The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
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Résumé
Initialement présenté dans le cadre d'une conférence d'artiste, cet article examine *Imported Landscapes / Paysages importés* (2010) et *Gardening the Suburbs / Faubourg-jardins* (2013), deux de mes installations photographiques récentes. La localisation de ces projets, respectivement réalisés en Espagne, au Maroc et en Palestine/Israël, définit « un équateur politique ». Ce concept imaginé par l'architecte Teddy Cruz désigne une politique différente de l'espace, permettant de porter un regard critique sur les processus socio-économiques et géopolitiques relatifs à la globalisation à l'ère du capitalisme néo-libéral. Cet équateur s'appuie sur une géographie revisitée du monde actuel de l'après 11 septembre, où une ligne de partage traverse la mappemonde en trois points distincts, qui sont des déserts aux frontières contestées : 1) celle qui sépare le Mexique des États-Unis ; 2) le sud de l'Espagne et le nord du Maroc ; 3) le territoire israélo-palestinien.

J'utilise la photographie pour interroger ce concept de ligne de démarcation et ce qu'il implique en termes de mobilité humaine, de porosité des frontières et de lectures matérielles du paysage. Les projets que je décris ici me conduisent à une remise en question de la notion de « frontières bien gardées » entre états-nations souverains, et de proposer de nouvelles associations politiques et symboliques entre et à l'intérieur des territoires situés sur cet équateur politique.

Mes réalisations ont pour but d'observer la relation photographie-paysage. J'établis des liens entre les pratiques de la photo de paysage à ses débuts et leur versions critiques et conceptuelles ultérieures, puis j'étudie les façons dont mon œuvre traduit, critique, et renouvelle ces conventions.

À la fois concret et immatériel, le médium photographique peut mettre le paysage en récit comme il peut le remodeler. Je crée des photos qui montrent que des paysages spécifiques incarnent les contradictions de la globalisation, et portent en eux les traces des empires et géographies du passé. Notre appréhension du paysage (dans la vie réelle et dans sa figuration esthétique en images) correspond à une composition matérielle ainsi qu'à un produit de l'imagination. Se voulant une analyse de mon expérience empirique et imaginaire des photos de paysage, ce texte explique comment ma pratique ouvre la voie à de nouvelles manières de rendre compte des seuils de l'équateur politique. De plus, mon travail invite à un dialogue, par le biais de la création, avec la notion d'une possible durabilité ou modification politique future de ces paysages.

Abstract
In this paper, first presented as an artist talk, I explore *Imported Landscapes* (2010) and *Gardening the Suburbs* (2013), two of my recent photographic installations. Produced in Spain and Morocco and Palestine/Israel respectively these sites all fall along the 'political equator'. Introduced by architect Teddy Cruz, the political equator suggests an alternative politics of space through which to critically consider socio-economic and geopolitical

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

processes associated with globalisation under neoliberal capitalism. This equator is based on a revised geography of the post-9/11 world, whereby a line drawn across a world map intersects at three contested desert territories: 1) the Mexico USA frontier; 2) southern Spain and northern Morocco; and 3) Palestine/Israel.

This concept and its implications for human mobility, porous frontiers and material readings of landscape are explored through my photographic practice. Through the projects described here I challenge the idea of 'hard borders' between sovereign nation-states and suggest new political and symbolic associations between and within the territories along the political equator.

I use these projects to examine the relationship between photography and landscape. I make connections between early photographic practices in landscape and their later critical and conceptual versions and consider the ways in which my work translates, critiques and revises these conventions.

Photography as both a material and imaginative medium is able to simultaneously narrate and re-shape landscape. I produce photographs that suggest how specific landscapes embody the contradictions of globalisation and carry the traces of past empires and geographies. Our understanding of landscape – in 'real-life' and as it is aesthetically configured in images – is something materially arranged and a product of the imagination. Through an analysis of my material and imaginative experience of landscape photographs, this paper articulates how my practice opens new ways of narrating the thresholds of the political equator and facilitates an imaginative engagement with potential future political sustainability or modification of these landscapes.

Plan
Introduction
Imported Landscapes
Gardening the Suburbs

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Introduction

My art practice explores the use of the still and moving image in suggesting metaphysical space. My quiet, meditative visual language engages with the potential and restrictions of lens-based media and the evolving relationship between politics, landscape and art histories.

These themes are developed through video and photographic wall installations that explore the intersection between botanical and urban landscapes. In works produced largely in the Mediterranean, I form imaginary landscapes that connect ideas of human mobility and porous frontiers to translate, re-organise and re-construct material landscape. These highly mediated spaces between the imaginative and the material operate as a medium for questioning the canonical idea of human separation still deeply embedded in lens-based landscape traditions.

While my work emerges out of late twentieth-century critical and conceptual theories on landscape practice, I subvert these visual languages by avoiding both the disinterested gaze and the 'monumental' landscape. Instead, fragmentation acts as my language in both still and moving image works to create new narrative possibilities. This fragmentation disrupts traditional modes of landscape image production and refuses a definitive or authoritarian position.

In this paper I will present two different projects. The first one, *Imported Landscapes* (2010), informed the second, *Gardening the Suburbs* (2013). I will consider these two works in terms of what visual language I develop through them and how this might suggest a specific set of global socio-economic, and political conditions. I will also describe how my thinking about photography, and its potentials and limitations, has developed as a result of the insights I had while making these projects.

I situate my practice in a lineage—one of my own devising—that begins with Francis Frith's nineteenth-century depictions of the Holy Land and Timothy O'Sullivan's photographic surveys of the American West, leads to Walker Evans and the New Topographics photographers (in particular Lewis Baltz), who were also making work in the American southwest, and ends with Paul Graham, a British photographer now primarily producing work in and about the United States.

All of these photographers understand the significance of architecture and the vernacular as key to the reading of landscape. With their individual motivations and working in different continents at different moments in time, they nevertheless manifest connecting points, from the inception of photography to the present day. I will examine how these practitioners have informed my work but firstly I will offer some context regarding the locations I am working in and the global conditions that my practice is concerned with.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 1 Timothy O'Sullivan, *Sand Dunes*, Carson Desert, 1867-1868

Fig. 2 Walker Evans, *Church of the Nazarene*, 1936

Fig. 3 Francis Frith, *Mount Horeb, Sinai,* 1858

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

The Pentagon's New Map:
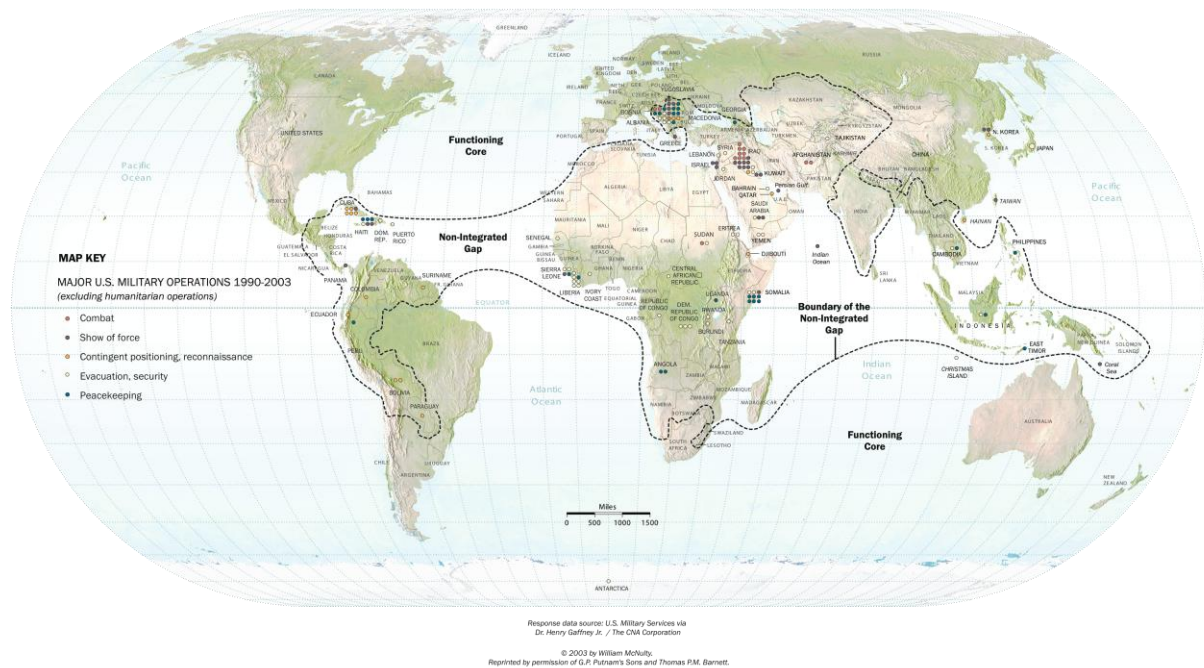War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century

Fig. 4 Pentagon's New Map

In the immediate wake of the events of September the 11th 2001, the United States of America's Secretary of Defence's taskforce commissioned the making of a new map to 'refocus the Pentagon's strategic vision of future war[1].' He was speaking about the 'war against terror' that found its rationale immediately after 9/11. On the Pentagon's New Map, a line demarcates what was formerly termed the 'first world' by the West. Here it has been renamed the 'functioning core'. Encircled in these boundary lines lies the 'third world', now referred to as the 'non-integrating gap'. The core includes parts of the world that are central to, and active agents in, economic connectivity and globalisation. The gap consists of those territories that remain 'disconnected', apparently posing a threat of terrorist networks, or those unable to play a role in global financial markets[2].

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[1] Thomas P.M. BARNETT, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century* (New York, 2004), 6.
[2] *Ibid.*

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
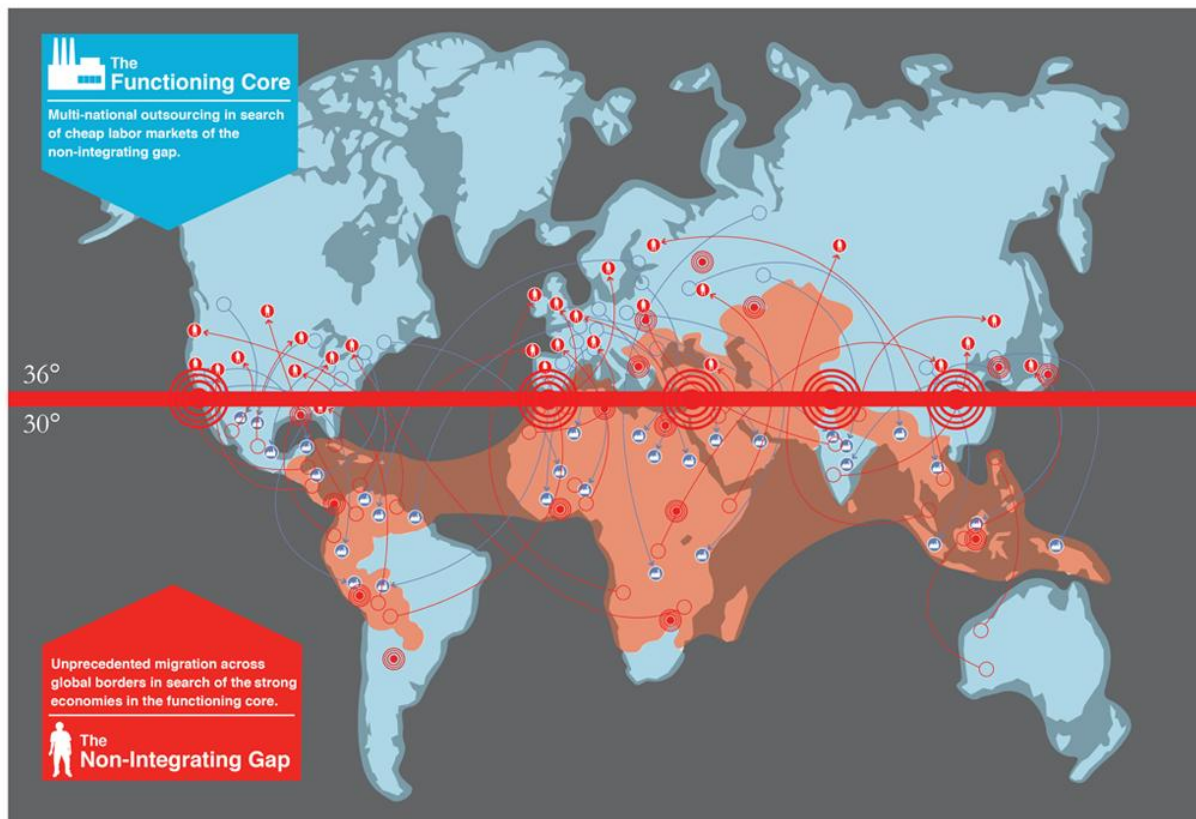Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 5 Estudio Teddy Cruz, illustration of the political equator

Architect and activist Teddy Cruz has used the Pentagon's New Map as a starting point from which to conceptualise a new political equator[3]. This equator, dividing the global North and global South, intersects at three contested desert territories: the USA-Mexico border, Southern Spain and Northern Morocco, and Palestine/Israel[4]. This 'corridor of global conflict' represents the hemispheric division of global wealth and poverty, and an expanding industry of fear[5].

Over the past few years, I have been making work along this equator, using these connected landscapes to explore ideas about human mobility and porous frontiers, connection and separation, and to think through ways of reading and reimagining landscape as both material and imaginative. *Imported Landscapes* was made in Southern Spain and Northern Morocco and *Gardening the Suburbs* I made in Palestine/Israel. I will first discuss *Imported Landscapes*, and the process of making, editing and exhibiting, and the understanding about how this work functions that came through this process.

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[3] See Teddy CRUZ, *'Border Postcards: Chronicles from the Edge', James Sterling Memorial Lectures on the City*, <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/74801062/JAMES-STIRLING-MEMORIAL-LECTURES-ON-THE-CITY-Canadian-Centre-for-> (accessed 12.10.12).

[4] I use the term Palestine/Israel to define both the current sovereignty and historical space of the territory and in order to acknowledge the complexity involved in naming this contested landscape.

[5] The India/Kashmir border, China, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and North and South Korea also fall on the political equator. I do not include them as case studies because my practice focuses specifically on the relationship between the political and symbolic nature of specific desert frontiers.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Imported Landscapes

The plate of Africa is moving at a rate of one centimetre per year against and underneath the Eurasian plate. In ten to fifteen million years, the Mediterranean Sea will no longer exist[6].

Fig. 6 Map of the Islamic world from the seventh through to the tenth centuries

Imported Landscapes was a site-specific installation and series of photographs commissioned by *Manifesta 8: The European Biennial of Contemporary Art*, 2010. The theme of this edition of the Biennial, which took place in the south-eastern Spanish region of Murcia, was a dialogue between Murcia and Northern Africa. I was one of thirty artists invited to make a piece of work responding to the theme as part of the festival's parallel events that ran alongside the two large group exhibitions.

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[6] I paraphrase Vojtech JIRAT-WASIUTYNSKI, *Modern Art and the Idea of the Mediterranean* (2007, 5).

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

I will first set the scene. In 711 AD, a Muslim army crossed the Straits of Gibraltar from Northern Africa to invade what we now call Spain, creating an Islamic kingdom that lasted for over 700 years. At the height of *Al Andalus'* power, the entire Iberian Peninsula was converted to Islam. This period has since been described as a 'Golden Age', a time of mutual tolerance between Spanish Muslims, Christians and Jews, during which the fields of science, agriculture, architecture and the arts flourished.

After four centuries of Islamic rule in Spain, the Crusades began, an aggressive territorial expansion of Southern Europe and the Middle East. By the sixteenth century, all Muslims had been expelled to Northern Africa, to what is now Morocco, and much of the Jewish population was dispersed throughout Europe and Northern Africa. Southern Spain has remained a contested border territory. Its Mediterranean coast is currently one of the main entry points into Europe for irregular African migrants, those denied entry into European Union territories under the restrictive visa conditions of the Schengen agreement.

Fig. 7 Corinne Silva, *New suburb of Tangier placed in former mining region La Unión, Murcia,* installation view, *Imported Landscapes*, 2010. Photograph by Ahlam Elena Azzedin.

To explore the connected landscapes of Southern Spain and Northern Morocco I travelled along the northern Moroccan coast, from Tangiers towards the Algerian border, making a series of landscape photographs. I then re-shaped the Spanish landscape by selecting and installing three pictures on eight by three metre billboards in specific locations in the region of Murcia.

These two Mediterranean landscapes share many geographical features including climate, flora and fauna. Through the act of placing one landscape inside another—the global South into the global North—I wanted to draw attention to the shared topography of these places at a time of increasing territorial partition. I was aiming to suggest the complex web of the ongoing connected narratives of trade, mobility and colonisation.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 8 New suburb of Tangier placed in former mining region La Unión, Murcia
Corinne Silva, from the *Imported Landscapes* series, 2010 (c-type print, 179 x143 cm)

Fig. 9 Port Tanger Med placed in highway leading to retail park, Murcia
Corinne Silva, from the *Imported Landscapes* series, 2010 (c-type print, 179 x143 cm)

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 10 Resort town of Al Hoceima placed in former industrial zone, Cartagena
Corinne Silva, from the *Imported Landscapes* series, 2010 (c-type print, 179 x143 cm)

Fig. 11 Exhibition view of *Imported Landscap*es series by Corinne Silva, *My Sister Who Travels*,
curated by Martina Caruso, The Mosaic Rooms, London, 18.07.14 – 30.08.14.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

The three site-specific billboard installations in Murcia were installed for about a month in December 2010. This installation was a re-forming of the landscape; it led to a visual and physical encounter with the billboards, which for many local people, with no *Manifesta* festival programme to guide them, was an unexpected encounter.

Once the posters were installed I made a set of three large-scale photographs of the billboards in the Spanish landscape to be viewed in a gallery. These three framed photographs of the billboards *in situ* have been exhibited in group shows and festivals, reproduced in publications, projected at artists' talks and displayed on my website. These photographs are always shown with a short title that details the layering of one landscape onto the other, while the billboard installation in Spain had no text with them. This is counter to the way in which billboards as vehicles for advertising usually operate, and so disrupts their purpose. A billboard is usually given a few seconds viewing time by passing vehicles. However, my 'slow' image, with no text to anchor it, stalls the habitual process of visual consumption. This intervention in the mundane transaction between billboard and viewer imposes a subtle alternative viewpoint into the Spanish landscape.

This project enabled me to understand how by manipulating the technical features of the camera—framing, scale, focal length and exposure—photographers do not merely picture landscapes but produce them. Making these installations made me shift my perception of photographs as just 2D images to understand how the photograph is both a representation of material forms in the world and a material object in itself. In this way, I think of my landscape photographs operating at the interface of the material and the imaginative: I am using photography to re-organise, re-vision and re-construct material landscape. In doing so, I form imaginative landscapes. These imaginative landscapes are not the fantasy images produced by advertising and tourism. They are an attempt to re-order the way these landscapes are viewed, experienced and understood.

Prior to the installation, in September 2010, I spent two weeks travelling across northern Morocco, a place I had never visited before, deciding each day what to photograph. Thinking of landscape as a cultivated construction, a conveyor of meaning, a language. In my mind's eye I was seeing southern Spain, laying one landscape over the other, noting the similarities and discounting the places that were visually too different for my purposes. I had a clear aim: to make pictures of landscape that could 'pass' for southern Spain.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 12 Author, Morocco, 2010. Photograph by Alex Coley.

I often work with a large format field camera, but with limited time, and unsure of what I was going to encounter, I used a medium format camera with which I could move more freely, shoot more material and feel more flexible in my approach. I returned from Morocco with hundreds of pictures and scanned around forty, chosen from the contact sheets. I decided on the initial edit based on which pictures felt to be balanced compositions when cropped to a panoramic format. Eight by three, scale-wise, is roughly equal to the third of the width of a full seven by six negative, and throughout the picture-making process I imagined a mask over the lens, cropping the image top and bottom.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 13 Billboard location, Murcia, Spain

In October 2010 I travelled to Murcia to choose the billboard locations. I did not want to do this remotely: it was essential to be there physically as the Spanish landscapes in which the billboards are sited are of equal importance to the Moroccan landscapes on the posters themselves. I spent a day driving round the region with employees of the billboard company, documenting and assessing the different options. I managed to find locations that told something of the ebb and flow of industry and how it has physically transformed the landscapes of this arid, largely rural and agricultural part of Spain. After the decline of the mining industry, fruit packing warehouses initially brought new jobs to the region, but as it is cheaper to employ workers abroad, produce is either sent to or grown in Morocco, and the labour too has been exported there. The former factories now act as storage space for the sprawling shopping mall nearby.

Through the specificity of these chosen locations, a dialogue between the billboard poster and where it was sited emerged that was not only general but also very specific. And yet, this dialogue could only be revealed in a gallery context through the way I titled each picture, which detailed first one location and then the other.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

To move towards a final edit, I grouped the Morocco pictures into two categories. The first included unpopulated landscapes without buildings, my gaze focused entirely on earth and sky and hills. The second category was the built-up landscapes. While I frequently work with cultural readings of public space and landscape architecture, I felt that the pictures in *Figures 14* and *15*, for example, didn't work because they had too much information or the wrong perspective.

Fig. 14 and *fig. 15* Corinne Silva, photographs from initial edit of *Imported Landscapes*, 2010

I made the pictures in *Figures 16* and *17* in Port Tanger-Med. The port, which opened in 2007, 40 km east of Tangiers, is extremely significant for Northern Africa, politically and economically. The Spanish State tried to block its construction, as imports and exports into northern and central Africa are now able to bypass Europe (and Spain in particular) and come directly through Tangier.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 16 Corinne Silva, photograph from initial edit of *Imported Landscapes*, 2010
Fig. 17 Corinne Silva, one of the final selected photographs for *Imported Landscapes*, 2010

My selection of the final edit was astringent, I discarded any photographs I considered to use too much of a 'documentary language'. So for example, I felt *Figure 16* focuses too precisely on the empty carcass of a building and the crates in front of it, whereas the final photograph selected, the one below, is quiet and spacious.

The port serves as an example of a physical reconfiguration of the core and the gap, the undeterminable coastline becomes a conceptual enmeshing and overlapping of the global North and global South. In choosing a more ambiguous picture of the port, I wanted to diffuse the signs of economic development in Tangier and present it as a barren construction site. Unless the viewer has access to the titles, it is unclear whether the port is being developed or has been abandoned.

For the final three gallery photographs of the billboard installations, the second life of the work, (see *Figure 11*) I photographed each according to its individual considerations. For example, in *Figure 18* it is possible to see a row of cottages behind the billboard, which I chose not to include in my final photograph. I wanted a topography that reinforced my proposition of a 'shared' landscape. The cottages may have rooted the location too firmly in Spain.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 18 Corinne Silva, *New suburb of Tangier placed in former mining region La Unión, Murcia,* installation view, *Imported Landscapes*, 2010. Photograph by Ahlam Elena Azzedin.

A series of unexpected problems with the installation forced me to return to Murcia three times. As a result I was able to spend more time there than I had expected, experiencing how the billboards functioned and how both I and others related to them. Through discussions with local people, it seemed that the works did act as portals into imaginative geographies, but not in the way I had thought. Without titles to explain the geographical location of the billboard posters, the people I met in Spain translated the installations as visions of how the landscape may have been or how it may be modified in the future. The billboard prompted the man in *Figure 18* to recall how this terrain has altered in past decades and to speculate on the implications of possible future development. I explained this merged landscape I had constructed, and he enjoyed my 'game'. However, a local woman was very agitated by the photograph on the billboard. She owns the land in which it is placed and read the billboard as an advertisement, thinking that a new construction was going to take place without her consent.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 19 Corinne Silva, *Resort town of Al Hoceima placed in former industrial zone, Cartagena*, installation view, *Imported Landscapes*, 2010. Photograph by Corinne Silva.

One particular unexpected setback while installing the posters in Murcia led to a further insight, another practice-born understanding of how the photograph is imaginatively and materially arranged. *Figure 19* reveals the condition of one of the billboards the first time I encountered it. The billboard company had installed my posters after four days of heavy rain and not being used to such weather in this part of Spain, they stuck them over layers of soaked paper, without considering the consequences. When I arrived the next day, the poster was flapping in the wind.

Perhaps my peeling posters offer the potential to literally experience a layering and a peeling back of landscape. Moving between the imaginative and material, a photograph is both image, surface, and yet also a tool for getting to what landscape theorist Anne Whiston Spirn calls "the deep context underlying the surface."[7] And it was through the process of researching, making, installing and showing the work, that I came to fully understand how these particular photographs on billboards, their materiality as well as their indexicality so apparent, might in fact contribute to and re-shape landscape, not just represent it.

Through the production of *Imported Landscapes* I was able to consider more deeply the potentials and limitations of the photograph, and clarify my aims, in terms of activating the agency of the viewer.

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[7] Anne WHISTON SPIRN, *Language of Landscape* (New Haven, CN/London, 1998, 24).

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Stephen Shore said something that I have found to be so useful when thinking about the possibilities of photography: he said a photograph can never explain, it can only suggest[8]. With the billboards, I'm aiming to find a way to release the viewers' agency through emphasising that an image does not and cannot contain all the information required to draw meaning. With *Imported Landscapes* I wanted to remind the viewer that there is something happening beyond the limits of the photograph, above and below, behind and around the black grid of the frame, beyond the moment chosen by me, the photographer.

Off-frame space is much more explicit in film, where characters move in and out of frame, panning shots remind the viewer of its edges and sound allows the audience to stay with the narrative, even when the protagonist is out of view. In still photographs, we know action is taking place beyond what can fit inside the black lines; we know the frame merely marks a provisional limit, its content referring to content beyond the borders of the photograph[9]. But this off-frame space is much more subtle, contained by composition. If the very frustration the photograph provokes when it yields nothing does not make the viewer turn away,—and there is always the risk the work will be rejected because it yields very little—then the content within the frame, this 'abducted part-space,' is intensely felt, precisely because there is more time for the viewer to linger and consider what is not contained within the photograph's borderlines[10].

As such, I suggest the *Imported Landscapes* photographs, both fragmentary and serial, might operate in a space between photography and film. Together these works form a triangle, a network of inter-related pictures. The sequencing of the pictures hung on a gallery wall creates a time-based narrative as well as a spatial experience as the viewer shifts between them. I instigate a dialogue not only between the three photographs on the billboards, but between these posters and the landscapes in which they are placed. In the gallery, as viewers become aware of the internal frames within each image they are also invited to make a connection across the six photographs. The viewers extend their awareness beyond the frame of the billboard, in turn entirely framed by the Spanish landscape. The frames within *Imported Landscapes* are suggestive of even more frames and consequently there is never a full picture, one can always pull back and see more.

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[8] 'Photography and the Limits of Representation,' Artist's Talk, *The Photographer's Gallery and Architectural Association*, Architectural Association London, 13 October 2010. See <http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/VIDEO/lecture.php?ID=1273> (accessed 27.10.12).

[9] See Siegfried KRACAUER, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford, 1960).

[10] Christian METZ, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, Vol. 34, Autumn, 1985, 87. Here, Metz draws on the work of Pascal Bonitzer 'Le Hors-champ subtil,' *Cahiers du Cinéma* n° 311 (May 1980).

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Gardening the Suburbs

> The human being is not a tree… perhaps human dignity consists in not having roots - that a man first becomes a human being when he hacks off the vegetable roots that bind him.
>
> Vilém Flusser

> To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.
>
> Simone Weil

Through describing my process of making *Gardening the Suburbs* I hope it will be clear how my sense of the photograph as both material and imaginative, a consideration of the space between still and moving image, and the potentialities of installation have all manifested in this more recent work. I would firstly like to expand on some of the more contemporary practitioners I see as part of my photographic lineage and briefly comment on how I draw on these people's work in my research and practice.

It is notable that while New Topographics photographers such as Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz had positioned themselves in a specifically American context, there were a number of British photographers simultaneously developing their own approaches, as well as interpreting the Americans' in a British context. The early work of Raymond Moore, Gerry Badger and Jem Southam all ran concurrently with the North American and German topographers. And while the New Colourists including William Eggleston and later Joel Sternfeld forged new ground in the United States, Paul Graham, Tom Wood, Paul Seawright and Anna Fox among others, were at the forefront of the New British Colour photography movement that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Less quasi-scientific and neutral than the New Topographics photographers, what interests me about these practices is how they were infused with European romanticism and surrealism and a distinctly British sense of irony.

It was Martin Parr and Paul Graham who brought the New Colour to Britain. They fused the formalism of American New Colour with the social political subject matter of British documentary photography. And for me, it's Graham, now living and working in the USA, who is the ongoing link between the American and British photography 'schools'.
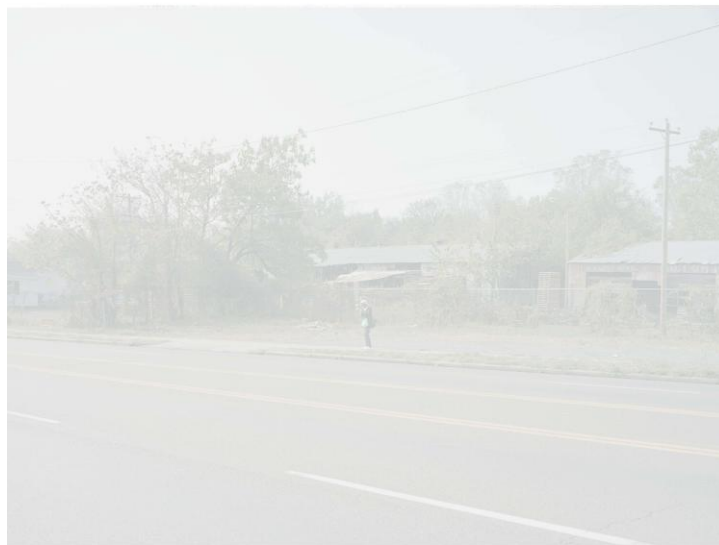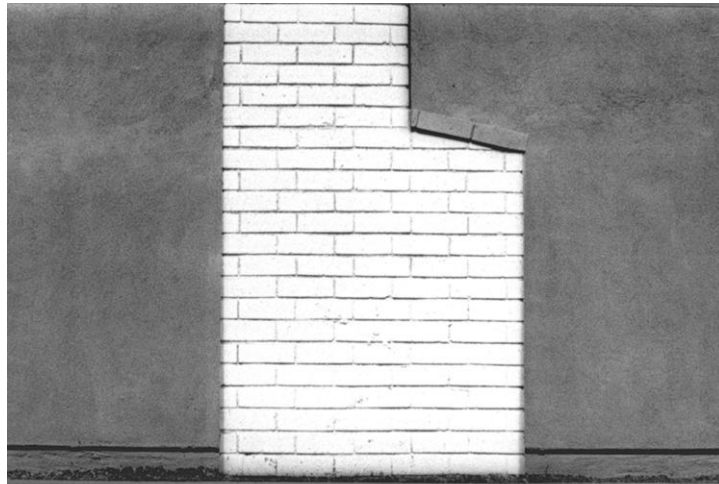
The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Fig. 20 Lewis Baltz, *Tract House #8*, The Tract Houses, 1971
Fig. 21 Paul Graham, *Untitled*, from the American Night series, 2003
Fig. 22 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Zeche Germania, Dortmund,* 1971

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

It is useful to me to have my photography contextualised within a certain framework of practitioners, yet for the purposes of my artistic production I do not approach their work intellectually. When I am travelling and making pictures, I engage with other practitioners' material in a very visceral way. Just as I meditate on and absorb the landscape during my daytime work, at night I absorb pictures I find on the internet.

It is not only the political intentions behind certain photographers' work but their desire to probe the ontology of the medium of photography that I engage with, and how each does so through a very distinct visual specific language. During one of my first residencies in Palestine/Israel in 2010 I had an instinctive need to look at Baltz, his graphic structures, lines and textures, blocks of shadow and light. His pictures hold the viewer outside the frame, yet they evoke a desire to penetrate, to understand.

Paul Graham responds to each of his past projects with his current project, always undoing and re-doing what photography is and can be. Like these practitioners, I understand my philosophy around the medium and I have a set of concerns that I bring to each project. My inquiry and intentions as a practitioner manifest in different ways in each body of work and every project opens up new questions to be explored in the one that follows.

I have spent the last three years travelling to Palestine/Israel making pictures of Israeli gardens: suburban gardens both public and private, planted forests and national parks. I am interested in the steady, ongoing Judaisation of the landscape, an intertwined Zionist and neoliberal push to build and plant across the Green Line and into the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The overall project is called *Garden State*. It consists of three interconnected photographic and sound works: *Gardening the Suburbs, Ascent* and *Wounded*. *Ascent* is a series of five small-scale, intimate photographs; *Wounded* is a series of nine large photographs with sound to be experienced as an immersive room installation; and *Gardening the Suburbs*, a vast, irregular photographic wall installation consisting of over one hundred and twenty pictures, each twenty-five centimetres square, and a number of plants on plinths with their common and scientific names written on labels.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Figs. 23 and *24 Gardening the Suburbs*, curated by ArtTerritories, Makan Art Space, Amman, Jordan, April 2014.

This piece was premiered at the Makan Art Space, Amman, Jordan, curated by ArtTerritories (see *Figures 23* and *24*) and I will be having a touring exhibition of the whole project, *Garden State*, organised in partnership with the Photography and the Archive Research Centre (University of the Arts London) and being shown first at Ffotogallery, Wales, in March 2015.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

It is *Gardening the Suburbs*, the largest project of the three that I will focus on here. I want to explore what gardens might represent in the context of the contemporary colonisation of this territory and why I have chosen to visually represent the Israeli civilian occupation through gardens and gardening. I also want to describe how I am working very consciously with both the materiality of the photographic installation and the surface of the photograph, which developed as a result of my process of making *Imported Landscapes*.
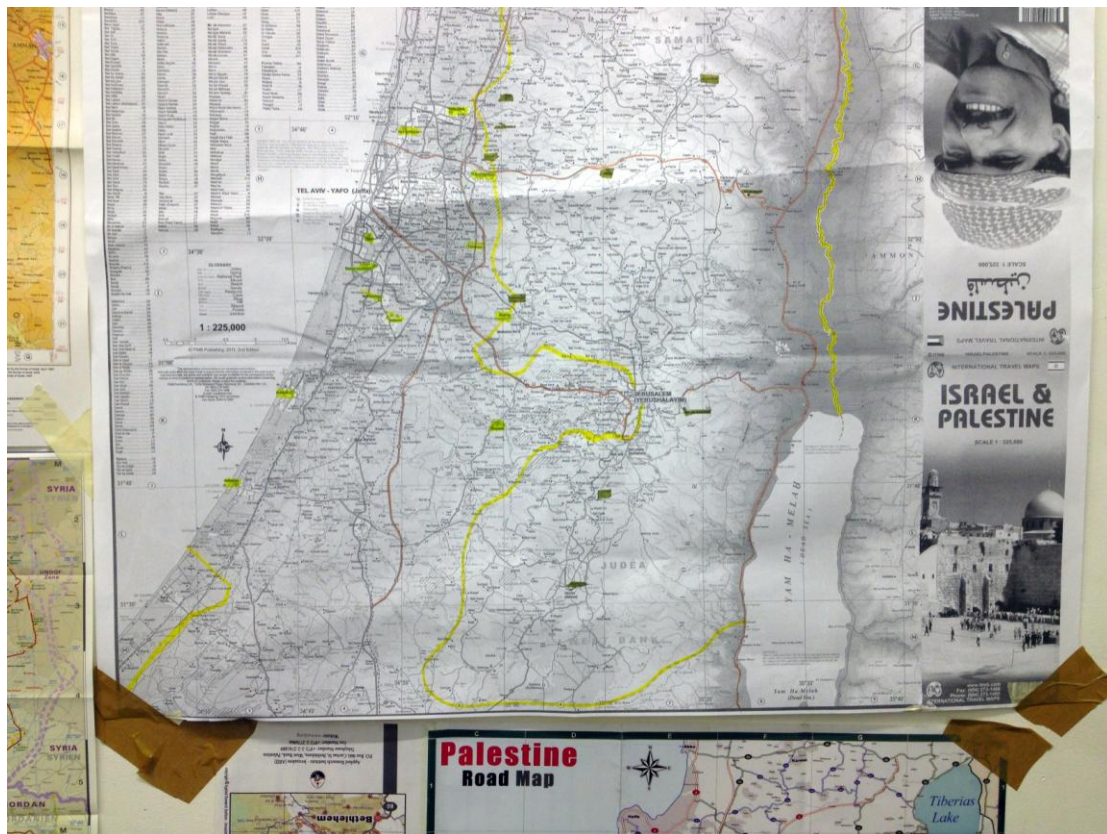

Fig. 25 Maps on author's studio wall. Green highlighted names identify Israeli settlements, yellow lines indicate the Green Line and borders with Jordan and Egypt, and red lines indicate major freeways. Photograph by Corinne Silva.

Before I look at my project, I will sketch a brief outline of the context in which I am working with regard to the implications of the Israeli civilian occupation of the Palestinian landscape, and how I came to choose the specific locations I worked in.

Between December 2011 and January 2013 I made a series of photographs for *Gardening the Suburbs* across twenty-three Israeli settlements on both sides of the Green Line. These settlements, like the European suburban towns they were modeled on, are classified by Israel as 'New Towns'. 'New Towning' were initially conceived as a Zionist/socialist venture in the 1950s, with the intention of moving people away from the cities to populate more of the terrain. This government-led initiative utilises most of the territory currently identified as the State of Israel for construction and thus justifies expansion into the West Bank.

Conceptualising colonial settlements as 'New Towns' is a way to normalise them in the Israeli imagination. By positioning the New Town as a safe environment for raising a family, with green areas and spacious living quarters, they become an attractive proposition, even

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

when illegally constructed across the Green line. As such, the Israeli civilian population who occupy these 'innocent suburbs' has a very dangerous function.
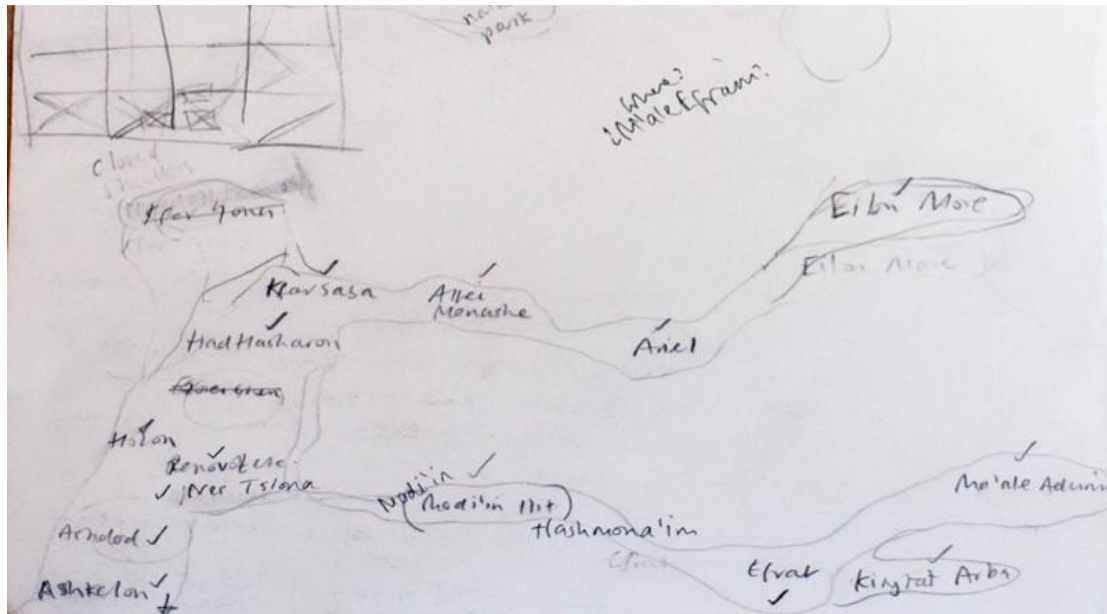

Fig 26. Author's sketchbook showing map of settlements visited

In this work, I form a large-scale, undulating, irregular installation made up of clusters of photographs of Israeli suburban gardens. The shape of the installation loosely maps the way these suburbs wind their way from the coastal areas surrounding Tel Aviv, across the Green Line and into the Occupied Palestinian Territories, cutting off Palestinian villages from one another and strategically positioning themselves either side of the main highways that dissect the region north to south and east to west.

By hugging the major roads and freeways, it ensures Israel has access to the main arteries of the region, should they require them. The recent conflicts in Gaza demonstrated how the Israeli military used Route 6, the barely used toll road, to drive its tanks down. The clusters of settlements around Route 6 are populated by many military families, who were invited to live there by the State. I suggest that Israeli power is not simply manifest in the military forms of spectacular violence seen in the media, but in this civilian/military occupation.

The State's tactic of spreading suburbs has been employed since the shift from the Socialism of the 1950s to the rising Capitalism beginning in the late 1970s. When choosing which settlements to photograph, I did not focus on the more ad hoc religious settlements, where the settlers use religion and holy sites as their motivation. All the places I chose are defined as secular and 'quality of life' settlements, a continuation of the 'New Towning' venture. They look much like the neoliberal gated communities you can find anywhere in the world. These 'neighbourhoods' require a particular civic appeal and urban typology, emphasising the pastoral landscape surroundings (however hostile they may actually be) in order to attract settlers. While there is no employment nearby, supplemented tax breaks, discounted fuel bills and the promise of the 'Good Life'—a house with a garden for the price of a Tel Aviv apartment—make the settlements an appealing prospect for young couples and families.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

The main point to re-emphasise, is that these New Towns begin within the boundaries of what is currently the State of Israel. Their gardens and the image of suburbia they help create serve to 'normalise' the settlements in the Israeli imagination, both those within the boundaries of the current State and those beyond. Ma'ale Adumim, the largest settlement with a population of 40,000 (depending on whose statistics you trust), is in many people's minds a commuter town for Jerusalem, Israel's answer to Croydon.

Fig 27. Gardening the Suburbs room installation, Makan Art Space, Amman, Jordan, curated by ArtTerritories

So why gardening and not architecture? Why am I not photographing the buildings? As a metaphor for human connection to place, plants speak of rootedness, uprooting, being transplanted[11]. Like mapping, planting is a place-making activity[12]. You only plant a garden when you intend to stay. Seen in the context of an attempted Judaisation of landscape and a 'return' to it, plants and gardens take on significant representational qualities. This is a botanical conflict.

I suggest that the reshaping of the landscape through the act of gardening is highly political and the materiality of gardens a coded tool to reinforce particular ideologies. Anthropologists have argued that gardens are a means through which everyday nationalism might be produced and emphasized[13]. The interesting thing to note about these gardens, however, is their hybrid nature and their 'anywhereness'. *Figures 28* to *35* show some of the segments of the installation, beginning with the Mediterranean coast around Tel Aviv and progressing eastwards into the West Bank. The layout of *Gardening the Suburbs* loosely reflects the geographical locations of the settlements, and it is interesting to see what specific styles of

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[11] Simryn GILL (Cologne, 2008). Simryn Gill quoted by Russell Storer, 51.

[12] Christopher TILLEY, 'From the English Cottage Garden to the Swedish Allotment: Banal Nationalism and the Concept of the Garden', *Home Cultures*, Volume 5, Issue 2, July 2008, Berg, p. 219-250, 223.

[13] See C. TILLEY, 'From the English Cottage Garden,' and Benedict ANDERSON *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006).

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

garden design arise in different geographical areas. I was drawn to certain motifs: the supported sapling, the white picket fence (that is sometimes plastic) and other features that suggest a cultural borrowing.

Fig 28. Gardening the Suburbs room installation detail

The gardening styles oscillate between two types of aesthetics: in some, an Orientalist fantasy is visible in the form of wild and sensual gardens that use indigenous plants, and others display a very ordered structure, similar to that of a French garden. In the majority however, particularly along the coast, in the New Towns south of Tel Aviv, Ashdod and Ashkelon, which border with Gaza, the gardens make use of vegetation that you would expect to find in places like Florida, or California. They could be in any number of gated communities worldwide, and that includes some of the new Palestinian gated complexes springing up around Ramallah. As the eye travels inland, east towards the desert and mountains, the gardeners make more use of rocks and boulders, more 'desert-like' features. I suggest these garden designs are evidence of an attempt to fuse with this landscape, to claim its history, to 'return' to it.
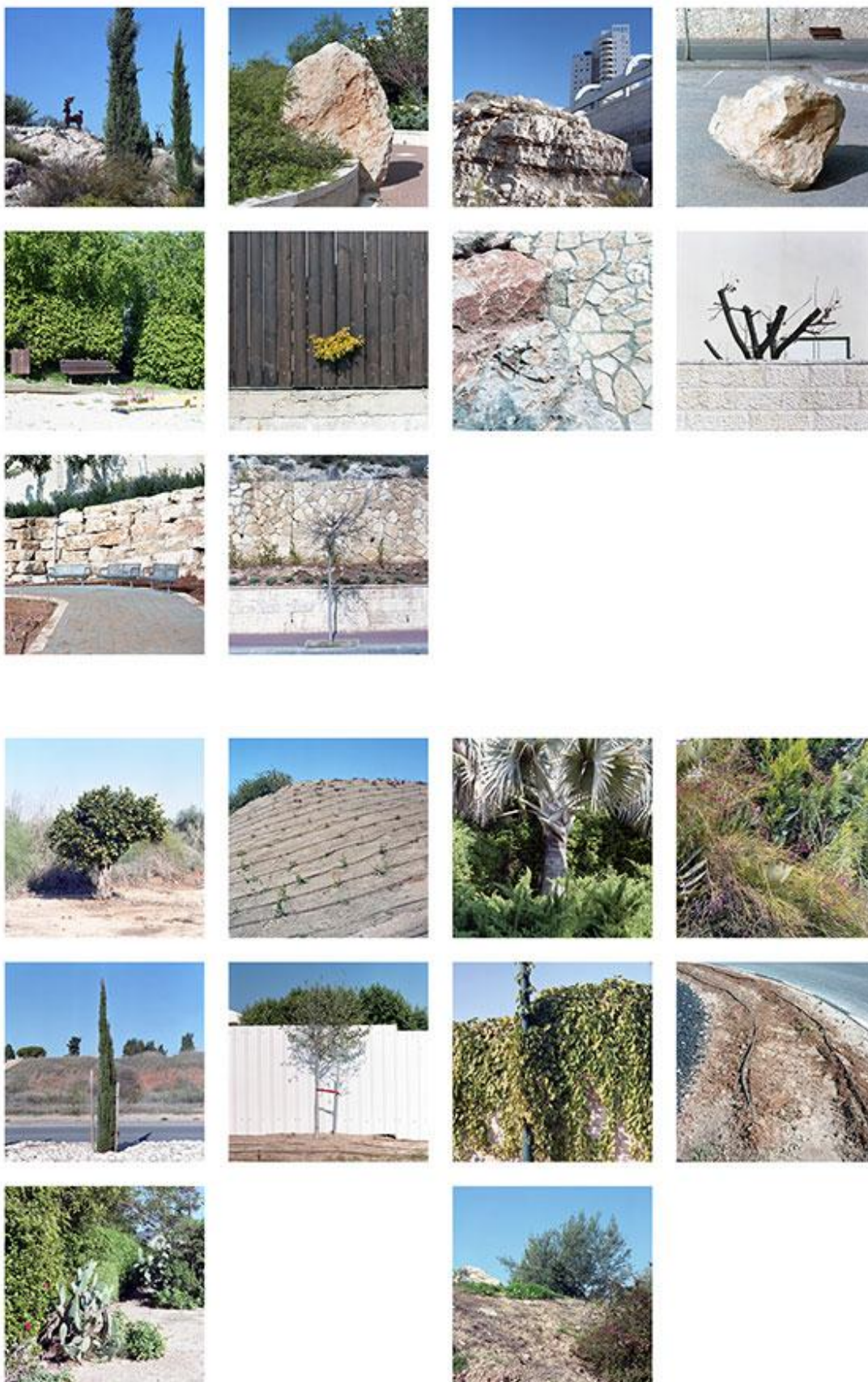
I think a lot about maps of this territory—which maps give what information—and I have a sense of multiple maps laying atop one another, each revealing or concealing something different. The Israeli landscaped spaces, and the ruined and existing Palestinian villages exist as separate geographies that inhabit the same landscape.

China Mieville's noir novel, *The City and the City,* describes two parallel worlds that are layered on top of each other but are socially segregated. These two cities occupy the same

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

geographical space, but via the volition of their citizens they are *perceived as* two different cities. A denizen of one city must dutifully 'unsee' (that is, consciously erase from their mind or fade into the background) the population, buildings, and events taking place in the other city, even if they are an inch away. Residents of the cities are taught from childhood to recognise things belonging to the other city without actually *seeing* them. At the heart of this novel is what people choose not to see, yet are all too aware of. As with Mieville's premise of being able to sensorially tune one terrain out, it's possible to ignore not only the ruins of exiled Palestinian villages but also the existing villages and towns. The street signs along the roads and freeways favour naming Israeli settlements over Palestinian villages, in some places at a rate of ten to one. The younger generation of Palestinians will have Hebrew place and road names ingrained in their minds at the expense of an Arabic geography.

Fig 29. Gardening the Suburbs room installation detail

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Figs 30 and 31. Gardening the Suburbs room installation detail

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

This layering of landscapes or surface upon surface comes through in the way I construct the pictures themselves. A key part of my process is an active seeking out of pictures that give me the courage to photograph in a certain way. In Walker Evans' *American Photographs*, his particular way of sequencing and linking pictures, how he mirrors pictures in one another and returns to places and faces, examining them from different angles, has been important to this work in thinking of how to lay a trail for the viewer to make links between pictures.

Gardening the Suburbs is about what is unseen as much as what is made visible, and my purposefully shallow compositions actively hold the viewer on the surface. None of the pictures take the viewer very far—there is a very shallow depth of field, you cannot penetrate them. In much the same way as I had hoped with *Imported Landscapes*, I hope that the viewer will look sideways, left and right, up and down, perhaps to go behind and into their imaginations; that they will piece something together out of these fragments.

The focus on keeping a tight surface in my photographs mirrors the content of the pictures: seemingly mature, wild gardens are revealed to have no depth, they fake their organicity. When examined closely, the gardens become façades somehow, planted to simulate a long-standing connection to these places, even though the settlement is probably quite new. My tapestry of lush greenery aims to suggest the façade of the Israeli state, hovering above the landscape, with a desire to merge, to embed, expressed through rocks and stones, and the flowers and trees kept alive by a constant source of piped-in water. And of course, that is the other fundamental point about these suburban gardens. The most important weapon Israel has in the occupation is water. The means to restrict and withhold Palestinian water, to take over Palestinian wells and reservoirs. Statistics vary but a general figure is that an Israeli uses 350 litres of water per person per day, and a Palestinian 70 litres per day.
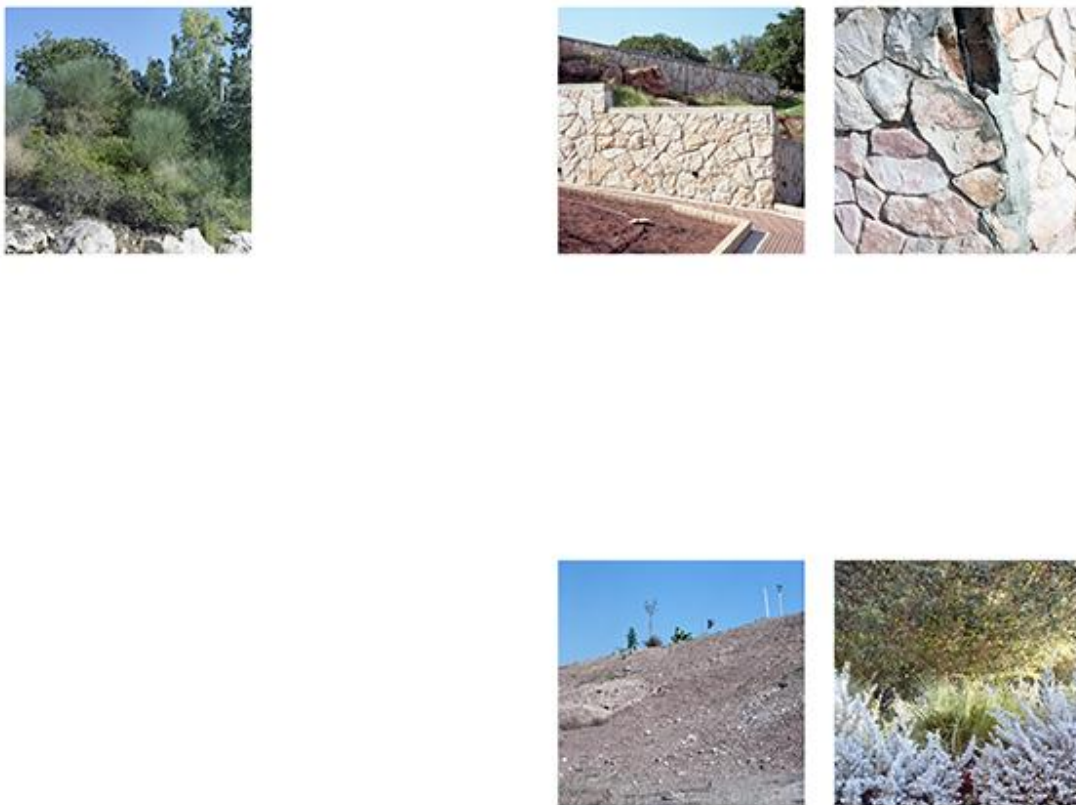

Fig 32. Gardening the Suburbs room installation detail

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

While I am looking at the façade, I nevertheless do not present an entirely smooth surface. A viewer might experience it initially as a wash of lush foliage, quite a visually arresting piece, but I hope the more time spent with it, the more the piece reveals itself to be about the cracks, the fissures, where things break apart and something else can be glimpsed. And perhaps in this sense, it reveals the mechanics of the civilian occupation, and also its weaknesses, the potential for change.

I consciously began this project with a strategy to look for the indirect signs and traces of the occupation rather than its more visible markers. Photography is a frustrating medium, as I have already emphasised, it cannot explain, it can only suggest. The Israeli Occupation and what remains of the Palestinian landscape (the West Bank and Gaza) have been over-imaged by Western photographers. I am interested in how I can develop a photographic language that might get you closer to the conditions than images showing a very militarised landscape. Many pictures I have encountered that depict this place as a violent or traumatised landscape do not get me to a place where I can think about the conditions behind the image. Nor do they get me close to the feeling I have when I am working in the region. One particular day stands out to me as helping me to understand what it is I am attempting to do.
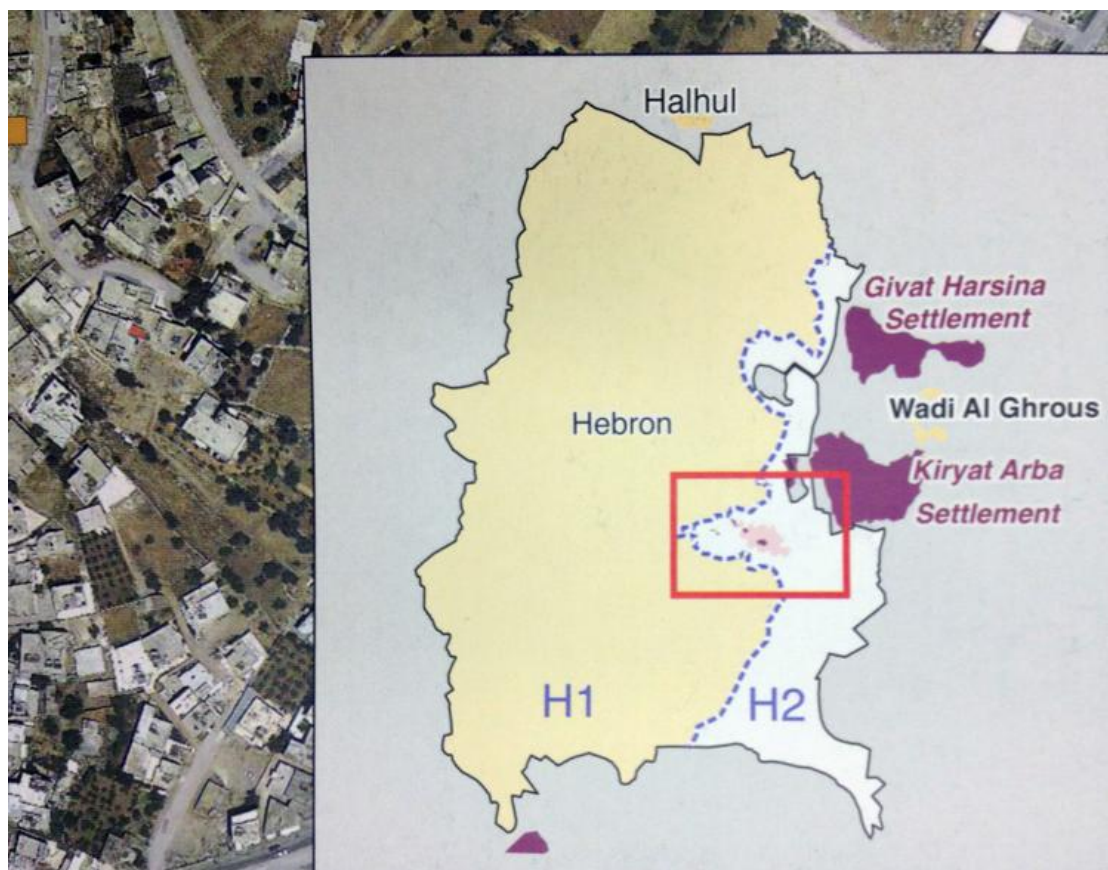

Fig. 33 Map of Hebron

Since 1997 Hebron has been divided into two sections: H1 and H2. The larger portion of the city, H1, is under Palestinian State Control, and H2 is the Israeli controlled area. The Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba, located just outside Hebron, (see *Figure 33*) is one the most contested settlements in Palestine/Israel, along with the four Jewish settlements located inside

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Hebron's city walls. I spent a few hours photographing in Kiryat Arba, then ventured into Hebron itself to view two of these settlements located within the city. As I drove away from Hebron I felt a deeply physical, visceral reaction to the violent landscape that surrounds it: the road blocks, checkpoints, watchtowers, the camouflage fabric flapping in the breeze, the groups of young Israeli soldiers sitting around, laughing, bored, killing time. It was then that I fully understood why it was that I had chosen to work with the seemingly inconsequential landscape gardening as a means to explore the violent civilian-military occupation of this territory.

For the first two weeks of this same trip, I had vivid nightmares every night that I was being strangled, choked, abducted, pursued. My subconscious mind was experiencing what I want the piece to articulate: the gardens as part of a scheme to map and grid and choke the earth. I am concerned with how I can develop a visual language that gets somewhere close to that feeling of horror, a slow creeping horror. And I am also interested in looking at the beast itself, the mechanics of this civilian/military/botanical occupation. In this way, my strategy has been to create pictures that individually do not contain too much information. It is through a build-up of pictures that meaning can be derived; yet unlike some of my previous works this piece does not take the form of a linear narrative. Photographic installation has the potential to behave differently from traditional linear narratives of photographs displayed in a book or on a wall, which are contemplated in relation to one another, the eye passing back and forth. An installation can arrange the receptive space of photography in a different way. I want the final piece to initially 'wash over' the viewer before he or she moves in to examine the details.

The lushness and sensuality of the plants visually entice the viewer, and I actively seek out beauty in G*ardening the Suburbs*. And yet once once spends time with the pictures one begins to realise how fixed and ordered, perhaps choking or overpowering, the reality of the gardens can be. At the same time, a tension is created: my photographs spill out, resisting containment by the grid, suggestive of a constantly expanding domination of landscape. The sensual pleasure of the piece complicates a clear reading of these places. My experience was that while ethically I am opposed to what these places represent, and I found working there extremely uncomfortable and stressful, I can understand how these gardens can soothe, lull one into a sense of security and make one feel protected.

Fig 34. *Gardening the Suburbs* room installation detail

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Finally, to summarise my intentions with the piece, by shaping this fractured and fleshly broken grid of flora, my own miniature landscape, I observe the way in which Israel attempts to connect with the earth, to spread and settle, to plant roots and grass over the historical and contemporary land of Palestine.

What I have done in this paper is firstly contextualise my work within a particular photographic lineage, albeit one which I am subverting. I also emphasised the connections between the landscapes on the political equator, and how photographic installation might be used to suggest certain sets of global conditions. And more than that, I highlighted the connections between my projects, how one project leads to certain insights and also questions, which I then try and resolve in the next piece, and from which, inevitably, new questions emerge, and so it continues.

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Biographical information

Dr Corinne Silva is Research Fellow at the Photography and the Archive Research Centre, University of the Arts London. She was the recipient of an Arts and Humanities Research Council PhD Scholarship and received her Doctorate from University of the Arts London in 2013. In 2014 she was artist in residence at A.M. Qattan Foundation Ramallah and the Kaunas Photography Gallery, Lithuania. She received a Triangle International Fellowship for a residency and exhibition at the Makan Art Space, Amman, Jordan.

The Politics of Planting and the Language of Landscape
Corinne SILVA
University of the Arts London

Recent group and solo exhibitions include *My Sister Who Travels*, Mosaic Rooms, London (2014); *Gardening the Suburbs*, Makan Art Space, Amman; *I See Europe!* Kunstbezirk, Stuttgart (2013); Brighton Photo Biennial (2012); The Photographer's Gallery, (2012); Flash Forward festival, Toronto and Boston (2011/2012); Wandering Abroad, National Media Museum/Ways of Looking Festival, Bradford, UK (2011); *Imported Landscapes*, Manifesta 8, (2010); *Badlands*, Noorderlicht Photofestival (2010); *Wandering Abroad*, Leeds Art Gallery, UK (2009).

Notice biographique

Dr Corinne Silva fait partie du Centre de Recherche sur la Photographie et les Archives de la Faculté des Arts à Londres. Elle a bénéficié d'une bourse de doctorat au Conseil de la Recherche des Arts et Humanités, et a obtenu ce diplôme à la Faculté des Arts de Londres en 2013. En 2014, elle a été artiste en résidence à la Fondation A.M. Qattan de Ramallah, ainsi qu'au Musée de la Photographie de Kaunas en Lithuanie. Elle est devenue membre associé du Triangle International pour un séjour et une exposition à l'Espace des Arts Makan d'Amman en Jordanie.

Parmi ses récentes expositions, seule ou avec d'autres artistes, on peut citer *My Sister Who Travels* aux Mosaic Rooms de Londres (2014), *Gardening the Suburbs* à l'Espace des Arts Makan d'Amman, *I See Europe* au Kuntstbezirk de Stuttgart (2013), à la Biennale de la Photographie de Brighton (2012), à la Galerie du Photographe (2012), au Festival Flash Forward de Toronto et Boston (2011-2012). Elle est aussi l'auteur d'oeuvres intitulées *Wandering Abroad* au Musée National des Média/Festival Ways of Looking de Bradford, au Royaume-Uni (2011), *Imported Landscapes* au Manifesta 8, *Badlands* au Festival de la Photo de Noorderlicht (2010), *Wandering Abroad* à la Galerie d'Art de Leeds, au Royaume-Uni (2009).