

One Map, Multiple Legends: Exposing Military Spatial Narratives in the Israeli Desert

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The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map.

(Baudrillard, 1994)¹

I question whether there are objects in the landscape that just anyone can see.

(Bier, 2017)²

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, his seminal work from the early 1980s, Jean Baudrillard proposes that contemporary society structures its lived experience in relation to symbols and signs, and not in relation to reality.³ He opens the work with a reference to a short story by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges about a map created by cartographers of an unnamed empire on a scale of 1:1, so exact that it covers the entire territory.⁴ In Borges's story, the map disintegrates after the fall of the empire, and only remnants of it can be found in the desert. Baudrillard returns to the fable to claim that rather, 'the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it'.⁵ Unlike representation, simulacra both precede and engender their referents, so that the real is what withers and rots at the edges, or deserts, of lived experience.

Amir Yatziv's thirteen-minute single-channel video work *Detroit* (2009) also deliberates on maps, deserts, simulations and ways of seeing

and experiencing space.⁶ The work takes its cue from Baudrillard in its focus on a map and a territory that were conceived in tandem, exposing in their dual existence a very specific, and distorted, military spatial imaginary.⁷ Within the short span of thirteen minutes, *Detroit* presents to its viewers snippets of interviews with four urban planners and one mosque architect that all try to make sense of architectural plans of an unidentified Arab village. The planners – two women and three men, three Palestinians and two Israelis – are not sure how to decipher the plans; something doesn't add up. The indicated space does not match any place known to the interviewees, all experts in their field. The interview snippets are cut by close-up shots of the plans, as well as by slow, long shots of the indicated territory, accompanied by screeching, sci-fi sounds that clash with the interviews' documentary form. In these moments, viewers are brought in on the secret: these are construction plans of a military urban warfare training centre in the Negev desert, itself a 1:1 simulation of a Palestinian city – simulation in Baudrillard's sense, without origin or reality, since that original city does not exist. The video focuses mostly on the plans' illegibility and on their inherent inconsistencies to suggest that, regardless of the work put into recreating an authentic spatial experience for the training soldier, the result remains to a large extent a military fantasy, and does not make sense to civilian eyes.

In this article, I offer a detailed analysis of *Detroit*, in order to tease out its critique of the blurred

boundaries between civilian and military ways of experiencing and mediating space in the context of Israeli political geography. Taking *Detroit* as a point of departure, I will present a number of works of art that address the phenomenon of 'spatial militarism' in Israel in which a military-inflected construction of space yields material and cognitive consequences, naturalising the military's status as the guiding principle of daily life.⁸ As I will show, within a growing body of works of art that investigate the 'shadow world urban system' that makes up military urban training centres around the world, Yatziv's work stands out as it turns the investigative focus away from the space itself, and towards its mediation.⁹ This shift in focus is highly productive for critical anti-military visual projects in its insistence on the fact that, even in a world that is structured according to the logic of the simulacrum, spaces cannot be comprehended separately from the particularities of the lives that shape them into being.

Applying Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum and the accompanying mapping allegory to a critical reading of an urban planning document necessitates some explanation. As visual devices, plans and territorial maps belong to contiguous yet distinct academic disciplines (namely, planning and geography) that open up to a separate set of practical and theoretical questions. They differ in terms of their semiotic and temporal logic, and they open up to different discourses and debates. Most importantly for our case, a plan's primary goal has never been the mediation of space as such. Rather, plans are more readily understood as guides for policy or markers of intention.¹⁰ Similarly, the planner's task is primarily a proactive one, 'defining and attempting to achieve a "successful" order of the built environment'.¹¹ To address the plan as simulacrum, then, seems beside the point, since the plan, by definition, precedes and engenders its referent.

At the same time, as visual forms, spatial plans and territorial maps come together under the

rubric of cartography and contain representational elements that come into dialogue with material space, whether present or imagined. Plans can and have been addressed as a specific type of maps, the latter understood in turn as the broad representation of a locality that can take many shapes and forms, including charts, models and plans.¹² Planning documents (as well as three dimensional models, for that matter) can thus be analysed as instances of urban cartography, following conceptual deliberations regarding maps and mapping (as I do below) when the focus is placed on the relation between space and its mediation, as it is in the case of *Detroit*. While in the video, interviewees clearly employ planning sensibilities for their inquiry, the work's main focus remains on the act of cartographical interpretation and on the relations between represented, simulated, and experienced space. It thus lends itself to an inquiry based on the discourse of critical cartography.

The map as legend

The video's probing of the authority of architectural discourse develops as the film progresses, but is present right from the start. The work opens with a seemingly factual statement, 'In 2006 an Arab Town was built with American Support' (00:07). Next, the camera zooms in on a printed text: the term 'legend' takes up a large portion of the screen, written in capital letters, italicised, and followed by colons (00:12). While the camera scrolls down to contextualise the term's primary meaning as index key for the plan that will soon be presented, an alternate meaning for the term 'legend', signifying myth or folklore, lingers, and frames the preceding expression as the beginning of a fairy tale ('once upon a time...'). This connotation is strengthened through statements made in the following scene by mosque architect Mamoun Hassan, the first of the map's five interpreters: 'I don't know if it is in Israel, if it is in Israel I'd be very surprised. I'm telling you I would like to know where it is and I want to change all my plans for the day and go see it, really', he says,

fixing through his sense of wonder the notion of the legend as one of fantasy. [Fig. 1]

The next couple of scenes cut between additional interviews with urban planners that all date the represented space to historical or ancient times (and in so doing, join Hassan's reading of the indicated territory as one that does not belong to the here and now), and close-ups of the plan's labels that conversely disclose it to belong unequivocally to the present, issued for construction in November 2006, and to contemporary powers, mentioning both the Israeli Defense Forces and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Only after this exposition of misinterpretation does the film present itself, fusing the name of the drawing with the title of the film, marking the former's illegibility as the latter's point of departure. The camera zooms out slowly immediately after to offer a full view of the plan, accompanied by high-pitched beeping sounds and quick pulsations that mark the film's second, non-documentary register, and coincide throughout the work with photographs of the built model as well as with the narrator's textual disclosures of the simulated nature of the space.

Critical cartography studies have long answered J. Brian Harley's call to study maps as thick texts, as socially constructed forms of knowledge.¹³ Nowadays, rather than as value-free images, maps are often addressed as 'a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations'.¹⁴ Plans are no exception; if anything, they flag, rather than hide, the social considerations involved in the organisation of space. In *Detroit*, Yatziv underscores the performative aspect of the map when he mobilises the plan's legend in order to mark the plan-as-legend. In so doing, he foregrounds the map as an allegorical device, 'a fiction, not unlike a story, that employs any number of figural means to imaginatively depict, not the real territory, but an alternative

version of it'.¹⁵ But what kind of allegory does his narrative expose?

At first, the allegory focuses (as in many contemporary map-art projects) on the fiction involved in the discipline of cartography as such.¹⁶ All experts are presented as baffled by a cartographic text they cannot read, their attempts to locate the indicated area in time and space, to narrate the space into existence, fail to match reference and referent. Yet as the film progresses, their confusion is given ground. It is based not on their misreading of the plan, but rather on the idiosyncratic character of the signified space itself, and more specifically, on its indifference to the social needs of its residents. 'I don't think that anyone living down there in those small cottages would agree to have people living next door in eight-story buildings' says Hassan (07:09); 'you don't leave that kind of space between houses, because how could you service something like that? ... when a garbage truck needs to go that length of a route, it's not financially sound', adds urban planner Dafna Ben Baruch in the subsequent interview excerpt (07:28). 'Where are the recreation spots? People live here but where do they meet for coffee? Where do they sit with their children?' asks urban planner Badria Biromi (08:09). 'The residents there can reach the mosque very easily, but there is no need for a sixteen-and-a-half-metre turret in a settlement of two-stories like this, instead they could have built a dome', continues Hassan (09:19), and urban planner Dr. Rasen Kymaise concludes this imaginary roundtable, orchestrated through cuts and edits: 'the old texture couldn't have developed the way it was built, natural environment, plants, atmosphere, all these things don't fit ... they built it as a model but not in actual reality' (10:58). Thus, in the end, the plan functions as a cartographic text in the most traditional sense, allowing one to accurately decode a space. Its status as reliable referent to reality restored, and its framing as allegorical fiction – as fable – moved elsewhere. [Fig. 2]

Note that, as viewers of Yatziv's work, we are not given access to entire interviews, but to the narrative created from editorial choices.¹⁷ That narrative clearly focuses on the lack of social considerations that is raised in the urban planners' queries. Those queries are presented against the backdrop of relevant sections from the plan, and, as the film progresses, also against the backdrop of documentation of the military town's cityscape, and so reinforce the shift of the work's critique away from the map's illegibility and onto the model's inconsistency. It is in this way that the legend of *Detroit*, underscored early on in the video, is given its final connotation – as a piece of military, orientalist lore, an illusory 3D model that employs a number of figural means to depict a version of the territory in which the inhabitants of an Arab town are thought of as flat characters, without context or history, without civilian interests or lived relation to space beyond that of possible combat. It is the legend the military tells about the people that make up the urban space that it depicts.

In this context, the name given to this model shadow city is not without significance. To name a military urban training centre in the Israeli desert after an American city known for its racially charged past and resulting urban decay, is to unabashedly flaunt the global as well as racial aspects of the militarisation of civilian spaces.¹⁸ What is more, American Detroit, the home to several of North America's oldest and largest Middle Eastern ethnic communities, was the first to be monitored and targeted in relation to national security threats in the wake of September 11.¹⁹ As Andrew Shryock and others make clear, 'Arab Detroit, as both a place and an idea ... is an easy domestic target that presents itself whenever Arabs and Muslims become official (and more difficult) targets overseas'.²⁰ While the main critique in Yatziv's *Detroit* remains within the prism of Israeli militarised spatial imaginaries, the overall framing of the work clearly points to the

collaboration between American and Israeli military industries and colonial enterprises, and uncannily exposes their administrations' desire to discipline, control and investigate their Arab citizens as threats to national security.²¹

Military geographies

The procedure of examining the coalescence of civilian and military comprehension of space, and the related naturalisation of militarised elements in public space, is not uncommon in Israeli art.²² Examples include works that expose the banality of military spatial presence within civilian public space by focusing on street signs (Meir Gal, *Beit Hanina/Pisgat Ze'ev*, 1997), memorials (Drora Domini and France Lebee Nadav, *Everywhere: Israeli Landscape with Monument*, 2002), or public bathing beaches in Israel (Efrat Vital, *Quiet Beach*, 2011); as well as works that present deserted military bases and detention facilities (as in the works of Roi Kuper, Gilad Ophir, Gilad Efrat, Yaron Leshem and Shai Kremer) to show how the landscape view both naturalises and conceals civilian-military social relations. Together, this body of works attempts to offer mediations on what social geographer Erez Tzfadia terms spatial militarism: the phenomenon in which a military-inflected construction of space yields material and cognitive consequences for Israeli society and culture, that naturalise the military's status as a central guiding principle of daily civilian life.²³

Elsewhere I offer a reading of such city- and landscape views within Israeli art as particularly useful for addressing what Rachel Woodward terms 'the geographies of militarism' – that is, the shaping of civilian space and social relations by military objectives, rationales and structures.²⁴ Tackling this issue through the landscape genre allows viewers to grapple with their failure to understand their civilian surroundings as implicated in military concerns. In what follows I attend to the artistic mediation of a related but separate phenomenon: that of 'military

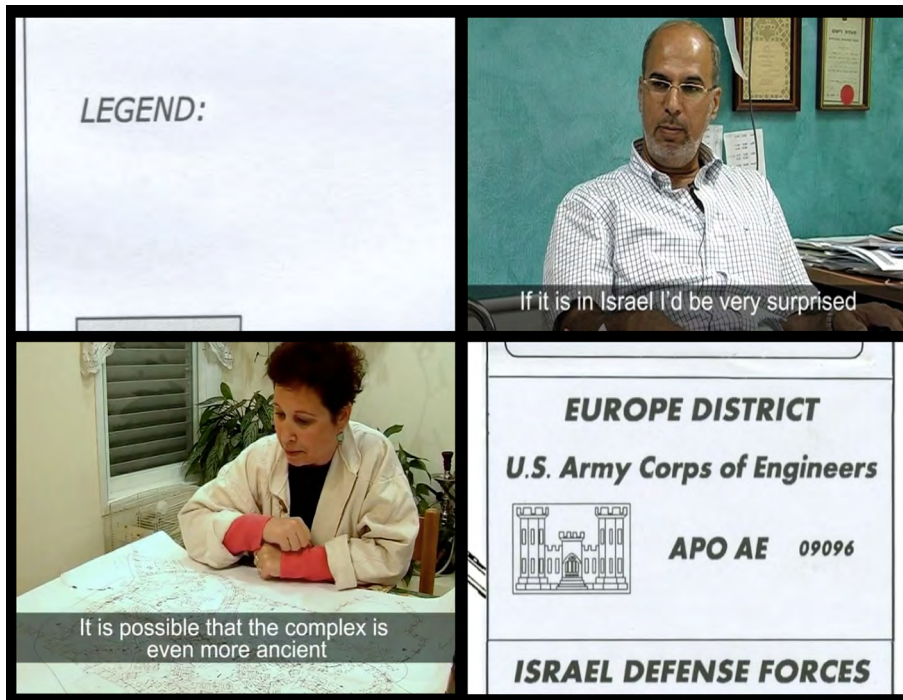


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Amir Yatziv, *Detroit*. Screen captures, 00:12, 00:39, 1:38, 1:49. Single channel video, 13 min. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2: Amir Yatziv, *Detroit*. Screen captures, 7:56, 8:11, 10:42, 10:58. Single channel video, 13 min. Courtesy of the artist.

geographies'. Following Woodward, military geographies differ from the geographies of militarism in that they address spaces that are specifically military rather than civilian, shaped by the production and reproduction of military capabilities.²⁵ Simulated towns for training purposes are a clear case in point for military geographies; what is more, their status as 'image' in Baudrillard's sense of the simulacrum makes them a particularly interesting subject for the visual arts.

In addition to Yatziv's *Detroit* video work, other visual artists have picked up urban training centres as their subject matter. One such work is Yaron Leshem's *The Village* (2004), a single panoramic colour print presenting a scenic view of an unnamed training facility in the north of Israel. [Fig. 3] The rural scenery is offered in high definition and mounted on a light box that allows for close inspection of its details. Those details, in turn, expose the village's forged quality, revealing the windows and doors of the houses to be painted on blocked facades, and the inhabitants to be painted, orientalist cardboard figures.²⁶ A second case in point is Shai Kremer's photographic series *Infected Landscapes* (2003–2007), which offers a broad range of depictions from current and former military training facilities, including close-ups of architectural details and panoramic overviews of Detroit (as well as the adjacent Chicago facility, located within the same military base).²⁷ [Fig. 4] The simulacral nature of the represented space is announced in a dry and descriptive form in each of the images' titles, while the images themselves have a dramatic character, verging on sublime aesthetics. As a whole the series is devoid of human figures except for one notable exception: *Urban Warfare Training Centre, Panorama, Tze'elim, Israel* (2007) offers a distant documentation of training units in action, visually marking the disjuncture between possible readings of the Detroit cityscape, as (residential) scenery, and/or as (combatant) scenario.

The project *Chicago* (2006) by the South African duo Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin offers yet another visual impression of Detroit's neighbouring training facility. This photographic series takes a more investigative approach and locates the viewer in front of brightly-lit close-up registrations of architectural structures, street views, cardboard figures and training props.²⁸ [Fig. 5] The matter-of-fact quality of the imagery and its avoidance of either pastoral aesthetics (as in Leshem's work) or dramatic effects (as in Kremer's composition and play with light and shade), lead Eyal Weizman to describe the project as an exercise in visual semiotics, a 'site specific survey of the artefacts, objects, buildings and landscapes' that make up the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, and the global economy of military conceptual imaginary systems more generally.²⁹ Within Broomberg and Chanarin's *Chicago*, documented traces of fabricated human activity are dystopian and strictly combat-related, and include bombed-out cars, graffiti (referring to freedom, blood and love), and pop-up cardboard figures featuring stylised terrorists. Stage props that could in principle act as innocuous markers of residential life (a guitar, a watermelon, or a fire extinguisher) function as representations of camouflaged bombs, titled according to a past event in which similar objects were used in practice. Finally, Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann's photographic project *Personal Kill* addresses the global thrust of what Stephen Graham terms a 'shadow urban system' of military mock-towns for training purposes, in their visual investigation of an equivalent training centre in Bavaria, Germany.³⁰

Clearly, then, these projects testify to a growing interest in a relatively new form of military spatial imaginary. A comparative analysis of the different ways in which each project mediates this vision to its viewers would be interesting in and of itself. As a group, however, the works of Leshem, Kremer, and Broomberg and Chanarin share the genre of the still image city- or landscape view, as the media



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Fig. 3: Yaron Leshem. *The Village*, 2004 (detail). Digital chromogenic print laminated on Plexiglas mounted on a light box. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4: Shai Kremer, 'Panorama, Urban Warfare Training Center, Tze'elim, 2007' (detail). From the series *Infected Landscapes*, 2003–2007. Chromogenic print. Courtesy of the artist.

with which they stage their spatial critique. Within the landscape genre, meanings and possible (mis)reading of the scenes are choreographed in relation to the camera's singular position and to the spectator's personal viewing experience in front of the image.³¹ This can of course be done in a critical way, as is most clear in the case of Leshem's *The Village*, in which the viewer is told (but cannot visually tell) that the panoramic scene is in fact constructed out of more than fifty smaller digital photographs put together. In this way, *The Village* combines a critique of the illusion of transparency related to the medium of photography with a critique of the illusion of the specific scene on view, related to military illusory simulation of space.

A telling exception within this genre is Bashir Makhoul's large-scale installation *Enter Ghost, Exit Ghost* (2012), for which Chicago served as initial inspiration.³² [Fig. 6] The installation comprises a maze made of large-scale lenticular prints leading to a stack of cardboard boxes that echo the mock city's layout.³³ A lenticular print is a compound image that changes depending on one's viewing angle. It is composed of two digital images that are cut into strips and then interlaced in alternative order.³⁴ The lenticular prints in Makhoul's maze are composed of photographic documentation of his cardboard model on the one hand, and of semi-deserted streets from various Palestinian cities and refugee camps on the other, creating a disorienting visual experience that culminates in the material cardboard version of Chicago, that 'turns a real village into an achieved battle-space and mocks the real village as a prophecy of the violence that is immanent within its representation'.³⁵ Rather than employing the landscape view, this work radically denies its spectators a stable vantage point from which to look at the images that surround them, and brings into view the abstracting force of model towns on the spaces that they structure after the fact.³⁶

Yatziv's *Detroit* shares the concerns that underlie the projects described above, but differs in terms of angle of approach. It too attempts to grasp, and mediate, the simulacral logic of a specific military topographical infrastructure and the discrepancy that lingers within the 'military dispositifs' that 'blur any point of stability between civilian spheres and those of actual military zones of conflict'.³⁷ Yet in this work, acts of looking and interpretation are not secondary to the depicted view, to be experienced and reflected upon in relation to it. Instead, acts of looking and interpretation make up the bulk of the work's narrative or storyline: they are what we viewers look at. The scenes that present cityscapes of Detroit are subordinate to the video's central narrative of baffled (mis)interpretation. They are carefully staged to avoid any semblance of transparency, presented together with an alienating soundtrack, and twice removed from lived experience as panning video shots over still imagery. Concomitantly, *Detroit's* focus on urban planners' ways of seeing, and on their deciphering of space by means of its spatial plan, directs attention away from one's singular, personal experience of (mediated) space, critical as it may be, and towards the dynamics involved in institutional coding and decoding of (urban military) landscapes.

Scripts, plans, and (mis)interpretations: the endurance of lived space

'It's a map or script for people, it is not a contingency plan', Biromi is heard saying close to the end of *Detroit*, against the background of Detroit cottages (12:10). [Fig. 7] To an extent, we have come full circle to the starting point of the video, since the image contradicts the statement made about it, and shows that the plan has been realised. Yet now we carry the knowledge of the past thirteen minutes of footage with us, and read the disjuncture between word and image differently. The script wasn't realised: it has been translated. Existing as a model in three-dimensional form, it remains (de)script(ive):



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Fig. 5: Shai Kremer, 'Street, Chicago Ground Force Training Zone, Israel, 2007'. From the series *Infected Landscapes*, 2003–2007. Chromogenic print. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 6: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, 'Untitled (Chicago #2)'. From the series *Chicago*, 2006. C-type print. Courtesy of the artists.

an extreme form of heterotopia, pointing to spaces beyond itself.³⁸

In its layering of reading and misreading, *Detroit* addresses a double visual bind. Departing from a contemplation of civilian inability to decipher military space, it moves on to deliberate on a military incapacity to comprehend space as created from, and for, civilian affairs. Through this dialogical move, *Detroit* highlights the fact that while the boundaries between military and civilian mediations of space may be extremely blurred, they are not lost just yet. The work mobilises critical cartography's contemporary focus on 'worldly struggles and conflicts between different social interests'³⁹ to show that, even as maps inscribe power and support dominant political structures, they also include a key for informed counter-readings.⁴⁰

At the same time, and crucially, the film's exposure of Detroit's essence as script or simulacrum only accentuates the repercussions that its inherent distortions (regarding the erasure of civilian concerns) may have on the military's conduct in actual lived space, in Palestine and elsewhere.⁴¹ Baudrillard himself is careful to point out that 'the war is no less atrocious for being only a simulacrum – the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead and former combatants are worth the same as in other wars'.⁴² This type of distortion is underscored in the somewhat sarcastic 2004 testimony of Nuha Khoury, a Palestinian resident of the city of Bethlehem, telling of her confrontation with a soldier performing a routine operation while she was carrying out the civilian activity of sipping coffee on her friend's balcony:

"go inside", he ordered in hysterical broken English. Inside! I am already inside! It took me a few seconds to understand that this young soldier was redefining inside to mean anything that is not visible, to him at

least ... Not only is he imposing a curfew on me, he is also redefining what is outside and what is inside within my own private sphere.⁴³

Khoury's testimony is far from representative of the dire human rights violations that Palestinian civilians endure in the face of a militarised interpretation of their lives and public spaces, including frequent military raids, building restrictions, house demolitions, police brutality, roadblocks and (night) arrests.⁴⁴ Trivial as her testimony is, it nevertheless points to the nuanced distortion that lies at the heart of this militarised conception of civilian space, rehearsed in facilities such as Detroit.⁴⁵ Such a spillover from the military, colonial map/model (that envisions the entire space as everlasting battle ground) onto the civilian territory of Palestinian lived space underscores the ways in which maps exert their influence, and the need to remain vigilant of 'the desire to participate in the map's deception, to believe its exercise, even while proclaiming the ironic discrepancies of representation'.⁴⁶

Detroit is only one of more than sixty urban warfare training complexes that were built around the world by the US army (or in collaboration with it) between 2005 and 2010.⁴⁷ The way in which such spaces feed into a militarised geographical cognitive framework has been addressed by critical theory almost immediately. Stephen Graham, a leading scholar in the field, attends to these spaces as part of an older and larger complex of discourses and representations that lead to an orientalist construction of Arab urban dwellings as military targets.⁴⁸ Reinforcing the underlying conclusion of Yatziv's video, he maintains that 'this shadow urban system simulates not the complex cultural, social, or physical realities of real Middle Eastern urbanism, but the imaginative geographies of the military and theme park designers that are brought in to design and construct it'.⁴⁹



Fig. 7

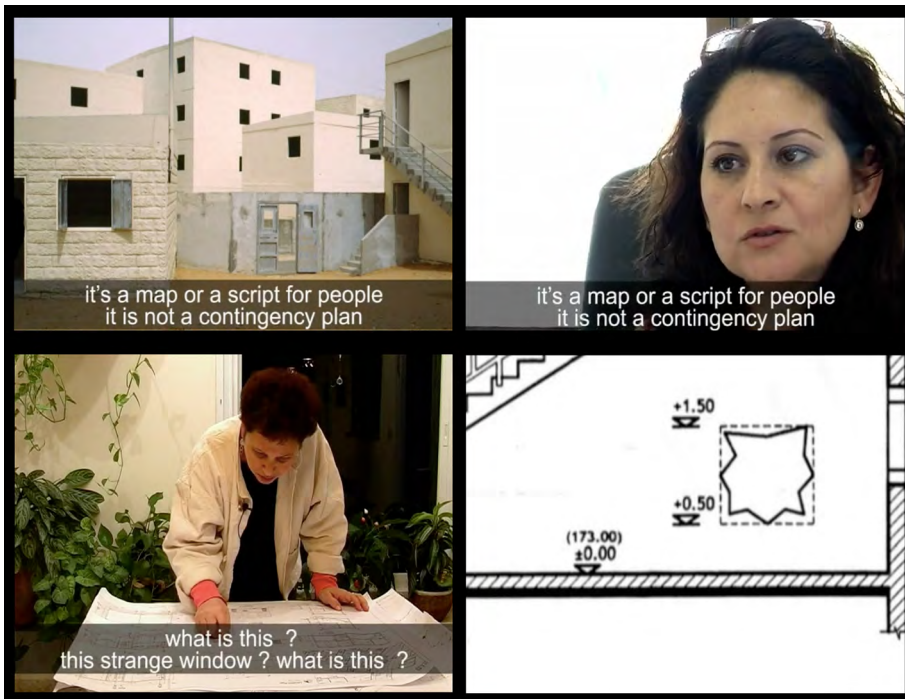


Fig. 8

Fig. 7: Bashir Makhoul, *Enter Ghost, Exit Ghost* installation view (lenticular surface showing boxes and a street scene), Yang Gallery, Beijing, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 8: Amir Yatziv, *Detroit*. Screen captures, 12:09, 12:11, 6:15, 6:21. Single channel video, 13 min. Courtesy of the artist.

An indicative visual cue for the disparate approaches to space that distinguish urban combat training facilities from their real-life counterparts, is a star-shaped mark that is repeatedly present in various shots of the architectural plan in *Detroit*.⁵⁰ These marks are the only signs on the map that Ben Shaul cannot decipher: 'What is this? this strange window? what is this?' she asks (6:15). [Fig. 7] The question, left unanswered in the video, is reiterated in cityscape images in Kremer's *Urban Warfare Training Centre, Interior, Tze'elim, Israel* (2007) and Broomberg and Chanarin's *Chicago #5* (2006), that zoom in on similarly designed enigmatic openings in the concrete walls of the facility's edifice.⁵¹ [Fig. 8, 9] As Eyal Weizman's study of contemporary 'operational architecture' makes clear, these pre-cast holes allow soldiers to practice 'walking through walls', a manoeuvre conducted by Israeli military units since 2002 as part of a new strategy of urban combat.⁵² During this manoeuvre, the entire urban syntax is reorganised, as soldiers '[use] none of the streets, roads, alleys and courtyards that make up the order of the city, and none of the external doors, internal stairwells and windows that make up the order of the building, but [move] horizontally through party walls, and vertically through holes blasted through ceilings and floors'.⁵³

Relevant for our case is the simulacral temporality underscored by the visual discrepancy of the clean-cut, planned and premeditated cavities in the training facility infrastructure on the one hand, and the messily-shaped penetrations, surrounded by clutter, that are the result of actual combat with the use of hammers and explosives on the other. The one cavity is built into the infrastructure, preceding its construction, while the other is supplemental in nature and formed by demolition. Such crude penetrations into the private space are not devoid of casualties, and are experienced by residents as a profound form of trauma and humiliation.⁵⁴ Their

neatly shaped counterparts in Detroit (both in the plan and in the built model) blatantly disclose an a priori interpretation of the space as designed for destruction. This, in contradiction to other textual codes within Detroit that are meant to produce something akin to Barthes's 'reality effect' by providing a civilian flair, including, for example, a building that is captioned as the New Hope Elementary School on the plan (03:56).⁵⁵

The star-shaped cavity in the wall is one of the more graspable visual elements of the discrepancy between civilian and military mediation of space, and it is for this reason that it features so prominently in Yatziv's short video as well as in comparable artistic projects. Yet, in this case too, exposing the military's mode of deciphering and mediating space is not enough in order to offer an enduring 'countergeography' that would undermine the logic of new military urbanism.⁵⁶ On the contrary, the military itself offers exposures of its training facilities to embedded reporters: a Vice report entitled 'War Games: Israeli Urban Warfare' from 2014 has news correspondent Alex Miller join a training session at the Tze'elim facility that includes coverage of the manoeuvre of 'walking through walls' as the latest development in urban warfare tactics. The reportage is created with evident collaboration from the Israeli Defense Forces and makes clear that, from the latter's point of view, both the facility and the trainings it hosts are something to be proud of, a cutting-edge answer to the challenges of contemporary warfare.⁵⁷ Similarly, military commanders interviewed by Weizman are proud of their bold and unorthodox architectural approach to the city. One of the interviewees, Aviv Kokhavi, heavily bases his operational approach on contemporary theory and asserts that 'space is only an interpretation' and that 'movement through and across the built fabric of the city reinterprets architectural elements (walls, windows and doors) and thus the city itself'.⁵⁸ What



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 9: Shai Kremer, 'Urban Warfare Training Center, Interior, Tze'elim, Israel, 2007'. From the series *Infected Landscapes*, 2003–2007. Chromogenic print. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 10: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, 'Untitled (Chicago #5)'. From the series *Chicago*, 2006. C-type print. Courtesy of the artists.

is taken to be a detrimental misinterpretation from the civilian side of things is considered a productive reinterpretation from the other end of the spectrum.

It is here that Yatziv's work stands out in relation to existing (artistic and academic) critical literature on urban military training centres. It does not only bring to light the military spatial visions (and legends) that such simulations imbue, but deciphers those visions as professionally unfounded. In its shift of focus away from the urban planners' perplexity with regard to the cartographic text that they are presented with and towards their informed unpacking of what makes this plan undecipherable to begin with, the very foundations of the mock city of Detroit as one that accurately simulates lived space (even if for purposes of destruction) are shaken. It does not matter that Detroit's architectural inconsistencies could be partly rationalised by the fact that the mock city was constructed, deliberately, as a patchwork of (mostly Palestinian) urban spaces.⁵⁹ Places do not exist in isolation, and so none of the segments of Detroit could ever recreate the spatial coordinates of any lived space. If anything, such a patchwork construction is indicative of the flattening of varied cultures, societies, and heritage into a single stereotype of 'Arab-as-enemy', a flattening whose racial and Islamophobic undertones are underscored through the metaphorical link to its American namesake.⁶⁰

In his analysis of the Israeli military's contemporary approach to Palestinian urban fabric, Weizman suggests that the urban environment should be understood

not simply as the backdrop to conflict, nor as its mere consequence, but as trapped in a complex and dynamic feedback-based relation with the forces operating within it – be they a diverse local population, soldiers, guerrilla, media or humanitarian agents.⁶¹

Spaces such as Detroit demand that we think of these dynamics as doubly-layered and shadowed, and of the entanglements of urban environments not only with the forces that operate within them, but also with those that sustain a specific image of them, sometimes to the extent of recreating an ideal (dystopian) image to their liking. What Yatziv's *Detroit* adds to the growing body of literature that aims to unpack the logic of urban military spatial imaginaries, in a nuanced, modest way, is a suggestion to 'scale down the rhetoric of the power of images'.⁶² Even if the territory does not precede the map, it does survive it and can still be made to critically inform it. The work reiterates an argument that has been spelled out in history time and time again, but that often escapes from view in a world structured by the logic of colonialism and simulacra. That is, that the power of endurance lies not in space as such, but in the particularities of the lives that shape it into being.

Notes

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1. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila F. Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.
2. Jess Bier, *Mapping Israel, Mapping Palestine: How Occupied Landscapes Shape Scientific Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 3.
3. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 1–42.

4. Jorge Luis Borges, 'On the Exactitude of Science,' trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, in *A Universal History of Infamy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 131.
5. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 1.
6. The video is available for online viewing on the artist's website at <http://amiryatziv.com>.
7. I employ the term map here in its broadest sense to denote the representation of a locality that can take different shapes and forms.
8. Erez Tzfadia, 'Militarism and Space in Israel,' *Israeli Sociology* 11, no. 2 (2010): 337–61.
9. Stephen Graham, 'Gaza is Everywhere', in *Bashir Makhoul and Aissa Deebi: Otherwise Occupied*, ed. Ryan Bishop and Gordon Han (Jerusalem and Venice: Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash, 2013), 141. See also Stephen Graham, 'Remember Fallujah: Demonising Place, Constructing Atrocity', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, no. 1 (2005): 7.
10. Peter Hall and Mark Tewdwr-Jones, 'Planning, Planners and Plans', in *Urban and Regional Planning* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 1.
11. David Harvey, 'On Planning the Ideology of Planning', in *The Urbanization of Capital* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 165.
12. David Buisseret, 'Introduction', in *Envisioning the City: Six Studies in Urban Cartography*, ed. David Buisseret (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), x, xii. As Buisseret rightly notes, plans as a genre are rarely the object of analytical attention, but when they are, they are attended to in tandem with other types of maps. That is the case, for example, in the multi-volume encyclopaedic series *The History of Cartography*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago University Press, 2015–2016), most of which is available online at <https://press.uchicago.edu>. See also Denis Cosgrove's approach to urban space as cartographic space in 'Carto-City', in *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2008), 169–82.
13. John B. Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power', in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jeremy W. Crampton and John Krygier, 'An Introduction to Critical Cartography', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2006): 11–33.
14. Harley, 'Maps', 177. For a particularly pertinent study on topographical spatial narratives in the context of Israel and Palestine, see Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); Bier, *Mapping Israel, Mapping Palestine*.
15. Robert T. Tally, 'In the Deserts of Cartography: Building, Dwelling, Mapping', in *The Map and the Territory*, ed. Shyam Wuppuluri and Francisco A. Doria (New York: Springer, 2018), 606.
16. For studies of map-art in literature and visual arts see for example Christina Ljungberg, 'Constructing New "Realities": The Performative Function of Maps in Contemporary Fiction', in *Representing Realities: Essays on American Literature, Art and Culture*, ed. Beverly Maeder (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2003), 159–74; Denis Wood, 'Map Art', *Cartographic Perspectives* 53 (2006): 5–14; and Tally, 'Deserts,' 599–608.
17. Throughout the span of the video effort is taken to foreground the work's non-documentary status and to flag the manipulative operation at the base of the conducted interviews as well as of the editorial process that followed. In so doing, *Detroit* refuses to presents it critique in opposition to 'false narratives', but rather keeps the viewer on her toes by staging, in an exaggerated manner and through critical 'complicit sensibility', the manipulative aspect residing in all forms of knowledge mediation. For more on critical complicity in the arts, see Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
18. On this note see for example Henry A. Giroux, 'War on Terror: The Militarising of Public Space and Culture

- in the United States', *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004): 211–21.
19. Andrew Shryock, Nabeel Abraham and Sally Howell, 'The Terror Decade in Arab Detroit: An Introduction', in *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade*, ed. Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 1.
 20. *Ibid.*, 5.
 21. *Ibid.*, 4.
 22. That coalescence is extremely widespread, with only 20 per cent of Israel's land inside the Green Line under no building restrictions due to military considerations. Amiram Oren, 'Shadow Lands: The Use of Land Resources for Security Needs in Israel', *Israel Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 149–70.
 23. Tzfadia, 'Militarism', 337–61. The perspectives with which Palestinian artists attend to colonial and militarised impacts on local urban and rural fabrics and their spatial narration exceed the scope of this article. Works that specifically attend to (material and representational) architectures within this field include for example Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme's immersive installation *The Zone* (2011, <https://baselandruanne.com>), Larissa Sansour's science fiction short film *Nation Estate* (2012, <https://larissasansour.com>), and Yazan Khalili's various photographic projects including *On Love and Other Landscapes* (2011), *Landscapes of Darkness* (2010) and *Colour Correction – Camp Series* (2007–10, <http://yazankhalili.com>), to name a few. Works that specifically dialogue with *Detroit's* subject matter include Bashir Makhoul's works *Enter Ghost*, *Exit Ghost* (2012) and *Giardino Occupado* (2013, <http://bashirmakhoul.co.uk>), as well as Wafa Hourani's *Qalandia 2067* (2008, <https://saatchigallery.com>).
 24. For Woodward's explication of the term, see Rachel Woodward, 'From Military Geography to Militarism's Geographies: Disciplinary Engagements With the Geographies of Militarism and Military Activities', *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 6 (2005): 718–40. For my own engagement with Woodward's terms in relation to civil militarism in Israeli society see Noa Roei, 'Looking Through Landscape', in *Civic Aesthetics: Militarism, Israeli Art and Visual Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 65–90.
 25. Woodward, 'From Military Geography', 718–40.
 26. A reproduction of this work is available online at <https://moma.org>.
 27. Reproductions from the series are available online at <http://shaikremer.com>. Both 'Detroit' and 'Chicago' are pseudonyms for overlapping sections of the ever expanding Tze'elim Military Urban Training Centre. Another telling nickname for the space is 'Baladia', which translates from Arabic to mean 'municipality' but is understood in the context of Tze'elim to stand as a generic term for town or city. Eyal Weizman, 'Urban Warfare: Walking Through Walls', in *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), 205–8; Graham, 'Gaza is Everywhere', 144–48.
 28. An impression of the project is available online at <http://broombergchanarin.com>.
 29. Eyal Weizman, 'Frontier Architecture', in *Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Chicago* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2007), n.p.
 30. An overview of the project as well as a short interview with the artists is available online at <https://themorningnews.org>. See also Ursula Frohne, 'Expansion of the Immersion Zone: Military Simulacra between Strategic Training and Trauma', in *Immersion in the Visual Arts and Media*, ed. Fabienne Liptay and Burcu Dogramaci (Amsterdam: Brill | Rodopi, 2016), 215–48.
 31. For detailed explorations of landscape imagery and spectatorial practices, see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2002); Ernst van Alphen, 'The Representation of Space and the Space of Representation', in *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 71–97.
 32. Gordon Hon, 'Enter Ghost, Exit Ghost', in *Bashir Makhoul: Enter Ghost, Exit Ghost*, ed. Gordon Hon (Beijing: Yang Gallery, 2012), 15. Available online at <https://issuu.com>
 33. An impression of the project is available online at <http://bashirmakhoul.co.uk>. The cardboard boxes

- that make up Makhoul's model resonate not only with the urban layout of the mock-up city but also with the actual use of cardboard facades and props within it.
34. Lenticular prints are most commonly found in street advertising and on postcards.
 35. John Beck, 'In and Out of the Box: Bashir Makhoul's Forbidden City', *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 7/1 (2012): 346.
 36. See also, Ryan Bishop, 'The Threat of Space: A Discussion between Bashir Makhoul and Gordon Hon,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 7–8 (2012): 324–40.
 37. Frohne, 'Expansion', 219.
 38. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.
 39. David Pinder, 'Cartographies Unbound', *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 3 (2007): 453.
 40. Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992); Crampton and Krygier, 'Introduction', 11–33.
 41. Military urban training facilities such as and including Detroit are utilised for training soldiers from different armies for combat in a variety of geographical contexts. Eyal Weizman, 'Urban Warfare', 207.
 42. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 40.
 43. Nuha Khoury, 'One Fine Curfew Day' (Jerusalem: Miftah, 2004), n.p. Available at <http://miftah.org>. Also quoted in Weizman, 'Urban Warfare', 185.
 44. See <https://btselem.org> for an online archive of human rights violations in the Occupied Territories. The history of the city of Hebron is a case in point for the gradual destruction of Palestinian urban fabric, see the website of B'tselem, The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: <https://btselem.org>. See also Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 13, 76–146, for a detailed historical account of the spatial and cartographical performances that 'bring the colonial present to focus' in their insistent preclusion of the possibility of everyday civilian life in Palestinian urban and rural dwellings. A recent case in point for the disregard of property rights during routine military training is reported on the B'tselem site, 10 June 2020, available at <https://btselem.org>.
 45. The discrepancy in spatial interpretations that Khoury points to resides here between civilian and military forms of interpreting space, that surpass, in times of combat, the distinction between Palestinian and Israeli perspectives. As Weizman makes clear, modes of spatial address used by the Israeli army are comparable to an extent with the ways Palestinian guerrilla fighters move unconventionally through the urban fabric. At the same time, my point is precisely that, within the prism that Detroit (and other facilities like it) offers, there is no non-combat time, and the urban fabric in question is always and already framed as everlasting battle ground. Weizman, 'Urban Warfare', 195.
 46. Aritha van Herk, 'The Map's Temptation or the Search for a Secret Book', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 31, no. 1 (1996): 133–34.
 47. Stephen Graham, 'Cities and the "War on Terror"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 2 (June 2006): 266.
 48. Graham, 'Cities', 262, 271.
 49. Ibid., 262. Graham and others point to the ways in which the legibility of such training sites is constructed in close collaboration with virtual simulation of space, spanning from the incorporation of virtual reality technology in military training to urban warfare video games. See, in addition, Frohne, 'Expansion', and, specifically for the Israeli case, Chava Brownfield-Stein, 'The Eyes of the State: The "See-Shoot" Weapons System, Border Surveillance, and Nintendo Warfare', *Res Militaris: European Journal for Military Studies, ERGOMAS* 6 (March 2019): 1–14.
 50. For example, in time slots 05:43; 05:51; 06:22, 06:23 and 06:52.
 51. Representations of both works are available online, at <http://shaikremer.com> and <http://broombergchanarin.com>, respectively.
 52. Eyal Weizman, 'Walking Through Walls: Soldiers as Architects in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', *Radical Philosophy* 136 (March–April 2006): 10; Eyal Weizman, 'Urban Warfare', 185–218.
 53. Weizman, 'Walking Through Walls', 9.

54. Ibid, 10.
55. Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11–17.
56. Stephen Graham, 'Countergeographies', in *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2011), 348–360.
57. The video report is available on the website of *Vice*, accessed 20 July 2020, <https://video.vice.com>.
58. Weizman, 'Walking Through Walls', 20.
59. Weizman, 'Urban Warfare', 207.
60. On this note see the essay collection by Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, eds., *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).
61. Weizman, 'Walking Through Walls', 8.
62. W. J. T. Mitchell, 'What do Pictures "Really" Want?', *October* 77 (1996): 74.

Biography

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