# NO CONSTRAINT OR THE POTENTIAL TO NOT DO

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## FOUCAULT'S HETEROTOPIA

Foucault asserted that in every civilization there exist spaces ‹outside all places› that function as realized, or materialized utopias. Foucault's heterotopia would break and even subvert the logic ingrained in spaces belonging to the first order by exposing an alternative to the status quo. «Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to,»[1] Foucault called ‹heterotopia› the range of spaces that exist at the edge of a given cultural economy; spaces representing real life instances of utopia, spaces where potential would become actual.

If at one level heterotopias are the embodiment of utopias – actualized potential in space – at another level they also are spaces of potential; a sort of incubator charged with the capacity to extend the dominating cultural space by incorporating otherness into the mainstream. An example of this can be found with the forgotten building stock of the Industrial revolution, first turned into lofts by marginalized artistic communities in cities like New York when out of use and rundown architectural remnants meant cheap rent for working-living spaces. Not long after that, these were readapted by the dominant culture to house yuppies and the likes seduced by a romanticized vision of bohemian living and a return to an architecture that had finally aged enough to regain popular interest. These industrial vestiges by and large gentrified in present time have most recently been recuperated by creative industries marching in rhythm with the political economy of capital, at last confirming the end of the once heterotopian programming.

Elsewhere along the spectrum of heterotopia can be found prisons: spatial devices conceived to recuperate individuals operating outside the confine of the law. Utopian spaces for their capacity to huddle and restrict deviant agencies, yet dystopian from the perspective of the individuals over which they exercise control.

Lieven De Cauter reminds his audience that Foucault's «later reflections on the panopticon as a paradigmatic heterotopia of modernity put an end to this neutral or somewhat romanticizing view of heterotopia.»[2] When Foucault interlaces this notion with his disciplinary work in ‹Discipline and Punish›, it becomes clear that heterotopias can be used in totalitarian agendas and eventually be normalized into everyday life. This applies to heterotopian infrastructures, whether they take the form of borders, barriers or otherwise.

## HETEROTOPIAN INFRASTRUCTURES: BORDER SPACES & SPATIAL BARRIERS

Eyal Weizman suggested that «[i]f borders are abstract lines which designate the edges of jurisdictions, barriers make those limits physical.»[3] Modern geopolitical dynamics have transformed borders into active tools of protection and reclusion, ultimately becoming the «central feature of the architecture of global politics.»[4] Border conditions become visible when territorial barriers are formed, emerging as physical infrastructures or special areas of separation within a territory.[5] In a constant search for defining their positions between inside and outside, border spaces become sequences of complex, often blurred and fluctuating boundaries that at once filter and allow for selective trespassing.[6]

The ‹Armistice Line› has been used as a border throughout the planning and negotiation for the Separation Wall. Figure A illustrates two points on a continuum of edge conditions, from abstract borders to a physical barrier, ultimately solidifying the apparently negotiable edges of a territory. Another example of border spaces can be found within the territories of the ‹Oslo Accord›, which led up to the legislative division of the West Bank into three main types of political territories: Areas A, B and C. This division of control announced a reconfiguration where Palestinian-administered territories would only exist between extensive residual spaces subjected to Israeli bylaws. This territorial makeover has been mapped often and again. Figure B provocatively depicts a new spatial articulation where Areas A and B (still under Palestinian administrative control) are portrayed as a series of disconnected archipelagos dispersed within an extended sea of Israeli controlled territories.

Decolonizing Architecture's representations of this spatial-political arrangement puts in bold a central effect of this framework, which ultimately tainted the value of spatial proximity. Disconnected items indexed throughout the pages of a catalogue. Each of these newly drawn administrative borders have been mapped using a 0.02 millimeter felt tip pen on 1:20'000 maps. As we bring these maps to a scale of 1:1, it becomes clear that each border has a width of nearly five meters, where no juridical status has been designated. As a result, one hundred and forty-two rings are left with a disputed status in the West Bank as it remains unclear whether Israel or Palestine should have jurisdiction over these atoll-like territories; an irregularity that the ‹Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency› has examined in depth.[fig d, e, 7]

The situation becomes even more complex as Israel commonly addresses the land of Area C as national territory in internal discourses, thereby using the spatial division of the ‹Oslo Agreement› while injecting it with a political meaning different than what has been negotiated.

Much like what has just been described, Foucault stated that «heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in a single real space several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves.»[8] Yiftachel and Yacobi's description of Israeli colonies in the West Bank is consistent with Foucault's description:

«Domestically [Israel] has presented the Palestinian occupied territories as part of the ‹eternal Jewish homeland›, thereby including Jewish settlers in those territories as full state citizens, despite the fact that they live outside the official bounds of the state. At the same time, internationally, Israel has presented the same occupied territories as ‹temporarily administered›, thereby excluding their Palestinian residents from political participation, leaving them powerless to shape the future of their own homeland.»[9]

This conflicted classification hauls positions in disagreement. Border spaces protecting these enclaves collate sovereign frontiers inside other geopolitical spaces, making these territorial patches at once sovereign and occupied. It reveals the utopian ideology reflected through them; material transpositions of a self-contradictory taxonomy of space.

This is again evident as new visual registers are being projected onto heterotopian infrastructures such as the Separation Wall and Road Barriers. For example, rainbows and blue skies have been painted on ‹Road 443›

1    Foucault, Michel: ‹Different Spaces›, in Foucault, Michel: ‹Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology›, Penguin Books, London, 1998 [1984], p. 178.
2    De Cauter, Lieven: ‹The Capsular Civilization, On the City in the Age of Fear›, NAi, Rotterdam, 2004, p. 61.
3    Weizman, Eyal: ‹Principles of Frontier Geography›, in: Misselwitz Philipp; Rieniets Tim (eds.): ‹City of Collision, Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism›, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2004, p. 84.
4    Williams, Vaughan: ‹Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power›, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004.
5    Rumford, Chris: ‹Global Borders: an introduction to the special issue›, in: ‹Environment and Planning D: Society and Space›, 28:6, 2010, p. 951 – 956.
6    Cruz, Teddy: ‹The Political equator: global zones of conflict›, in: M Schoonderbeek (ed.): ‹Border Conditions›, Architecture and Natura Press, Amsterdam, 2010, p. 33-39.
7    Decolonizing Architecture's project titled ‹The Red Castle and the Lawless Line› explores this anomaly and the potential that lies within it. The project was presented for the first time at the 4th International Architecture Triennale of Oslo in 2010 at ‹0047 Gallery›.
8    Foucault, Michel: ‹Different Spaces›, p. 181.
9    Yiftachel Oren & Yacobi Haim: ‹Barriers, Walls, and Urban Ethnocracy in Jerusalem›, in: Misselwitz Philipp; Rieniets Tim (eds.): ‹City of Collision, Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism›, Birkhäuser: Basel, Basel, 2006, p. 172.
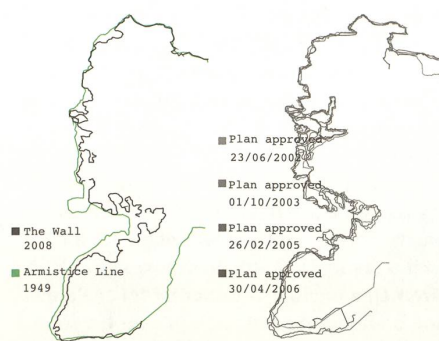
fig. a
‹A continuum of edge conditions,
from borders to barriers›
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and Camillo Boano

■ The Wall
2008

■ Armistice Line
1949

■ Plan approved
23/06/2003

■ Plan approved
01/10/2003

■ Plan approved
26/02/2005
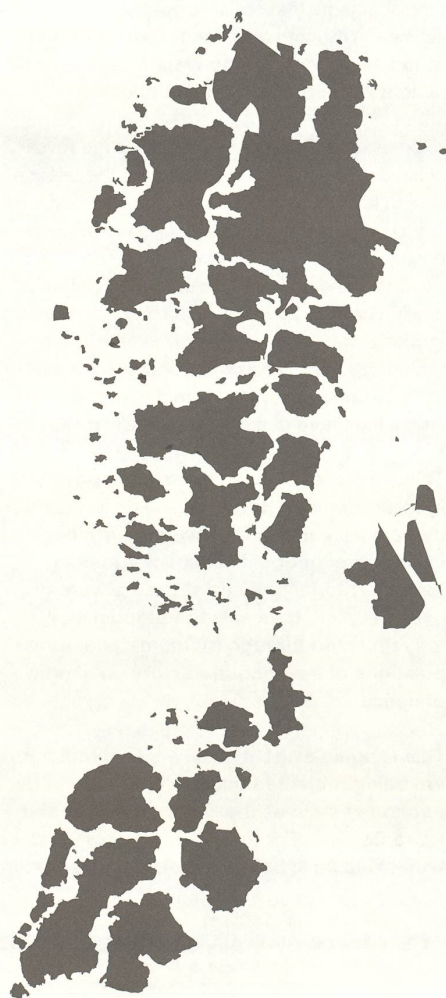
■ Plan approved
30/04/2006

fig. b
‹West Bank Archipelagos›
© Benjamin Leclair-Paquet
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in Bir Nabala, reproducing a perfected version of the landscape that they block. Speaking of these, Shmuel Groag writes that «an imagined orientalist view of reality replaces the panorama of the actual community, all the while masked by the argument that such a wall is necessary to guard the security of passing travelers.»[10] Similar strategies have been used on the Palestinian side of the wall, but for completely different intentions. While this added layer contributes to the heterotopian nature of the Israeli structures, the use of the Separation Wall as a platform of creative expression resists the integration of the wall into the mainstream.[fig f, g] These actions align with a totally different programming than what was intended by the colonial agency.

## HETEROTOPIAN INFRASTRUCTURES: BYPASS ROADS

The term bypass roads refers to the system of road networks that can only be used by Israelis and internationals. They allow settlers to quickly move within and across the territory without ever entering it, which encourages the colonization of the West Bank and by default, increases the size of extra-territorial Israeli settlements.

Since the eruption of the second Intifada in September 2000, West Bankers lost nearly all access to the 800 kilometers of bypass roads that have been constructed throughout the West Bank to facilitate movement beyond the ‹Armistice Line›. While ‹USAID› money destined to support the development of Palestinian territories has been used to cover the cost of some of these roads, the primacy of settlers' security has indefinitely suspended the right of West Bankers to access the network.

Writing about bypass roads, David Newman explains that «[w]ith significant improvements in Israel's transportation system, an increasing number of ‹development town› residents are commuting on a daily basis to their places of work in urban centers.»[11] This passage offers an insight from a perspective that considers settlements in the West Bank as suburbs to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

For West Bankers unable to access the spaces connected with these roads, bypass roads[fig. h] are by and large perceived as spa-

10    Groag, Shmuel: ‹The Politics of Roads in Jerusalem›, in: Misselwitz Philipp; Rieniets Tim (eds.): ‹City of Collision, Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism›, Birkhauser: Basel, Basel, 2006, p. 182.
11    Newman, David: ‹Colonization as Suburbanization, The politics of the land market at the frontier›, in: Misselwitz Philipp; Rieniets Tim (eds.): ‹City of Collision, Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism›, Birkhauser: Basel, Basel, 2006, p. 84.

tial barriers.[12] Their legal designation works alongside a segregational system leaning on iconographies reflecting the modernist aesthetics associated with the Europeanization of Israel post-1947.

Groag concedes that the «quality, size, and nature of each road [...] is a fair indicator of whether Palestinians or Israelis move along it.» This suggests that the aesthetics of each set of roads juxtaposes sign systems affiliated with cultural groups at opposite sides of a divided spectrum. The projection of symbols charged with a long heritage of colonial domination helped in producing a Palestinian ‹imaginative geography›[13] that folded the demarcation between Israelis and Palestinians, perceived as the inverse of each other. Israel can layer a road network that has become nearly as symbolic as its national flag within the regional context, onto the territorial base of its adversary. These characteristics coupled with their correspondence with Oslo Accord principles have earned these roads the nickname of ‹Forbidden Roads Regime›[14] by the Israeli NGO ‹B'Tselem›. The NGO explains that «dozens of islands separated by a sea defined as Area C»[15] are now connected by their own transportation infrastructures solidifying the heterogeneity of two systems layered onto the West Bank. A fabula in construction, mythical and real.

Foucault refers to heterochronias to designate «heterotopias connected with temporal discontinuities.»[16] This is encapsulated in the conceptualization of a ‹Palestinian space-time› asymmetric to ‹Israelis space-time›. The accumulation of time in its relation to movement has become faster for Palestinians using a destitute road system designed between a series of no-go zones.[17] As Yiftachel and Yacobi write, «[c]heckpoints, and now the fence/wall, are forcing West Bankers to use alternate routes such as the infamous and perilous Wad an-Nar road to the east of the city.»[18] Since West Bankers lost their right to use ‹Road 60› to transit between Bethlehem and Ramallah via Jerusalem, the thirty-minute journey now takes around two hours via ‹Wad an-Nar›[fig. i]; a name which loosely translates to ‹Valley of Hell› in references to the frequent accidents that occur on this narrow and unlit and partly unpaved and spiraling road.

12    Groag, p. 182.
13    The concept of ‹imaginative geography› was first developed by Edward Said and explained at length in Derek Gregory's ‹The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq›, John Wiley & Sons Inc., Hoboken (NJ), 2004
14    B'Tselem, ‹Forbidden Roads Israel's Discriminatory Road Regime in the West Bank›, Information Sheet August 2004. Available at: http://www.btselem.org/download/200408_forbidden_roads_eng.pdf, Accessed January 24, 2012.
15    Ibid, p. 4.
16    Foucault, ‹Different Spaces›, p. 182.
17    B'Tselem, p. 36.
18    Yiftachel & Yacobi, ‹Barriers, Walls, and Urban Ethnocracy in Jerusalem›, p. 174.

fig. c
*Extract from ‹Decolonizing Architecture's Catalogue of Palestinian Controlled Territories›*
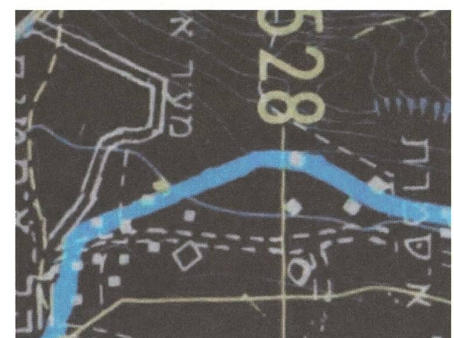*© Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency*



fig. d
*‹The 0.02 mm border line at a 1:500 scale, Jericho›*
*© Benjamin Leclair-Paquet*



fig. e
*‹The Lawless Line between Area A & Area C›*
*© Benjamin Leclair-Paquet for ‹Decolonizing Architecture›.*



fig. f
*‹The Wall as a projection screen and canvas for creative expression›*
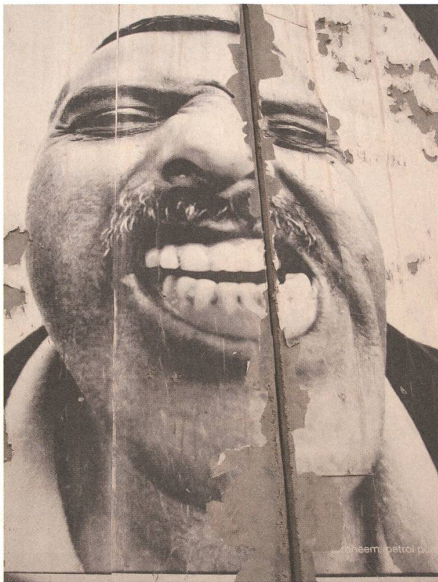*© Benjamin Leclair-Paquet and Camillo Boano*

*fig. g*
‹Palestinians or Israelis?›
© art by JR
© photography Benjamin Leclair-Paquet
and Camillo Boano



*fig. h*
‹Bypass Road, Har Homa›
© Benjamin Leclair-Paquet



*fig. i*
‹Wad an-Nar›
© Benoit Burquel

These infrastructures of separation function inside the Israeli utopia of a defined and palpable Jewish biblical land, which allows Jewish people an escape from their long history of repression. Settlement barriers evoke the feeling of security that is at the heart of Israel's quest for a safe motherland freed up from anti-Semite sentiments.

Heterotopian infrastructures exist between perfected spaces and spaces of illusion. They merge Foucault's concept of hetero-chronias with the notion of heterotopias of fantasy as these infrastructures of security only provide a make-believe perfected space, in reality deprived of the power of the occult that would eliminate any threats from the land Israel aggressively claims.

## AGAMBEN'S POTENTIALITY

Potentiality is often understood in relation to actuality, where it is defined as some-thing not-yet actual, but that over time and through the principle of development has the power to become. Agamben writes that the child «is potential in the sense that he must suffer an alteration (a becoming other) through learning» in order to reach a state of actuality.[19]

The Italian philosopher expresses a shared sense of concern with Aristotle for a second type of potentiality that they refer to as existing potentiality; a terminology used to describe potential that already ‹belongs to someone›:

«Whoever already possesses knowledge, by contrast [to the child], is not obliged to suffer an alteration; he is instead potential, … thanks to … a ‹having›, on the basis of which he can also not bring his knowledge into actuality by not making a work, for example.»[20]

He supports this with the example of the architect who has the potential to choose to not build.[21]

Agamben identifies the key feature in Aristotle's thoughts in this crucial notion of ‹existing potentiality›. He writes, «the great-ness — and also the abyss — of human potenti-ality is that it is first of all [the] potential not to act.»[22] Existing potentiality contains the power of negation, the freedom to resist; «potentiality is always also constitutively an

19   Agamben, Giorgio: ‹Potentiality›, in ‹Potentialities, Collected Essays in Philosophy›, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 179.
20   Ibid.
21   Ibid.
22   Ibid.
23   Agamben, Giorgio: ‹On What We Can Not Do›, in ‹Nudities›, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2009, p. 43.

impotentiality, [...] the ability to do is also always the ability to not do.»[23]

«Nothing makes us more impoverished and less free than this estrangement from impotentiality.»[24] **Agamben argues that what separates human beings from other living beings is that we are the only** «animals who are capable of their own impotentiality.»[25] **Deprived from our impotentiality, we are forced to translate potential into actual, thereby losing our freedom to animal instinct.**

**Agamben relocates freedom on the other side of the spectrum, not in actuality, but in potentiality and its twin, impotentiality:**

«To be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing, nor is it simply to have the power to refuse to do this or that thing. To be free is (...) to be capable of one's own impotentiality, to be in relation to one's own privation. This is why freedom is freedom for both good and evil.»[26]

**What are the political consequences of defining freedom not in terms of actuality, but in terms of the potentiality to not-be, to not do? What kind of environment would a society incapable of its impotentiality produce? Building on Aristotle's radical work once again, Agamben concludes that:**

«Separated from his impotentiality, deprived of the experience of what he can not do, today's man believes himself capable of everything, and so he repeats his jovial ‹no problem›, and his irresponsible ‹I can do it›, precisely when he should instead realize that he has been consigned in unheard of measure to forces and processes over which he has lost all control. He has become blind not to his capacities but to his incapacities, not to what he can do but to what he cannot, or can, not do.»[27]

**In a way distressfully similar to what Agamben describes here, Israel continues its colonial strategies across the ‹Armistice Line› in a way that suggests that it has started to lose sight of its impotentiality. The devices it produces through the axiomatic of occupation have not only become heterotopian from a Palestinian perspective, but have also become an other space, both imaginary and real for the better part of the world. As Israel ingeniously locates loopholes and legal grey zones from which to operate, it repeats its jovial ‹no problem›, leaving**

behind a sense that its potential to impotentiality is slowly escaping its reach; that everything that can be done is automatically done, suspending in so doing any process of reflection that might allow it to find within itself the freedom it seeks for itself.

**However complex and biopolitically charged these infrastructures have become, they cannot succeed in separating West Bankers from their impotentiality, leaving with them the power to resist and ultimately, the root source of potentiality.**

«Those who are separated from their own impotentiality lose, on the other hand, first of all the capacity to resist.»[28] **The relative ease and extent with which Israel has been able to unleash its heterotopian infrastructures onto extra-territorial spaces implies the becoming of a predictable agency, unable to not do. The biopolitical confinement it sought to proliferate to compete against its adversary has instead taken over its own mechanism.**

24  Agamben, Giorgio: ‹On What We Can Not Do›, in ‹Nudities›, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2009, p. 45.
25  Ibid, p. 44.
26  Agamben, ‹Potentialities›, p. 183.
27  Agamben, ‹On What We Can Not Do›, p. 44.
28  Ibid, p. 45.

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