Jobs and Freedom in 1963, as well as snippets of contemporary protests. Images of police punctuate the movie without being conceded too much space, revealing a deliberate choice to privilege festivity over violence. In doing so, the work pays homage to the staunch resistance and exuberance used by Black populations to oppose the social death plaguing their daily existence. Of the two registers used in the voice over, the poetic is arguably the more convincing, evoking the sound piece from *Dead Yard*. Speaking in the first person, Robinson imagines her death in police custody and solicits the involvement of the listener: "If I die in police custody," we hear, "don't believe the hype … Rise the fuck up … Burn everything down." Such an

[71] *Dead Yard* was held at Cubitt, London from September 3 to October 25, 2020. For further details about the exhibition, visit: https://www.cubittartists.org.uk/rip-germain-dead-yard.

[72] For a review of the show that raises similar points, see: Tom Hastings, "Mourning Moments," *Texte Zur Kunst* 120 (2020), https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/120/mourning-moments/.

exhortation turns the audience into witnesses of an event which has not yet happened, but is likely to occur, and asks for immediate partisanship regardless the details of the injury. Details are unimportant—this would appear to be the implicit message—when the story keeps repeating itself, endlessly, with very little variation.

Despite making recourse to different narrative strategies, R.I.P. Germain's and Languid Hands' work engages in a similar exercise of foretelling, one which serves as a potential counterpoint to the work of Forensic Architecture. If the desire to expose the opacity of contemporary neoliberal society is common to all three practices, the temporal frame in which they operate is markedly different and points to an equally divergent political take on the issue. Whereas Forensic Architecture adopt an archaeological perspective, orienting their efforts towards the recovery of material evidence and testimonies of past events, R.I.P. Germain and Languid Hands turn their attention to the future, enacting a "performance of prognostication."[73] Their futurity does not offer an easy escape, but rather is the continuation of a present in which death is an immanent way of living. This temporal contraction is best conveyed by the scene in *Towards a Black Testimony* in which the artist declares 'to be dying with open eyes'; two temporal modes that invoke different ideas of testimony in relation to their respective practices. R.I.P. Germain's and Languid Hands' decision to operate in the future, as deadly it could be, serves as a warning for witnesses of racial violence, who are asked to question official narratives and ultimately *act*. Forensic Architecture's reconstructive efforts and demonstrative language, on the other hand, forecloses any dimension of praxis and revolutionary futurity in a manner akin to the logic of capitalism.

Ultimately, the experiential knowledge presupposed in the forecasting exercises of R.I.P. Germain and Languid Hands stands in opposition the minutiae of evidentiary information pursued by Forensic Architecture, questioning both the latter's usefulness and its implicit truth-bearing capacity. In doing so, it also eschews the domain individual testimony in favor of a form of collective popular wisdom which ventriloquizes systemic nature of capitalist violence. Although Forensic Architecture's investigations have, in many circumstances, challenged official narratives intended to protect state and police power at the expense of vulnerable civilians, the emphasis that their video works place on empirical evidence risks overshadowing the underlying regimes of inequality and oppression; the patterns of structural injustice with which R.I.P. Germain's and Languid Hands' predictions explicitly confront the viewer.