

Deeper than Oblivion

Trauma and Memory in Israeli Cinema

Edited by
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For our partners, Alex and Oded

“Walking through walls”: Documentary Film and Other Technologies of Navigation, Aspiration, and Memory

Janet Walker

*There are always holes in the wall for us
to evade and the improbable to slip in.*

Siegfried Kracauer (1969; 1995)¹

Availing myself of the Google Earth geographic information program, I “fly to” the modern city of Modi’in, Israel from my study in Santa Barbara, California.² The virtual globe spins below me as I navigate across North America and the Atlantic Ocean, and on across North Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. I arrive with ease, unhampered by features of the landscape and borderlines, and untroubled by stony remains in the vicinity of my destination. Yet if I look around as I settle down to earth, I can see the regular contours of planned communities and patches of forested land. And if I turn on Google Earth’s “Borders and Labels” layer, I notice Modi’in’s proximity to the 1949 Armistice Agreement Line otherwise known as the Green Line demarcating Israel from the occupied West Bank.

As a US citizen who is Jewish and a documentary scholar, I approach this land with respect for the challenges of inhabiting, filming, thinking and writing about, and moving in and around this troubled region. Keenly aware that I have much to learn (and that there are things I will never know or will know only differently and from the outside³) about how residents’ lives are affected by the struggle for territory and the debates about the legalities and ethics of Israeli state policies and actions, I proceed.⁴

This chapter aims to explore documentary film and other technologies of navigation via a “spatial turn” in trauma studies for which I advocate as a pursuit of spatial media studies, itself a sub-field of the discipline of film and media studies.⁵ Inspired by the documentary *9 Star Hotel* (Ido Haar, 2007, Israel)—about the lives of Palestinian workers whose progress across the landscape is infinitely more treacherous than my virtual touring—and specific layers imported into Google Earth, the essay will discuss how each of these texts, in its respective mobilization of certain “transference sites,”⁶ exemplifies a flexible spatial practice that unblocks passages, remembers, and possibly even reconciles traumatic space and place⁷ in Israel/Palestine. A corresponding strategy of spatialized documentary film analysis is needed, I believe. This chapter therefore strives to develop both the geopolitical implications of site-seeing as a documentary practice and the epistemological implications of mapping as a mode of critical reading.⁸

Blocking/Transference

Set literally at the roadblocks or checkpoints where people wait and are detained, and from which many are turned back, the documentaries Anat Zanger analyzes in her essay “Blind Space: Roadblock Movies in the Contemporary Israeli Film,”⁹ among others one could nominate,¹⁰ depict the tension between the Israeli effort to block or control movement across a given space and the arduous and often frustrated attempts by Palestinians to cross or pierce these boundaries for purposes of family, work, or medical treatment. Such films may be read as sympathetic to the petitioners, and in this way resonant—if not necessarily in accordance—with the Palestinian nationalist call for open borders and right of return. In the Israeli roadblock cycle, would-be return is “suspended”¹¹ in time and space; enacted as an extended arabesque of dispossession over and against the Palestinians’ undesired or unachievable alternatives of centripetal assimilation into Israeli society or centrifugal scattering into the diaspora. Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi identify an alternate strategy in the many recent Palestinian films dealing with blocked access: that of “striv[ing] to reconstruct an *imaginary* harmonious space out of the fragmented blocked one” (my emphasis).¹²

Even films that do represent bodily return to the spots in Israel from which families were expelled in 1948 tend to render time as suspended between the

past and the future, and space as inaccessible and frozen. This is due in large part to the fact that these “returns” are, by necessity of war and state politics, merely temporary visits or spatially approximate. In *Biram* (*Ashes*, Rima Essa, 2001, Palestine/Israel), for example, the filmmaker and her mother walking on the road pass a sign pointing to the Israeli Kibbutz Bar’am established on the land of Biram. “They demolished the house and stole all the bricks,” we hear said. “So we would have no hope of returning. But we never lost hope. Even if I’m dead, I’ll return . . . Either on our legs, or on someone’s shoulders.” The family are Israeli citizens living 4 kilometers away in Jish, but they must elude the guard to pick olives from their former orchard. *The Roof* (2006, Palestine/Germany) ends with the Palestinian-Israeli filmmaker Kamal Aljafari reminding his mother (presumably for the upteenth time) that it would feel “strange” to finish remodeling the half-built second story of the house where the family has lived for a generation since finding refuge there in 1948, because it “doesn’t belong to us.”

But what if we were to regard the protagonists’ and the filmmakers’ trajectories in these films as productively complicating the topography of Israel/Palestine? With all due respect for the historical and hard realities of expulsion, expropriation, confinement, and agonizing delay—and for the reading of the roadblock film as a critique of blocked space—what if we were to flex our critical muscles and lift from critical human geography a de-essentialized notion of place that comprehends features of the landscape as both material in nature and necessarily produced through existing and evolving structures of knowledge and power?¹³

Zanger brilliantly reconceptualizes Israel’s roadblocks and checkpoints, and the filmic representation thereof, as an infrastructure of contact and mixing. “Because [the checkpoint] is located in an intermediate space that is neither on the one side nor on the other,” she writes, it “creates the effect of a meeting place between specific identities that it seeks to simultaneously define and conceal” (3). “Transference sites,” in Zanger’s reading, “insist on purity, distinction, and difference” while at the same time facilitating “contamination and mixing”: they are “imaginary, fluid, and always in the process of change” (4). For her, the roadblock movies are notable precisely for their ability to present these borderline physical locations as “heterogeneous meeting points located in the indeterminate space between surveillance, prejudice, and fears” (3). She therefore sees their potential for helping us resist instead of reiterate the impenetrability and fundamentalist sense of ownership of Israeli and Palestinian nationalism.

What would it mean, we may ask accordingly, deliberately to extend the liminal space Zanger identifies to the territory of Israel/Palestine; to see that broader whole and not just the checkpoints and border zones as a “transference site” of contestation and expressivity? And further, given the psychoanalytic dimension invoked by the word “transference” and lived as psychic suffering by people whose movements are hampered, what would it mean to understand the space of Israel/Palestine as “unassimilable” in Caruthian terms?

As I have discussed elsewhere,¹⁴ where Cathy Caruth has theorized trauma as a psychic structure of experience characterized by *temporal* “belatedness,” she couches her ideas in language that suggests a related *spatial* indeterminacy, multiplicity, or unassimilability. “The impact of a traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness,” Caruth has written, and “in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time,” and “in connection with another place and time.”¹⁵ The rich debate that Caruth’s influential work has inspired about psychic temporality and the historical truths and enigmas that traumatic experience arguably renders, has not been accompanied by sustained attention to these spatial aspects, present but less developed in her writing.¹⁶

Applying to the case of Israel/Palestine this notion of unassimilable space—the propensity of a traumatic event to pop up outside the lines, resist simple location, and/or reside in psychic space—we might effect a geopolitical move that resists, as does Zanger, the disjunctive spatiality through which the region is typically mapped. A more complicated cartography might be designed; one that accepts these spaces, including texts, as *already multiply inhabited*, if often by “irreconcilable cultural positions.”¹⁷

Mapping documentary

Several shot sequences of furious physical exertion lend structure to *9 Star Hotel*. We see young men running, dodging traffic, striving breathlessly uphill and down the rocky terrain, porting their belongings and flinging them across a river, seeking the cover of trees and of the night: “infiltrating” Israel (as indicated in the opening, explanatory title) from the Palestinian village of al-Midya to work in the construction of Jewish homes. In the first of these sequences, pine trees in the landscape form an undulating border between forest and scrub, the former constituting “the blooming desert” of Zionist discourse. A nearby settlement

(Hashmona'im) is introduced on the horizon. The movement of machines, men, and animals builds shot by shot until, suddenly, a group of men dash across a dirt road into the forest and, in the subsequent shot, hurry along a forest-adjacent path. The next shots are much closer. Now we see the faces of young men, including Muchamad, one of the two main protagonists. The camera trails in line and Ido Haar, acting as cinematographer as well as director, captures the strenuousness of the journey, and one man’s twisted ankle. Then, out of the forest onto the road, the group crosses toward the camera and in the next shot passes it by. There is a primal cinematic quality to this “chase film” construction, complete with successive obstacles and mishaps. Only, at this point in the film, the men are not literally being chased but rather exist in a condition of threatened, imminent capture. This is how they make their way to work.

Although we approach only a single checkpoint (the film is defined by the exertions of those seeking to avoid such spots), this area of a few square miles in which the film takes place is certainly a “transference site” of the most painful variety. Here pertain the paradoxical properties Zanger has noticed: of “purity, distinction, and difference” (these people chase after those people) and at the same time “contamination and mixing” (these people chase after those people). A tense mutuality pervades this space: catching interlopers occupies the police, while building the homes of the police and their fellow Israeli citizens occupies the laborers.

The area of transference may be construed as even wider if we consider not only what is actually seen in the film but also what we learn from observing the men’s cell phone connectivity and attending to their and the filmmaker’s geographic references. For example, in a second “sneaking in” sequence, Ahmad, a friend of Muchamad and the other person in the pair of young protagonists (the police call them “juveniles,” at least as translated from the Hebrew), has broken his ankle. He is caught and taken into custody. Shortly thereafter he is released to friends who deliver him for treatment to a hospital in Ramallah. From there he returns to his home in Yatta, and, after a short period of healing, he returns to work.¹⁸ In another sequence, Muchamad faints and is borne away to the hospital by a friend with a car. Previously, he had alluded to looking for work in Jerusalem.

That Ido Haar is a more privileged occupant of the place, is brought home in one particular moment in the film where security guards on bicycles patrolling a neighborhood of Modi'in under construction comment to Haar, in a kind of stage whisper, “We are looking for illegal workers.” Elsewhere in the film he stands

in plain sight on a road—paradoxically *less* visible to the border patrol than his Palestinian companions hiding in the forest for whom all eyes are peeled—as jeeps on patrol come and go. But Haar, as an Israeli citizen, is not permitted to visit Ramallah (though many of us go where we are not supposed to). I imagine his directionality vectors and Ahmad's crossing and diverging: Haar moves freely among Tel Aviv, Modi'in, Jerusalem, and his family home in the "no man's" land at the Green Line, and less freely into the West Bank; the workers move around the West Bank, including Ramallah, with sporadic, risky forays into Modi'in and elsewhere in Israel.

Objects too describe a spatially wide network—that of the global consumer culture in which the workers also participate. The primary-colored plastic ride-along toy that Ahmad salvages from town and displays inside one of the makeshift dwellings will likely end up in his home village (and for that matter, and to emphasize the expansive cartography that connects so many of us, I recognize that toy as one my own daughter enjoyed, complete with cracked steering wheel assembly and satisfying horn toot sound). It is the film's compositional and cinematographic expansiveness and multi-directionality, I submit, that makes of territory a transference site and, in Henri Lefebvre's terms, an imaginative and constructive "space of representation."

In fact the creative use of place and space in *9 Star Hotel* forms a limit case of documentary film in general. While contemporary documentary studies is founded on the project of exposing the narrative and also fictive elements of documentary film, the *spatial* referentiality of documentary in general is to my mind equally illusory, and, as with the spatial referentiality of trauma, equally neglected. Cinematography and montage in any documentary where people and environments are depicted—and even, perhaps especially, in site-specific documentaries where place matters profoundly—necessarily *constitute* the places and objects which the shooting and editing seem only to document mechanically and observationally.¹⁹

Curious about the material path taken by the Palestinian workers in *9 Star Hotel* and where they camped, I contacted Ido Haar. Thanks to his generosity, there ensued a series of Skype conversations and the creation of more than a dozen maps to describe these spaces, two of which are provided here as Figures 13.1 and 13.2.²⁰ As noted at the start, I envision this cartographic practice as a mode of textual analysis and spatialized epistemology in tune with critical human geography's foundational conviction that geography is more than "the charting of land masses, climate zones, elevations, bodies of water," and so

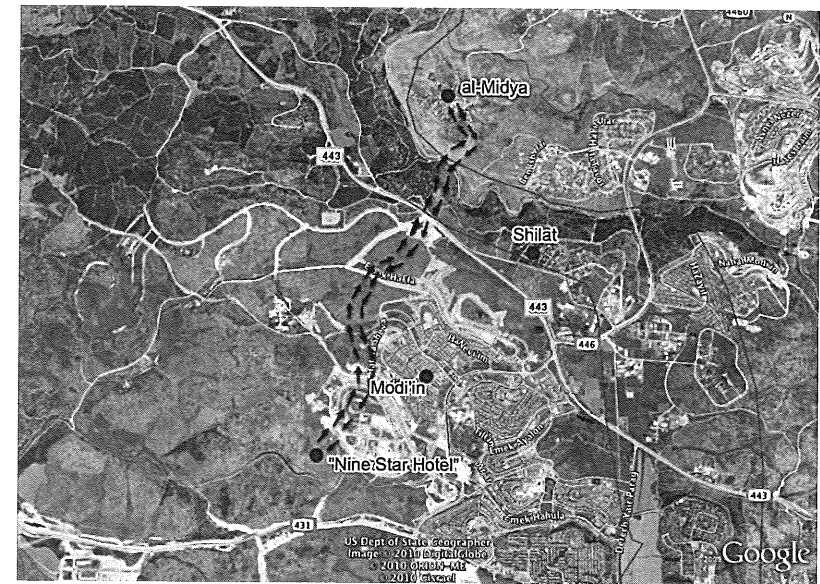


Figure 13.1 The assumed path of workers in and out of Israel; map by Greg Eliason and Janet Walker.

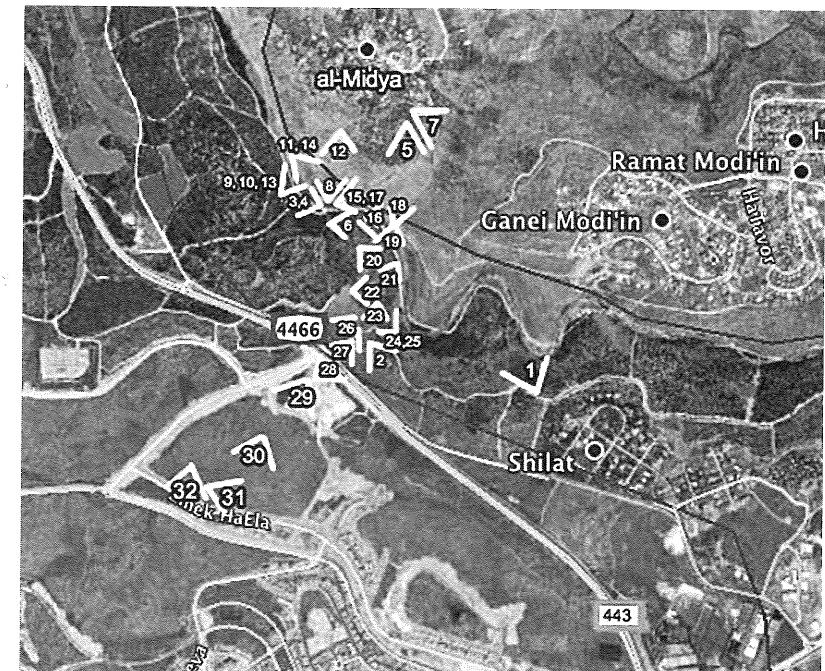


Figure 13.2 The construction of space through the first 32 shots of *9 Star Hotel*; map by Greg Eliason and Janet Walker.

on. The premise of this particular field of geography, emphasizes Irit Rogoff, acknowledging the inspiration of Henri Lefebvre, is that geography is “a body of knowledge and an order of knowledge which requires the same kind of critical theorization as any other body of knowledge.”²¹ As an anti-essentializing enterprise, therefore, critical human geography can disrupt “moralizing discourse[s]” about “who has the right to be where and how it ought to be so” and supposedly definitive cartographies.²² The ground beneath and beyond our feet, and in *9 Star Hotel*, is simultaneously real and imaginary; solid and constantly shifting; proprioceptively and representationally sensed; already claimed, and, felicitously, in Irit Rogoff’s term, “unhomed.” Definite spatial division may well be the fantasy of the divisive.

Instead of a defined scheme of screen direction in which movement into Israel is always, say, from the northeast to the southwest, and movement back to Palestine the reverse, the bodily movements we see in *9 Star Hotel* proceed in all six directions in relation to the cinematic frame, including away from the camera, toward it, and blowing right by (not to mention up hill and down which I have yet to figure out how to render in 3-D). Editorially as well, the shots that make up each sequence are pieced together from footage that is temporally asynchronous and spatially noncontiguous: shot at different times, out of temporal order, and according to a spatial logic beholden less to a pre-given path in the scrub than to a representational practice through which the path and its meaning are jointly created. Figure 13.2 in comparison with Figure 13.1 represents the rather more disparate physical locations and camera directions of the first 32 shots of the film as identified for me by Ido Haar. I intend this comparison to demonstrate, not so much where any body walked, but rather the inevitable constructedness of even this most painfully site-specific of films.

“Treefurcation”

W. J. T. Mitchell writes that “[l]andscape is a natural scene mediated by culture . . . both a real place and its simulacrum.”²³ The “treescape,” to borrow the term from Irus Braverman, with which *9 Star Hotel* opens is itself a “work of landscape” or “technology of cultivation” in the service of the Zionist project.²⁴ Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish National Fund, with the benefit of donations from the Jewish diaspora, has planted more than 240 million trees, most of them in coniferous forests.²⁵ Enacting and exemplifying efforts to cultivate the

desert and Europeanize the landscape, these pines have rooted diasporic Jews and Jewish claims to the territory and ultimately the Israeli state. Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* remembers sticking “small green leaves to a paper tree” at his Hebrew school in London to register another sixpence collected for the Jewish National Fund. “The trees were our proxy immigrants, the forests our implantation.” Behind the tree planting, he writes, “lay a long, rich, and pagan tradition that imagined forests as the primal birthplace of nations; the beginning of habitation.”²⁶ I too, from my California suburb, planted trees in Israel for Tu B’Shevat. And, in an example of the wild intertwining of Israeli and American state iconography along with the complex layering of memorial culture, somehow my fallen president’s head hovered over the Israeli forest I helped plant in honor of my dead grandfather for the state of Ben Gurion (Figure 13.3). Fast growing and needing little tending, durable, long living, and visually distinct, the pine tree by virtue of its “robust legibility,” explains Irus Braverman, is a “favorite artifact in the eyes of the state.”²⁷

As many readers will know, these forests not only demarcate and secure Israeli territory, but also bring it into being, since, under Article 78 of the Ottoman Land Code, a longtime cultivator of an area of land is afforded the right of possession. Afforestation has long been used to lay claim to supposedly

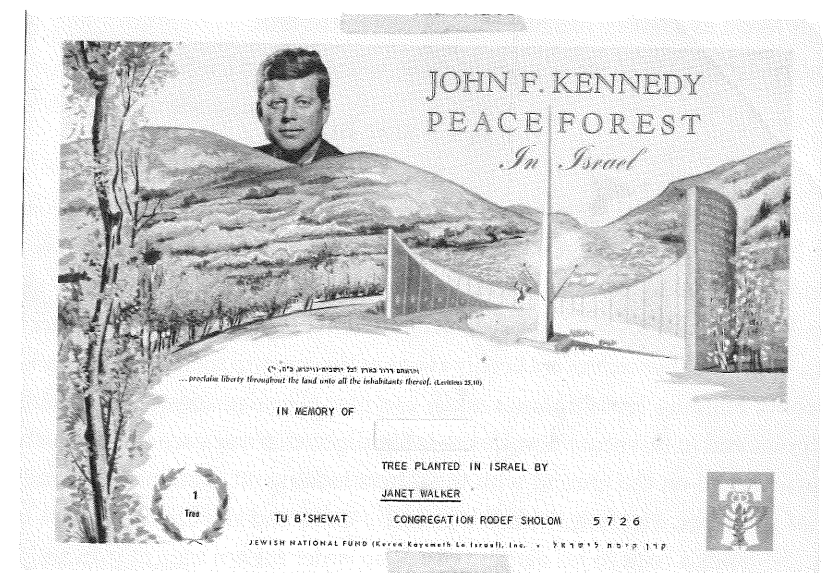


Figure 13.3 Planting trees in Israel. Certificate courtesy of the author with permission from the Jewish National Fund.

undeveloped, uncultivated, and unowned lands. The Jewish National Fund has established parks on the sites of more than 80 former Arab villages, abandoned or depopulated between 1947 and 1949 and destroyed at that time or subsequently.²⁸

Pressure for recognition of this practice has been brought to bear by Zochrot, an organization that supports Palestinian return and memorialization through archeological and mapping efforts to locate and describe the disposition of houses, mosques, and public buildings in these former villages.²⁹ Walking the paths of a former village, stopping here and there where a house once stood to hammer a sign into the ground, the members and guests of Zochrot emplant another, reappropriative kind of signifying grove.

The treatment of the forestlands in *9 Star Hotel* also functions, in places, in this reappropriative manner. In the first sneaking in sequence and also, similarly, in another wadi-crossing passage, the trees are adapted to the Palestinian workers' own purpose. When they duck for cover into the pine forest, their use of it and the observation and filming of that use by Haar standing on the road, illustrate the malleability of ostensibly tangible and fixed geographical features of the land. The undulating border described by the conifers in the film's first few shots and the fact of this species in the no man's land between Israel and the occupied territory are a kind of would-be hardscaping made soft through the "cultivation" of this forest as a *hiding place* by the workers in the film.

"This is a 9 star hotel"

While the stars in the eponymous "hotel" may suggest a rating of high-quality and luxurious amenities, in reality the men sleep in makeshift huts on the hillside, exposed to extremes of temperature and to the elements. Or they sleep in individual cubicles of cardboard, blankets, and plastic; or right out under the stars. That they themselves are keenly aware of the irony of their plight—working as labors building Jewish homes while camping illegally, subject to capture at any point and in this sense homeless—is highlighted in one particular sequence. Ahmad seated on the ground with the others looking on, stacks stones, one on top of the other. Playfully, with the glee of a child and the life experience of a man, he holds a rock to his ear and places an order for ten tons of iron and ten tons of cement. "This is a 9 star hotel," we hear over a close-up of the tower, just as it topples. Elsewhere in the film, such ironies of home and shelter multiply. The workers come across some Jewish children building a "wooden house, camp" on

the outskirts of their compound. "I told you I'm a bit scared of Arabs," comments one boy, perhaps willing to stick around because of the presence of Haar with his camera. "Doesn't your mother ask you, 'Where were you?' 'Where are you going?'" "She knows we're here," comes the reply. Not exactly, we gather. The children ask the workers if they might bring two more iron rods to shore up the camp.

Throughout the narrative, the men's conversations with one another are by turns astute and naïve, frivolous and frustrated, accepting and rebellious, and concerned with the future as well as the past. Consider the following snippets of conversation:

"Our problem is that at 12, we already think about women and marriage."

"That's right."

"Arabs only think about their dicks."

"When your father sees you're 12, he says to himself, 'The boy has grown it's time I marry him off.' But the boy is still an adolescent. His sexual drive, his sexual drive is strong. So when you turn 13 and your father says, 'I've seen your cousin,' you can bet you'll end up marrying her. Five or six years later, the boy wakes up and says to himself, 'My father forced me to marry my cousin. I want to choose a woman.' So he goes and marries again. He has five kids with each of them. Soon enough he has to pull his 12 year old out of school to help earn money. You understand? We think backwards. We never think ahead."

Over a shot of Abu Halil, an older man in the group, as they hunker down, sheltering from the rain:

"Same as yesterday—no work."

"We came for nothing."

"I worked only today and I've been here two weeks."

Or this:

"We got used to working in Israel."

"When they finish the wall we won't be able to sneak in."

"Without a permit you'll be shut out."

"Two more months, three at the most."

"But the worst place is Jerusalem. The lowest you can get."

Further ambitions:

"I want to join the Palestinian forces . . ."

"They only take people who can read and write . . ."

"In tests I'd always make up my own answers . . ."

"Now we're sorry . . ."

"Yes, school days were the best days."

The youth of these workers, a number of whom have had to become the family's sole breadwinner at a young age, their camaraderie, and their aspirations are brought home by the film's graceful observation and juxtaposition of spontaneous conversation and arduous labor.

As is evident, the primary goal of this chapter is to locate trauma as a spatial matter. Consequently, I have dealt mainly with the *mise-en-scène* and editorial regimes of bodies, movement, and environment. But the men's own voices also conjure the pathways of belonging and unbelonging to this place, and they conjure as well its traumatic historical context. One of the intimate conversations filmed by Ido Haar concerns the moment of silence observed on Yom Hashoa, Israel's Holocaust remembrance day. "Tomorrow at 10:00 there's a siren. All the Jews stand still not moving left or right like statues," observes a worker in a blue shirt sitting up in bed. "They stop their cars. They get out of their cars, even if they're on the highway. The police, everyone." "What if I talk to someone?" another man queries. "He won't answer until the siren stops," comes the response.

At night, from their beds, the men converse about this topic respectfully, seemingly in awe of the number of Jewish people murdered, using the terms "killed" and "murdered," as translated by the English subtitles. "6 million—the same number as the Palestinians" [meaning the Palestinian population], someone remarks, over a shot of another man rising to a seated position. "Yes, just like the Palestinians and that's only those who died." The men make the connection between this Jewish commemoration of wartime deaths and the Nakba without broaching the conventionally disjunctive trope of Israeli Independence *versus* the Nakba: "They have a memorial day and we don't." "Yes, we do. Didn't they say on TV, it's been 55 years since the Palestinian catastrophe?"

The men exchange historical information, relating the catastrophes of these two peoples. The workers' perspective contains none of the animosity one might well acknowledge as justified, given the wartime usurpation of Palestinian lands now within the Israeli borders and the continuing occupation of the West Bank. The main impetus stems from a practical consideration: "If they [the murdered Jews] were still alive, where would they all live? We would have to build houses for them. 6 million, good god! If each had just one child, that's 12 million." This

is the conversation of working men everywhere: needing the work for pay—in reality, the more work there is, the better for the earner—and at the same time wanting it not to be too much, eager to accomplish it all. The injustices and inequalities of the actual and imagined situations are evident to me as to the workers. But the point I wish to emphasize is that, assuming the houses would be within their radius, the men articulate a vision of ample work within an unvalled, and in this sense shared, terrain.

Walking through walls

In its determined, spreading, multidirectional movement across the land, *9 Star Hotel* engages in a practice that resonates with other spatial practices of the militarized region. As Eyal Weizman describes in his writing about urban warfare, the tactic of "walking through walls" was used in the West Bank during "Operation Defensive Shield" as a kind of "inverse geometry" in which soldiers moving through built-up areas would avoid using streets, alleys, and courtyards, and instead pass along by punching holes through the walls, ceilings, and floors of private homes and any other buildings in their path. The Israeli Defense Forces drew on aerial photographs and global positioning systems to plan the movements of the small teams of soldiers who, for their part, would be "saturated within [a town's] fabric to a degree that they would have been largely invisible from an aerial perspective at any given moment."³⁰ "The question," asks Brigadier General Aviv Kochavi, making explicit reference to the influence of postmodernist and post-structuralist theory,³¹ "is, how do you interpret the alley? Do you interpret it as a place, like every architect and every town planner does, to walk through or do you interpret it as a place forbidden to walk through? This depends only on interpretation."³²

Keeping in mind this attitude toward space as a fabricated, "inverse geometry" subject to constant interpretation and reinterpretation, I turn now from transverse movement to the vertical axis: the look down on a surface whether flat or dimensional, "real" (as from an airplane) or represented (as on a blueprint or map). In the words of Weizman's epigraph: "whoever owns the ground, it is from the depth of the earth to the height of the sky."

Google Earth presents a supermap of the region and, as indicated at the start, I have spent many hours flying here and there around the globe noticing things that connect me to facts on the ground: how the shadow of the Eiffel

Tower stretches horizontally at a certain season and time of day, or that the satellite image of my own neighborhood was at one point out of date, having been taken during the short period of time when our new second story was under construction (discernible from the air as a raw pine-colored square in the midst of my neighbors' gray-brown roofs). Google Earth has "repurposed decades of satellite imagery to represent the world as a mosaiced and navigable domain." But, as the cultural satellite scholar Lisa Parks is dedicated to showing (the apt phrase just quoted is hers), this imagery comprises not a window on the world nor value-neutral research, but rather a thickly material site of spatial and geopolitical construction in its own right.³³ Our critical use of it in conjunction with travels on the ground has the potential, I believe, to contribute to the forging of new and necessary connections among far-flung people and places.

Consider the Green Line from the perspective of this sort of de-essentialized cartography. In the area of Modi'in, the Green Line is actually a double line with a no man's land between. If we turn on the "Borders and Labels" layer of Google Earth, we can see the Line and the region it constructs. We can see, for example, that the curved border formed by the coniferous forest encroaches right across this no man's land instead of stopping diplomatically at the first marker.

And yet, Google Earth in and of itself is blind to the area's separation fence or wall; first, in that we lose resolution in trying to come close, and second, in that the path of the Wall is not a layer in Google Earth. But it is possible to find the information on a hackers site and import it into "My Places" in Google Earth, thereby revealing all the points where the Wall encroaches over the Line to encompass water resources (such as the wadi seen in the film) and cut off Palestinian villages from ancestral lands and the fingers of new Jewish settlements.

Irus Braverman adopts a critical cartography when she takes issue with the purported objectivity of aerial photographs used by the Israeli mapping agency to determine whether land has been cultivated and is thus owned under Article 78 or is uncultivated and available to be claimed.³⁴ I take a lesson from this work to study the locale that is *9 Star Hotel's* core footprint. Were there any Arab villages in this immediate area up until 1948? Historical maps indicate quite a few:³⁵ Barfiliya on the western border of Modi'in; Kharruba, 'Innaba, and al-Kunnayyisa forming a semi-circle set off a bit further from Modi'in's western boundary; and al-Burj and Beit Im'in along the Green Line to the east of Modi'in.

None of these former villages is recognized when typed into Google Earth. The search term elicits a "did you mean" with further suggestions. In a way, their absence from this go-to reference source is understandable since they are no longer inhabited. But if one navigates to the site Palestine Remembered,³⁶ the villages are not only listed but also located (in relation to al-Ramla not Modi'in) and referenced through photographs, written testimonials, information, and videos. It is possible, moreover, to import the information from the hypertextual Palestine Remembered site into Google Earth such that the village names appear suddenly, populating the field of the map where they can now be recognized and made navigable.³⁷ As detail boxes on the site report, 1,647 people from 'Innaba became refugees in 1948. 12,444 dunums of Arab land were usurped. The area once was irrigated and planted with citrus and olive groves and cereal. The fate: "Partial destruction soon after occupation, and complete destruction in 1952."

Cognizant of both the limits and the benefits of embodied knowledge, I inform Ido that I am coming to Israel, and accept his invitation to trek the byways of *9 Star Hotel*. There on site, I point to a rectangular patch of ground hemmed in with stones that I had spotted in the film and searched for via Google Earth imagery. Might it be the remains of a previously planted field? My consumer grade GPS digital camera registers the coordinates of the "9 Star Hotel" where Muchamad, Ahmad, and their compatriots camped in order to work—and from which they were periodically burned out and deported, and removed for good after end of the filming process: 31 degrees North by 34 degrees East (Figure 13.4). From there we are able to confirm this place's proximity to the village of Barfiliya whose inhabitants in 1948 numbered 847: 31 degrees, 54 minutes, 2.16 seconds North by 34 degrees, 59 minutes, and 15.80 seconds East.

It may be that most or all of the campers at the 9 Star Hotel are Palestinians whose families are originally from the West Bank rather than refugees from the areas now encompassed by Israel. In this sense, the life paths of these two constituencies are different and "return" is not literally enacted. And yet, from the perspective of a spatialized trauma study such as I have been advancing, the pre-1948 and current presence of Palestinian people on these same rolling hills may be read as constituting a temporally unsuspended and longitudinally mixed space of remembrance, exertion, and return.

The film ends with the encampment being consumed by flames after a raid in which ten men are caught. Muchamad and Ahmad are not among the arrested and we see them and some of the others we have come to know inspecting their

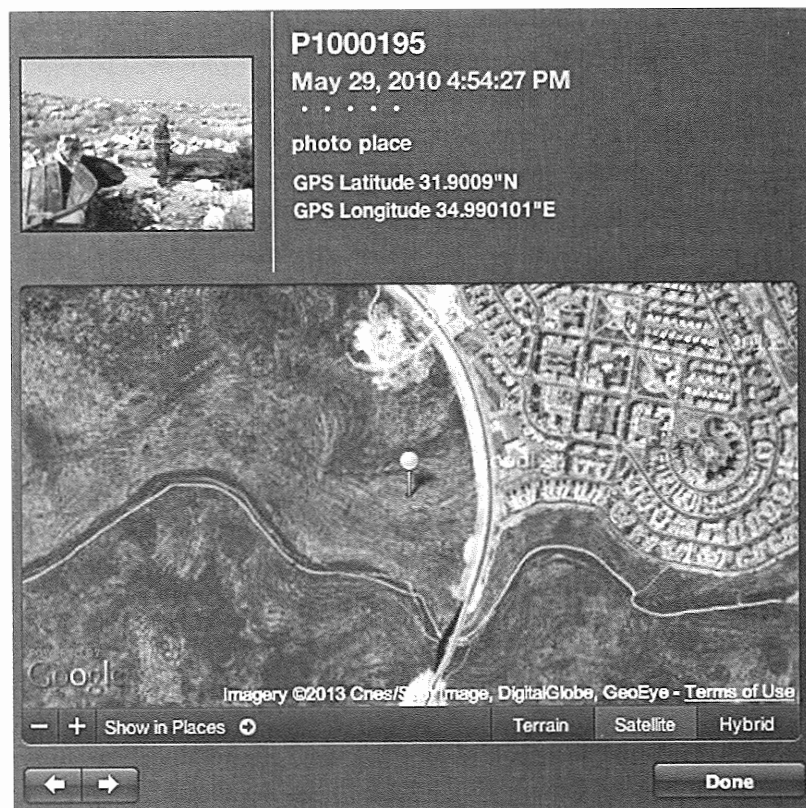


Figure 13.4 Positioning the “9 Star Hotel.” Photo courtesy of the author.

losses: the red- and blue-colored flames shooting up from a chemical battery; the smell of cooking as their food supplies are burned to a crisp; the sound of crackling as salvaged boards are reduced to ash. “We’re like scavengers; like those who harvest olives after the locusts,” says Muchamad, invoking in the same breath his peoples’ continued connection to this land and the appropriation of its fruits by others.

Tunnel trade³⁸

When Kochavi spoke to Weizman about his method of “walking through” the walls of Palestinian houses, he also used a simile for the soldiers’ advancing motion. It was, he said, “[L]ike a worm that eats its way forward, emerging at

points and then disappearing.”³⁹ With the earth moving capacities of the worm in mind, I turn now to another area of Palestine and another film. In and around Rafah along the border of Gaza with Egypt there existed a large number of smuggling tunnels. Having proliferated in 2007, at the time of the Blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel with the support of the United States and Egypt and following the election of the Hamas party to the Palestinian government, these tunnels were used for conveying weapons, medicine, food, cigarettes, alcohol, and goods of all kinds. Over 3,000 tunnels were destroyed by Israeli forces, and in late 2009 Egypt began construction of an underground barrier in order to curb their use by smugglers.⁴⁰

But the “tunnel trade” continued and the tunnels harbored resistance: to the Blockade, to the Israeli military, to the Egyptian policing of their northern Sinai border—to *blocage* in general as a form of spatial domination. Here too, as with the east to west breaches of the West Bank, we observe another alternate geography—that of going under ground.

The news documentary *Gaza Tunnels—Israel/Palestine* (Journeyman films, March 3, 2008, 18 min. 30 sec.) begins with Said, a 14-year-old boy in a yellow hooded sweatshirt, lowering himself into a tunnel, taking care to avoid the exposed electrical wires. This is one of three tunnels (at the time) of around 700 meters in length that he and other youth had constructed for hire (and which, when completed, were taken over by adults who reap the large profits). A minute or so later we see goods being pulled through the tunnel and then examined and prepared for sale. Elsewhere in this short film we observe rubble in the streets, the remains of homes that have been bombed during fighting and in Israeli’s efforts to destroy the network of tunnels leading from the basements of some of these homes.

Like *9 Star Hotel*, this film, in its subject matter and in the filming process, exerts resistance against roadblocking or closing off space. Here there is movement—albeit underground—but movement across a border that the strength of nations has failed to seal off completely. Peoples’ paths are expansive—from a home or other digging site in Gaza burrowing onward to the basement of a home in Egypt.

Using the full range of the vertical, Said engineers his tunnels with the aid of Google Earth. “I open Google Earth,” he explains to the filmmaker(s) and we see him seated before his computer calling up his neighborhood and that of accomplices in Egypt. In this way, combining contemporary uses of satellite

imagery and digital technology (like the IDF's use of infrared sensors to navigate through walls) with "old-fashioned," laborious digging, Said enacts his resistance "from the depth of the earth to the height of the sky" to the forces that would control ingress and egress from air, land, and sea.

As Israel has physically withdrawn from Gaza and portions of the West Bank, the state has sought to control the Palestinians "from beyond the envelopes of their walled-off spaces, and by relying on the strike capacity of the Air Force over Palestinian areas." Strikingly, Weizman terms this "territorial 'arrangement'" a "vertical occupation," one in which "the principle of separation has turned ninety degrees as well, with Israelis and Palestinians separated vertically, occupying different spatial layers."⁴¹

In the West Bank, settlements take the high summits connected by roads raised on bridges over or sometimes blasted through tunnels below Palestinian lands. In the meantime, Palestinian areas are walled in, such that narrow passageways below Israeli multi-laned highways are at times the only way to get from Palestinian place to place. But Weizman points out that Palestinian activists too have recognized the possibilities for surging over and under as well as through Israeli walls and barriers.

Conclusion

Since *9 Star Hotel*'s production, a double line of electrified fencing has gone up in the area where the groups of workers once passed from their West Bank villages including Za'tara and Yatta into Israel proper and the particular neighborhood of Modi'in under construction. As we stood together above the wadi the workers used to cross with their herds of sheep and commuting back and forth to work (Figure 13.5)—in the shadow of a major concrete installation of separation (Figures 13.6 and 13.7)—Ido Haar drew my attention to the screen of fast-growing trees (Figure 13.8) planted to preserve the forest's serenity for picnickers, while workers trace longer, even more arduous routes around. By virtue of the privilege of my US passport, I also used the occasion of this visit to tour the West Bank. I saw the narrow, rutted path out of Yatta that now must serve as a bumpy access road since the paved road has been blocked at the junction of road 60. I wondered whether Ahmad now passes along this more painstaking route, surely less frequently but from time to time.



Figure 13.5 Crossing the wadi; *9 Star Hotel*. Film by Ido Haar. Frame enlargement courtesy of Eden Productions Ltd.

In its spatial logic, *9 Star Hotel* elasticizes the roadblock genre through its emphasis on mixing, multiple inhabitation, and transference. It stands as an exemplary "crossing film," alerting us to others in this mode. *God Went Surfing with the Devil* (Alexander Klein, 2010, United States) is another, recent documentary of this type. Even though the protagonists weren't allowed to bring surfboards from Israel to Gaza for distribution to locals, people themselves are getting through; there are many "workarounds." And in fact, I would identify the zealous labor of separation as evidence, precisely, of the opposite: that is, of the vitality of transference and the entropy of exchange.

As interdisciplinary academics, we can embrace anti-fundamentalist spatial epistemologies to crack open the struggle for contested territories. As film and television scholars, we can spatialize documentary textual analysis, repurpose navigational modes, and engage in on-site witnessing—triangulating among these methods to allay the hypostatization of place. In this relational manner we might deepen our perception and increase the reality of criss-crossing paths and already mingled lives. Understanding and change may result, I hope, from a critically and self-critically charged combination of lived, mapped, and imagined spaces.



Figures 13.6 The wadi blocked. Photo courtesy of Steve Nelson.

In “The Right to Refuse: Abject Theory and the Return of Palestinian Refugees,” the Tel Aviv University sociologist Dan Rabinowitz argues that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must accommodate deeply held Palestinian and Israeli sensibilities and bridge the gap between idealized vision and contemporary reality. Rabinowitz’s plan for change—and I am impressed with his initiative to propose policy shifts from the seat of the academy—involves various forms of

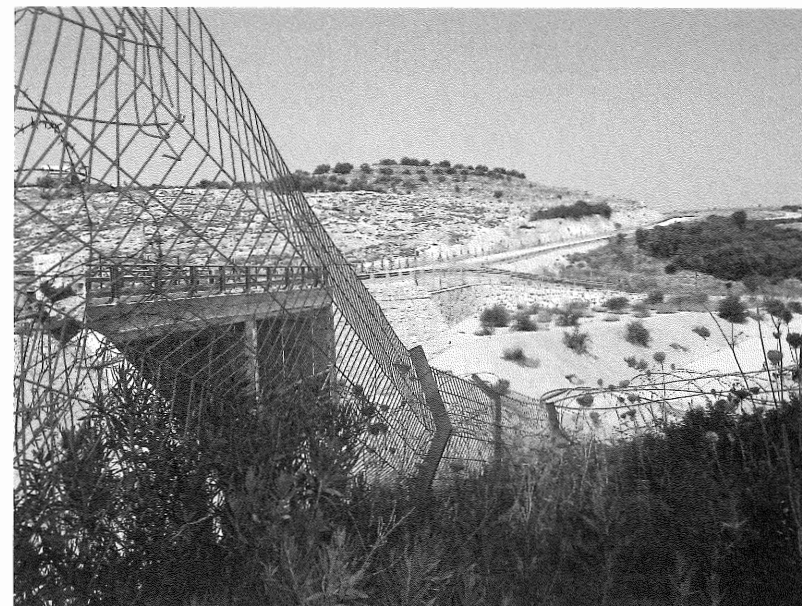


Figure 13.7 Blocked space. Photo courtesy of Steve Nelson.

tangible redress: allowance for the return of internally displaced Palestinians, restitution and compensation, granting of the right of return for a significant number of the externally displaced, immigration opportunities to countries beyond the Middle East. Also, and of equal importance, according to Rabinowitz, is symbolic redress, including mutual recognition of past and present injustices. “One of the assumptions underwriting notions of transitional justice,” he states with citations to other scholars of this latter field, “is that physical and material issues often represent much deeper cognitive, sentimental, and even spiritual undercurrents. Addressing these currents can diffuse bitterness and other emotional residues and improve the odds of reaching an accord.”⁴² Calibrating decisions about who and how many are to return to the number of surviving first-generation refugees, Rabinowitz suggests, “could engender significant symbolic resonance and thus become conducive to transitional justice.”⁴³

9 Star Hotel and the other crossing documentaries along with the Google Earth and Palestine Remembered interfaces discussed herein forge creative geographies replete with symbolic significance. By depicting Palestinians and Israelis inhabiting a territory that was *and is already*—if contentiously and even violently—shared, these imaginative and affecting texts realize an *existing* transference site that we may seek to consolidate and enlarge.



Figure 13.8 A screen of trees. Photo courtesy of Steve Nelson.

Notes

I am grateful to Ido Haar, internationally acclaimed filmmaker and stellar person, whose film is an inspiration and without whose help the essay's presentation of a cartographically sensitive textual analysis of documentary could not have been realized. My thanks are also due to Boaz Hagin and Raz Yosef for their thoughtful editorial comments; to Linda Dittmar, Greg Eliason, Yoel Elizur, David Gray, Tamar Liebes, Raya Morag, Steve Nelson, Jade Petermon, and Anat Zanger for their knowledge, expertise, and support; and to the conference committees and participants of the Seventh and Eighth Tel Aviv International Colloquia on Cinema and Television. I gratefully acknowledge the funding provided by the University of California for research travel in Israel and the West Bank.

- 1 Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishing [1969] 1995), 8. Quoted in Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6.
- 2 The idea to build a modern city near two neighborhoods under construction was conceived in the mid-1980s. According to Guy Liberman, The National Planning and Building Council, under Ariel Sharon as housing and construction minister, approved the plan in 1990. "Was Building City of Modi'in A Mistake?" *Haaretz.com*,

- July 16, 2008. Accessed August 8, 2009. www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/was-building-city-of-modi-in-a-mistake-1.249671.
- 3 I would like to thank Boaz Hagin for encouraging me to overcome my hesitation to speak about these matters in Tel Aviv by generously expressing an eagerness for non-insider points of view and transnational dialogue.
 - 4 The lives of residents and exiles are also affected by the discourses and activities of the numerous inter- and nongovernmental groups and scholars around the world. These include B'Tselem: the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, the New York-based Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. For a list of Human Rights and Peace Groups see www.ariga.com/humanrights/index.shtml and for a list of Human Rights in Israel and the Occupied Territories see www.derechos.org/human-rights/mena/iot.html.
 - 5 Spatial media studies might be seen, genealogically, as descending from the work of Henri Lefebvre, particularly his magisterial *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell [1972] 1991), and, locationally, at the intersection of film and media studies and critical human geography. Relevant recent volumes include Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Douglas Richardson, eds, *GeoHumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011) and David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, eds, *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). Within film studies, groundbreaking works include Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002) and Edward Dimendberg's *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
 - 6 As will be discussed below, I am adopting Anat Zanger's use of the term "transference site" in her article "Blind Space: Roadblock Movies in the Contemporary Israeli Film," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24, no. 1 (2005): 1–12.
 - 7 In this essay I rely on Yi-Fu Tuan's conception of "space as that which allows movement" while "place is pause." See, for example, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.
 - 8 Giuliana Bruno's insight that cinema spectatorship in general is a matter of "site-seeing" is doubly true for site-specific documentaries and perhaps triply true for those of which the premise is physical movement and return. See Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, especially chapter 1, "Site-Seeing: The Cine City." See also my chapter, "Moving Testimonies: 'Unhomed Geography' and the Holocaust Documentary of Return," in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, edited by Jakob Lothe, James Phelan, and Susan Suleiman (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

- 9 *Borders*, Eran Riklis and Nurit Kaydar, 2001; *Close, Closed, Closure*, Ram Levi, 2002; and *Checkpoint*, Yoav Shamir, 2003. Zanger, "Blind Space."
- 10 See, for example, *How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Arik Sharon* (1997) and *Pour un seul de mes deux yeux* [*Avenge But One of My Two Eyes*] (2005) by Avi Mograbi.
- 11 My use of the word "suspended" is inspired by the topic description of the Eighth Tel Aviv International Colloquium on Cinema and Television Studies, entitled "Suspenseful Times and the Moving Image" (Tel Aviv University, June 8–10, 2010).
- 12 Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, chapter 6, "A Dead-End: Roadblock Movies," *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 153. In "The Palestinian Road (Block) Movie" (including *Route 181* [Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan, 2003], *25 Kilometers* [Nahed Awwad, 2004], or *Road Map* [Multiplicity, 2003]), Kay Dickinson adopts a similar critical perspective. "It would be impossible to claim that these forms of fractured and partial access to a 'home culture' should be celebrated without a sense of the pain they also affect" (142), she writes. Yet she suggests, as well, that "the tenacity with which these situations are dealt and the communicative gestures they afford are critical to the creative and egalitarian road-building process to which so many filmmakers and critics aspire" (142). In *Cinema at the Periphery*, edited by Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belén Vidal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).
- 13 For exemplary works of critical human geography from a de-essentialized perspective see Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 14 Janet Walker, "Moving Testimonies and the Geography of Suffering: Perils and Fantasies of Belonging after Katrina," *Continuum* 24, no. 1 (February 2010): 47–64. Reprinted in *Interrogating Trauma: Collective Suffering in Global Arts and Media*, edited by Mick Broderick and Antonio Traverso (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).
- 15 Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 8–9. See also Caruth's monograph, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
- 16 Phrases and sentences in this paragraph are drawn from my article, Walker, "Moving Testimonies."
- 17 Rogoff, *Terra Infirma*, 110.
- 18 Some of this information about what happened to Ahmad was shared with me by filmmaker Ido Haar. The film itself does show the end of a telephone conversation

- in which the guy with the phone reports to the others that, while they are camping on the hillside, Ahmad is lying in bed.
- 19 Here I am borrowing and paraphrasing Hayden White's explanation of "tropics" as "the process by which all discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively." *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 2.
- 20 The initial Skype conversations, each over an hour in length, took place on January 21 and 29, 2010. As indicated, Ido Haar himself created the map prototypes. The finished versions were realized for me by Greg Eliason. For a discussion of this scholar/filmmaker collaborative working process see "Mapping Documentary: Roundtable with Filmmaker Ido Haar and Film and Media Studies Scholar Janet Walker in Conversation with David Gray and Jade Petermon," *Media Fields: Critical Explorations in Space and Media*, issue 3, edited by Ryan Bowles and Rahul Mukherjee (2011), www.mediafieldsjournal.org/mapping-documentary/2011/8/21/mapping-documentary-roundtable-with-filmmaker-ido-haar-and-f.html.
- 21 Rogoff, *Terra Infirma*, 21.
- 22 Ibid., 3.
- 23 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, second edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.
- 24 Irus Braverman, "'The Tree Is the Enemy Soldier': A Sociological Making of War Landscapes in the Occupied West Bank," *Law & Society Review* 42, no. 3 (2008): 452, 461.
- 25 The swamp-clearing function of tree-planting is well known. The eucalyptus trees planted in the Hula Valley were well suited to this purpose. See Carol B. Bardenstein, "Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 158. See also Braverman, "The Tree," 450.
- 26 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 5–6.
- 27 Braverman, "The Tree," 461.
- 28 See the Zochrot website. In a continuation of the practice, Canada Park was planted mostly in the West Bank over the ruins of the Palestinian villages of Yalu and Imwas that were depopulated in 1967 during the Six-Day War. See Yuval Yoaz, "The Palestinian Past of Canada Park is Forgotten in JNF Signs," translated by Talia Fried, *Haaretz*, June 12, 2005. www.zochrot.org/index.php?id=210. Accessed January 19, 2011. Standing over the ruins of houses and millstones and the remains of olive orchards, the trees are, in the words of Carol Bardenstein, "an act of erasure of Palestinian memory" ("Trees, Forests," 164).

- 29 I am grateful to Linda Dittmar who introduced me to Zochrot and invited me to join the group's visit to Khirbat al-Lawz in June of 2008.
- 30 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London and New York: Verso), 186.
- 31 Brigadier Generals Aviv Kochavi and Shiman Naveh both, the latter having retired from the military to codirect the Operational Theory Research Institute from 1996–2006, have drawn on critical theory to explain military maneuvers. But Eyal Weizman is skeptical of the extent to which such military tactics are in fact drawn from the work of left-wing radical humanities scholars and artists. As he asserts wryly, supported by historical research, "the Israeli military hardly needed Deleuze to attack Nablus." Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 214.
- 32 Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 198.
- 33 Lisa Parks, "Between Orbit and the Ground. Conflict Monitoring, Google Earth and the 'Crisis in Darfur' Project," in *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, edited by Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 246. See also Lisa Parks's book, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
- 34 The mapping agency is called Survey of Israel: Agency for Geodesy, Cadastre, Mapping and Geographic Information and the Land Appeal Committee. Malka Offri, the person whose job it is to read the photos—through zoom-transfer, double-photo, and stereoscopic processes—insisted to Braverman that "the use of aerial photos . . . promotes a regime of truth" and insisted as well on the accuracy and impartiality of her work ("The Tree," 468).
- 35 "Map of Palestine 1948: Depopulated Villages and Towns Compared with Map 2008." Bethlehem, West Bank: PalMap Palestine Mapping Center, 2008. www.palmap.org.
- 36 www.palestineremembered.com/. Accessed May 19, 2010. My understanding of this history is deeply informed by the stunning volume edited by Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Nakba*.
- 37 My practice here is one of importing these alternate sites into the "My Places" section of Google Earth. I am not, in this case, acting as a volunteer geographer petitioning Google to have this additional information officially included.
- 38 I borrow this section title from the film *Tunnel Trade*, by Laila El-Haddad and Saeed Taji Farouky, Gaza, 2007.
- 39 Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 199.
- 40 See "Gaza Strip Smuggling Tunnels," Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip_smuggling_tunnels. Accessed November 19, 2011. Egypt now allows Palestinians to enter Egypt from Gaza at the Rafah cross. See "Egypt Gaza Border Reopened Permanently." May 28, 2011. *Huffington Post World*. www.huffingtonpost.com.

- com/2011/05/28/egypt-gaza-border-reopened_n_868390.html. Accessed November 19, 2011.
- 41 Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 11.
- 42 Dan Rabinowitz, "The Right to Refuse: Object Theory and the Return of Palestinian Refugees," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 507.
- 43 Rabinowitz, "Right to Refuse," 515.

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