

<CT>**The Morning After: Profaning Colonial Architecture**</CT>

<CST>**DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency)**</CST>

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<TEXT>In 2007, after a few years of engaging in spatial research and theory with the conflict over Palestine as our main site of investigation, we decided to shift the mode of our engagement and to establish an architectural collective based on a studio/residency program in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem. **DAAR** (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency) seeks to use spatial practice as a form of political intervention and narration. The work of the studio/residency is based on a network of local affiliations and the historical archives we have gathered in our previous work and that we keep on assembling. The residency program has already brought together groups of leading international practitioners—architects, artists, activists, urbanists, filmmakers, and curators—to work collectively within the framework we have set up.

Our practice has had to engage continuously with a complex set of architectural problems centered on one of the most difficult dilemmas of political practice for architects: **how to act both *propositionally* and *critically*** in an environment in which the political force fields, as complex as they may be, are so dramatically skewed. Is intervention at all possible? How could spatial practice within the here and now of **the conflict over Palestine** negotiate the existence of institutions and of their legal and spatial realities? How can we find an “autonomy of practice” that is both critical and transformative?

We started by experimenting with a series of interventions that attempted to give new contents, meaning, and agency to the term “decolonization.” We suggested revisiting this largely discredited term in order to maintain a distance from the current political language of a “solution” to the Palestinian conflict and its respective borders. The one-state, two-state, and now three-state solutions seem equally entrapped in their respective “top-down” expert perspective, each with its own self-referential logic. Decolonization, on the contrary, seeks to unleash a process of open-ended transformation toward the goals of equality and justice. It looks for and finds cracks where potential for transformation and reuse of the existing dominant structures, architectural infrastructural and legal, could be found. It is a sometimes confrontational, at other times cunning approach to the reality of occupation and dispossession.

Historical processes of decolonization often have reused the buildings and infrastructure left behind in the same way for which they were designed, a way that left the colonial territorial hierarchies intact. In this sense, past processes of decolonization never truly have done away with the power of colonial domination. Profanation, a concept analogous to decolonization that Giorgio Agamben has proposed in relation to the domain of the sacred, is **“to restore things to its common use”**: **but he also point out that** “To profane does not simply mean to abolish or cancel separations, but to learn to make new uses of them.”<sup>1</sup> Decolonization is a counter apparatus that seeks to restore to common use, to fantasy and play, what the colonial order had separated and divided. The goal of decolonization is the construction of counterapparatuses that find new uses for the abandoned structures of domination. These uses are sometimes pragmatic and at other times ironic or provocative challenges. As such, “decolonization” is never achieved,

but is an ongoing practice of deactivation and reorientation understood both in its presentness and in its endlessness.

The issues we are dealing with led us to assume that a viable approach is to be found not in the professional language of architecture and planning, or not only there, but in inaugurating a collaborative arena of speculation that incorporates varied cultural and political perspectives from a multiplicity of individuals and organizations. We concluded that an open and collaborative architectural residency program thus had to replace established modes of architectural production.

In what follows, we will elaborate on several key concepts informing the overall program of DAAR. We will then present several specific case studies that investigate and probe the political, legal, and social force fields through a series of architectural interventions. By combining discourse, spatial intervention, education, collective learning, public meetings, and legal challenges, the attempt is to open up the discipline and praxis of “architecture”—understood as the production of rarefied buildings and urban structures—into a shifting network of spatial practices that includes various other forms of intervention.

DAAR engages a less-than-ideal world. It does not articulate a utopia of ultimate satisfaction. Its starting point is not a resolution of the **conflict over Palestine** and the just fulfillment of all Palestinian claims; also, the project does not offer a solution and should not be thought of in terms of one. Rather, it mobilizes architecture as a tactical tool within the unfolding struggle for Palestine. It seeks to employ tactical physical interventions to open a possible horizon for further transformations.

Whatever trajectory the conflict over Palestine takes, the possibility of further partial—or complete—evacuation of Israeli colonies and military bases must be considered. Zones of Palestine that have been or will be liberated from direct Israeli presence provide a crucial laboratory to study the multiple ways in which we could imagine the reuse, reinhabitation, or recycling of the architecture of Israel’s occupation at the moment this architecture is unplugged from the military/political power that charged it.</TEXT>

### <AHEAD>**Destruction, Reuse, Subversion**<AHEAD>

<TEXT>The handing over of colonial buildings and infrastructure is always deeply problematic, for it is torn between two contradictory desires: destruction and reuse. The popular impulse for destruction seeks to articulate “liberation” spatially from an architecture understood as a political straitjacket, an instrument of domination and control. If architecture is a weapon in a military arsenal that implements the power relations of colonialist ideologies, then architecture must burn.

The impulse of destruction seeks to turn time backward, reverse development into a virgin nature, a tabula rasa on which a set of new beginnings might be articulated. However, time and its processes of transformation can never be simply reversed: rather than the desired Romantic ruralization of developed areas, destruction generates desolation and environmental damage that may last for decades. In 2005, Israel evacuated the Gaza settlements and destroyed three thousand homes, creating not the promised tabula rasa for a new beginning, but rather a million and a half tons of toxic rubble that

poisoned the ground and the water. The decontamination process has been greatly impeded by the complete closure of the Gaza Strip, which is the new form that Israel's occupation has taken.

The other impulse, reuse, seeks to impose political continuity and order under a new system of control. It is thus not surprising that postcolonial governments tended to reuse the infrastructure set up by colonial regimes for their own emergent practical needs of administration. The evacuated infrastructure and built structure were often also seen as the legacy of “modernization” and as an economic and organizational resource. A strong temptation present throughout the histories of decolonization was thus to reuse infrastructure and built structure in the very same way they were used under colonial regimes. Such repossession tended to reproduce some of the colonial power relations in space: colonial villas were inhabited by new financial elites and palaces by political ones, while the evacuated military and police installations of colonial armies, as well as their prisons, were reused by the governments that replaced them.

Reusing Israeli residential and military areas would, similarly, establish a sense of continuity, rather than of rupture and change. In the context of present-day Palestine, reusing the evacuated structures of Israel's domination in the same way as the occupiers did—the settlements as Palestinian suburbs and the military bases for Palestine security needs—would mean reproducing their inherent alienation and violence. The settlement's system of fences and surveillance technologies would thus enable their seamless transformation into gated communities for the Palestinian elite.

There is, however, a third option: subversion of the originally intended use, repurposing it for other **ends**. We know that evacuated colonial architecture doesn't

necessarily reproduce the functions for which it was designed. There are examples of other uses, both planned and spontaneous, that have invaded the built environment of evacuated colonial architecture, subverted its programs, and liberated its potential.

Even the most horrifying structures of domination can yield themselves to new forms of life. Believing in the potential of existing forces to shape reality, we started our investigation with the most complex option of the three, which speculates on the use of colonial architecture for purposes other than those they were designed to perform. For this reason, the project seeks to spatialize a set of possible collective functions in the abandoned military structures and the evacuated houses of the colonists. What new institutions and activities can model the evacuated space, and what physical transformations do these spaces require? The guiding principle is not to eliminate the power of the occupation's built spaces, but rather to reorient their destructive potential to other aims. We believe that if the geography of occupation is to be liberated, its potential must be turned against itself.

Given the scale of Israeli construction in Palestine and the need for housing, all three approaches may need to be applied and simultaneously coexist.<sup>2</sup> Some areas of settlements will be destroyed, some reused, and the original uses of others subverted. Because the reuse of the colonial architecture is a general cultural/political issue, we do not seek to present a single, unified architectural solution, but rather “fragments of possibility.”

## **Manual of Decolonization**

Thus, rather than a single unified proposal of urban planning covering the entirety of Palestine, DAAR has presented a series of detailed transformations of different architectural sites. There are hundreds of thousands of Israeli-built structures in the West Bank, but because the number of typologies in settlements and military bases are limited—variations on the single-family dwelling in settlements and concrete prefabricated barracks on military bases—these fragments of possibility constitute a semigeneric approach that could be modified to be applied in other evacuated areas.

These projects have sought to determine to what extent the evacuated structures are adaptable to accommodate new uses and will demonstrate the various ways in which they can be transformed. These investigations were based upon a series of meetings with the stakeholders in this process, including representatives of various organizations and individuals, the local community, members of various NGOs, representatives of government and municipal bodies and academic and cultural institutions, local residents, and representatives of resident associations. Their genuine participation is the crucial factor and the only element that could guarantee the implementation of the actions proposed by these projects.<sup>3</sup>

Two project sites were chosen as two different prototypes of decolonization: the colony of P<sup><alef></sup>sagot, which is still inhabited by colonists, and the former Israeli military base of Oush Grab, which was evacuated in 2006. The proposals that follow exemplify a variety of different approaches to the decolonialized subversion of existing structures.

## **<AHEAD> Case Study North: The Colony of P<alef>sagot</TH>/<TH>Jabel Tawil< in the Ramallah Region</AHEAD>**

<TEXT>Located on the hill of Jabel Tawil, 900 meters above sea level, the colony of P<alef>sagot visually dominates the entire Palestinian area. Until the occupation, it was used as an open space for recreation. The hills of Jerusalem and Ramallah were popular with families from the Gulf, especially Kuwaitis, who traveled there to escape the summer heat (the people of Ramallah still call the hill “the Kuwaiti hill”). In 1964, the municipality of Al Quds (Jerusalem) bought the land and prepared a plan for its development into a tourist resort. The work started in early 1967 with the construction of an access road. The work was interrupted by the Israeli occupation. In July 1981, on the initiative of the Likud Party, the colony of P<alef>sagot was inaugurated as “compensation” to right-wing Israelis for the evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula. The area designated for tourist accommodation was the first to be occupied by settler housing. The first houses set on the hill of Jabel Tawil were prefabricated structures wheeled over from Yamit, a settlement in the north of the Sinai. P<alef>sagot is at present a religious settlement inhabited by seventeen hundred people, mainly American Jews and a minority of recent Russian and French immigrants.<TEXT>

### **<BHEAD>Ungrounding: Urbanism of the first Ten Centimeters</BHEAD>**

<TEXT>Settlements are suburban when put in relation to the Jewish geography in the Occupied Territories—they are fenced bedroom communities fed by a growing



matrix of roads and other infrastructure—but they could be understood as potentially urban when put in relation to the Palestinian cities beside which they were built. The surface of the suburb is marked by its various uses. It is inscribed extensively with the signs of the petty-bourgeois lifestyle that maintains it: an excess of roads and parking lots, private gardens, fences, sidewalks, and tropical plants. The pattern of streets in the settlements/suburbs is a folded linear structure strung by roads and sidewalks. By designating drive<TH>/<TH>walk<TH>/<TH>no-walk areas, channeling movement, and designating the different degrees of private and public space, the first ten centimeters of the urban ground surface embody most of its operational logic and also its ideology.

This surface is the primary site of our intervention. Under the category of “ungrounding,” we suggest a radical transformation of the first ten centimeters of ground. It is the logic of the surface that we seek to deactivate in order to dismantle the structures that define the internal organization of the suburb and transform its private, public, and communal functions.<sup>4</sup> Ungrounding is achieved by the dismantling of the existent surface—roads, sidewalks, private gardens—and replacing them with a new surface layer. The pervasive system of concentric roads and spaces for parking will be eroded, removed, or buried under new surface layers. The barriers and fences that demarcate the edges of the private lots of the single-family homes will be removed as the ground gets abstracted and “collectivized.” Built structure will be suspended like pavilions on a single, unified new surface. The regrounding of the surface is a central part of a strategy that seeks to reconfigure a new figure-ground relation. The possible connection between the individual buildings will be reconceived. Connection would be undertaken across a field in which movement is not prescribed by the linear folds of the roads and the

sidewalks.

Could controlled material decay become a process of place making? How can destruction become a design process that may lead to new uses? In the case of ungrounding, it is clear that the destruction of the surface by actively uprooting its elements and also by accelerating the decay of other surface elements would create the ground from which new life could emerge.</TEXT>

### <BHEAD>Unhoming<BHEAD>

<TEXT>The molecular level of the occupation is the single-family house on a small plot of land. Investigating ways to transform this repetitive semigeneric structure may open up ways to transform the entire geography of occupation. What are its limits of transformability? Can a single-family home become the nucleus of new types of public institutions? Which structural parts should be retained, and what are the possible ways of connecting together groups of houses? The problem is also how to transform a series of small-scale single-family houses into unified clusters of communal space to accommodate larger functions such as halls and classrooms, laboratories for a research institute, clinics, and offices.

The problem of “unhoming” is not only a technical question of transformation. A lingering question throughout the project has been how to inhabit the home of one’s enemy. Within the multiple cultures that inhabited Palestine throughout the decades, rarely has one ever been the “first” or “original” occupier, but rather each is always a subsequent inhabitant. To inhabit the land is always to inhabit it in relation either to one’s

present-day enemies or to an imagined or real ancient civilization. This is a condition that turns the habitation of old cities, archaeological sites, battlegrounds, and destroyed villages into culturally complex acts of “cohabitation.”<TEXT>

### <BHEAD>Folded Vision</BHEAD>

<TEXT>We believe that any act of decolonization must include interventions in the field of vision. The settlements are organized as optical devices on a suburban scale. Their pattern of streets as concentric rings around the hilltop, the placement of each house, and the space between the houses and the organization of windows and rooms follow design principles that seek to maximize the power of vision with both ideological and strategic aims in mind.

The pastoral view out of home windows reinforces a sense of national belonging when it reads traces of Palestinian daily lives—olive groves, stone terraces, livestock—as signifiers of an ancient holy landscape. The view is also strategic in overseeing tactical roadways and surveying the Palestinian cities and refugee camps. The visual affect of the settlements on Palestinians is in generating a constant sense of being seen. From Palestinian cities, one can hardly avoid seeing a settlement, and one is most often seen by one.

Because the organization of homes is directed toward the surrounding view, the main door into each settlement home is approached from the inner areas of the settlement. Entering the home, one moves into the living areas and the main window, which opens onto the landscape. But what happens if the people that should now be

arriving at these houses are those formerly “composing the view”? What if the new user could now approach the house from the view? Our response is a small-scale intervention. We propose to change the direction of the front door to face not the inner areas of the settlement, but the Palestinian cities. Changing the direction from which one enters the house also alters the spatial syntax of its interior. This small-scale intervention is “cinematic” in the sense that it is an intervention in the framing of the conditions of vision and in directing ways of seeing. It reorganizes the field of the visible, a perspective folded onto itself.</TEXT>

### <BHEAD>Deparcelization</BHEAD>

<TEXT>In the course of our analysis, we made use of both documentary and narrative sources to identify some of the landowners within the areas of the colonies. Jabel Tawil<TH>/<TH>P<alef>sagot is at the gravitational center of various orbits of extraterritoriality: displaced communities, displaced individuals, migrations, and family connections. Our investigation traced some of the Palestinian landowners to the United States, Australia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and of course closer at hand in Palestine, sometimes fenced off a few meters away from their lands. Their private and family histories are the intertwined histories of Palestine and its displaced communities, forced out by the occupation and by economic and professional opportunities overseas. About half of the area occupied by the P<alef>sagot colony belongs to private owners, with the other half registered as belonging to one of various kinds of collective lands. The fate of private lands should be decided by their owners. It is within the communal lands that we

propose various types of collective uses.

We discovered a map dating to 1954 that shows the original parcellation of Jabel Tawil. We superimposed the 1954 plan onto the plan of the colony. The Palestinian demarcation lines cut arbitrary paths through the suburban fabric of the settlements, sometimes literally through the structures themselves, creating a new relationship between the houses and their parcels, between internal and external spaces, and between public and private spaces. Some of these odd lots are public lands. This archipelago of public lots forms the basis of our proposals.</TEXT>

### **<AHEAD>Case Study South: The Former Military Base Oush Grab (the Crow's Nest)</AHEAD>**

<TEXT>In May 2006, the Israeli Army evacuated a military camp strategically located on the highest hill at the southern entrance to the Palestinian city of Beit Sahour, in the Bethlehem region. It was built as a military base by the British Mandatory Army during the Arab revolt (referred to by some as the very first intifada). After 1948, it became a military base for the Jordan Legion. After 1967, it became an Israeli military base. A menacing fortress, it overlooked the edge of the town. Most houses surrounding the camp were destroyed by tank shells and gunfire originating at the base. Floodlit during the night, with searchlights constantly scanning the area around it, the base was caught in an endless day.

The evacuation was itself a violent operation. At night, dozens of tanks rolled into the town, and in the morning, the base was found empty. Moments later, Palestinians

entered the base and took away every element and material that could be recycled.<sup>5</sup>

During the era of the Oslo Accords, an agreement was signed between the Palestinian municipality of Beit Sahour and the Palestinian president office of Yassir Arafat guaranteeing that in case of a possible Israeli evacuation, the base would not be used by the Palestinian police and be handed over to the management of the municipality as a public space. Upon the municipality gaining control of the site, a master plan designated a set of public functions, including a neighborhood with a hospital and a public park. A play area for children, a restaurant and an open garden for events have already been constructed on the slopes of the hill.

The most contentious part of the site is its summit. There, several concrete buildings formed the heart of the former camp. Surrounded by a giant earth mound running around the top rim of the hill, these buildings seem to inhabit the crater of a volcano. Although the summit is evacuated, it is still kept under the (remote) control of the Israeli military. Because it provides the most strategic views in the entire area, the military did not accept it being occupied by Palestinian eyes.</TEXT>

### **<BHEAD>Revolving-Door Occupations</BHEAD>**

<TEXT>After its evacuation, the summit and its buildings were at the centre of various contentious confrontations between Israeli settlers, the Israeli military, and Palestinian organizations. Our office has been directly engaged in this. In May 2008, protesting against President George W. Bush's visit to Israel and in anticipation of some "government concessions," settler groups sought to use the emptied buildings of the

military base as the nucleus for a new settlement outpost. The topographical location of the base on the summit and its existing fortification would easily lend themselves, they thought, to their regimented and securitized way of life. The military declared the site a “closed military zone,” but nearly every week settlers, would come back to occupy the base, hold picnics there and conduct heritage tours and Torah lessons, and raise the Israeli flag. Israeli soldiers have been present to “protect” the settlers. Palestinian and international activists, including members of our office, also have occupied the site and have confronted the settlers. A set of competing graffiti written by one side and then obliterated by the other testifies to the revolving door nature of occupancy there. Our proposal for the reuse of this site thus became an intervention in the political struggle for this hilltop.</TEXT>

### <BHEAD>Design by Destruction</BHEAD>

<TEXT>In the base of Oush Grab, the first stages of our architectural proposal have employed forms of destruction. Because of its revolving-door occupation, in which the danger of the place’s appropriation by settlers always exists, it is important first to render the building less amenable to being used before allowing new functions to inhabit them. As a first stage of design, we have proposed to perforate the buildings of the military base by drilling holes in their walls. When the building is finally appropriated, these holes will transform the walls into screens.

Another way to intervene within the base is to transform its landscape. The earth rampart raised around the buildings has been constantly shifting due to Palestinian

contractors using the site as a dump for their unwanted rubble and other contractors taking some of the earth from the rampart as material for construction. Our intervention seeks to use the shifting nature of the rampart to reorganize the relationship between the buildings and the landscape. We will partially bury the buildings in the rubble of their own fortifications.</TEXT>

### <BHEAD>Migration</BHEAD>

<TEXT>Given the competing claims for Oush Grab, our intention was to accelerate the processes of destruction and disintegration. It was to be an architectural project of obsolescence in which where the ghost town of the former military base would be returned to nature. In researching the site, we consulted with a number of local NGOs,<sup>6</sup> including, perhaps unexpectedly, the Palestine Wildlife Society, from whom we learned that the contested hilltop is a point of singularity within the natural environment.

More than 500 million birds on their way between northeastern Europe and East Africa navigate over the Syrian-African Crack—the Jordan Valley as it crosses Palestine—during the autumn and spring migrations. These large flocks of birds land on the high points and important grasslands. The former military base that overlooks Bethlehem is on a bottleneck of the migration navigation path in the Jerusalem Mountains.

Twice a year for a few weeks each autumn and spring, tens of thousands of these birds land on the hilltop of Oush Grab. Around them, a temporary microecology of small predators and other wildlife gathers. It is a breathtaking and terrifying scene.



Given the intense claims for the site, our intention is not to renovate and convert the base into another function, but rather to return it to nature. The buildings and the artificial landscape will stand at the center of a park in which nature will gradually take over the buildings.

Our proposed physical intervention is to accelerate this process of return to nature. As noted, the first stages of our architectural proposal involve perforating all external walls within the buildings on the summit with a series of equally spaced holes. In the next stage, our colleagues in the Palestine Wildlife Society expect that these holes will be inhabited by birds.

We also seek to transform the landscape. We intend to open up the fortified rampart enclosure to allow access and drainage. This transformation of the earth rampart will partially bury the buildings in the rubble of their own fortifications, reorganizing the relationship between the buildings and the landscape.</TEXT>

### <AHEAD>The Lawless Line</AHEAD>

<TEXT>In addition to the strategies followed in these two case studies, events have provided the opportunity for an intervention of a different kind. In 1993, a series of secret talks held in Oslo between Israeli and Palestinian representatives inaugurated what was later referred to as the “Oslo Process.” As is well known, this process defined three types of territories within the West Bank: Area A, under Palestinian control; Area B, under Israel military control and Palestinian civilian control; and Area C, under full Israeli control. When the process collapsed and the temporary organization of the Occupied

Territories solidified into a permanent splintered geography of multiple prohibitions, a fourth area has suddenly been discovered. Existing between all others, it is the width of the lines separating them.

Less than a millimeter thick when drawn on the scale of 1:20,000, it measures more than five meters in real space. Our project exploits the thickness of this line, following it along the edges of villages and towns, across fields, roads, fences, and terraces and through olive and fruit orchards, , gardens, kindergartens, homes, public buildings, a football stadium, a mosque, and finally a large castle recently built.

Within this line is a zone undefined by law, a legal limbo that pulls in like a vortex all the different forces, institutions, organizations, and people that operate within and around it. With Areas A, B, and C already claimed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the area within the thickness of this line is an extraterritorial territory, perhaps all that remains from Palestine, a thin, but powerful space for potential political transformations. Political spaces in Palestine are not defined by its legal zones, but operate as legal voids. Investigating the clash of geopolitical lines intersecting on the domestic space of a house and operating on the margin between architecture, cartography, and legal practice, we have sought to bring a court case that in effect calls for acknowledging the anarchic regime of political autonomy represented by this line. It is the extraterritorial dimension of these seam lines, small tears in the territorial system, that offers the possibility for tearing apart of the entire system of division.</TEXT>

## <AHEAD>Conclusion: Forms of Present Return to the Common</AHEAD>

<TEXT>Territorially speaking, the **common** is different from both the public and the private domains. Both private and public lands involve relations between people and things regulated by the state. The state guarantees private property and maintains public property. By contrast, the common is a relation between people and things that is not mediated by the state.

Both private and public lands are territorial mechanisms for the governing of men and women. Sometimes this form of government operates by maintaining these distinctions and sometimes by blurring them. The endless privatization of the public space and the incessant intrusion of agents of the public into the private domain are both techniques of government control.

In Palestine, the idea of public land is particularly toxic.<sup>7</sup> Although prior to Zionist colonization there existed a wide multiplicity of collective lands and collective uses of land, agricultural, religious, nomadic, and so on, upon occupying the land and excluding its people, the Israeli state has reduced them all to one category —“state land”—and has seized control over it as the sovereign. This state land was once a public space, but only inasmuch as it was reserved to the only public that was acknowledged as legitimate—the Israeli Jews. The contours of public land became the blueprint for colonization. This form of sovereignty was willing to acknowledge only Palestinian individual rights and thus only private land. The state’s mechanism of humanitarian

balance could tolerate Palestinian presence only as individuals. In many cases, it simply took their land.

The main legal resource for this aspect of colonization was the Ottoman Land Law of 1858. This law was the result of an agrarian reform across the Ottoman Empire, which was sovereign in Palestine until 1917. It recognized a plot of land as *miri* (privately owned) if it had been continuously cultivated for at least ten consecutive years. If a landowner failed to farm the land for three consecutive years, the land changed its status to *makhlul*, land that the state could appropriate to itself or transfer to a private citizen. Farmers who did not want to pay tax for land that could not be used for cultivation therefore gave up ownership over uncultivated areas, even if these were only small patches of rocky ground that actually existed within their fields. Like islands of state land within private fields. The topographical folds, summits, slopes, irrigation basins, valleys, rifts, cracks, and streams of Palestine were no longer seen simply as mere topographical features, but as signifiers of a series of legal manipulations, generating a patterns of islands of small, privately owned fields within an area of uncultivated “state land.”

Today, as a result, a common exists in Palestine only in immaterial territorial form or in extraterritorial forms, scattered in a diasporic archipelago of camps. The cities and villages demolished in 1948 are now one example of a common space, and their mirror image, the camps, is another. After sixty years, the memory of a single house is now equally shared by hundreds of families. In the camp, the common is the shared history of displacement and the absence of private property.

In this respect, thinking the revolution that is “return”—the reinhabitation of Palestine by those displaced from it—means thinking a revolution in relation to property.<sup>8</sup> Seen in this way, the common is an action, rather than the designation of a kind of property or type of land. The return is the practice that attempts to return this land to common use.

The notion of return has defined the diasporic and extraterritorial nature of Palestinian politics and cultural life since the Nakba in 1947–48. Often articulated in the “suspended politics” of political theology, it has gradually been blurred in the futile limbo of negotiations: while the common that is a shared Palestine is under suspension, it is a common inasmuch as it is under suspension.

#### POSTSCRIPT: PRESENT RETURNS

Our projects dealing with the return extend the legalistic approach to the right of return with a projective strategy that aims to open the political imagination to different forms in which a return could take place.

The return is today a political act that is continuously and incessantly practiced and that projects an image into an uncertain future. It connects to a varied set of practices that we would like to call “present returns,” thus grounding them in present-day material realities. Present returns include a multiplicity of rites and practices. Thinking about returns necessitates the adoption of a stereoscopic vision that navigates the complex terrain between two places—the extraterritorial space of the refugee and the out-of-reach village of origin. The destroyed village and the destroyed camp are two interrelated sites in a terrain with a history of continuous destruction. But the destruction of the refugee

camp does not simply mirror the destruction of the village. To destroy a camp is to destroy what is already destroyed—the destruction of destruction. Both the demolished villages and the refugee camps are extraterritorial spaces not fully integrated into the territories that surround them. The former is legally defined as absentee property and the latter as an area administered by the United Nations, a sphere of action carved out of state sovereignty. Refugee life is suspended between these two ungrounded sites, always double. A circular probe from both camp and village, our projects materially articulate the complex extraterritoriality stretched between these two sites.

Present returns also involve exploring ways in which the figure of the refugee and its associated spatial regime of dislocation reshape the political space of the present. It is between the sites of dislocation and of destruction that an architecture of the future could take place and shape. Exploring the forms of return of Palestinian refugees means also exploring ways in which the figure of the refugee and its associated spatial regime of dislocation both reshape the political space of the present and force us to image a new political space yet to come. It is in this space between the sites of dislocation and of destruction that a future extraterritorial polity could take shape.<TEXT>

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<NOTES>1. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

2. Although our proposals are based essentially on the third approach, we consider the possibility in some cases of also using the other two at the same time. Demolition, for example, will be necessary in cases in which colonies or military camps are constructed in particularly valuable landscape areas, just as simple reuse as residences could be proposed in areas where demand for housing is particularly urgent and in which colonial architecture is constructed on lands belonging to private Palestinians. In these cases, only the owners can decide on the future reuse of these structures.

3. We started our project by setting up a series of meetings with local NGOs—the Palestine Wildlife Society, the Women’s Shelter, Save the Children, the Alternative Tourism Group, and the Alternative Information Center, among others—but also with local authorities, the University of Birzeit, local residents, and so on. Together, we developed conceptions regarding the various ways in which particular sites within the colonies and military bases could be designed. Whenever we presented and discussed our plans and models, the initial reaction of our discussants was a smile. In the beginning, we feared we were being ridiculed. Were our plans too far-fetched and outlandish in this environment of permanent impossibility? It is also true that models are reduced worlds “under control” and that they often make people smile. But on the other hand, the smile we noticed may be the first moment of decolonization. We would like to interpret the

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smile as an opening up of the imagination to a different future. Decolonization starts when people regain their agency and articulate their right to plan their future.

4. Through our work in the Occupied Territories, we have started to realize that the project may form a possible laboratory for architectural actions whose reach may go beyond the local specificity of our immediate environment. It may also form the beginning of a way to think through the future of the suburban settlements, many of which are in dire crisis in other places worldwide. The ritual destruction, reuse, *redivivus*, or *détournement* of the single-family house may suggest a possible repertoire of action for the larger transformation of other types of secluded suburban spaces.

5. The first moment of access to the colonies and to the military bases is a possible moment of transgression whose consequences are unpredictable. Although in the Gaza Strip it was the Israelis who demolished most of the buildings, those buildings left intact were mostly destroyed by the Palestinians. The morning after the military left, Palestinians destroyed the space and carried out as many remnants of building materials they could use and carry. This destruction is a spontaneous architectural moment of reappropriation, and as such, we believe that it should not be prevented or controlled. It is only after the indeterminate result of this moment of first encounter and within the possible rubble of its physical results that architectural construction may begin. This moment of first access questions the conception of architecture and urban planning. The acceptable precondition for planning is a situation of spatial and political certainty—a clear site demarcation, a schedule, a client, and a budget. The erratic nature of Israeli control and the unpredictable military and political developments on the ground render



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Palestine an environment of high uncertainty and indeterminacy. Planning in such conditions could not appeal to any tested professional methods.

6. The role that NGOs play in Palestinian society must be explained: Palestinian civil society was greatly strengthened during the intifada of 1987–1992. Local leaders organized resistance and a set of alternative services, such as schooling and medicine, for those denied access to them by the Israeli Army. The Palestinian Authority, whose leaders have largely come from abroad, attempted to centralize and regulate the network of self-governing institutions that developed throughout the intifada. The network of institutions locally formed during the first intifada was transformed into the infrastructural framework of contemporary NGOs in Palestine. The local leaders of the first intifada largely preferred to become directors of NGOs, rather than officials in the Palestinian Authority. Most former leaders of the leftist Popular Front are now directing leading NGOs. A good example is Mustafa Barghouthi and his health-care network. The West Bank has since been governed in parallel by the Palestinian Authority and by a series of local and international NGOs, both under the umbrella of ultimate Israeli sovereignty. In many cases, Palestinian “NGOcracy” (as the phenomenon came to be known) provided better-quality services—medical, educational, planning—than those of the Palestinian Authority, which was always “less than a government in less than a state,” as the saying has gone. NGOcracy has its dangers, of course. Most NGOs, much like the Palestinian Authority, are internationally funded, and although donors are operating in support of Palestinians, they are in fact not accountable to the people of Palestine and often pursue the cultural and political agendas of the donor states. Philanthropy has thus become one of the main vehicles for Western countries to intervene in the politics and culture of

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Palestine. Bearing these dangers in mind, the network of NGOs seems to us an important vehicle for developing new types of Palestinian public, social, and communal spaces, and some NGOs might be the first to occupy the evacuated and transformed spaces. We have noticed that the archives of these NGOs are also the “living archives” of Palestine. A combined archive of the hundreds of local NGOs, or access to them, would provide information about the environment, welfare, human rights, and politics throughout Palestine and thus could offer a diffused and multifocal alternative to state-centred information centers.

7. Public spaces and public institutions are generally managed by state and/or local authorities and are thus an important means by which government articulates itself. In Palestine, the long period of statelessness under colonialism has shifted the manner in which public space and the public in general functions. Until the beginning of the 1990s, Palestinian cities were directly managed by the Israeli military. Through the “Civil Administration,” the military controlled planning and development permission and thus the central activities of the different municipalities. During this period, the Palestinian cities were transformed into dormitory towns with very little public space. Furthermore, the Civil Administration actively inhibited public institutions from developing. Private clubs, cinemas, schools, and universities were put under close scrutiny or forcibly shut. The military required any association of more than three persons to have a permit. But difficulty in establishing and maintaining public institutions persisted even after the Oslo Accords of 1993. The main reasons that impeded the creation of open public space in the Palestinian cities were the borders set up for Palestinian “self-administered areas.” These borders were drawn tightly around the built-up area of the Palestinian cities and villages,

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leaving little potential land for new construction. The structure of land ownership within Palestinian cities meant that very little land was not privately owned, and municipalities have had difficulty accessing lands. Most open spaces and new institutions were created by the many international organizations and NGOs.

8. The return of things to common use is of course the main condition for the general political tendency that in the last sixty-odd years was collected under the term “return” in relation to two inverse, but interdependent utopias—the Palestinian rights of return and the Jewish law of return.</NOTES>