



Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe
Berlin, 2005, Eisenman Architects. (wikimedia commons)

architectural photography and the contingency of history

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Examines the current history of architecture's contingency in the present situation of high security as the attempt to contain the inevitability of history by prediction and anticipation. Contingency is seen as the appearance of a lapse in time in which a potential insecurity can be anticipated. Architecture itself has to think risk situations and is thus part of the wider system of securitization including finance security. Architectural photography has been taken in-house by architecture under the threat of terror. Instead of a model of historic archival function photo scanning technologies and automated 'photographies' now take on the task of representation of architecture as part of the containment of risk. How this ethical crisis has concerned architecture has been stimulated by the theoretical work of Peter Eisenman as he had reconsidered the unthought history of modernity as late history, that of contingency. Citing the 2005 Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe by testing Eisenman's historicity, the paper iterates the methodology of conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck. Examines the wider context of architectural photography in the work of two artists Harun Farocki and Walid Raad. Paper assesses critical practices dealing with architectural representations. Posits that an extended possibility of architectural photography is developed precisely out its ability to allow for contingency as interrupting the circuit of exchange that represents architecture in the ascendancy of global capitalism. Discusses architectural photography in virtual technology and archival retrieval in the ways in which both Farocki and Raad respectively extend the scope of architectural concepts into critical and political modes of engagement. Under the exceptional conditions of the contingency of historicity in the return of deep-lying diagrammatic/archival structures, the ethical dimension of architectural photography achieves a political importance.

keywords Contingency, Cistoricity, Photography, Risk, Eisenman, Farocki, Raad

In 1984, Peter Eisenman reflected on history since World War Two as productive of a 'sensibility' that had emerged 'unforeseen by modernism'. For Eisenman, this condition represented, "a memory of a previous and progressive time and an immanence, the presence of end –the end of the future– a new kind of time"¹ For the architect this realization seems to have occurred with considerable force –as if architecture's true crisis had finally come into focus. It was inevitable that this change in the perception of historical time as 'late' meant also a change for Eisenman in his thinking about architecture. I want to suggest that this event –of the return of a previous 'history'– represents the emergence of a 'contingency' as the appearance of a space of emergence interrupting the flow of time. In 1984 the question was made more apparent by changes determined by the equivalent emergence of global insecurity that could only have arrived after the inauguration of a late modernity to which Eisenman referred. I would suggest that this space is hypostatized by this new time, had been gaining force and was occurring at different places through the 1970's and early 1980's. These spaces of emergency have, I would suggest, become continuous: a global evolutionary 'contingency' becomes the necessary 'condition of possibility' for the ascendancy of global capitalism².

The fissure in historical time detected by Eisenman therefore coincides with architecture becoming increasingly involved in its technical image. By reflecting its own credentials in projecting the space of the burgeoning sector of techno-capitalism, architecture sought to establish a new rationalism of effective and intelligent structures fit for purpose in the febrile environment of globalization. The risk –the wager– of this architecture would be with its 'photo' image. Could it withstand its role as a sign-bearing medium to be advertised as a worldview and retain its functional integrity at the same time? I will argue that this use of the image is more a default reflection/refraction of emergency under the conditions of risk as much as what it says about architectural history and its 'ethics' of photography. Architectural media (if we can call it so) had begun to be impacted by the race to financial deregulation beginning around 1978. As it became increasingly defined by large projects requiring extensive financial speculation, so new architecture inevitably reflected this 'surface' of risk. These new structures were not architecture in the sense of a traditionally modern combination of proportion and scale, form, function and legible construction, but were rather, more like giant 'modules' that could appear and disappear without trace. That history was to be ignored by these technologies, insofar as the structures themselves were the architecture of risk and therefore expendable, caused Eisenman to reconsider his former rationale in his rediscovery of a delayed historicity. In effect, Eisenman saw that architecture of necessity would no longer need any historical adherence to a traditional ethic (of labor or material) but would simply be a means to an end.

Under this late modernity of economic rationalism and capital control, architecture in a sense, must itself become equally homeless. The interface of the architectural surface thus becomes part of a system of standardized parts: it is designed to deflect any possibility of a hold on the building's historico-generative structure. Consequently architectural quality, that is, its logic and its potential historical importance, is displaced.

Martin Pawley has described how the 'architecture of stealth' summed up the process of displacement. This condition of 'invisibility' (Pawley took his concept from the 'stealth' bomber) was tantamount to a surveillance of risk from a non-existent point a form of totally integrated security. Pawley further suggests that this was soon adopted to enhance and support the flow of global capital³. In this situation, contingency would represent the necessary preparation for an unseen event, the likelihood of which increases due to heightened risk-taking. So, in order to forestall contingencies the building itself must be able to 'think' intelligently. Unlike the Panopticon, the famous apparatus of surveillance introduced into postmodern architectural discourse by Michel Foucault⁴, the 'new-tech' building does not need the totemic eye of power, as its impenetrable surface is now enabled across an invisible security network.

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Eisenman had actually experienced this with considerable anxiety at the very time when cybernetic control systems were being developed against a background of increased levels of international instability. The result is that the architect becomes indebted to technology in terms of risk solutions to cover costs. Architecture is ever more integrated into the system of financial security and will eventually become reliant on leveraged debt in order to function. A *de facto* contingency plan is factored-in to avert the possibility of a disaster thus providing for a state of mutual debt between architecture and its symbolic function in the financial system. An opaque pact between new architecture and advanced conditions of capital control thus became unavoidable. The new concepts of architecture, such as securitization and stealth, mean that architectural photography is replaced by data gathering systems and automated scanning technologies⁵. In consequence, architectural photography itself is reified and celebrated.

Securitization had adapted itself to the model of architectural photography configured to align with the requirements of the general emergency. The steady flow of urban 'images' in the news media often show the exceptional measures to defend space for reason of public safety and the horrific consequences when such security fails. Photographic technologies are now themselves generated by their own media to portray a contingency as only a passing moment of history. Such 'photographies' are the agency of control, as they have no means to contradict political hegemonies that valorise the security of architectural investment.

Conversely, what Eisenman was thinking about was clearly not the semantic historicism used to cover over the economic reality of securitization, but rather the possibility of a properly architectural historicity. This radicality pitches him against historicism and against the accepted order of 'financial' architecture, as he required an investigation into the deeper formal structures that underpin architectural philosophy. What Eisenman thus proposed was to install history as the 'ethical' meta-structure of the built work through the use of axiomatic geometries and integers. The basis for this was the diagram and the model as they were more flexible in seeking out the fundamental concepts of architecture through the immanent critique of architectural thought.

Architectural 'thinking' would thus be identified with the diagram or plan that marks the idea of the architectural. This was at that time an experimental and conceptual architecture that need not (perhaps *should* not) be built to be historically significant. Thus it could remain a datum; but to do so would require the photographic apparatus already inherent in it to exemplify the conceptual structure of the architectural image as it were, without photography. Clearly this presents its importance for Eisenman reaching apotheosis in the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe installed in Berlin* in 2005 (f1).

This work exemplified Peter Eisenman's thinking about how architecture could be put to the ethical test of evoking a powerful memory of the past. The monument covered a 19,000 square meters of site comprising 2,711 uniformly grey concrete stele arranged at varying elevations and orientations in densely packed rows. The monument had a topographical effect caused by the undulations of the stones appearing to rise and fall in movement. It is this movement of impossibly heavy objects emphasised also by the strange agitation of air through their gaps that creates a hypnotic effect. Thus the essence of the monumental building transcends its base structure to produce a physical sensation in the visitor –one that is imprinted strongly on the memory.

The concrete is coloured in a particular way: it is nearly overdetermined by being ashen grey. But despite this possibility, the moment of history for this architecture achieves truth when its concept and idea form a unity that can be sensed as having historical meaning. This must also mean that even a solid block (the metaphor of death) can move and flow. Eisenman invokes the stele analogous to that cited by the philosopher of speed, Paul Virilio. In the Tehran cemetery from which the Ayatollah Khomeini staged the Islamic

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revolution in 1979 Virilio noted how the gravestones harbour a 'photo-cinematography' precisely because they are monochromatic blocks, "Hermes: the god of *herme*, of the big stone enclosing the camera obscura of the tomb, the Attic stele which brings death itself before us in a living picture"⁶.

In Reinhart Koselleck's terms, historical thought was the articulation of the 'what will have been' the future anterior of the 'expectation' of history that was always already a moment of history. Eisenman's understanding here, though different from Koselleck's ontological approach, in many ways understands the same paradox: that history is but the ethical 'idea' of history. This metaphysics however touches ground by the 'coefficient' of its space of time where a 'peculiar form of acceleration (that) characterizes modernity'⁷.

Blocks thus come out of time via theories of temporization, which bounds the actual physical plane of any future interpretation. Thus the speed of time leaves only an essence of a trace that could only appear retroactively as a deferred future. Koselleck's historicity accredits the unstable actions of history to the nature of a living 'consciousness' -as if to say that history 'thinks' itself historically. "Coefficients of change and acceleration transform old fields of meaning and therefore, political and social experience as well"⁸. Concepts of history then are mapped over into the 'coefficient' of the image that would be to suggest that all images of architecture explain the elasticity of history in the present.



f1_Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Berlin, 2005, Eisenman Architects. (wikimedia commons)

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Recently an exhibition held at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, was an installation of Harun Farocki's history of video games, *Parallele I-IV* (2012–14) a four-part video cycle⁹. Each part of the cycle is devoted to the evolution of gaming technology. They key point of Farocki's re-editing was that he chose to project his work in HD format on 'public' screens thus tearing them from the private fantasies of the player (f2). This action was to 'architecturalize' them¹⁰. In *Parallele II* there are loops from games famous in the classic history of the medium, Grand Theft Auto, Minecraft and Assassins' Creed. These replace the relatively crude diagrams of *Parallele I*. The later *Paralleles* demonstrate how the games have evolved into high definition virtual reality sometimes appearing to refer to actual historical events: the invasion of Iraq, insurgencies in Africa, organised crime and the general detritus of the contemporary U.S. urban environment.

The title implies parallel worlds separated digitally by the finest of margins and enhanced to a 'real' more vivid than that experienced in real-time. In the final images (IV) we are transported through and under solid objects and we see the world transformed to a self-contained digital matrix –a desert of the real– of idealized images where it is possible to view spaces from any position. These short video loops are seen projected on a series of infra-thin plasma screens emphasizing that the games are both entertainment (in the most banal sense) and default 'educational' apparatuses (on a more sinister level). Informing by praxis how to use space under conditions of exceptional emergency they thus mix private fantasy with militarized targeting.



f2_Installation view

Parallels I-IV, 2016, Harun Farocki. Courtesy of Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

Avatars ostensibly under 'our' control are seen performing actions as if they are in a mode of drive and are disturbingly, violently, unaware of any surroundings. In one scene an outlaw, brilliantly rendered in a black leather coat and wide brimmed hat, is seen striding across a desert. When he approaches scrub and cactus he simply goes right through them: the bushes, although they are swaying in a breeze, do not react to his movement. Cynthia Beatt's coolly 'Americanized' voiceover informs us that the things in the simulation do not react to others because they are merely 'things in themselves'.

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The virtual is the hyperreality of the thing to the extent of what it reveals beyond the scope of ordinary perception. The very nature of the 'thing in itself' bears out the horizon of contingency like an armoured consciousness unable to react to anything other than its own purpose. Like a sealed module (a 'server' facility or in this context Eisenman's Berlin 'tombs', a block) Farocki's selection of buildings are the things-in-themselves of the hyper-architectural. The accoutrements of reality accompany them: bushes, clouds, deserts, cities buildings and monuments. The avatars assume the figures of 'monads' – individuals operating outside of social conditioning (**f3**). The screens in Farocki's installation traverse and survey the geopolitical *mundus* of globalization populated by human replicants. In this sense what Farocki highlights in his edits and in the voiceover amounts to a new presence of the 'real in the virtual' that Brian Massumi has dubbed the 'autonomization of affect'¹¹. This affect is to donate to fiction the truths of the real because its wavelength is designed to pass below the normal defenses and influence the plasticity of the cerebral cortex. Thus the games are involved in behavioural modification. In her study of Supermax Prison Facilities in the United States, Sharon Shalev conjures up a terrifying spectrum of surveillance and its intended 'affect' of modification that could well also describe Farocki's *Paralleles*. She states; "(The) External design of is not intended to as a means to communicate a message of deterrence to the outside world because the outside world has no view of the prison site.' The videos likewise do not communicate: they only precipitate action and in so doing they meet the requirements of an absolute of the diagram of real space recalling Foucault's assertion that the surveillance environment of the panoptic is an epistemic diagram of 'power reduced to its ideal form'¹². The diagram of containment is the apparatus of control no longer needed for execution but simply to serve the rationalisation and distribution of power through the system. Virtual reality represents the economy of a synthetic apparatus as the old relations of disciplinary production similar to production in general, are transformed. Now in the light of the virtual to which there is no defense, a subject of subjection self-produces and willingly behaves like the rat in the maze. For Raymond Bellour the connection to Foucaultian paradigms is evidence that Farocki's 'diagrams' chart the "inhumanity of time through the abstractions of space and turns every attempt at grasping the real into an exposition of its own processes"¹³.



f3_Parallele

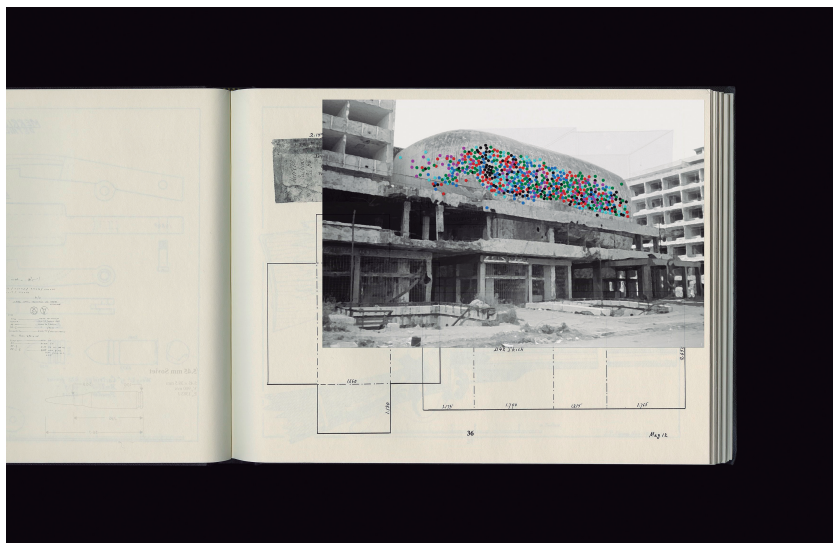
IV, HD Video Projection, 2015, Harun Farocki. Courtesy of Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

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Bellour is describing what amounts to a Koselleckian history under the conditions of hyper-capitalism the structure of which is equivalent of a virtual and yet conceptualized – as– real displacement. The architecture of Farocki's screens is that they are closely aligned to mental pictures. The viewer is always privileged to best 'see' the action (f3) and to render the images even more insidiously fascinating. Such is the hook that their ideology of accumulation and its concomitant distinctions of good and evil are conceptualized by the player. Thus the games are informed of a double 'action upon action' that, whilst displacement is constantly played out by the controlling activity of the observer/player, the architectural affect is one of a compelling contingency. This virtual contingency (it is a radicalization) is dangerous, as this affect has no cause of its own. It is then a pure contingency.

The games are neutralized insofar as they cannot be played in the installation. Instead they achieve the distance of historical documentation. In this way they represent extension of older documentary media. The historicity that Farocki encourages can then work in a revolutionary way to question the circuitry of capitalism and its reliance on the fantasy of sex, death and destruction. Miriam de Rosa writes; "(The) operations of representing, replicating, and sublimating the imagery and the figures connected to surveillance can be seen as strategies (...) to develop a personal restitution of its forms"¹⁴.

Statements of security work by obverse terms to drive Walid Raad's epic, but now completed project, *The Atlas Group*. The strategic diagram of western authority had imprisoned Raad and his colleagues, which is in a space of actual subjection –Lebanon under siege conditions.



f4_Let's be honest the weather helped Israel

1998, Walid Raad/ Atlas Group. Archival colour inkjet print, 46.4 x 71.8 cm.

© Walid Raad. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

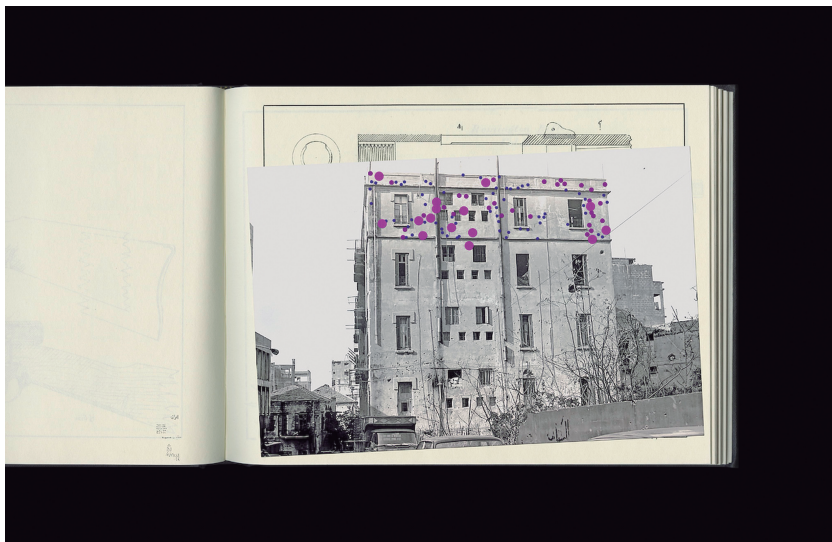
Raad had lived therefore under the idealised, diagrammatized space represented by the 'legally' sanctioned implementation of a 'state of exception'¹⁵ exerted by the IDF (Israeli Defense force) over the city of Beirut. The legal 'apparatus' of invasion and occupation thus is the shell for the 'economic' development of the liberalization process. Atlas Group stood in resistance to this procedure and the archive was/is the repository of this crime for Raad. It is not the one shared by the official museums of the tourist histories that act to legitimise infamy. For Raad this is nothing more than exploitation, surplus value as cultural capital. So the deconstruction of such valorized meanings is the 'counter-memory' of the Atlas group. For Raad this is to repulse the conventions of the 'official' museum as an architectural space associated with high capitalism and neo-imperialism.

Homelessness is the state of exception applied by the structure and situation of architectural capital. The Atlas Group was the predicate (name) for an attack against Israeli and US backed architecture-capital in the loss of Lebanon's cultural identity. By archival replacement, which is the installation in archival documentation of both 'true' and 'fictional' but equally *real* material, a critical function is surreptitiously adapted to a revolutionary use similar to Farocki's. Practices of displacement brought by invasion and occupation are then put through a process of restitution. By exploiting a secret affinity of invasion and capital exploitation, The Atlas Group was able to claim a role to being a serious yet shadowy organization that had amongst its collaborators many of the leading literary and Marxist figures of Lebanese culture. The archive so produced is a real fiction and the work of Raad and philosopher, Jalal Toufic. But its ethical totality is here analogous to the conceptual diagram of Eisenman and the deconstruction of the virtual encountered in Farocki's edits.

Photography (surveillance) in the sense employed by Raad is the 'contingency' of architecture conceptualised to the quasi-state form as the imposition of a juridical economy over territories of containment. This is elegantly demonstrated in a number of works under the general title, 'Let's be Honest the Weather Helped' followed by the place and date (**f4** and **f5**). The abandoned buildings catalogued by the Atlas Group look to all intents and purposes as the remnants of an urban topography familiarized in Farocki's games. Here however, there are real buildings and their photography is anonymous. We encounter them in the albums of the Atlas Group, as they are the very annals of Lebanese modernity. The vernacular is here redeemed to a political function by creating a sense of a true cultural memory of a never-would-be. In this sense contingency is doubled back on itself.

These architectural photographs thus became themselves the bearers of the index of historicity. By placing them over their plans we are invited to consider them as either targets for destruction or attempts at design solutions to address the problems of the lack of functional buildings. To complicate matters, Raad carefully applied 'markers' in the form of coloured discs to the facades presumably where shell, mortars or machine gun fire had damaged the edifices. The fictional element, of course, is that the discs represent unmarked points; the actual damage to the building that the photograph would have revealed is covered up. The discs thus gave the sense that they are themselves a design strategy, i.e. not only a kind of architecture but also that they are legally recognized indicators required by forensic evidence. The use of the discs is also the indicator of an ironic form of gambling as putting your disc/chip/bit-coin where a shot will land next mimics the techniques of speculative capitalism. The contingency element is very clever here, as it is both architectural and ironic showing how the banal acts of destruction could be turned into an entrepreneurial opportunity to 'arbitrage' one's labor¹⁶. In this deadpan irony the Atlas Group was somewhat analogous to the 'Forensic Architecture' that Eyal Weizman has been conducting in the Occupied Territories of The Left Bank by again gathering digital evidence of the IDF's policy of controlled destruction¹⁷.

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f5_Let's be honest the weather helped Iraq

1998, Walid Raad/ Atlas Group. Archival colour inkjet print, 46.4 x 71.8 cm.

© Walid Raad, Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

The subversive aspect of the Group's work was centred on topographical and architectural photography as well as the thousands of other documents they collected and archived. Architectural photography was the equivalent of a surrogate, a historically defiant signifier to organize concepts of resistance conceptualized by Raad as the logical outcome of photography's own 'posthistorical' condition. Therefore Raad represents the trauma of the Lebanon via a constructed process of Koselleck's futures past through the means of 'found' photographs. He recognises the necessity of collective amnesia in the light of the war to which Lebanon had been subjected and his work traces out the architecture of a counter-memory by a process of intuitive reconditioning. Walid Raad/Atlas Group thus constructs a fictional archive that remakes the past, as it would have been if the future had ever existed. "The fictional collectivity of the Atlas Group (...) is a stand-in for the missing political collectivity of the globally transnational, which is both posited and negated by capital itself"¹⁸. Raad and his collaborators had determined the counter-memory of their own political architecture that was able to transcend the place it is denied.

This thought subverts the logic of Atlas Group's choices of photographs for their project. They subtly reflect on conceptual photography from Dan Graham to Bernd and Hilla Becher. Yet in another way the attitude of Raad is indifferent to the history of architectural photography. Instead he accepts what amounts to the any-photography-whatever of architecturally built structures thus establishing a certain blurring between photography as a private pursuit and intelligence gathering in its politico-architectural implications.

The democracy of photography has been proliferated by technological development coinciding with the achievement of digital globalization. Simultaneously, the resulting geopolitical pressure-points evidenced by the conflicts between image and content between truth and propaganda have also blurred the distinction between fictions and realities echoing the virtual surface of techno-architecture. Architectural photography as a medium has in fact entered into its own future, which is already its past.

endnotes

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