Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth

Edited by Forensic Architecture


Forensics originated from the term “forensis” which is Latin for “pertaining to the forum.” The Roman forum was a multidimensional space of negotiation and truth-finding in which humans as well as objects participated in politics, law, and the economy. With the advent of modernity, forensics shifted to refer exclusively to the courts of law and to the use of medicine, and today as a science in service to the law. The present use of forensics, along with its popular representations have become increasingly central to the modes by which states police and govern their subjects.

By returning to forensis this book seeks to unlock forensics’ original potential as a political practice and reorient it. Inverting the direction of the forensic gaze it designates a field of action in which individuals and organizations detect and confront state violations.

The condition of forensis is one in which new technologies for mediating the “testimony” of material objects—bones, ruins, toxic substances, landscapes, and the contemporary medias in which they are captured and represented—are mobilized in order to engage with struggles for justice, systemic violence, and environmental transformations across the frontiers of contemporary conflict.

This book presents the work of the architects, artists, filmmakers, lawyers, and theorists who participated directly in the “Forensic Architecture” project in the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths University of London, as well as the work of associates and guests. It includes forensic investigations undertaken by the project and its collaborators aimed at producing new kinds of evidence for use by international prosecutorial teams, political organizations, NGOs, and the UN. It also brings together research and essays that situate contemporary forensic practices within broader political, historical, and aesthetic discourse.

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In his introduction to the book Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth (Sternberg Press, 2014), Eyal Weizman, director of Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London, evokes the curious story about a bronze statue of Theagenes of Thasos, a Greek Olympian of the 1st century AD. It is said that the statue once killed a man by falling onto him and that subsequently the statue as an object was put on trial for murder and condemned to be thrown into the sea. The work assembled by the Forensic Architecture team is therefore also revolutionary for the discipline of architecture itself. Architecture is understood as a matter affected by the politics that operate around it and through it. A project by Forensic Architecture, Center for Research Architecture, Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London Published by Sternberg Press. Forensic Architecture was formed in 2010 as a research project within the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. The project developed as a response to several converging phenomena, such as the urbanisation of warfare, the erosion of trust in evidence in relation to state crimes and human rights violations, the emergence and proliferation of open source media (or ‘image’. Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth (PDF). Berlin: Sternberg Press. p. 9. ISBN 9783956790119. ^ Kimmelman, Michael (April 6, 2018).