



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

**BUILDING A COUNTER-IMAGE:
CRITICAL APPROACHES TO AERIAL VIEW**

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER, 2022

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Master of Arts Thesis

2022

**BUILDING A COUNTER-IMAGE:
CRITICAL APPROACHES TO AERIAL VIEW**

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A thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in
Design Master Program

Istanbul, September, 2022

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Date



to my mother and father,

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayşe Nur Erek, for her support, guidance, and patience throughout this challenging journey. For today and beyond, she has always encouraged me and my confusions in inspiring way. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Assoc. Prof. İnci Eviner, the enlightening courses I took from her and working together have had a significant impact on this thesis and my personal pursuits. I learned a lot from her. And I would like to thank to Prof. Dr. Bülent Tanju, for his invaluable feedbacks and comments in finalizing this research.

I would also like to thank my instructors, who shaped my understanding and quest on the means of architecture during my undergraduate years at Bilkent University Department of Architecture. Dr. Ayşe Belgin Henry, for introducing other ways of looking; from stones to above, and Dr. Segah Sak, for her encouraging and inspiring perspective. They are always support me searching for the *other* ways of practicing & participating in architecture from the very beginning of my journey to become an architect.

This thesis, which slightly spanned a long period of time, could not have been completed without the support of my friends and family. I would like to thank Barış Arman, Bilge Bal, and Ilgın Hancıoğlu for their *solidarity* and their creativity. İlayda Güler, for her invaluable friendship and wisdom contributions on this thesis, Kadir Çıtak for his ‘machines’ of visions, inspiring presence, and abiding support, and, Mehmetcan Çökük for his gags and magics. These are a few words to thank for my dear friends who have always put up with me, but many words in my life.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my dear parents, Halime Özsüt Şenol and Mehmet Şenol. Their unconditional support and unfailing love always keep me alive and made this process possible. The way they struggled has always inspired me for searching other possibilities of the ‘act of build-ing’. Thank you for being with me and supporting in wondering and chasing the *fractures* in my life.

BUILDING A COUNTER-IMAGE:
CRITICAL APPROACHES TO AERIAL VIEW

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, seeing and perceiving the environment has been one of the most outstanding efforts of humanity. Looking from above, as a privileged way of seeing, has turned into a boundary-drawing action for political organizations, surveillance studies, and urban planning with the advent of photography and aviation technologies. When the multi-layered relationship of seeing and knowing is handled through the city and space, it also paves the way for a problematic form of representation in which seeing, showing, and hiding are intertwined. In the 20th century, aerial photography moved away from the human body and suggested a way of seeing from above, resulting in the operationalization of urban space. As the gaze itself becomes an apparatus of control, following the invisible and ambiguous part of these operational images reveals the knowledge production machine with counter-imagination possibilities. This study, which seeks fractures in those images with examples from various political, architectural, and artistic practices, tries to redefine the image and the urban space it sees as an intervention area. Tracing the fractures in the disembodied, commanding, and abstracted intentions of looking from above, in these fractures, the spatial and temporal potentials built by artistic subjectivity are questioned. Hiding and tracing, as a ‘counter-action,’ at the asymmetrical threshold between visibility and invisibility, it can pave the way for enduring, resisting, or coexisting with/through the violent relationship between aerial vision technologies and everyday life on the ground.

Keywords: Aerial imagery, (In)visibility, Threshold, Surveillance Technologies, Artistic Intervention

KARŞIT GÖRÜNTÜNÜN İNŞASI:
HAVADAN GÖRÜNÜME KRİTİK YAKLAŞIMLAR

ÖZET

Ayrıcalıklı bir görme biçimi olarak kuş bakışı, fotoğraf ve havacılık teknolojilerinin ilerlemesiyle politik organizasyonlar, gözetim çalışmaları ve kent planlama için sınır çizici bir eyleme dönüşmüştür. Görme ve bilmenin çok katmanlı ilişkisi, kent ve mekân üzerinden ele alındığında problematik bir temsil biçiminin önünü açar. 20. yüzyılda insan bedeninden bağımsızlaşan ve yukarıdan görmenin bir biçimini öneren hava fotoğrafçılığı, kuş bakışı baktığı kentsel mekânın daha düzenli, müdahale edilebilir ve kontrollü olması arzusuyla iktidar tarafından işlevselleştirilir. Bakışın kendisi bir kontrol aygıtı haline gelirken, bu operasyonu mümkün ve daim kılan görüntüleme teknolojilerinin görünmez ve muğlak kısmını takip etmek parçası oldukları bilgi üretme mekanizmalarının sözde nesnel kodlarını ortaya çıkarır. Çeşitli politik, mimari ve sanatsal pratiklerden örneklerle havadan görme biçimlerinde kırıklar arayan bu çalışma, imgeyi ve müdahale alanı olarak gördüğü kentsel mekânı tartışır. Bedensiz, hükmedici, ve yerden soyutlanmış bir anlatı oluşturan bu görüntülerdeki çatlakların izini sürerek; bu çatlaklarda sanatsal özelliğin inşa ettiği mekânsal ve zamansal potansiyelleri takip eder. Görünürlük ve görünmezlik arasındaki asimetrik eşikte bir ‘karşit-eylem’ biçimi olarak saklanmak ve iz sürmek; havadan görme teknolojileri ve sokak ölçeğindeki gündelik hayat arasındaki şiddetli ilişkiye direnmenin, ya da birlikte var olmanın yolunu açabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Havadan görünüm, Görünmezlik, Eşik, Gözetim Teknolojileri, Sanatsal Müdahale

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCTV: Closed Circuit Television

FA: Forensic Architecture

GSV: Google Street View

MOBESE: Mobil Elektronik Sistem Entegrasyonu

UAV: Unmanned aerial vehicle

US: United States

WTC: World Trade Center

WWI: World War I

WWII: World War II

YKKS: Yapı Kredi Kùltür Sanat

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, seeing and perceiving the environment has been one of the most outstanding efforts of humanity. Looking from above, as a privileged way of seeing, has turned into a boundary-drawing action for political organizations, surveillance studies, and urban planning with the advent of photography and aviation technologies. As the camera rises from the ground, it begins to produce information about the ground. The horizon line gradually disappears, and the human perspective begins to turn upside down. More can be seen; thus, more can be known. From a newspaper footage image about a destructive war to a fascinating cover photo of a magazine, aerial photography surrounds the visual world and human perception of the 21st century. The way of seeing from above, which moved away from architectural possibilities and the human body as a condition of looking from above, oscillates today between the militaristic gaze and the ostentatious.

In the early times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the forms of 'seeing from a distance' have become more critical than ever before. A physical rupture from city space brought a pursuit of virtual connection to it. The opportunity to witness the aerial views of the closed and evacuated public spaces from afar was accompanied by a sense of nostalgia, longing, and a fear of the unknown. In addition, punishment, confinement, and surveillance through vision technologies operated by political tools were more frightening than ever before. Initial research questions were shaped in that strange times (Figure 1.1); why was it impressive to watch an empty square that I was away from, from the angle of an authoritarian perspective of a live security camera which can partially see the whole? We have long been accustomed to finding directions with Google Maps, watching breathtaking drone contents in media, and the existence of security cameras turned into urban furnitures. However, in today's world of images, we are more surrounded by these images than ever before, with their both deadly and lively aspects. As the target of these technologies, the urban space becomes the object of surveillance, where spatial and temporal narratives are separated from its layers to create a 'single and whole' image, while at the same time revealing the possibilities of 'being there' through different mediums with the virtual occupation of the space which operated by politics.

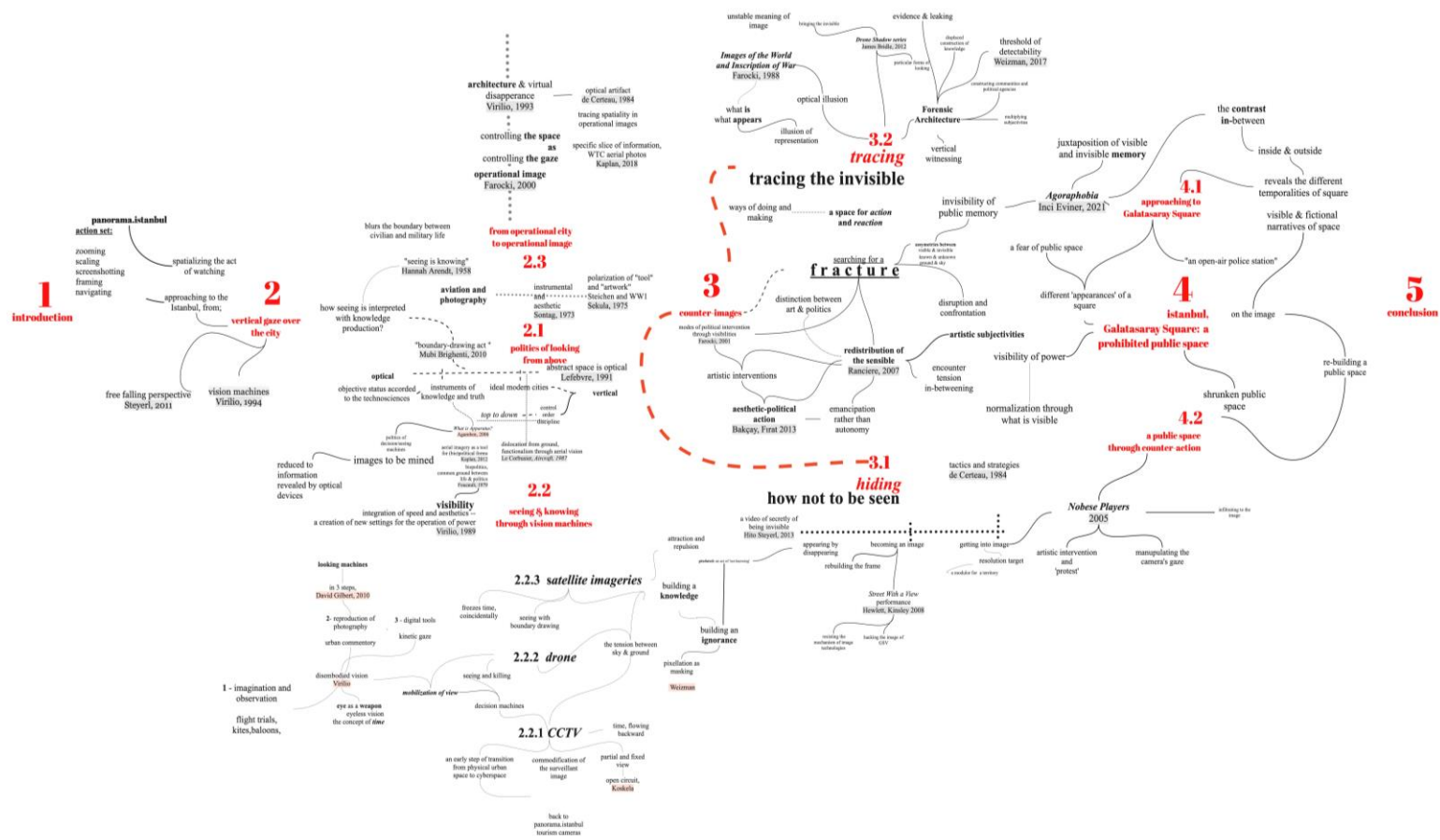


Figure 1.2 A map of the thesis

Chapter 2, concentrates on the politics and problematics of the relationship between seeing & knowing at the urban scale. From the virtual space that *panorama.istanbul* offers as an up-to-date panorama of Istanbul, ways of seeing from above and the representation of the city in the construction of knowledge and reality are tried to be discussed. As the camera moves away from the boundaries of the human body, it tries to define the political space that aerial photography defines in the city and points out the fragility of the 'objective' image suggested by today's imaging technologies. Approaching the image as a ground for examination, operation, and transcription; makes space a subject of knowledge. In Chapter 3, the spatial and temporal relationality of the image is tried to be explained through some practices that redefine the image as an intervention area. Approaching the threshold between visibility and invisibility as a field of counter-action, reveals the hidden operation of all these technologies and the demonstrative power of the

political. Maurice Blanchot points out that, the only way to avoid the gaze of power is to develop unique and individual techniques that will construct invisibility (1987). Thus, it opens a space to discuss how everyday life and art construct transitory invisibility, or how it transforms visibility into a counter-image. The thresholds and contrasts between what the mechanical eyes are looking from above to represent or hide in everyday life will be unfolded through selected cases, under two main actions: hiding and tracing, thus, seeping through/by/with aerial imagery. Chapter 4, aims to address these discussions at the scale of Istanbul. The image of Galatasaray Square, which has been turning into a political scene for a long time will be tried to be read through selected works.



2. VERTICAL GAZE OVER THE CITY

"Explore Istanbul without leaving your home!" (Posta Gazetesi, 2020)¹

In 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic forced an immediate shutdown, many alternatives to being remotely there became popular. The quotation is from a local newspaper, addressed to a website, and promises to explore Istanbul without leaving home.

Flying like a bird through landmarks and enjoying the meticulously selected view. Neither linear nor entirely aerial, the semi-detached perspective of the eye, takes the spectator on a journey through 'the beauty' of a city. *panorama.istanbul*, a website, which proposes today's most up-to-date Istanbul panorama, consists of images recorded in 2019. The gigapixel panorama, published by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Directorate of Geographical Information Systems (IBB-CBS), is open to the public and can be viewed through a website prepared for this purpose. The photographs taken by gigapixel cameras placed at 28 different points of the city were combined according to their geographical information to form a single, gigapixel image. The image's quality, consisting of hundreds of photos taken sequentially, allows zooming in to distant points in a single image.

A single panorama produces many images, and a single image enables many details to see. Zooming, scaling, framing, navigating, screenshotting, or seeing are actions/operations that can be verified over the city's image. These and many more actions that the panorama permits, relocate the inactive status of the spectator into an active participant. Engaging with the image by 'wandering' instead of just looking leads to a process of discovering the unknown in the given scene (Albers, 2014). Millions of pixels and photographs that gather to become a panorama; are not only a 'giant image' but also an image ready to get lost in it. Furthermore, thus, we are left alone with the dazzling, impressive, but a partial perspective of the dominant eye over the city. "With the role of the viewer reconfigured with regard to the image, it also reconfigures the viewer's relationship to place in a manner not unlike other data-driven realms in which the process

¹ A headline from a local newspaper in May 5, 2020. Translated by author.

of finding, navigating, and choosing digital content is the central artistic act" (Albers, 2014, p.20). Panoramas spatialize the act of watching. From early cylindrical architectural forms to today's virtual panoramas, the configuration of an eye of the spectator is placed in the middle of the scene, enabling the possessing of the territory, the city, the war, or the 'scene.' Watching *panorama.istanbul* is like recapturing the existing sight in many different ways. The spectator becomes a participant in the image by orienting the way of seeing, framing a place, and zooming in or out to context. The immobile spectator falls through the center of the city, infinite data oceans, searching for 'something.'

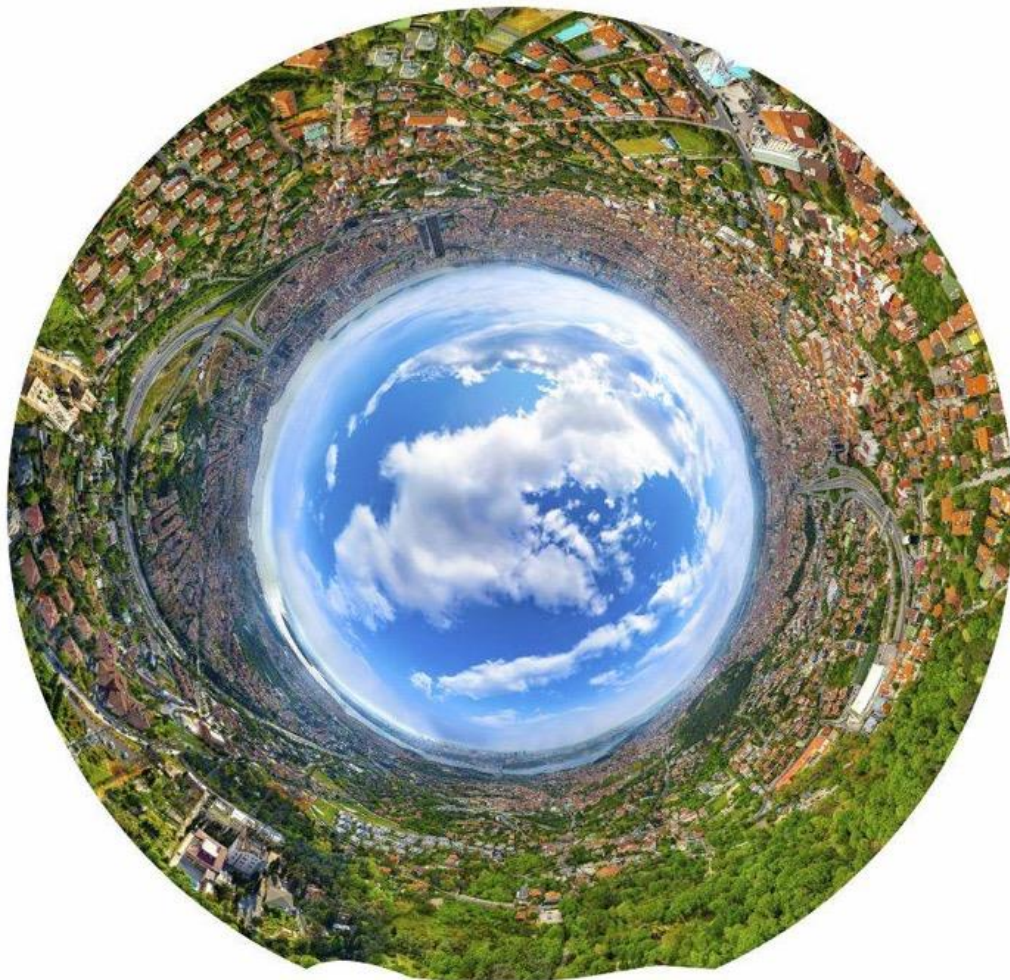


Figure 2.1 Looking up from *panorama.istanbul* (Source: screenshot from *panorama.istanbul*)

The *panorama.istanbul* website welcomes its users/spectators with a spinning top view of Istanbul (Figure 2.1). The image we start to look at from afar and above turns into a panorama taken from a specific place in a few seconds. After this vertiginous encounter, the viewer manages the navigation of the ride. The spectator, who zooms in or out by scrolling up and down, changes the point of view with the cursor, navigates between the panorama images of different points with the options it offers, and sets out to mine thousands of data in a singular tab.

Panoramas, as many other images from the above offer, constitute a political and social representation of the period they were drawn or captured. We can read from the leading examples of manipulations of the representation of the city by the administrations that panoramas are also shaped by the interventions of the government (or the policies of seeing/showing). For example, in the panoramas of Istanbul made by western travelers in 1453, it is seen that Christian buildings are shown larger than Ottoman buildings, emphasizing the Christian appearance of the city (Gür, 2017). It is possible to talk about how the politics of hiding/showing are represented by a mechanical eye in today's gigapixel panoramas, just as the painters who produced the panoramas and manipulated their paintings in the direction of the request.

Panoramas, which struggle to leave a trace to the future, have a mutual relationship with the city. Photographs were taken from 28 different points of Istanbul for the *panorama.istanbul* website. When we consider panoramas as signs and traces that indicate the current image of the city, these selected 28 viewpoints are denotative to present the most up-to-date panorama of Istanbul in 2019. Whereas most viewpoints frame Istanbul's historical peninsula, some are chosen from newly completed urban renewal or restructuring regions. Ataşehir - Maltepe axis has been rebuilt with vertical construction in the last 20 years; Polonezköy offers a convenient perspective to watch the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (Third Bosphorus Bridge), which are some of them. (Figure 2.2 and 2.3)

The temporality of the city is virtually embodied in the captures of a variety of optics, constantly looking from different perspectives and purposes, whether for control, surveillance, or entertainment. With teleoperation technologies that enable us to see and control remotely, the pattern of everyday life is documented by many “vision machines” (Virilio, 1994) from a distance. But, together with image technologies, how do we perceive the city? A city, a set of physical and temporal relations embodied, how can be represented in a single frame of the image? Especially if this series of images is responsible for being a city's 'panorama'.



2.1 Politics of Looking From Above

From the late-eighteenth century, with panoramas and dioramas, the cities and historical events started to be represented in spectacular illustrations where the looking eye started to be elevated to dominate the territory. As the eye began to dominate the city; the concepts of representation, control, and surveillance were intertwined with the confidential angle of view, which detached from the ground but could see all.

Since humans began to produce images from/of the spaces; the meaning of the image, the gaze over it, possible power which it carries become an object to navigate and understand the world. From icons to miniatures, humans and their relationship with their surroundings were always centered on the object of the gaze. From panorama paintings to today's drone photography, with the invention of optics and surveillance technologies, imagery is dealing with many breaking points. Camera obscura, telescope, stereoscope, surveillance technologies, CCTV, and drone photography bring the optical unconscious to the eye. The nature of what appeals to the camera rather than the eye is different. It is not only producing a representational moment but also forms the city serving for this mechanical gaze and its aesthetics.

Hannah Arendt (1958) insisted on the fact that the power of the new modern technological instruments like the telescope was eminently linked to their immediately perceptual nature, that is, to the fact that it could be easily overlooked that this seeing was also a knowing. So, how do these influences between seeing and knowing take place, and how are the boundaries between them drawn? (Arendt (1958) as cited in Brighenti, 2010, p.11)

As Andrea Mubi Brighenti (2010) points out, in the relationship between seeing and knowing in social theory, the way of seeing brings a decision mechanism that is directly political for what is allowed to be seen or not and therefore known. "Machine of vision," as mentioned by Virilio (1994), refers to connections between visual regimes and the dissemination of images between art history, photography, war, and urban planning. From the early history of photography, when a single frame needed weeks to become an 'image,' to today's technology of simultaneous viewing and recording; the 'machine of vision' became a tool to analyze social behaviors, sorting them, and interfering with them if needed.

How did the city, daily life, and humans become the object of a political strategy of power? How do surveillance and image technologies play a role in this account?

Caren Kaplan (2012) points out aerial imagery as a tool for producing biopolitical forms of control; "tradition of distanced or linear perspective, has represented power as a transcendental aesthetic practice that brings together sight and knowledge. This Apollonian gaze gathers diverse life on earth into a vision of unity, thereby producing an individualized, divine, and mastering view from a single perspective" (Cosgrove, 2001, as cited in Kaplan, 2012, p.10). Thus, it blurs the boundary between civilian and military life and builds Agamben's (1998) state of exception, which includes and excludes people regarding the political order. This state also turns everyday life into a deadly threshold between who to be seen & who to be seer, visibility & invisibility, orientation & disorientation, and who to be inside & who to be outside. Thus, this liminality in which a territory or city is placed on to be is a "boundary-drawing act," as Andrea Mubi Brighenti states. "Territories are acts or events that unfold in time, creating determinations, trajectories and rhythms based on threshold making and boundary-drawing acts that introduce discontinuities in the field of visibility" (Brighenti, 2010, p.125).

One responsibility of architecture is to give order to and control the publicly used spaces: a wall to separate, a gate to enter, or a façade to provide a clue about what is happening inside. From fortress walls of ancient cities to today's ubiquity system of control and surveillance, the 'city' has to be controlled by power holders. Rather than constructing materially existing borders, some transparent and mobile systems of control have emerged to act as a decision machine of border or look for unthinkable cases. The screen of CCTV or the instant image product of a drone camera is bearing at the threshold. The threshold where the daily life and state of war intertwined in the visualization of vertical perspective. Approaching this threshold from both perspectives of means of public and tools of politics gives a clue about how the aerial imagery and photography become an apparatus for sustaining control at the city scale.

The production of knowledge and truth is one of the instruments of biopolitics² over human life. For this purpose, politics need some tools to construct a partial ground where the knowledge can be produced and be convinced as truth by the population. Here we may recall what Agamben (2009) points out with apparatus in his three essays collected in the book *What Is an Apparatus?* Agamben defines apparatus as "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings" (Agamben, 2009, p.14). From this point forth, aerial gaze from several closed-circuit cameras, drones, or satellite images can be considered as ubiquitous apparatuses of politics which construct a never-ending imaginary of territory from a specific frame and capacity of action for any possibility of coming danger. So, aerial photography can also be discussed as an instrumentalized image that sustains a society in a way the government wants to rule.

While explaining the contradictions in abstract space, Lefebvre points to the analytical decomposition of space, where the notion of space becomes a subject of analysis (Lefebvre, 1991). Abstract space is not only measurable by geometrical tools, but also it is a ground for social operations through hidden measurements: statistics, codes, so interactive maps, navigation tools, and so on. Abstract space is optical; it can be seen, observable, measurable, and controlled. With the privatization and commodification of the public, the abstract space becomes instrumentalized and becomes a product of power and violence. Transparency, homogeneity, and orderliness become camouflage for abstract space that hides the operation of power, so violence.

² Biopolitics, which Foucault pioneerly described as a "style of government that regulates populations through biopower" (Foucault, 1979/2010), opens a timeless discussion about the tension between political tools over population. Biopolitics, which points to a common ground of life and politics, is the politics that includes the control and reproduction of the population by several aims in its most general definition. Thinking about the city and the power relations between control mechanisms and human needs, the 'bio' prefixes of politics comment on how the politics successfully integrated into the domain of sovereign power and everyday life. Based on Foucault's definitions, the reduction of life into the biopolitics is one of the leading grounds for Agamben's work on the critical concept of homo sacer and bare life. (Agamben, 1998) Since Agamben points out that one purpose of sovereign power is to "create a biopolitical body"; biopolitics is the entry of bare life into the realm of sovereign powers hence its ongoing construction and management by it. Biopolitics, appear in the conceptual background of the systematics, which controls, regulates, and reproduces life.

In the images produced for ideal modern cities of the 20th century, the observer is placed at such a distance that the eye can see the whole territory. In these images, the city becomes an object of an abstracted eye without a human presence (Şentürk, 2013). Whereas, in the 21st century, the human body is ejected, and not even the one taking the photo but becomes a possible target or data for a biopolitical organization. Some projects of modern architecture and specifically “Modulor City” by Le Corbusier (who brought functionalism of build environment and urban pattern with the dislocation of the human body in 20th century modern architecture) was an early attempt at archi-biopolitical strategies that shape city with phenomena of 'functionalism' which also work as a political instrument for order, control, and discipline of everyday life. In this project, like many other modern architectural projects, functional and strategic design of the modern utopic city is also integrated with verticality. Since the city started to rise on a vertical dimension, verticality became an instrument for becoming a power to dominate the sky, dislocating from the ground with a divine gaze from above. "We desire to change something in the present world. For the bird's-eye view has enabled us to see our cities and the countries which surround them, and the sight is not good" (Le Corbusier, 1935/1987, p.11). *Aircraft*, a book by Le Corbusier published in 1987, including his declaration of "the airplane is the symbol of the new age" (p. 13) in the introduction; shows how the urban pattern was going to be destroyed and designed from top to down with the aerial image coming with aviation technology in (Figure 2.4). This declaration not only describes the critical turning of modern architecture but also shows the power and instrumentalization of images to reconstruct cities, daily life, and, thus, humans through politics.



111

Rio de Janeiro, enclosed.



Figure 2.4 Aerial photograph of Rio de Janeiro by plane and Le Corbusier's sketches (Source: Le Corbusier, *Aircraft*, 1934)

Since visibility and visual space have been a field of intervention for social and political theories since the earliest times of history, the possibility of capturing this visibility from the air is a perfect option for reconstructing this interfered ground. However, this time, not a representation as in the early classical paintings, but as a controlled production of city and documentation with its mastering perspective. Recalibration of the human eye to the level of bird's eye level, builds a new means of surveillance from the 20th century of aerospace technologies to today's satellite imagery and creates a possibility of witnessing something 'unthinkable' or 'unknown.'

Over time the gaze has become a weapon associated with war. The capacity for image generation and disembodied vision from autonomous vision machines turn them into a machine that not only controls the act of looking, but also instantly decides who lives and who can be visible to others (Virilio, 1994). This situation which builds a deadly threshold between visibility and invisibility, leads to dystopian attitudes in urban planning at the macro scale and methods of decomposition of the 'safety' at the micro-scale.

2.2 Seeing and Knowing Through Vision Machines

Perceiving and representing the city has been one of the most outstanding efforts of humankind throughout history, along with technological developments which directly affect photography and aviation, thus the way of seeing. From 18th centuries panoramas to today's satellite imageries, the desire to see and represent more is associated with a view from above, which provides a supposedly objective and accurate image of the territory. With the invention of photography and later with aviation advances, the photograph becomes an instrument for controlling, city planning, and war besides its aesthetic value. This section focuses on the brief history of the camera's ascent at the urban scale to trace the volatile relationship between the subjective and the objective that aerial perspective establishes, which creates an ambiguous representational space with its political and operational nature.

Approaches to 'capturing' from above are directly related to technological developments, which constitute political and sociological milestones. From an urban perspective, David Gilbert (2010) suggests three distinct ages of aerial vision.³ From creative imagination of early flight experiments to today's digitalized view, these three ages are divided by some critical turning points of technology and humanity, which destructively show the potentials of aerial vision. Due to Gilbert, the first age covers early flight trials by kites and balloons in the 18th and 19th centuries. Imagination and curiosity are concretized by observation tools where the eye of the observer and their way of narration with words, lines, and maps are essential. The second age is related to the reproduction of photography and its mechanical representation. Here, the camera started to be used for urban commentary and offers an extreme perspective which also works for military and war technology. In the third age, which includes today's technologies, the aerial view is characterized by digital tools and a kinetic perspective; it is not just a photograph, but a machine that organizes the situation, sees from the height of 'truth,' and creates a future way of being data. Here 'groundlessness' (Steyerl, 2011) also becomes as important as the notion of the ground. Even the meaning and permeability of ground can be questioned by

³ These distinctive three ages of aerial vision described and examined on city of London's urban history but may offers a fertile tool for re-examine or understand any metropolitan city which follows similar steps on modernism.

the virtual extensions of land, which emerges far distant from the ground and ubiquitously offers an infinite ground as in satellite images.

As Cosgrove argues, "Vision, freedom, and mastery over space accompanied a state of breaking beyond the anxious closure of mapped space in the late nineteenth century" (Cosgrove, 2001, p.238); the 20th century began with a new vision over the city, with the conjunction of photography and aviation technology. A brand-new perspective presented through the mechanical eye of the camera and the distant flight of an airplane shaped the perception of the city, society, and economy. When a pair of eyes were able to claim over the limit of height that architecture authorized before, they started to fiddle with the perspective usually human was habituated to percept the environment. A new commentary, narration, knowledge, and sense of orientation began to settle from the sky toward everyday life.

As the aerial image extends its scale and is freed from the limits of the human body, the imagination of seeing leaves its subjectivity and creativity in the objectivity of the machine. Thus, the land's so-called 'objective' image has become mappable, observable, and almost virtually travelable. Within the age of mechanical reproduction of photography, the human body and camera still are dependent on each other. From the early trials of Nadar capturing the first aerial photographs from balloons and kites in 1858, unachievable angles are a common pursuit in the history of photography and aviation. In an aerial photograph taken from an airplane or an elevated building, still pairs of human eyes witness and capture the view. Thus, until the beginning of the 20th century, 'the vision machine' is not independent from humans. In 1908, tries of photographer Julius Neubronner with pigeons; aerial vision went one step beyond, which foreshadows the 21st centuries of drones and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technologies. A camera with an automatic shutter release fastened on pigeons took several photographs in their flight without human will.⁴ The possibility of seeing the perspective from the bird adds an angle to human vision that would typically be impossible to see without it on an architectural

⁴ In the beginning of 20th century, pigeons had an important role for communication and logistics due to their speed. Neubronner's father was working with pigeons for transporting prospectuses of medicines for emergency situations. Neubronner's experiments were held with his fathers pigeons. A pigeon could fly approximately 100 km's far.

extension. (Figure 2.5 and 2.6) The vision of humans and animals began to work together. A flying pigeon with a camera, a human allowing and waiting for its route, and a camera whose shutter is accidentally pressed. The photograph of Frankfurt taken from pigeon cameras are interesting for looking over the city. An aerial view of the city framed in pigeon wings feels on the threshold of being turned upside down, in both meanings. It is not the aesthetics of surveillance, but the narration that birds produce while navigation is held by chance. It contains neither the informative drive that any aerial photograph seeks nor the successful (and perhaps illusionistic) point of view that is anchored. Neubronner's experiments with pigeons in Frankfurt led to many discussions as it shows the camera can be independent from humans and able to 'go,' 'fly,' and 'see' more.



Figure 2.5 Neubronner's pigeon camera

(Source: <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/dr-julius-neubronner-s-miniature-pigeon-camera>)



Figure 2.6 Frankfurt city from a pigeon camera

(Source: <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/dr-julius-neubronner-s-miniature-pigeon-camera>)

With the technological advances in aviation, aerial reconnaissance was conducted through photography in World War I, which also foreshadows the inseparable connection between speed and image for warfare. Edward Steichen, who was one of the most important photographers during WWI and II for aerial reconnaissance and served as a Director of the American Expeditionary Force in France, perceived war as a new field of photography for both technically and conceptually (Figure 2.7).



Figure 2.7: Steichen, E. (1914-1918) *Aerial Bombs Dropping on Montmedy*, WWI.

Smithsonian American Art Museum

In his article “The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War” (1975b), Allan Sekula discusses Steichen's aerial photographs from WWI which had ambiguous meanings between becoming an instrument to artwork.

Certainly 'artifact' is a vague enough label for these things. Are they records, tools, artworks, decorations, commodities, relics? It is true that the "originals" of these photos manifest a kind of archeological presence. (...) But consider a more or less specific and quasi-archeological sense of the word "artifact"; the range of its meaning hinges on a polarization of "tool" and "artwork," of the functional and the esthetic. (...) For in addition to their "obvious" original function, these particular pictures have come in a particular way to represent elevated moments of authorship. We are confronted with the seemingly fortuitous intersection of an artist's life and an aggressive, globalizing technology, that of air war. (Sekula, 1975b)

Aside from the aesthetic side of Steichen's photographs, which brought the 'unknown' in front of humans, they have an operational purpose for the military with their mechanical readings. The power of reading those images, which oscillates between the art of photography and military apparatuses, underlies the contradictory nature of reconnaissance photographs captured through a 'bird's eye view.' In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag addresses the criticism of photography and the social impacts of images. She writes, "Cameras implement the instrumental view of reality by gathering information that enables us to make a more accurate and much quicker response to whatever is going on. The response may be either repressive or benevolent: military reconnaissance photographs help snuff out lives, X-rays help save them" (Sontag, 1973/2005, p.138). As Sontag and Sekula point on these two concepts of photography, cameras implement an aesthetic and instrumental view of reality. Today we discuss it with new technological methods that capture and respond spontaneously by the camera's own mobilization ability. Information from a distance, that vision technologies present, turns the image and the ground it sees into an investigation area. Early trials in mosaic mappings, where manually captured images are put together to form a singular map from plural views, suggest various modes for reading these images (Figure 2.8).

Seeing from above begins to produce a privileged knowledge mechanism that constructs the mechanisms of strategy, exploration, occupation, and defense by reading the physical configuration of space. These military maps not only dominate the world wars, but also constructs a spectacle where the sight becomes the pivot of destruction.



“Mosaic mapping.” U.S. School of Aerial Photography, Langley Field, Virginia. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force)

Figure 2.8: Examination on aerial photographs. “Mosaic mapping” by U.S. Air Force (Source: Grover Heiman, *Aerial Photography: The Story of Aerial Mapping and Reconnaissance*, 1972)

With WWII, ‘the sky’ would gradually become occupied and dominated by those in the power of sight and becomes the field of control. Anything as elevated as an airplane was

able to document and represent what was going on the ground. This glorious representation also included cities under explosions, wars, and destruction. Like military units conduct ‘mechanical readings’ on aerial photographs, today's algorithms that scan footages of security cameras with artificial intelligence chase the similar intention of seeing more and drawing borders with privileged perspectives of controlling.

2.2.1 CCTV, where the time begins to flow backward

On the website *panorama.istanbul*, the panorama view of Istanbul is in conjunction with several vision technologies. Live 'tourism camera' recordings, which are also accessible publicly from municipality websites, bring the layer of time in frozen and ‘timeless’ views of the panorama. Alongside the panorama viewpoints marked on the map, the pinned 'tourism camera' (Figure 2.9) offers to watch simultaneous recordings within the panorama images. 'Tourism cameras' (as they call it for the website) is a confusing and ambiguous term at first glance. These records are indistinguishable from any security camera or CCTV recording, but not for surveillance, for entertainment. The image of surveillance and pursuing the city from a dominant gaze has already become a commodity (Figure 2.10).

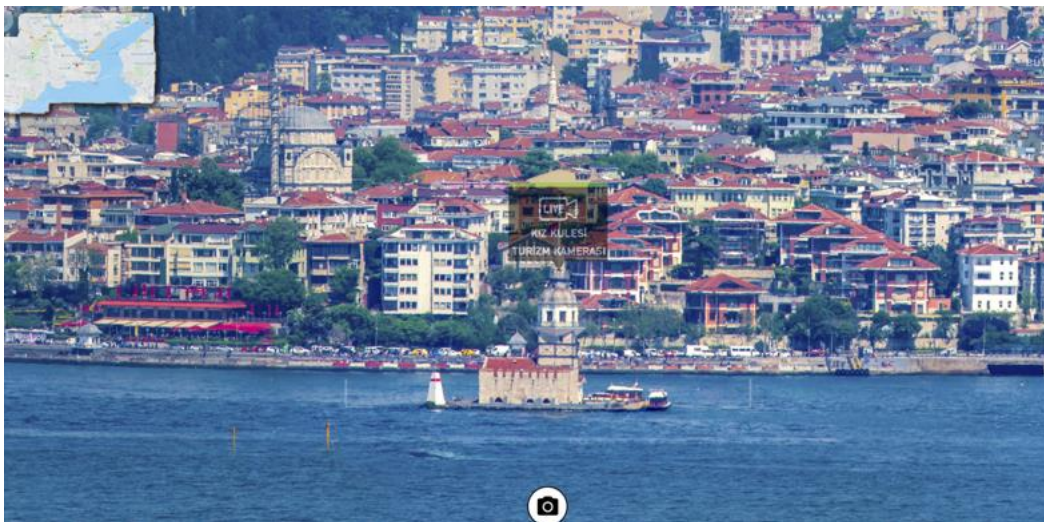


Figure 2.9: A view of Kızkulesi from *panorama.istanbul* (Source: screenshot from *panorama.istanbul*)



Figure 2.10: A concurrent view of Kızkulesi from a Tourism Camera, (Source: screenshot from *panorama.istanbul*. August 28, 2022)

"Today, the strategic value of speed's "noplacement" has definitely outstripped the value of place. (...) The delineation between past, present, and the future, between here and there, is now meaningless except as a visual illusion" (Virilio, 1994, p.31). Surveillance cameras, and CCTVs, are considered an early transition from physical urban space to cyberspace. The concept of time and space began to import more complex relations within a monitor frame of the observer. The living space, where time and space are intertwined, is divided into layers as if by surveillance cameras, and then these layers form the items of an inquiry one by one. Thus, it can be said that time started to flow backward to detect a moment, and the sense of monitored place is reduced to evidence. The camera's point of view is fixed and, therefore partial. So, the two-dimensional partial representation of living public space, can never be a complete representation or evidence: there is always a blind spot. A dream of a transparent society (Foucault, 1978/1995), where the spatial organization falls behind the aim of purity of the public and needs visionary apparatuses, changes the nature of public space.

Although it has many different uses today, early forms of surveillance cameras were used in Germany to observe rockets in wartime. Whereas in the 1950s, CCTV began to be used as an advanced control system for commercial use, the camera could only provide live monitoring without a recording as footage. CCTVs have several and sometimes incompatible purposes of use in city's everyday life. Just as a digital eye on a mission to seek insecurity creates a sense of security for the public, the constant monitoring of any place encompasses endless possibilities and oppositions regarding imagining, technology, and politics. While the city's daily life becomes an actual image like never before, it is impossible to be hidden and not be watched in megacities.

Suspended on a steel construction or attached to the façade of a building, the camera produces a spontaneous video recording of the space. The image of public space from any surveillance camera in an urban context is thoughtfully restricted within the borders of the lens angle of the camera, wishing to see the whole, capture more, and dominate over. The location and spatiality of a surveillance camera also depend on the hierarchy and the accuracy of looking from above. CCTVs, like a contemporary border mechanism without physical elements; are developed with automated sensors, infrared cameras, and even body temperature detections, where a human body turns into data. Although it tends to hide as much as possible in order to catch any criminal, the presence of security cameras and the emotions they evoke are part of the public space and publicity (Koskela, 2000). As the camera produces one directional gaze, it does not endure visual contact. Even the materiality of the camera is deterrent or reassuring to someone; it reminds them of control, power, and their operation. Today besides their operational presence for control, many image technology pretending to see like 'CCTV' have infiltrated into everyday life, urban marketing, and the entertainment industry.

The public streams and media use of cameras, whose existential purpose is surveillance, opens new dimensions in the discussion of produced images and their further meanings. Besides the 'tourism cameras' entangled in the *panorama.istanbul*, websites like *earthcam.com*⁵ shares the live stream of CCTV's mostly located in touristic centers of

⁵ www.earthcam.com, www.skylinewebcams.com, worldcams.tv are some of the examples of live streaming webcams. Beside the website domains, many applications accessible through Google Store or Apple Store also enables to watch, share and save some footages in mobile phones.

cities. Although the website offers a virtual travel opportunity on real-time recordings used mostly for tourism purposes, the website can turn into a publicly real-time tracking system in an unusual situation like a war. Like *earthcam.com* or any other websites that present live recordings of several public and private CCTVs, surveillance footage becomes an object of commodification and entertainment. Streaming these recordings live on platforms such as YouTube or Twitch⁶ also builds a space for discussing, interacting through comment(ing), and archiving by screenshot(ing).

2.2.2 Drone, a distant eye

After several experiments with balloons, kites, and pigeons in the history of aerial photography, aviation technologies were met with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, drones, in the 20th century. Israel initially designed UAVs for surveillance and scouting in 1973, and the United States accelerated the production of drones. Unsurprisingly, in 1991 The Gulf War was the first war where the UAVs were actively used, and the world was mediated by their 'scenographic' footage of the destruction. Today, we can simultaneously witness its magnificent image of a "free-falling perspective" (Steyerl, 2011) and its brutal destruction.

Reading drones as remote "vision machines"; Virilio (2006) underlies more meanings than a flying camera provides an extreme perspective over a space. The idea of recording space without human agency, leads to infinite possibilities for both seeing, killing, and recalling the life. The drone's gaze illustrates an extreme panorama drawn by the confidential and transcendent eye of the machine, which swings between being a hobby, sport, tool for art, and weapon at the same time. Since the contemporary city is shaped by speed and politics (or speed for politics), the present time is dubious in the image of instant records by surveillance apparatuses. It only foreshadows the future, proves the past, and loses the present (Virilio, 2006). Following the 'moment' is quite impossible, even for the drone director who sees the machine's distant eye from a screen. The distance

⁶ Online video sharing services and social media platforms, can be accessible through [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and [twitch.com](https://www.twitch.com)

between the moment and the viewer begins ultimately to be separated by drone technologies.

The animalized apparatus is thus not only an animal-like apparatus (although certainly the example of the drone suggests as much), but an apparatus that points beyond human subjectivity as a possible horizon. When the proliferation of surveillance means that no part of biological life—human, animal, plant or otherwise—is safe from visual invasion or colonization, can there still be possibilities of resistance? (Wilkinson, 2013, p.8)

From a question Wilkinson underlies about vertical politics and 'animal-like' apparatuses, tracing a fracture in the frame of the prejudiced aerial image may draw contrary imagery in the age of drone warfare where the tension between sky and ground turns into a strategic operation of biopolitics (Parks, 2007).

2.2.3 Satellite imagery, a divine panorama

"At the margins of the earth's atmosphere and the threshold of the vast realms of space, we enter a world of orbits. Here we start to encounter the crucial but neglected manufactured environment of satellites and space junk" (Graham, 2019, p.206).

In the second half of the 20th century, as space technologies and photography began to intersect, the 'world of orbits,' in Graham's words, depicts the new extension of the human gaze, where the territory and politics turn into an upside-down image – visually and conceptually. Like astronomy, it looks at what belongs to the earth from the vacuum of space, undoubtedly building the most reliable, hidden, inclusive, and distant image from satellites. To get a surveillance gaze all over the earth, which was initially a military purpose, it eventually gained communal area in humanitarian, forensic, and later daily usage with public access by various interfaces.

Today, interactive web maps such as Google Earth and Google Maps provide access to high-quality satellite images, a view of the earth, a territory, or a city with infinite possibilities of scaling, zooming, seeing, and hiding. Google launched Google Maps/Earth in 2005. As a free online mapping service, Google Maps uses the Mercator cylindrical map projection for the map base. Google Earth, a software version of Google

Maps, is designed as a 3D sphere and gathers numerous panoramas of the earth taken from satellites in a single plane. As such, Google Earth is roughly a journeying tool that aims to get lost, while Google Maps becomes a navigation tool that aims to find direction. Since the day they were announced, they have also been the focus of many discussions on private life and becoming data. To share a comprehensive view of territory in its entirety with the environment, primarily raised concerns about the possibility of planning terrorist attacks. On the scale of the city and daily life, the fact that the house, office, street, briefly any coordinate can be monitored in detail with recorded street images is a concern for privacy.

With its 'playful' interface with the user, the whole earth becomes an object where one can take a stroll in, zoom into any detail, be lost, or be oriented on a single screen. The technical opportunity of a wide range of zooming in and out of a single frame of view creates an indefinite sense of being lost, perhaps not physically, but visually. 'Zoom,' a verb that usually our bodily limitations cannot calibrate, is a curious computer-assisted action. Where the machine eye becomes more accomplished than the human eye, seeing the inside of the pixels is unthinkable freedom and captivity. A top-down view with a distorted perspective freezes a particular moment and turns into a dazzling vertical image. The relationship of time and space in a satellite image has a one-off coincidental intersection. On the contrary to a vertical image captured from a CCTV or drone, 'time' cannot be traceable in the physical moment of vision. It freezes an unprecedented and will not reoccurring moment.

Hence places are as near as a click in a screen beside their physical distances, aerial views became more accessible by their playful interface which evoke surveillance as a voyage. Chad Harris(2006) discusses what Google Earth produces as “a techno-discursive distance between the observer and the observed, and a particular kind of surveillant subject. This subjectivity is structured by an omniscient, imperial gaze, a particular kind of subjectivity that signifies dominance over what is being observed.” (Harris, 2006, p. 102). The illusion that aerial views, Google Maps and detailed panoramas do not only redefine a ground which is resonant between past & future, here & there, one & another; but also offer a “free-falling perspective” (Steyerl, 2011) that orients non-places in an

illusion of ground. As Steyerl illustrates, they “do not actually portray stable ground. Instead, they create a supposition that it exists in the first place” (Steyerl, 2011, p.8). That distinctive gaze, as Gilbert offers, eventually becoming the everyday, ordinary gaze itself. Today, the situation of looking from above, which is not a position but a tool, has become so 'ordinary' that even the state of falling, as suggested by Steyerl, always seeks 'more'. A more zoomed-in image, a higher resolution, a more panoramic view, and so on.

Google Street View (GSV), Google Maps' extension, which focuses on the ground scale rather than the aerial representations, provides a virtual ride through many streets and rural areas through interactive panoramas seen from human eye level. With a mouse click, satellite images with an aerial perspective are dissolute into street views that make it possible to see as if or pretend to be there. What is ambivalent is that the way images are gathered to get a 'street view' is automatic and coincidental. Nobody presses the shutter button of the camera as in CCTVs. A constantly recording GSV car or Google Trekker⁷ capture whatever is going on (Figure 2.11). A passerby by chance, a moment of argument, the most private moment of someone's life, or anything that can be lived in the public space, is frozen by a camera, coincidentally looking through.



Figure 2.11: The reflection of the seer. Encountering with a Google Trekker in GSV. (Source: screenshot from GSV)

⁷ Google offers cameras in the form of wearable backpacks for places where it is impossible to record with a car. Google Trekkers are those who are trekking, hiking, or just walking to collect street panoramas. Although it is often used in rural areas with no drive way, it is also used for partial public spaces with only pedestrian access. Google's goal is to make what everyone can see archivable and representable in databases.

One another issue, which becomes apparent with the wide range use of satellite imageries, is pixelation and partial resolution. Since the beginning of the 2000s, human rights organizations have started to use satellite imageries from several remote sensing technologies for human rights issues. A satellite image, which is accepted as evidence of objectivity, directly renders reality. Where and 'how detailed' objectivity will appear is a political issue. In the words of John Tagg, "privileged apparatuses within the given social formation" (Tagg, 1988, p.189), they are so-called direct and objective rendering of a piece of land administered and allowed by political authorities. The established knowledge and truth can be partial, pixelable, or missing in the image. The invisible one is the ignored or secreted. Here, politically disadvantageous geographical conflicts and very secret central information agencies bear the same fate on the map: pixelated. Thus, it is possible to say that visibility becomes a form of political appearance.

2.3 From Operational City to Operational Image

In his interview *Architecture in the Age of Its Virtual Disappearance* (1993), Paul Virilio refers to the shifting dimensions of architecture and materiality at the very beginning of the era of visual and optical machines. The discussion of the 'disappearance of architecture' in the late 1900s, when architecture and city were just introduced to screen scale, with the dimension of virtual and started to think with the notion of 'speed'; is still an essential stop for understanding today's aerial, operational images and tracing spatiality in those images. As theorized by Harun Farocki (2000), operational images underlie the images which are not for watching or depicting; but for tracking, controlling, detecting, and targeting. They are not aimed just to be a photograph, memory, or document representing reality; instead, they become part of a technical operation. Since the image itself and what it frames become part of the operation; visibility becomes not only a tool of operation, but also the operation itself.

"Centuries ago, matter was defined by two dimensions: mass and energy. Today there comes a third one to it: *information*. But while the mass is still linked to gravity and materiality, information tends to be fugitive. The mass of mountain, for example, is something invariable, it is immobile; its information, however, changes constantly"

(Virilio, 1993, p.180). In its traditional definition, architecture can be defined as an organization of space in which three visible dimensions governed by gravity and time, an invisible dimension, come together. This is basically how a 'matter' or tactual face of architecture becomes visible with physical construction. Since WWII, when architectural construction and destruction became the tool of representation or operation; the definition of both matter and architecture started to be expanded with virtual meanings. The dimension of 'information' added to the physical structure of architecture has made both the power relations of the practice of 'building' and the meanings of the architectural structure visible. More than just making it visible, the practice of architecture can even be said to be reduced to the information revealed by optical devices.

In 1984, when the World Trade Center (WTC) offered the highest elevation for watching the Manhattan, Michel de Certeau pursued everyday life shaped around strategies and tactics. Where the systematic grammar of space is visible from 1370 foot height tower of WTC, is an essential point for de Certeau, in the Part 3: Spatial Practices in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). He defines an operation as an optical artifact where the urban fact is transformed into the “concept of a city” (de Certeau, 1984, p.93). "Linking the city to the concept never makes them identical, but it plays on their progressive symbiosis: to plan a city is both to think the very plurality of the real and to make that way of thinking the plural effective: it is to know how to articulate it and be able to do it" (de Certeau, 1984, p 94). 'An operational concept' referred by de Certeau in the threefold step remains valid. First, a rational organization, then a synchronic system, and finally an anonymous subject can be summarized as his threefold operation and the purpose of non-human eyes in urban planning today. Operational image and the spatial operation are intertwined in today's vision machines that looking from above. The vertical image (Dorrian, 2007) or free-falling perspective (Steyerl, 2011) both refers to the militaristic gaze from above with the advance of aerial photography, which today infiltrated into everyday life rather than the military. Way of seeing from above, now not only represent what has been built on the ground but also infiltrates the process of control, surveillance, and urban planning. Where the urban and architectural design intertwines for building an image from satellites, started to reduce the social sphere "as genuinely performative" (Latour, 1984) into a “mediatic assemblage,” as Dorrian (2007) offers. However, contrary

to the perspective that de Certeau looks at from the top of the WTC and that the optical image of the city belongs to the military, today this vertical view constitutes daily life itself and shows how cities can be controlled and commercialized. Even on the basis of CCTV footages or drones, which has become a marketing and entertainment value instrumentalized besides its usage in surveillance technologies.

Caren Kaplan, in her book *Aerial Aftermaths* (2018), refers to the 'unseen' collection of aerial photographs of the collapsing moment of the WTC, which was published on ABC television news in 2010. Philip Delves-Broughton, a journalist for ABC Radio National commented on "rare and chilling views" of collapsing moment as; "We have seen the Twin Towers collapse hundreds of times on TV. The steel and glass skyscrapers exploding like a bag of flour, the dust and smoke pluming out across Manhattan. But never like this, from above" (Broughton, 2010 as cited in Kaplan, 2012 p.3). At similar times, Jan Ramirez, chief curator at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, (ironically) commented about the collection, "With these pictures, you move from a specific slice of information to much greater context" (Ramirez, 2010). "A specific slice of information," used to describe what happens after dozens of aerial photographs were published 10 years after the attacks, raises some questions and fractures to follow about politically, so partially, construction of knowledge through images. Even though it has been 10 years since the attacks, the chilling impressiveness of the published aerial photographs paved the way for understanding, approaching, and revealing the hidden politics of the vertical images (Figure 2.12). The capacity of images that produce violence and fear; and the operation of imagining technologies for surveillance over a city to produce a constant, safe, 'controlled' way of living are in cooperation. The machine eyes circling over the city at different scales, not only operational but also representational for the relation of practices of power and daily flow of the city. As the architectural presence disembodied from its ground, new ground construction started in the image scale. Thus, the operation with spatial properties can be visible on different edges: Operation as the spatial organization and the illusion of architecture as demonstrating/hiding the operation.

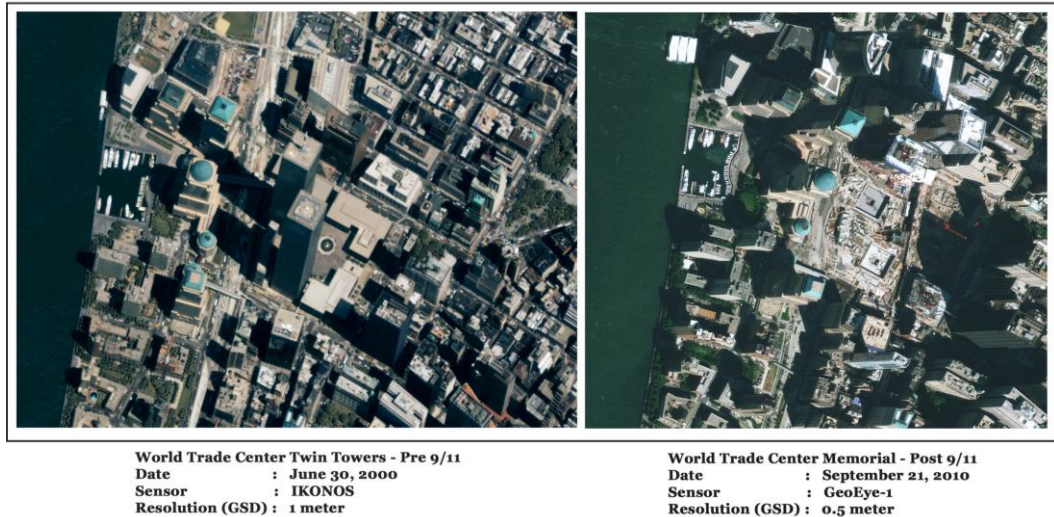


Figure 2.12 WTC from above

(Source: <https://www.satimagingcorp.com/gallery/ikonos/ikonos-geoeye-pre-post-911/>)

"But how images are put together to make biopolitics or militarized aero mobility can only be grasped if we keep images 'alive' as objects that are not to be read but lived with, dynamically engaged as powerful assemblages, composed of multiple incommensurable parts, never reducible to the visible end product" (Kaplan, 2012, p.18). As Kaplan offers, "keeping images alive as objects", points tactics to infiltrate the images and the operation behind them.

3. COUNTER-IMAGES THROUGH HIDING AND TRACING

Does approaching these images generated through vision technologies as a field of action and reaction offer a possibility of producing an alternative way of knowledge production? Can tracing the fractures hidden by images that design and determine how we see, look, and read reveal the politics and operations behind them? Since the vertical truth bares the visibility by masking the 'other' and making it invisible, fractures in this 'endless transparency' arise. Is it possible to see everything? Or we, mostly as spectators of those images, just a consumers of images that are designed to show? Paula Amad defines aerial view "has always been dialectically in tension with the view from below, the two gazes enmeshed in a struggle of attraction and repulsion" (Amad, 2012, p.67). That tension in abstracted and embodied knowledge from cogency of looking from above causes fractures between power of seeing and power of ignoring on the ground. Tracing a fracture, can be a tactic or a tool for orienting in this "altered spatiality of globalization"(Cosgrove, 2001). Based on these questions, this chapter examines the invisible and ambiguous parts of aerial, so disembodied images.

By decontextualizing the objectivity of these images, artistic interventions and counter-research practices point to the thresholds, borders, possibilities, speculations, and counter-imagining possibilities of the gaze and the camera, which is an ideological device. Discussing the invisible and ubiquitous one in the visible form of production and as modes of intervention over the political circle, based on the question of Farocki, "How does the shift from montage to navigation alter the way images—and art—operate as models of political action and modes of political intervention?" (Mende & Holert, 2017, p.1) Not only to approach the image as an end product, but also to regard an image itself as a process; it opens a space for action, to be counter, and replaces the narrative with powerful tools for creating an image. In this way, describing invisibility as managing the ways of being visible is an upside-down regarding the accustomed image, but underlies the capacity of an image as itself. Approaching the threshold between visibility and invisibility as a field of counter-action also reveals the hidden operation of all these technologies and the demonstrative power of the political through the knowledge production.

"Aesthetic-political action" (Bakçay & Fırat, 2012); provides a ground for transboundary political potentials of collective action. Publicity, produced by relationality, does not only see the outside the sovereign. It builds a counter-space with socio-spatial practices and collective feelings that allow revealing the alternative to the existing. The violent aesthetics of aerial images embrace various tactics between the power of the eye and the territory it gazes. Seeing more than what can be seen also gives an idea of what is unseen, invisible, and hidden. Aesthetics, as described by Ranciere, describes a field experience that creates sensations and reveals political subjectivities. As it stands, where the boundaries of art and politics become ambiguous. The potential of that ambiguous and liminal state permits the forms of becoming visible, sensible, and palpable in which temporal encounters, tensions, and transitions are possible. Discussing about aesthetic dimension of political practices, defines the experience in between them, which leads to questioning the representation itself, and the distinction between art and politics.

Today's vision technologies which cannot be considered independently from their political meanings and contexts, construct a contradictory space between subjectivity and objectivity. Aside from the destructiveness of all these seeing/vision technologies; artistic tactics, interventions, and 'aesthetic-politic' actions construct possible agencies for understanding, interrupting, and constructing the subjectivities. Fracture can define the moment when the rigid, authoritarian, controlling, and supposedly objective vision from above begins to crack, intertwine, and enables a new, third possibility. Practices that use these images for other than their ultimate political purposes, construct new subjectivities, collectivities, and meanings that are inconspicuous at first glance. Artistic practices, as "ways of doing and making", maintain the contradictions and asymmetries between forms of visibility and knowledge production through them. The fractures, invisibilities, and subjectivities can be visible through them, and it may open a collective place in order to agent with them. Re-distribution of the sensible, as Jacques Ranciere (2004) emphasizes, underlies a form and possibility of 'togetherness' between what is possible and acknowledged, included and excluded, self and other. The potential of sensible, which follows emancipation rather than autonomy, shows how power relations affect our lives

and traces possible ways to combat them in different scales. It indicates a potential place to bear with them, together and mutually.

The possibility of artistic subjectivity for creating a fracture also constructs agencies on the seeing-knowing relationships between the ground and temporality. Engaging with the aerial vision with artistic strategies, to be more specific, not only alter the reality but also creates the possibilities of looking from the inside, from the ground, and to upwards and constructing temporal agencies. This chapter aims to hold that discussion through several artistic and research practices which are directly or indirectly engage with the vision technologies and view from above. The counter-relation established on vision machines will be discussed under two main focuses: hiding and tracing, thus, seeping through/by/with aerial imagery.

3.1 "How Not to be Seen?"

A video by Hito Steyerl (2013), *How Not To Been Seen: A Fucking Didactic Education.MOV File*, oscillates from the structures of visibility to the possibility of invisibility. Steyerl structures the invisibility in five didactic lessons lasting fifteen minutes; "How To Make Something Invisible For a Camera," "How To Be Invisible in Plain Sight," "How To Become Invisible by Becoming a Picture," "How To Be Invisible by Disappearing" and "How To Become Invisible by Merging Into a World Made of Pictures." A computer-generated voice over and various (in)visible images of places and humans flowing on a green screen accompany to her ironic way of lecturing. She reveals the 'secrets' of being invisible by giving a Do It Yourself recipe of how to be 'counter' to visibility. From becoming a picture to becoming an image object; body, ground and optical device may present themselves as an agency and seek a way out of the dictated way of seeing and targeting.

The main question of how to avoid being visible is not just about looking for a magical mask which hides from the eyes of surveillance (Steyerl, 2013). For Steyerl, the mask not only suggests hiding, but also getting into the image. She implies that the image itself and its process of 'being an image' are open to any kind of intervention by revealing the

visibility policies and their operational process of images. Not accepting the apparent as a frame of visibility but defining a space to rebuilding the framework.



Figure 3.1 A resolution target (Source: screenshot from *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File*)

The first lesson begins with zooming into a resolution target in front of the green screen, where the computer-generated voice over starts to describe the resolution target as: "This is a resolution target. It measures the resolution of the world as a picture. Resolution determines visibility. Whatever is not captured by resolution is invisible" (Steyerl, 2011). With the spread of aerial photography in the 20th century, a world pictured from above needed to have some calibration and resolution targets that measure visibility and set a standard for scaling the image (Figure 3.1). So, the calibrated image can be zoomed, scaled, or pixelated by their resolutions. These resolution targets are a means of placing the divine eye of a new visual era, which cannot be interpreted by the human eye and does not exist for human scale. Located in the middle of a desert, with black-lined human-made stripes of varying length and thickness, these targets evoke remaining pieces of architecture from the 1950s, when the United States (US) air force and spy surveillance

services were trying to test the resolution of the images in order to use them as a part of operations.⁸ Today, hundreds of them whether still using or not, remind the initial attempts of the formation process of aviation developments and aerial images that enable us to zoom and scale in it. These landscapes, which are built for calibrating the eye of surveillance to the human eye; are the initial and basic step to approaching how to make the world visible and fit in a picture. Over time, aerial photography does not only serve for surveillance and control technologies for the military; it turns into a usual image of the city/territory/place, which orient humans in daily life by and because of it. Since the gaze is coming from the top, the image of an area which totally 'naked' and 'honest' is not only held by stakeholders. It becomes an object ready to circulate, navigate, reveal, or be desired. As Steyerl has mentioned the linear perspective as "established an imaginary stable observer and horizon, so does the perspective from above establish an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground" (Steyerl, 2011). It might be said that, approaching the 'floating' observer and ground leads to new descriptions and discussions about locating the human body as a pixel from above and the built environment as evidence or reminder.

"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 publicly available satellite images are designed to mask." (Weizman, 2017, p.30) A designed mask, pixelation, represents a top-down view of politics that, as Eyal Weizman points out, has the right to decide where to zoom in or what to pixelate. A system of resolution for a satellite image -which can be accessible for the public- aims to remove the human body from the represented image. However, this is a biased way of filtering, where some territories become more pixelated as come to light in many inquiries hold by independent research groups on human rights violations. In Lesson 4, where Steyerl asks, "How to be

⁸ For detailed research on these targets; a research and documentation project by Damon Sauer and Julie Anand, *Ground Truth* (2016) explores the physical remains of the CIA/Air Force project known as Corona which was aimed to establish the first maps and images of earth from space in 1960s. The remains of resolution and calibration targets remind of the desire to see and target from above, while today hundreds of them blend into the desert landscape. Detailed statement and photographic documentation of *Ground Truth* is accessible from <http://www.2circles.org/ground-truth.html>.

invisible by disappearing," we are leaving from green screens to non-places⁹, to unidentified gated places and virtual renders of architectural representations. Anonymity is a way of being invisible by blending into space. Non-places, as argued by Marc Auge (2009), roughly define spaces of globalization where place becomes a temporary passage without historical, urban, or identical relations. A corridor of a shopping mall, an airport, or a gated community are the places where invisibility becomes a commodity (Friis, 2021). Being invisible is ambivalent. Like being a pixel or living in a gated community, becoming invisible by disappearing means getting lost in the accepted image or resisting becoming that image. The invisible one either becomes anonymized in space and loses their political agency or is in a state of resistance or danger against the categorization of space.



Figure 3.2 An architectural render (Source: screenshot from *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File*)

Most architectural renderings create transparent, identical, and invisible human representations; while separating spatial agency from human, it also characterizes the community as anonymous, safe, and so invisible (Figure 3.2). Here, the rupture between

⁹ “Non-place”, is coined by the French anthropologist Marc Auge, to refer to anthropological spaces of transience where human beings remain anonymous, and do not hold enough significance to be regarded as ‘places’ in their anthropological definition.

space and human agency comes to light in a rendered image. An architectural image that suggests (or dictates) the use of space relies on a sense of security and order in those non-places. Ones who are not fit into that frame due to their otherness, leave their transparent masks and become visible. In short, in these sanitized spaces with designed ways of living, 'the different' stands out and turns into a target.

Being invisible by infiltrating the image itself also paves the way for resisting the mechanism of image technologies. *Street With a View*, a performance and intervention by Ben Kinsley and Robin Hewlett realized in 2008, is an act of infiltrating the street images recorded by Google tools. With the collaboration of residents in Pittsburgh's Northside and the direction of Kinsley and Hewlett, several scenes were prepared to stage before the GSV car arrived in Sampsonia Way. Like a parade or a sword fight, the daily life of the street is occupied by a performance of tableau vivant staged for Google's cameras (Figures 3.3 and 3.4).



Figure 3.3: A screenshot of tableau vivant in Google Street View.

(Source: <http://benkinsley.com/street-with-a-view/>)



Figure 3.4: Google’s camera car and performance.

(Source: <http://benkinsley.com/street-with-a-view/>)

Chris Ingraham and Allison Rowland’s article “Performing Imperceptibility: Google Street View and the Tableau Vivant”; refers to the contemporary reenactments of the historical performance genre, tableau vivant, as “living images that resist biopolitical control by performing imperceptibility” (Ingraham and Rowland, 2016, p.210). 2008 was a year when Google Earth/Maps was a relatively new platform for encountering the myriad ways to see and capture the city. Kinsley and Hewlett’s tactics of ‘hacking’ the image of GSV were embodied by becoming more visible and deciding how to become an image for the frame of Google by using performance as a tool for collective communication and disputation. Their tactics are not hiding and becoming invisible but infiltrating the image to generate creative criticism and mislead the purpose of recording the streets. “They would signify an effort to show that Google’s logic of a universal ‘view’ is always susceptible to not noticing what it is really seeing, and hence the tableaux would reveal the possibility that an alternative logic exists which escapes the one driving a surveillance society’s produced indexicality” (Ingraham and Rowland, 2016, p.224). As Ingraham and Rowland call “performing imperceptibility” and reading their

performances as “micro-political acts”; points how the Google (and other similar databases using the information of city) reinvent the notions of control and surveillance in the commodification of everyday life and city. Their living image immortalized in the Google database is the reproduction of the street by masking the natural and ordinary flow of the road that Google desires to see, capture and make the data of.

3.2 Tracing the Invisible

If we take an interest in pictures that are part of an operation, this is because we are weary of non-operative pictures, and weary of meta-language. Weary of the day-to-day practice of remythologizing quotidian life, weary of the ever changing and many channeled program of images custom-made to mean something to us. (Farocki 2004, p.18)

In Farocki's films and texts, the invisible, thought of as the unknown, is re-discussed as what is actually hidden within the visible, and an alternative point of view is approached to seeing and visibility. *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, a film by Farocki (1989), reveals the connection between war, perception of vision, image, and information by exposing 'black spots' of aerial photography mostly captured during the 1940s in Germany. Optical developments from WWI configure vision machines, as Virilio (1994) points out, and show how the operational image becomes an object and narrator of the war, by one side of ideological power. During and after WWII, when aerial photography was widely used, the military began to monopolize the conflict between ‘what is’ and ‘what appears.’

Approaching the camera as an ideological device shows how the photograph and image become a political apparatus. In his other films and essays, Farocki focuses on the operational processes of transforming and building a situation into a representation – an image- instead of approaching the image as a product. Looking and searching for fractures, points to the unstable meanings of an image, which underlies the possible interventions in that process. Several forms of intervention penetrate into the images and their representations as a tactic of the military. As photography and optical technologies progress, illusions that the photograph will reveal while hiding certain details are also devised. These tactics of 'hiding' are the invisible side of stunning aerial photographs,

which appear to reveal the so-called knowledge and truth. Although Farocki asks these questions over time when aerial photography could only be realized with airplanes and missiles, it remains up-to-date and unanswered for today's vision machines, surveillance weapons, and so on. Even if the methods of infiltrating visual information through photography have changed, the ideological narrative and desire underlying these tactics are still shaped around the same foundation.

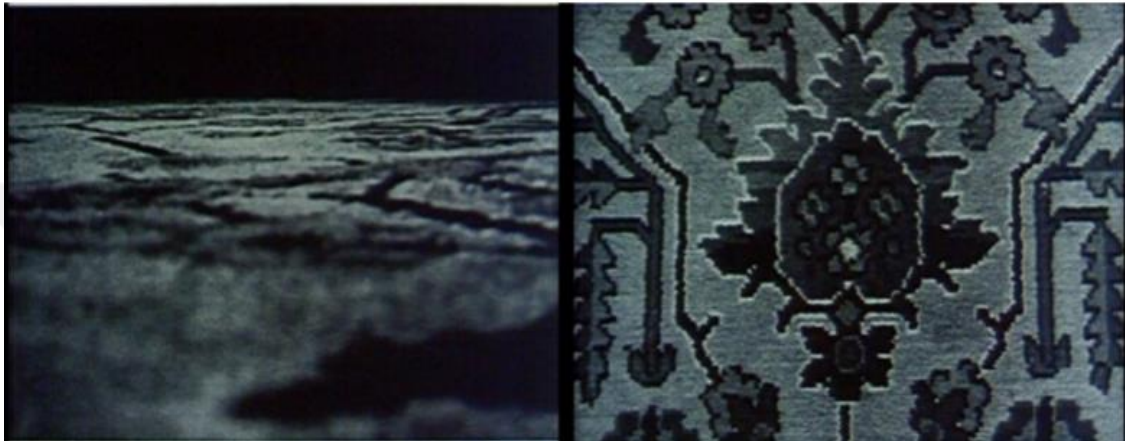


Figure 3.5 A cat and human perspective of a carpet

(Source: Screenshot from *Images of the World and Inscriptions of War*)

Looking from above gives a tremendous perspective to understand the whole in all its objectivity (Figure 3.5). But, this two-dimensional perspective is like a 'pattern' construction, as in Farocki's carpet example. While providing a view of the whole, it is not possible to approach the scale of the parts that make up the whole. This perspective, which is only a representation of reality, helps us ignore the image's violent potential. Recalling Baudrillard's presentation of the image as what constitutes reality, it may mask the absence of reality by constructing an illusion (Baudrillard, 1994). Thus, the process of war and the production of its image cannot be separated from each other. And therefore, it is political. Different politics and conditions can alter the way of reading a photograph and what it shows.



Figure 3.6 A study on aerial photographs of the Auschwitz concentration camp
(Source: Screenshot from *Images of the World and Inscriptions of War*)

Hannah Arendt (1951) views concentration camps as "laboratories for the regime," and life and death may seem like part of the experiment, operation. But it is not limited to that. The images and records of what people outside of the camp will know about it, are also part of the operation and a one-sided representation of truth. "Laboratories, in which experiments were carried out, to see whether the fundamental claim of totalitarian systems that human beings are capable of being totally dominated is correct. Here the question was to establish what was possible at all and to obtain proof that absolutely everything is possible" (Farocki, 1989). In *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, Farocki questions the invisibility of the concentration camps, which is apparent in aerial photographs. Aerial photographs taken by early American reconnaissance flights in 1944 are re-emerged in 1977 by two photo analysts dealing with old cases of WWII. These photographs, which have been ignored (or preferred to be seen only partially by certain people) for 30 years, begin to produce hidden truth and knowledge about the concentration camps. Looking back on these 'hidden' photographs also points out how the

photograph is analyzed when it is considered as visual information (Figure 3.6). A set of tactics from pixelation to illusions that make it 'invisible' infiltrating to photographs create an ideological space for manipulating information. Thus, knowledge and reality become an object, which is carefully generated by several ideologies. As Steyerl (2013) offers, "whatever is not captured by resolution is invisible"; several holes in some structures of Auschwitz, revealed the attacks and gas chambers when the aerial photographs were analyzed. "The hole in the roof is a sign that the building has been attacked by aircraft. However, this hole and the violence it produces are on the threshold of detectability. Because the size of this hole in the image is smaller than a single pixel of public satellite images" (Weizman, 2017, p.5).

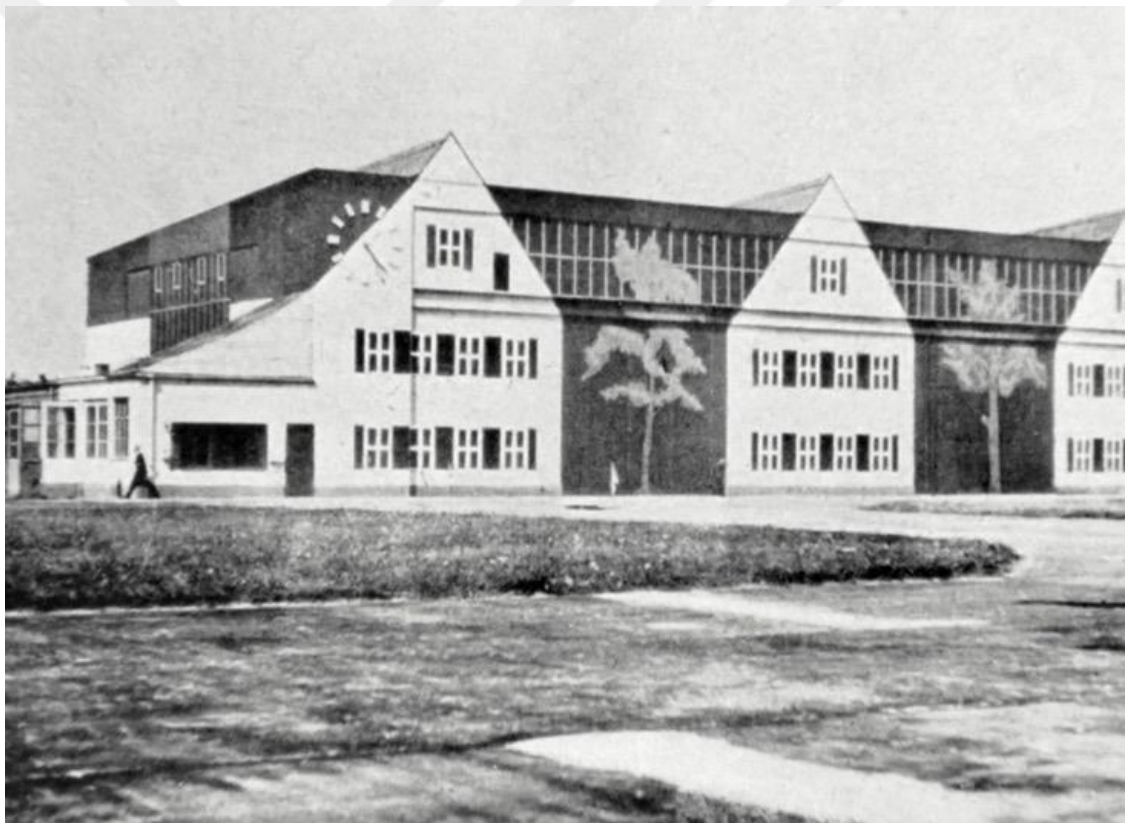


Figure 3. 7 An aircraft hangar painted as detached houses and trees

(Source: Screenshot from *Images of the World and Inscriptions of War*)

Farocki mentions a book released by Nazis that contains guidelines for optical illusion painting.¹⁰ In that book, methods of application of optical illusion paintings on places related to the military are cited. These tactics are designed according to the aerial perspective capturing from above. An optical illusion painting on the facade of the building becomes the camouflage for an aircraft hangar (Figure 3.7). In that way, an eye looking from the sky can see war structures as a series of ordinary private houses. Safe, uninteresting, and therefore ‘off-target.’ It becomes like transparent human figures in architectural renderings what Steyerl shows, a piece of the whole that works in order, as it should be. Since it appears as a series of detached houses from a distance, it loses its materiality as an aircraft hangar in the image. Whether the image itself or the territory it frames, the materiality and reality of a virtual image are open to intervention. Farocki (1989) points out, "Beside the real world is set a second world. A world of pure military fiction." Thus, if there is no image, there is no evidence. Or if it is not in the image, it does not exist. This is one of the methods of generating images in the ideological sense; they hide by showing.

Caren Kaplan asks in her article, “A Rare and Chilling View: Aerial Photography as Biopower in the Visual Culture of 9/11”(2012); “What the state need to see?” and then continues, “Spectators and consumers of images participate in biopolitical projects in many ways including militarized aeromobility and its imagery.” What can be revealed by approaching to viewing and appearing not only as a concept of surveillance, but also a pile of knowledge to be traced about the city? How do militaristic vision apparatuses that reduce the distinction between war and everyday life, also dissolve the distinction between art and politics in terms of the city’s knowledge production? One another important point to emphasize in Farocki's narration, is approaching to image as a set of spatial data: a set of data that reveals space and time. Within early attempts at aerial reconnaissance, the territory has become the object of knowledge where investigations are situated. The physicality of architecture, where destruction, occupation, and construction occur, becomes the privileged way of generating evidence or disclosure. Some contemporary practices like Forensic Architecture (FA), a research agency, which

¹⁰ The original name of book is, *Richtlinien: für die Tarnung gegen Luftsicht* and can be translated as, “Guidelines: for camouflage against air sight”

carries inquiries on cases about human rights violations, will be a fruitful case to discuss how visual information is read through space and time in more architectural structure.

FA, an independent research agency under Goldsmith University, conducts architectural and media research on behalf of international litigants, human rights organizations, and political & environmental justice groups. The team weaves the data of the incident around a narrative by using multiple methods and different technologies of recording, including site visits, radar scanning, digital modeling, photographic cartography, and collecting the visual and audial material recorded during the case by surveillance infrastructures or coincidental records. As the tactile value of architecture - captured from various visualization optics and techniques - becomes the narrator of an incident, they build a 'counter-forensic' and alternative way of truth-telling / leaking by using the control structure and surveillance. In their practice, all individual data collected from the site within different angles, perspectives, and time periods are placed in a new digital model of 'moment.' A 3D model of space, works like an object from now on, is the evidence and objective narrator for the incident. Recreating the space and moment in digital software with all the data collected, is like re-enacting the happening which can be seen from all angles. Weizman aims to "bring new material and aesthetic sensibilities to bear upon the legal and political implications of state violence, armed conflict, and climate change" across a "multiplicity of forums, political and juridical, institutional and informal" (Weizman, 2014, p. 9). These gaps, erasures, and misprisions can be recognized and engaged by collaborative aesthetic practices that do not rely solely on human witnesses but on the "sensorial capacity of matter itself," or, according to Weizman, "the ways in which "matter can detect, register, and respond not only to contact and impact, but to influences in its environment and to remote presence" (Weizman, 2014, p.14-15). In this way, historical and contemporary maps and aerial photographs can be animated in relation to each other, remaking connections as temporal and spatial elements become visible in new coordinates and configurations. Sharing the results and documents in the form of art, opens both the process and the findings to the discussion, interpretation, and negotiation. Cases that we are not used to going outside the courtrooms and cannot be a part of their processes begin to be included in different agencies. In the forums with different agencies where FA opens its work, the 'politic,' 'truth,' and the 'objective'

becomes contestable. Contrary to the so-called objective knowledge, produced by an authority, FA's concern is to point out the mechanisms of knowledge production where many subjectivities can be visible side by side or together.

All these images produced by different agents, technologies, and perspectives form a scene, in the roughest sense, by overlapping their spatialities and temporalities. The agency of architecture starts from here. It is an encouragement to remember, to be remembered, and to make it visible. It is on the threshold of showing how the piece of architecture can be evidence and also be a mask to hide the evidence. "We use models as ways of viewing. Models are optical devices for us in the way that they allow for a navigational viewing that places images in a simultaneity. You don't cut, you move in-between them. Sometimes we build those spaces physically ourselves in order to create the reenactments that are necessary to interrogate the image itself" (Weizman, 2021, p. 239).

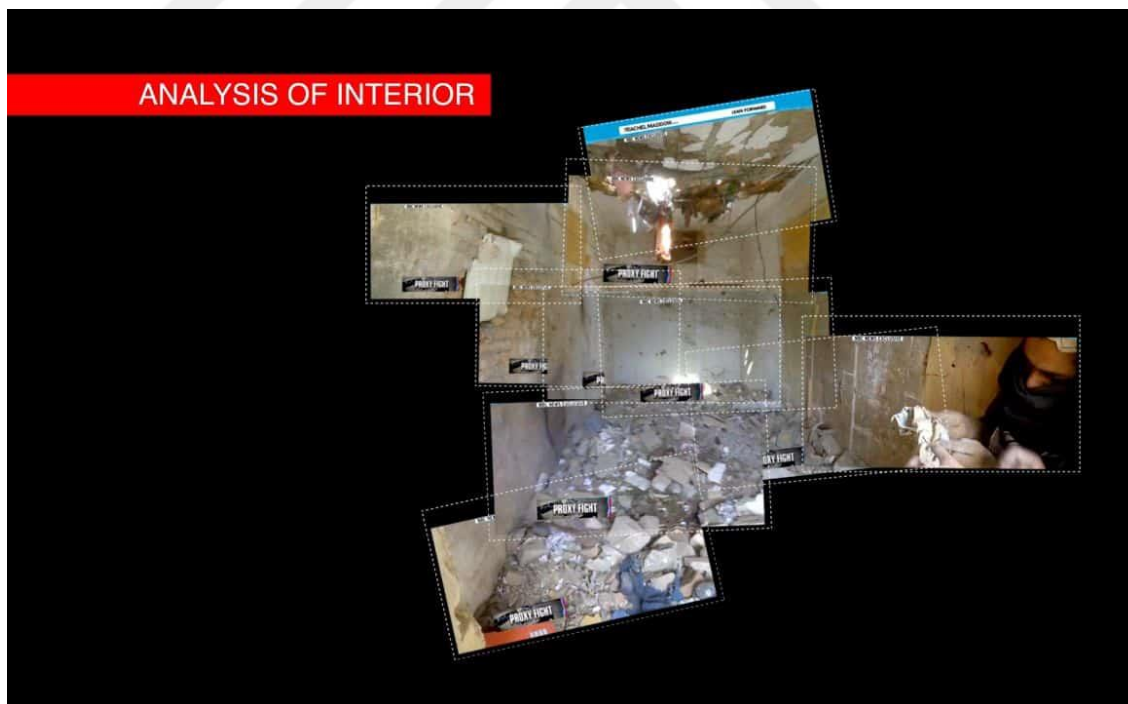


Figure 3.8: *Drone Strike in Miranshah*, Composite image of the interior, from stills from MSNBC footage, Forensic Architecture; 2012. (Source: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drone-strike-in-miranshah>)

Pakistan has long been subject to drone attacks by the US. With the leaked footage of one of the devastating attacks on March 30, 2012, FA was investigating the matter. Juxtaposing the spatial records captured from a mobile phone, the moment of attack was re-enacted in 3D models (Figure 3.8). A panoramic collage, which is generated through found images, shows the distinct architectural signature with a small hole on the roof shows the entrance of the missile through the building. When the clues were compared with the publicly available satellite images, it was shown that the traces were smaller than the 50x50cm pixel size, in Weizman's words, "the threshold of detectability" (2017). The relation between the pixel's size and the missile's dimensions missile was enough to hide the destruction. However, the 'contrary evidence' revealed by the superimposition of images showed not only the spatial trace of destruction, but also the concealing power of the politics at work. Spatial re-enactment through 3D models, and information gathered through witnesses from the ground re-visualize the asymmetrical destruction held by the US that mainly focuses on 'spatial destructions' (Weizman, 2017). The architecture is shown in the form of documentary, which seeks performative variations rather than only circulating images through public domains. "It registers the effect of force fields, it contains or stores these forces in material deformations, and, with the help of other mediating technologies and the forum, it transmits this information further" (Weizman, 2014, p. 15).

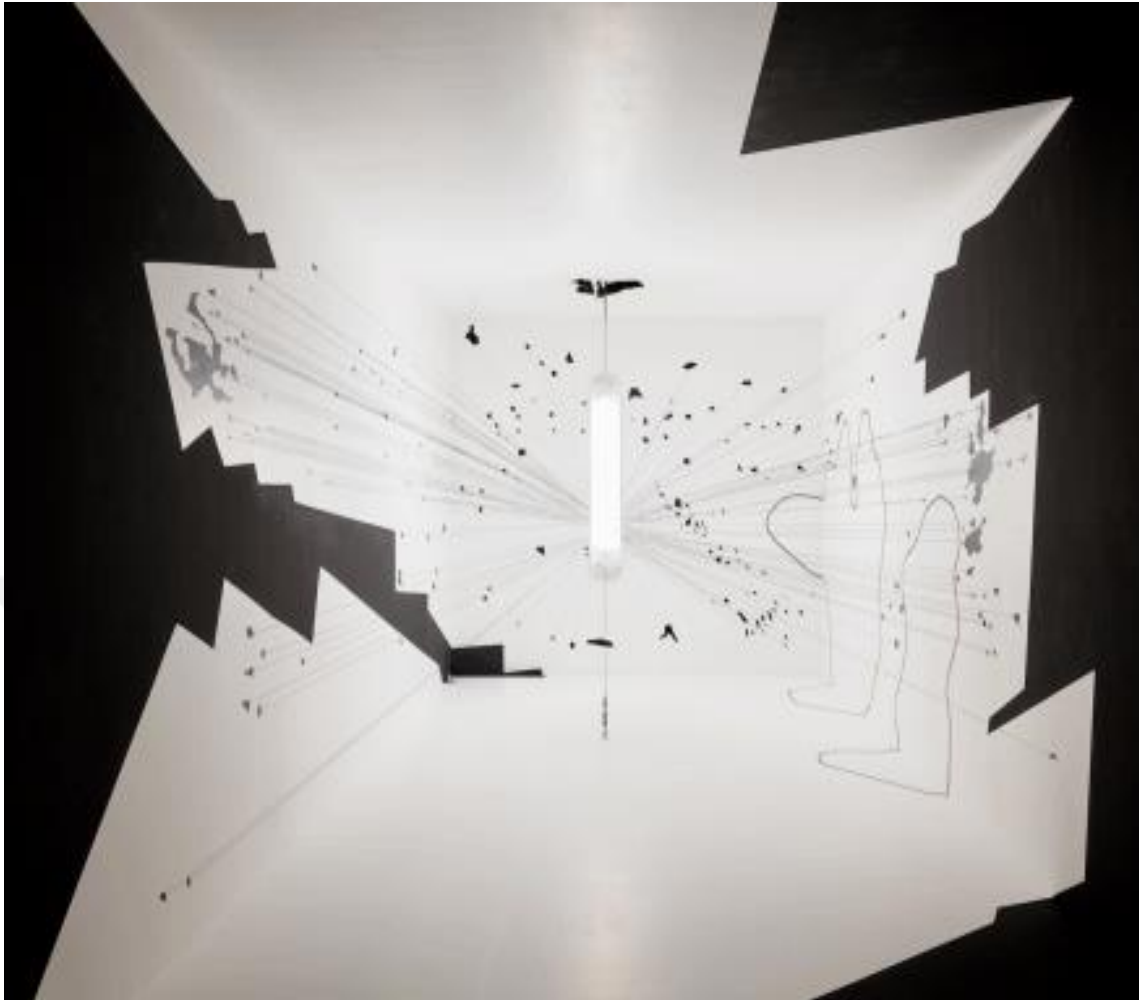


Figure 3.9: Digital model for “Drone Strike In Miranshah,” For 2016’s exhibition in Mexico City (Source: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drone-strike-in-miranshah>)

From FA’s optical approach on architecture, the analysis and outputs are taken place in biennials and exhibitions (Figure 3.9). Making results and their images public through art has also been a way of discussing objectivities, hidden subjectivities, and destructive image technologies that are considered unspeakable. Tracing the invisible, for the unspoken, in the case of FA, leads new agencies through images that have value in evidence.

In the age of drone warfare, the extent of destruction and the reign of the sky are meticulously concealed. Even a satellite image, accepted as evidence of objectivity, directly renders reality. But a fracture starts here; where and 'how detailed' objectivity

will appear is a political issue. In the words of John Tagg, "privileged apparatuses within the given social formation" (Tagg, 1988, p.189). They are so-called direct and objective renderings of a piece of land administered and allowed by political authorities. The established knowledge and truth can be partial, pixelable, or missing in the image. The invisible one is the ignored or secreted. Here, politically unadvantageous geographical conflicts and very secret central information agencies bear the same fate on the map: pixelated.

Tracing the politically 'partial' knowledge leads to more questions about speaking that way of partial witnessing. In the *Drone Shadows* series (2012a), James Bridle draws outlines of drones on 1:1 scaled representations on several urban pavements. Where he brings drones back to cities and makes visible their sizes, measurements, and shapes, without their physical destructions, allowing for a subjective encounter with the political discourses they produce. The project started with a screenshot, where Bridle traces a drone's shadow on Google's satellite images captured in Nevada, supplied by the US military (Figure 3.10).

The drone also, for me, stands in part for the network itself: an invisible, inherently connected technology allowing sight and action at a distance. Us and the digital, acting together, a medium and an exchange. But the non-human components of the network are not moral actors, and the same technology that permits civilian technological wonder, the wide-eyed futurism of the New Aesthetic and the unevenly-distributed joy of living *now*, also produces obscurantist "security" culture, ubiquitous surveillance, and robotic killing machines. This is a result of the network's inherent illegibility, its tendency towards seamlessness and invisibility, from code to "the cloud". Those who cannot perceive the network cannot act effectively within it, and are powerless. The job, then, is to make such things visible. (Bridle, 2012b)



Figure 3.10: A drone shadow captured from Google Earth Satellite View, 2012

(Source: <https://jamesbridle.com/works/drone-shadow-002>)

Usually, we are not familiar with the images of military drones without the scenes of destruction, warfare, etc. In their representations, we are more accustomed with what they can do and their power on destruction. They are much like invisible machines, can be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. By bringing the outlines of an invisible drone to the city and ground level, Bridle recalls the hidden world of drones on the ground scale. The invisible and omnipresent presence of drones has been carried on the city scale, as an ordinary stain on the ground or a ghost descended from the sky. It is an encounter with the hidden violence of military drones. The counters of drones, again, are readable from an aerial perspective, but on the ground level their hugeness is integrated into daily life with physical intervention on the ground.

The way Bridle put drones as a debatable object by infiltrating into the image of everyday life, is about persistently making visible the knowledge of the implicit (Figure 3.11). The subjective approach of placing the drone's shadow in many capital cities, establishes a temporal relationship between the ground that the drone sees as a target and the ongoing daily life (Figure 3.12).



Figure 3.11: *Drone Shadow 002*. James Bridle, 2012, Istanbul. Commissioned for the Istanbul Design Biennale (Source: <https://jamesbridle.com/works/drone-shadow-002>)



Figure 3.12 Tracing the *Drone Shadow* series in Google Maps Street Views. (Source: Screenshots from GSV in order 2014, 2018, 2019, and 2020)

The ultimate goal of these practices is not only subverting the operation which is already accustomed to. Subversion - as an act, situation, attempt, deception, or resistance - can be traced in different scales and senses in discussed practices. Trapped in a node of power and knowledge, the city and its physical environment are important to the narrative of all these works. From street-level CCTVs to satellites looking from the sky, space tends to become a 'surveillant object' where it begins to lose its visible and invisible layers to form a singular, dazzling, and so-called genuine image. A fracture indicates the other and counter ways to encountering with these images. Making a critique of them, their effect, their enchantment, or their operation behind; can pave the way for possible coexistences and encounters between vision technologies and society. The city space is not only the object of aerial gaze but also a getaway where resistance against the gaze can also take place. Hiding and tracing, as common pursuits in these examples, are tools for defining subjectivity with playing the asymmetries of visualities. Through an aesthetic decipherment or an artistic intervention, whatever is on the ground about time, space, and body seeps into these images from above. Making these fractures visible shows the possibilities of alternative forms of production of knowledge which not formed by a singular policy.

4. LOOKING AT ISTANBUL FROM ABOVE

Not accepting aerial perspectives only what they offer us to see, but also tracing counter ways of penetrating into them; de-codes the militaristic way of knowledge production into a revealing and performative practices of knowing – which offers not one-sided top-down information about any spatial data. Thus, it can be an act of resisting while revealing both of ‘the top-to-down productions,’ whether for urban planning or ways of seeing. Istanbul, in 2022, correlates complex relationships with ‘top-to-down’ urban politics and restricted public spaces. As the image of the city from above gets ostentatious day by day, the ground becomes disembodied from what the power desires to see and demonstrate. This chapter aims to scale the politics of visibility from an aerial perspective to Istanbul, Galatasaray Square.

The *Nobese Players* (2006) and *Agoraphobia* (Eviner, 2021) are selected as two different modes of seeing/looking at Galatasaray Square in different temporalities. From the aesthetic-politic action of *Nobese Players*, whose counter-surveillance practices were constructed performative beings of becoming public in the square, to İnci Eviner’s single-channel video, *Agoraphobia*, that points to the confined square detached from ‘the public’; an altering square in last 20 years and its optical relationships are focused. The way artistic practices produce potential communities and subjectivities through the relationship between the city and public space will be discussed.

4.1 Asymmetries of Visibility: Galatasaray Square

Galatasaray Square, one of Istanbul's most crucial public spaces, has been surrounded by barricades for a long time. It is an important node of Istiklal Street, leading to Taksim Square at one end and Tünel Square at the other; it has become a political scene for a while. The square, which hosted many important counter-movements, protests, and marches in its history, is a prohibited public sphere today. In Galata and Taksim, where political turmoil is most felt in Istanbul, the public space is being tried to be redefined with efforts to homogenize and naturalize it by authority.

The public space, where unexpected encounters turn into fear, has been shaped by various limitations and mechanisms of control together with modernity. According to Lefebvre's definition, the city is a space of encounter which allows for the possibilities of unpredictable events and potential cultural interventions (Lefebvre, 1991). As a moment of rupture in urban life, the political event gives a radical form to the public space and opens it to new possibilities (Batuman, 2019). Especially Taksim Square and Istiklal Street, the most valuable examples of counter-architectural forms, contradictory encounters, and possibilities of coexistence with the Gezi Protests, are tried to be homogenized day by day. One of the apparatuses of government is visibility, to maintain sovereignty as well as control and surveillance.

What is visible and, therefore, dominant in one of the city's most political squares is critical. Galatasaray Square has been engraved in our memories with the sit-ins of the Saturday Mothers (Cumartesi Anneleri) and the actions of dozens of different rights defenders. Whereas today's-built image is an empty square under a blockade, it produces a new object of fear in the public square with agoraphobic practices. The fact that the square - where witnessing, remembering, and reminding creates a performative public space- is surrounded by barricades today, is also a reminder of the restrictive power of the government over public spaces. David Harvey (2013) mentions, public spaces that were privatized and closed now wholly prevent people from having political dialogues and being a part of the public as a political body. Galatasaray Square and many other public spaces create space for 'possible encounters and protests' and are also subject to closure by the government. Aiming to restrict public spaces to limit the masses, the government's method for Galatasaray Square is to surround the square with barricades, thus preventing access. The fear of mass coexistence on the power front transforms the square into the spatial equivalent of fear over time. The demonstration of Saturday Mothers, which was shown as the cause of the barricades, has had an important place in collective memory since 1995. Saturday Mothers gather regularly in Galatasaray Square to search for their 'disappeared' relatives. They began a sit-in for the first time in May 1995 in front of Galatasaray High School. In time, these meetings became repeated every Saturday and were the most extended protest for the Turkish human rights movement. In order to draw attention to unidentified murders and disappearances in custodies, they were

revealing their visibility as a form of ‘protest.’¹¹ The gatherings were suspended for the first time in 1999, due to the heavy police responses and increased violence. Gatherings started to continue in the square in 2009 but were banned by the Beyoğlu District Governor's Office in 2018, the 700th Saturday of gatherings. And then the square, completely surrounded by police vehicles and barricades, turned into a prohibited public space that has not been physically accessible and cannot be used publicly since 2018. This confinement, which initially evoked an extraordinary and even a criminalized situation, gradually became one of the usual, everyday images of the square, Istiklal, and even Taksim. The daily life that flows next to it continues to flow in a way that has internalized the barricades and the fear of the square.

4.2 Building a Public Space Through Counter-Action, Nobese Players

One of the many social movements that took place in Galatasaray Square was the *Nobese Festivali*, a series of gatherings in public spaces conducted by Nobese Oyuncuları (Nobese Players), aimed to draw attention to the increasing number of security cameras in Istanbul.

According to a research held by UK-based technology company Comparitech about surveillance camera statistics among the most populated cities, Istanbul ranks 42nd among the top 50 cities with 109,000 cameras in 2020. The early attempts of city monitoring systems in Turkey were laid in Istanbul in 1996. The MOBESE (Mobile Electronic System Integration) system covering the entire Istanbul started to work in 2005. Shortly after the MOBESE (CCTV) cameras began to be used in Istanbul, various reactions emerged on the urban scale. Nobese Festivali was one of the most notable reactions in public space. Conducted by Nobese Players, they are inspired from one of the most

¹¹ By their forms and tactics of gatherings of Saturday Mothers, Galatasaray Square became the spatial address of ‘becoming visible’. The silent form of the sit-ins allowed what was meant to be expressed away from the polarizing language of politics. (Göker, 2021) The public image of becoming visible was an important stop to discuss the relation of potential of public space in order to become an image or a reminder. Gatherings that became a ritual with their regular repetition has gained a place in the public memory with the permanent image that infiltrates into the everyday life of Istiklal Street. They began a sit-in for the first time in May 1995, in front of Galatasaray High School. In time, these meetings became repeated every Saturday and were the most extended protest for the Turkish human rights movement. In order to draw attention to unidentified murders and disappearances in custodies, they were revealing their visibility as a form of ‘protest.’

influential counter-actions, Surveillance Camera Players, which was a group of situationist activists gathered in New York City in 1996 and adapted several theatre plays to perform in front of the surveillance cameras (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 SCP's play, *God's Eyes Here On Earth* on CCTV. St. Patrick's Cathedral, Manhattan, 2000. (Source: <http://www.notbored.org/god's-eyes6.jpg>)

Nobese Players has come together in various public places since 2005 and started to perform various performances in front of security cameras. At first, the players who used Galatasaray Square, Tünel Square, and Mis Sokak spread to many squares and even different cities. Their actions were based on simple and playful tactics, such as looking at a security camera with a mirror, spraying paint through the camera, etc. One of the most visible tactics was to perform in front of security cameras (Figure 4.2). They introduce themselves as ones who are uncomfortable with being watched, trying to keep every move under control, non-violent, on the ground, with broad participation, and adopting the method of continuous action and making instant decisions in public space. Being visible is a tactic for the Nobese Players, who react to a new step taken in terms of visibility

policies for the city as even more visible. In their words, to be visible is to be observed, to be defined, to be named, to be classified. The power-mass does not find it sufficient to be visible in order to see/watch, it also makes it necessary to want and desire to be visible (Nobese Players, 2006)¹².



Figure 4.2 Nobese Players in Galatasaray Square (Source: izleniyoruz.net)

Their performances not only turned the security officers watching the cameras in the security rooms into spectators, but also created a space for unexpected encounters and togetherness in the public space they were in. The Nobese Players, which soon afterward turned into a festival and spread to different public spaces of the city simultaneously, were a kind of practice of being together in the public sphere. It has turned into a playful and situationist performance against a 'new' and 'above' eye in the public sphere by performing its counter-actions by manipulating the camera's gaze and purpose. The

¹² A brief description from their website, *izleniyoruz.net*. Translated by author.

actions of Nobese Players were subjected to police violence over time and some of the group members were got arrested because of ‘disturbing public order.’

Surveillance, including dozens of different vision apparatuses in our daily practices since 2005; has become an accepted phenomenon for the public sphere and a fragmented city image that expands its meaning day by day. As Koskela points, “The amount of the visual representations expands as surveillance cameras produce real-time simulations of the city and turn everyday life into a theatrical spectacle. The intensity of the surveillance camera material circulation has led to the situation where news is packaged as entertainment and entertainment is news” (Koskela, 2002, p.305). Today, security cameras, which have turned into a customary vision over a place, have become a part of the public space and even a witness of ‘trust.’ The advancing technology of ways of seeing and the new, extraordinary perspectives proposes to mask the violence of surveillance and derive a kind of entertainment, marketing, and economy form with cities and how they are represented by an eye from above.

4.3 Fear of Public Space, *Agoraphobia*

Inci Eviner’s single-channel video, *Agoraphobia* (2021), centers upon Galatasaray Square and brings visible and fictional spatial narratives together. The video produced for the *This Place/Burası* exhibition was prepared in cooperation with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat (YKKS), and exhibited at YKKS.¹³ Eviner, reveals the different temporalities of the daily life of Galatasaray Square, from an aerial and cross-sectional scene.

Three-minute-long looping video is split into two parts. Above is an aerial view of Galatasaray Square, reminiscent of the security camera recording. Below, sectional views of an enclosed space that evokes ‘any place’ is located. In the aerial view, the outside of the square is frozen. In the square, which is physically frozen, the only trace that can be followed, is time by the shadows on the move. The section view, which is familiar at first

¹³Kevser Güler is the curator of the exhibition, which was shown at Yapı Kredi Culture and Art between 21 September 2021 – 6 March 2022.

glance with its closeness and ‘anyness,’ includes several repetitions of a conflict or a reconciliation. In the middle of the video, a monkey slowly across on the verge of these two different views, divides the sensual of closure with the unexpected (Figure 4.3). The square, where barricades have blocked pedestrian access since 2018, opens up the possibilities of ‘access’ on vertical layers in Eviner’s video. In the video, she brings together the objective image of the square and the fictional narratives of space through subconscious images and points out the power relations over a restricted public space, the daily life of the square, and the unconscious.



Figure 4.3 *Agoraphobia* by Inci Eviner, 2021 (Source: Screenshot from *Agoraphobia*)

In Eviner's video, the square is divided into two; the square is framed by barricades and the surrounding, Istiklal Street. In the street, the flow of daily life is frozen. In contrast, the 'forbidden' everyday life of the emptied square can be followed by the changing projection of the sun in time. The contrast between apathy inside the barricades and the vitality outside, it finds its response as a kind of getting used to, accepting, and forgetting about the politics blocking the square. The view from above, which contrasts with the abstracted square and the street visible, reveals the different temporalities of life, flowing, and standing still.

The uncanny section views placed under the square imply fear with subconscious figures and objects. There are scenes and phobias of a confined life in a completely closed space, as if tucked into tunnels. A dead-end argument between two people, a flag and flagman, a half body, animal masks, and the sculpture imprisoned between four walls is like taking a journey into the hidden subconscious of what is about the memory of the square. A monkey strolling across the threshold between the square and sections; reminds us of our fears derived from the square and publicity. While acting as a mediator between these two disjointed places, the monkey also carries our crooked relationship between the public space and the private. The statue, which symbolizes the 50th anniversary of the republic, was designed by Şadi Çalık and took its place in the square in 1975. The sculpture symbolizes progress and breakthroughs with the futuristic image of stainless-steel forms reaching the sky; it turns into a linear monument in the middle of the square. Today, with the barricades surrounding the statue, a forensic case image is added to the invisibility fate of the monument in the image of the city.

As Paul Connerton (2009) refers to the relationship between monuments and forgetfulness, the danger of oblivion leads to the construction of monuments, and the existence of monuments leads to forgetfulness. Monuments that enable us to remember the past, a historical achievement, or a social breakthrough also preserve it. "If giving monumental shape to what we remember is to discard the obligation to remember, that is because memorials permit only some things to be remembered and, by exclusion, cause others to be forgotten." (Connerton, 2009, p.29) Today, the sculptural alignment of the police barricades framing the square may also reveal an unusual form of monumentalization by symbolizing oblivion, intimidation, and prohibition of the public sphere. The way we witness this sculpture from Eviner's video also questions how a monument (or reminder as Connerton defines it) loses its meaning and turns into space and a monument of autocracy. The sculpture, which creates an image of threat in the flowing daily life of İstiklal, appears before us as imprisoned between four walls in the sections of the subconscious. Çalık's monument, which is almost 'invisible' even though it has been there since 1975, emerges in new and surveillant forms of visibility, which is re-located in Eviner's fictional spatial narrative.

Agorophia, which creates a fracture in the bird's eye view of the square with the uncanny encounter created by the subconscious sections, refers to the tension between outside-inside, square-street, public-private, and the fear that this tension builds, especially in Galatasaray Square. A fissure in the steady and aerial image of the square as imitating the surveillance apparatus that watches over the city and the knowledge it imposes; also reveals our distorted relationship with politics visible in the public sphere. “What is truly political is, in short, a different way of seeing, a different way of staging the matters at hand, an intervention into a given order of the sensible” (Diken & Tuncer, 2019, p. 686). As Diken and Tuncer point to the ‘politicise’ through Eviner’s videos of *Harem*(2009) and *Parliament*(2010); what may be politicized in *Agorophia* is the juxtaposition of visible and invisible memory (or knowledge) of a square from a new layer of witnessing. It is about being paralyzed by the fears that a temporally and spatially 'frozen' public space makes us forget or even ignore.

5. CONCLUSION

Perceiving the city through the vision technologies that are distanced from ground scale; problematizes photography's relationship with knowledge and representation from a spatial, temporal, and, therefore, public framework. The top-down images are on the verge of knowing as it shows everything and nothing at once. It may not be the knowledge itself, but it will be the knowledge that can be produced from it. In her article "On the Intervention of Photographic Meaning" (1975), Allan Sekula puts comments and reviews on what makes a photograph objective and communicative. Communication, by its nature, is tendentious. The communication handled through the photographic messages, again by their nature, oscillates between an immediate representation of the real world and what that representation (hence the world) should be implied. "However, the definition also implies that the photograph is an 'incomplete' utterance, a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability. That is, the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context determined" (Sekula, 1975a, p.37).

Aerial images are located at the bends of this binary divide. In contrast, it maintains an absolute and abstracted view from a distance that everything is 'clear, together and obvious' and reconstructs life on the ground. Sekula puts forward that it is possible to formulate this position as "a photograph communicates through its association with some hidden, or implicit text; it is this text, or system of hidden linguistic propositions, that carries the photograph into the domain of readability" (Sekula, 1975a, p.37). Readability, which puts architectural presence as evidence in aerial photography, is an action taken by the power that holds it to determine the context and potential of the communication it offers. The 'incomplete' discourse of photography reminds the existence of implicit expressions it will suggest as well as the 'correct readings' that push it to objective truth. What Thomas Keenan proposes to say is "political maneuvering" (Keenan, 2014, p.66) rather than objectivity that is resulted from 'correct reading' of the evidence (it is the aerial view within the scope of this thesis). Aerial photography, which is inherently considered objective since it is distanced from human subjectivity with a vertical perspective, not only constructs more 'readable' ground for knowledge production over a territory, but it

also decides what and who can be readable in those images due to its political nature. On the city scale, it is governmentality, inclusion, and exclusion, ordering by destroying that the authorities establish through knowing and seeing. This hidden violence, concealed by the illusion of objectivity, is the political apparatus for controlling, disciplining, and ordering.



Figure 5.1: How does the AI object detector see *panorama.istanbul*?

(Source: A screenshot from the *panorama.istanbul* read by an online object detector ai <https://iashin.ai/detector>)

Can a city be read through the image captured from above? Before discussing its possibility, it aids to look at how the machines of 'reader' and how the codes of that machines are attempted to read. CCTV monitoring security rooms have been replaced by various artificial bits of intelligence that work for object detection on images. These systems, which are believed to be more objective in that they do not include human interpretation, reveal the basic grid of 'reading' through the categorization of similarities. These systems are actively used on the city scale, in order to detect 'unexpected' situations

which are categorized as dangerous. Where the reading and interpreting of these images are left to the machines, the agency of technology is also conducted through those political apparatuses. Although a systematic reading cannot see anything exactly, it tries to categorize the visible, which is enough to take action (Figure 5.1). Returning to the question asked by De Certeau; "What is the source of this pleasure of seeing the whole, of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts" (de Certeau, 1984, p.92) "the pleasure of seeing the whole"; today, turns into a pleasure not only looking for capturing the whole but also a pleasure for categorization and separation through the image of 'whole' which machines of readers are also mimicking.

Artistic gestures, representations & interventions, aesthetic-political actions, and counter-forensics can mediate objectivities produced by/because of/through authorities with their subjectivities. They can defeat their undeniable mechanism of truth, uncover their hidden operations, and contend for the visibility of opposing possibilities. And thus, it may point to alternative methods of knowledge production that not only resists to asymmetries of looking from top to bottom but superposes the contrary layers between space and time. This point, where aerial visibility begins to be interrupted in the frame of an image or directly in city ground, defines the 'fracture' mentioned for this research. It is more about interrupting a moment, than a physical crack, thus, suggesting a counter-action as hiding, tracing, and seeping which are chosen to be examined for this research. What is attempted to be meant by interruption is a momentary state of fragmentation, division, or inclusion into a concrete totality. Thus, it is an encounter. It is the penetration of a subjective stance or experience into something absolute, defined, and with borders. Thus, it is a visible encounter between the objective and the subjective. Like any encounter, it reasons to a temporal compromise or conflict with the unfamiliar. Thus, it is an encounter between the objective and the subjective, which can generate not general but "situated knowledges," other spaces, and possibilities.

"Situated knowledges," a term coined by Donna Haraway (1988), expresses an attempt to get out of the objective-relativist dichotomy where she is placing vision through the feminist discourse. By its very nature, objectivity is perceived as a "view from above, from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p.589). It is a disembodied perspective that contradicts

the very nature of embodiment in all vision systems. It transcribes the marked bodies, places, and situations. While holding power to show them to others or not, it also decides how to represent them. Referring to disembodied vision, "the god trick of seeing," which means the illusion of dismissing the agent of knowledge not only produces objective, all-seeing, absolute images but also seeps into everyday life and shows as mundane.

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. Here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position, not of identity, but of objectivity, that is, partial connection. (Haraway, 1988, p. 586)

Contrary to what the view from above claims, we can discuss the pretending situations of their vision technologies, as their way of seeing can never be completely objective. Partial connection, pointed out by Haraway, reminds the gigapixel images of panoramas which claims the unlimited and uncropped way of representing the city. It reminds the partial nature of even the single, whole, dominant, and disembodied image, which is put together from tons of tiny different images, and fragments. Unlike aerial photographs produced by many other vision technologies, gigapixel panorama images look complete, perfect, and objective more than ever before, as they promise 360-degree vision.



Figure 5.2: A general view from *panorama.istanbul* (Source: a screenshot from website)



Figure 5.3: Doubled-humans of *panorama.istanbul*. (Source: screenshot from *panorama.istanbul*)

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 are screenshots captured from the same angle of viewpoint in different ranges of zooms that approaches from above to the scale of ground. Figure 5.3 is not a camera fault nor a technical accident. It is the partial nature of seeing everything, the illusion of showing so-called everything. Similar to Google's Street View, which also uses 360-degree images, the machine of vision already edits and gathers in pursuit of showing everything. They are both products of technical processes and demanding constructions that stitch the detached moments, spaces, and bodies as a singular and united

representation. The repetitions of moving/lively pieces of that image remind dissociation between the city, ground, everyday life, and the way it is represented partially and not completely. It is an effort to represent a whole that does not actually exist. With a subjective presumption that 'all' possibilities can never be brought together in a single image frame, and even that places, times, people, and situations cannot be captured/recorded/represented 'exactly and precisely' by any technological optics.

When we look at the tools and methods used by the state authorities and practices of counter-interventions, it is possible to see parallels in how they approach an aerial view as a set of data or an object of knowledge. As in Forensic Architecture, where the machine imagery turns into counter-narratives, their findings and investigations follow the visual path of analysis and tactics evoke the way politics are also operating. In the rough outline, they both approach the spatial and architectural organization as a set of data and seek to decompose, resolve, understand, and therefore represent. This is not the desire to construct the 'most rightful' objectivity. Contrary to the way of knowing derived from ambiguous objectivity, it proposes an alternative method of producing knowledge that makes room for subjectivities, makes them visible, and comes together with them. Objectivity is desired to be produced not through 'one' but through 'many of' which may overlap or contradict each other. This leads to new questions about visual technologies as the common ground where many opposing processes coexist on the same basis of mechanical functioning. Like in the history of aerial photography and satellite images, both the violent and repressive operation of the authoritarian and the way to resist them, to understand and act upon them, exist at the same common ground. However, they leave from this common ground and turn to different and contrary extremes.

At the city scale, these image technologies are associated with space, power, and knowledge. The public space is controlled and categorized through surveillance technologies, where the power is operated through a distanced eye. Since this is related with the pursuit of 'homogenization' and 'normalization' of the public space; what is unexpected, coincidental, and unknown turns into danger, and into a 'forbidden one.' These images are not only a tool for the functioning of power. Contrary to the irregular and unpredictable nature (where the potential is) of the public space; they have already

infiltrated everyday life and the way we perceive it. But a city, anyhow, is a space of encounters, possibilities, and coincidences. Whether under the apparatuses of surveillance or illusionist vision technologies, a city and public space cannot be reduced to a representation which operated through politics. Within these biased representations and a way of seeing constrained by the illusion of aerial perspective, artistic subjectivity and forms of aesthetic intervention can be the potential of re-discussing the pre-given frames of public space, engaging in while preserving subjectivities and resisting them. Aesthetic strategies on the counter-imaginings, as exemplified in the cases of two different attempts to disrupt the concrete narrative of public space and Galatasaray Square, while revealing how power relations affect our relationship with the spatial, it also makes us think about possible ways to combat them in different forms and scales by reminding the sensory, hidden, temporal and so, subjective.

An attempt to follow a fracture through that images can be a way to subvert their coded grids. It can create a temporary situation that gives space to encounters. At the urban scale, it can lead to an approach to the knowledge of the public which has been tried to be cornered, controlled, and erased. While many regions are shown in detail, in *panorama.istanbul*, the viewing angle and image quality chosen for the Galata neighborhood is partial. It doesn't hide anything, but it doesn't even let us look far enough compared to other viewpoints it sees, where is more physically homogenized to represent (Figure 5.4). It is a partial, dazzling, and fascinating view and enough to hide the problems on the ground.



Figure 5.4: A view from Galata Tower (Source: screenshot from the *panorama.istanbul*)

The fracture, as used to describe this ambiguous and subjective situation, leads to a disruption in embodied narratives about the city. In Ranciere's terms, it encompasses forms of experience that generate new political subjectivities. In the political sense, subjectification takes place through sharing the sensible which is excluded from the sphere of authority (Ranciere, 2004). Interrupting the usual course of events in the public space, disruption, not only represents but also intertwines with a specific conflict between political and social situations. As Ranciere points out, "what artists offer us is not a rectification of information but modes of sensual presentation that break the same frames of representation" (Ranciere, 2012, p. 288).

An objective image of an event, space, and city makes it possible to analyze it. It makes it possible to be spoken about, defined, embodied, and thus politically intervened. Today, we live in an age where these images and what they spoke about completely intervene in our everyday lives, whether with media tools or directly political operations; how we potentially relate to them is important to our understanding of their operations behind/by/through them.

The way to deal with them is to stubbornly place what belongs to time and space in this sequence of images. Seeking new tools, methods, and tactics to juxtapose and interpret them; allows us to perceive them without a prescribed authoritarian perspective. And this; it may constitute a threshold, a state of being on the threshold, the potential of the threshold, and may indicate the presence of a threshold against the bordered notions.



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