# Forensics and Fora: Reconstructing and Re-membering the Centre d'Identification de Vincennes (CIV)

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Between early 1959 and the declaration of Algerian independence in summer 1962, the Centre d'Identification de Vincennes (CIV) was the primary place where Algerian-French workers picked up during nightly police raids were triaged, interrogated, and far worse. Though this "identification center" and "administrative interment" site is consistently referred to in histories of the Algerian War, the CIV has, for over five decades, evaded location and escaped description as a space and place that was itself a contributor to the violence enacted against this community.

Forensic architecture, as a set of methods developed through Eyal Weizman's eponymous lab (Forensic Architecture or FA), expands the tools and purview of architectural practice to include the "production of architectural evidence and to its presentation in juridical and political forums." These techniques "focus attention on the materiality of the built environment and its media representations" as forms of evidence. The relatively recent development of such methods may explain how the razed CIV's space, place and events that occurred there remained obfuscated for so long.

This paper discusses the architectural methods used to produce evidence of the CIV's location, to virtually reconstruct its material architecture, to speculate on its immaterial atmospheres, and the centrality of these methods to make this architecture knowable as a contributor to state sanctioned violence. Forensic evidence demands a forum; thus, the conclusion discusses spatial and performative fora as potential frameworks for revealing and debating such hidden histories and for collective re-membering.

"Forensics turns architecture into ... a probative mode of inquiring ... It demands that architects focus their attention on the materiality of the built environment and its media representations."

—Eyal Weizman, Forensic Architecture

## THE GAP

With the exception of the 17-19 October 1961 Bataille de Paris,<sup>4</sup> the Centre d'Identification de Vincennes (CIV) was the primary destination for FMA—Français Musulman d'Algérie or Muslim French of Algerian origin—picked up during nocturnal police raids in Paris and its inner suburb between early 1959 and the declaration of Algerian independence (mid-1962). These raids and the 17-19 October demonstrations and massacres have been vividly chronicled by Jean-Luc Einaudi, Linda Amiri, Sylvie Thenault and Emmanuel Blanchard amongst others. They recounted the massive numbers of men photographed and fingerprinted, detained beyond legal limits and tortured at the CIV. The archives of the CIMADE<sup>5</sup> document their members' social work conducted on behalf of the detained men. Activist Monique Hervo detailed the black eyes and broken bones of the men who returned home to Nanterre after CIV internment.<sup>6</sup> Historians, government functionaries, NGO workers, activists and journalists recorded and drew relations between police policies, political protest, and individual lives impacted by the struggle for independence and its repression through detention in the CIV.

More recently *Funambulist* editor Léopold Lambert has presented space as a protagonist in this story, mapping recognizable stadia as well as basements where men were interrogated and beaten. While Lambert spatialized the October events in his chrono-cartography, information regarding the CIV's location contradicted. Unlike the familiar civic institutions and spaces, the CIV did not previously exist *as such*. This less than publicly recognized "centre" was inserted, according to Einaudi, within "old garages built by the German occupation." Others suggested that the CIV occupied the *Cartoucherie*, a former munitions factory. Others placed it in a historic fort. These contradicting claims flagged unresolved questions. Where exactly was the CIV located and what was the nature of its architecture?

#### **METHODS**

The methods employed in this research drew upon those of Eyal Weizman's Forensic Architecture (FA)<sup>11</sup> in order to produce evidence that places and spatializes this little-known and razed site of internment once located within the city of Paris. No single document—neither in the archives of the Prefecture de Police (PPA), the CIMADE, Hotel de Ville, Ville de Paris, nor the National Archives—explicitly states where the CIV was, reveals its address, <sup>12</sup> nor presents its appearance. As the CIV and its details

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Figure 1. The CIV in the IGN Archive (aerial photographs dated 1958.05.01, 1959.01.19, 1960.04.24). Institut Géographique National, cropped and rotated by the author.

are obfuscated, answers had to be teased out from between the lines found in the above archives and from scant media representations. I drew spatial data out of primary source materials authored from distinct perspectives. These included aerial photographs from the French National Geographic Institute (IGN); Ministry of the Interior, Police Department and humanitarian aid workers' reports, memos, as well as an activists' personal journal; a building contractor's drawing; and a single eye-witness photograph. The spatial data gleaned from these documents were placed in relation, overlayed and delineated. Thus, architectural methods of analysis, synthesis and representation were deployed probatively rather than projectively so that the spatial fragments of the CIV could be re-membered, a term I shall return to, and re-presented.

#### LINE, AREA, SHAPE, VOLUME

One document in the PPA indicates the origin of the temporal vector—the inauguration of identification functions in Vincennes. Specifically, in a 19 January 1959 memo, General Director of the Municipal Police André Gaubiac ordered the transfer of FMA identification functions from the Garage MacDonald to the Garage de Vincennes beginning at 23:45 the next night. Gaubiac's memo signals the site's former function as a garage, to which Einaudi referred, and the new role slipped within.

A second vector proved important. All of the letters written by members of the CIMADE on behalf of the interned located the CIV on the route de la Pyramide, but without indicating a street number. <sup>15</sup> Somewhere along this line a geometric figure had to be fixed.

Transcripts of a municipal council meeting articulated the surface area of such a figure. In the June 1960 discussion concerning the Bois de Vincennes, representative Pierre Néron remarked on the jarring presence, in the middle of recreational fields, of a 2.5 hectare camp enclosed in barbed wire fencing where

the police department continued to operate a North-African triage center.<sup>16</sup>

The geometric shape of this area appeared in yet another medium—a red-sepia print from a contractor's bid to install loud-speakers and audio-surveillance equipment in the CIV.<sup>17</sup> In defining the scope of the proposed work, Bouyer Electro-acoustique delineated a compound of four long and several small structures. Two large halls and nine smaller "chambers" within Building "B," in the middle of the compound, are drawn and referred to in the list of proposed services, as the rooms where listening devices were to be installed. As a bid-set, we may interpret Bouyer's documents as representing a projected future but not necessarily the fact of an existing, functioning camp.

Yet another source and representational medium pinned this figure to an exact geographic location on the route de la Pyramide. Scaled and rotated, the shape of the compound of buildings delineated by Bouyer precisely matched the figure of four hangars and smaller attendant structures appearing in IGN aerial photographs taken throughout the late fifties and into the 60s. A 1944 photo is the earliest IGN record of three of the four long structures, showing their roofs painted in camouflage stripes. Netting, extending from and between these structures, obfuscates the view of what appear to be vehicle-filled yards. Given that these structures are absent in images taken between the mid '30s and 1944 (the last one being taken in the mid 30s) supports Einaudi's assertion that these spaces came into being during the occupation.

IGN images taken during the fifties reveal the consolidation of the compound around a courtyard enclosed by a fourth hangar to the north. Beyond the geometry of this formation, aerial photographs taken between 1958 and 1962 reveal visible and invisible shifts in activity. [Figure 1] In '58, the courtyard was filled with paddy wagons. The winter '59 photo shows an empty yard and snow dusting the ground and the roofs, except that

of Building B. This absence of snow on the roof suggests that this structure's interior was either heated or inhabited. In subsequent images, visible activity remained absent, while small out-buildings and grafted spaces propagated.

These documents—PP and government agency memos, aerial photographs as well as the contractor's drawing—pointed to this figure as *hypothetically* housing the CIV. Following this hunch, I overlaid and synthesized the evidence through digitally constructing the camp's plan.<sup>20</sup> [Figure 2]

#### **MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL QUALITIES**

Evidence from on the ground eyewitness reports—from inspectors, aid workers and one journalist<sup>21</sup>— corroborated that the activities within these structures corresponded to those of the CIV. Beyond pinpointing and giving shape to the CIV, their reports and articles held atmospheric qualities of the place.

Following the first inspection by Jean Viatte, a member of a government commission protecting individual liberties, his report described the material conditions of the former garage serving as identification center and administrative internment site. He articulated the relative sizes, number, and disposition of rooms and the interior construction of un-rendered block. He enumerated quantities, types and distribution of furnishings. The ordering in Viatte's report corresponded precisely to the interior partitioning shown in Bouyer's drawing and to all other written descriptions of the CIV in the police and CIMADE archives.

Viatte, other government official and CIMADE reports elaborated upon the immaterial qualities and temporal cycles of the CIV.<sup>23</sup> Amongst these conditions, Viatte cited limited fresh air intake creating stiflingly hot conditions in Building B. Senator Benacer's 1960 memo to the Interior Minister called attention to internee's complaints of insufficient coal for heating.<sup>24</sup> In Viatte's October 1961 report he described fluids in excess—leaking roofs, an overflowing septic system and the odors this produced.<sup>25</sup> Perpetual overcrowding exacerbated already unhealthy conditions.

Viatte also related the camp's temporal rhythms, including limited courtyard access, content and timing of daily meals, weekly CIMADE visits. <sup>26</sup> He recorded the number of men picked up the night before, adding to the population already bidding time in the identification area, and the duration of time men spent in detention on the administrative internment side of the wall, often well in excess of the 14-day legal limit. Other testimonials filmed by Jacques Panijel and recorded in Monique Hervo's journal described the cold and filthy conditions of the identification hall, such as the concrete floor upon which many detained men ultimately collapsed and slept after multiple days awaiting identity verification. <sup>27</sup>

Throughout both Police Department and Viatte's reports one finds derogatory remarks concerning North Africans and their



Figure 2. CIV Shadow Plan. Drawn by the author (2019).

capacity to endure heat, filth and other sub-standard conditions. Yet even engrained cultural biases did not blind the government official to the strategies deployed in the CIV. Viatte called out "deplorable" crowding, sanitation, heating, ventilation levels, "even for North Africans." He witnessed and reported forms of slow violence including durational exposure to cold, heat, humidity, filth and stench combined with insufficient accommodations that led to sleep deprivation and exhaustion.

# FORENSIC ARCHITECTURAL METHODS: PROBATIVE AND PROJECTIVE

Forensic architecture, as a set of methods developed since 2010 through Weizman's lab, "refers to the production of architectural evidence and to its presentation in juridical and political forums."29 It is a practice that "turns architecture into ... a probative mode of inquiring ... focus[ing] attention on the materiality of the built environment and its media representations."<sup>30</sup> Given the relatively recent development of forensic architectural methods, it is not surprising that these methods have not previously been employed to investigate the space and place of the CIV. Historical, political, and social science research into the CIV and its role in the Algerian War, and corresponding disciplinary perspectives have, rightfully, prioritized human and socio-political narratives. Yet in doing so, CIV's architectural space and place have been overlooked as a form or source of material or immaterial evidence and underestimated as a culprit contributing to violence.

Forensic methods as an emerging set of practices were critical to conceptualizing and carrying out this research. Locating and spatializing the CIV as described above demanded reading archival

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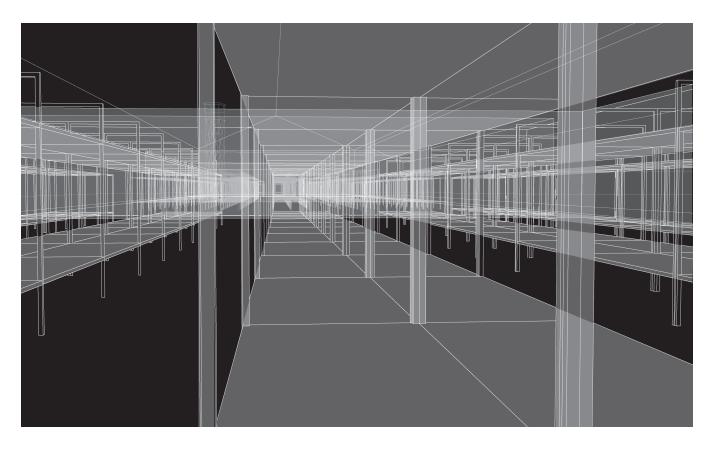


Figure 3. Unrender #15, CIV internee's perspective: Building A, lower bunk. Drawn by the author (2019).

materials architecturally; words and images were probed for spatial, material, constructive and environmental clues. The tools of architectural representation and ideation were employed to translate and synthesize these fragments. Drawing assembled data, gaining accuracy with each iteration, placing the emerging spatial formation in relation to site, to time, and to context.

To render this evidence accessible—to translate planimetric drawings to volumetric, three-dimensional views legible to non-experts—the architectural data had to be *projected*, speculatively. Bouyer's plan, together with aerial photographs taken over a period of years, revealed a shape-shifting thing, a work in progress. They revealed temporal transformations and a *projected* CIV in two senses. The Bouyer drawing conveyed a planned, future, projected camp in plan. The aerial photographs revealed the projection of the camp's massing, as shadows cast on to the ground in an absolute present.

Informed by Forensic Architecture's study of aerial photographs, these shadows were scrutinized. The sun-path diagram corresponding to Paris' latitude determined the sun's altitude, azimuth and time of day of the photo known to have been taken on 24 April 1960. Applying knowledge of architectural shadow casting, the theory of like triangles, and one last clue—the vertical dimension of an RATP bus<sup>31</sup>—made it possible to geometrically translate the lengths of shadows of the bus and buildings seen in the aerial photograph into the heights of each buildings' edges.<sup>32</sup>

This probative method of closely examining the shadows created the theoretical and technical ground from which to project a virtual construct—a digital model that reveals the space of, around and within the CIV. [Figure 3]

This virtually assembled construct, and the research underpinning its construction, renders knowable and visible the place and space of the CIV. Seeing its architecture, though skeletal, can not only assist in making no-longer extant architectures and the events that occurred there more accessible—the story of the CIV and its place in the history of the Algerian War. Forensic Architecture has demonstrated the utility of digitial models as tools for remembering<sup>33</sup>—both as memory prompts and tools to re-member—putting parts torn asunder back together. The intent of this research and the resulting model are not to fetishize the CIV building, but rather to fill a gap in the record and create a tool for assembling stories and histories.

Historical records already make known that the CIV was employed to warehouse a colonized population and to detain inactivated laborers beyond legal limits so as to cut off the flow of funds supporting their war of independence. What historians overlooked was the CIV as physical actant. Drawing out, analyzing and interpreting the architecture exposed the inhospitable spaces and noxious atmosphere of the CIV that contributed to the suffering of those interned there. The architectural space and the immaterial properties performed not only as an instrument of colonial

power and migrant worker repression. Documentation of the perpetuation and expansion of an overpopulated, ill-suited, partially-renovated, insufficiently furnished, under-heated, poorly-ventilated and primitively-plumbed facility is evidence of spatial qualities known and leveraged by the police as an instrument of durational, sanctioned violence.

As this research pinpointed and described the CIV's architecture and "deplorable" conditions, new questions arose concerning forensics and *fora*. What is the appropriate forum for remembering a site that has yet to be publicly acknowledged, and in relation to which its victims' stories largely remain officially, purposefully silenced?<sup>34</sup> How can threads of the narrative—of the contrast between mass movement in the streets (17 Oct) and the stillness in the CIV, of shadows cast and "unrendered" finishes—inform spatial, temporal, and embodied dispositives and modes of re-membering. I conclude by speculating on strategies for remembering the CIV through ephemeral and durational, immaterial and physical, performative and spatial means.

#### **EVIDENCE'S PERFORMANCE IN THE FORUM**

Again referring to Forensic Architecture's (FA) practice, evidence they create is, at times, brought into courts of law; at other times, new ephemeral spaces and events are produced as alternative contexts that manifest and materialize evidence of past and no longer extant spatial events and that house gatherings, discussions, debates in which past and present come into relation. One such instance was FA's Guangju Folly II (2013). This intervention ephemerally marked the circular place of the 1980 Guangju uprising and circumferences of other, more recent, "roundabout revolutions." Adjacent to these circles, FA erected a temporary pavilion housing a film-studio / roundtable to prompt conversation and collaborative action. Weizman writes, "The folly is a political thesis in build form, reflecting on the relation between the roundabout revolution and roundtable politics, the protests in the streets and the necessary post-revolutionary brinkmanship."35 The Guangju Folly II leveraged site markings that oscillated between visibility and invisibility, and offered an ephemeral pavilion to gather community, foster discussion, and produce new media representations. It inhabited the street and sheltered a provisional community in conversation.

Marching On (2018), as a combined research project, exhibition and performance in public space, presented a similar pairing of strategies—of fleeting inhabitations of public space and a curated conversations within a space of representation. Marching On: the Politics of Performance, exhibited at NYC's Storefront for Art and Architecture, presented research by Bryony Roberts and Mabel O Wilson on histories of African-American marching groups as "powerful agents of cultural and political expression, celebrating collective identities and asserting rights to public space and visibility." The research and its presentation on and as enclosures within Storefront revealed histories of black bodies in segregated and contested public space, and in the US military and its fife-and-drum corps. The architect-scholars

contemporaneously collaborated with the Harlem youth performance group, the Marching Cobras, to develop Marching On, a drill team and dance squad performance, which foregrounded the performative claiming of public space by African-American teens. Historically, Roberts writes, "[m]embership in these bands granted access to public space, but only within particular northern cities, outside of which performers faced violence and arrest."38 The event claimed space and asserted belonging to place, through embodied acts of music-making and dancing bodies and by their donning mosaic multicolored capes patterned after the claimed place, Marcus Garvey Park, central to the Harlem community historically and today. As a spatially and temporally distributed forum, Marching On moved between an interior, that contained and rendered visible evidence of past performances, and a public space-time for new "iterat[ions of] the lineage of marching in Harlem."39

Marching On and Guangju Folly II manifest hidden histories by leveraging critical relations between two experiences—enclosed spaces designed/installed for gathering, presenting and discussing evidence and through situated spatial acts in which bodies re-iterate and re-assert ways to be in space. To these two models, I add a third, complicating condition proposed by Aroussiak Gabrielian and Alison Hirsch. In their essay on "prosthetic landscapes," they discuss place(nessness), mediation and memory through examples of database aesthetics, immersive media and use of geospatial and locative media. 40 Working with historian Alison Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory," as one mediated through immersive technologies, in their speculative Memorials for the Future Gabrielian and Hirsch explore how "geospatial media might be synthesized with physical places in contemporary memorial-making to transport us virtually to sites of memory and transport memorial landscapes into the space of our everyday lives."41 They imagine "prosthetic landscapes" as palimpsests of past, present and future, as supporting spatially distributed and networked communities to build stories "so far." Neither gathering a community in a physical space nor temporal moment, Gabrellian and Hirsch's prosthetic landscape offers a tool for imagining the forum as a networked community in both situated and unsettled encounters with site.

Together these examples complicate notions of physical versus virtual fora for debate; durability or ephemerality of memory-prompts and memorials; and the role of sites and situatedness for acts of commemoration or re-membering. Contemporary art and architecture theorist Mechtild Widrich's concept of the performative monument<sup>43</sup> explores such a complication, and the potential and power of this paradoxical combination—of performance and monument. She writes:

"thinking through the notion of a temporally extended audience ... can, but need not, comprise a community, just as its acts of commemoration need not be acts of memory. An act of commemoration does not relive the past but is itself a present fact of public conduct. The insistence on

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Figure 4. Re-Membering the CIV: testing augmented reality experience of the CIV. Photo: Ivan Altamirano

real presence and experience is thus radically ambiguous, pointing to the past while carrying its political and aesthetic effects into the future."<sup>44</sup>

Through her theorizing performative memorials, Widrich examines the important work of stitching past and present through distributed and "extended" spatial and performative acts, individual ritual and collective audiencing as replacement for the memorials of yore. Thus, as I explore means to coax the specter of the CIV out from textual archives, drawings and models and into spaces and times for collective embodied knowing, I have concluded with these examples. They offer signposts for ways in which evidence of the CIV, its architecture and impact on lives may become spatialized, temporalized, mediated and networked in and as a future forum. [Figure 4] In the next chapter, the intention is to integrate the virtual CIV into physical and digital fora in which oral histories of the CIV may be gathered and presented, and to pave the way towards formally recognizing this place and dignifying the site through acts of re-membering.

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#### **ENDNOTES**

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- 2. Weizman, Forensic architecture, 11.
- 3. Weizman, Forensic architecture, 11
- 4. According to Viatte's 27 October 1961 report, of those arrested during the demonstrations, 6500 were held through Oct 20th at the Palais des Sports; 2,000 at the Palais des Expositions and 2500 at the Stade Coubertin until Oct. 23rd. At that time, 8500 were released and 550 sent to Algeria; the remaining were sent to Vincennes for verification. Over 2200 were detained or interned on the day of Viatte's visit. See: Jean Viatte, Compte Rendu (de visite au centre de Vincennes, Oct 1961), Ministère de l'Interieur, Archives Nationales, Commission de sauvegarde des droits et libertés individuels (Paris, 26 October (order); 27 October (report) 1961).
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- André Gaubiac, Transfer au Garage de VINCENNES du Centre d'Identification F.M.A., (le-Pré-Saint-Gervais: APP, 1959).
- Not the Avenue de l'École de Joinville where the contemporary CRA is located nor the Route du Champ de Manoeuvre which gives access to the Cartoucherie compound.
- 16. Julien Tardieu et al., Bulletin Muncipal Officiel de la Ville de Paris: Débats des Assemblées de la Ville de Paris et du Departement de la Seine, 367 (Paris: Republique Francaise, 1960). In the original, "centre de triage nord-africains."
- 17. Bouyer, Projet de Sonorisation, (Le-Pré-Saint-Gervais: APP, 1960).
- 18. In the 1968 IGNF photo the adjacent Hall Joseph Maigrot is already in operation. The subsequent series of images (month unknown, 1969) document the CIV site completely cleared and not far away the brand-new Paris VIII campus.
- 19. As a form of "negative evidence" neither building perming or demolition permit exists for the CIV in the Ville de Paris archives, suggesting that the construction occurred in both the temporal fold while France was not independent France and/or the legal fold of a state of exception.
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- 29. Weizman, Forensic architecture, 9.
- 30. Weizman, Forensic architecture, 11.
- The T55 is indicated in Gaubiac's memo, and other models are visible in Panijel's and Adi's films and photos. Specifications for historic bus models can be found through AMTUIR (https://amtuir.org/le-musee-des-transports-urbains/ les-collections/).
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- A prime example is Forensic Architectures use of a digital model of structures impacted in a drone strike (Mir Ali 2010). See: Weizman, Forensic architecture, 44-47.
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- 37. Franch et al., "Marching On: The Politics of Performance."
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- 42. Gabrielian and Hirsch, "Prosthetic Landscapes:," 122
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- 44. Widrich, Performative monuments, 8.