WHAT ISN'T THERE

IMAGING PALESTINE

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Abstract

What Isn't There is a research project that considers the possibility of creating an image of Palestine by documenting the 418 Palestinian villages that were erased with the establishment of the State of Israel. The work has taken many forms over a twenty-year period including: photography, film, sound and installation. At the heart of this project is a set of interwoven questions: Is an image of Palestine possible and what would constitute such an image? how do we consider the image if, as I argue, the realms of politics and art are not separate? in a world saturated by mediated images, what are the interventions we can make as artists not only to make meaning, but to make meaning matter? The film installation accompanying this dissertation is a four-screen film projection situated in an outdoor urban garden. The installation immerses the viewer in fifteen distinct landscapes that were once the locations of Palestinian villages. While these sites often contain little that reveal their origins, the placement of the installation, the repetition and juxtaposition of images all point to the imaging of Palestine.

For my love, Tamira, who has traveled the land with me and knows it now as I do.

Acknowledgments

To acknowledge is to accept or admit the existence or the truth of something. This dissertation means to acknowledge the existence of Palestinians across the world who have been dispossessed of their homes and their land. For any reconciliation, agreement, solution, or conversation to occur, the first step is to acknowledge. The individuals who have made this dissertation possible are too numerous to mention. They range from historians who have been brave enough to face the facts and retell history as it need be, to philosophers and artists who have delved into of the problematics of creating an image of anything in order to tell a story. Yet there are those within my life who have helped bring this dissertation into being who must be recognized and thanked for their support throughout.

Most significantly, I'd like to thank my mum, Kappy Flanders, who bravely faced down my detractors even if she didn't yet believe. Over the years, it is has been her resilience, her memories, and her openness to change by facing difficult truths that have inspired me to continue with this project. My sister Judith Flanders, who has read and commented on my work along the way with wisdom, precision and thoughtfulness; my supervisor Michel Daigneault who together with Nell Tenhaff have shepherded me through the dissertation process with patience and insight; my other advisors Dr. Shannon Bell and Charlotte Cotton who read the work with diligence and provided incredibly helpful feedback; Noga Kadman whose project on the villages was one of the first comprehensive Israeli endeavors that inspired me to continue my own. Generously sharing her knowledge, Noga mapped the villages giving me the direction that had eluded me in the first years of the project and for which I am deeply grateful; Dr. Eshrat Erfanian a frequent Public Studio collaborator, my friend and colleague from the Whitney ISP through our PhD's, for her insight into my work and our shared vision where poetics are at the heart of political change; Dr. Anna Friz who's sonorous acumen has opened new doors and made our work so much richer; Dr. Risa Horowitz who cleared the way for all the York visual arts studio PhD's to come (and reads the fine print); Jared Raab and his visual wizardry; Darby MacInness whose thoughtful editing gave new

life to our footage, Lili Huston-Herterich for her tireless work on all of our projects, Dr. Irmgard Emmelhainz for the discussions we shared on our work and time in Ramallah; Philip Monk who remains a writing inspiration; Emelie Channgur for her ongoing support of the creative work of Public Studio; Fady Joudah who entrusted me with his family's village stories and shared his Darwish translations; Doina Popescu for curating my work and her ongoing enthusiasm and love of this project; Eitan Bronstein and Zochrot for their tireless work in documenting, archiving and educating Israelis about what their government and Zionist organizations around the world wish to hide; Robert Masud and Beit Zatoun for exhibiting our work and providing a cultural home for Palestinians and social justice work; Huda Ackall, our "mother" in Palestine for feeding us endlessly and sharing her history; Bonnie Rubenstein for being a champion of the project over many years and risking its wider exhibition; Fernanda Faria, an art lover, and a framer of so much more than pictures who exhibited one of the first incarnations of What Isn't There; Lynne Fernie for her friendship and enthusiasm in all that I do artistically and otherwise; Karyn Sandlos for her guidance and friendship through the PhD process; to those I consider my Toronto art-family and from whom I have learnt about social justice and activism — from queer rights to Palestinian and Indigenous struggles: Tim McCaskell, Richard Fung and my dear, dear friend BH Yael, and the next generation: Chelsey Lichtman, Alexis Mitchell, Natalie Kouri-Towe. Thanks to the following colleagues who have all been helpful in so many ways: Nina Levitt, Zev Farber, Suzanne Carte, Michael Maranda, Dr. Jessica Wyman, Dr. Gabby Moser, Dr. Sara Knelman, Jesse Boles, June Pak, Elida Schogt, Troy Ouellette, Scott McLeod, Dr. Sharon Sliwinski, Dr. Deborah Britzman, Dawn Burns for keeping all of us PhD's organized and Dr. Roger Simon (Z"L) who first brought the ethics of visuality to my attention.

And last but certainly not least, John Greyson, a brilliant artist and filmmaker, who has been much more than an advisor, but a mentor, a friend, and a co-conspirator.

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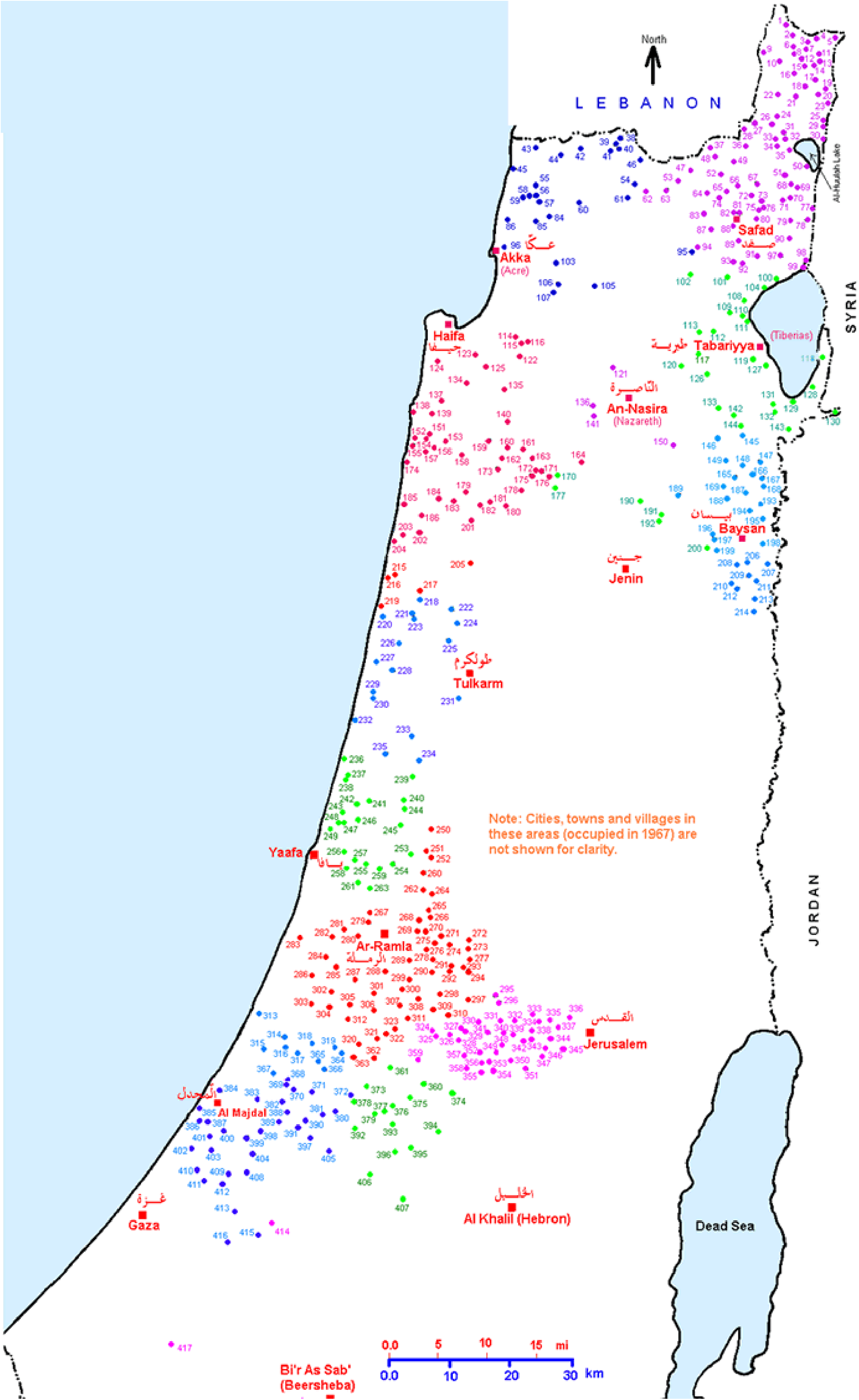
North
LEBANON
SYRIA
JORDAN
Al-Huulah Lake
Safad
صفد
Akka
عكا
(Acre)
Haifa
حيفا
Tabariyya
طبرية
(Tiberias)
An-Nasira
الناصرة
(Nazareth)
Baysan
بيسان
Jenin
جنين
Tulkarm
طولكرم
Yaafa
يافا
Ar-Ramla
الرملة
Jerusalem
القدس
Al Majdal
المجدل
Gaza
غزة
Al Khalil (Hebron)
الخليل
Dead Sea
Bi'r As Sab' (Beersheba)
0.0 5 10 15 mi
0.0 10 20 30 km

Note: Cities, towns and villages in these areas (occupied in 1967) are not shown for clarity.

Destroyed Palestinian villages of 1948

Introduction

The beautiful in nature is history standing still and refusing to unfold.

- Theodore Adorno

There is a photo of me in a pressed straw-coloured yellow shirt and stiff green pants. I am smiling, with arms crossed in front of my paunchy stomach. I am uncomfortable with the intrusion of a photographer, defiant perhaps. I am five. I am in my school uniform, standing next to our rented home. We had just moved from Canada to Israel. *Olim Hadashim*,[1] new immigrants. My mother said I adapted quickly, shouting epithets in the schoolyard in my newly acquired Hebrew. The photo reveals a feisty yet vulnerable and anxious child. I am squinting into an unfamiliar and relentless sun, the crushing heat relieved only by the cool, stone walls of my school. I am surrounded by red earth and a cerulean sky, my daily palette as I walk to and from school. The driveway is half covered in sand, as is much of the country—it is still being built.

Looking at the photo conjures the remainders of memory. I begin to assemble the strands of the past with the politics of the present, sifting through notes, archives, and years of making images about a place acquired through force and exile. My grandparents and parents were directly involved in the creation of the State of Israel: we bought land there as early as 1922; we fundraised; we built a home in Jerusalem; we moved there. We returned to Canada. We became *Yordim*, the Hebrew word for descent, understood as a fall from grace.

* * * * *

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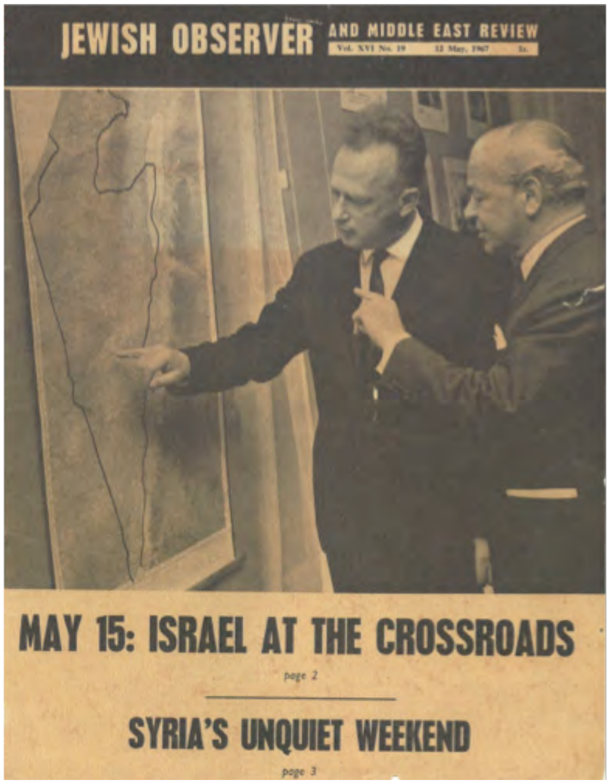
[1] The word Olim comes from the Hebrew word, La'alot (לעלות), to ascend. This is the term for those who immigrate to Israel, fulfilling one of the basic tenets of Zionism: to return to Israel from the Diaspora.

Illus.1. My mother and aunt building my grandparents home in Jerusalem in 1974.



JEWISH OBSERVER AND MIDDLE EAST REVIEW

Vol. XVI No. 19 12 May, 1967 1s.

MAY 15: ISRAEL AT THE CROSSROADS

page 2

SYRIA'S UNQUIET WEEKEND

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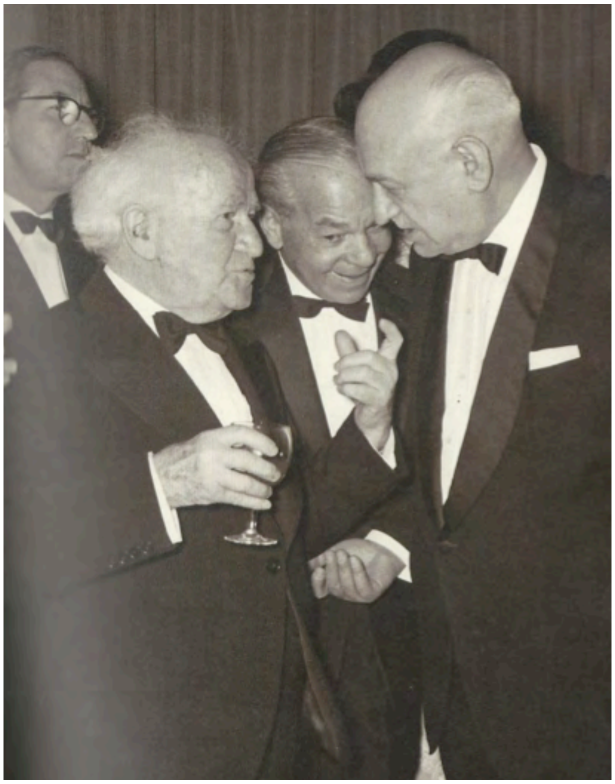
Illus.2. My grandfather and Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli general and Israel's fifth Prime Minister, 1967.



Illus.3 My grandfather and David Ben Gurion, Israel's main founder and first Prime Minister. (date unknown)

For over twenty years, I have been investigating landscape and its relationship to shifting political geographies. While producing numerous works during this time—ranging from documentary films to media-art, live music performances to photo-based installations, which all in one way or another point to this subject—there has been one singular project that has persisted: *What Isn't There*, an ongoing media project documenting the present absence of over 400 Palestinian villages that ceased to exist with the establishment of the State of Israel. For Palestinians, this event is known as the *Nakba*, the Catastrophe, wherein eight hundred thousand Palestinians lost their homes through mass migration and forced exile.[2] For those who remained within Palestinian territory, it has also meant an ongoing occupation by the Israeli military.

What Isn't There has taken on many forms over the years, from photographs to light panels, public murals to large film installations. It is an ongoing body of work that traces the political landscapes at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the prism of war and architecture and the ongoing destruction of memory. It is also the mapping of a biography, a series of discoveries in which a coming to consciousness politically and artistically reveals itself through different strategies over the years. It has been the artistic unfolding of a life's work dedicated to righting political wrongs, while attempting to find a bAllance between metaphor and documentary in a highly volatile political landscape.

The execution of this work demands a continuous walking through the land over years and re-inscribing its history by reconstituting an atlas of Israel. The images and texts refract what was once there and what remains, for the most part, in cultural memory. For those who were exiled and their descendants, the villages hang like phantom limbs, like absent presence. The research outcome accompanying this text—part of what continues to be a lifelong project—is an outdoor film installation that serves as a mark, a trace of the past signifying the absent presence of four hundred plus villages that no longer exist. Four angled wall-like structures stand in an open field and serve as screens for the projection of a series of villages that look to the architecture of absence as a way to reconstitute a subtle, enduring presence. Once the viewers find themselves within this "cinema without walls," the villages unfold around them; creating an immersive environment where the viewer is embodied in the landscape. The films do not follow a narrative *per se*, but rather create environments using repetition and a paratactical structure,[3] one moving to the next. Being exposed to the site, sounds and life-size landscape images of the locations I have visited over the years, the viewer enters the landscape of the villages experiencing them much as I did. These locations that are spread throughout Israel, are nature reserves and/or are found within newly created Israeli cities, and are therefore populated by Israelis who become characters. They become integral to each village as we are watching them, giving definition to these spaces not as abandoned, forgotten landscapes, but as postcolonial sites of memory. As the landscapes envelop you, the boundaries between subject, maker, and viewer erode.

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[2] The 1948 War is known to Israelis as The War of Independence and to Palestinians as the *Nakba*, which translates to "the Catastrophe." It was in this war that Palestinians were evicted from their towns and villages and became refugees scattered across Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other parts of the world. It is this period that forms the basis for the destruction of the villages that I trace. The villages of 1948 exist within the UN armistice line of what became declared as the State of Israel. Palestinians who remained in Israel became known as internal refugees, often displaced from their town or village to somewhere else nearby barred from the right to return to their former villages and homes. Those who fled or who were exiled became Palestinian refugees elsewhere in the world without the right to return to their homeland.

Few Palestinians appear in these villages for the obvious reason that most have been living in exile for sixty-five years and cannot access their lands. Over the years, I have encountered internal refugees (Palestinians living inside of Israel), some of whom have managed to journey with me to these sites. While reparative justice is one of the aims of this project, it has become clear to me through the works that have emerged, that in certain respects this is an *Israeli* project. Meaning, the resulting documents often reflect more about contemporary Israeli society and colonial history for the simple reason that Palestinian lives have been erased from the landscape. On the other hand, the intention therefore is to point to this absence as the postcolonial condition and, as such, give presence to Palestinian voices and Palestine as a place. To fill the gaps of Palestinian voices as much as possible, I have recorded their histories over the years and have included some of their stories in this text (and in the installation) that, in their paucity, represent the counter-narrative.

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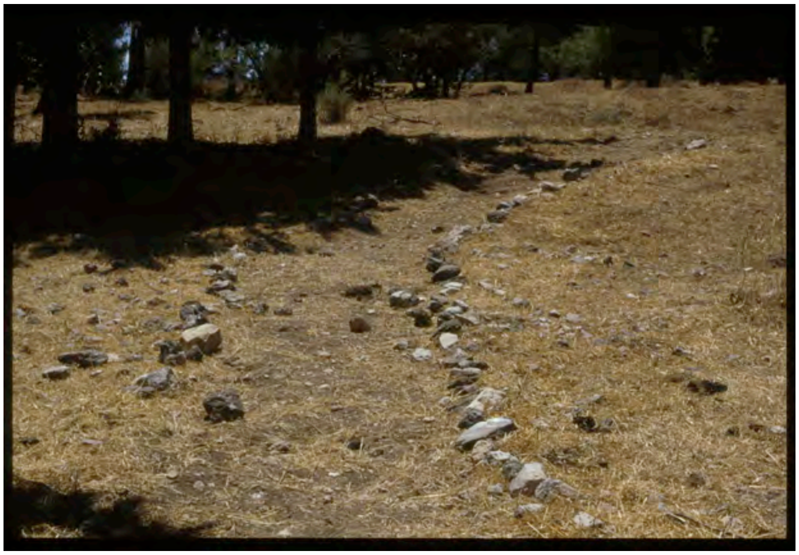
[3] From the Greek, meaning "to place one thing beside another."

This accompanying text[4] operates as commentary and guide as you move through the film installation of the villages that no longer exist. The personal accounts of my experiences in the landscapes that appear throughout the text are meant to draw a picture for the reader. They give you the back-story of the many villages I have sojourned to over the last many years and are supplements to the villages experienced in the installation. In each landscape and each village, there were animals that accompanied me on my journeys. These animals appear in the form of a contemporary bestiary of sorts, providing a tangential aspect to both text and installation that means to create a space of reflection and familiarity. Moreover, this research project as a whole (both the text and the bodies of work that are a result of the research) has engaged aspects of critical theory specific to the history of photography, in order to create a space for the possible imaging of Palestine. As I will argue later in this text, the experience of being in the landscape (in text and image) and the eliciting of the sensorial, aims at creating a common space (or as Rancière would have it, a dissensus, a disruption of space, in which political art, or as I will insist from hereon, *art as politics* can emerge). Only when read and viewed in concert is this space able to materialize.



Illus.4. Lubye, 35mm Slide. 1993.

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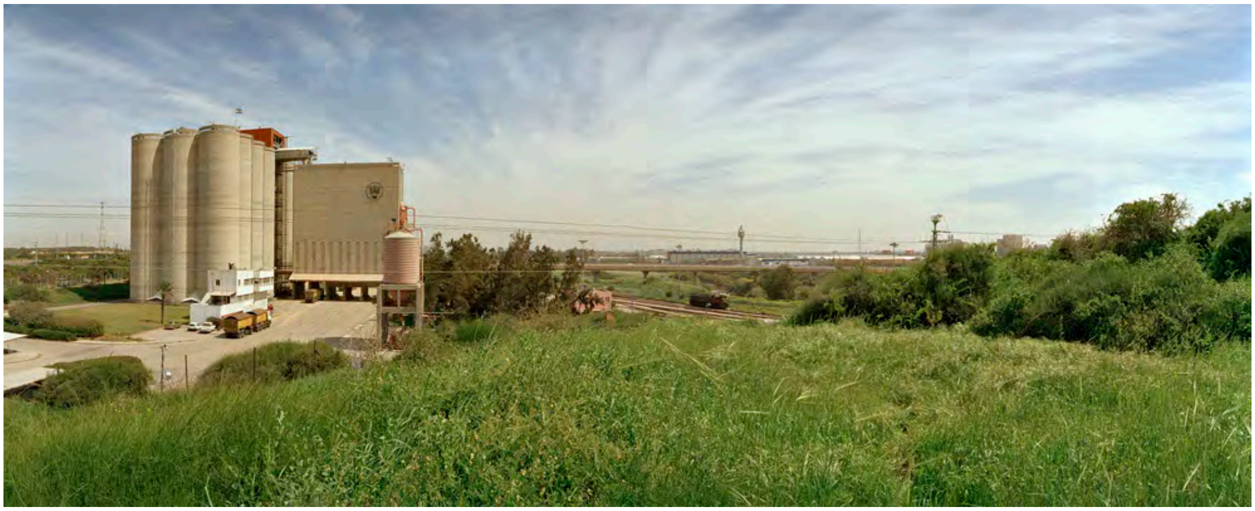
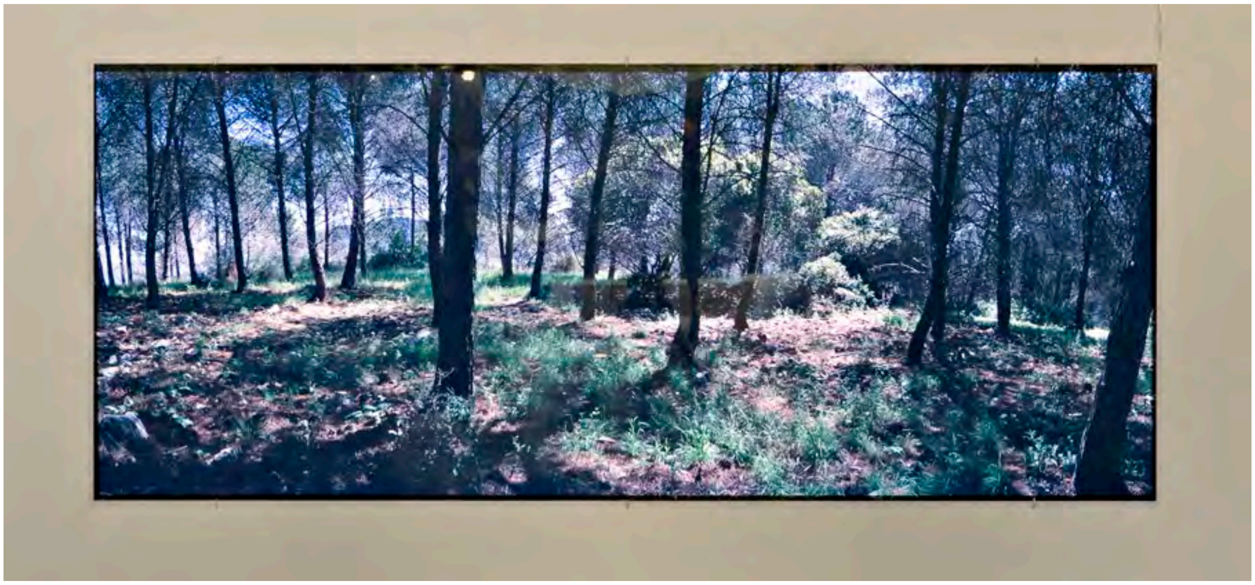
[4] NB: as a practiced-based PhD, the dissertation is composed of two components: An exhibition of our research and a supporting paper. Therefore, when I refer to the dissertation, I am referencing both components, and when I refer to the text, I am referencing this supporting paper.

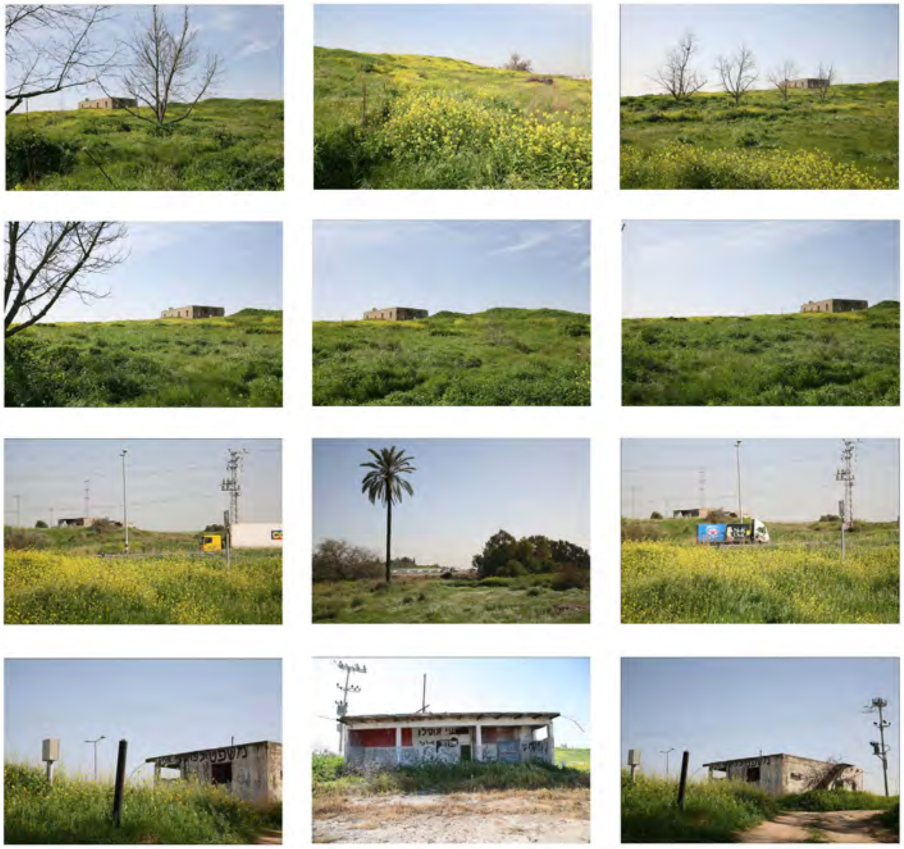
Illus.5 Beit Thul, Widelux Transparency, 2002.



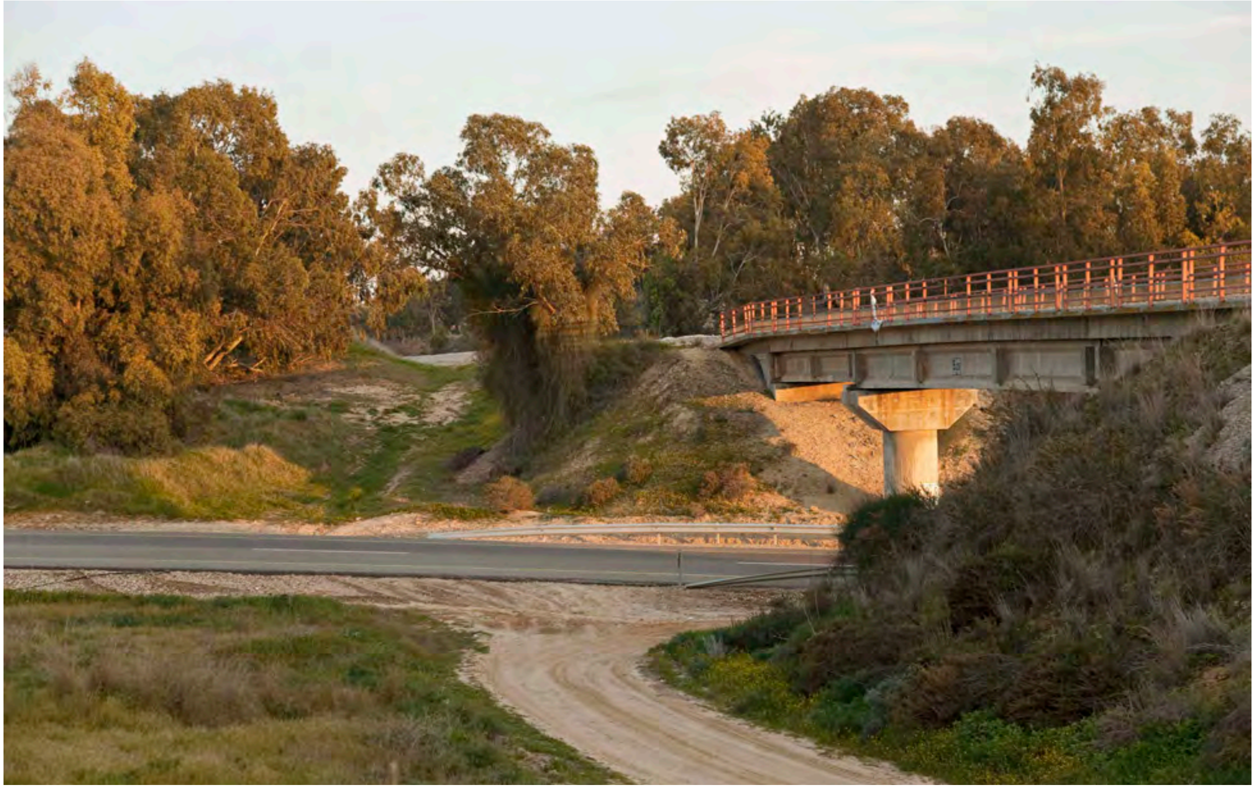
Illus.6. Arab Suqrir, Duratrans on Light Panel. What Isn’t There, Contact, Toronto, 2008



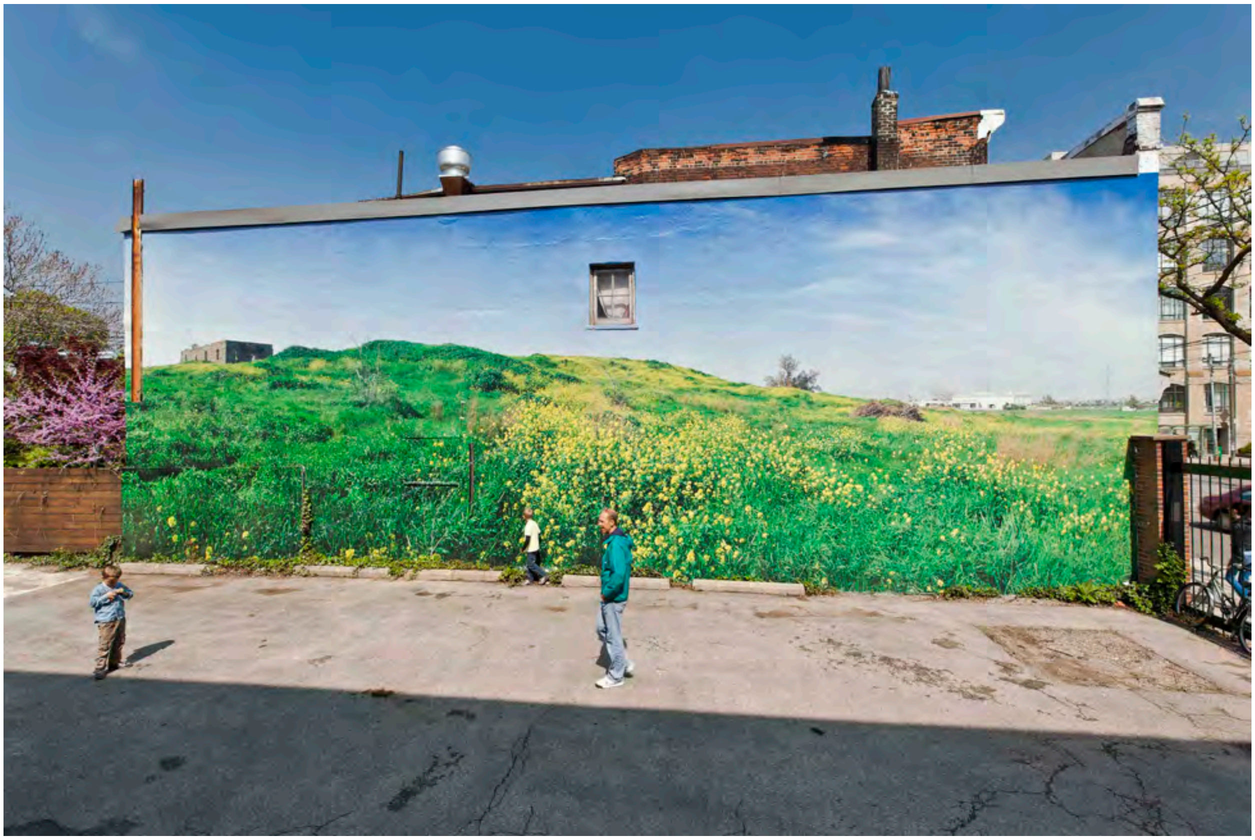
Illus.7 Khirbet Al Damun, Duratrans on Light Panel, What Isn't There, Akau Gallery, Toronto, 2007



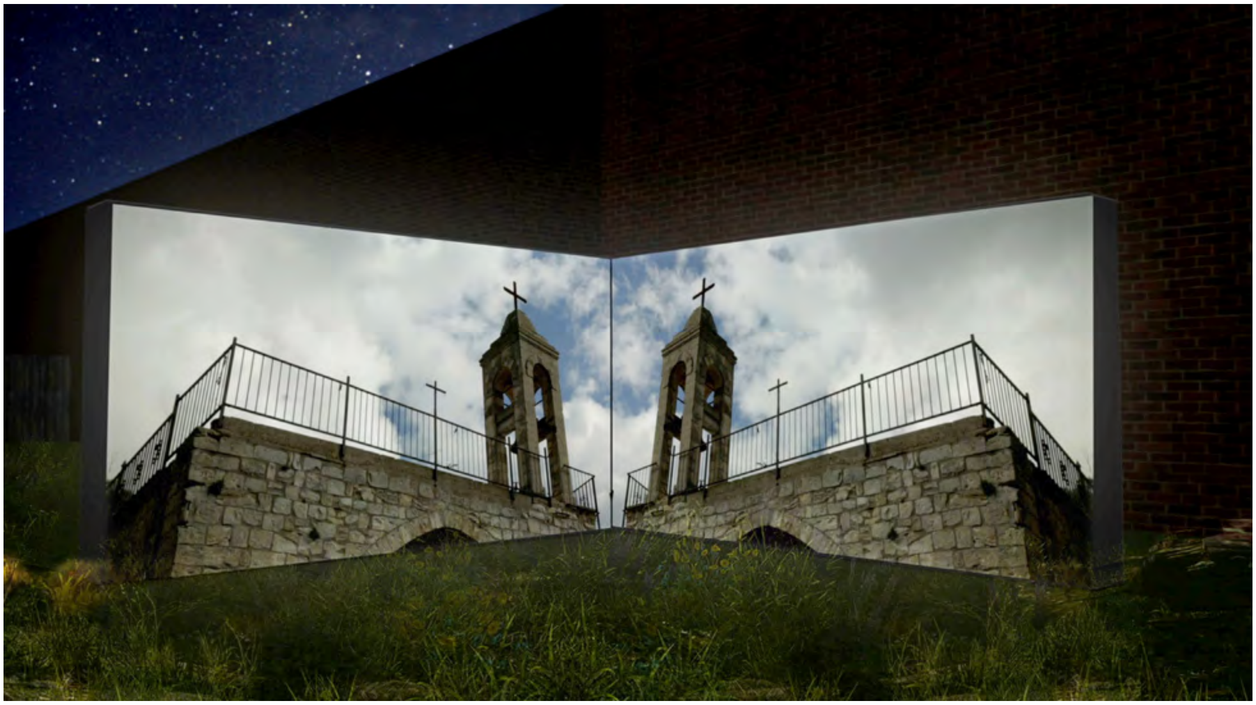
Illus.8. Isdud Village Typology, Archival Inkjet Print, What Isn’t There, Zochrot Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2012.



Illus.9. Hulayjat, Archival Inkjet Print, What Isn't There, 2008



Illus.10 Isdud, Photo on Vinyl, What Isn't There. 2011 Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto, Contact 2011.



Illus.11. Installation View, Prototype, What Isn't There, 2014.

The embattled lands of Israel and Palestine are at the core of this project; after all, conflict gathers in the land. But these lands are never free from the landscape. In my work, the land is the material setting—the backdrop of conflict—while landscape emerges as the foreground upon which political anxieties are cast: landscape renders the land and its conflicts in aesthetic terms and plays an active role in identity formation. We frame our world with the landscapes that surround us. As children we already burden our landscapes with tales of adventure, mythologies and foreboding and hence as adults those frames become more complex and laden. As Simon Schama tells us in *Landscape and Memory*: "For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are in fact indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."[5]

My research starts with landscape and all that is inscribed upon it; it was in retracing the land that I understood that these landscapes, and hence the land itself, could be transformed with every step I took over these twenty-some years.

When I began photographing the villages, my excursions consisted of solitary journeys into the countryside in an attempt to reconcile the blind spot left behind by a Zionist indoctrination that eliminated Palestinian history and lives. I cannot be certain how conscious those early investigations were, or if I even understood the enormity of the project I was initiating. Over the years, as my knowledge and commitment to social justice and Palestinian liberation grew, the journeys became more intense and purposeful, especially in deepening my understanding of how images functioned and how my work could be more effective and provocative.

In 2008, I began working with architect Tamira Sawatzky. We founded a collaborative art practice called Public Studio. Having recently finished an essay documentary film entitled *Zero Degrees of Separation* (2005)—a large project that took place over several years and was born out of an ongoing engagement with activists and emerging LGBT communities—my work moved from a solitary practice to a more social one. This shift to a collaborative model might also indicate a return to the more socially engaged practices that informed my very early work, my participation in movements for social change and the art alliances we created therein. These video art collectives of the 1980's and 1990's that were critical of institutions complicit with the status quo, capital and inequality, replaced individual authorship with collective practice, and focussed on the diseemination and messaging of the work through social interaction. The work many of us produced at the time created an inextricable link between social and visual processes that forced an art of engagement addressing politics, cultural issues, processes and identity, that ultimately challenged the cult of the individual so prevalent in the art world. Returning to this mode of production in a new form, I was able to integrate these lessons of the past using collective practice as a basis for a collaborative practice, but with a different intention — to incorporate the viewer as an actor, not only through an immersive process, but through implication in an attempt to collapse the distinction between viewer and maker.

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[5] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 6.

While it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the array of questions that emerge from the history and theory of collaborative practices, I do think it is important to briefly remark on how my shift to a full-time collaborative practice, what we might call a "conscious collaboration," has influenced my work. Having worked in film, however, what we now name "collaborative practice" is also a natural extension of a film crew, a cameraperson, or an editor, who come together to shape a work. It can be equally extended to studio assistants who execute (and contribute) to the work of their artist/boss. And while this latter form may be a more passive form of collaboration, what I do want to say about my project shifting from a singular to collaborative practice, is that while the project was my way of understanding and exposing what had happened in the landscape of my childhood, in later years, it demanded a larger participatory practice that could accommodate what had occurred — This wasn't simply one person's remembering, but an ethical investigation that required more than one's own subjectivity to formulate a response to that of a wider group, from collaborators to audiences. Essentially it required the creation of a pool of witnesses. Throughout the following text, I move between referring to work that has occurred singularly and in collaboration, representing the tensions between singular and collective authorship and a twenty-year history of production in different forms.

When Tamira and I travelled together to Palestine to work on several projects, including *What Isn't There*, our work together took an architectural turn. This is reflected in the film installation for *What Isn't There*, which recreates the space of a village through bounded walls. By placing the viewer inside the village, we attempt to recreate an experience much like our own, of being in a space that required contemplative viewing in 360°. It requires stillness rather than movement in order to engage with the surroundings and translate that place into a different space with all its attendant historical and political implications. The form aims to engage the viewer as an active participant; you are not just looking "over there" but are immersed in those very spaces yourself. This shift from passive viewing to one of engagement is the result of years of approaching the subject of the obliteration of Palestinian presence from different artistic angles. Over the years of considering how images function and my role in this documentation process, I transition from a personal history to a collective one, from understanding to responsibility. As I argue throughout the dissertation, the images that constitute *What Isn't There* are not illustrations of historical wrongs, but rather, objects meant to stimulate ethical, political, and philosophical discourse. And like many of the discourses that fail to right human wrongs, these images similarly encounter failure—the failure to represent Palestine and the trauma of the *Nakba*. Instead, they function as an attempt to imagine the unimaginable.[6]

And yet, I am working from the premise that Palestine cannot be imaged—but, which Palestine? 1967 Palestine, understood as the West Bank? Or 1948 Palestine, that was completely lost in Israel's "War of Independence?" Perhaps the Palestine of the British Mandate from 1917 to 1948, or Ottoman Palestine which lasted for hundreds of years wherein Palestinians had relative autonomy? Is it the Palestine of maps drawn and redrawn by various organizations, armies, governments, UN special committees, NGO's, activist groups, or religious groups that place Jerusalem and Al Aqsa Mosque at the center? Palestine exists in the imagination differently for many, and for some—that is, for various Israeli settler groups and certain Israeli government parties—not at all. Again, it is the politics of erasure that I have endeavored to remap and redress in this work.

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[6] I am indebted to Sharon Sliwinski for this particular formulation of understanding images in relation to human rights. She shows in her recent book *Human Rights in Camera* (2011) how we have come to experience human rights through aesthetic experience.

Most attempts to image Palestine take a hybrid form of what is not there and what is wished for, the outcomes of which reflect a harsh reality born of a series of violent colonial projects. The aftermath of this violence and its absence from the annals of history are reconstructed here to address these gaps, resulting in another kind of failure: the failure of images in general, and photography in particular. As I will demonstrate in theory, and in my own practice, the contingent nature of photographs and their very instability help navigate the terrain of loss and create the possibility of mapping absence in a cogent way that addresses the politics of place through its very absence—or, to put it another way, this work "put(s) forward the unpresentable in presentation itself."[7] The relationship that is established between the viewer, the spectator, and the subject, placing aesthetics within the world of/as social practice rather than outside of it, signals a first step towards imaging Palestine and its forgotten landscapes. This is seen most explicitly in my reading of Ariella Azoulay's Citizenry of Photography alongside Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida and Jacques Rancière's Emancipated Spectator, wherein the traditional boundaries of the subject, spectator, and makers are disassembled.

The chapters of this dissertation, like the installation itself, are meant to connect the reader to the landscape. Each chapter begins with a story that takes place in the landscape—in a village and the occurrences that happen there. But I add this: over the years, a miscellany of animals materialized in almost every village location I visited, from which I began to form a sort of bestiary. I have appended an animal tale to the village stories as a way of expanding on both the experience of these sojourns and further exposing the role of flora and fauna in a Zionist landscape.

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[7] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 81.

Animal compendiums date back to the Ancient world and were early forms of natural histories. In the Middle Ages, animal stories were combined with morality tales, giving rise to bestiaries that took the form of illuminated manuscripts.[8] Each and every animal had an assigned place and therefore meaning. Many we still use: lions as symbols of pride, or pelicans, who supposedly in times of famine pecked at their own breasts, and fed their children on their blood—this being a symbol of both maternal sacrifice, and also, more specifically, an emblem of Christ crucified. Animals, especially in the wild, stir a curiosity in us often provoking the early child explorer. As we observe their connection to the landscape and to nature, they move us to perceive our own location in our surroundings. Recognizing something of ourselves in them, animals allow us just enough distance to process that empathic moment. Bestiaries elicit man's ability to traverse real and imaginary worlds, from animal archetype to mythology. Somewhere between those two points, animals are also subject to totalizing ideologies. Growing up in Israel, one does not just meet a Nubian Ibex[9] in the wild without knowing its biblical connection to the land (and hence the Jewish patrimonial claim to that very land). Indeed our subjectivity is constituted by discursive practices and power-relations. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas would argue that we are also constituted by an Other; we recognize ourselves through the Other in a precognitive, affective experience. The bestiary that finds itself in the text that follows, together with my travelogue and theoretical considerations about photography, means to locate you, the reader, in the world of an Other that is your own.

I have taken my cues from artists working in similar veins who have contended with the limits of representation and all that that entails. I am indebted to my mentor, Martha Rosler, whose work has been a lifelong investigation of how images function, specifically photographs, and her attempts to mirror the world back to us in ways we refuse to see. Her early work on the US war in Vietnam *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, and her analysis of "liberal documentary photography" and its limitations,[10] provided me with the ongoing courage to similarly face Israel's injustice towards Palestine. Her investigations of the limits of visuality, by laying bare the structures of images, have challenged my own thinking about what images can do. The work of Walid Ra'ad and the Atlas Group in its investigations and formulations of imaginary archives, as well as his articulations of Arab identity, were seminal in forming my own practice as it relates to creating an archive of images of places that do not exist.[11] Emily Jacir's *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied in Israel in 1948,* was the first time I had seen an art work specifically on the villages that I had been photographing for so long that convinced me to not only continue with my project, but how important it was to have a Jewish voice (and one from the vantage point of living in and amongst Israelis) invested in this same endeavor. And while this list of acknowledgments is by no means exhaustive, the final artist I wish to mention whose work has profoundly influenced my own, is that of Willie Doherty, the Irish media artist who takes up deeply similar positions in landscape photography and film installation concerned with The Troubles. His work explores the many meanings that single images can have, what they say and don't say through a poetic stillness. For me, Doherty seeks the same position I strive for in my own work, political landscapes that eschew spectacularization and didacticism but mange to convey the many layers of meaning embedded in the land.

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[8] An example of a popular bestiary in the twelfth century would be the Aberdeen Bestiary, one of fifty remaining such compendiums.

[9] *Ya'el* in Hebrew.

As a result of negotiating this landscape for twenty years, I have encountered different versions of history and events that have taken place therein. Each village has a uniqueness of its own, a sensibility that emerges within the overarching premise of imaging Palestine. As these are places that have been battered by different histories over the years, they have therefore taken on new forms. As a result, I have taken a particular narrative approach to elucidate those particularities and to give them a presence that otherwise may not emerge. But I must restate that despite all attempts to fix an image of Palestine, there is no such claim in these glimpses that I offer.

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[10] Martha Rosler, *3 works* (Halifax: NSCAD Press, 2006). In Rosler's now infamous 1981 essay, "In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)" she criticizes social documentary photography and its intentions and prominence in museums, examining its motivations and connections to Liberal welfare state policies rather than social change. Her further investigations into the image encompassed a deconstruction of how they circulate and transmit meaning, and how to re-insert political narratives that photographic modernism worked so hard to cover-up.

[11] In some ways these places no longer exist but in this instance I am creating an archive of places that do not exist. In other words, they don't refer to the past but rather constitute a series of places that are fictions; in one sense they are not what I say they are.

When I began this project, there were few references to the *Nakba*, certainly none in Israeli society or my Zionist world. And while there were countless UN and Red Cross reports buried in archives documenting the Palestinian Catastrophe of 1948, few came to light. Oral histories formed the large part of the stories of villagers who were expelled, while some publications that told the larger story exclusively in Arabic, were more internal histories. Today, there are several books, many articles, MA and PhD theses, web projects, films and reconstructed atlases that provide some hope that the Palestinian narrative will and continue to be told, and that Israelis, some of whom have begun to uncover this history themselves, will begin to listen and reconcile.

The authors who have elaborated on the history of these villages have informed and inspired my own work and I am indebted to their tireless research and documentation. Salman Abu Sitta, a Palestinian civil engineer, a researcher and writer published *The Palestinian Nakba of 1948* (2000), registering the depopulated villages of 1948 and *The Return Journey* (2007), an atlas that locates the villages in current day Israeli maps. Noga Kadman an independent Israeli researcher and writer published *Erased from Space and Consciousness* (2008), the first Hebrew language book that marks the locations of the villages that vanished and documents that which took their place. Zochrot, an Israeli NGO started by activists against the Occupation, has interviewed and published numerous pamphlets recording the stories of villagers and refugees who are still alive, as well as a book dedicated to these oral histories. Zochrot, which means "remembrances," has to this day taken hundreds of Israelis around the country to the locations of various villages to educate and pay homage to this memory. They have attempted over many years to post signs with the names of the villages, most often only to have them torn down time and again by other Israelis not wanting the past to enter their present. One of the most comprehensive works is *All That Remains*, a book I unearthed in a small English language bookshop in East Jerusalem. It was 1993, and I had just begun documenting the villages two years prior to the publication of this tome by Walid Khalidi.

Until this time, I had wandered into the field with two sets of maps: A contemporary Israeli topographical hiking map that I had learned to read in Israeli high school (a course preparing us all for our mandatory army service soon to come), and a set of pre-1948 Palestinian maps that indeed marked the villages, but had little correspondence to the new Israeli landscape of highways, forests, new towns and suburban sprawl. I methodically placed photocopied transparent versions of the old Palestinian maps on top of my Israeli hiking maps and set-off for the day in search of a village. I cannot estimate the times I found nothing, but the project began in earnest as an examination of *what wasn't there*, what could not be imaged. Two years later, after many wonderful rambles but perhaps fewer yields than hoped for, I discovered Khalidi's book, which uncovered each and every village, providing snapshots of their populations, boundaries, agricultural yields and specifics on their depopulation in 1947-48. The locations of the villages were marked by an obscure system known as PGR=Palestine Grid Reference. Based on longitude and latitude, it has its own references, (six digits, a, b, c and x, y, z) for Northing and Easting[12], the Cartesian coordinates used for measuring distances. Or what I like to think of as the x/y axes of the geographic coordinates that bring us to familiar points without knowing; a wayfinding of sorts.[13] While explorers used the term Northing in the 19th century as way to mark their progress towards the North Pole, here I imagine I am Easting — discovering the unknown in the familiar, informed by a compass and the likes of Edward Said. "Villages like dots erased from their letters."[14]

I am indebted to all these works and hope that my work contributes in some small way to the ongoing scholarship on this subject, but mostly I wish it to be seen as a gesture of reparation to those who's lives were destroyed, who were displaced by my family, and who continue to live elsewhere, not in their homes.

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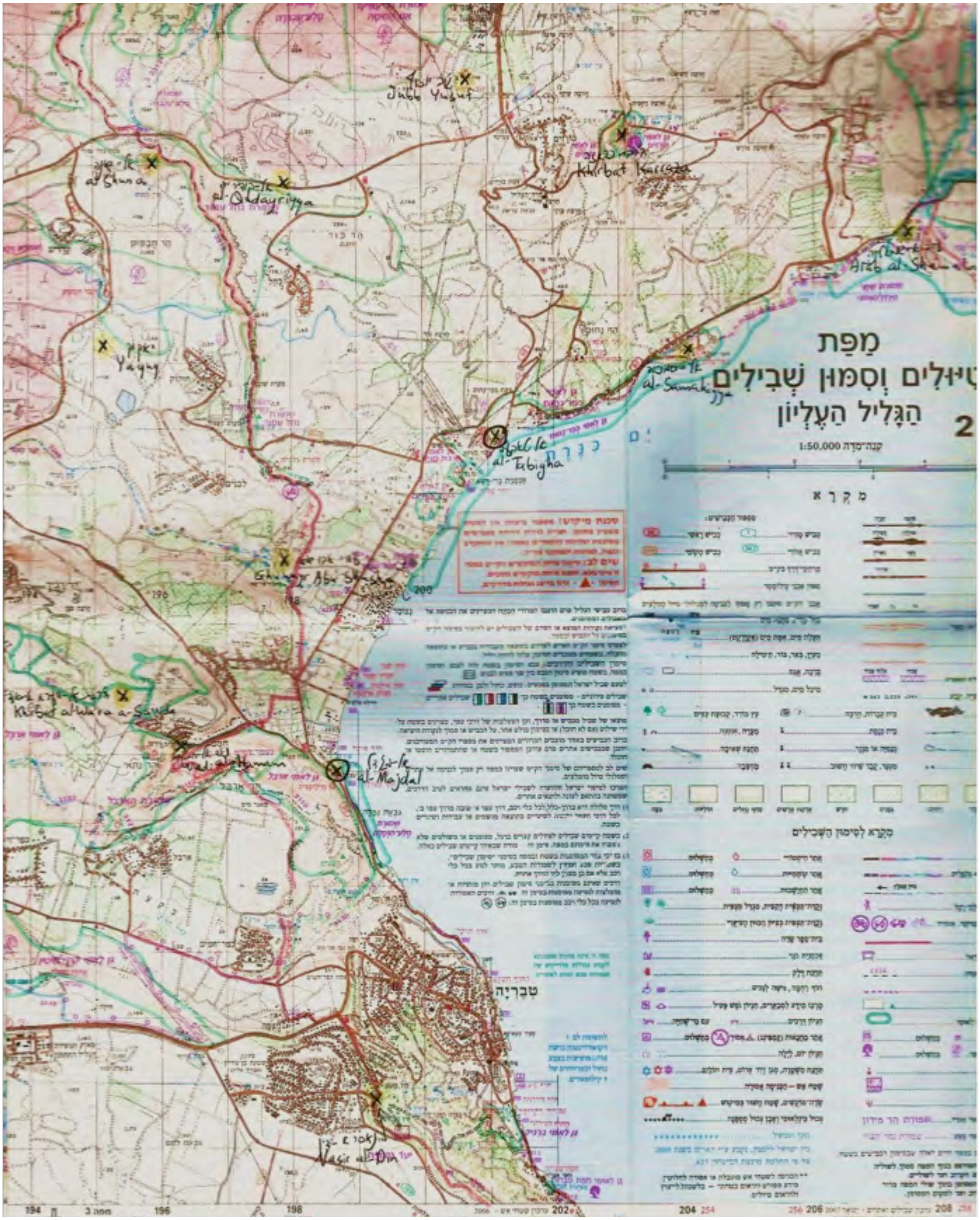
[12] http://www.plands.org/books/book%2002-06.html#tar1

[13] Historically, wayfinding was an informal mapping and method used by travelers in finding unknown, unrecognized or mislabeled routes.

[14] Mahmoud Darwish, "Not As A Foreign Tourist Does," in *The Butterfly's Burden*, trans, Fady Joudah (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2007).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al-Shuna
al-Qudayriyya
Khirbet Karraza
Arab al-Sham
Yaquq
al-Samaki
al-Tabigha
Ghuwayr Abi Shusha
Khirbet al-Wa'ra a-Sawda
Wadi al-Hamam
al-Majdal
Nasir al-Din
מַפַּת
טִיּוּלִים וְסִמּוּן שְׁבִילִים
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Illus.12 My Israeli hikinig map depicting villages drawn-in by hand and marked with an X.

CHAPTER 1

---Tiyul---

Dorcus Gazelle (Gazella Dorcus)

Illus.13

"Watch for the rubble, it's not quite what it used to be. Watch your hoof doesn't get stuck in that ditch!" The gazelle's tone was nervous. Her unwitting partner simply wanted to smell the breeze, eat the new spring grass and move on. No time for all this tumult. They had been down this road over many years and, truthfully, not much had changed. He glanced backward, then turned and dolefully continued down the dusty path.

> The Tiyul's[15] purposes are to mold the character of our youth and to make it an organic, inseparable part of the landscape of the homeland; to plant in its heart and soul, and to inscribe in its flesh and sinews the healthy feeling of deep-rooted, unservable, valiant communion with the land, with its stones, its waterways, its vegetation and with its entire history […][16]

My first contact with the Israeli landscape was as a child, hiking with schools and scouts, finding the rhythms of my newly adopted homeland. It was here I discovered my love of walking, nature, and its host of animal life. I embraced the writings of Gerald Durrell, a naturalist, conservationist, and author who grew-up in colonial India and Corfu, Greece with his mother and siblings, including his famous brother, author Lawrence Durrell. Like the younger Gerald, I found my place outside of conflict by tucking myself into the wondrous landscapes that were known to me as "the Land of

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[15] *Tiyul* – Hebrew for a hike/hiking.

[16] Zev Vilnay, *The Tiyul and It's Educational Value* (Jerusalem: Sheaalim, 1953)

Israel." I relished the colours and lines of my topographical hiking maps, pulling on my desert boots and donning my hat with enthusiasm. I remember my nose being close to the ground much of the time, "studying" the behaviour of ants, beetles, or whatever might have crossed my path; always the child who brought home the wounded bird, creating for it a nest made from shredded rags and newspaper tucked inside of a Tupperware container.

The delicate Dorcus Gazelle of the Negev desert was a gatekeeper in my transition from a Canadian landscape into a Middle Eastern one. I was not yet aware that the landscape I had entered was a political one. Landscape and nature were instead my escape from a traumatic uprooting and displacement. With the shock of the new, I took refuge in the flora and fauna of this new, gentle palette. Jerusalem was steeped in golden browns with a particularly unique red earth known as *hamra—hamra*, from the Arabic word for the colour red. When my grandmother died in her home in Jerusalem in 1994, I took some of this earth from her garden to remind me both of her English love of gardening and the land I grew up in. By this time however, I understood *hamra* in political terms: the red earth of my childhood, now steeped in conflict and injustice.

Now, decades later, I walk in these same places, but with less enthusiasm. I still cannot help being taken with the breathtaking and diverse landscapes, but in every place that I marvel, I hear the Palestinian Poet Laureate Mahmoud Darwish's words: "Unfortunately, it was paradise."[17]

The photograph I hold in my hand is so blurred I can hardly make it out: With their backs to the camera, long lines of youth march into the distance towards a ruined structure on a hill beyond. This black and white photograph from the Palmach archives has no date and only the following information:[18]

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17 Mahmud Darwish, Munir Akash, and Carolyn Forché. *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

18 The Palmach was an elite fighting force established in 1941, by the Haganah (the Jewish fighting forces during the British Mandate in Palestine). The Palmach was responsible for Plan D (in Hebrew Plan Dalet), the primary purpose of which was to demolish and empty Palestinian villages of their residents so they would not return.

Illus.14

> "Knowing the land" was assigned an important place among the educational components of the Palmach. It was seen as a means of strengthening the relationship between the fighter and his land, and in turn, binding the nation to him.[19]

With walking sticks in hand and hats for the uncompromising sun, they march off in search of their land that still has the name Palestine. My innocent wanderings on school and scouting trips were the function of a Zionist ideology that established *tiyul* as a foundational aspect of a nationalist education.[20] Since the beginnings of Jewish settlement (*Yishuv*) in Palestine in the early 1900s, there was an implicit understanding that in order to 'know the land' (*yediath ha'aretz*), one had to journey into it, walk through the landscape and create a connection. The youth movements at the forefront of Zionism came to Palestine with socialist values and revolutionary nation building in mind. They established the country's first *Kibbutzim* (collective farms) coupled with the working of the land; sinking roots into it in order to create a sense of belonging.[21] *Tiyul* was not only a way to become familiar with the land but, as several scholars have noted, was a ritualized "knowing," an act that constituted an end in itself, where the walking, climbing, hiking, consecrated the land: "By the act of hiking, people strengthen their feeling of the legitimacy of their claim to the land and also establish the basis for national identity. One may therefore claim territory is identity."[22]

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[19] Translated from the original Hebrew on the Palmach Website: http://info.palmach.org.il/show_item.asp?levelId=38612&itemId=5499&itemType=0

[20] Shaul Kelner, Tours that bind: diaspora, pilgrimage, and Israeli birthright tourism (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 27.

[21] These socialist values were in contradistinction to a Diasporic Jewry that was predominantly urban and bourgeois.

This zeal for belonging through the land itself was expressed equally by artists and writers who immigrated to Palestine. Painters such as those associated with the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in the early twentieth century set out to create a naturalist-Zionist art.[23] And while many were European with origins in Romanticism and Orientalist schools, they considered the land they were painting a canvass for "renewing the nation as of old."[24] Modernist writers and painters of the 1920s, who emigrated from Europe, broke with these traditions, though were nonetheless connected by the same idealism. According to Ygal Zalmona, a past curator of Israeli art at the Israel Museum:

> The sense of mastering nature in the 1920s was so keen that one of the daily papers issued a call to artists to follow in the footsteps of the pioneers and "conquer the country by painting it." […] The Israeli painter is neither concerned with a realistic depiction of his natural surroundings, nor interested in using the landscape for the purposes of a conceptual demonstration. The involvement in the landscape is supported by the basic desire of the Israeli individual for rootedness.[25]

Various versions of "the Arab"[26] emerged in Zionist landscape painting over the years, vacillating between an Orientalist perspective and a land with no trace of inhabitants. Both forms represented the colonial disposition toward the Palestinian as "Constitutive Other."

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22 Orit Ben-David. "Tiyul (Hike) as and Act of Consecration of Space" in *Grasping Land, Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*, eds. Eyal Ben-Ari and Yorim Bilu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 117.

23 Ygal Zalmona, *Landscapes in Israeli Art* (Jerusalem: DK. Graubart Publishers, 1984), 9.

24 As quoted in Zalmona 9.

25 Ibid 12, 22

26 I will shift between Arab and Palestinian from time to time in the text as the distinction refers to how Palestinians have been labeled and self-proclaim in varying contexts. Palestinian is mostly reserved for those living in the West Bank and Gaza, in what is understood since Oslo to be the future home of Palestine. Palestinians living in the 1948 borders of Israel have been referred to by Israelis as "Arabs" since the beginning of Zionist immigrations. Since the 1948 war, Israel has referred to the Palestinians within the 1948 borders as Israeli Arabs. Most Palestinians living in Israel call themselves Israeli Arabs although more recently, many have begun to adopt the more political moniker of Palestinian. I have tried to keep true to the context of how Palestinians refer to themselves throughout the text.

---The Arab (not) in the Landscape---

It was November 2008, and I was now living in Ramallah with my partner, Tamira. We had signed up with a walking group composed of Palestinians and expats that each week went on a different hike in the Palestinian countryside. Our first hike was to Wadi Qelt, a walk I had done with my Israeli classmates in 1978. It was a beautiful meander along an ancient aqueduct through the Judean desert near Jericho, along the 1967 border. The main attraction was St. George's Monastery, a series of dwellings hanging on the edges of cliffs built by monks in fourth century CE.

The group met at 6:00am at Al Manara, the main square in Ramallah. The first person I recognized was Raja Shehada, a Palestinian writer and lawyer who had established the first human rights legal organization called Al Haq. I had been an avid reader of Shehada's writing and had literally just finished his most recent book at the time, *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*. Shehada and his wife Peggy were huge walking enthusiasts and here they were on my first "Palestinian" walk.

Shehada writes of wild cyclamen and thyme, of encounters with gazelles and donkeys, and of memories of a landscape that is now mostly gone, overrun with settlements and barriers that abruptly interrupt his walks. For Shehada, there is no separation between nature, the landscape, and politics. His writing attempts to oppose the Zionist version of *Yediath Ha'aretz* with a Palestinian counter-narrative[27] that is not just a glance at the past, and all that has vanished, but that contextualizes the present landscape and all that is now inscribed upon it. He notes that the very figure that conjured a biblical landscape for the waves of Jewish settlers—the Arab—was the same one now being erased from the land. Shehada's observations firmly echo Edward Said's *Orientalism* wherein the archetype of the Arab (versus the particularity of the Palestinian, in this case) is set against the West but simultaneously the "Orient" as a concept defined by the West revealing the structures of colonizer and colonized.

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[27] Ian Black. "Lost Landscapes." Theguardian.com., 23 Aug. 2007. Web. 05 Feb. 2014

The irony of returning to the same landscape exactly thirty years later and walking that same path with a different consciousness did not escape me, nor did the restrictions we encountered on our walk. I did not recognize the entrance to the well-known Wadi Qelt path when we arrived, for a simple reason: Palestinians were no longer allowed to use the common entrance; we had to circle back, clamber over a steep mountain and round a corner—a twenty minute detour—only to return within fifty meters of the "Israeli" entrance. It was a grim reminder that the conflict in Israel and Palestine is one of land: who is entitled to it; how has it been claimed; how can it be crossed?

Israel has long associated itself with the land as its place, its protection, its security, its ancestry, its prophesied patrimony. Zionism is associated first and foremost with the land and one's national identity inextricably connected to that land, hence creating a space, rather than a location. It was impossible to live in Israel in this time of nation building without being brought into that frame. Israel was not only a country but was a complete ideology—the consecrated land of Israel.[28] One cannot walk in this land without encountering this omnipresent and burdened sense of place.

For artist Robert Smithson, who photographed the banal landscapes of Passaic New Jersey, comparing the industrial landscapes to monumental ruins, New Jersey was both a place and a state of mind; it represented "his reality."[29] Similarly, Israel was the place I was raised in and in many respects, knew best. My first efforts in photographing the landscape were about discovering my reality anew.

When I set out to document the first villages I had heard about, I was clueless as to what I was looking for, or even at. I was walking in a landscape that was deeply familiar yet with the beginnings of a new understanding. I was searching for traces of something that eluded me. I literally took photos of nothing hoping instead it was something. I can best describe these photographs as non-intrusive. At the time, I had not thought to disrupt the space, but rather timidly attempted only to find the trace and to capture it. The disruption that did exist however was at the level of discovery. Walking in the landscape, knowing it as one thing and meaning to relearn and reveal it as another, was the beginning of a journey that was the first step to a coming to consciousness. It was only through this wandering in the landscape and not knowing, could I begin to understand what was there that I had never seen.

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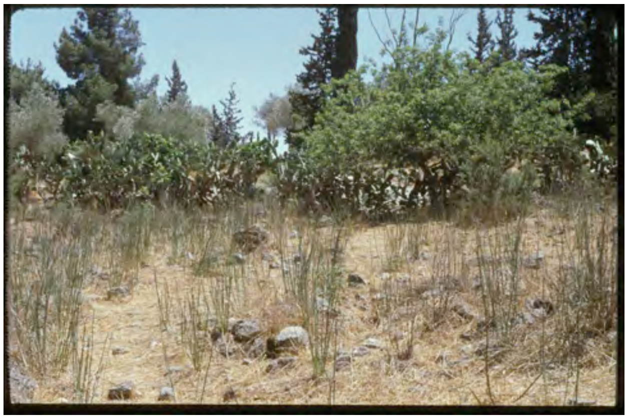
[28] As Zionism emerged at the height of the colonial enterprise, it also came into being at a time of heightened anti-Semitism in which Jews were often designated without place. Take for example the Pale of Settlement to which Jews were designated to live in under Imperial Russia (1790s–1917). Jews were barred from living anywhere outside of the Pale and oftentimes within it there were restrictions as well. The Holocaust being the second period of massive emigration was also predicated on the rubble that was Europe and of course the extermination which indeed eradicated any trace of space.

[29] Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xx.

Walter Benjamin theorized that distraction could lead to revelation. The dialectic of distractedness that he elucidates in the *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, is both a function and product of the technology that subsumes us. As a result, we see in and through a state of distraction, which, for Benjamin is a fundamental aspect of modern consciousness. While for him the camera loaned itself to a kind of distractedness in its errant frames (both by the viewer and the operator), it is within these frames he argued that we might find something we had not seen before. My walking and wandering in the Israeli landscape, reproducing images of what was not yet in my consciousness produced this very apperception[30].

This is the village of Lubye. Can you see it?



Illus.15 Lubye, What Isn't There, 35mm slide, 1993.

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[30] While perception refers to a coming to consciousness through the senses, Kant describes apperception as the unification of perception to the self.

---Lubye: Forest for the Trees---

(Nikon F3)

Cow (Bos Primigenius)

How many horses have they got in this town? How many young men? Nobody knows! They haven't bothered to count 'em! That's peace for you! I've been in places where they haven't had a war for seventy years and you know what? The people haven't even been given names! They don't know who they are! It takes a war to fix that. In a war, everyone registers, everyone's name's on a list. Their shoes are stacked, their corn's in the bag, you count it all up – cattle, men, et cetera – and you take it away![31]

Illus.16

Lubya (PGR: 190242) was the first village I visited. It was 1993, and I was taken there by Nahla, a psychologist from Nazareth who worked with children affected by war and violence. Nahla told me about her family's village now situated in the Lavie Forest. "It was a beautiful village, high on a hill, 11 kilometers from the shores of the Galilee." She put me in a taxi driven by her cousin. Twenty minutes later he pulled up next to the entrance to the Lavie Forest and told me "Go inside; go inside and see." I wasn't sure what I was supposed to see. There was a thick growth of pine trees, a children's playground, and what appeared to be a path. There was nothing I could see and I wasn't sure what to do. I snapped a few rolls of film of stray rocks and errant pathways with my Nikon analog camera[32] and stood in the middle of the forest, waiting for what felt like a reasonable amount of time to pass before I could go back to the taxi and face Nahla's cousin. He asked if I "saw" and I nodded, gravely. I couldn't possibly tell him I didn't see anything, I couldn't admit to not understanding enough to see what couldn't be seen.

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[31] Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 24.

[32] My Nikon F3 35mm analog camera was my first "serious" camera that distinguished me from "amateurs" or so went the marketing pitch stemming from Nikon's image as the photojournalist's camera with its integrated motor drive and NASA testing.

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ILFORD XP2 SUPER
ILFORD XP2 SUPER

Illus.17 Lubye, Contact Sheet, 1994

The Jewish National Fund (JNF or its Hebrew abbreviations, KKL) was established in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, with the express purpose of buying land for Jewish settlement. In 1908, the JNF planted its first trees, a memorial to Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism. The trees were planted by residents of a nearby village called Khulda (PGR: 141136), next to the Jewish settlement of Hulda. In Operation Nachshon,[33] Jewish military forces destroyed (Arab) Khulda[34] and cleared other villages from Ramla to Jerusalem.

By 1948, the JNF owned close to 250,000 acres (or 936,000 *dunam*) of land in Palestine and by 2010, 240 million trees had been planted.[35] Early Zionists understood that planting trees in Palestine served several purposes: they represented an ownership (and cultivation) of the land; they altered the landscape to create a new and distinct presence recalling Eastern Europe;[36] and perhaps most significantly, trees stood in for human presence—symbolically, every tree was meant to represent a Jew who would soon be returning to the homeland. The symbolism of trees, their anthropomorphism, and their value *as people* came to be the single-most successful Zionist enterprise in the building of the nation.

My great grandfather is in the back row wearing a hat that is more like a fedora. Identifying the hat is how my grandmother instructs me to recognize her father, how to distinguish him from the rest of the crowd. This is a photo of the attendees at the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, in 1903.

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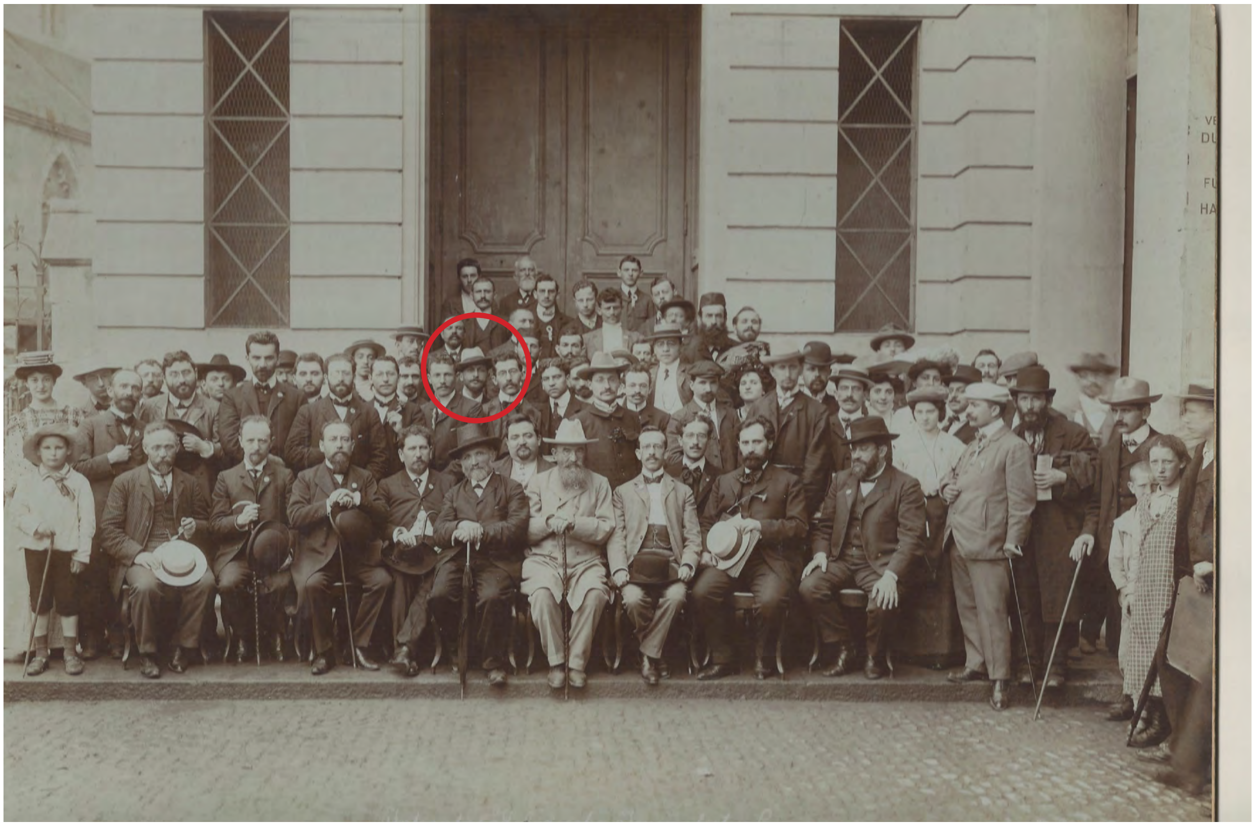
[33] Operation Nachshon's purpose was to "break the siege of Jerusalem." It was the first operation as part of Plan Dalet, the purpose of which was to clear areas of Arab (Palestinian) inhabitation to make way for Jewish settlement.

[34] Note that the Hebrew and Arabic transliterations are different from village to village.

[35] http://www.jnf.org/work-we-do/our-projects/forestry-ecology/ n.p. n.d. Web 1 April, 2013.

[36] The trees being planted were not native species and in part were meant to help settle the second wave of settlers (the Second Yishuv) who were immigrants escaping a set of new anti-Semitic laws enacted in Poland, hence urban and not revolutionary. This wave of settlers had a difficult time adjusting to this new strange land with unfamiliar landscapes and customs. As a result, a large percentage of these settlers eventually left Palestine.



Illus.18 Isaac Danziger, Sixth Zionist Congress Basel, 1903

This is the year the JNF purchased their first parcel of land in Hadera, a swampy, marsh-like area approximately forty kilometers south of Haifa, along the coast. While the amount of acreage purchased varies from fifty to 800 in the JNF's own historical accounts, its significance lies in its being the first acquisition of land. Much of the purchased land would only be populated over time; hence, in order to concretize ownership, and in keeping with customs of the day, trees were planted on the acquired lands. We speak of "roots" to denote our heritage and of a "rootedness," likening ourselves to trees deeply implanted in the land, as a way of creating a connection of identity to place.[37] Legal scholar and political geographer, Irus Braverman contends that the JNF's planting of trees was a means of occupying the land before there were enough human bodies and legal rights to do so; they served as "proxy immigrants."[38] Each planted tree came to represent a diasporic Jew and their ownership of the land. Upon Braverman's birth, a certificate came to her parents depicting a tree that had been planted in her name by the JNF together with the municipal government of Jerusalem. Braverman notes that "While the practice of planting trees to celebrate birthdays is not uncommon, it is perhaps much less common as part of a national enterprise."[39] The certificate (and hence the tree itself) represents the Jewish body, the inextricable link between that body and the land (rooted and named) and the binding of the individual (Jew) to the collective (Nation).

The identification of individuals with trees, and hence place, was not particular to Zionism, but rather was embedded within a larger colonial practice. The British Mandate of Palestine, like other British colonial enterprises such as India, sectioned off areas of land into varying zones of regulation: forest reserves, agriculture, urban dwelling, etc. This regulation served as a way to appropriate lands within a legal framework.[40] Trees were protected under British law; hence, in the British Mandate of Palestine, once a tree had been planted on a parcel of land, it fell under a regulatory body. The British Mandate's forest ordinance of 1926 serves as the basis for current

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[37] Liisa Malkki. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1(1992): 24-44 (as cited in Braverman p. 72)

[38] Schama 5.

[39] Ibid 65.

[40] Irus Braverman, *Tree Wars: A Study of Natural Governance in Israel/Palestine and in Four North American Cities* (PhD Dissertation: University of Toronto, 2007), 42.

Israeli law.[41] This regulation of space in turn regulated the people in that space and reveals how landscape becomes not only a function of the backdrop "over there" but so too an ideological system: constructed, formal, aesthetic, ordered—a cultural image that structurally represents and symbolizes its surroundings.

Landscape in this case not only comes to represent a nation, metaphorically, but also as Benjamin would say, nature itself:

> Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.[42]

The pine trees that quickly covered hills where none existed, now, in a mimetic foreboding sign of the population to come, transformed the landscape, crowding the Palestinian out of the landscape. The Zionist narrative, similar to other colonial projects, depended on the erasure of Palestinian history which not only included the appropriation and transformation of land and property, but so too all aspects of their culture such as language (the changing of village names to Hebraicized versions), schools, libraries and theatres.

Twenty years later, I return to Lubya still tucked away in the Lavie Forest. I am now working in collaboration with Tamira on my film of the 418 Palestinian villages that no longer exist. We lodged at a B&B run by a gay couple who had left the city for the country. We were about fifteen kilometers outside of Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee. Our hosts informed us that the Lavie Forest was only a few kilometers away. We decided to go for a walk to see what I had not seen so many years ago. It was February and I savoured the dampness and the fields of colour; it was almond blossom season. Scattered everywhere were narcissus, Crown anemones, Corn Poppies, Turban Buttercups, Syrian Thistle and Persian Cyclamen. We walked along the side of the highway until we reached the entrance to the Lavie Forest. We wandered along a road that is now built through the forest, in order to see nothing, again. There was a newer playground, but it was fenced-in. There were some tents covering what looked like an archaeological dig, but the gate was locked. We could not see the remnants of a village and we weren't sure if this was the right place at all. The forest was dense with pine trees; it felt so dark and foreboding that when the bushes rustled loudly beside me, I jumped. I turned to find myself face to face with a very large cow, although she seemed hardly interested in us at all. Still, I was curious to know how a cow came to be in the middle of an Israeli state forest. Soon there were more of them, about ten in all, moving along the road. We decided to follow them and see where they were going. The cattle led us around for about an hour and just as we were about to give up our quest, we arrived at a clearing on top of a hill. There was rubble all around. There were no structures, but there were the remains of older roadways, and *sabra* (cacti) in and amongst the pine trees. An open area the size of a three soccer pitches stretched out in front of us, strewn with rubble. The cows had brought us to Lubya.

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[41] Ibid 52.

[42] Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 333.

As we walked out of the clearing of Lubya and the JNF Lavie Forest, we noticed a sign suggesting we had entered a South Africa Forest.[43] Over eighty such JNF forests have been planted where Palestinian villages once stood. The South African instance glared with irony. The Absentee Property Law (APL) that was enacted by Israel in 1950 was passed the same year as The Groups Areas Act in South Africa. The latter was a series of acts passed by the South African Parliament that forcibly removed non-whites from their homes and designated those areas for whites only. Non-whites were moved to remote areas, with no right to return. The Israeli APL stipulates that an absentee is anyone who, at the time of the 1948 war, was in any other part of the land of Israel that is outside the area of Israel (effectively this refers to the West Bank and Gaza). Hence Palestinians who were forced out of their villages—but who were told by Jewish forces that they would be able to return within weeks—had their assets transferred to the Custodian for Absentee Property from whom they were never allowed to reclaim or receive compensation. The Custodian for Absentee Property is allowed under Israeli law to rent or sell those properties, and hence the village properties were in fact sold to the JNF. So began the planting of forests in the place of villages.

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[43] There are in fact dozens of forests in Israel similarly named after a country or individuals who donated the funds, i.e. Canada Park, Norwegian Kings Forest, Coretta Scott King Forest, British Park, Kennedy Peace Forest, etc.

The Absentee Property Law also affected Palestinians who stayed within the 1948 borders who, despite being "in the land of Israel," were not permitted to return to their homes by military order; thus, their property was seized by the Custodian for Absentee Property. These Palestinian who still live in Israel and have Israeli citizenship are known as Present Absentees.[44]

I had been instructed early on that when looking for a Palestinian village, one simply needed to spot large growths of *sabras*. Prior to global positioning systems, these rudimentary methodologies also lead to interesting misidentifications. Generally however, it is fair to say that the *sabra* symbolizes the enduring absent presence of the villages that once populated the landscape. Palestinian writer and politician Azmi Bishara notes that

> The villages that no longer exist were forced out of public awareness, away from the signposts of memory. They received new names — of Jewish settlements — but traces (of their past) were left behind, *like the sabra bushes* or the stone fences or bricks from a demolished houses…[45] [emphasis added]

As I moved through the pine forest and amongst the *sabras*, that present absence was palpable; each pine tree representing a Jew who had planted a tree via the JNF, claiming their right to a land they had never stepped on, while each scattered *sabra*,[46] dwarfed amongst the pines, was the (Present) Absentee Palestinian, a ghost haunting the landscape.

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[44] "The Internally Displaced Palestinians in Israel," in *The Palestinians in Israel: Readings in History, Politics and Society*, eds. Nadeen N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbah-Khoury. Haifa: Mada Al Carmel, Arab Centre for Applied Research (2011): 27-46.

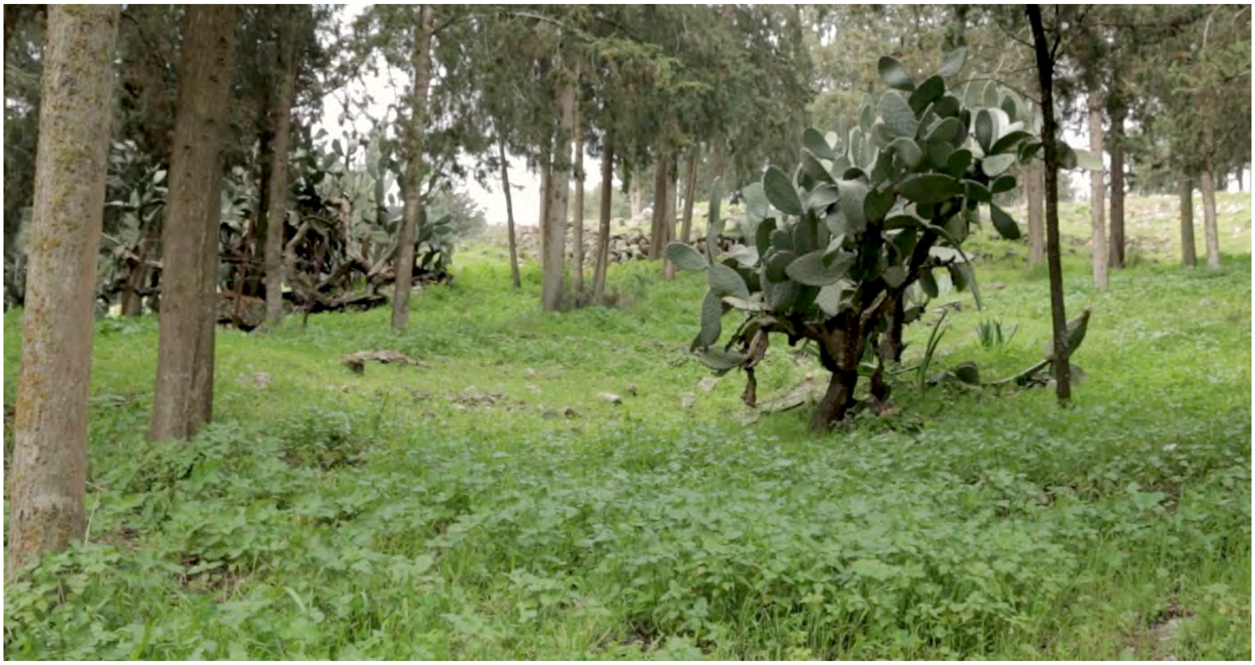
[45] Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), 267.

[46] The *sabra* is a cactus that bears the fruit commonly known as the "prickly pear." It is considered to be a defining feature of the Israeli and Palestinian landscape. When Zionists came to Israel and saw the ubiquity of this plant in the landscape, it came to represent for them the local indigenous land. In the 1930's they adopted it as a symbol for the "local Jew," one born in Palestine. As the expression became more popular, the cactus was then used to describe the native Jewish Israeli: "prickly on the outside but with a soft, sweet fruit on the inside." The Hebrew-English Oxford Dictionary defines the Hebrew word *sabar* (n.) as: "cactus; prickly pear; *Sabra* (native born Israeli)" and the Hebrew word sabari (adj.) as "characteristic of native born Israeli." I am indebted to Yael Ben Maor for these insights from her article "The Israeli Palestinian Conflict - The Botanical Version. Published and presented in a conference organized by ECLAS, European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools & University of Genova, Italy 2009.

CHAPTER 2

---Vanishing Images and the Auratic Presence---

Possessing a name means being in danger of disappearing. What has no name, either now or after the fact, cannot disappear without the disappearance of its disappearance.[47]



Illus.19 Qula, What Isn't There, 2009

The two sit incongruously next to one another; they are from different landscapes, facing each other like indisposed neighbours. The undisciplined *sabra* grows rhizomatically, its roots stretching forever sideways transforming as it needs to, versus the vertical pine imported from Syria, meant to mimic a European landscape and chosen for its ability to grow rapidly and populate. They haunt the landscape, reminding us of the people who are at once there and not there. My ongoing artistic interventions and documentation of these landscapes reveal a traumatic loss, but so too the repression of that loss. When I began this project in the early 1990s, it followed on the heels of a body of work concerned with the abject. Many artists at the time, especially in the queer community, were looking to identity and loss, and its subsequent trauma (in the context of AIDS and Reaganomics). This was a time that witnessed, as Hal Foster would later put it, "the return of the Real,"[48] which signified for him a moment in which artists were returning to questions of the actual—bodies, to the ethnographic—social sites. For my part, I was trying to come to grips with a disturbing colonial past buried in the landscapes of my childhood, engaging the troubled documentary form from a postcolonial perspective.

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[47] Adi Ophir, *The Order of Evils: Towards an Ontology of Morals* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 43.

According to Foster, artwork being produced in the 1990s was in fact predicated on trauma. Coinciding with its time, *What Isn't There* attempted to redress a traumatic history. Acknowledging the limitations and ultimate inadequacy of documents to address the complexity of an ongoing trauma, my work challenged the conventions of documentary[49] by stitching it together with personal history and memory. I proposed to investigate art's ability to grapple with how history is constructed, while addressing the public taboo of the Israeli landscape's relationship to a colonial past.

While my camera of choice at the time was the photojournalist's Nikon, the method was as far from the profession as possible. Employing wayfinding techniques of compasses, landmarks, and tracings of old and newer maps, I would set off in search of a village. My "arrival" was never quite certain. Much of the work at this phase of the project could best be described as process-based—the journeying was as important as the finding of the location itself. When I had indeed "arrived" somewhere that I designated as "the place." I would carefully begin to document everything in the vicinity: walls, errant pathways, rubble, *sabras*, and often simply "nothing." I designated these areas and my journeys to them as "villages." The results were banal photographs that documented my process. To this day, I cannot be sure that my first trip to Lubye actually found me in Lubye.

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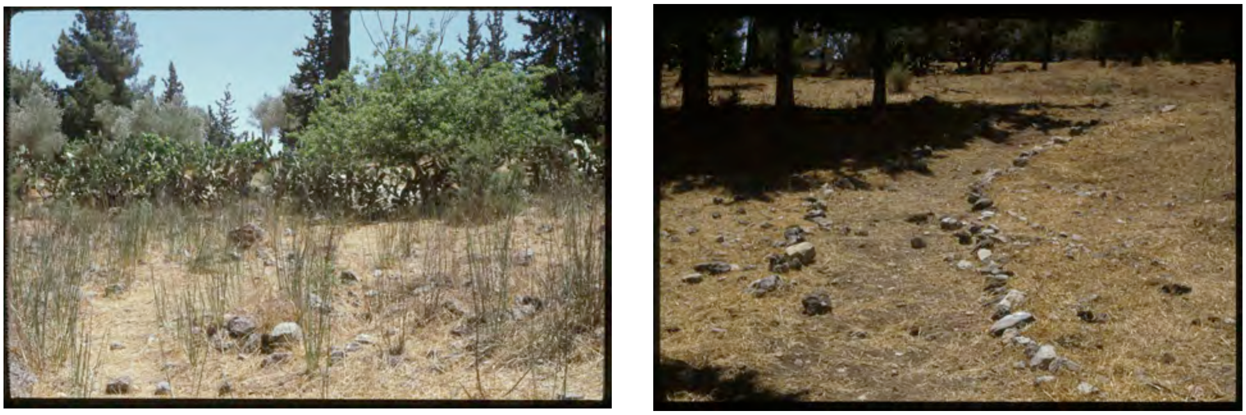
[48] Hal Foster.*The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996).

[49] The broadest net that I can cast here in regards to a definition of documentary would be "something which we can say has a basis in real events."



Illus.20 Lubye, What Isn't There, 1993

These landscapes, these "villages," contend with the story of the traumatic loss of home for Palestinians while Zionism defines them as "new uninhabited lands, planted and cultivated by its rightful owners." The knarred *sabras* that sit obscured amongst the pine forests in Lubye, now stand out as documented specters of the Palestinian uninhabitants.

Here, the ghost that haunts the landscape is colonialism. And, if we follow Derrida's formulation of spectrality,[50] the ghost that returns is in the form of a photograph; it has a presence, a stain, despite its supposed absence. Derrida's hauntology (playing on the word ontology when pronounced in French) suggests that there is a state of being that is more than Being, something more primal that destabilizes ontology through the rejoining of the self and its haunting other. The spectre, or the ghost, suggests that the past cannot be separated from the present, as it is always constituted through the deferral of the past, much like the rhizomatic *sabras*.

How does photography engage the spectral? Roland Barthes' last text, *Camera Lucida*, describes the photograph as a marker of the "return of the dead," in which being photographed was like undergoing “a micro-version of death: truly becoming a specter.”[51] In *What Isn’t There*, the photograph is the stain that always returns, marking an absent presence and functioning in the gap between absence and presence. The image of the *sabras* and the pine trees is a dialectical one, wherein past and present interact, creating a juxtaposition, and thus a fragmented image that unseats the smooth lines of history and wakes us from the dream-like state induced by Zionism’s narrative, recounting instead the story of catastrophe and dispossession. The specter of the colonial past returns in the form of the photograph raising the question of how one deals with a troubling history and a nation that refuses to acknowledge the existence of that history.

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[50] Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* written after the fall of the Berlin Wall, refers to the opening line in Marx and Engel's Communist Manifesto in which they refer to a ghost haunting Europe, the specter of Communism. Derrida, in his call for a New International in the face of Neoliberalism and deregulation, uses this reference to suggest that the ghost continues to return the more we ignore Marxism.

For Barthes, once the photograph has been taken, the subject becomes an object and in essence no longer exists—it is now only present in the image. “Disappearance is an occurrence,” says Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir, “that by its very nature is finitude.”[52] In photographing these villages that no longer exist, I am paying witness to their finitude—enacting the occurrence of their disappearance, negotiating this occurrence by shifting between still and moving images. In these moments, in these villages, in these photographic events, something that wasn’t there now appears, and something that was present disappears. This pointing and naming of something—“that was here, this is there, that place is that”—this indexing, accords a name to a place, puts it into being, thereby presiding over its appearance and disappearance.

Without a name, without representation, these occurrences cannot take place. When I am speaking of “What Isn’t There,” I am actually speaking about what is there. What has disappeared remains. Ophir refers to this as, “a gap between ‘was there’ (before) and ‘is not there’ (now).” And in this gap we catch a glimpse, an afterimage that is Palestine. The *sabras* that peek out from behind the pine trees, that you would not notice unless you were looking specifically for a mark, stand in for the villagers who once lived here, who planted these sabras and whose roots stretch invisibly underground touching their neighbour, lingering in the forests.

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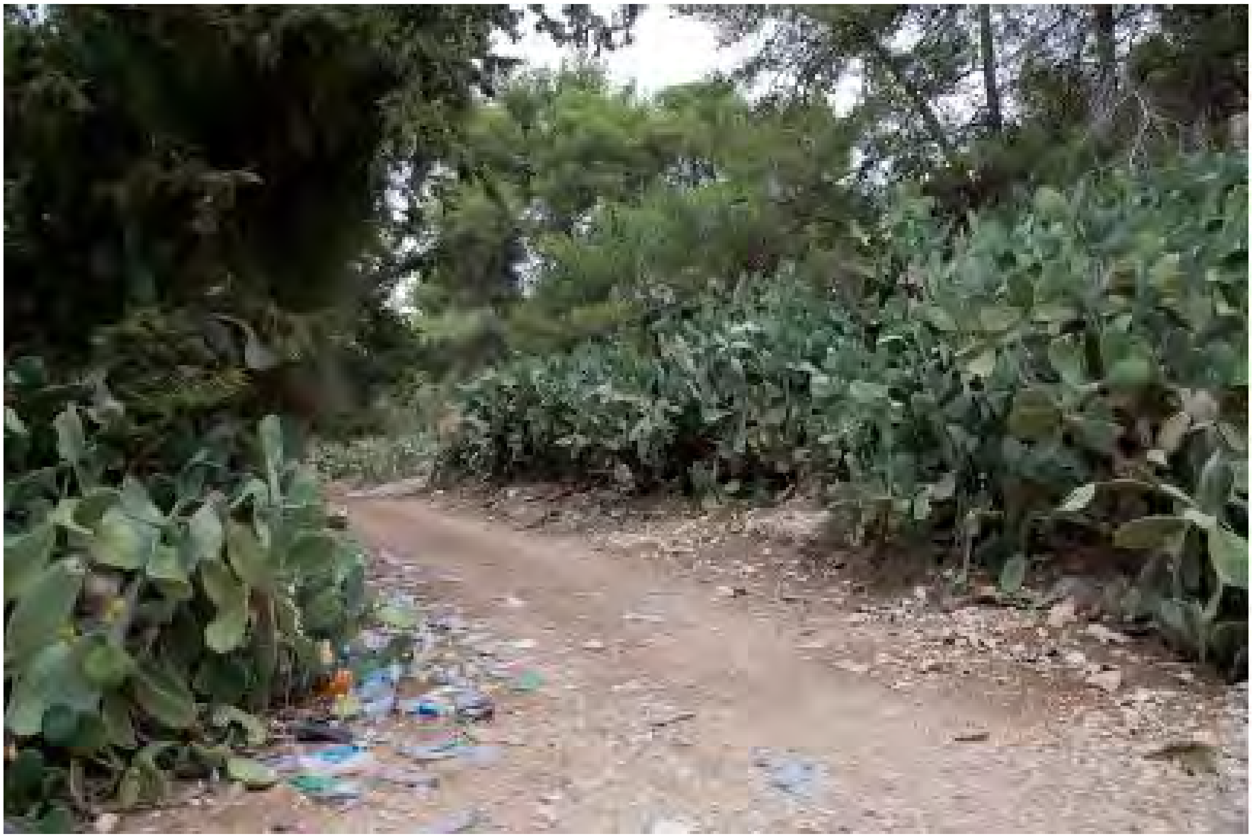
[51] Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 14.
[52] Ophir, Adi, *The Order of Evils: Toward an Ontology of Morals.* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 42.



Illus.21 Qula, What Isn't There, 2009

---*A Little History of Photography*---

In Walter Benjamin's "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" essay, he defines the aura as: "the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be."[53] The aura is most closely associated with the uniqueness of a work of art, and it is the quality in traditional art forms that allow us space for contemplation. Benjamin argues that with the introduction of technology and reproductive arts, the aura erodes and uniqueness is replaced with the mechanical copy. But in in his "Little History of Photography*,"* Benjamin's theory of the aura conflicts with this later and more politically motivated formulation. As Carolin Duttlinger's argues, in her essay "Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of Photography," Benjamin engages in personal and narrative readings of photographs resulting in a process of alienation and identification that have lasting implications for later readings on photoreception, drawing a line specifically to Barthes' personal and symptomatic readings in *Camera Lucida.*

According to Duttlinger, Benjamin's more nuanced version of the aura in *Little History of Photography* laid the groundwork for Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and photoreception in general. She argues that photography and aura do not sit in opposition to one another but are, rather, involved in a "complex process of interaction."[54] Through a closer examination of Benjamin's aura, she locates photography in the interstices of "historical testimony and autobiography, reflection and recollection."[55] Through several examples in *Little History of Photography*, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and *A Berlin Childhood,* Duttlinger shows us how Benjamin also looked at photographs as a reciprocal encounter that created an interplay between viewer and image, opening a space for an empathic encounter that shifts the more traditional meaning of the aura "as a fixed historical category towards its reconceptualization as a transhistorical model for interpersonal encounter."[56] The photographic aura thus performs the function of both alienation and familiarity, resulting in the narrativizing of images that we see later replayed in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. Barthes' descriptions of photographs take a decidedly personal turn in his cultural and semiotic reading of images, which in turn set the stage for photographs to fall somewhere between documentary and fiction.[57]

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[53] Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Henry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968) .

[54] Carolin Duttlinger,"Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of Photography" in *Poetics Today* 29:1 (2008): 79-101.

[55] Ibid 81.

Camera Lucida radically shifted the discourse in photo theory. Many found it hard to reconcile what appeared to be a modernist approach in search of an "ontology of photography" within Barthes' semiotic and postmodern vocabulary.[58] But rather than contradict political readings of photography as *Camera Lucida* has been castigated for, Bathes' personal mode of photoreception can be traced to the transhistorical aura that creates the triadic relationship of subject, photographer, and viewer that critical theorist Ariella Azoulay claims is necessary and inherent to photography as an enactment of civic duty.[59]

Camera Lucida remains a much-debated, deeply personal text that on its surface contrasts with his earlier, Marxist Structuralist and semiotic approaches to decoding images. This lyrical work seemingly shifts away from a position of a political analysis of photography, to a personal and totalizing theory of the photograph in which he claims he is searching for "photography as such"—its ontology. But in his exploration of the affective impact of the image, Barthes, rather than turning from a political analysis of images, opens up a whole new range of possibilities through a symptomatic reading of images that place photographs in an active and engaged role. It is this combination between an affective and political engagement with images that creates a third space for the reading of contemporary photography in which a different set of relations are at work in the reading of images. For Azoulay for example, our sanctioning of images as either "too political" or "too aesthetic" is a false relation that brackets off the space in which the photograph is taken. This space she argues is a political one in which reciprocal relations are at work. Furthermore, she posits that every image exists in the aesthetic plane and that politics are at work in every image. Azoulay thus calls upon us "to consider the 'political' to be an attribute of the work of art itself."[60]

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[56] Ibid 96.

[57] Duttlinger shows how this can be seen for example in Benjamin's description of a portrait of Kafka from his childhood wherein he narrativizes the author's life through looking at a photograph. This repeats in Barthes' Camera Lucida in which he describes a photograph of his mother in the famed "winter garden" image that the reader never sees. As a final example, Duttlinger points to Sebald's Austerlitz in which the author begins with an image of himself from childhood in which he cannot recognize himself.

[58] Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 18.

[59] I will return to this aspect of Azoulay's thought in Chapter 6.

In opposition to much of the critique which sees two distinct epochs of Barthes' writing on images, photo theorist Geoffrey Batchen describes *Camera Lucida* as a continuation of Barthes' earlier work on photography, and as a decidedly political history of photography that, like Duttlinger, he argues can be understood as an extension of Benjamin's *Little History of Photography.* Batchen demonstrates how Barthes' *studium* and *punctum* is a continuation of his earlier theoretical practices, in which he opposed terms of his own design, like *denotation* and *connotation,* (terms used to describe aspects of an image in *Mythologies),* or *jouissance* and *plaisir* in *The Pleasure of the Text*.[61] Barthes' *studium* is analogous to an anthropological understanding of an image—what we know collectively such as the description of a place, a context that is common, ie; a garden. The *punctum* is a personal relation to something in an image that can only be understood by those involved (an example being Barthes' mother's necklace in the much discussed, but never shown, photograph *Winter Garden* photo). Barthes' description of the *Punctum* is "this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."[62] I would argue that Barthes' *Studium* and *Punctum* and his textual/personal readings reflect an ongoing engagement with radical juxtaposition from which new meaning is meant to emerge. Geoffrey Batchen notes that in *Camera Lucida* Barthes selects "ordinary," sometimes banal photographs, that are "public forms of photography—rather than about other, more visually innovative genres."[63] Barthes is thus engaging photography in general rather than select images signifying a critical reading of history. According to Batchen, this coupled with his choice of (politically affected) photographers and subject matter,[64] produce politically inflected work that deals with "*a* history of photography rather than *the* history of photography" denoting the shift in power from canonical readings to personal, from author to reader.[65] Furthermore, Barthes seems less interested in specific works as an avant-garde practice but rather focuses on photography as a whole. Batchen's point is that what makes *Camera Lucida* so contentious is Barthes' choice to not equate avant-garde works with political practice, and to suggest more radically that political practice lies in photography itself, as a medium:

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[60] Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography,* translated by Louise Bethlehem. (London: Verso, 20120, p 45

[61] Batchen 8.

[62] Barthes 26.

[63] Geoffrey Batchen, "Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography" in *The Meaning of Photography*, eds. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimpson (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2008), 80.

> Perhaps he recognized that a normative history that privileges avant-garde practice, even those practices that at some point contested the establishment of their own time, is still a normative history. It merely feeds an art-world economy for whom such "dead" avant-gardes are only so many commodities, intellectual and otherwise. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes seems to be interested in exploring the possibility of inventing an avant-garde form of history, not in providing yet another history of avant-garde pictures.[66]

For Barthes, the personal, the political, the fictional, and the autobiographical that inhabit Camera Lucida fuse in order to unseat photography from photographs and critical detachment. It is important to note that he situates the personal clearly in relation to C.S. Pierce's definition of the index: "…in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one whand, and with the senses of memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other. . . Psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity."[67]

This refusal to celebrate an avant-garde together with his Lacanian analysis of an encounter with the

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[64] Batchen clarifies that Barthes did not select random images (although Barthes makes it quite clear in his choice that the image itself per se as a masterpiece is of no interest to him), but rather each choice contains a political subtext in the selecting of either underrepresented African American photographers, images from the conflict in Nicaragua, or political assassins. The images do however maintain the feel of random personal choice and the everyday rather than iconic images which invite an aesthetic critical discourse in the service of that image.

[65] Ibid 81.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid 82, quoting C.S. Peirce from "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955) 107-8

Real,[68] forms the basis of Barthes' search for the ontology of photography, the oscillation between photograph and viewer, text and reader "collapses any sharp distinction between a referent and the psychological associations a viewer brings to it. In Pierce's theory of semiotics, in other words, [as in Barthes',] there is no real outside the activity of representation."[69] Barthes' *Camera Lucida* in effect collapses all binaries, even his own (*punctum/studium*), in order to yield a complex set of relations in which photography and representation function in both our consciousness and in the political sphere, one dependent on the other. In the face of the death of photography as such, like the owl of Minerva spreading its wings at dusk, at the moment when Barthes theorizes photography, the medium is in its demise. This implosion left a space in which to inscribe a new theory of the circulation of meaning and its attendant politics.

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[68] Again, while not in the scope of this paper, it is significant to note that Barthes looks to psychoanalytic philosophy (Freud and Lacan in particular) to explore the idea of trauma and loss as it can be read in photographs and in turn what the act of recognition produces in us. Lacan's Real is external to symbolization much the way Barthes' *punctum* cannot be seen but is something that jumps out, that pricks the viewer in a particular moment. For Barthes, one of the defining characteristics of photography is that it is an encounter with the Real, which is something that cannot be assimilated or subdued. When thinking about photography and how it (can) function, thinking outside of the symbolic is crucial when it comes to images of traumatic events.

[69] Ibid 83.

---Conceptual Photography---

Influenced by French structural and poststructural theory—and differing from their post-conceptualist peers who believed "that language was inextricably bound to ideology"[70]—post-conceptual artists Martha Rosler, Fred Lonidier, Allan Sekula, and Fred Steinmetz argued for a more engaged art practice that allowed the spectator to become more active in relation and response to the work. The political upheaval that was at the forefront of the social reality of these post-conceptual photographers was central to my attempts at unraveling the dynamics of the Middle East conflict. Despite the fact that conceptual art provided a political response in volatile times, it was not necessarily involved in active politics. Post-conceptual photographers were indeed responding to the call for political action, but were equally interested, as artists, in intervening in the plastic arts in order to test the limits of representation. Martha Rosler's early video intervention *Semiotics of the Kitchen* or Allan Sekula's *Aerospace Folktales* that resembles a "picture gallery" are two such examples. It was this very tension, however, between their artistic inquiry and their political intervention that distinguished them from their other post-conceptualist peers. As Alex Alberro states in his introduction to *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*,

> […] rather than stopping at an analysis of the system of representation itself, such works have a clear political subtext. For if the post-conceptual models of artistic practice that I outlined earlier question and deny the possibility of rational communication within the contemporary public sphere, the work of Lonidier, Rosler, Sekula and Steinmetz is characterized by an attempt to elicit dialogue, as much as political exchange, via redemption of critical, reflexive, activist modes of thought that combine theory and practice.[71]

What Alberro calls a "subtext," however, would better be described as an *Ur*-text,[72] the politics of which were sitting overtly on the surface of the work, emanating from a critique of the military industrial complex—from Vietnam protests in specific, to a feminist critique calling for an end to the discrimination of women, to most significantly, an overt examination of class in America. Not only did their work address these major issues of civil unrest of the late 60s and 70s, but it did so as a decidedly Marxist critique of contemporary American society. Think for example of Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967) in which she collages images of the horrors of the Vietnam War into advertising spreads from *Life* magazine, or *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974) which demonstrates the limits of both the visual and of language, but was nonetheless "an attempt to elicit a dialogue, as much as political change".[73]

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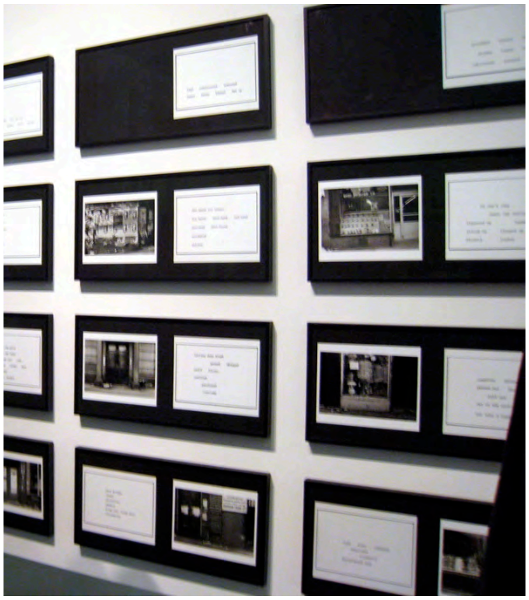
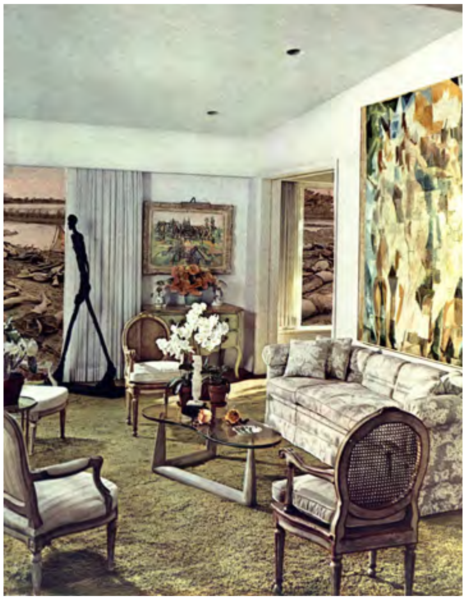
[70] Alexander Alberro, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1999), xxix.

[71] Ibid xxx.

[72] I use the term "Ur" from the German meaning "original" to suggest that the politics of these artists was at the origin of the work rather than as Alberro suggests, a "subtext."



Illus.22 The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptions, Martha Rosler, 1974-75



Illus.23 House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home, 1967-72.

Although it was the radicality of the works of photographers Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula that allowed me to think of photography as a possible political response and agent of social change, the sense of detachment that accompanied their intellectual deconstruction of the image also made me wonder about the possibility of the power of the image as a force of change: could a desiccated, didactic image indeed elicit a response from the viewer with anything other than ennui?

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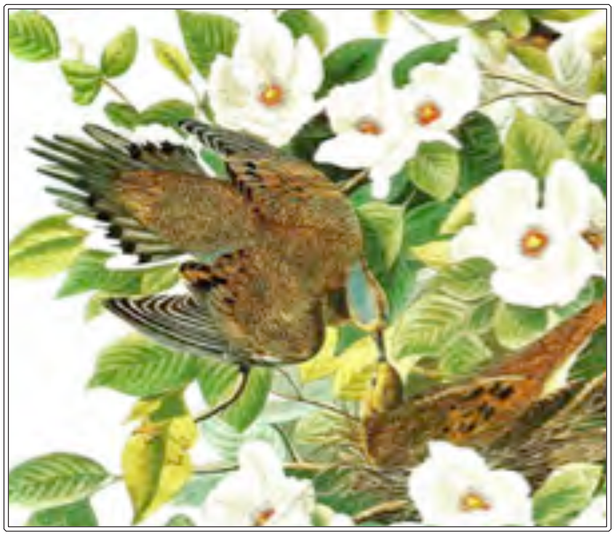
[73] Alberro xxx.

While they struggled to unpack the image in a consumerist society and reveal the problems inherent in the construction of meaning within the frame of photography, their attempt to recondition ways of seeing slipped into a hermetic world, quite the opposite of their intention. Unlike the diagrams of Mark Lombardi, for example, which function as maps of capitalist structure and neo-liberal agendas, their work flattened the photographic image to an indexical form that I would argue is antagonistic to the photographic image itself by emptying it of the very thing that connects us to images.

I approach these differing strategies through a particular lens of political landscape photography. My purpose however, is not simply to investigate how photography functions in relation to landscape, but rather to reread images as they relate to contemporary landscape and politics in general, and Palestine in particular, by invoking the notion of a responsibility for what is visible. In my final chapter, rather than defining what constitutes a political image, I try to define *how* images are politics.

---Isdud---



Illus.24

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)

The flesh of these birds is remarkably fine, when they are obtained young and in the proper season. Such birds become extremely fat, are tender and juicy…These birds require good shooting to bring them down, when on wing, for they will fly with great swiftness, and not always in a direct manner. It is seldom that more than one can be killed at a shot when they are flying, and rarely more than two or three when on the ground.[74]

> `The daisy flock in the photo reminds me of a line from Palestinian poet-laureate Mahmoud Darwish that he wrote for his father. As for my words elle, I don't know what to say: That Israeli Poet Yehuda Amichai fought there while my father at fourteen walked back alone in the night to collect his school papers because his illiterate mother was not sure that the new schools for refugees would recognize his schooling; while Amichai rested, and fatigue rested in his memory for years in order to come alive again in a poem about the three most exhausting times of his life. It puts poetry to shame. He probably, or at least one would hope, would be ashamed of himself and his poems had he known or even thought of the child my father was that night.`[75]

At the side of the highway, up on a hill, sits one single building—the boys' school of the Palestinian village, Isdud (PGR 118129). A few date palms were scattered around the site, while in front of us was a grassy hill laden with the yellow blooms of Bastard Cabbage. A black cat leapt from within the flowers and grabbed a Mourning Dove in mid-air.

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[74] John James Audubon. *Birds of America*. Online Version. http://web4.audubon.org/bird/BOA/F29_G3b.html

[75] Excerpt from an email by Fady Joudah to me, May 9, 2011.

While this bird is ubiquitous, I associate it distinctly with my youth in Israel. When I lived at my grandmother's home in Jerusalem, the doors of my bedroom were always open but for the decorative wrought iron shutters. The Mourning Dove would be the first to call out with a soft *coo-ah, coo, coo, coo*; I was sure it was meant just for me. It did not strike me as mournful and as this was the first sound I heard every morning, I simply assumed the bird was a *Morning Dove*.

Walid Kahlidi, in his book, *All That Remains*, says that based on excavations and antiquities found at the village, Isdud had been inhabited almost continuously from the seventeenth century B.C. until 1948 when it came under Israeli attack and its inhabitants were expelled.[76]

I took this photo for Fady. It was later exhibited as a 23ft x 70ft wall mural in the courtyard of the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art. Looking at the photo conjures memories that may or may not be true, eliciting the remainder of memory that is forged by what it is I know now and what I have forgotten: the two are inextricably linked.

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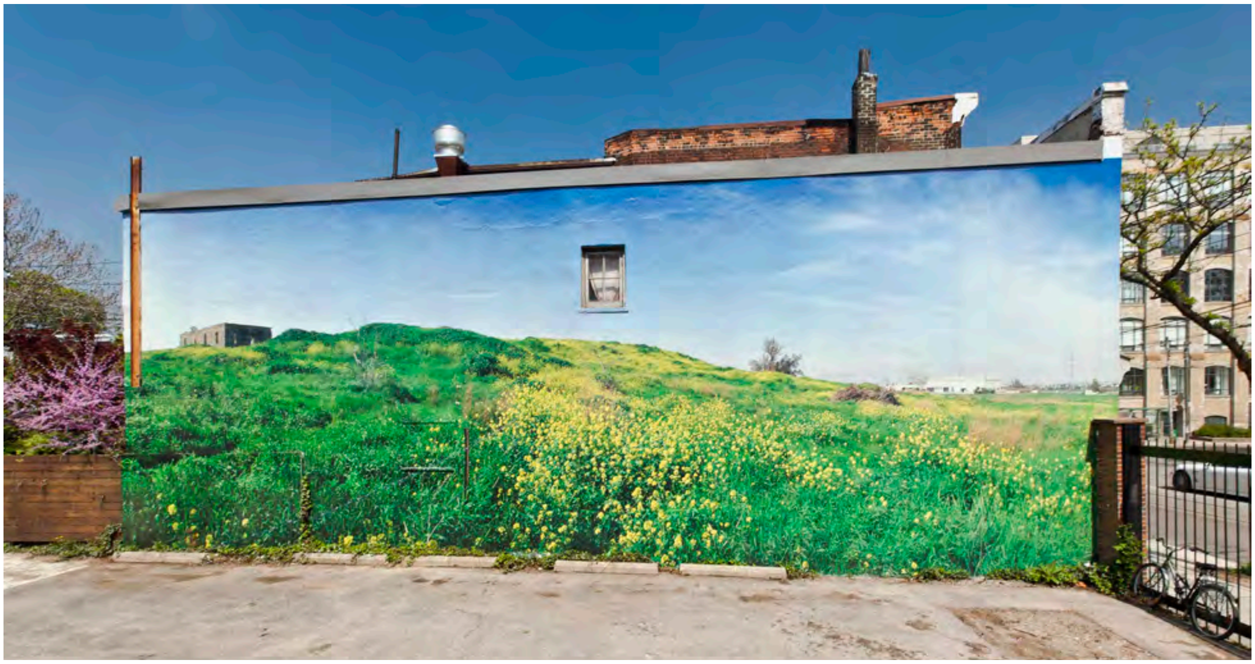

Illus.25 Isdud, What Isn't There, 2009-2011. Contact, Toronto, 2011

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[76] Khalidi 110.

CHAPTER 3

---Space, Place, Landscape---

The term *landscape* emerged from the Dutch *landscap*, meaning "land" + "scap" for ship (a word formatting element meaning condition). *Land* etymologically can be traced to mean *the home region of a person or a people, territory marked by political boundaries*; in modern English, it can simply mean *someone's country*. In landscape, even in its etymology, human beings are necessary for its completion. In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama writes that "Landscape is the work of the mind. . . Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."[77] Hence landscape is reflective of human presence; it does not exist without us and expresses the deeply intertwined nature of land and culture.

WJT Mitchell also claims that landscape necessitates a human presence for its completion but even more so figures in the formation of identity, in other words sits in a dialectic relation with subjectivity. In *Landscape and Power*, he states that the aim of his book is to "change landscape from a noun to a verb. [We can] think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."[78]

In an attempt to understand the sprawling notion of landscape and how it figures in the cultural imaginary, Mitchell affixes the category of *Landscape* to *Space* and *Place*, creating a "dialectical triad"[79] from which to create a productive understanding of just what it means when we speak about landscape; what it *does* rather than what it *is*.[80] While landscape may be understood as the "aesthetic framing of space and place," it also borrows from each of these categories producing a more dynamic meaning. De Certeau's splitting of space and place is the foundation for Lefebvre's *Production of Space*. For de Certeau, place is as an organized space, one that comes under the jurisdiction of "the law of the proper."[81] Space, by contrast, is more abstract. Lefebvre deconstructs space into three spheres: *perceived* space, daily activities that take place in a society that create space; *conceived* space; the controlled, planned creation of space; and *lived* space, also called *representational* space, that which is imaged and presented symbolically. Borrowing Henri Lefebvre's third category of space, Mitchell applies it to *landscape*: "If a place is a specific location, a space is a "practiced place," a site activated by movements, actions, narratives, and signs, and a landscape is that site encountered as image or 'sight.'"[82]

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[77] Schama 7.

[78] WJT Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

[79] Ibid x.

Landscape has materiality: rocks, earth, trees, water, etc; yet, this materiality cannot be separated from culture and from iconology.[83] Walking in nature, much like how we experience landscape, creates a distinction between the natural world and culture, yet as Cosgrove has stated, nature is always a cultural image.[84] Culture, which also comprises one's identity, is inextricably located in nature, the origins of the word itself denoting a cultivated piece of land. In Latin, the verb *colere* contains the meaning of both "to cultivate" as in education, and in the physical sense, as in agriculture. Conversely, we use the descriptor of being "uprooted," displaced as a result of wars, exile, colonialisms, etc. and, in the case of refugees, a mobility that implies a disconnectedness from place. Palestinian cultural theorist Ihab Saloul claims that loss is itself an identity for Palestinians built on an "unmapping from time and space".[85] Hence when people are exiled and removed from their landscape, they are experiencing the trauma of losing their identity that is also inextricably formed in relation to space and place. But because landscape is also a cultural image, Palestinian identity exists in a paradoxical space, indivisible from their land. And it is because of this paradox that I argue that an image of Palestine is both impossible and possible simultaneously, wherein disappearance is an occurrence. In their book Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory, Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi call this a "nonexistent presence."

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[80] Ibid 1.

[81] Ibid x.

[82] Ibid x.

[83] Here I am referring to art historian Erwin Panofsky's understanding of iconology as distinct from iconography (the symbolic reading of images) by which he intended a deeper reading of images "by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion…" as quoted in Denis E. Cosgrove, Denis E., and Stephen Daniels. The Iconography of landscape: essays on the symbolic representation, design, and use of past environments. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 1988), 3.

[84] Ibid 1.

[85] Ihab Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2

> In [Elia] Suleiman's first film, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, there is no past to return to and no dreamed about land in which one can arrive. Still within this total void, the film searches for signs of a nonexistent presence. It bestows meaning upon the failure of memory, and turns that meaning into the core of the work.[86]

Palestinians continue to be found in nature regardless of their absent presence, like an afterimage in which the image fades from its materiality to a memory that leaves behind a residue. The images I create in these spaces are a residue of the disappearance, a presence that plays out along a continuum—not a single point (and hence not a single image), but as a series of endless points in the spirit of becoming. And so it remains in limbo, neither here, nor there, neither in the past nor the future, but in an endless present. A transition. Palestine time.

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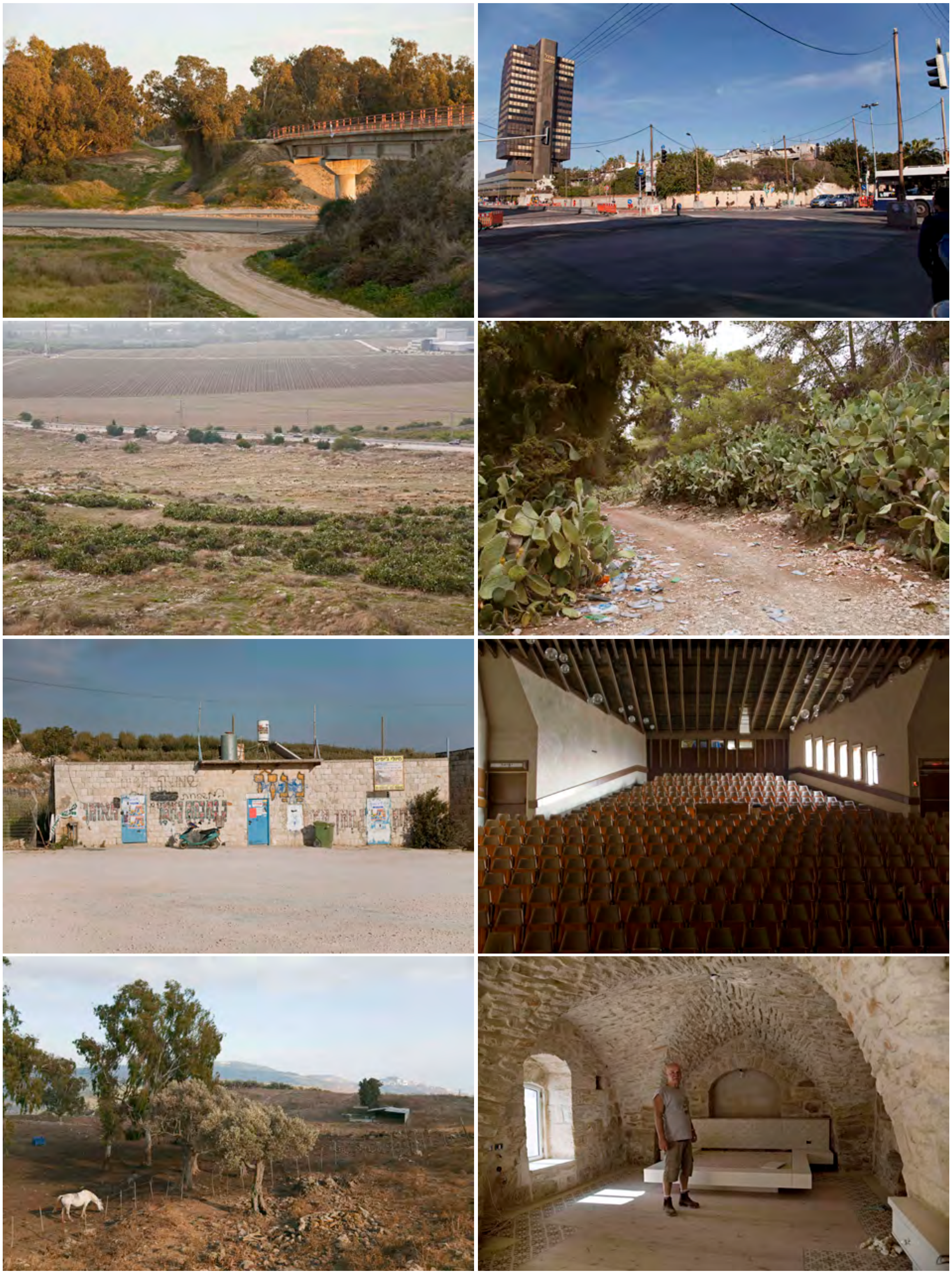
[86] Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi,eds. *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape Trauma and Memory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 6.



Illus.26 What Isn't There, various images, 2008-2012

---New Topographics---

Allan Sekula employed photography to produce a critical realism as a way to map late capitalism's absorption of all aspects of social and cultural life (what the Frankfurt School referred to as "mass culture"). His work was a resuscitation of documentary photography under the postmodern condition and had a profound impact on my early practice. His desire to use photography as a way in which to create social transformation—with the understanding that it too produced its own fiction—lies at the heart of *What Isn't There*.

> How do we invent our lives out of a limited range of possibilities, and how are our lives invented for us by those in power? [...] Given a certain poverty of means, this art aims toward a wider audience, and toward considerations of concrete social transformation. [...] We might be tempted to think of this work as a variety of documentary. That is all right as long as we expose the myth that accompanies the label, the folklore of photographic truth.[87]

Sekula wanted to change the way we understood the world of images by deconstructing all things we once held true about the photographic image. In his own work he destroyed authorship, photographs as contingent on context, single-image aestheticism, and pictorialism. But as Jeff Wall argued in *Marks of Indifference*, photography nonetheless carried the burden of depiction and provided the viewer with an "experience of experience":

> But dragging its heavy burden of depiction, photography could not follow pure, or linguistic, Conceptualism all the way to the frontier. It cannot provide the experience of the negation of experience, but must continue to provide the experience of depiction, of the Picture.[88]

In his refusal of representation, Sekula's work was successful as institutional critique, but I would argue that it ceased working as "experiences of experience" and hence as a critique of what the photograph is meant to do.

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[87] Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary" in *The Massachusetts Review* 19.4 (1978), 859-883.

[88] Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art." In *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982*, exhibition catalogue (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2003), 44.

When I photographed these villages in the 1990s, the outcome was somewhere between the ethnographic and the post-conceptual photo work of the New Topographic photographers, whose work focused on the overlooked spaces, the anti-landscapes (parking lots, shopping malls, motels, freeways, etc.)—a hybrid of conceptual and pictorial form. While seriality and anti-landscape (in its totemic form) was very much a part of my practice, I began to shift towards the resuscitation of single images, like those of the New Topographics.

Taking its cue from conceptual photography, an exhibition called *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, curated in 1975 by William Jenkins at the ICP at George Eastman House, showed the work eight young (all male[89]) American photographers: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel, Jr. The work emphasized a new approach to landscape photography, and photography in general, wherein an "absence of style" demarcated the new borders of landscape images. In the catalogue for *The New Topographics*, Jenkins described this new form of disinterested image:

> The pictures were stripped of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion and opinion, [...] rigorous purity, deadpan humor and a casual disregard for the importance of the images.[90]

While indeed these artists borrowed from their conceptual antecedents—specifically Ed Ruscha and his banal/categorized images of the contemporary American landscape—they also did so with a decidedly "photographic eye." In other words, while attempting to deconstruct landscape, many of them harkened back to the great modernists (e.g. Ansel Adams, Margaret Bourke White, Timothy O'Sullivan, and Alfred Steiglitz). All but Shore had presented photographs that were in black and white, showing great formal concern. What was of particular interest to me, as I experimented with different forms of landscape photography over the years, was the intersection between conceptual photography and a new emerging form of landscape photography, one that eschewed Modernism's promise, but that also had not quite arrived at an understanding of landscape itself as inscribed.

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[89] Bernd and Hilla Becher were also invited to be a part of the exhibit however it's primary purpose was to showcase the work of new, young American photographers (not surprisingly all of whom were male). Deborah Bright takes up the question of gender in her 1985 article "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men" suggesting it is not by coincidence and serves to reinforce the notion of landscape as the male domain of imperialism that consequently left all "others" out of the frame as well.

[90] *New Topographics*, University of Arizona. Center for Creative Photography. Tucson, Az. International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 2010.

In Deborah Bright's 1985 essay, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography," she argues the need to interpret landscape as a constructed text with affixed cultural meanings. She posits that landscape photography has been, and continues to be, considered a wholesome, digestible subject that "stands indisputably beyond politics and ideology and appeals to 'timeless values.'"[91] I argue that Israeli concepts and representations of the land follow a very similar ideological blueprint to the aspirations of an idealized American West and other colonial enterprises of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *What Isn't There* grapples aesthetically with the portrayal of these landscapes that were once villages by considering what gets represented in the photographic frame—and what remains outside the frame—in relation to notions of timelessness ascribed to photography in general, and to Palestine in particular. It was at this juncture, that I began to consider the primacy of a landscape image as a singular image in connection with the passage of time in Palestine, and that I introduced the idea of light panels and time-based work.

When I first began to experience the ephemerality of these liminal spaces, I attempted to formally incorporate that into my photographs by shooting on colour reversal film, from which I would create large transparencies. These works then morphed in the 2000s into backlit images on micro-thin LED panels. I had been working with lightboxes on a different series about queer identity and abjection, and thought it would be interesting to bring the idea of the lightbox into my Israel-Palestine work. At the time Jeff Wall's work was circulating, and while he fixed the photo-tableau, I was more interested in the idea of light as a something that would unfix the image from its materiality. The micro-thin panels let the image frame disappear and allowed the landscape to float on the wall.

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[91] Deborah Bright, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography," in *The Contest of Meaning: Alternative Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

Because Palestine has a particular relationship to temporality, I introduced video into my work as a way to contend with a history in a state of suspended animation; Palestinians' history ceased to progress in 1948, and was replaced by a timelessness that is experienced by refugees who cannot go backwards or forwards.

> For many years the refugee ideology dominated Palestinian culture. In other words, the idea of the temporal prevailed: while drifting about and fighting, the refugee always remains temporary, and in a transient condition there is no room for memory, except at the passing moment.[92]

George Khleifi and Nurit Gertz suggest this transience manifests in Palestinian cultural production as the result of historical trauma. Because trauma sits outside of consciousness, it cannot be integrated into historical narratives leading to the future. They argue that: "Ostensibly, it does not leave a trace."[93] The video piece that figured in this series introduced the concept of time into the timeless photos (on light panels) that hung beside it, affixing a present and presence to all the work. This first video intervention will repeat itself later in the installation that accompanies this text.

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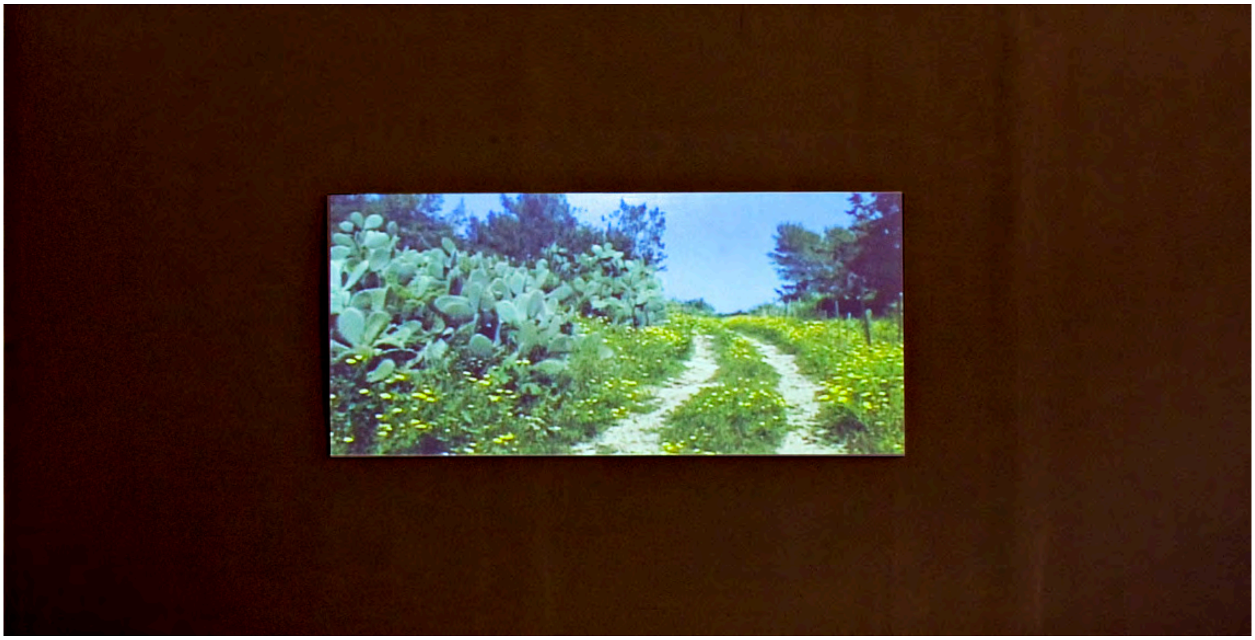
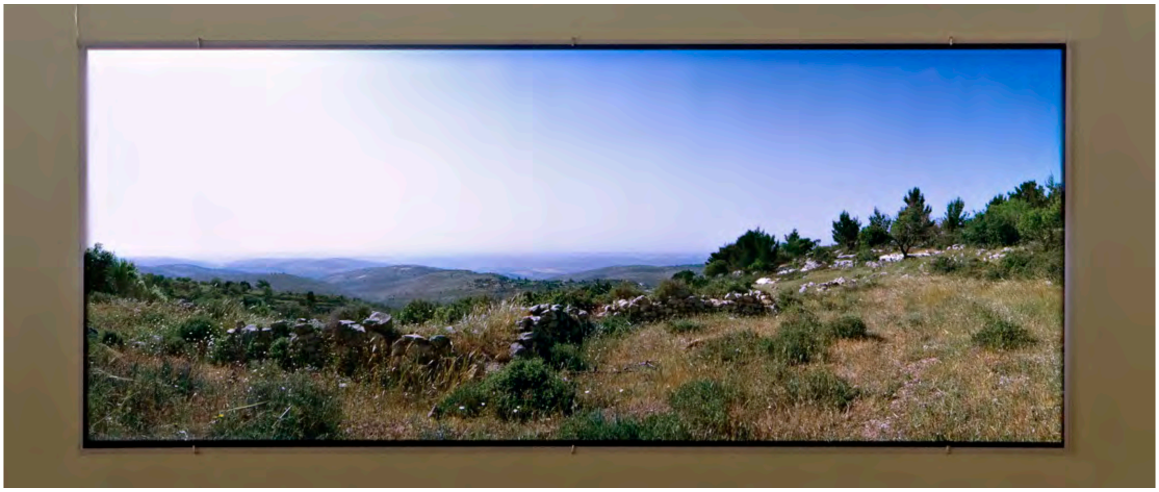
[92] Muhammad Hamza Ghanayem, 2000. "Before Birth, After Death," *Gagg*, Vol. 3, pp.12–17. [Hebrew] found in *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape Trauma and Memory*, eds. Nurit Gertz and George Khleifi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) 2

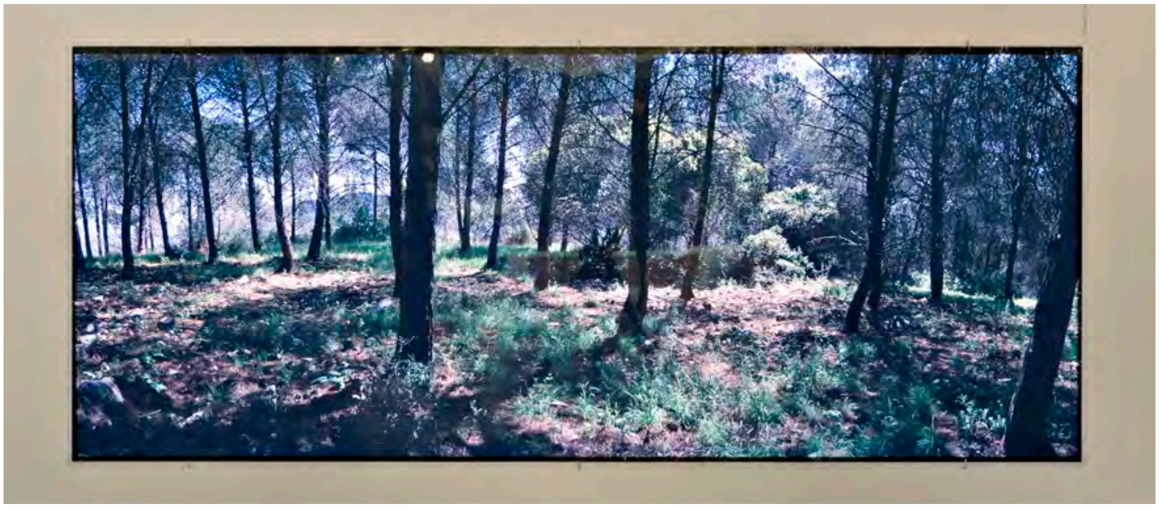
[93] Gertz and Khleifi 3.



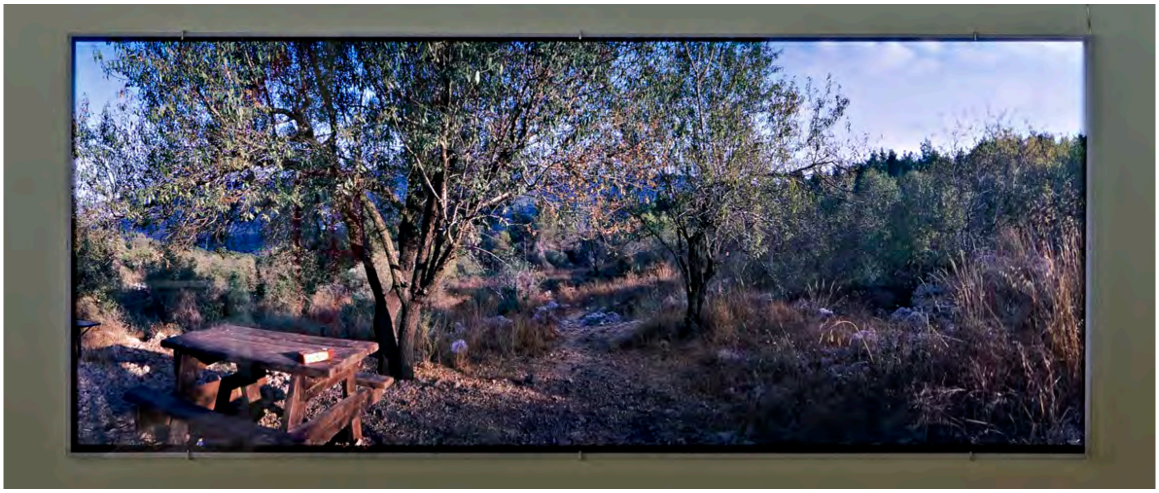
Illus.27 What Isn't There, Ayn Ghazal, 2005, Detail. Video Projection, 3 min loop Akau Gallery, Toronto 2007



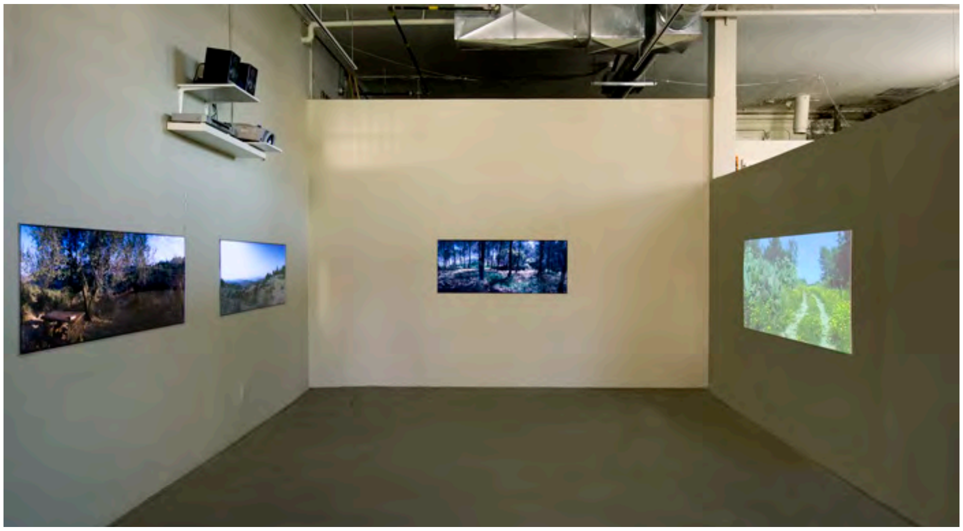
Illus.28 What Isn't There, Beit Thul, 2000, Duratrans on lightpanel. Detail. Akau Gallery, Toronto 2007



Illus.29 What Isn't There, Khirbet Al Damun, 2006, Duratrans on lightpanel. Detail. Akau Gallery, Toronto 2007



Illus.30 What Isn't There, Sataf, 2005, Duratrans on lightpanel. Detail. Akau Gallery, Toronto 2007



Illus.31 What Isn’t There, Akau Gallery, Toronto 2007

Representation in and of landscape in Israel and Palestine is the primary location of the conflict, I argue. The competing narratives play out in and through representation; the Palestinian version of its landscape has become completely subsumed by Israeli dominant narratives. The most prominent of these narratives is the Jewish return from genocide, a rebirth after the Holocaust, with Israel at the center of the narrative: the land that saved the Jews. Grafted onto this is an earlier version of Jewish oppression, ostracized and subject to virulent anti-Semitism in Europe, wherein the return to Zion from ongoing exile, became the antidote with the "Jewish homeland" as safe harbour. The dispossession of Palestinians in the face of these two narratives of liberation and salvation, and their lack of a national narrative have exacerbated the difficulty of imaging Palestine. As Gertz and Khleifi remind us: "Like the historical time of the Palestinian nation, Palestinian geography too, has oscillated between the abstract, mythic idyll, and concrete reality."[94] Palestine's traumatic past is also its present. The *Nakba*, the catastrophe that ended life as Palestinians knew it and began for them a long chapter of exile, is an ongoing catastrophe that creates the conditions of non/being. Palestine is both at once a place and a non-place; it is a nation and a non-nation, rendering the possible often impossible. How then does one represent that absence and presence?

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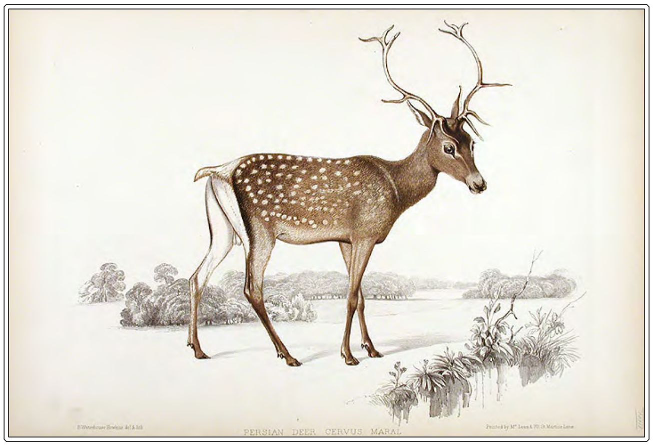
[94] Gertz and Khleifi 6.

---Dayr al Hawa: Hunting the Mesopotamian Deer---


B. Waterhouse Hawkins del. & lith.
PERSIAN DEER. CERVUS MARAL.
Printed by Mr. Lane & Pr. St. Martins Lane.

Illus.32

Persian fallow deer
(Dama dama mesopotamica)

The Deer of Syria are born on the highest mountains, on Amanus, on Libanus, and on Carmel. And when they want to cross the sea the herd goes down to the beaches and waits until the wind drops; and as soon as they observe that there is a favourable and gentle breeze, then they brave the open sea. And they swim in single file, holding on to one another, the ones behind supporting their chins on the rumps of those in front [...see below] takes the last place in the line, and resting itself upon the one next in front of it in the whole troop, brings up the rear. And they make for Cyprus in their longing for the meadows there, for they are said to be deep and to afford excellent pasture. The Cypriots indeed claim that they live in a fertile country, and venture to compare their arable land with that of Egypt. And there are Deer from other countries too which show this same capacity for swimming. For example, the Deer of Epirus swim across to Corcyra: the two countries face each other across a strait.[95]

The hills that surround Jerusalem are astonishingly high, at least in relation to the legendary lowest place on earth, the Dead Sea, which is only a forty-minute drive from the archetypal golden Dome of the Rock. Here in the hills and forests that encircle the city, the air feels thin, even sharp as we set-up our camera in a picnic area on top of a mountain in the middle of a pine grove. There are the requisite signs for various battles of 1948: the Golani Brigade that "bravely fought" in this area in order to break the siege of Jerusalem. There is of course no sign that marks the Palestinian village Dar Al Haywa, here at that time.

In the early morning hours, we are sure we will not encounter any others, but as soon as we release this thought into the considerable winds that make our sound recording impossible, we are greeted by a white station wagon circling the hill and pulling up to park within a few meters of us. A man with a green polo shirt steps out holding an antenna that looks like it's from a 1950s sci-fi B movie and begins to wave it around, close to where we are filming. Curiosity got the better of me. "What's that?" I ask in Hebrew. "An Antenna," was his obvious answer. "Yes, yes, I see that, but what's it for?" "I'm searching for Mesopotamian fallow deer." Of course you are, I think to myself; why else would you be here? "And what exactly is a Mesopotamian fallow deer?" I ask. The soft-spoken zoologist begins the story of the rescue from extinction of this subspecies of the fallow deer, or as others argue, this separate species.

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[95] Aelian, *On the Characteristics of Animals*, trans. A. F. Scholfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 357-9. Translation from the Greek original; I have kept the funny capitalization of Deer.

Several legends seem to follow the fallow deer in their varying and fantastical migration stories. The first such legend by Roman author Aelianus, in 200 AD, recounts their travel from Mount Carmel and the mountains of Lebanon across the Mediterranean Sea. The deer awaited favourable winds and waded into the water, all in a line, head on rump, and crossed to the shores of Cyprus.

By the late 1800s, habitat destruction and hunting were amongst the primary reasons for the endangerment of the Persian fallow deer. Thought to be extinct in the mid 1940s, a small group of individuals were found in Iran where they were caught and taken into wildlife refuge. With the drive to (re)build Israel, from forests to nature, Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), established in 1962, declared as part of their mission, the reintroduction of animals found in the holy scriptures. An army general named Avraham Yoffe, headed-up the mission to rescue four promised deer to be gifted to Israel from the Shah of Iran. On the eve of the revolution in 1978, according to the now famous legend,[96] Yoffe managed to get the four deer and a planeload of Israeli diplomats out of the country, the last flight to leave Tehran. Yoffe, who ran the INPA, was said by conservationists to have fought for nature conservation with the same zeal as in battle. Yoffe was a commander in the Haganah, the Jewish military forces responsible for the displacement and destruction of over four hundred Palestinian villages and eight hundred thousand Palestinian residents of those villages. The Persian fallow deer were released into the wild in 2009 in an attempt to propagate the species.

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[96] While this story was told to me by mother who knew Yoffe, the story has become urban legend and can be found in countless sources including, for example: http://israel-tourguide.info/2012/12/11/introducing-fallow-deer/.

My new friend Noam, the zoologist, was responsible for the deer's dispersal and spent many a Saturday tracking them with his odd antenna. "Do you hear that?" he asked excitedly. I heard some crackling and a faint beep, beep, beep. "That's one of the main females. She's alive; we can tell because when the signal gets stronger and fainter, we know she is on the move." I had hoped to spot this infamous deer but Noam said that we would most likely not see them, as they were desperately shy. We continued to listen to radio signals for some time as the wind picked up and the sky began to cloud. As Noam began to pack up, assured that his deer were thriving, he asked me about our film; what was our subject? Despite always being tentative in these situations—never knowing who we will meet and their reaction to a story about how Jews displaced almost a million people—I somehow trusted him: "Do you know where we are, what this place is?" He paused and thought about my question carefully. There were signs around, referring to our location and its Jewish version of history. "Oh you mean the Arab village, Dayr Al Hawa? Yes, I know, but not many do." Indeed, he was the first Israeli we had met, who had not been involved specifically with a reclamation or political project, who knew exactly where we were. "It means "Monastery of the Wind," you know." And just then a gust of wind blew my hiking maps across the pine forest; it felt like the beginning of a good, albeit melancholic, day.

Dayr al-Hawa (PGR: 153128) was captured in 1948 as part of Operation Ha-Har. The village was demolished and a lookout tower was erected on the village lands. Khalidi describes the village as follows:

> The village stood on a high mountaintop, overlooking wide expanses of land to the west, north and south. A secondary road linked it to another secondary road that lead to Bethlehem and that ran several km southeast of the village, and dirt paths linked it nearby villages. […] The villagers, all whom were Muslim, worshipped at a mosque in the western part of the village and maintained a shrine for Sheikh Sulayman, a local teacher. [...] Fruit trees which yielded apples, olives, figs and almonds, were planted on the slopes.[97]

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[97] Kahlidi 285.

---Sublime Landscapes---

As wars shift territorial homelands and landscapes change dramatically in response to environmental impact, a return to landscape photography in the digital era offers new opportunities to engage with land and the evidence it harbours. In our age of hyperspectacle, there seems to be a general assumption that in order to understand the impact of a phenomenon (e.g. a disaster) we need to be either seduced or repelled by its awful spectacle. Sublime spectacles manifest daily in mediated images of disaster highlighting the ubiquity of images and our increasing image consumption. While the sublime refers to a visual sense of shock—that which is beyond our comprehension—the spectacle offers a comprehensible event. Yet we find these antagonistic terms often presented together aesthetically. As the power of technology replaces nature as the site of the contemporary sublime, artists are moved to confront technologies often-incomprehensible negative effects. Yet, in a time dominated by the rapid circulation of consumer goods and people, hyperspectacle foregrounds much of our culture, creating a simulacrum, or what Frederic Jameson (after Sartre) refers to as a "*derealization* of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality."[98]

Contemporary landscape photography has often taken human intervention in landscape and the resulting massive changes in our environment as its main subject, invoking both the hyperspectacle and the sublime. Photographers working in this genre such as Isabelle Hayeur, Ed Burtynsky and Hirome Tsuchida—who also look to absence in landscape—often employ before-and-after images to comprehend the present.[99] The direct engagement used by these artists (often intended to shock spectators into awareness) too often functions as one-dimensional spectacle, imposing a singular reading on us.[100] Work that looks to ruins often suggests that spectators are complicit in the destruction, but I wonder if we need to pose the problem of ruination and loss in different way: in the wake of disaster, can we interpret landscape as both a site of struggle and as a site of the sublime, thereby invoking a recuperative or restorative element? Can we summon this "recuperative" sublime to release ourselves from the paralysis of disaster/spectacle?

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[98] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 34.

[99] This before and after can be seen in Burtynsky's photographs of quarries for example—bottomless holes in the landscape that technology has removed in the name of progress; or in his images of mining tails—beautiful and terrifying hot red and orange streaks that run across massive landscapes warning us of impending doom; Hayuer's images of ethereal constructed landscapes warning us of a future of destruction or her tract housing that represents our march towards the grey sublime of homogeneity; or finally, Tsuchida's remnants of Hiroshima that point backwards and are a forewarning of nuclear annihilation.

I return to the sublime via Kant because he recognized a clearly aesthetic dimension in the way we formulate certain kinds of judgments, reflective rather than empirical. While aesthetic judgment does not give rise to reason, it does incite feelings, which in turn provoke a contemplative space in which ideas form. The Sublime, according to Kant, opposes the Beautiful on the aesthetic spectrum. The Sublime agitates and excites, whereas Beauty is harmonious and is meant to induce calm. Beauty is the expression of the limited and sensible; the Sublime is the limitless and ungraspable. For Jean-François Lyotard, the sublime's very incompleteness is what makes it a central concept in postmodernity.

> Lyotard, […] regards the artistic avant-garde as a vital tool in exposing the logic of late capitalism, arguing that the resistance of 'difficult' forms of art to public consensus marks the limits of a consumer-based society. […] The artistic category that Lyotard assigns to the business of forging consensus is the beautiful. With its fostering of unity, harmony and communicability, the beautiful becomes the perfect form for consolidating the version of reality that best suits the needs of a capitalist regime.[101]

What defines the sublime for Lyotard, ultimately, is its "unrepresentability."

While Slavoj Zizek concurs with Lyotard's formation of the unattainable sublime, he reintroduces its element of transcendence, drawing from Lacan's *jouissance*—pleasure only obtained through displeasure.[102] According to Zizek's reading of Kant and Lacan, the Sublime in its stature of the "unattainable," is the expression of something that cannot be, yet provides us with the very experience of that negation. In other words, this transcendence is an "experience" of a thing that is ultimately unrepresentable.[103] Hence, we experience displeasure due to its incompleteness, yet simultaneously it gives us pleasure "by indicating the true, incomparable greatness of the Thing, surpassing every possible phenomenal, empirical experience."[104]

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[100] I would argue further that their spectacularization of these destroyed landscapes while perhaps well-meaning, has allowed the works to be consumed by a market hungry to release itself from the guilt of active participant to "observer." Simultaneously the images also function as talismans suggesting that we can keep these horrors at bay by possessing the images of them and finally, operate to release us from responsibility because in the act of having purchased them we have hence "acted against" the destruction.

[101] Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), 125.

[102] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2008), 229.

What is significant is Zizek's return to transcendence in the sublime, which transports us to an experience, even in its negation, versus Lyotard, for whom the sublime was relegated to complete alterity. Through these various permutations, the sublime nonetheless represents the possibility of revealing a reality that cannot otherwise be seen or understood other than through reaching the limits of comprehension, where unity and understanding fail and we encounter that which is "other." *What Isn't There* is a project that finds itself at these crossroads—at the aporia of judgment. It struggles through a series of approaches and images over time, to present a history of trauma that cannot be grasped in a single image. Hence it is not in an image of "a landscape" that we find an engagement with the sublime, but rather in the process of the project as a whole, over time. It is in the different iterations of the project—attempts through fragments of walking, of discovery, of photographing, of mapping, of engaging landscape, of filming, and finally, of installation—to tell the story against itself, in its absence. In the outdoor installation of *What Isn't There* that accompanies this text, I bring together the many strands of this project (although by no means is it a culmination of the iterations) in order to engage what I like to call the "recuperative sublime," which produces a form of comprehension that Kirk Pillow sees as "partial comprehension of aesthetic unities that defy conceptual unification."[105] Pillow's "sublime reflection" provides an 'interpretive response' to the "other" that has thus far eluded us in its postmodern negative.

> A successful work of art, one that induces the viewer to think (and feel), defies our efforts to determine the whole of its meaning. What results then is an open-ended and interpretive response to the work.[106]

A recuperative sublime provided me with a conceptual platform for returning to difficult images, allowing for a complex aesthetic response that post-conceptualism's over-intellectualizing failed to provide, its strictures reducing art to speech and "cultivating the art of disappearance."[107] In Jacques Rancière's argument for an emancipatory aesthetics, art can finally be released from the quagmire of sublime/spectacle. Rancière questions Lyotard's category of the "unrepresentable" by asking: under what conditions is the art object "unrepresentable"?[108] For Rancière, art cannot be separate from politics and replaces the unrepresentable with *dissensus*, a disruption which brings forth a moment of *democratic politics* and hence the space for political reconfiguration. I will return to Rancière's art-as-politics argument in Chapter 6, *Finding the Political.*

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[103] In Kant's terms, this 'Thing per se' or "Das Ding as sich" is the unknowable.

[104] Zizek 229.

[105] Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel*. (Cambridge, MA:MIT Press, 2000), 6.

[106] Ibid 68.

When framed as a *disruption*, the sublime reflects perhaps more of what we can ascribe to Kant's open-ended 'free play of the faculties in the sublime understanding. It is the fracture, the unattainable whole (and the limits of cognition) that the sublime represents, that can force us to rethink the status of reality.[109] As Pillow concludes: "Facing the sublime also propels us to cut new paths of sense that, in their relating of the (as yet) unrelated, defy given conceptual rules."[110]

What Isn't There takes as its subject the uncharted and contested territory that remains hidden from most people's view—the areas I am working in are seen by one population as one thing, and by another as something else. For the most part, the Palestinian population is no longer able to access these locations to commemorate or to impose their memory on these landscapes; they exist only in their imaginations, stagnant images from long ago. The Israeli population, by contrast, has no idea what came before the current landscape and walk "through" these landscapes as if the remnants that are evident are, at best, without meaning or, at worst, completely irrelevant. For a nation imbued with artifact as evidence, it is fascinating to witness the "memory gap" that occurs in these places. The images I am producing attempt to reinvest these landscapes with a collective memory by taking other histories into account in this region and by asserting the human history that belongs to these landscapes.

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[107] Sylvère Lotringer & Paul Virilio, *The Accident of Art* (New York: Semiotexte, 2005), 38.

[108] Jacques Rancière, "Are Some Things Unrepresentable?" in *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: New York: Verso, 2007), 109-138.

[109] Pillow 7.

[110] Ibid 6.

CHAPTER 4

---Reconstituting The Atlas: Redrawing the Archive---

Photography and its archive are structured by both forgetting and remembrance in which certain futures are promised and others excluded.[111]

There is no political power without control over the archive, if not of memory [112]

The archive is synonymous with the trace and the document; archives are composed of documents, and photography as an evidence-based material forms a large component of archival practice since its invention. The photographic record in its indexicality and its relationship to evidence and the subject's existence (this event happened here at this time) has come to define the basis of the archive. As I continue to chronicle 418 villages that no longer exist but for miscellaneous archival materials and remnants, I am attempting to reconstitute an atlas of the region that was erased—Palestinian life before the *Nakba*. I note too, however, that this archive is also a deeply personal one, in which the process of collecting has been one of uncovering—what Freud referred to as a "working through" of the unconscious—in order to come to terms with an event that is denied by my family and community.

While my atlas is in no way a comprehensive one like Walid Khalidi's *Palestine Remembered*, it tells a story in tension with dominant narratives that continue to play out in the frame of *What Isn't There*. While Khalidi's book serves as an important archive of Palestine's history, the ongoing destruction of memory that is at work in Israeli society requires its own archive. *What Isn't There* is rather more a process of engagement that will point the index finger in another direction; the "over there" is now a different "over there." In other words, while the singular images that constitute the project of *What Isn't There* point to locations within Israel, the project as a whole points to the location of Palestine. In reconstructing a contemporary visual archive of each village, *What Isn't There* works against the notion of an archive constructed by a state apparatus that excludes aspects of history and memory that do not serve its narrative. The archive functions as a form of remembrance and, in this case, the archive destabilizes the dominant narrative of Palestine as recounted by Israeli history offering a "counter-memory."

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[111] Cross, Karen, and Julia Peck. "Editorial: Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory." Photographies 3.2 (2010): 128.

[112] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever,* Trans. Eric Prenowitz. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4.

As discussed already, however, the photograph is not a stable document and it is this very uncertainty and its intimate relationship to and as memory—both serve to record moments of the past yet do so as fragments—that position it as an antidote to the notion of singular histories and dominant narratives. In creating a "new" yet always incomplete and always partial archive, *What Isn't There* speaks to a potential future for Palestine, in a landscape that has thus far refused its existence.

> The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future…it is the future that is at issue here, and the archive as an irreducible experience of the future.[113]

As the archive is always being inscribed in the face of finitude, it thus points both backwards and forwards, and like the uncovering of the unconscious can become a useful tool in determining the future. The formulation of the archive of *What Isn't There*, therefore works in this place of rupture—of looking backwards and simultaneously uncovering in order to determine the future; and while perhaps utopian, it projects a future in which an image of Palestine can be formed.

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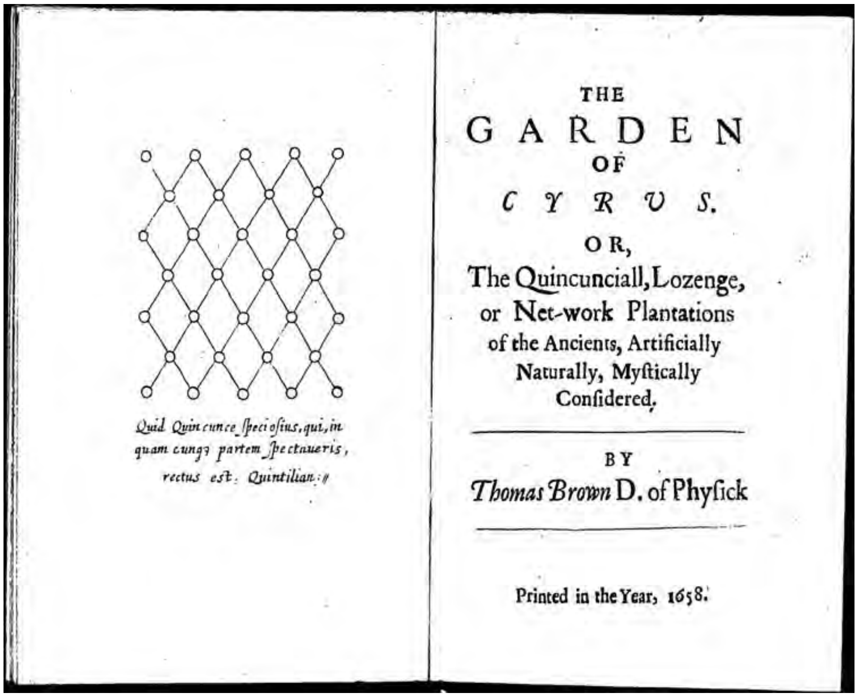
[113] Derrida 68.

---The Quincunx---

(widelux)

> *True to his own prescription, Browne records the patterns which recur in the seemingly infinite diversity of forms in the Garden of Cyrus […] he draws the quincunx, […]Browne identifies this structure everywhere, in animate and inanimate matter: in certain crystalline forms, in starfish and sea urchins, in the vertebrae of mammals […] At all events, it is clear from Browne's account that the endless mutations of Nature, which go far beyond any rational limit, and equally the chimaeras by our own minds, were as much a source of fascination to him as they were, three hundred years later, to Jorge Luis Borges [in his] Libro de los seres imaginarios […]*[114]



Quid Quincunce ſpecioſius, qui, in
quam cunq; partem ſpectaueris,
rectus est: Quintilian:

THE
GARDEN
OF
CYRUS.
OR,
The Quincunciall, Lozenge,
or Net-work Plantations
of the Ancients, Artificially
Naturally, Myſtically
Conſidered.

BY
Thomas Brown D. of Phyſick

Printed in the Year, 1658.

Illus.33 In the Garden of Cyrus, Thomas Browne

On the morning of Purim on the fifteenth day of Adar in the year 5773,[115] I scrambled to the top of a hill adjacent to the Latrun Monastery. The Monastery, which is at the junction of the roads to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, figures prominently in many of my childhood stories and in the foundational myths of the Jewish State, serving as a demarcation point in the battle to break the siege of Jerusalem. From November 1947 until June 1948, the Battle of Jerusalem raged. Jewish and Arab militias fought for control of the city after the Partition Plan for Palestine declared it would be placed under special international rule, *corpus separatum*. According to the version of events that were told to me, the Palestinian Arab nationalist Abd al-Qaser al-Husayni blocked the road to West Jerusalem in order to cut off the Jewish residents of Jerusalem from food and water supplies, aiming to starve them into surrender. Operation Nachshon[116] broke the first blockade while the Battle of Latrun was an attempt to break the second. Jewish forces never were able to capture Latrun, (PGR: 148137) and it remained under Jordanian rule until the 1967 war. Instead, the Jews built a new road to Jerusalem circling Latrun called The Burma Road. Abd al Qaser was subsequently killed in Castel (al-Qastal PGR: 163133) a Palestinian village at the centre of one of the many battles that erupted in the hills of Jerusalem. It was in documenting the remains of the village al-Qastal, that I first began photographing with a camera called a Widelux, developed in Japan in 1948 to take panoramic images—at 150 degrees we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place.

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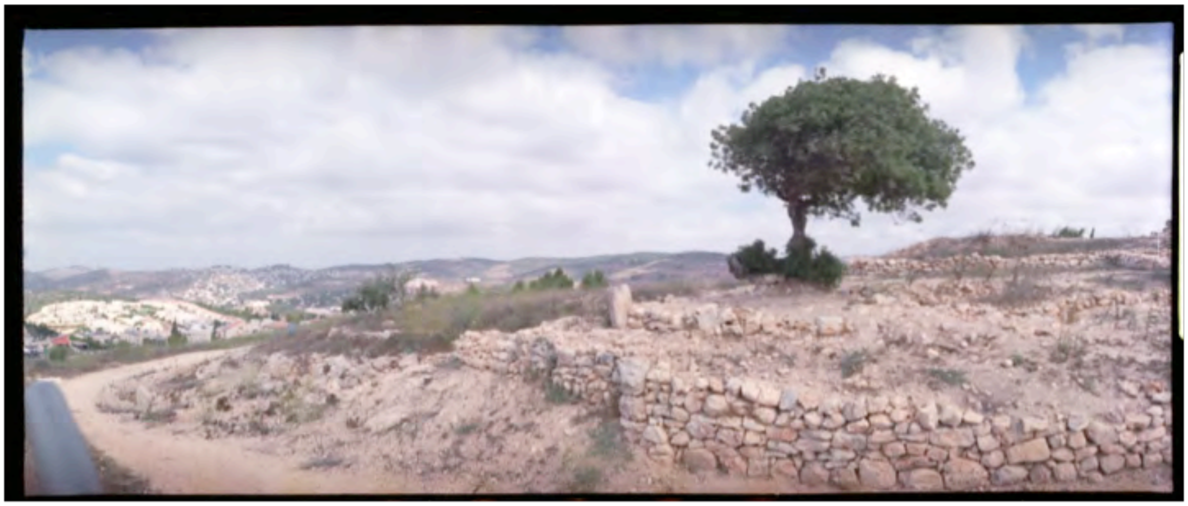
[114] W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (New York, New Directions Books, 1998) 19-23.
[115] February, 2013.



Illus.34 Al Castal, What Isn't There, 2004

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[116] Operation Nachshon was the first military operation of Plan Dalet, the Haganah's plan to destroy and evacuate all the villages in the boundaries of the 1947 Partition Plan. Operation Nachshon was responsible for the destruction of: Latrun, Dayr Yasin, Dayr Muhaysin, Khulda, al-Qastal and many more villages in the Jerusalem area.

W.G. Sebald uses sixteenth century physician Thomas Browne's exploration of the *quincunx* as a template in his book, *The Rings of Saturn*—an unfolding of sorts, that addresses the connections between nature, art, and the universe. Sebald, like Browne before him, uses symbols and images to explore the less tangible aspects of life through artistic experience. The Widelux is my *quincunx*, the mechanics of which create an angled image of 150 degrees. It is a blunt angle, imprecise and oscillating, hovering between what is there and what is not. It became my constant companion over the next ten years when photographing these landscapes of loss, this home that now only exists in the imagination and memory of Palestinians. Browne's *quincunx* is a diagram, a form that suggests the complex evolution and repetition of nature, but that also faces impending loss. "Much as in this continuous process of consuming and being consumed, nothing endures, in Browne's view. On every new thing there lies already the shadow of annihilation." [117]

Illus.35 Key to Palestinian Home

In the tradition of melancholy there is a sense of inexplicable loss, a catastrophe that cannot be located. Walking in and through history provokes an uncanny sensation that arises when transporting ourselves through these imaginary yet real landscapes; we feel a sense of home that we know is not.[118]

In the BBC documentary *In Search of Palestine* (1998), Edward Said returns to Israel, to find his family home in Talbiye, a wealthy Arab neighbourhood in Jerusalem that fell to Jewish forces in 1947. He was twelve when he lost his home. I recognize the street on which the cameras follow him—it is five minutes from my grandparents' home, also in Talbiye. I was twelve when I lived in my grandparents' home.

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[117] Sebald, 23-24.

[118] What is interesting here is that this could be applied to BOTH Palestinians and Jews, in which these landscapes represent home and not to each in distinct ways.

> I feel even more depressed when I remember my beautiful old house surrounded by pine and orange trees in Al-Talbiyeh in east Jerusalem, which has been turned into a "Christian embassy." I went there a few days ago and took several photographs.[119]

Said's family lost their home and others lost much more in the *Nakba*. While the *Nakba* is indeed documented, it has also fallen victim to the contingent erasure of the Israeli high court's recent "Nakba Law"[120] and the ongoing destruction of memory through the Zionist narrative of "A land without a people for a people without a land."[121] The *Nakba* therefore becomes an uncanny experience for Palestinians—the recovery of experience at once familiar but that had to be estranged in some way, a repression of the loss of home. As Freud tells us, the most uncanny place is "home," being at once the most familiar and unfamiliar simultaneously, and when that home has also been destroyed, there is a traumatic event that returns. However, the exile of 1948, which rendered Palestinians refugees, did not end; it is as an ongoing event, as they remain refugees in their own land, a trauma that continues to form contemporary identity and narratives. While the *Nakba* took place in 1948, stories are told as if they are happening currently, as though the state of exile was perpetual. Time collapses in Palestine.

Castel, the Battle of Jerusalem, and the image of the *quincunx* recede as the church bells at Latrun begin to ring. They remind me of the present; it is Sunday, and it is Shushan Purim, a holiday for (Jewish) Jerusalemites. Having climbed to the top of the hill, I walked along what appeared to be a stone roof of some kind, wide sculpted boulders covered in grasses. I carefully navigated a narrow structure bAllancing my tripod and camera to the other side, heading towards two intact buildings standing farther afield. As with all the villages we had visited, this one had no signs, no interpretative plaques, just a dot on my hiking map that indicated the village of Latrun (PGR: 148137).

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[119] Interview with Edward Said in *The Jerusalem Times*, March 1999.

[120] The "Nakba Law" (2011) as it is commonly referred to, is a watered-down version of a bill whose original intent was to sentence to prison anyone who marks Israeli Independence Day as a day of mourning or who holds memorial events for the Palestinian "Nakba" (destruction). The current law grants the finance minister of Israel the power to reduce the budget of state-funded bodies that mark the state's Independence Day as a day of mourning.

[121] This oft-cited phrase is erroneously attributed as an invention of the early Zionist Israel Zangwill (Birtish author) and while he indeed used a version of this phrase, it was already in common usage throughout Britain, used by 19th century Christian writers as described in Garfinkle, "On the Origin, Meaning, Use, and Abuse of a Phrase," p. 539; Israel Zangwill, "The Return to Palestine," New Liberal Review, Dec. 1901, 615.

---Latrun: Shushan Purim[122]---

In the near distance three young women and one older one sat on a grassy knoll, facing Jerusalem. Two of the girls were in modern dress, jeans and sweatshirts, while the third, the reader, had her head covered with a long braid running down her back and a long black skirt—Orthodox. She had a book on her lap and I could hear the faintest sound, a cantillation—the distinct chant of the reading of the Megillah.[123] From the hilltop just beyond the monastery's bell tower, I could see Tel Aviv to the northeast, the road to Jerusalem behind me, and the towns of Lod and Ramla directly in front of me. A small patch of forest stood between us; this was Hulda. I remembered Khulda from my last expedition. Another dot on my hiking maps that approached the 417 others. I ended up there, as on many occasions, by accident. I was on my way to Gaza. It was December 2008, and Israel had just launched an all-out assault. From our television set in Ramallah all we could see were clouds of smoke rising from Gaza City, ambulances rushing through the narrow, crowded streets, and people running with bloodied children in their arms—the same piece of footage running over and over every ten minutes in a traumatic repetition. We got into our car and drove towards Gaza with no purpose other than perhaps witnessing. Did I think we would rush people from their bombarded homes to nearby hospitals? As there was a full-scale military operation ensuing, predictably, we were not allowed to enter. We were turned back at the foreboding entry to Gaza called the Erez Checkpoint. In fact, we were turned back a kilometer down the road from Erez, where a jeep straddled the highway in front of us. I attempted some story about being an international journalist. I was directed to the "journalist area," a twenty-foot hill beside a highway five kilometers away from Gaza. Long lenses sat atop tripods capturing wisps of white smoke, the same ones I had seen a few hours earlier on television. The reporters pointed and conferred with others as to whether it was white phosphorous. After an hour of speculating and feeling the mounting frustration of helplessness, we got back on the road. I thought perhaps if we returned to our practice of photographing Palestinian villages of 1948, we would at least contribute in some small way to the battle against the ongoing destruction of memory. While three thousand people were soon to be killed in Gaza, I climbed the hill to Khulda, once a Palestinian village of approximately 300 people, transformed into the site of the JNF's first forestation project dedicated to the memory of Theodor Herzl.

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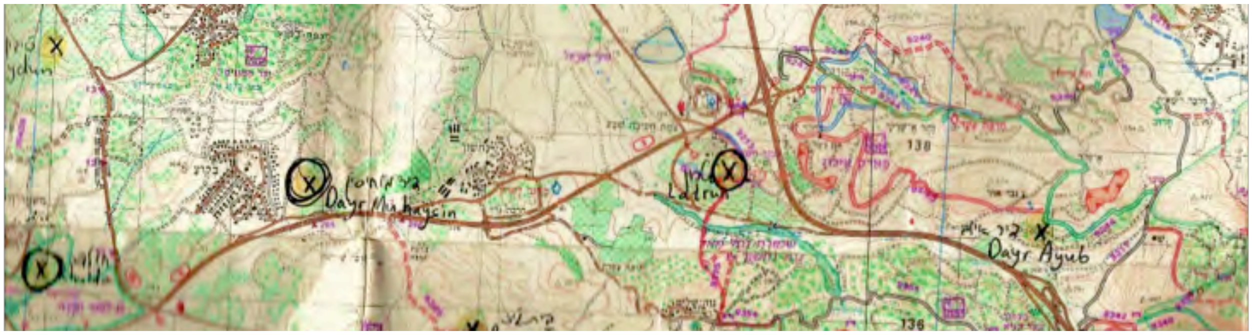
[122] Shushan Purim refers to the celebration of the Jewish holiday Purim as it relates to the Persian capital city of Shushan where the Jews were saved from annihilation. Normally Purim is celebrated on the 14th of the month of Adar, the day after the Jews fought their enemies and rested. But in Shushan, the Jews fought for two days and hence the celebration comes a day later. This translated to walled cities including Jerusalem and outlying villages such as Beit Shemesh, Lod, Ramla and other Palestinian villages we were near to on this day.

[123] The reading of the Megillah, the Book of Esther, is part of the traditional celebrations on Purim.

According to Kahlidi, Khulda (PGR: 141136) was a village that sat atop a flat hill with a four-sided view, lying close to the highway that connected Gaza with Jerusalem. According to the history of the Haganah the village was taken "without fighting." The houses however, were razed to the ground two weeks after its was occupied and the residents were never to return.[124] Khulda was at the centre of a series of battles that took place under the code name: Operation Nachshon, whose mission was to break the siege of Jerusalem. According to Israeli historian Benny Morris, operational orders stated that "all villages along the (Jerusalem-Khulda) axis were to be treated as enemy assembly" if they were to resist then they should all be destroyed and their inhabitants expelled.[125]



Illus.36 Israel Topographical Map, Set of 12.

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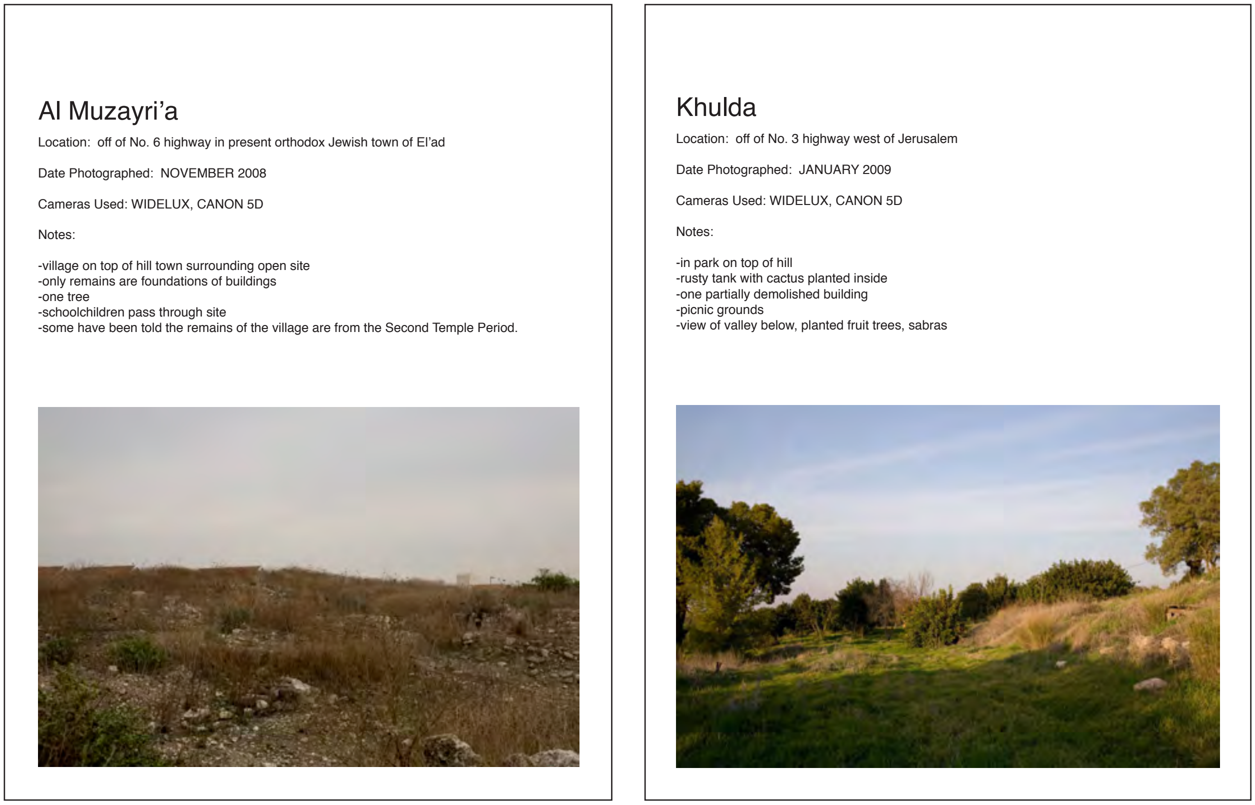
[124] Khalidi, Walid, Ed., *All That Remains, The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*. (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992). p.389

[125] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 114.

WHAT ISN'T THERE
LOGBOOK MAY 2004-JULY 2010

Illus.37 What Isn't there, logbook cover, 2009-2011



Al Muzayri’a

Location: off of No. 6 highway in present orthodox Jewish town of El’ad

Date Photographed: NOVEMBER 2008

Cameras Used: WIDELUX, CANON 5D

Notes:

-village on top of hill town surrounding open site
-only remains are foundations of buildings
-one tree
-schoolchildren pass through site
-some have been told the remains of the village are from the Second Temple Period.

Khulda

Location: off of No. 3 highway west of Jerusalem

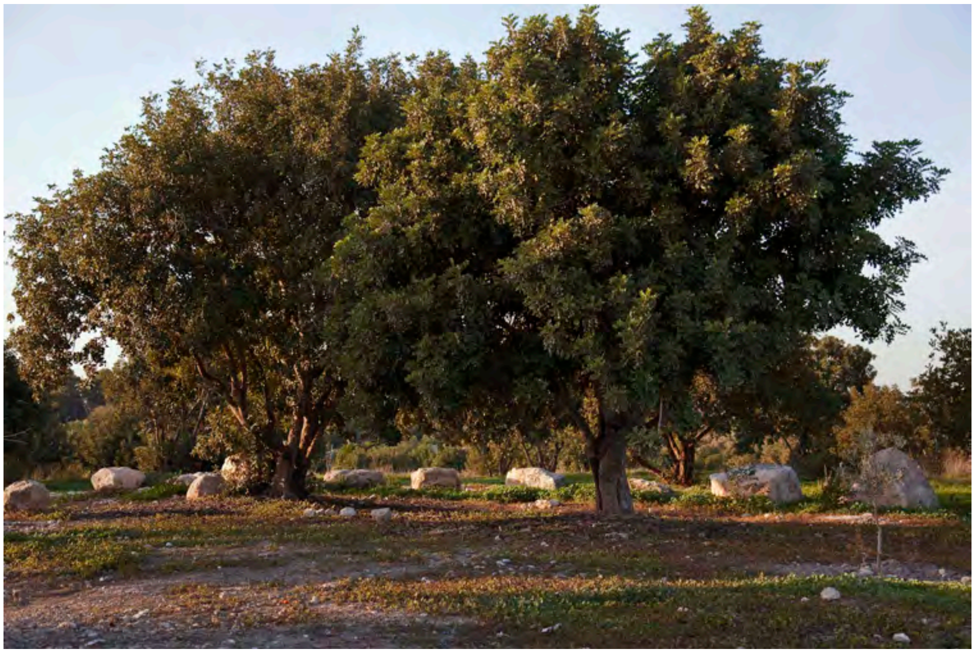
Date Photographed: JANUARY 2009

Cameras Used: WIDELUX, CANON 5D

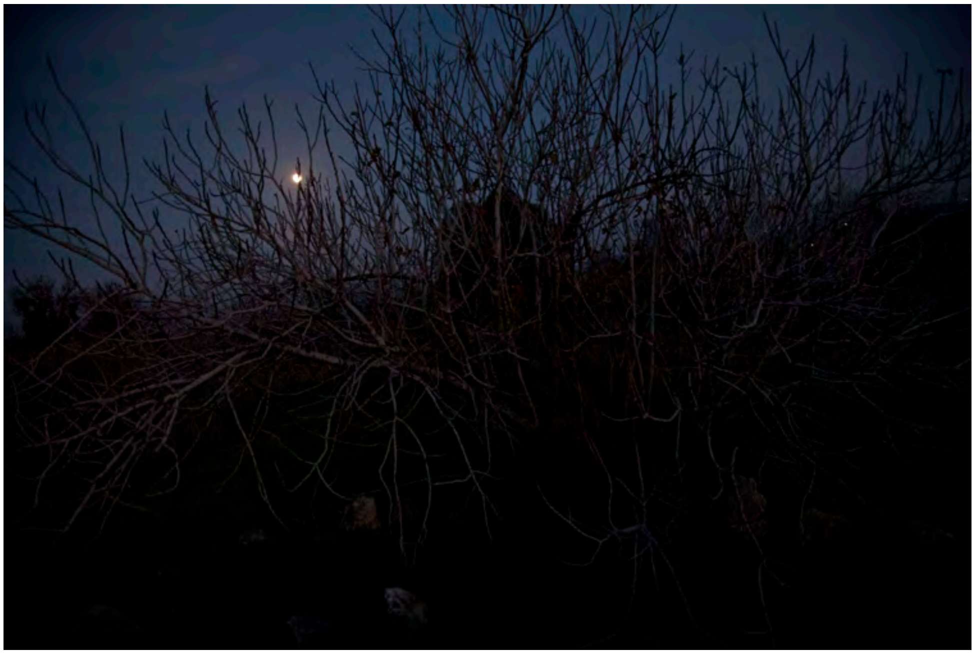
Notes:

-in park on top of hill
-rusty tank with cactus planted inside
-one partially demolished building
-picnic grounds
-view of valley below, planted fruit trees, sabras

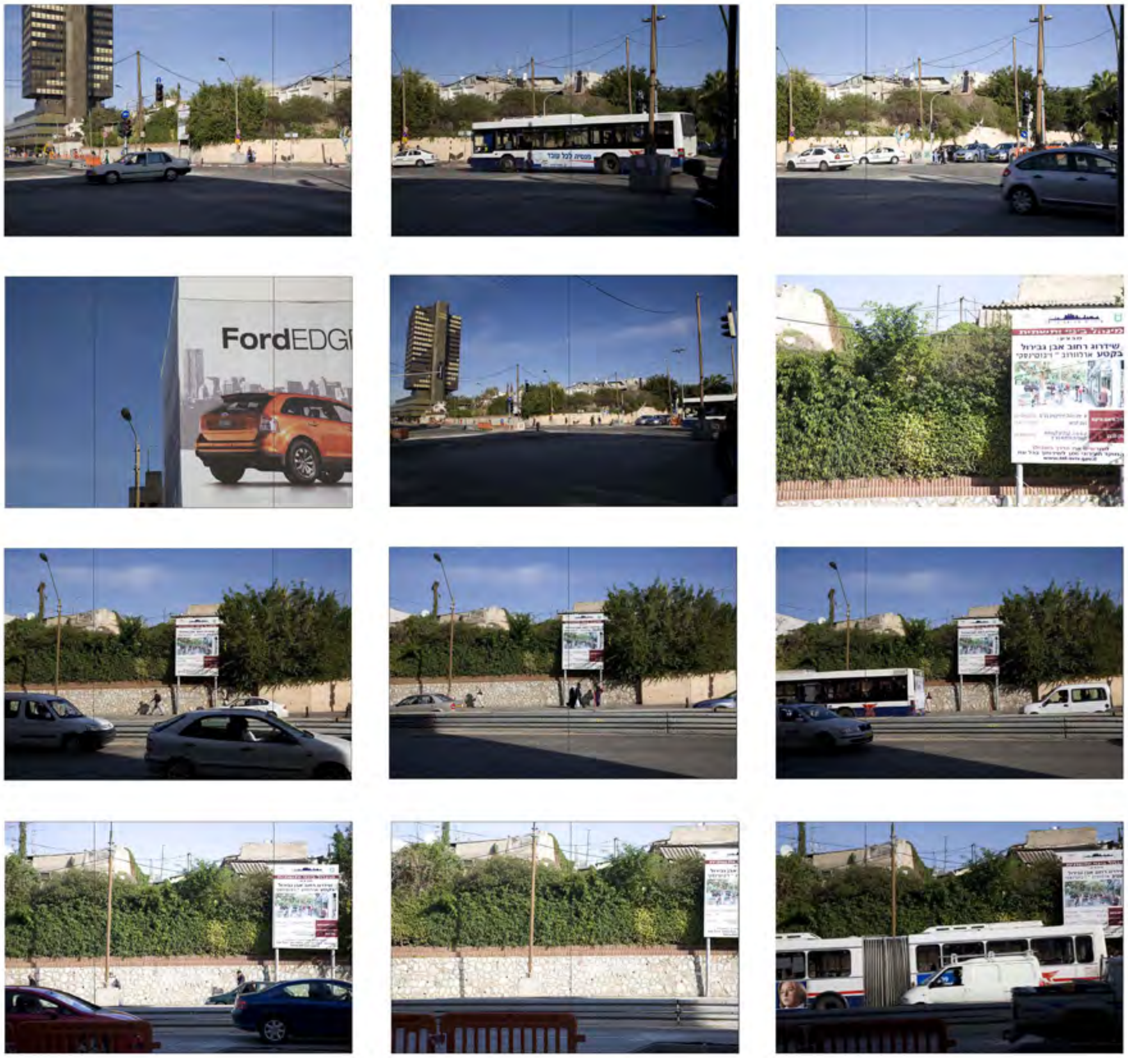
Illus.38 What Isn’t There, Log Book, details. 2011



Illus.39 What Isn't There, Khulda Inkjet Archival Photo, Beit Zaytoun, Toronto, 2011



Illus.40 What Isn't There, Deir Muhaysin, Inkjet Archival Photo, Beit Zaytoun, Toronto, 2011



Illus.41 What Isn't There Typology. Inkjet Archival Photo, Zochrot, Tel Aviv, 2012

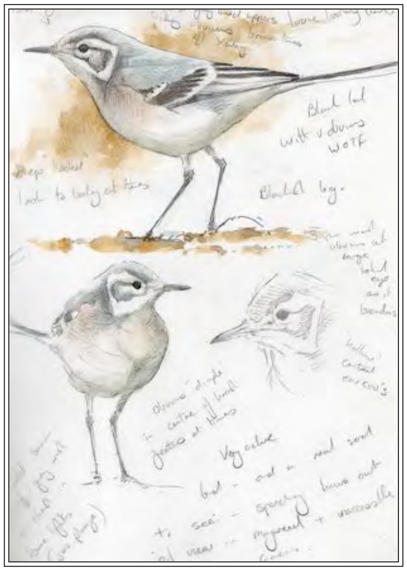
As I gazed across from the village of Latrun to Khulda, to Dayr Muhaysin (PGR: 143137), their triangulation spread out before me, the Gaza drive elides with our sojourns in these villages and our current Purim hike. The villages ceased being pastoral locations and instead turned into geographic points on a map lining up in a military strategy with the wars folding in on one another. I traipsed back down the hill of Latrun and put the cameras into the trunk of the car.

This event marked the beginning of a new series of works, a more frenetic gathering of images as the landscape began to shift drastically. Spaces were collapsing into one another with the emergence of the separation wall splitting the West Bank from Israel and splintering Palestine further into shards with settlements and checkpoints and separations between peoples. The wall and all the arbitrary boundaries that came with it were creating an even more pronounced state of apartheid. Palestine was being defined solely along 1967 borders, and Palestinians within Israel (from 1948) were being completely segregated from one another. Now living in Ramallah (in Palestinian 1967 borders),Tamira and I attempted to create an atlas of sorts, logging as many villages as we could manage as we traveled across military checkpoints and borders to photograph the Palestinian villages of 1948.

We created two sets of images: a continuation of the Widelux panoramas, but also a series of digital 35mm photographs to serve as logs, markers of our presence in each village; later, these photographs became the subject of several exhibitions that were interested in the archive.

---Khirbet al Zababida---

Blinding Light, Looking at Looking



Illus.42

Citrine Wagtail (Motacilla citriolla)

Of the still more extensive genus of Wagtails or Warblers, Palestine offers an interesting collection; but none of them occur with much frequency. Most readers will remember that there is little allusion in Scripture to the singing of birds.[126]

According to my map, Khirbet Al Zababida[127] (PGR: 134184) was off to the right of Highway 2, the main coastal highway from Tel Aviv to Haifa. Tamira and I took the exit to Kibbutz Yakum, and began the task of pinpointing the location of this tiny village. There was a gas station on my left with a road that circled behind it. We drove on a narrow, single-lane, paved road that lead to an even narrower dirt road. A corroded sign that said Jazra Nature Reserve hung on an angle by a single rusty nail. We parked under a tree and began hiking through the tall grasses soaking my canvas shoes with the early morning dew. There were a few small structures on a hill to my left but I couldn't tell if they were the remains of the village or outbuildings belonging to the kibbutz[128] that was to my right. Before 1948, the village was reported to be of moderate size and inhabited by a Bedouin tribe called al-Nusayrat. They grew bananas, citrus, and grains and constructed a canal to drain the marshy land around it. There had been a road that linked this hamlet to the larger town of Qalqilya to the southeast. To the west of the village were sand dunes separating it from the sea.[129] In looking for clues of Zababida's past, I barely noticed the three buses dropping off hundreds of school children ranging from six to sixteen. The younger children were being directed to look at plants and flowers, learning how to observe and identify species in this petite nature reserve. Wearing headphones attached to a field recorder, I could hear the amplified sounds of birds, buses idling in the background, and hundreds of children. I was sure I heard their guide say something about a circus tent in the distance, but when I gazed in the direction he had pointed, somewhere between the nothing that was visible and the cognitive dissonance from the possibility of a circus in a nature reserve, I dismissed his comment as the fault of my rusty Hebrew, and we continued walking.

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[126] John Kitto, *The Pictorial History of Palestine and the Holy Land: Including a Complete History of the Jews*, vol II (London: Charles Knight and Co, 1844).

[127] Khirbet is the Arabic for a small ruin

[128] Collective farming communities established in the early 1900's that were a blend of Zionism and socialism.

[129] Khalidi 566.

While Tamira filmed the hordes of children, I meandered through the gently sloping green valleys of the reserve and spotted a Yellow-headed Wagtail, a fairly shy creature that flew off in the direction of the invisible tent. This particular Wagtail, also known as a Citrine Wagtail, is at the centre of an ongoing debate as to whether in belongs phylogenically to Eastern and Western Wagtails—its belonging hanging in taxonomical bAllance. That it finds itself here, at once between the East and West, is no mistake. It darts in and out of the bushes; I follow.

There was an orchard of neatly planted orange trees belonging to the kibbutz's land that we were now trespassing on. I remembered a childhood story about how Israeli law allowed a person to eat as much as they wanted from a kibbutz field or orchard, but only if the yield was consumed right then and there. If you carried grapefruits, oranges, peaches, or the like off the land, you could be arrested. This struck me as a fair and equitable arrangement that meshed with the socialist values that the kibbutzim were founded on. There were signs all around warning trespassers of biting dogs which seemed to contradict those very romantic ideals, and while terrified a white-fanged Doberman might appear at any moment, I decided to test the theory and reached out for the perfect, juicy orange. I peeled it and popped a slice in my mouth. Despite the intoxicating scent of orange blossom all around me, I was greeted with the most bitter orange I had ever tasted. We continued a little further along the orchard and reached a tear in the fence.

Kibbutz Yakum, established in 1947, had taken over the old village lands of Al Zababida after the residents were evicted in 1948. The coastal plain between Tel Aviv and Haifa was an expanse of considerable Jewish settlement by 1948, and the design was to clear the area of Arabs to make way for more Jewish settlers.[130]

We heard voices coming from the other side, right through a hole in the fence. Crossing over would allow me to get away from the invisible attack dogs but also into what appeared to be someone else's private property. Had we reached the end of the nature reserve? We stepped over the fence and stopped immediately: A slight, small bald man was throwing knives at something I could not quite see.

I peered around the bush and saw the knives' destination. Thankfully, they were bouncing off a wooden board; an Amazonian woman was coaching the waif-like man. With his last throw the knife stuck, and through my headphones I could hear the tip finding its entry-point into the wood. We moved with some hesitation towards a small tent in the compound. Inside were twenty or so men and women in tights, sweatshirts, and bandanas holding back youthful hair. They were scattered around like colourful jewels; sinewy women climbing ropes, contortionists exercising on floor mats, and a dreadlocked boy twirling endlessly inside a large metal hoop. No one seemed to mind two strangers, one with headphones and a recorder and the other with a film camera, standing by and watching.

Outside the tent there was a woman swinging back and forth on a trapeze with a long safety line attached around her waist. She shouted down to us that we could film her but that it was really only her second time on the trapeze. On the ground, an antipodist, who was juggling cylinders and barrels with his feet, asked where we were from and what the film was about. Against my better judgment, I decided to tell them just what it was—that there was a Palestinian village right under this circus tent, under the tight wire, the trampoline, the climbing ladder, and the trapeze. There was no anger or argument; they simply listened and nodded. They wished us luck and went back to their swinging, jumping, climbing, contorting, bAllancing, and other feats. A little while later, a tall blond man with grey eyes and a ponytail came over and said he thought the film was "very important." "They don't teach us any of that in school," he offered. "We need to know. I will never see this circus tent the same way again and I don't think I will see any place here the same way. Thank you." His honesty and unaffectedness took us by surprise, as it was not something we were used to in a country of people known for their unapologetic aggressiveness. He ran off to join the others in a group floor exercise. We exited the circus grounds climbed back through the tear in the fence, like Alice emerging from the rabbit hole. We hiked back across the little nature reserve and sat down under the shadow of a large Eucalyptus tree, the branches drooping down, almost touching the ground and swooping back up again with the small afternoon gusts of wind.

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[130] Khalidi 566.

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CHAPTER 5

---Pointing East, The Indexicality of Palestine---

Photography's contingent status as an index, a trace of the real, has placed a heavy burden on photographic images; we battle over their meaning and significance, putting strain on their existence. As photography has entered a new phase, both in its digital incarnation and in its prominent positioning as "the new painting" gracing the museum's walls,[131] we must ask many of the same questions again about what images can do, but from a new vantage point, not only to make meaning, but to make meaning matter. By instantiating the notion of responsibility for what is visible, I have approached these debates through a lens of landscape photography, not simply to investigate how photography functions in relation to landscape, but rather, with the intention of rereading contemporary landscape, in general, and the landscape of Palestine, in particular. The ongoing effort demanded by *What Isn't There* requires, therefore, a rethinking of our relationship to images and what they do through the triangulation of photographer, subject, and viewer wherein their affect resonates in the larger political sphere. As photography has an historical vocation as a conveyor of information—be it scientific, journalistic, even aesthetic—a photograph was and still is linked to the indexical; the assumption here is that it points to something that "was," and as viewers we are engaged in that process of completing an image's trace with a myriad of interpretative possibilities. Contemporary photography, however, elicits new questions for older theories about indexicality that not only try to account for current anxieties about the disappearance of the medium in the age of digitization, but also address some of the significant changes that have occurred over the last two decades in the photographic field, in which photography has come to dominate museums and galleries, addressing very different concerns.

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[131] In a conversation between Allan Sekula and Benjamin Buchloh in *Performance Under Working Conditions,* Buchloh points out that "the large-scale colour photographic image has been pictorialized to such a degree that it has effectively taken the place of painting." Ed. Sabine Breitweiser, 22, (Vienna, Generali Foundation, 2003).

Mary Ann Doane in her article, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction," undertakes a history of the index in order to better understand our relationship to images as they undergo the transformation of digitization. The core of her argument—"that the index in fact is perched precariously on the very edge of semiosis"[132]—suggests that the process of encounter and engagement are implicated in the reading of photographs. David Green and Joanna Lowry, contemporary British photography theorists, have asserted that the act of taking the photograph is as relevant to its reading as the trace that exists therein. Shifting the focus of the index as a marker singularly of past events, both Doane and Green/Lowry move us, and the image, into the present pointing to an extended notion of indexicality:

> [. . .]the indexical sign was less to do with its causal origins and more to do with the way in which it pointed to the event of its own inscription. Photographs, therefore, are not just indexical because light happened to be recorded in an instant on a piece of photosensitive film but because first and foremost, they were taken.[133]

Hence indexicality emerges as a twinned notion including the record and its event, *double indexicality*. What I am suggesting, therefore, is both the event that took place and its recording, the act of photographing the event, is as much a part of what we see, as the trace in the image itself. Furthermore, we can say that in accordance with the concept of index as trace, we are also witnessing the supplemental, that which is in excess yet is integral to meaning. If we agree with Doane's formulation of the index as *deixis*, the aspect of the indexical—which according to Pierce represents the shifter in language emptying out the image,[134] (this, they, now, here)—we can conclude that it performs the function of pointing to "what isn't there." It is the dialectic between these two (the deictic index and the index as trace) that produces what Doane calls "an eeriness and uncanniness"[135] invoking the real, returning a presence not necessarily seen but nevertheless experienced by the viewer.

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[132] Mary Ann Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," in *Differences* 18. 1 (Spring 2007) 2.

[133] David Green and Joanna Lowry, "From Presence to the Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality" in *Where is the Photograph*, ed. David Green (Brighton: Photoforum and Photoworks, 2003), 48.

[134] Ibid 2.

The photographic index is a marker of not only what has been, but of what was performed, i.e. the act of taking the photograph. It is in this secondary aspect that we come to understand the larger interplay of not only what is happening in our engagement with the photos of Palestinian villages that no longer exist, but also of contemporary photography, in general.

Doane, and Lowry/Green's important contribution to the discussion on the *index* and *double indexicality* is important here for two reasons: first, it contends with contemporary photography, not only with "banal" or everyday images; and secondly, it substantiates the case for photography as politics through a process of "encounter and engagement" as proposed by Ariella Azoulay, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Rancière.

The final element to understanding and closing the circle of the photographic event is the photographer's act of photographing and the resulting photograph, which, together with the viewers' and photographers' "civic duty," [136] functions as a place of politics and how aesthetics meets politics.

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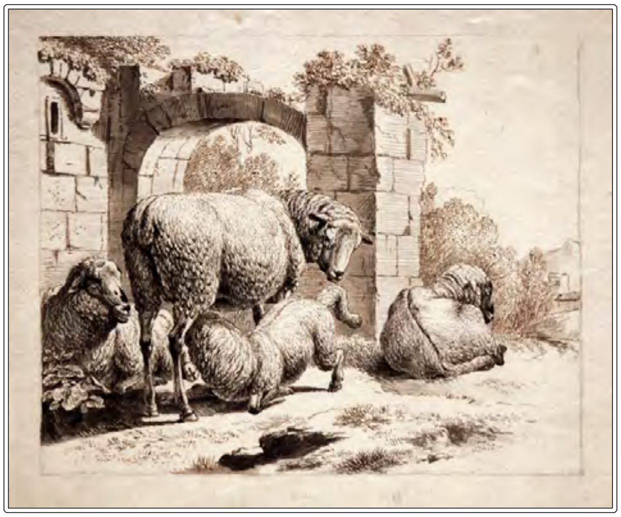
135 Doane 2.

136 In Azoulay's *Civil Contract of Photography*, she argues that photography is a key component of public life and culture that requires an ethical engagement between subject, viewer and photographer. This dialogic encounter is a kind of "civic duty."

---Al Shajara: Of Surrogates and Bitter Oranges---



Illus.43

Sheep (Ovis aries)

Only the orange peel is ours.
Behind me was the desert.
I saw you on briar-covered mountains;
You were a shepherdess without sheep,
Pursued among the ruins.
You were my garden
When I was away from home.
I would knock on the door, my heart,
For on my heart

The doors and windows, cement and stones are laid.[137]

We unload our bags and proceed down the steep hill to our "loft" in Ilaniya, a Moshav[138] founded in 1902. The sign at the entrance to the village, by the large electronic gate, boasts of its one hundredth anniversary. We follow the directions given to us by Aviram, our host. Next to the grocery, to the left of the entrance, is their home, an old stone house with a string of torn Israeli flags, a wild garden full of spring blooms, a small orange tree that produces bitter oranges known as Khush Khash,[139] and a sign in Hebrew that reads "Where Reality Meets Spirit." Our host greets us as he unloads three small children from a tiny car. He is slightly rumpled, with what looks like an English Flat Cap sitting atop his head. He appears more like an Englishman in the countryside than an Israeli on a Moshav, yet oddly seeming both in and out of place. He is, in fact, a French horn player for the Haifa Symphony.

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[137] Mahmoud Darwish, *Lover From Palestine*, trans. Fady Joudah, in a private correspondence Nov. 30, 2013.

[138] Moshav is the Hebrew word for small town or village. Many were akin to a Kibbutz with a slightly different working model. While there was some collective activity, each farmer owned their own parcel of land.

[139] Khush Khash is an orange varietal that is only used for juice blending.

Ilaniya began as a small communal farm originally established in 1902 by early Zionists. Like most pre-1948 Israeli settlements, it took its name, originally Sejera from the Palestinian town it abuts: al-Shajara (PGR: 187239), which literally means "the tree" in Arabic. Later, the Moshav renamed itself Ilaniya, the Hebrew word for "tree." It was settled by members of the Second Aliyah (1904-1914), a movement of young mostly Russian idealists escaping the pogroms of Russia and armed with revolutionary ideology. Most Jews associated with this movement established communal agricultural settlements (such as the Kibbutz and Moshav). In photographs from the Central Zionist Archive, farmers of the Second Aliyah can be seen mostly wearing Russian peasant peaked caps. After the war of 1948, the settlers evicted the Palestinian villagers who lived in Sejera, destroying their village, and absorbing its lands as their own.

Aviram's partner Ronen won't be back until nine o'clock that evening: "He works near Tel Aviv as a computer engineer and I'm pretty much a single parent these days." Aviram and Ronen have three adopted children: a boy from Guatemala and twin girls from India. The girls were conceived by an Indian surrogate with Aviram's sperm and a donor egg from an anonymous Indian woman. This method has become increasingly popular amongst gay men in Israel who are forbidden by law from using domestic surrogates. In 2008, the *New York Times* followed this trend of medical tourism revealing the exploitation that comes with the practice of renting wombs (oftentimes from illiterate women who never see the money).[140]

Do I imagine these colonial moments more often in Israel than back home in Canada? I scrutinize every detail I know, but these behavioural norms are indeed part of the narrative of Palestinian dispossession by a colonial enterprise and belong to a legacy of post-colonialism. To omit these details would be to perpetuate the dominant narrative that for too long has constructed the tale of modern Israel's birth. This process of decoding is at the very heart of my undertaking, a slow and deliberate pulling of threads, an unraveling one set of images to be replaced with another. While this causes some anxiety, some sense of one truth versus another, competing narratives, photographic truth and other such tropes, it also is an opening, a place from which to see something else.

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[140] Amelia Gentleman, "Foreign Couples Turn to India for Surrogate Mothers," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2008.

I am reminded of my discomfort as a young photography student while reading Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. His elegiac text and its imposed subtext that wove beneath and covered and darkened the image, read completely against the grain of photography theory of the time which was geared towards an institutional critique and the social role of photography.[141] But my anxiety was a remnant of reading photography as documents with singular fixed meanings, as historical records rather than the complex indexes constructed of ideologies that we know in our heads but forget in our hearts. I read that Barthes had written this text soon after the death of his mother—I was reading his text at the time of my father's death. I had one particular photograph of my father I had taken ten days before he died. It was dark, grainy, and difficult to read; but, of all the photographs I had of my father, this one contained my *punctum*. These events provoked in me this rereading of images, making space for the imprecise science of affect.

We film Aviram, a proud father, carrying his two daughters in his arms to the old village lands of al-Shajara. We are approximately fifteen kilometers from Tiberius, with several more villages to film in the morning.

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[141] Allan Sekula's Body and the Archive, 1986; Martha Rosler's "in around and afterthoughts (on documentary photography), 1982; Douglas Crimp's "The Museum's Old/The Library's New Subject, 1981; etc.

---Affect---

Much debate has surrounded the affect of images, especially as it relates to responsibility and judgment. Susan Sontag has argued in *On Photography* and later in *Regarding the Pain of Others* that photography is incapable of intervention; the photographer cannot intervene any more than the photographed. Sontag proposes therefore that photography's addressee is the viewer and not the subject, suggesting that photography fails in its promise to awaken social conscience or as she exclaimed even more damningly: "the act of photographing is more than passive observing ...it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening."[142] While Sontag is correct in her observations that the ubiquity of images of suffering have in turn given rise to a variety of affective responses, from indifference to compassion, this does not necessarily make true that they contribute to ongoing atrocities. But how can we reconcile the place of the image in the face of atrocity? Does our viewing of the image affect our thinking and bring us to judgment?

In her doctoral dissertation *Visualizing Human Rights*, Sharon Sliwinski claims that photographic representation is integral to understanding atrocity as it provides us a psychic bridge to something we cannot experience as it is occurring. We produce a blind spot in order to live through trauma, and hence the psyche can only recognize those events through images of something that has already happened. It is from this recognition that Sliwinski argues we see atrocity as unjust, which in turn sets the terms for the conceptualization of an Others' rights. For her, this happens through the aesthetic encounter with images:

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[142] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977) 12. It is interesting to note, although not within in the scope of this paper, that much recent theory suggests that Human Rights work only serves to legitimize the illegal actions of the state it is interfering with. An example of this would be the UN's ongoing assistance to Palestinians through the refugee program that serves to keep them in at levels of subsistence, or as Azoulay says: "on the verge of catastrophe."

> The encounter with a photograph of atrocity is affectively disruptive, producing a feeling of uncanniness, or at the extreme, anomie. This disruption can provoke the spectator's faculty of judgment, which, I claim, serves as an act of recognition.[143]

She reminds us that many critics have argued that photography tears representation away from reality leaving a void between aesthetics and politics placing photography somewhere between its incapacity to effect change and as something that helps us see what may otherwise not have been seeable.[144]

In her subsequent book *Human Rights in Camera,* Sliwinski proposes that it is through an aesthetic encounter with images that we are reminded that we have the "right to have rights."[145] While she acknowledges that we do not always arrive at the same moral convictions from witnessing images of atrocity, "the aesthetic encounter can give way to reflective awareness of our role as moral agents. Contemplation of the emotional situation will give rise to thought."[146]

In this same framework, therefore, Sontag's response to images of horror manifest as a negative dialectic, a traumatic break that rests in Lyotard's sublime.[147] This break that leaves Sontag in a state of despair does not negate the operations of the aesthetic encounter with images as a place for the production of human rights, but rather signifies a negative dialectic in which the break with comprehension (Lyotard's sublime), points to that which is outside the individual—an engagement with the Other that produces a *dissensus*.

Photography's affect, which moves from the personal to the realm of judgment, circulates in a network of social relations that, while opening our minds to what is possible and creating a *sensus communis*, remains for Sliwinski in the world of *vita contemplativa.* I would like to suggest however, following Rancière and Ariella Azoulay, that our aesthetic engagement with images is better aligned with *vita activa*. For Rancière as I will demonstrate, this is determined through an elision between art and politics to *art as politics* and for Azoulay it results in her restructuring the ontology of photographs as the event of photography—an encounter between the photographed, the photographer and the subject.

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[143] Sharon Sliwinski, *Visualizing Human Rights: Photography, Atrocity and the Ethical Imagination* (PhD Dissertation, York University, 2005) 6.

[144] Ibid 2.

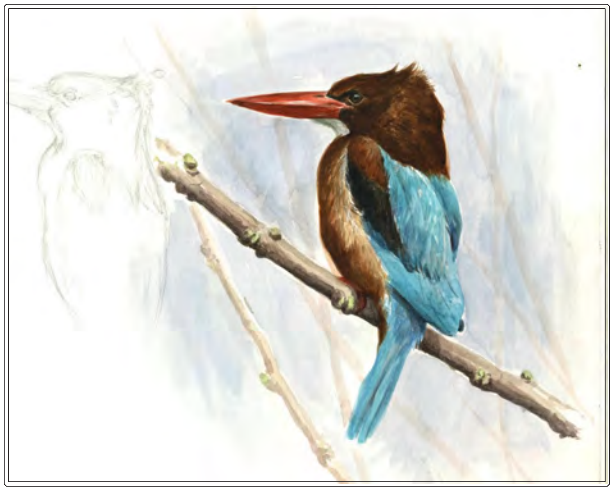
[145] Following Hanna Arendt's formulation in which "the right to have rights" was formulated on recognition and hence the right to belong to a community.

[146] Sharon Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera* (Chicago: University of Chicago University Press, 2011), 30.

[147] Ibid 32-33.

Al Majdal: Mary Magdalene's Hometown

(Canon 5d DSLR)



Illus.44

White Throated Kingfisher (Halycon Smymensis)

The kingfisher is sometimes given to hoarding, and, having caught more fish than it can eat, will take them to its secret storehouse, a crevice among roots perhaps, and there hide them until it is able to eat them. [148]

Hoards of tour buses pass us on the road as we wind our way around the Sea of Galilee. Our first stop is a village called Al Majdal (PGR: 198247), which in Arabic means, the tower. There are several versions, as one gets used to in this land, of the progeny of the town's name. It is clear however, that is indeed connected to the ancient Magdala, the town reputed to be the birthplace of Mary Magdalene. There are writings from as early as the sixth century by Christian pilgrims of their visit to Magdala who had traveled to see the church and house of Mary Magdalene (although no church was ever found). There is indeed a Roman town however, being dug up this very moment. A synagogue, some Roman houses and a marketplace have thus far been identified. This particular dig, unlike most, was a joint project between a Mexican priest, Father Juan Maria Solana, the Israeli Antiquities Authority and a Muslim-Palestinian archeologist, Dr. Arfan Najjar. It seemed quite unusual because the workers at the site were Israeli Arabs from nearby towns and international archeology students. I didn't hear a word of Hebrew or meet a Jewish Israeli that morning. The only indication that this was a Jewish-Israeli sanctioned dig was the Israeli flag, its white background and blue Star of David waving beside another one, an intensely blue flag with a white emblem belonging to the Israel Antiquity Authority. In the distance there was some construction going on which Professor Najjar said was the future hotel for Christian pilgrims who would arrive upon the completion of the new church commemorating "Mary Magdalene's Hometown" as the sign at the entrance informed us. We were invited to look around and given permission to film; I had spoken in Arabic and earned their trust.

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[148] *Appleton's Journal of Literature Science and Art* (New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1869), 444.

We arrived first at Al Majdal in the morning, the site of the Palestinian village approximately 500 meters from the current archeological site. There is no sign for 'Al Majdal', however there is a sign for Majdal,[149] which boasts a beach on the Sea of Galilee (no swimming allowed), a picnic ground and a sad looking swing-set circa 1975. There is an equally musty looking, closed, snack shop. The place is deserted. We take our cameras out preparing to film the village. There are a few fishermen in the distance, standing motionless but for occasionally casting their fishing lines. At first I think they must be Arab villagers from nearby, but as we get closer, I hear the distinct sound of Russian that can be heard across this country as often as Hebrew. The men are topless; one with an enormous belly is lying face down on the beach. It is barely eight o'clock in the morning, a tent stands nearby the fishermen and a fire crackles on the beach with a coffee pot boiling away, all of which I pick-up on my microphone. One man sets out in an undignified rubber dingy yelling back to his friends as he rows away from shore. This is the current population of Al Majdal, formerly a town of approximately 62 houses according to a 1931 census. In 1948, after the destruction of Tiberias by Jewish Forces, the order went out to clear all the Arab villages in the area around the sea of Galillee. The villagers of Al Majdal were transported to the Jordanian border. [150] The Israeli town of Migdal, purchased by Russian Zionists in 1910, currently owns much of Al Majdal's lands.

A white-throated kingfisher, an intensely turquoise bird, the likes of which I had never seen before, hung over the bulrushes at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. The Russian fishermen continued to take turns in the dingy going back and forth across the water while the pounding of stone could be heard from the church and hotel construction a half-kilometer away. Aviram, our host back in Ilaniya, put his hands across his face and explained, “I draw a screen around my eyes so that all I can see is beauty; the rest I forget about.”

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[149] Removing the "Al" (Arabic for "the") from the name of the town removes it from the lexicon of Palestine, essentially stripping it of its "proper name."

[150] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,1947-49* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984),114.

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CHAPTER 6

---Finding the Political---

> ... aesthetics is not the theory of the beautiful or of art; nor is it the theory of sensibility. Aesthetics is an historically determined concept which designates a specific regime of visibility and intelligibility of art, which is inscribed in a reconfiguration of the categories of sensible experience and its interpretation. [151]

What does it mean to consider art as politics rather than political art? For Rancière aesthetics does not stand apart from politics, it is not a supplement but rather is constituted by and with the aesthetic regime of art. Azoulay argues that the photograph is an act of politics—both point to the gap we have created between the world of aesthetics and the world of politics that renders art powerless. I would argue that Rancière and Azoulay's main concern is with politics—who has power, who is heard and how can the voiceless gain voice? Rancière's politics is specific to that which lies outside of what he terms "the police" which refers to the institutionalized, the social order, the organization of powers. Hence for Rancière politics is a place of emancipatory possibility; it is a place of participation for all and manifest as an event that disrupts the homogenous space of the social order. This happens via the redistribution of the sensible—it is this redistribution that allows for our very participation in the social. In other words, the sensible constitutes *politics*.

For Ariella Azoulay, the photograph is understood as an enactment between the photographed, the photographer, and the spectator. Through this triad, the act of photography becomes one of engagement and responsibility. Photography is no longer Sontag's document that is responsible for further atrocity, or Sliwinski's photography that like Sontag's resides in the viewer, but rather a politicized space in which a series of events occur, including witnessing. For Azoulay, spectatorship is a civic duty and therefore belongs to the realm of the political:

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[151] Rancière, Jacques "Thinking between disciplines: an aesthetics of knowledge." in: *Parrhesia*. Vol. 1, 2006. (English). Translated by Jon Roffe.

> Anyone who addresses others through photographs or takes the position of a photograph's addressee, even if she is a stateless person who has lost her "right to have rights," as in Arendt's formulation, is nevertheless a citizen — a member in the citizenry of photography. The civil space of photography is open to her as well. That space is configured by what I call the civil contract of photography.[152]

Azoulay refuses the canonical view of the photograph as the "has been" (as Barthes declares in *Camera Lucida*) and proposes instead that the photograph is a product of *vita active,* active life rather than the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*). Despite the fact that photos are still and therefore appear to produce a relationship to something that was, Azoulay argues instead that the ontology of the photograph is in the event and that it does not even require the production of an image. In other words, it is a set of relations (sometimes producing an excess of what is in the image and sometimes a lack) that can mediate political relations.[153] In her review of Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Irmgard Emmelhainz says:

> [P]ositing photographs as an exchange of gazes, Azoulay, claims that the act of photography, photographer and photographed assume a hypothetical spectator who can potentially interact with them in the space of photography. Proposing an ethical viewership that transcends the passive and desensitized spectator, Azoulay politicizes photography not by considering it as documentation of an event, but as a politicized space that can actualize speech and action.[154]

What Isn't There considers the event of photography as enacting a civic space, a place of politics. In an age of spectacle and the end of images, what can become of art that aims neither to recycle itself, nor to define itself by its uniqueness, but rather positions itself as a response to an *event*? Alain Badiou, who like Rancière is concerned with how something new can be seen, prioritizes "the event"—something that disrupts the current situation. Badiou's event emerges from the domain of art, wherein the subject *becomes* a subject through witnessing. Badiou and Rancière are both concerned with the emancipatory possibilities of aesthetic experience, but Rancière, specifically in

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[152] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*,(New York: Zone Books, 2008), 85.

[153] Ariella Azoulay, "What is a Photograph? What is Photography?" In Philosophy of Photography, Vol. 1, no. 1. 2010 p. 8-13

[154] Irmgard Emmelhainz, Review of Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, unpublished book review, with permission of the author, 9.

The Politics of Aesthetics, offers us an important reversal in relation to aesthetics and "political art":

> The arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them [...] what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible...It is up to the various forms of politics to appropriate, for their own proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices rather than the other way around.[155]

And while it is the political that reconfigures the work of art through appropriation (and hence would not distinguish between works), Rancière proffers an opportunity, through his reconfiguration of the political, a way to once again understand and give voice to images that disrupt the order of things forcing moments of 'democracy'. Rancière's political field, in which the distribution of the sensible takes place, contains no judiciary, no political parties. The "distribution of the sensible," which creates the conditions of possibility for perception, thought, and activity—and hence what it is possible to apprehend by the senses—creates communities and real effects that produce "regimes of sensible intensity." Eli Boronowsky, in "Notes on the Politics of Aesthetics," says that Rancière's aesthetic regime, "attempts the promise of new modes of art and new forms of life and community. This promise ties art to non-art in a complicated 'system of heterologies.'"[156]

Rancière's political framework relies on "active equality" rather than what we can construe currently as a "passive equality"[157]—a place of non-action and political passivity that seems to be pervasive in the West — and only where active equality is present can a 'dissensus' emerge and help produce a reconfiguration of the seemingly inescapable 'nullity' ascribed to all contemporary art most famously by Baudrillard. In those rare moments where *democratic politics* do happen, an aesthetic politics disturbs the "meaningful fabric of the sensible" and "reconfigures given perceptual forms."[158]

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155 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2009) 19.

156 Eli Boronowsky, "Notes on the Politics of Aesthetics" in Fillip 4, Fall 2006. Vancouver.

157 Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 2. May defines passive equality as that which is protected by government institutions, an equality that is 'given' and/or 'protected' rather than taken or enacted by the subjects of equality. Rancière's understanding of *politics* is not the everyday sense of engaging with government, voting, etc, but rather as something that concerns *equality*. For Rancière, democratic politics happens rarely, but it does happen and it is this *dissensus*, the manifestation of the distance from the sensible from itself, that elucidates where the politics of aesthetics merge for Rancière and how/when 'political art' can work.

158 Rancière 63.

> It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations. […] political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an 'awareness' of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. In fact, this ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning.[159]

This has lead me to think about how works of art can *work*, releasing them from the singularity of commodities and simulacra or more significantly from the stagnation of a quotation, of a statement with no political will.

Through a continuous reworking and re-strategizing, I have attempted to position *What Isn't There* in this place of rupture, presenting idyllic landscape images that ask the question of what it is that cannot be seen. The highly charged political landscapes that are presented do not reveal themselves in the immediate (and perhaps not at all), but suggest a multiplicity of places, of histories, of war, destruction, and removal without any "evidence" of such atrocities. By refusing to show the "destruction," the "before and after," *What Isn't There* uses images against themselves to suggest what they fail to capture, provoking what it cannot evoke and reminding us of what we have forgotten.

As time progresses and the villages recede, these spaces have become overrun with Israelis who have taken to these locations as sites of recreational activity. They are mostly unaware of what has transpired in these locations, as there are no signposts or commemorative plaques; there is no mention of them in their history books. The villages exist in national parks, in Israeli cities and towns, by the side of the road and on Kibbutzim. Inevitably, they are populated by Israelis. After the villages were mapped on Google Earth,[160] I shifted my artistic activity from sojourning in remote places in order to find the villages, to arriving at a pre-determined, already located destination in order to film them instead. Since 2009, Tamira and I began filming the sites of the villages in order to engage the space and those who are in them more actively. We were often met with questions as to “what were we filming,” which always generated conversations about these sites. Even if little was exchanged between ourselves and others in the landscape, the presence of our camera and our activity staged an event in which we were all now complicit, disrupting and enacting the space of politics. I will return to these films, now seated as an installation, at the conclusion.

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[159] Ibid 63.

[160] http://www.palestineremembered.com/

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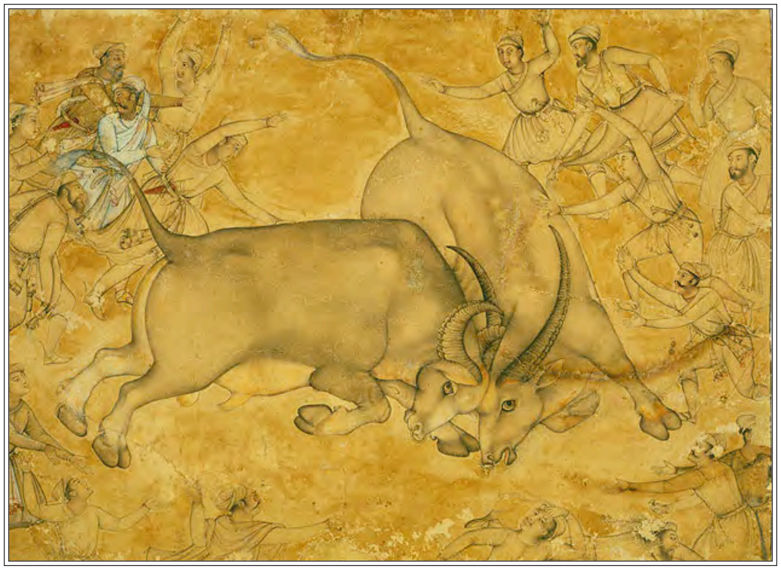
---*Jammasin al-Gharbi: Hamakom*---



Illus.45

Water Buffalo (Bubalas bubalis)

> *Disdainfully doth the buffalo glance thereat, nigh to the sand with its soul, nigher still to the thicket, nighest, however, to the swamp.*
>
> *What is beauty and sea and peacock-splendour to it! This parable I speak unto the poets.*
>
> *Verily, their spirit itself is the peacock of peacocks, and a sea of vanity!*
>
> *Spectators, seeketh the spirit of the poet--should they even be buffaloes!*
>
> *But of this spirit became I weary; and I see the time coming when it will become weary of itself.*
>
> *Yea, changed have I seen the poets, and their glance turned towards themselves.*
>
> *Penitents of the spirit have I seen appearing; they grew out of the poets.-*
>
> *Thus spake Zarathustra.*[161]

Four unfinished towers approximately forty floors each, stood to our left. On our right, a small village or more appropriately, what looked more like a squat with low-rise single floor structures, stretched out in front of us. Just as we were setting-up our cameras, a rotund middle-aged man appeared. He didn't seem friendly. He approached and asked what we were doing there. I told him we were filming the impact the condos across the street were having on this neighbourhood. "You'll forgive me if I don't trust you," he said in a heavily accented English, "we have seen your sort here before and I'd like to ask you to please leave." While we had been warned about entering these contested communities, I really hadn't prepared a quick comeback. We were accused of working for the condo developers, being just one more set of people trying to screw them over. As we weren't working for the condo developers, we at least had some version of the truth on our side. I promised him this wasn't the case, and said we were truly concerned about the subject of the encroachment on their neighbourhood by the developers. We didn't know much about the situation, although we had been somewhat briefed about the long-standing dispute between these people and the Tel Aviv municipality who were attempting to throw them off the land and hand it over to developers. It was prime land at the North End of Tel Aviv to which the most expensive real estate was spreading. David, our interloper, was eventually convinced by my Canadian story and that we were definitely not from the evil developer side of the equation. I hadn't explained the real reason for our visit — that the site he and his fellow squatters were defending was in fact known to us as the Palestinian village of (Al) Jammasin al-Gharbi (PGR 131166), 6.5 kilometers north of Jaffa, 2.5 km from the seashore. According to Khalidi, the village's name Al-Jammasin meant "the buffalo breeders." Gharbi in Arabic means West and references it's sister village to the East (Jammasin al-Sharqi)[162] which we ventured to later in the afternoon. A 1944 census notes a population of 1080 persons.[163]

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[161] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (A Book for All and None) (Los Angeles: IndoEuropean Pub. 2009).106.

The irony of Jewish villagers being thrown out by developers as the Palestinians had before them, escaped our hosts completely. It was one of those blind spots that kept returning time and again in our visits to village locations. David's aunt remembered living with the Palestinians briefly when she was a child, "until the day the busses came and took them away." When she spoke, it was with a cool, detached tone that was hard to reconcile with the traumatic stories of refugees like my neighbour Georgette had told me about her family's trek from Ramla. David and his community's struggle seemed solely rooted to theirs alone, abandoned by the rest of the country in favour of development. David excused himself; he had to get to the synagogue in time for prayers. The synagogue was in a lean-to like structure that stood in the middle of a dusty square that served as a parking lot. A synagogue he told us is necessary; "the authorities will not bulldoze a place sanctified by god."

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[162] Khalidi, *Palestine Remembered*, 244.

[163] Ibid.

Hamakom in Jewish liturgy refers to the presence of god. It literally means "the place." The meaning here is to show that while god is metaphysical, he can only be understood in physical terms by humans. But the use of "place," here does not refer to a geographical location but a space as capable of containing something else, metaphysical and unbounded; a placeless place. Hence space becomes a continuum, something measurable and subject to geometric calculation of points and grids, but so too an infinity that includes that which exceeds the knowable.

From the outset, *What Isn't There* has intended to figure how in the face of absence can a Palestinian presence still be unearthed. Architecture and landscaping have been the co-conspirators that have simultaneously erased Palestinian presence from the land, profoundly enunciating the end of one existence with the beginning of another. *What Isn't There* has endeavored to respond to this void by creating an archive, an atlas of contemporary Israel that re-imagines these spaces differently. For twenty some years, I have researched, walked in search of, collected, filmed, photographed, interviewed, and reconsidered these spaces, mostly viewed through an absence. But there is one work, long-suppressed, in the *What Isn't There* archive, that perhaps re-opens the question of possible worlds from another vantage point.

In what feels like a paradigmatic shift, a "time of possibles," I wish to reveal a singular photo work that has not been exhibited, which Tamira and I produced in 2008. It could be said that this work anticipated another time that is now our current moment.

The image was meant to be part of a series of works about the villages wherein we reimagined them as they may be, in some kind of utopic fiction, replacing an architecture based on appropriated Palestinian forms. In a series of Widelux photographs, we constructed a sequence of boxes, nestling them into the landscape and meant to reference Habitat. Habitat is a modular living complex that was built in Montreal for Expo '67. It was the Masters of Architecture project of Israeli-Canadian Architect Moshe Safdie. His design draws inspiration from the Palestinian villages that dotted the landscape of Safdie's childhood of the 1940s and 50s; their shapes and forms are unmistakable.

Moshe Safdie became affiliated with a group of Israeli architects in the 1950s and 60s, who felt that the Modernist architecture that dominated the Israeli landscape no longer fulfilled the needs of an emerging "Israeli" culture. Modernism's promise of the future corresponded with the early Liberal Zionist aspirations to build the long-awaited dream of a Jewish homeland. Over time however this new group of young architects, born in Israel, wanted a contemporary architecture that spoke more of place, that connected them back to the land in which they were living[164]. In 1967s Six Day War, Israel annexed the West Bank, the Golan Heights, Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula and East Jerusalem. The victory produced a surge of power leading to an intense expansionist-building phase. A new hybrid style that incorporated the (Palestinian) vernacular of the landscape to encourage a greater sense of belonging emerged. Architecture became the main frontier of this ideological battle and Safdie one of its great protagonists.

> Addressing the notion of place (makom in Hebrew), the younger architects claimed that Zionist modernism had failed to create a place to which the new immigrant could belong, and with which she could identify. Nor did it fulfill the desire to "naturalize" Israelis into this ancient region — to devise an architecture "of the place," [Hamakom] a place to which they wanted to belong, as well as possess. The alternative was found in the Palestinian vernacular, which came to typify not only an ideal communal built environment, but more importantly, a natural, harmonious and uncontrived extension "of the place."[165]

Architecture has long-served the purpose of creating a national identity. Israeli architecture reflects and reinforces the nationalist aspirations of the colonial enterprise that is Israel, thus as such also establishes its cultural identity.

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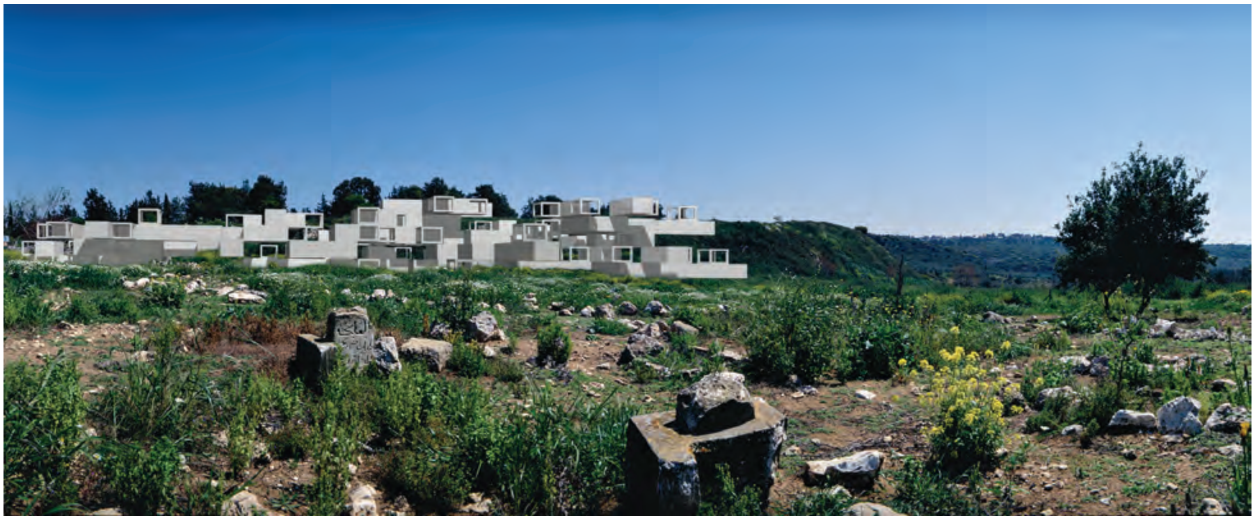
[164] Alona Nitzan-Shiftan, "On Concrete and Stone: Shifts and Conflicts in Israeli Architecture." In *TDSR* xxi.1 (2009): 51-66.

[165] Ibid 55-56

> Throughout history, one of the most explicit, and most meaningful ways to bind people to the land, and to history, has been architecture. Thus, in Israel, the building of structures and the landscaping of nature, from housing estates in East Jerusalem to national parks in the Golan Heights — has both framed the private domain of everyday life and conveyed a narrative of state power.[166]

Whether it was the modernism of the 1920s-1950s that reflected the Jewish migration's desire to create a new world (albeit in one that already existed but was being rapidly dismantled), or the movement of Israeli architects in the 1960s that wanted to reconnect with the land, (that at once Orientalized and on the other replaced Palestinian villages), the very activity of building the nation is embedded in the structures. Their fixity and erasure of a Palestinian landscape replete once with its own buildings, now destroyed, made me wonder if indeed the power of architecture is one way to address the annulment of Palestinian place.

In re-appropriating the forms of a Palestinian village that Safdie had appropriated in the 1960s, we wondered if through this one image, perhaps we could imagine collectively what is there.



Illus.46 Ayn Ghazal, Habitat 48, What Isn't There, 2008

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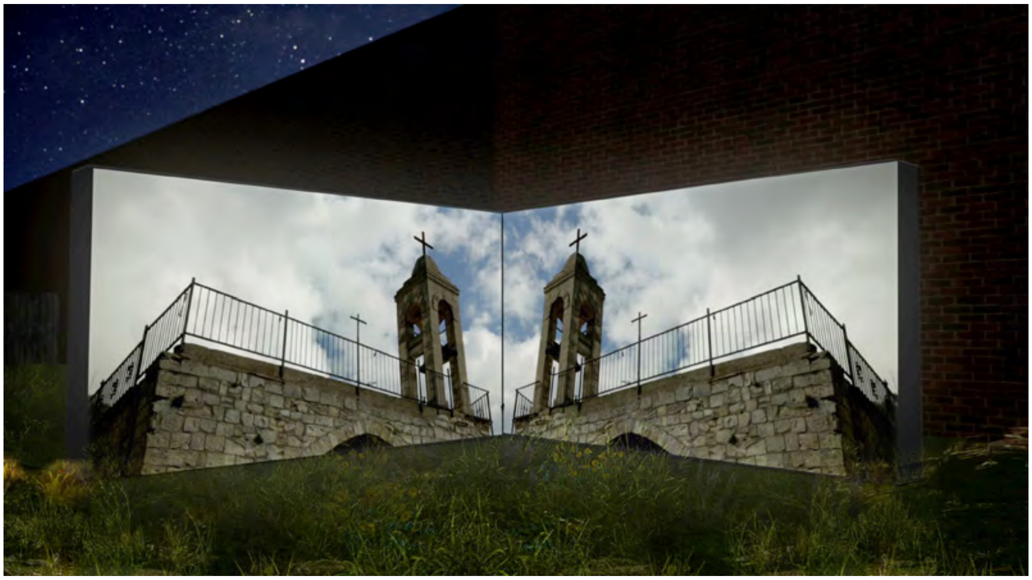
[166] Ibid 52.

---Between Stillness and Movement---



Illus.47 Installation View, What Isn't There, 2014

The most recent incarnation of *What Isn't There* is a film installation of fifteen villages that intends to continuously unsettle the viewer by altering the experience of a space that is understood as one thing but is presented as another. The installation places itself within the discursive space of a culture of screens that calls for multiple viewing points but also participation. As Claire Bishop states in her book *Installation Art*, unlike film or photography, installation is meant to address a viewer by placing them at the centre of the experience—as a presence in the space that is necessary for the completion of the work.[167] While I borrow from installation art, the idea of an activated viewer, the work is more an outgrowth of a practice that is meant to be read within the context of an expanded photographic field—a hybrid form between photography and film. Indeed it is within this context of screen culture that we begin to see how the categories of photography and film become even less material.

How do we account for contemporary photography's seamless movement between still images and moving stills? In her article, *Reinventing the Medium,* Rosalind Krauss argues that art during postmodernism was organized around the photographic object, which she thus defines as a

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[167] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005) 6

“theoretical object,” because artistic objects at this time (70s and 80s) incorporated several aspects of photography’s inherent qualities, such as its relationship to the copy, its eschewing of authorship, and its ubiquity in cultural formation.[168] But, as George Baker argues, just as photography was becoming embedded in the art world, this might have been the moment in which photography, as a medium, was coming to its very end as we knew it. Photography as such, at least in the art world, began to transform into something other than the photograph.”[169] What we have in its place, however, for we have argued that photography is also “everywhere,” is something now composed not only of an “image” but is often referencing other art forms—Jeff Wall’s photographs that function as paintings; Candida Hoffer’s large format photographs that can be equally considered a pictorialist and painterly engagement with photography; contemporary Canadian artist Geoff Pugen, who moves between photography and video, Nancy Davenport, Mark Lewis and Willie Doherty whose “still images” are film installations that reference photography, or photographs that reference film.

There are several texts that have emerged examining what are both old and new hybrid forms between cinema and photography. While some create the oppositional categories of film and photography (still *and* moving), there are several scholars who, tracing back to Benjamin’s *Little History of Photography*, create a third space between stillness and movement, where my work currently resides. Between stillness and movement one can point to an active viewer, something that is crucial to my project of enacting both present Palestine and its history.

In their book *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, Karen Beckmann and Jean Ma suggest that while this issue rests in current technology’s drive to blend media and the consequential disappearance of medium specificity; they point backwards to Aby Warburg and Philippe Alain Michaud’s *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, in which Warburg flips traditional aesthetics on its head in his reading of Florentine painting by looking to how artists were representing movement.[170]

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[168] Rosalind Krauss, “Reinventing the Medium,” in *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (1999): 290.

[169] George Baker, “Photography’s Expanded Field,” in *October* 114 (2005): 121.

[170] Karen Beckmann and Jean Ma eds. *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

> The controversies surrounding Warburg's argument—which include the abandonment of a passive and contemplative viewer in favour of an interactive spectator drawn into the work itself through the representation of motion—could not be more pertinent to a present concerned with problems of immersive and spectacular environments that threaten to absorb the viewer and destroy the distance many believe to be necessary for critical contemplation.[171]

In the face of global capitalism—where speed is king, where borders are continuously being made and remade, where places are deterritorialized and re-territorialized, where the flood of images and information threaten to overwhelm our ability to think and analyze, engulfing us and making us blind—the intervention of elongated time, space and movement and stasis, seem an adequate and necessary response.

My own work has taken on the challenge of trying to image Palestine and its history through Palestinian landscape, moving between film and photography with the shifting topography of what has become simply, *media*. My feature documentary *Zero Degrees of Separation* (2005), which was shot throughout much of the Second Intifada, engages the notion of land and its attendant landscape to unravel the history of the conflict. The film traces the landscape with a series of moving stills, conscious of the fact that every inch of land is witness to not only trauma but to scrutiny. My more recent work on the apartheid roads that crisscross the contemporary Palestinian landscape, *Road Movie* (2011) was shot in stop motion animation at one frame per second. The effect of which is similar to watching a series of (moving) stills on landscape. The idea of freezing motion or moving stillness seemed an apt intervention in a landscape that refuses time, that can seem inert and/or in constant motion. Both things are true in Palestine. When you travel on Palestinian roads you experience an odd sense of forward motion that stalls and halts as the hundreds of checkpoints that have been set up by the Israeli military, not only remind Palestinians that they are under occupation, but that their movement is dependent on another.

Since the Second Intifada, many Palestinian films have focused on conflict and tension within Palestinian society reflecting a similar timelessness, a waiting and wanting in undefined locations. In their book on Palestinian Cinema, Gertz and Khleifi suggest that this lack of time and geographical specificity has pervaded Palestinian cinema since the 1970s.

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[171] Ibid 5.

> Like the historical time of the Palestinian nation, Palestinian geography, too, has oscillated between the abstract, mythical, idyll and the concrete reality. In films produced in the 1970s, actual geography was not shown. In fact, the real events captured in these films were delineated in abstract time and space that symbolically represented Palestinian space of 1948.[172]

Despite a brief reprieve in the late 1980s and 90s where the "time" (and hence place) began to emerge in Palestinian cinema, the landscape has been transformed even more drastically with settlements, walls, checkpoints and roads blurring borders and the demarcation of space once again.[173]

If *Palestine Time* is in some temporal space inaccessible to most viewers, then it also seems reasonable to suggest that a project about Palestine needs to repeat and rupture this temporality in order to open a space for viewership. The film installation of *What Isn't There* considers time an essential artistic intervention in an ongoing attempt to image contemporary Palestine.

Situated in an empty lot in downtown Toronto, a four-screen projection of Palestinian villages is presented as an outdoor installation in a Canadian landscape. The projection is accompanied by a soundscape that includes location sound and snippets of interviews and interactions with different people we encountered in and around the villages. We locate the viewer inside the villages by surrounding them with bounded/unbounded walls. A printed pamphlet with Walid Khalidi's village descriptions accompanies the work.

The empty lot which doubles as a community garden maintained by a group of Tibetan grandmothers, mirrors one story of exile and displacement with another. Both these sites, the garden and the installation, find themselves at the crossroads of a built environment in which public space has all but disappeared. But in a quiet, radical gesture, they aim to create a social space for local community. Locating the work here also signifies a moment in which moving pictures have expanded not only beyond the boundaries of the cinema, for we have seen cinema and its surrounding discourse move into other institutional spaces for the past two decades, but literally have become a cinema without walls.

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[172] Gertz and Khleifi 6.

[173] Ibid 7.

Here, the screens are fashioned at 90° angles that unseat landscape from the harmonious panoramas of the picturesque. The angled walls create instead, a contained space that references the built environment (the village buildings, now gone) and the current openness that has replaced it. The projected landscapes that sit side by side are often inverted and mirrored creating an unnatural sense of perception that thwarts the ideals of landscape; orchards that normally appear in straight lines, connect trees across a seam in the screens in bizarre, sometimes even monstrous forms. This seam in the middle of the angled screens that both connects and disconnects the landscapes and in which people magically and eerily disappear and reappear, disrupts our sense of perception. This is the place of the recuperative sublime and of politics where our conventional experience of cinema and landscape is interrupted yet nonetheless maintains an absorptive affect, what Barthes termed the 'pre-hypnotic' of cinema.

> There is a 'cinema situation' and this situation is pre-hypnotic. According to a true metonymy, the darkness of the theatre is prefigured by the twilight reverie (a prerequisite for hypnosis, according to Breuer-Freud) which preceded him from street to street, from poster to poster, finally burying himself in a dim, anonymous, indifferent cube where that festival of affects known as film will be presented.[174]

Wandering in this empty Canadian urban lot, in a Tibetan vegetable garden, and in a temporal Palestinian village, forges an unusual set of relationships that means to evoke a sense of timelessness—a dreamlike state in which an image of Palestine emerges through the association of individual affective connections and the fragments of complex realties. Has an image of Palestine appeared?

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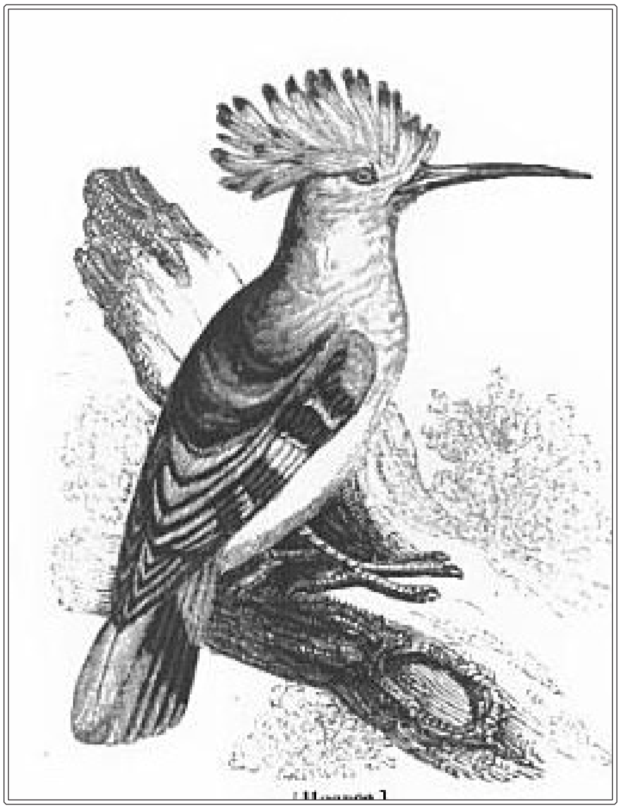
[174] Roland Barthes, 'Leaving the Movie Theatre', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 346

---Conclusion: Ramla---



Illus.48

Elle: “I suppose you know the Hoopoe is the national bird of Palestine?”

John: “in fact, national bird of Israel – the sunbird is proposed nat bird of Pal.

John: “note: when i got out of prison, but was stuck at airport, and running every day in that weird park -- i kept coming across a pair of hoopoes on the lawn -- made me think of you!”

The first part of this conversation was the last email I had with John Greyson before he disappeared into an Egyptian prison for fifty-two days. When he was finally released, I received the second note as if little had meanwhile transpired. We were discussing the Hoopoe, a magnificent bird that I saw regularly on my village trips. One lived in my backyard in Ramallah. The Hoopoe was declared the national bird of Israel in 2008. Its non-kosher status caused some concern at first, but the fact that in ancient times it was the messenger between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, assigning it the appearance of an emissary of hope (as its English name alludes to), consecrated it once again.

My exchange with John made me wonder why I had mistaken this bird for Palestine’s national bird rather than Israel’s. A Freudian slip, to be sure, signifying the slippery terrain that is not only Israel and Palestine, but also my place in it. Was I the Hoopoe?

I am sitting in Georgette and her husband's living room in Ramallah, Palestine. The television is on in the background with images of the US presidential election. It is 2008, and Americans are on the verge of electing their first African American president who was campaigning on a message of hope. I ask Georgette what she thinks of Obama and possible change in the US? Like most Palestinians, she answers wearily "It won't make any difference for us. I hope it does, but as it has been for sixty years, I'm quite sure it won't." The numbers in the blue and red checkers across a map of the US continue to scroll across the television as we shift back to Georgette's story of exile.

In July 1948, the Israeli army captured Ramla,175 (PGR: 138149) a bustling town at the crossroads of Jaffa and Jerusalem, and expelled its Palestinian inhabitants. Together with her mother and aunts, Georgette left Ramla on one of the convoys. Georgette's father had been taken away as a prisoner with her uncles. "Huwaje," her aunt said to the bus driver, "please stop, my niece is not with us. I must go back and get her." In the chaos, this one-year old child had been left under a tree. "Huwaje is the name for a Jew," Georgette explains to me. "My aunt was braver than my mother to speak with the driver—he was humane, he waited. We drove from Ramla to Latrun, where we were left at the side of the road. We had no shelter, no food. We walked for many kilometers; some children died along the way. One mother left her child because she couldn't feed her. We slept in a field for days until we found an old barn; most slept under the olive trees. We had nothing with us, just some clothes for the children; we thought we would be home in two weeks. Many weeks later the UN came, and the Red Cross. We didn't have food. They set up tents."

I imagine Georgette amongst the well-dressed deportees of Ramla as seen in the Red Cross' archival photographs documenting the flight of Palestinian refugees. She is a tiny woman, maybe seventy now. She is my neighbour in Ramallah. She hands me Ma'moul, date-filled cookies she baked for Easter, over our shared fence. She invites me in and tells me her story. "Bring your camera next

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175 Ramla is connected to the city of Lyd (Lydda under the British Mandate). The two cities spread over time and merged, although their separate names are still used to distinguish one from the other.

time," she says. "I can tell it again so it is recorded." She has never seen her home since. This is her picture:

Illus.49 Georgette, Ramallah 2009

I make a special trip to Ramla later.on. One of my side-projects was to visit the villages of Palestinians who would tell me their village stories and in return, I would offer to bring back an image for them. Ramla is one of the few "mixed cities" as they are known in Israel today, meaning both Jews and Palestinians inhabit it.[176] Ramla together with its sister city, Lydda, had a population of approximately 60,000 people in 1948. Military commander Yigal Allon[177] was the commander of Operation Dani, the purpose of which was to clear the area known as "The Triangle" to secure the Jerusalem–Tel-Aviv access road. The offensive, which included air raids, bombings and a ground invasion, was meant to "induce civilian panic and flight."[178] Despite a signed surrender by the Arab Legion, Jewish forces opened fire on the townspeople (stating there was an "uprising") killing over 250 civilians. After this incident, Lt Colonel Yitzhak Rabin gave the following order:

> 1. The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age. They should be directed towards Beit Nabala. Yiftah (Brigade headquarters) must determine the method and inform (Operation) Dani HQ and 8th Brigade HQ. 2. Implement immediately.[179]

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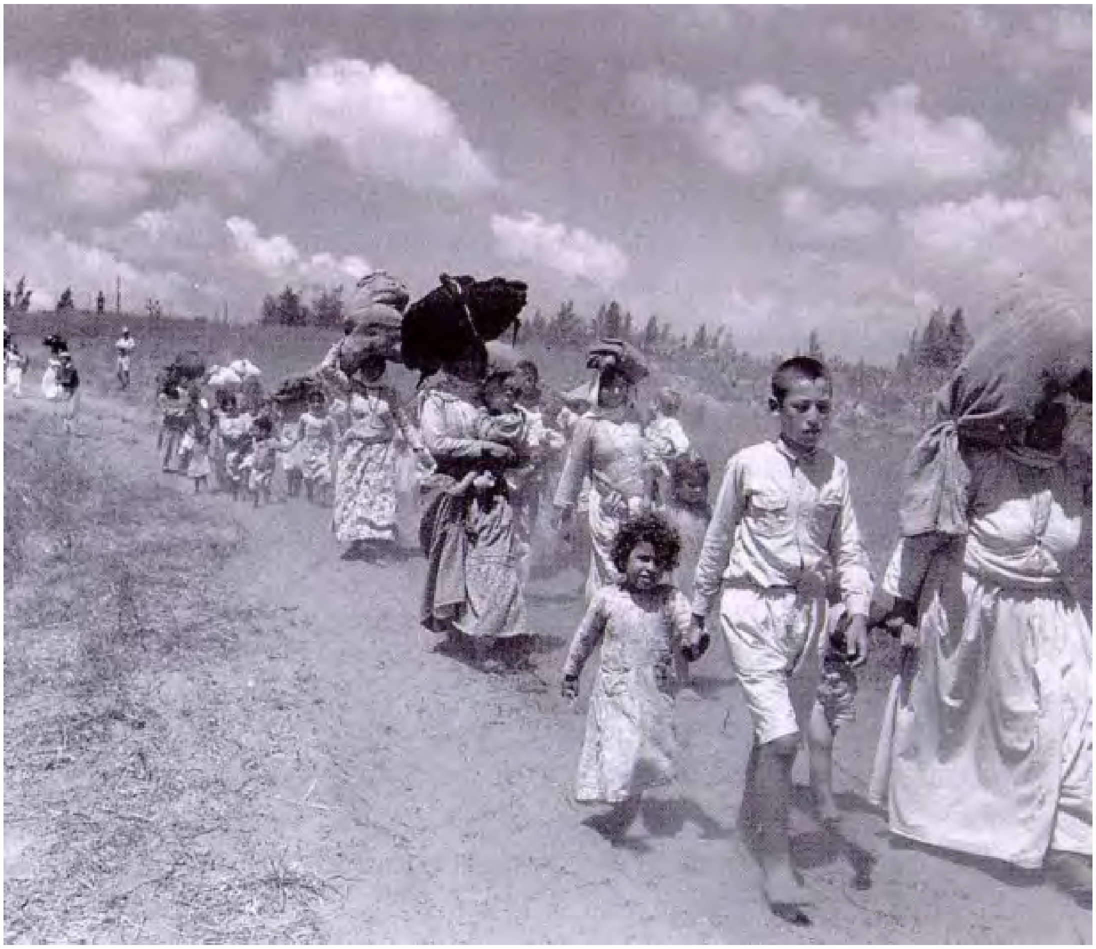
[176] The Palestinians who live in Israel (rather than the West Bank, Gaza or the diaspora) are known as Palestinians of '48, signifying they remained within the 1948 borders of the partition plan.

[177] Yigal Allon was the commander of the Palmach and Haganah (Jewish fighting forces under the British Mandate) and later became a general in the Israeli Army.

[178] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 204.

[179] A similar order was given concerning Ramla. See Morris 207.



Illus.50 Women and Children Carrying Their Possessions
(Palestinian Refugees), David S. Boyer, 1948

---*Engaging Images*---

After twenty years of journeying in landscapes that appear as one thing but are actually another, one acquires a sense of instability that becomes familiar. Uncertainty has been the driving force behind this project, forcing me to question all that we are presented with and all that I extend to others, in turn. Unsettling the official and mediated representations of Israeli landscape has been at the forefront of this undertaking—be it the early Zionist propaganda from "greening the land," and the JNF's parks which provide "much-needed forest and parks" (on illegally acquired Palestinian lands), to today's version of a "progressive hi-tech Israel" (the cities of which are built on Palestinian villages). While the installation and this accompanying text signal the end of a large undertaking, they merely serve as another chapter—the project is a lifelong one. Imaging is not a matter of a beginning and an end, of a starting and ending point, wherein there is a coming-to-consciousness. History cannot be fixed—not by confining it or by reparation. The image is an event in and of itself, an *énoncé*, as described by Lyotard.

Throughout this project, meaning, like history, has shifted. My purpose in recording these villages has also shifted with time, unfolding with each political movement. At times the purpose was to simply mark these spaces as a way of contending with a blinding light that eradicated one history and replaced it with another; at a different moment it was an act of reparation; in a third instance it was an investigation of the limits of representation; currently, my purpose is simply to proclaim these landscapes as Palestinian villages through an active engagement between the spectator, artist, and subject in the spirit of Azoulay's "citizenry of photography" and Rancière's "politics that gives voice to the voiceless"—recognizing them as "members who have a part in the sharing of what's common." [Or what should be common.]

Each act of making a work in Israel and Palestine follows the same flux as the history one is trying to record. It is fleeting, appearing and disappearing; it lodges in your memory, but when trying to retrieve it, it slips from sight, and thus from site. The images that constitute *What Isn't There* therefore call attention to this slippage, be it in the film, photography or installation; they demand that the viewer actively watch the images and reconstitute that which is not there in order to "take part," to take responsibility for what is occurring. *What Isn't There* makes the claim that it is not enough to record, to document, to show, or to witness. Rather, it is also essential to analyze, deconstruct, reveal and engage through and with that which is being imaged and those who participate in the viewing. The artist is not an observer in this sense, but an active participant—an activist.

THE END.

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47. Installation View, What Isn't There, 2014. Copyright: Public Studio. Collection of the Author.

48. Hoopoe, origin unknown.

49. Georgette, Ramallah 2009. Copyright: Public Studio. Collection of the Author.

50. Women and Children Carrying Their Possessions (Palestinian Refugees), David S. Boyer, 1948. Copyright: Bettman/Corbis

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Installations/Photography/Video

Willie Doherty: Buried, single-screen installation, 8mins, 2009

Elle Flanders: What Isn't There, photo/video installation, 2007

------------------Zero Degrees of Separation, film/video, 89mins, 2005

------------------Lacking Desire, photo/multimedia, 1996

Elle Flanders & Tamira Sawatzky: What Isn't There, photo installation, 2008

Emily Jacir: Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948, multimedia installation, 2001

William Jenkins: New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape, photo exhibition, 1975

Isaac Julien: Paradise Omeros, video installation, 8min, 2002

Public Studio: What Isn't There, Photo/wall installation, 2011

------------------ What Isn't There, photo installation, 2011

------------------Road Movie, film installation, 56mins, 2011

------------------ What Isn't There, photo/multimedia installation, 2011

------------------ What Isn't There, outdoor film installation, 42mins, 2014

Martha Rosler: The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems, photo installation, 1974–75

-------------------House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home, photo collage, 1967-72

------------------- Semiotics of the Kitchen, video 5:30mins, 1975

Edward Said and Charles Bruce: In Search of Palestine, BBC, Video, 1998

Allan Sekula: Aerospace Folktales, photo installation, 1973

Elia Suleiman: Chronicle of a Disappearance, film 88mins, 1996

WHAT ISN'T THERE
INSTALLATION 2014 CREDITS:

Directed by Elle Flanders

Camera by Tamira Sawatzky

Written by Elle Flanders

Produced by Public Studio (Tamira Sawatzky and Elle Flanders)

Edited by Jaared Raab

Phonography, Music Composition, Sound Mix by Anna Friz

Additional Editing: Darby Macinnis, Tamira Sawatzky, Josh Schonblum

Special Effects and Animation by Jared Raab

Additional Camera by Elle Flanders

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