JOURNAL OF E-LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY
Vol. 22, No. 1 (2026)

INVITED PAPER

"To redeem horror from his invisibility". Forensic Architecture's work with images

Guerri[a,1]

[a] …

(published: 23/5/2026)

DOI
https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1136376

CITE AS
Guerri (2026). "To redeem horror from his invisibility". Forensic Architecture's work with images [Invited paper]. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*, *22*(1).
https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1136376

1. Faced with the pain of others

We live in a situation that can be succinctly described as *Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), to borrow the title of Shoshana Zuboff's famous book. The technological network to which we are connected and for which we work, more or less consciously, produces a political and social asymmetry that highlights once again how technology as a whole cannot in any way be regarded as neutral, but is always politically oriented (see also Casilli, 2020; Ippolita, 2017).

We are witnessing a phenomenon that originates from the dialectical opposite of surveillance. I am referring to the relationship we have with the images of the systematic destruction of the population of Gaza. Faced with the sheer volume of images and testimonies of the annihilation of thousands of human beings in Gaza, we have witnessed – and continue to witness – a sort of blockage, a loss of speech, a paralysis of action. The images of an ongoing genocide do not provoke the ethical and political stance one might have expected, particularly in European countries and even more so in those very nations whose populations actively collaborated in the systematic elimination of European Jews and which, for decades after the Liberation from Nazi-Fascism, shaped the ethical and political conscience of generations on the values of coexistence developed precisely in the wake of that immense tragedy.

On the one hand, in recent years we have seen the Israeli army using the Lavender artificial intelligence system to monitor every aspect of life in Gaza (see Yuval, 2024), with the aim of identifying "suspected" Hamas affiliates and eliminating them as swiftly as possible without these individuals ever being tried in a court of law, as required by the principles governing a democratic state. On the other hand, we are faced with a wealth of images and testimonies showing the systematic process of annihilating the population and seizing territory, yet these do not elicit the ethical and political response one might reasonably expect. We look, but we do not see what the images are showing us.

So what happens to us when we look at those images? It is one of the questions Susan Sontag grappled with throughout her life: what happens to us when we look

[1] corresponding author - email: …

at images of "the pain of others"? Images of bodies burned by napalm in the Vietnam War, the corpses of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the civilian victims of the war on terror, migrant children drowned and washed up by the waves on the shores of the Mediterranean. Sontag's detailed reflection on this kind of imagery can be summed up in a single sentence: "the aestheticizing tendency of photography is such that the medium which conveys distress ends by neutralizing it" (Sontag, 1973, p. 98). According to Sontag, the reason we are unable to see what we are looking at lies in the relationship we establish with the images reproduced by the media: whilst, on the one hand, images bear witness to the suffering of others, on the other, Sontag concludes that those images, precisely because they are images (photographs, videos etc.), neutralise the shock they have provoked in the observer. For Sontag, there are many reasons for this perceptual outcome: the proliferation of forms of entertainment which, in the consumption of images, result in the absence of a contemplative space capable of allowing reflection on what we are looking at is, for Sontag, certainly one of the main reasons for the neutralisation of the distress that a war photograph initially conveys to the viewer.

Sontag pauses to reflect on Jeff Wall's image *Dead Troops Talk (A vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol*, *near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986*). It is a large-scale image installed as a lightbox; Wall's installation is not a record of an incident that occurred, but a visual construction designed precisely to explore the very question that Sontag herself is addressing. In the installation, we see several Soviet soldiers riddled with bullets, disembowelled, with their heads split open, yet still alive after a violent attack. But the bodies of other soldiers lie lifeless on the ground. Sontag is searching for an image capable of escaping those forms of neutralisation of anguish and pain that characterise our relationship with images of war. Wall's image seems to respond to this need to oppose war, just as Turgenev's *The Execution of Troppmann* manages to oppose the death penalty. Sontag observes, regarding Wall's image: "Engulfed by the image, which is so accusatory, one could fantasize that the soldiers might turn and talk to us. But no, no one is looking out of the picture. There's no threat of protest. They are not about to yell at us to bring a halt to that abomination which is war. They haven't come back to life in order to stagger off to denounce the war-makers who sent them to kill and be killed" (Sontag, 2003, p. 125). And finally, Sontag concludes her reflection:

> *These dead are supremely uninterested in the living: in those who took their lives; in witnesses – and in us. Why should they seek our gaze? What would they have to say to us? "We" – this "we" is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through – don't understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; and how normal it becomes. Can't understand, can't imagine (Sontag, 2003, pp. 125-26).*

According to Sontag, even Wall's image fails to establish a connection with the viewer. The dead in the scene constructed by Wall are irrevocably separated even from their comrades-in-arms who are still alive, just a few centimetres away from them. The distance separating us, who observe the dead from a safe distance, from those lying on the ground is unbridgeable, at least in the images. The suffering endured by those who have died, the terrifying and horrific consequences of war transposed into an image, do not stir the imagination of the viewer; and so we, the observers, continue to look at the photograph without being able to see what is happening and without being able to take a stand against the violence of war. War is unimaginable, Sontag seems to conclude, so its reproduction in images can only be a checkmate for us who view them.

If we follow Sontag's line of reasoning, the act of looking but not seeing by millions of citizens who are unable to take a stand in the face of the images from Gaza is, so to speak, absolved – at least on this specific issue – of their aesthetic responsibilities. We have countless images of the destruction suffered by the people of Gaza, but however terrifying they may be, they fail to strike a chord with our emotions, our imagination and our reason: "Can't understand, can't imagine" writes Sontag. Sontag seems to identify structural aspects within the images that prevent the viewer from empathising, from recognising themselves in the painful action unfolding in the scene they are watching. It is as though images of death in war always have an anaesthetic or hyperesthetic effect in terms of the relationship they establish with pain and death.

But let us try to consider the relationship between images, wars and ourselves from another perspective as well. In the 1960s, Siegfried Kracauer, in a famous passage from *Theory of Film*, interprets cinematic images by drawing on the myth of Perseus and Medusa:

> *We have learned in school the story of the Gorgon Medusa whose face […] was so horrible that the sheer sight of it turned men and beasts into stone. When Athena instigated Perseus to slay the monster, she therefore warned him never to look at the face itself but only at its mirror reflection in the polished shield she had given him. […] The moral of the myth is, of course, that we do not, and cannot, see actual horrors because they paralyze us with blinding fear; and that we shall know what they look like only by watching images of them which reproduce their true appearance. […]*

> *Now of all the existing media the cinema alone holds up a mirror to nature. Hence our dependence on it for the reflection of happenings which would petrify us were we to encounter them in real life. The film screen is Athena's polished shield. This is not all, however. In addition, the myth suggests the the images on the shield or screen are a means to an end; they are to enable – or, by extension, induce – the spectator to behead the horror they mirror (Kracauer, 1960, p. 305).*

And in the final paragraph, Kracauer concludes:

> *The mirror reflections of horror are an end in themselves. As such they beckon the spectator to take them in and thus incorporate into his memory the real face of things too dreadful to be beheld in reality. In experiencing the rows of calves 'heads or the litter of tortured human bodies in the films made of the Nazi concentration camps, we redeem horror from its invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination. And this experience is liberating in as much as it removes a most powerful taboo. Perhaps Perseus 'greatest achievement was not to cut off Medusa's head but to overcome his fears and look at its reflection in the shield. And was it not precisely this feat which permitted him to behead the monster? (Kracauer 1960, p. 306).*

It is interesting to note that in these passages Kracauer also engages with images of the Holocaust, one of the tragedies of contemporary history which, in many respects, calls into question the very possibility of representing that event through images. As is well known, he was among the first philosophers, in the 1920s, to recognise the anaesthetic and distracting function performed primarily by images within the context of the nascent entertainment industry (see Kracauer, 2022). But this does not prevent Kracauer from recognising an opportunity in our relationship with images: the possibility that they might serve as testimony. Let us analyse Kracauer's passage: images allow the viewer to convince themselves of the possibility of decapitating the horror they reflect. Images allow us to "incorporate"into our "memory" "the real face of things too dreadful to be beheld in reality". By looking at the horror reflected in images, "redeem horror from its invisibility**".** In this sense, the experience of engaging with images can be liberating because it has the potential to remove the most powerful taboo. Finally, it is precisely through images that we can overcome fear, break free from the paralysis it imposes on us, and by looking at its reflection in the shield, we put ourselves in a position to start acting again.

This reflection on the testimonial potential inherent in images does not imply a naive and optimistic acceptance of images in their entirety. As we mentioned, it was Kracauer himself who, from the 1920s onwards, began to develop a phenomenology of entertainment images and the role of distraction. In addition to Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard and Susan Sontag have all explored the alienating function that images perform within the society of the spectacle, right up to the era of surveillance capitalism. But I believe it is necessary to continue thinking dialectically about the sphere of image production, and not to abandon the testimonial capacity that images continue to fulfil in our time. I believe that the work on images by the Forensic Architecture research group can be understood as an ideal continuation of Kracauer's insights.

Weizman describes the formation of the research group he founded as follows:

> *Forensic Architecture is also the name of a research agency I established in 2010, together with a group of fellow architects, artists, filmmakers, journalists, scientists, and lawyers. We undertake independent research or act on commission from international prosecutors and environmental and human rights groups to investigate state and corporate violence, especially when it bears upon the built environment. The agency produces evidence files that include building survey, models, animations, video analyses, and interactive cartographies, and presents them in forums such as international courts, truth commissions, citizen tribunals, human rights and environmental reports, and, on one occasion, in the UN General Assembly (Weizman, 2017, p. 9).*

For FA in the context of the use of images in forensic contexts, see Grespi & Villa (2024).

We know that many acts of violence would not exist were it not for verbal, photographic, video and other forms of evidence that demonstrate their occurrence. At the same time, we know that there is a significant asymmetry between the capacity of state institutions and large industrial groups to utilise image-producing tools, and the capabilities of individual citizens and communities who suffer the violence of state-sanctioned warfare. This asymmetry is present across all technological sectors and can be summarised by the difference in the focusing capabilities of the optical systems of drones and satellites available to governments, compared to the satellite imagery accessible to the public.

> *Unlike the randomly disturbed grains of analog photography, digital images, such as satellite images, are divided into a grid of equal square units, or pixels. This grid filters reality like a sieve or a fishing net. Objects larger than the grid are captured and retained. Smaller ones pass through and disappear. Objects close to the size of the pixel are in a special threshold condition: whether they are captured or not depends on the relative skill, or luck, of the fisherman and the fish (Weizman, 2017, p. 27).*

There are human figures and objects that hover on the threshold of detectability due to the resolution of the images documenting the event. In the 1970s, satellites transmitted images of parts of the Earth where the width of a single pixel corresponded to a distance of 60 metres. In the 1980s, linear resolution reached 30 metres and, by the early 1990s, around 20 metres. It was during the 1990s, amidst the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, that satellite imagery began to be regarded as crucial visual evidence of what was occurring in war-torn territories, precisely because of its resolution, making it possible to identify large bombed-out buildings or mass graves, for example. At the start of the 21st century, resolution reached 2.5 metres per side, and a few years later it improved further to 0.5 metres. Then this process of focusing on the planet from above came to a halt. Why? Weizman writes: the reason for halting the improvement in resolution lies in the fact that:

> *at 0.5 meters, the pixel resolution corresponds to the dimensions of the human body – an area 0.5 meters by 0.5 meters is roughly the size of the human body as seen from above. As such, the pixel could be thought of as analogous to what Le Corbusier called a "modulor" – a system of proportions and measurements that relate to the human body. The satellite images "modulor" was not meant to help organize space, but rather to remove the human figure from representation. The human body was now drowned within the pixel resolution available to independent groups to analyze human rights violations (Weizman, 2017, p. 28).*

It is important to note that the resolution limitations of satellite imagery apply only to publicly available images. The resolution of military drones is extremely high (though subject to military secrecy), whilst US Keyhole-class satellites have a resolution of around 15 centimetres, but these are inaccessible to human rights groups.

The official reasons given for this suspension of the satellite image focusing process are based on respect for individual privacy. But, as Weizman rightly points out:

> *The difference in resolution demonstrates the imbalance of power. While the human body is the scale to which drone optics are calibrated, it is the very thing that publically available satellite images are designed to mask (Weizman, 2017, p. 30).*

Images are becoming increasingly important both in the conduct of warfare and in the subsequent reconstruction of events; in modern warfare, in particular, imaging equipment is used by military personnel to track down targets, whilst at the same time governments delete those images to eliminate any evidence of unwanted deaths, effectively erasing those deaths. Since the nineteenth century, state police forces have used photography to reconstruct crime scenes; today, it is the perpetrators – that is, states or companies acting on behalf of state powers – who are equipped with more effective and powerful tools than the investigators, namely international courts and independent research groups:

> *The visual spectrum between the high resolution used for killing and the low resolution available for monitoring the killing is the space exploited by deniers. The practice of counterforensics […] has to engage a condition of structural inequality in access to vision, signals, and knowledge, and to find ways to operate close to and under the threshold of detectability (Weizman 2017, p. 30).*

FA's work consists of reconstructing, using all the technologies at our disposal – particularly those relating to the study of architectural structures, the various types of imagery associated with the event, and the analysis of eyewitness accounts – events that would otherwise not exist in the public record, neither for those who experienced them nor for those seeking to understand history: civilians killed pre-emptively or "by mistake" in undeclared wars, migrants who have drowned in the Mediterranean, men killed by police forces in violation of the laws of the very nation in which they operate. The perception among the global public is that these events *do not exist*, not because there are no images to bear witness to their existence, but because these images are systematically withheld from the public eye by the political power of states – a political power which, as we have observed in recent years, is increasingly dependent on the interests of a few powerful groups. The relationship between the current US government and Big Tech is highly significant (see Bria, 2025).

2. Counter-forensics

> *Although the name [Forensic Architecture] refers to the work of building surveyors, our agency is composed instead of an interdisciplinary team of architects, filmmakers, artists, scientists, and lawyers. Our products are evidence files in the form of building surveys, physical or digital models, animations, video and maps of various forms. When we work in a legal context, it is often for prosecutors in international law or human rights cases, but our work is not limited to the legal domain – we also produce evidence for citizen- organized truth commissions and tribunals and human rights and environmental protection agencies. Our investigations seek to extend beyond the procedural limitation of each of the forums in which we are asked to present evidence. We try to present incidents in their historical and political contexts – to reconstruct around them the world that made them possible (Weizman, 2017, p. 64).*

Weizman emphasises that FA's work goes beyond the boundaries of the legal context. Not only does FA's gaze extend beyond the limits of the law, but, as Weizman explains, it aims to reverse the very notion of forensic investigation – which is, in fact, subservient to the law – with the result of turning the direction of its gaze on its head, a gaze typical of government agencies such as the police or the secret services when they investigate all those they intend to keep under surveillance. The need to go beyond the boundaries of the law stems primarily from the fact that the killings of individuals or groups of people, the existence of which FA seeks to demonstrate, mostly take place within the logic of the law and are justifiable under existing state laws.

The first methodological revolution concerning the practice of FA is of an aesthetic nature:

> *It is in this way that forensic architecture is able to invert phenomenology's categories of perception and experience: it is not concerned with how we might experience a building, but rather, fundamentally, with how a building might experience its users, how it might sense the way they move and act within and around it. This is not to make an anthropomorphic point: buildings sense not in a human, but rather in a building sort of way. The same principle, as I will later show, can also be extended to build environments and larger territories across the dry surface of the earth. They also act as political sensors to be read (Weizman, 2017, p. 54).*

According to Weizman, therefore, we are faced with a substantial monopoly on information about the war – not only of a military nature, but also of a legal and informational nature, in terms of both words and images. Consequently, an investigation seeking to prove the existence of killings perpetrated by a state (or its contractors) must necessarily adopt a different perspective from that which sets the destruction of human lives through military operations as its own end, justifies such actions through the law, or renders them non-existent in historical terms by preventing or restricting the sharing of images and documents that bear witness to the killings that have taken place.

The term that best describes this revolution in FA's research activities is "conter-forensics" a term coined by Thomas Keenan (2014) on the basis of Allan Sekula (1993)'s reflections [Sekula refers primarily to the work of Clyde Snow and Susan Meiselas in Kurdistan after the first Gulf War: "Counter-forensics, the exhumation and identification of the anonymized ('disappeared') bodies of the oppressor state's victims, becomes the key to a process of political resistance and mourning"]. If the investigative practice employed by FA focuses on deconstructing the violence inherent in state law – which is increasingly founded on forms of war that are concealed or justified on legal grounds – then we must overturn or shift this perspective in order to open ourselves up to a different outlook and discourse, and to establish aesthetic relationships that differ from those that dominate in inter-state relations governed by the logic of law. One way to develop a counter-forensic perspective is to take the phrase "Forensic Architecture" and place the emphasis on the adjective "forensic", that is, relating to the forum, the public square, that open space where matters of importance to the polis are discussed and debated. The history of the use of the English term "Forensic – and the same can be said of the Italian adjective "forense" – follows a "followed a trajectory of linguistic telescoping" (Weizman, 2017, p. 65). The term "forum" no longer refers to the town square where public debate aimed at establishing justice takes place; instead, it has been reduced solely and exclusively to the spaces where legal proceedings are conducted – in essence, the forum is the court. What Allen Feldman (2004) has termed the "police concept of history" operates across three "theatres": the field, the laboratory and the forum, understood as a court of law. In contrast, the practice of counter-forensics seeks to erode the difference between these three spheres, which are regarded as separate, with the aim of constructing forums where there aren't.

Now, the issue of *construction* is fundamental to the practice of FA research, particularly when considered in relation to the use of images in counter-forensic practice. Military attacks are occurring with increasing frequency in urban areas, and different urban environments are "highly sentient in both material,

analogue, and digital terms" (Weizman, 2017, p. 57). When an act of war occurs,

> *all elements of the city start recording, each in its own way. Buildings record vibrations and the force of impacts. Plants record – crushed fields around a city's agricultural outskirts register the movement of military vehicles on them when they stop photosynthesizing, a signal that is captured by remote sensors orbiting above and beamed back to earth. Air- quality sensors pick up increases in traffic as tanks roll in or refugees escape. People remember – in processes that, as I have already shown, are often complex and not straightforward – and increasingly use their camera phones to record the events around them, uploading images, sound, and video online. Each of these sensors is indeterminate, and patient investigative labor has to be invested in reading anything from them and then later also in cross-referencing and pulling the data together (Weizman, 2017, p. 58).*

These modes of perception are not immediate; they do not reflect reality – or a fragment of reality – in a mirror-like manner. Instead, we must think of all these signs as *media* – even when they are not media in the strict sense – through which an event can be reconstructed. And media convey meaning only in the form of a narrative; they require interpretation and imagination, not mere presentation. It thus becomes clear that, for Weizman, counter-forensic research is "an aesthetic practice" (Weizmann, 2017, p. 94) because "it depends on both the modes and the means by which reality is sensed and presented publicly" and "slows down time and intensifies sensibility to space, matter, and image" (Weizmann, 2017, p. 94). Counter-forensic activity is aesthetic because "seeks to devise new modes of narration and the articulation of truth claims" (Weizman, 2017, p. 94) Weizman conceives of matter as a whole as an aesthetic sensorium (see: Weizman, 2017, p. 94) capable of perceptually capturing, in ways specific to the matter in question, everything that occurs in a given place. This opens up the possibility of conceiving of counter-forensic practice as grounded in a material aesthetic: "Material aesthetics" (Weizman, 2017, p. 94) has no evidence to present within a pre-established interpretative system such as the law, but must reconstruct the places and moments of an event through the images, sounds, voices and environmental structures in which such testimonies are imprinted.

Weizman explains some fundamental aspects of material aesthetics:

> *Material aesthetics is the quality of relations between things – the being of matter in the world, its ability to absorb and the degree to which it might. This extends the principles of photography to the rest of the material world, breaking film's and digital photography's monopoly over visual representation. The inverse must also be true: as objects become images, images should be studied as things, parts of the material world. Still, to be read as sensors, the transformations of material objects must be captured by other sensors, such as photographs, analog or digital, remote or proximate, single or hyperspectral, that translate the sensorial capacity of matter into data and help make sense of them (Weizman 2017, p. 96).*

Thus, whilst forensic practice centres on the idea of demonstrating, through clear evidence, a linear and direct relationship between cause and effect, counter-forensic research, on the other hand, requires reconstructing what happened through a process of 'montage'. Weizman refers to this as a "field causality" (on the issue of field causality, see Solla 2022) that can be constructed through a montage employing images, objects and words.

> *While criminal law seeks to establish a linear string of causal relations between intentions, actions, and victims or between, so to speak, the two ends of a smoking gun, the representation of the causes of environmental violence demands the establishment of more complex and diffused causal structures. I propose the term "field causality" to refer to indirect forms of causality, multidirectional and distributed over extended spaces and time durations. It is an inherently spatial form of causality whose employment seeks to reconnect the multiple threads that linear juridical protocols have torn apart (Weizman, 2017, p. 119).*

In counter-forensic investigations, there is never a smoking gun; the images are not immediate and are not authentic; they must always be placed in relation to other images, other signs, and a discourse. Weizman defines the "architectural image complex" (Weizman, 2017, p. 100) that characterises much of counter-forensic research as an assembly of numerous photographic materials which, when spatially repositioned, function as an "optical device" (Weizman, 2017, p. 186) that allows the viewer "to establish and view images and the relations between them" (Weizman, 2017, p. 186). To show what happened, a construction is needed – an editing process capable of holding together materials, images and words.

All the counter-forensic investigation methods developed by FA over the years are currently being

used in the creation of the *Cartography of genocide*, which aims to reconstruct everything that has happened in Gaza since 7 October, drawing on all available visual and other evidence (see https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/a-cartography-of-genocide).

In *Investigative Aesthetics*, Fuller and Weizman focus on the need to engage with images in a manner that reflects justice and to re-establish that sense of community which has been lost in the sensory realm, as it is dependent on the logic of the law. The starting point for Fuller and Weizman lies in understanding that all media technologies are not neutral but are always politically oriented.

> *The media technologies of artificial intelligence, satellite images, social media platforms, smart cities or facial recognition cameras are not neutral; they are products of specific political and historical contexts, with inbuilt biases, opacity, partiality and illegibility and have the potential to enhance discrimination and domination. These biases may not only be those that entrench existing social norms, which have to be fought and reworked, but also those that are particular to specific media forms. These might be particular idiosyncrasies or predilections. They might texture or produce information in certain ways (Fuller & Weizman, 2021, p. 16).*

3. Investigative aesthetics

Precisely because of the political orientation of media technologies, we must proceed to construct what the authors term an "investigative aesthetic", maintaining a sceptical attitude towards terms such as "fact", "evidence", "truth" and "knowledge", whilst at the same time seeking to redefine and problematise those very notions. This work, which examines terms such as fact, evidence and truth, is necessary because we are confronted with forms of monopoly over these very concepts. The authors write: "This challenge is urgent because it happens at the same time as the rise of political powers that aim to replace the always conditional concept of truth with a thrilling sense of certainty" (Fuller & Weizman, 2021, p. 19). In this regard, it is essential to conceive of the image not as a surface upon which an immediate proof is imprinted, but as a door that opens up new connections with other sensitive traces, with other forms of testimonial evidence. It is within this context that the concept of aestheticisation emerges. For Fuller and Weizman, aestheticisation is understood in a sense that is the opposite of the meaning it has in Walter Benjamin's thought. The term aestheticisation should not, therefore, be understood as a spectacular and fetishistic relationship with images, but rather as the chance to activate one's own sensitivity to certain events within a common, public context. As Fuller and Weizman state:

> *Aestheticisation, the process or act of becoming or making sensitive, is dialogic and collective, just like an emotion is relational and justice is assembled. There is a process to take part in it, but it is also necessary to recognise how the sensing self is an occurrence. The conscious subject is built up through the interaction of numerous entities, systems and experiences. Each of these may have quite distinct aesthetic capacities [...] Aesthetics is, crucially, a question of the material relation within and between entities and the ecologies of which they are part (Fuller & Weizman, 2021, 35-36).*

If aestheticisation is the process of becoming sensitive to an event, a capacity to enter into a sensitive relationship with something, this also implies that every fragment of the environment in which human beings live is itself aestheticised, that is, capable of sensing and capturing signs of an event that has entered into a relationship with that fragment of matter.

This notion of aestheticisation has its dialectical opposite in "anaesthetisation". Anaesthetisation is the act of numbing the senses. The authors give the following example:

> *For example, a sense of injustice can be aestheticised or anaesthetised, in fact may be primarily so as a feeling before it becomes a thought. And this can create a link between what one may tacitly perceive, see or hear; what one may feel about what one sees and hears; and how that affects one's sense of right and wrong. In this sense, to be politicised is to increase one's ability to be "aestheticised" to the world (Fuller & Weizman, 2021, p. 36).*

In this passage by Fuller and Weizman, we may find at least the beginnings of an answer to the question we posed at the very beginning: why are there so many images and so many accounts of the genocide in Gaza, yet a lack of political response capable of opposing it in a clear, decisive and unequivocal manner? Firstly, following Fuller and Weizman, the issue should not be approached from an iconoclastic or technophobic standpoint: it is not simply because of the sheer volume of images as such that a live genocide fails to provoke a wave of revolt in the countries most directly concerned, such as the EU and the US. The point is that the way in which that event is perceived has been shaped, as a whole, by the media's coverage of the event, by the forms of repression directed against those demonstrating in support of the inhabitants of Gaza and calling for an immediate halt to the ethnic cleansing, by

the stance taken by the mainstream media, and by the media system as a whole. This entire complex communication system has ultimately produced a public numbing in the face of ethnic cleansing in the Palestinian territories. Sensing and sense-making constitute the dialectical poles of aesthetics: we can perceive without the production of meaning, without the aestheticisation of a particular event. We can look at images without seeing anything. When a group of people is unable to form a common aesthetic understanding of events unfolding in history, they are prevented from taking a political stance. Without an aesthetic understanding of the event, it is impossible to move on to a political analysis of it: aesthetic understanding, critical engagement and political action constitute three aspects of a single act.

The research into images and testimonies carried out by the FA research group is a response to the need to bring violent acts committed by governments against small or large communities of human beings out of invisibility and the realm of the imperceptible; these acts of violence would not exist, nor would there be persecutors and victims, were it not for restoring their visibility within spaces that are simultaneously legal, scientific and artistic, in an attempt to produce a new political meaning within the community, to bring what was relegated to invisibility back into the public gaze and discussion of the forum. FA's work aims to "redeem horror from its invisibility" by showing how a fundamental aspect of this redemption involves changing the relationship we have with the system of technology and images as it currently unfolds within "surveillance capitalism". It is not technology and images in themselves that constitute the direct cause of this numbing effect, but a certain type of economic domination that also unfolds on the level of the technological articulation of the sensible.

References

Bria, F. (2025). *Le coup d'état de la tech autoritaire*. "Le Monde diplomatique", novembre 2025: https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2025/11/BRIA/68925

Casilli, A.A. (2020). Schiavi del clic. Perché lavoriamo tutti per il nuovo capitalismo. Milano, Feltrinelli

Feldman, A. (2004). Securocratic Ars of Public Safety: Globalized Policing As Scopic Regime. Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 6(3), p. 332.

Fuller, M., & Weizman, E. (2021). Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth, Verso, London-New York 2021.

Grespi, B., & Villa, F. (2024). Il postfotografico. Dal selfie alla fotogrammetria digitale. Torino Einaudi

Keenan, Th. (2014). Counter-Forensics and Photography Grey Room, 55, 58-77.

Kracauer, S. (2022). Selected Writings on Media, Propaganda, and Political Communication, New York, Columbia University Press.

Kracauer, S. (1960). The Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Kurgan, L. (2013). Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics, New York, Zone Books.

Ippolita (2017). Tecnologie del dominio. Milano, Meltemi.

Sekula, A. (1993). *Photography and the Limits of National Identity*. Culture-front, 2(3), 54-55. http://web.archive.org/web/20210922141940/http://greyroom.org/issues/55/12/photography-and-the-limits-of-national-identity/

Solla, G. (2022). Aprire l'immagine, forzare lo sguardo. Forensic Architecture e il Caso Iuventa, *PHILM. Rivista di filosofia e cinema,* 1, 211.

Sontag, S. (1973). On Photography. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Sontag, S. (2003). Regarding the Pain of Others. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Weizman, E. (2017). Forensic Architecture. Violence at Threshold of Detectability. New York, Zone Books.

Weizman, E. (2012). Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation. London, Verso.

Yuval, A., (2024). The AI Machine directing Israel's bombing spree in Gaza, + 972 Magazine, April 2024: https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/

Zuboff, S. (2019). The age of surveillance capitalism: the fight for the future at the new frontier of power, London, Faber and Faber.