

Between the Sea and the Security Fence

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charred in places by the various fires which had been set during the clashes with IDF patrols which periodically unfolded there. There was also a hole in the wall which had been broken open by students who had wrapped their keffiyehs into masks and used hammers to crack apart its concrete, a gap you could fit your arm through, but not much more. The hole was not part of the partition, but rather existed simply as its absence, as an opening which could be perceived and experienced only in its negativity, only because part of the colonial world had been demolished and destroyed. This negation of a part, this hole that had punctured through the distribution and administration of life, is a place where we can begin to pursue a different mode of *thinking anarchy*, one which might let us begin freeing it of the police order that aspires to so totally capture and constrain it.

This hole in the wall did not aspire to change the wall's path in a more favorable or just or democratic direction, nor to aestheticize it in this or that way, but simply existed as evidence of its absence, of a world where there had once been a partition but where there was one no longer. The true beauty of the hole is found precisely in the fact that it does not have to prove or convince anyone of anything, it doesn't need to be accounted for or made sense of, nor does its existence depend upon being represented or counted, exhibited or verified, defined or demarcated. Rather, the hole is proof of *itself and its reality*, of an existence beyond the police, of anarchy. In the deconstruction of the constructed order, the deformalization of the colonial form, the departure from the partition, the anarchic resides. This lacuna in the architecture of power cannot be grasped, but *nonetheless exists* as an abolition of what aspires to grasp everything. If there is such a thing as *anarchy in itself*, it is found in those practices and repertoires which cannot be added to nor subtracted from but rather void the calculus of domination, which refuse the count and the part proper to all constituted power and instead create an opening in the very heart of things.¹⁷ The possibility of a Palestine which can escape its colonial devastation, which can liberate itself from the police and from the partition, persists precisely in those lives that punch holes open within the aesthetic and anaesthetic world, giving us not something to look *at* but *through*.

- December 2023

17: There is still much to be learned from the theorization of anarchy as a *destituent* power, as "the deactivation of the technique of sovereign power that splits forms-of-life into animal/human, bare life/power, household/city, and even constituent/constituted power ... a power or capacity that wrests back life's own most possibility for assuming any form whatsoever from the truncated existence that defines us as the subject of so many *dispositifs*." Hostis, "Destituent Power: An Incomplete Timeline."

and that, causing those who live on to do so in states of trauma and shock, finding it no longer possible to make sense of the world that has been unmade around them. The militarized sensing of the colonial regime thus feeds into forms of violence which render the world and life itself increasingly senseless, into ruins which can no longer be neatly partitioned nor clearly perceived, into what can only be made sense of as genocide.

Within Israel's anaesthetic colonial violence, Palestinian life is ultimately transformed into a disposable and discardable material, into what Achille Mbembe has called "a residual humanity that is akin to waste."¹⁵ As the aesthetic sets the coordinates of life and the anaesthetic the coordinates of death, lives are assigned their parts in order to position them within the order of the police or dispose of them. Gaza and the West Bank come to be made sense of only as the leftovers of the colonial project, as the remnants which must be fully categorized and catalogued only so its removal can be fully confirmed and completed. The Zionist fantasy that Israel will make the desert bloom here must be reread in light of the reality that the life it dominates withers away as detritus in its wake. Within the currents of Israel's anaesthetic violence everything is made sense of at ever higher fidelities, but only as a means of better policing and purging an increasingly colonized wasteland that expands across the surface of the world.

If the aesthetic functions as an *archē* that partitions and polices its anarchist foundation and the anaesthetic arises as an *archē* premised upon the eradication of the anarchic, what is left of anarchy itself? For Rancière, the anarchy of politics reaches its conclusion precisely when it becomes tied to the police order it aspires to confront, never realizing itself as anarchy *in itself* but only ever anarchically reorganizing the social order and then being reabsorbed within it.¹⁶ In this sense, Rancière sees anarchic politics as only a means of reforming and redistributing the order of the police, ultimately concluding that it is a rare occurrence which never persists beyond the policing that survives and subdues it. If we accept this tamed and restrained understanding of anarchy, we must also accept that the aesthetic and anaesthetic administration of the world is an essential part of it. Is this what life will always consist of, the choice between being policed and being eradicated?

While I was teaching courses in the West Bank city of Abu Dis, every time I arrived and departed along with the students, staff, and faculty we had to walk beside the separation wall which had been erected just on the other side of the street of the university's entrance. The wall had been decorated with paintings of Jerusalem and of rolling blue waves, scrawled over with slogans such as كفا (kefaya, enough), and

15: Achille Mbembe and Torbjørn Tumyr Nilsen, "Thoughts on the Planetary." *New Frame*, September 5, 2019.

16: Catherine Malabou identifies Rancière as a *philosopher of anarchy* but not as an anarchist for precisely this reason, noting that "The problem is that although Rancière asserts the heterogenous nature of politics (in the originary sense) and the police, he argues that police is nonetheless necessary. If 'politics is specifically opposed to the police,' police is nevertheless not viewed as the evil that a radical politics should seek to overthrow." Rancière himself claims the same: "If politics implements a logic entirely heterogenous to that of the police, it is always bound up with the latter." See Catherine Malabou, *Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy*, Polity, 2023, 182.



Part I: Between the Sea and the Security Fence

Across Gaza's fragmented collage of architectures and ruins, the abstraction of life rivals life itself. Subsumed by social technologies that densely blanket and code the territory without pause, lives are so exhaustively represented and recognized as *this or that kind of life* that it is the easiest thing in the world to forget that *anything actually remains living* beneath the thick waves of identification and classification. Refugee, militant, civilian, hostage, prisoner, soldier, and victim — these are the abstract coordinates that position lives within various military stratagems, political maneuvers, and economic programs, the particular forms of identity that are each coupled with their own particular shades and intensities of violence, the circulating codes that establish what a life *is* in ever higher detail, only to further establish what can be *done* to it. *To live and die as an abstraction*: this is the fate imposed on all who inhabit the space between the sea and the security fence.

Abstraction is real to the degree that it determines a life's form and its lived conditions, granting or denying access through a checkpoint, flipping on and off water and electricity, providing momentary cover or painting a target on your back. Palestinian or Israeli? Muslim or Christian or Jewish? Man or woman? Citizen or refugee? What kinds of life might possibly be lived and what kinds of death may inevitably arrive come to be determined by an abstract calculus that ranks and sorts on the basis of these terms, shifting around and reorganizing sexualized and racialized hierarchies of lives, integrating each identity as a variable of a unified colonial operation. Each life

in Gaza is steadily suffocated by all of the ways they're represented and recognized by the forces that dominate them, by all of the ways life is subsumed and subordinated as one of many coded and categorized lives, by all of those predicates that facilitate the abstraction of life, and in so doing, facilitate its ongoing subjugation and eradication.

When international observers demand that the indiscriminate killing must stop, what they fail to comprehend is that the killing ceaselessly becomes more discriminating and discerning, always more individuated and informed, but that doesn't make it any less devastating or total. As Israeli soldiers prepare to expunge life from large swaths of Gaza, they do so with data that pinpoints the cell phone locations of those who have chosen to remain and resist the army's evacuation orders, adding resolution to and helping to refine their planned desolation. Drones persistently buzz overhead, surveying fleeing families piling onto truck beds so as to help generals optimize their bombardments. Water is shut off and food and medicine shipments are throttled or halted, all while Israeli bureaucrats count the calories consumed by the incarcerated population. It's likely that Israel knows more about who they're obliterating than any other regime in history, a knowledge that doesn't even partially arrest but only augments the violence. The more each life is abstracted within the colonial situation, the more that each life is captured, calculated, and circulated as this or that kind of Palestinian life, the more sharpened the killing can become. Within the colonial armature, the abstraction of life is neither immaterial nor indiscriminate, but rather is designed to tactically enhance the domination of life: the tightening of its control over information and identities is only ever the prelude to the tightening of control over territories and bodies.

As periodic deluges of bombs break windows and blast apart neighborhoods, lives sheltering in this home or that hospital may wonder whether their deaths will be counted as a faintly regrettable civilian casualty or a successfully neutralized terrorist, be collected as a data point for a military commander's combat simulation or as another entry in a United Nations spreadsheet, be memorialized as a martyr on a political party's banner or as an online post to be quickly scrolled past. Walking down the street in search of dwindling groceries in the midst of the surrounding blockade, those same lives' thoughts might drift instead to the satellites that track each of their movements from low orbit in preparation for the coming ground invasion, or perhaps to the drones that stream footage of crowds in hopes of matching faces with biometric profiles in military databases, wondering whether they'll simply be surveilled as another inconsequential detail of the hostile terrain, or be targeted for erasure from the map. As missiles are fired off to detonate what had just been abstracted, families decide whether they should shelter together in a single room so they might at least die together, or whether they should spread out among multiple buildings so at least part of the family might survive and live on. The abstract edge of Israeli apartheid gives form to life only so lives can be exposed to *ever more numerous regimes of death*, documenting so as to better dispossess, sorting so as to better starve, representing so as to better bring to ruin.

numbered cells so the IDF could order evacuations and conduct operations at a more particularized scale, transforming the terrain into a space which could be anaesthetically recalibrated into kill zones as desired.¹³ It is not enough to force a people to flee from where they live, to make them cower beneath snipers' bullets and the shells of tanks, to instruct them that neither hospitals nor schools are safe, or to bury them within thick layers of burning dust and rubble. Nor is it enough to starve them and shut off their water, to cut electricity and communications, or to blockade the entire territory causing such severe shortages that emergency amputations and surgeries have to be performed without the use of medical anesthetics.¹⁴ The anaesthetic logic of genocide not only demands that life endure all of this, it also demands that life be documented, partitioned, and accounted for as it is being extinguished, that both life and its killing be *made sensible*.

This sensual partitioning of the carnage is anaesthetically reflected in the aftermath of the massive bombardments and ground incursions, when the survivors are expected to produce detailed evidence of their own annihilation for global audiences. As this recursive expression of the anaesthetic takes hold of the situation, having your neighborhood mapped by satellites and filmed by drones and then turned to rubble is only the first step of a process which then compels the ruins and death and destruction to be documented and circulated online. Life and death come to *make sense* only as data points within a military campaign, only as violent blips to be recognized and registered within the same genocidal apparatus that effectuates them. Israel at once holds up its own desolation as proof of its success, while telling those who survive amidst the rubble that they in fact had bombed themselves, reducing the situation to a form of evidence that reveals only the "progress" of the genocide, and nothing more. To become a witness within this anaesthetic context is to find oneself condemned to play the role of *a police witness*, submitting the lives and deaths of those around you to the interrogation and verification of those forces who accumulate evidence only as spectacular trophies of their own genocidal triumph, a morbid pride that is performatively on display as groups of Israeli soldiers smile and snap selfies as Palestinian neighborhoods are bombed in the background behind them.

The anaesthetic ultimately comes to resemble something closer to its colloquial usage here, first working as a *sensing that destroys* before culminating in *the destruction of sense*. When a bomb detonates within a residential building in Gaza, it does more than blast apart the roof that had sheltered the interior from the weather and sky, disintegrate the walls that had separated a kitchen from a bedroom, a library from a nursery, or a shower from a garden, and bury the building's inhabitants beneath avalanches of debris. A bomb also functions as a form of *sense destroying violence* — exploding any sense of inside or out, known or unknown, familiar or strange — crumbling buildings and bodies together into heaps of rubble and flesh which resist being categorized much less comprehended by those who survive. The rain of Israeli bombs blast apart the differences between one place and another and between this life

13: Julian Borger and Ruth Michaelson, "IDF instructions on Gaza refuge zones cruel 'mirage', say aid agencies." *The Guardian*, December 7, 2023.

14: Nidal Al-Mughrabi and Abir Ahmar, "Surgeon flees Gaza City's last functioning hospital after anaesthetics run out." *Reuters*, November 17, 2023.

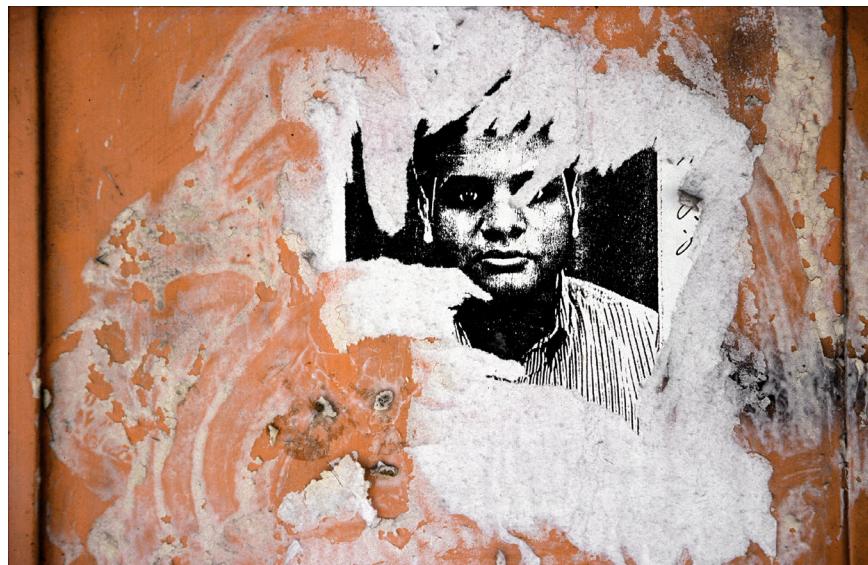
cess,' and recommends bombing sites in real time."¹⁰ The digitized surveillance apparatuses deployed across Palestine in this way produce voluminous quantities of data about each and every Palestinian life, all of which is fed into this "mass assassination factory" through which "the military can generate new targets at a faster rate than it attacks" and "the number of civilians who are likely to be killed is...calculated and known in advance to the army's intelligence units."¹¹ While the Israeli military claims to exclusively target members of Hamas and calls the murdered civilians collateral damage, what the use of these technologies reveals is that all of the dead have been accounted for before the killing has begun, each life has been *assigned their appropriate part* within the digitized technologies that sense and then steer bombs towards them. Within the anaesthetic regime, collateral deaths are *collated* within a computational apparatus in which lives are counted, then calculated, then killed.

As bombs were already falling, but before the ground invasion had begun, Palestinians were ordered to evacuate to the southern half of Gaza by the Israeli military who used drones to drop masses of leaflets warning of the violence to come. Those who chose to flee in hopes of surviving this continuation of the Nakba, packing up their things and rapidly abandoning their homes, found themselves forced to pass through shipping containers equipped with surveillance technologies installed along the evacuation route so their faces could be checked against Israel's biometric databases, an apparatus designed to sift and sort through the displaced for additional targets to be eliminated.¹² Once people began arriving in southern Gaza, they had new leaflets dropped on them which linked to an online map which divided Gaza in a grid of

10: Yuval Abraham, "A mass assassination factory": Inside Israel's calculated bombing of Gaza," +972 Magazine, November 30, 2023.

11: Abraham, "Mass assassination factory."

12: Washington Post investigative reporter Evan Hill outlined this process on twitter using contemporaneous satellite photography and video taken on the ground



It is on the basis of life's abstraction that lives can be so carelessly and effortlessly substituted by lists of their predicates, through which a life can be computed, contemplated, and potentially culled as if it were simply a set of its discrete and described properties. Concatenated accumulations of ID cards, police files, population databases, and government permits shape the terrain within which life is lived, shifting the contours of where a life can and cannot study and move and shop and build and work, as well as what healthcare and food and water a life can or cannot access. While life and death may elude any total or final definition — witnessing a life being born or passing away often leaves us without words, speechless — their abstraction nonetheless prepares the ground so that even the most extreme forms of devastation can nonetheless fluidly roll off of freshly numbed and lubricated tongues: "a million Gazans ordered to flee," "neighborhoods sheltering Hamas to be wiped away," "all who remain are responsible and must pay a price." What is genocide if not the moment when an abstraction finally suffocates everything it enfolds and encompasses, finally squeezes all of the life out of what it so definitively catalogs and circumscribes? No genocide proceeds without its own codes and classes of life, without moving to *eradicate precisely what it abstracts*.

To speak of war and peace in Palestine is simply to speak the names of two modalities of a unified abstract process, one which delivers death abruptly and the other which delivers death procedurally, measuredly, apportionately. Aerial bombings and arbitrary arrests, border checkpoints and economic blockades, indefinite detentions and targeted assassinations, bulldozers and barrages of tear gas: these are only the most obvious and widely documented technologies that ever more numerously choke what remains struggling to live. In each case, the abstract works to optimize and rationalize all of the violence that relentlessly circulates, to classify life so as to better calculate and complete its destruction, to give form to a war and peace that only promise to *annihilate you at different speeds*.

As the diverse cacophony of lived experience is abstracted away within the coordinates of this or that ethnic or religious history, this or that political party or faction, this or that historical trauma or ancestral claim — abstractions which then go on to determine the conditions of survival within which a life lives — it's no wonder that lives can come to wholly identify with their abstraction, to see their abstraction as themselves. This is in some sense a deeply pragmatic fact, in the sense that the struggle to survive has been coupled with the representation of the survivors, through which lives live in the narrowing avenues of existence that are held open by those who claim to represent them. Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank are each content to be the outsourced administrators of this abstract colonial regime, working to both rigidly represent and precariously provide for Palestinians while at the same time policing Palestinian lives and repressing whatever compromises their abstract monopoly. While Hamas promises to destroy Israel and the Palestinian Authority promises to cooperate with it, both function as complementary extensions of the occupation's abstraction, one representing hostile lives to be exterminated and the other representing pacified lives to be expelled.

Life's identification with its abstraction is also a political one, as seeing oneself as Palestinian is to understand that you share a common history with other Palestinians, that you have a shared tradition of survival and struggle because you all have been subjected to a shared process of dispossession and domination. The abstractions that thickly flow across Palestine don't simply imprint themselves upon life in this sense, but also emerge as forms which lives are drawn to and become implicated in. Subjectively taking form in various identities and nationalisms, the abstraction of Palestine does not simply function as a mode of repression, but also as lived experience and social context where people who have been subjugated together search for methods of surviving and revolting together. These struggles always ignite from within the colonial abstraction, but what remains decisive is whether they orient themselves towards preserving and perhaps securing a modicum of sovereignty over their abstract existence, or they aspire to explode it once and for all. In Palestine and across its diaspora, there are those who remain undetermined by all of the ways they have represented and recognized, who search for one another in the remnants and ruins of their shared past, and who fight for a Palestine *liberated from its colonial abstraction*.

What is this Palestine that could succeed in escaping its colonial abstraction, that could manage to incinerate what represents and identifies it so totally, that refuses to be eradicated and revolts against what eradicates? A Palestine that has thrown off its abstraction would be one less concerned with any particular identity and more formalized as a creative and insubordinate movement, less organized by what it is and more by *what it can do*. It would be a Palestine that arises from those forms of life which can be grasped only as turbulence and dissonance by those who would desire to police their form and impose forms upon them, those forms of life who have become autonomous and free to the degree that they can play with their form as one can play in the tumbling waves of a beach. These forms of life live as multiplicities, *as ensembles* and *as part of ensembles* without any need of unity, as lives who live in opposition not to other coded forms of life but rather in opposition to their abstract desolation and determination. They live a form of poiesis that can be described just as Aimé Césaire describes poetry: *as a descent into oneself*, but also *as an explosion*. What we are left with is not this or that *kind of life*, but rather *a life* that ruptures any container one may attempt to lock it within.

This *insurrection against abstraction* doesn't entail the disappearance of Palestine, but rather the disappearance of the colonial world that has functioned only to capture and constrict, to cut apart and contract. A Palestine mapped and scanned ever more exactly by colonial forces, a Palestine that emerges simply as an accumulating archive of its discrete attributes and abstract properties, is a Palestine that exists only as the shadow of what dominates and codes it, as the inverted symmetry of its occupation. The end of the colony in this sense entails not only the end of the colonizer but also of the colonized, abolishing colonial abstraction as a means of abolishing the colony and its determination. Only when Palestine is able to accomplish this insurrection against its abstraction, only when it escapes its abstract existence as the shrinking remainder of Israeli expansion and domination, will we truly be able to begin learning what Palestine is and can be.

what it renders sensible.⁶ In Palestine, it is precisely *the dominated* who are most clearly heard and seen by those who dominate, who are most thoroughly documented, surveilled, and sensed, who are subjected to an *anaesthetic violence* which assigns them their own place and part in their ongoing genocide.

While the aesthetic functions as a police order opposed by politics, the anaesthetic works instead as *a politics of the police*, as an *archē* that takes anarchy as the object to be accounted for and partitioned within its modes of purging violence. In aesthetic regimes numbers are printed on ID cards and stored in databases as a means of tracking and allocating the biopolitical coordinates of all of those lives who have a part in society, while in anaesthetic regimes numbers are inscribed on arms and rendered on top of drone footage as a means of informing the various machineries of death ceaselessly at work.⁷ The shift from the aesthetic to the anaesthetic here marks the shift from a logic of addition to a logic of subtraction, from a count that adds and integrates lives within a social distribution to a count that subtracts and removes lives from existence. The anaesthetic in this way relies upon the mathematics of deduction, a parallel process of negative counting that sets things aside in order to allocate and assign violence *particularly upon the supplementary*.⁸ As the so-called international community argues over the correct quantity of proportional violence, what they actually aspire to decide is the correct proportion of aesthetic and anaesthetic violence, the correct balance of what, for Palestinians, is apartheid and genocide.⁹

Israel's anaesthetic assault on Palestine now counts and partitions life principally as data, an abstract development which allows its genocide to be increasingly automated. In an article published by *+972 Magazine*, sources inside of the Israeli military describe how the militarized devastation of Gaza has relied upon a system known as *Habsora* (The Gospel), an artificial intelligence technology which "processes enormous amounts of data that 'tens of thousands of intelligence officers could not pro-

6: For a theorization of how these forms of sensing work as forms of abstraction in the context of Palestine, see my previous text "Between the Sea and the Security Fence."

7: The writing of numbers on arms is a thread of domination which has been formally sewn throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, puncturing the surface of history in the Holocaust, in the mass repression of migrants, and presently in the ongoing assault on Gaza where Mohammed Odeh, a 14 year old Palestinian who was detained by Israeli soldiers, recalls: "They kept saying, 'You are all Hamas.' They wrote numbers on our arms. My number was 56.' When he stretches his arms out, the red marker is still visible on his skin." Linah Alsaafin and Maram Humaid, "Like we were lesser humans": Gaza boys, men recall Israeli arrest, torture," *Al Jazeera*, December 12, 2023.

8: Catherine Malabou notes that for Rancière aesthetic regimes involve "the distribution of entitlements to exercise power ... a distribution that feigns that all parties have, or can have, their part." ("Stop Thief!: Anarchism and Philosophy, Malabou, 190). Rancière himself defines the aesthetic supplement as arising from the count of the social, noting that while the function of the police "lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement" nonetheless this counting occurs as "the exclusion of every supplement," a supplement which then politics can count as its own (Rancière, *Dissensus*, 36). The aesthetic in this sense declares and imposes itself as total, even as this totality emerges with a constitutive supplement of the uncounted, of the parts who have no part, which is what the anaesthetic counts as its own.

9: The logic of the count that runs through both the aesthetic and the anaesthetic can be seen clearly converging in the Roman practice of executing mutinous soldiers from which we get the word *decimate*, in which one in ten were killed as a means of imposing order on the remaining nine.

tains its apartheid across Palestine and intensifies its desolation of Gaza it becomes ever more apparent that the colonial and social order is built not only upon the *aesthetic*, a policing of lives that determines who has a part and participates, but also upon what I call the *anaesthetic*, a policing of lives that shapes not their *participation* but their *eradication*.

Anaesthetic violence counts lives ever more exactly only so it can ever more precisely calculate their devastation. It assigns parts to lives, but only so they can partake in its expansive purge. It renders lives ever more visible, but only so it can disappear them more completely. The anaesthetic is the formal inversion of the aesthetic, allocating and administering parts not as a means of giving form to any *archē* or order but rather of laying waste to the anarchic and disordered. While the aesthetic produces and maintains its own internal count and distribution of parts, and in so doing exposes itself to the supplement of what fails to count or participate, the anaesthetic instead turns towards the supplementary in order to formally envelop and then extinguish it, always adhering to its essentially hostile formal logic: *sense and destroy*. Unfolding as complementary dimensions of the capitalist and colonial order, the aesthetic administers life and the anaesthetic annihilates it.

The sharpened carnage of Israel's anaesthetic violence circulates most profusely through a panoply of digital technologies, carrying the colonial project forward by bringing ever more networked waves of ruin down upon the colonized. Israel prides itself on its advanced surveillance technologies, which aspire to document and informatically capture each and every particle of the territories it occupies, aiming to informatically integrate and thus *make sense* of what it desolates within its colonial apparatuses. Drones circle above neighborhoods and stream footage, checkpoints

are densely outfitted with facial recognition technologies, and cell phone locations and conversations are ubiquitously tracked, and yet all of this surveillance is undertaken only as part of a colonial project which aspires to *erase what it inscribes in such detail*, bringing its genocidal destruction down upon

sponse to Agamben's analysis of the Holocaust, where he argues that the *demos* must be understood not as the indeterminate site of bare life but as "the count of the uncounted — or the part of those who have no part...surplus subjects that inscribe the count of the uncounted as a supplement." In doing so, he fails to grasp the ways in which the *count of the uncounted* is precisely the form which genocide takes as its object, which genocide takes as the *supplement* to be eliminated. See Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus*, Continuum, 2010, 70.

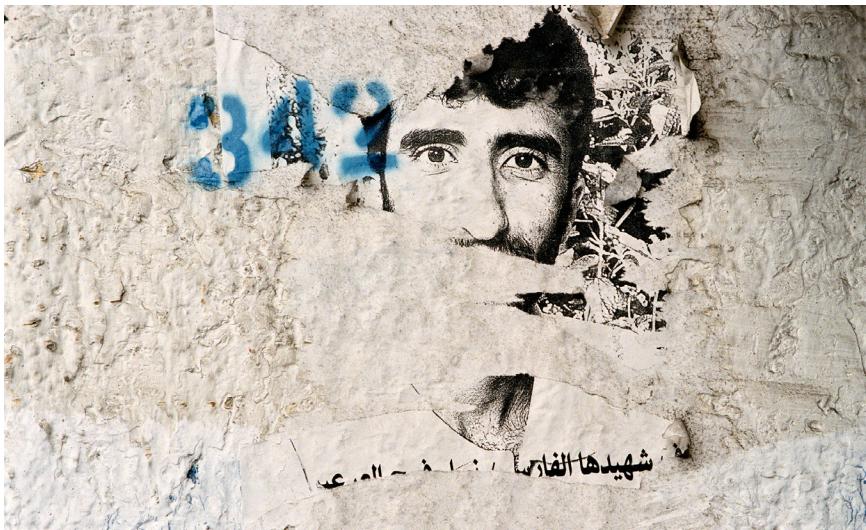


Here and now, even in anticipation of the militarized desolation that awaits its full and terrifying deployment across Palestine, there remains an effervescent revolt of those who defend the radical singularity of life and attack life's colonial abstraction, who live within forms of life that are wholly incongruent and incommensurable with the surrounding regimes of abstract violence: the insurgents of Gaza who stage attacks on the fence and organize resistance against Hamas' repressive forces, the anarchists within Israel who refuse conscription and take sledgehammers to the separation wall, the grieving families who do not allow their dead to be taken as symbolic cannon fodder for the next round of killing, the saboteurs who set fire to surveillance cameras in East Jerusalem and dismantle checkpoints in the West Bank, and those who break apart the partitions that have been built around so many identities and find themselves sitting instead in an immense constellation of lives.

Between the sea and the security fence and the river and the sea remain all of those lives who struggle alongside their neighbors for futures that spiral out across a shimmering multiplicity and unrepresentable diversity of Palestinian forms, unconstrained by codification and identification, no longer determined by the colonial abstraction and domination of life. Everything depends upon proliferating and intensifying and acting in solidarity with the force of those lives that refuse the abstract domination of life, that don't premise their own form on the violent separation and tireless eradication of forms, that threaten to bring an end to the colonial world so that we might possibly live in another.

- October 2023





Part II: Anesthetic Violence

In his essay “Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Noise,” the artist Yazan Khalili recalls gathering with friends in a city in the West Bank to paint some graffiti mocking the Palestinian Authority’s security collaboration with Israel.¹ After police officers from the Palestinian Authority approached and instructed them that it was prohibited to paint there, Khalili found that:

The Israeli-built Wall outside the city, on the way to Jerusalem, became the only space where it was possible to draw political graffiti. The Israelis allowed Palestinians to draw whatever they wanted on the wall, as long as it was on the Palestinian side ... Drawing anything on the Israeli side, however, was strictly prohibited.

This *partitioning of land* that also functions as a *partitioning of the sensible* is taken up by Khalili as a point of departure to examine the colonial policing of who and what can appear and where, of what is heard as speech or disregarded as noise, of what is permitted to *make sense* or is barred from doing so. Drawing upon the work of Jacques Rancière, Khalili’s essay helps us understand how this *sensual policing* of places and people organizes life across Palestine, allowing one person to smoothly blend into the scenery of Jerusalem’s old city while another sticks out and is subjected to interrogation and arrest, one group chanting on the streets of Haifa to loudly demonstrate while another is bludgeoned and dispersed, and one driver to freely pass through a checkpoint at the edge of Bethlehem while another is stopped and searched. All of these forms of policing are built upon what Rancière describes as an *aesthetics* that rests at the foundation of social life, a *sensible distribution* that establishes and enforces who belongs where and for what purpose.²

1: Yazan Khalili, “Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Noise.” *e-flux journal*, February, 2019.

2: Rancière defines the distribution of the sensible as “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define

The aesthetic policing of Palestine functions to help establish Israel’s colonial *archē*, its *hierarchical order* within which lives are compelled to play their assigned parts and keep to their assigned places. This policing operates on the lower frequencies of everyday life, as when a Palestinian is told to hand over their phone each morning at the entrance of an Israeli settlement so they cannot photograph the farm they are paid to pick fruit at, but also operates at more punctuated intensities, as when a Palestinian walking across Hebron is stopped by Israeli soldiers and told matter of factly: “Only Jews walk here.”³ In this way, the colonial administration of the sensible polices who *has a part*, how this *taking part* is socially distributed, and what form this *participation* may take or not take. What we call *common sense* is nothing other than the sensual order of the police, the checkpoints and watchtowers installed at the limits of experience and perception, the aesthetic administration that contours and cuts across social life.

Within this distribution of the sensible, Rancière argues that the only truly political response is to oppose and combat these forms of policing. Politics in this way always arises as an *anarchy* that underlies and threatens all *archē*, an unruly disorder that always moves to break apart and transform the aesthetic order.⁴ Governments, political parties, demonstrations, strikes, and even revolutions in this way all fail to be political if they fail to challenge the already established aesthetic terrain, working only to shuffle around and rearrange the hierarchy and order of its given parts. Within this aesthetic framing, both the Israeli state and the Palestinian Authority are *entirely apolitical*, serving only to reproduce and recalibrate the partitioning logic of the occupation, operating indistinguishably from the operations of the police. Politics for Rancière ultimately arises only when those who have been discounted and have no part come to initiate their own count and take their own part — a worker realizes themselves as *proletarian*, a woman as *a feminist*, the colonized as *a people*, etc. — interrupting the distribution of the sensible and forcing a new distribution into being. On one side are the police who encode and enforce society’s *archē*; on the other is the political *anarchy* that always threatens to disrupt and reset the aesthetic administration of the social order.

While Rancière’s approach has been widely deployed to theorize everything from class struggle to domestic life to contemporary art, the limits of his project reveal themselves when confronted with the ongoing genocide in Palestine.⁵ As Israel maintains the respective parts and positions within it ... This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.” (Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Continuum, 2004, 12)

3: “Separation policy in Hebron: Military renews segregation on main street; wide part – for Jews, narrow, rough side passage – for Palestinians.” https://www.btselem.org/video/20150419_separation_fence_in-hebron

4: Against the imposed consensus of the police, Rancière argues that politics “is a specific rupture in the logic of *archē*. It does not simply presuppose the rupture of the ‘normal’ distribution of positions between the one who exercises power and the one subject to it. It also requires a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions ‘proper’ to such classifications.” See Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” *Theory & Event* 5, no. 3 (2001).

5: Rancière’s refusal of the concept of bare life, his inability to grasp that those who are exterminated *are also counted*, is ultimately what marks the failure of his project. Exemplary in this regard is Rancière’s re-