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EARLY STAGE

DATA, ARCHITECTURE, SURVEILLANCE: VISUAL REGIME OF SPATIAL OPPRESSION

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

DATA, SURVEILLANCE, SECURITY, REPRESENTATION, ARCHITECTURE, OPPRESSION

DDR STATEMENT

In my research project “Data, Architecture, Surveillance: Visual Regime of Spatial Surveillance” DDr methodologies play a critical role in exploring the limits of visual regimes and their effects. By emphasizing the help of convergent thinking and establishing open-ended processes, my research question would be more consistent. The core part of my research project lies in understanding the political, economic, and technological catalysts that drive spatial oppression. In order to achieve this, I am proposing using various drawing and image processing methodologies to simulate what is seen through computer vision and the state’s eyes. With this process, I believe that the artistic and architectural approach would broaden my research areas. Furthermore, within the artistic methodologies, I can speculate new narratives and establish a counter approach. At the end of the research, the resulting spatial installation would reflect on the embodiment experience of oppression spaces and scrutinize possible outcomes on various scales. In conclusion, I believe that my research would be much richer with the employment of DDr instruments and would be a particularly convenient approach for working on my research project.

ABSTRACT

Data, Architecture, Surveillance: Visual Regime of Spatial Oppression is a practice-based research project that aims to explore how states build their visual regimes through architecture and how such architecture changes visual perception. While looking at this, a series of counter-mapping strategies are planned which will reveal surveillance infrastructures. The output of this research would be a spatial installation that explores the imagination of states’ structure by developing technocritical approaches through suppression theories. Furthermore, this research looks at mapping technologies, image production processes, and data collection in order to understand how states are looking and how computer vision is utilized in their manipulative approaches. The project in its entirety is multi-layered—the first layer is the theoretical, which forms the academic dissertation and discusses the relationships of the technological developments. The second layer is a more practical approach, which will include field research and an exploration of digitisation methodologies. The third layer would be the comprehensive outcome that merges and intertwines methodologies in a map and spatial installation format.

Data, Architecture, Surveillance: Visual Regime of Spatial Oppression

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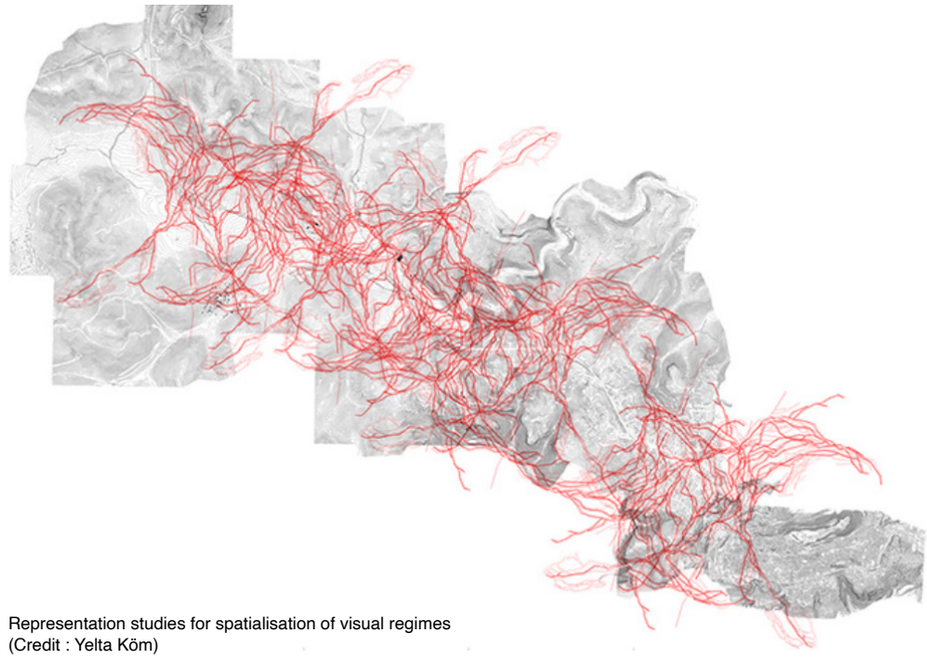
We live in cities as commodities; cities are, therefore, contemporary tools of securitisation and surveillance systems. Understanding the city image as an observer requires an active role on behalf of the citizen, who perceives the world around them and has a creative part in developing the image of the city (Lynch K., 1960). Nowadays, however, citizens are not independent in their perceptions, with other actors working to change their behaviour by using technological and spatial tools. These actors are shifting their shapes most of the time—they are, for example, sometimes governmental organizations and sometimes private corporations. Technology companies have stated openly that their goal is to change people›s actual behaviour at scale; in doing this, they could capture people›s actions, distinguish good and bad, and develop ways to reward the good and punish the bad (Zuboff S., 2016). Knowing this, it is possible to see how governmental structures display similarities to tech companies in that they treat people not only as citizens, but also as individuals defined by numbers and digital representations.

This process is undoubtably intertwined with neoliberal policies that promote the free market and privatise the global and local doing and undoing cities. The state governs through a managerial model and administers the city as a kind of corporation. The principle of cooperation between the state and market, therefore, lays at the core of neoliberal governance. Within this cooperation, authoritarian regimes are also establishing their visual regimes. The modern state looks at the world from a bird›s eye view, divides it into pieces, and regulates it in a subject hierarchy. It aims, furthermore, to change perception through surveillance tools and create new secure zones in physical environments. On a larger scale, such visible and invisible infrastructures can legitimise implanting security and tracking tools in cities, ultimately accelerating dispossession and oppression processes.

In our modern, digital world we are constantly faced with spatial and security technologies through our personal computers or smartphones. Applications and platforms that use mapping technologies play an important role in mass behavioural manipulation of the physical environment. Through it, the perception model of the physical environment constantly changes, and the physical environment›s visual landscape is controlled, monitored, and digitally monetised, becoming a spatial entity acquired by states or protected through counter-strategies. Through this, we can see that digitisation today enables a staggering shift in surveillance control, strength, and scope (Graham S.; Wood D., 2003).



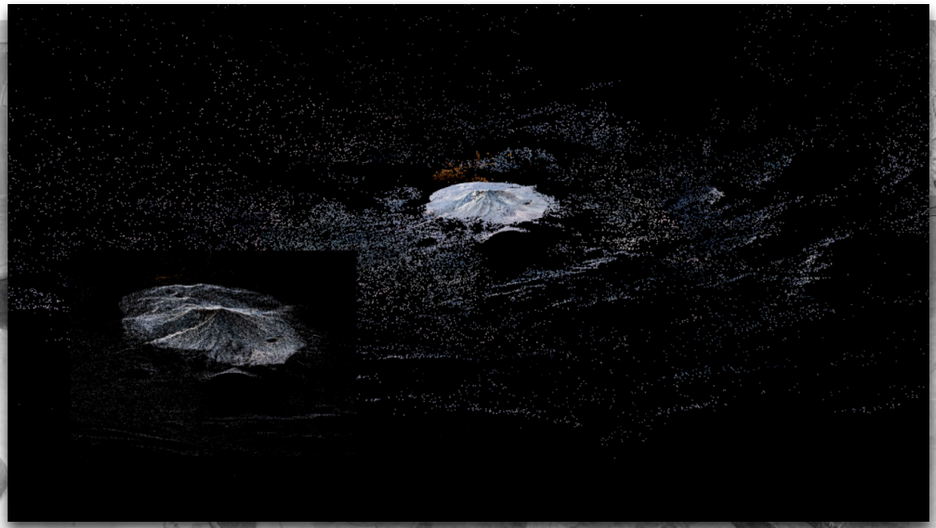
Representation studies for spatialisation of visual regimes
(Credit : Yelta Köm)

It is important to think about these systems within the development of digital mapping bound together with historical military and defence industry interests and funding, often backed by nationalist motivations. With the advent of the computer and the beginning of digital mapping processes, land census, and calibration systems which emerged in the sixties, a virtual image of the world began to be composed. While the earth becomes a weightless object assembled from satellite images, GIS data, aerial photos, and a globe to spin by clicking on a mouse, the technological tools which make this possible leave actual, physical traces on the earth (Helmreich S., 2016). Such entanglement requires us to think about infrastructure, surveillance, and architecture together. It has essential roles, especially in regard to colonising and new initiatives that alter and change a community or society at any size. Cartographic representation and power relations are always bound together and states use maps as tool of maintaining authority—because of this, in today›s world, this relationship becomes increasingly more complex and intertwined as time passes. I am interested, therefore, in how citizen-based, open structures can build strategies against oppressive governmental structures while they maintain their authority.

In the history of modern Turkey, maps and visual symbolism play a crucial role. Knowing that maps have a political role, it can be understood that the geopolitical imagination of Turkish nationalism reproduced itself through maps. Almost all common facets of nationalist ideologies use the map as a nationalist sign, which

is separated from its surrounding geographical context and implying unity. Of course, there is a strong distinction between the nation and others, and it creates the illusion of a homogenous population (Batuman B.; 2010).

In the last decade, Turkey has undergone many changes in its cultural and political scene. Within these changes, neoliberal developments play a crucial role in spatial oppression, with different tools and homogeneous illusions strengthening each day. I am looking, how state has developed visual regimes with spatial interventions. Especially in Southeastern Turkey, spaciocide is occurring in the Sur Neighborhood, which is under a process of destruction and deterritorialisation in Diyarbakir city and would be one of my research's main aspects. Sur is the historic central district of Diyarbakır, the largest city in Turkey›s predominantly Kurdish southeast. Since Hellenic times, this area has functioned as a vital cultural centre—its ancient, fortified walls and the adjacent Hevsel Gardens are UNESCO world heritage sites. On the other hand, the migration policies and migration movement along Turkey›s borders brought spatial changes and new conditions in certain areas like the Turkey-Iran and Turkey-Syria border areas. With all this in mind, I want to focus on nationalism occurring since the national building process from early republic until today and am looking at the visual regimes built by architecture. Further, I want to look at today's spatial settings in governmental surveillance and security works through people›s oppression with different digital and analogue technologies.



Digital Photogrammetry Tryout / Investigations through digital territories (Credit : Yelta Köm)

The motivation of neoliberal manipulative technology corporations and states have similarities. While I am thinking primarily about the distinction between data collection, cooperate aims and authoritarian visual regimes, I found a lot of common motivation. I believe there is plenty of room to discover the research questions and reflect on the study's objectives—the methodological approach proposed for this

Aerial Images (Source : The General Directorate of Mapping of Turkey)

research is related to qualitative, artistic, and architectural methods, as well as field research on a case study. The research schedule is planned to start with the theoretical aspect, based on the relationship between new technologies and visual imaginaries, surveillance systems and mapping technologies, military and security influences, and the spatialization of oppression. The practical section will begin with collecting data from archives, producing tryouts with machine vision, and developing new counter-narratives. In this process, I will look into the visual environment of authoritarian regimes and merge them with spatial conditions. The project in its entirety is multi-layered—the first layer is the theoretical, which forms the academic dissertation and discusses the relationships of the technological developments. The second layer is a more practical approach, which will include field research and an exploration of digitisation methodologies. During the second layer, I am planning to do a series of experiments, where I will use artificial intelligence and digital photogrammetry technologies, mixing them into artistic approaches and exploring the liminality of oppression›s spatial conditions. The research in this section looks at archival satellite images to understand what it means to see from the state's eyes with computer vision. I want to design the second layer as an open studio, where I could set up my experimental environment.

The third layer would be the comprehensive outcome that merges and intertwines methodologies in a map and spatial installation format. At the final phase, with the spatial intervention and counter-mapping, I will produce artefacts such as images, objects, and spatial setups. I believe that these processes have important potential to help me discover possible visual regimes. While working with photogrammetry and aerial images, I want to

argue that their illusion of accuracy is based on fictional and colonial map modelling. To do that, I want to elaborate my approach through possibility and discover various possibilities of visual regimes in their socio-geographical context. The practice-based research process will lead me in the next stages of my research, with a more consistent way that will help me to converge research methodologies. The mixed methodology followed in this research seeks to examine the spatiality of oppression practices and how they establish their visual regime. I aim to reach a counter-strategy project and establish a new narrative through witnesses and answering questions that reach for the underlying political, economic, and technical catalysts which drive analogue and digital surveillance methodologies of spatial oppression. Furthermore, I hope to examine how digital visualisation technologies can be used to create spatial conditions of oppression through experience and encounters.

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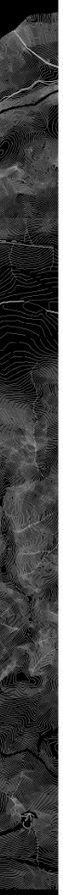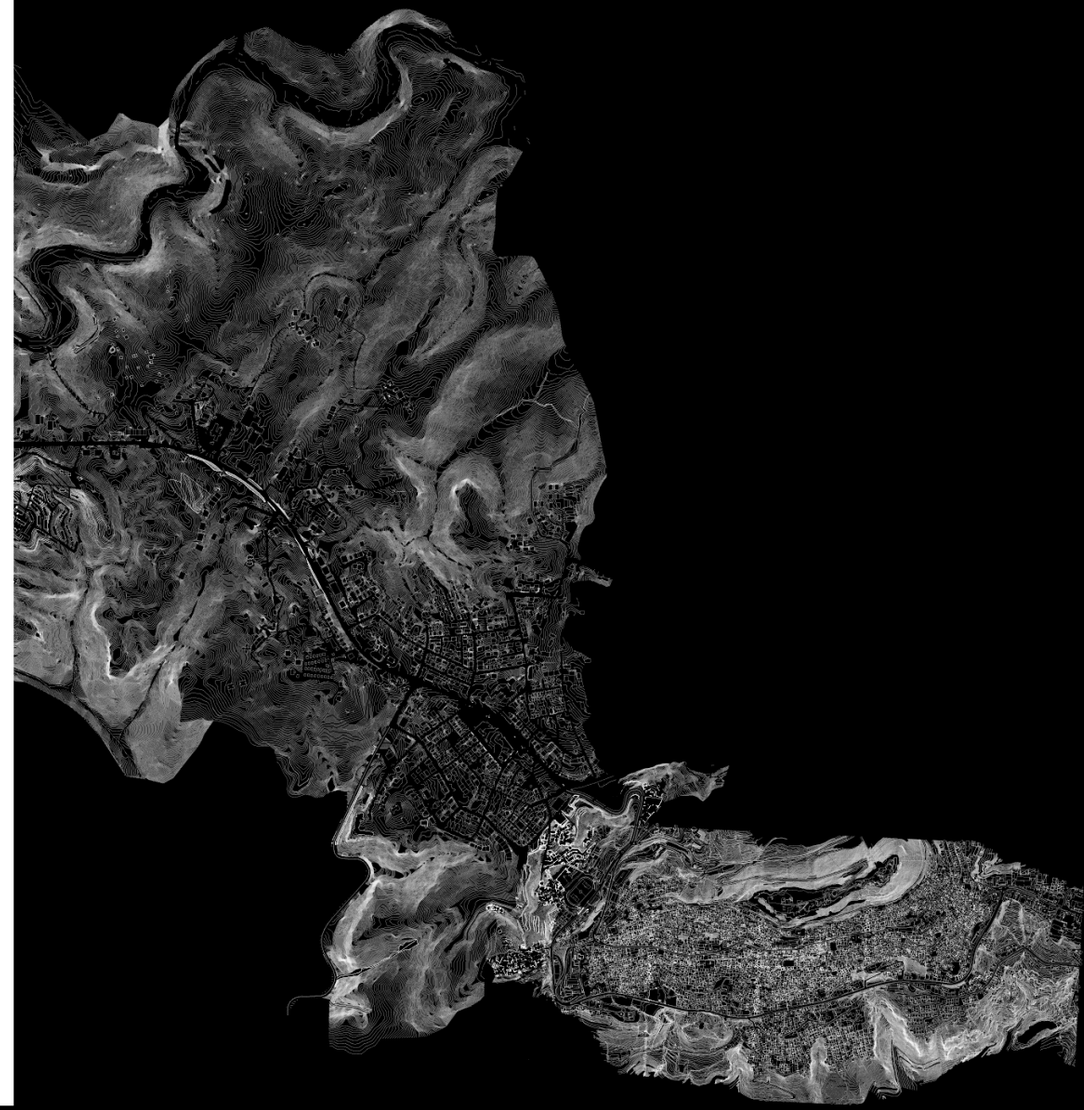
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