

# Stories



Credit: Gregor Hofbauer.

# Design Tools for Alternative Narratives

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Three stories narrate professional and design practices that expand the Galaxy of Design, testifying to comprehensive experimental approaches, from the products produced, to the languages and techniques employed, to the themes and meanings. A studio, a scholarly research agency and a professional, who further shift and shred the boundaries of the discipline. The first is Superflux, which takes us to an experimental and speculative dimension, working on multimedia narratives in which the artifact becomes a programmatic, post-tech narrative pretext, representative of a consistently decentralized vision of man in the Planet. Forensic Architecture, which using digital technologies to analyze the built environment, places design as a methodological approach at the service of investigations of human rights violations. Finally Thomas Thwaites, for whom the project (which can be performance, device, installation or film) is always about finding answers to fundamental questions about our relationship with time, technology and nature.

# Superflux

Superflux is a London based design and film studio founded by Anab Jain and Jon Ardern in 2009. Their works explore the relations between politics, culture, technology and the environment. Social injustice, racism, colonialism, extractive capitalism, inequality and climate apathy are strongly connected to our identity. We live in a context in which every interaction with digital technologies becomes a tool of extraction and manipulation. Superflux's work often returns to these concepts, such as in the film *Intersection* (2021), set in a very near future in which humanity seems able to evolve towards a more cohesive and cooperative society in a tale of strong hope rooted in an angry and pessimistic present, but in which those struggling to reimagine the extractive technologies that characterize our times are actually already building that future. It is a work that comes from a process of critical sensemaking, mixing field research, foresight, speculative design, telling of a transition from a world hostage of the relationship between technological platforms and media, to a scenario of almost post-apocalypse in which only the essential technology is put at the service of communities, between localism and purification. A fundamental part of their work is the creation of speculative devices or "diegetic prototypes", in which they stratify morphological archetypes that take up vernacular forms and solutions with an essential and post-technological approach to support the needs of a new society that remains digital, but that has completely overcome all inhibitions in overturning its values, freeing itself from those of the consumer society founded on a fundamentally extractive approach. The scenario of a post-apocalyptic world (or post-crisis climate), also characterizes the installations recently created for the Venice Biennale 2021, placing us at the moment of a hypothetical awakening after the catastrophe in which we look to the future with hope. A

hope that starts from the simple fact that life still exists and that it will rise again with us, in the form of nature which returns to take possession of the urban ruins glimpsed from the window in *Refuge for Resurgence*, or reappears to generate a luxuriant clearing that appears at the center of a dead forest (*Invocation for Hope*). The first installation takes us to the scene of a multi-species banquet in which man tries to propose a reconstruction of a world that is finally more-than-human, inviting to dinner beings that in the present we would chase out of our garden. An initiation rite — of an era — that is the symbol of a new coexistence made of radically egalitarian and inclusive experiences (everyone has their own menu, their own cutlery, their own seat) in which again, the artifacts are narrators of a mythology of transition, but also "primitive" and frugal to testify to a humble and profound regeneration of our values. *Invocation of Hope* is an artificial exterior, a dead and burnt forest, solemn and metaphysical, organic ruins of our destructive civilization. But at the center of which we find hope in the future in a lush clearing, a symbol of a pact of rebirth between human and non-human.

## References

Superflux. (n.d.). <https://superflux.in/>



Still from the Intersection.  
Credit: Superflux.



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Window View created for Refuge For Resurgence. Credit: Superflux and Cream Projects.

Table setting from Refuge For Resurgence. Credit: Mark Cocksedge.

Refuge For Resurgence exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2021. Credit: Giorgio Lazzaro.



# Forensic Architecture

Forensic Architecture is a research agency founded in 2010 by Prof. Eyal Weizman and based at Goldsmiths, University of London. It is committed to the development and dissemination of new evidentiary techniques and undertakes advanced architectural and media investigations on behalf of international prosecutors, human rights and civil society groups, political and environmental justice organizations. It is composed of architects, artists, filmmakers, journalists, software developers, scientists, lawyers and an extensive network of collaborators from a wide variety of fields and disciplines. Forensic Architecture is also an emerging academic field that refers to the production and presentation of architectural evidence in legal forums, including the courts, and for advocacy purposes. The encounter between architectural design and forensic science generates a new practice in which the boundary between disciplines blurs. Contemporary conflicts increasingly take place within urban areas where houses and neighborhoods become targets and most civilian casualties occur within cities and buildings. But they are also and immediately represented ubiquitously on social networks, creating an unprecedented archaeology made up of fragments of images, shots that make it possible to reproduce a scene from angles that the official images made it impossible to capture. It is in this way that the ballistic reconstruction of a shooting, superimposed on a timeline made of videos found on the web, recombines in the space of a 3D model generated from satellite maps, creating a multimedia assembly of alternative and complementary narratives. When contacted by an NGO or the family of a victim to request support for a court case, the mission is to provide an interpretation of the facts from a different perspective than the institutional version. As much data and information as possible is collected such as

maps, images, interviews, audio, video, satellite data, legal transcripts, and content from social media. Gathering the material is often made difficult by authorities denying access to the sites, and the significant delay of operations weeks, months or even years after the event occurred. Various experts work on generating reconstructions, using tools from architecture, engineering, urban planning and film, comparing photographic images taken from different angles, subjecting leaked official images to a thorough reading by dedicated software, or carefully analyzing raw sound sequences. While new technologies have contributed to the complexity of forms of conflict and control, they have also enabled new means of monitoring. As urban battlefields become increasingly dense with data and media, Forensic Architecture's response is to use all possible media and technology spaces to co-generate "open-source", collaborative, and choral evidence. Relying on software they implement and maintain, they approach research as a participatory endeavour, involving victims and stakeholders in reconstructing, even performatively, the history of armed conflict, environmental destruction, and other political struggles. Their investigations define an apparatus of methodologies and trans-disciplinary experimental technological approaches, whose narratives reconstruct and deconstruct the violence of authority as it reverberates in space, places and official media narratives that when confronted with traces, findings, videos and images drawn from social networks become attackable, contestable and refutable: an unexpected and radical approach that takes the tools and supports typical of architectural design and puts them at the service of social justice, with humility and the willingness to deal with technologies and languages that come from other worlds, other cultures and sensibilities, both methodological and performative. This

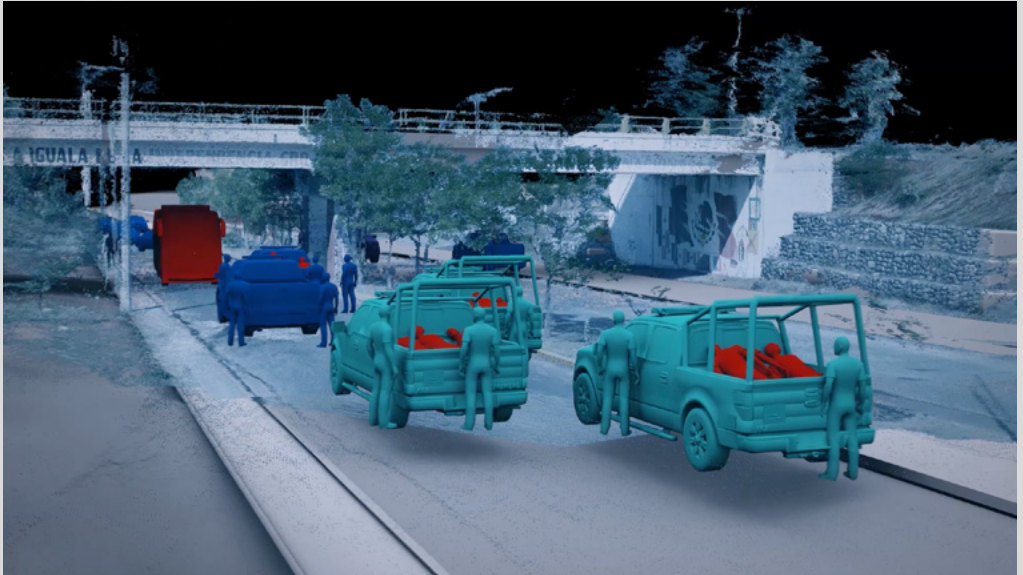
is why their work is exhibited in art galleries, museums, conferences or distributed in the form of texts, in a specularity that the project — of a forensic reconstruction — establishes between the input and output materials of the process, as varied and interconnected as all those fragments of stone, concrete, video, sound or satellite maps that have been sought and put into a system. But the project in this case is no longer an artefact nor the documentation needed to make one, but the 1:1 scale model of truth that we might have risked losing. This practice can still be defined as design (and research), because it is oriented to the production of relational spaces consisting of events and their places, of scientific evidence, of multimedia fragments, products of mass surveillance models, of bodies, of organic, inorganic and digital matter, which recombine in different moments of time.

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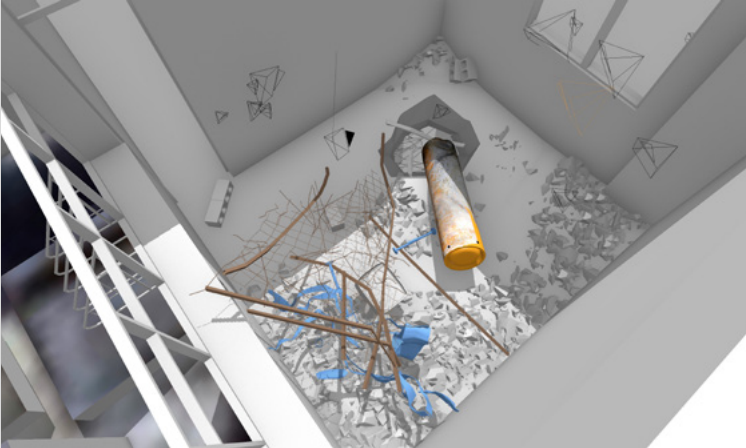


**At the Palacio de Justicia, between twelve and fourteen students (red) were beaten up and loaded into the back of multiple police vehicles (turquoise). Forensic Architecture, 2017.**





The source of the third smoke plume on the north west of the warehouse. Forensic Architecture, 2020.



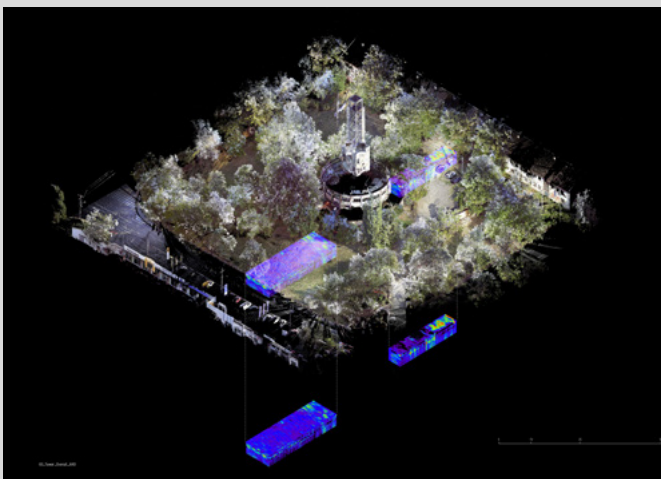
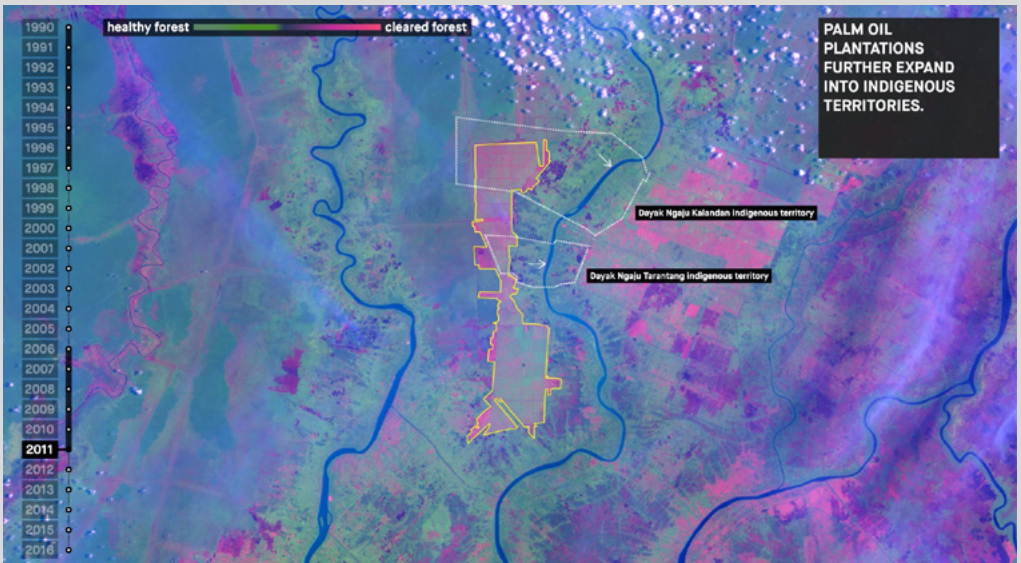
Reconstruction of the chemical attack site in Douma near to al-Shuhada square. The discharged chlorine canister, wire mesh fence and deformed harness are visible amongst the wreckage. Forensic Architecture, 2018.

Dean Issacharoff — the soldier accused by Israel of giving false testimony — describes the moment he illegally beat a Palestinian civilian. Forensic Architecture/Breaking the Silence, 2020.





Superimposition of the models from the three witnesses we interviewed as they describe a convoy of soldiers escorting a group of arrested Palestinian civilians to a militarised checkpoint in Hebron. Forensic Architecture/ Breaking the Silence, 2020.



Expansion of palm oil plantations into the territories of the indigenous Dayak communities. This plantation work lead to massive forest and peat fires in 2015, resulting in extensive damage to these communities and the ecosystems of which they are a part. This environmental violence is known as 'ecocide'. Forensic Architecture in collaboration with FIBGAR, 2017.

Central tower at Staro Sajmište (the former Semlin death camp) in Belgrade. ScanLAB Projects/ Caroline Sturdy Colls/ Forensic Architecture, 2013.



Forensic Architecture located photographs and videos within a 3D model to tell the story of one of the heaviest days of bombardment in the 2014 Israel-Gaza war. The Image-Complex, Rafah: Black Friday. Forensic Architecture, 2015.

According to FA's analysis, between Mark Duggan exiting the minicab, and receiving the second, fatal shot, no more than 1.5 seconds had elapsed. Forensic Architecture, 2020.



Trina Reynolds-Tyler reconstructs the night after Harith Augustus was killed, the protests that followed his death, and the reaction of the police. Forensic Architecture, 2019.

# Thomas Thwaites

Thomas Thwaites is a London-based designer, exploring the psychological and social impacts of technology. His research and process of creation are often intertwined as a story, told through live lecture-performances, published books, moving images and exhibitions. His approach to design sometimes appears more like a journalistic investigation in which the practice of the two professions is mixed and reconfigured into a narrative process with multiple outputs. His first book, *The Toaster Project*, is about an attempt to build an electric toaster from scratch using pre-industrial techniques, from metal mining to the production of plastic from oil. The process is clearly nearly impossible without “cheating” by his own admission (to be intransigent he would have had to, for example, produce the electricity needed for the processes as well), but it still helped in the pursuit of deeper questions about the relationship between humankind and artefacts. How big, vast, dispersed, articulated, sustainable and simply reproducible by one man is the production chain of a toaster? The project is therefore not a concrete attempt to reconstruct a device that we can buy for the cost of a sandwich, but a reflection on the spatial-temporal scales of supply chain flows. Thwaites investigates a form of alienation of contemporary man who is now totally disconnected, from the point of view of knowledge and awareness, from the processes that generate the devices necessary for even the simplest daily actions (when did it become impossible for us to manufacture everyday objects?).

While on the one hand this would lead us to think of the qualities of an extremely organized, specialized and efficient civilization (without dwelling on the destructive and extractive nature of the processes necessary for this efficiency), today, in light of the consequences of the pandemic regarding the fragility of global supply chains, the

designer’s only apparently naïve reflection is more useful than ever and possibly, already compelling evidence of the need for a profound revision of our relationship with things. In his book titled *GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday from Being Human* he tells us about the experience of trying to live as a goat, following a herd of goats in the Alps as a full member for about a week. A reaction to a moment of disorientation in which the answer to all questions is to take a “vacation” from the human dimension. For the purpose, Thwaites designed a kind of exoskeleton that allows him to walk on four legs, a prosthetic artificial stomach, visited a behavioural psychologist and a neurologist to explore how to disrupt certain parts of his brain. Preliminary research on the project led him to become interested in the social, relational and metabolic mechanisms of the animal to be impersonated, as well as the possibility of physically removing mnemonic and cognitive abilities from himself to try to look as much like the goat as possible. According to Thwaites, the project has become an exploration of how close new technologies can bring us to realizing an ancient human dream: that of taking on the characteristics of other animals. But instead of the ferocity of a bear, or the perspective of a bird, the most useful trait in modern life seems to be something else, like the “nimble” but socially structured adaptability of a goat. The multi-species relationships that intertwine with the - even unexpected - outcomes of emerging technologies are also the subject of the *Policing Genes* project, in which the designer imagines a surveillance chain on the misuse of genetically modified plants by private citizens. In a scenario of easy accessibility to genetic engineering techniques at a DIY level, the police uses technological beehives to monitor the territory, in which once a gene belonging to a prohibited or protected species is detected in the pollen carried

by bees, it is possible to decode the position of the plant and therefore of its owner. Design is declined here in different forms, from the most recognizable in the design of the device, to the much more sophisticated heuristic to explore the relationship between species, organisms, powers, matter and law. Design as a material, speculative and advanced practice, capable of placing socio-technical assemblages within scenarios of the near future, which allow us to accelerate the consequences of non-control on the combined effects of emerging technologies. Design can again offer itself as a mediator between sciences and worlds, to produce systems that do not serve the market, but produce value by demonstrating the effects of our actions beyond the complexity of the contemporary, forcing us to activate necessarily political discussions on futures that are closer than we imagine.

## References

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**GoatMan, 2015.**  
Photo: Tim Bowditch.



*GoatMan*, 2015.  
Photo: Tim Bowditch.

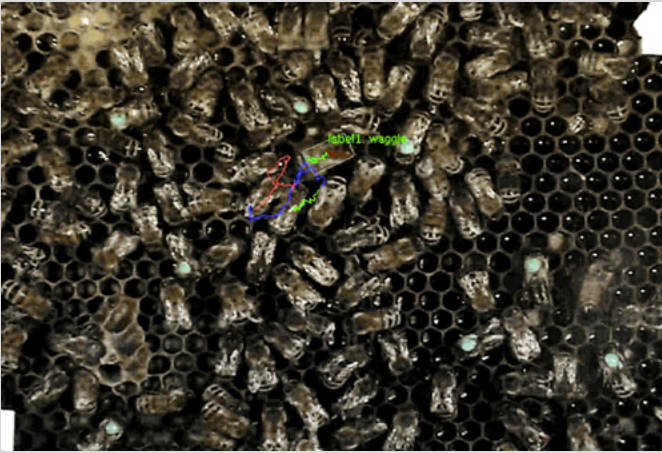




*GoatMan*, 2015.  
Photo: Tim Bowditch.

*Policing Genes*, 2010.  
Automated waggle dance tracking.

*Policing Genes*, 2010.  
Photo: Theo Cook.





*The Toaster Project*, 2009.  
Photo: Nick Ballon.

*The Toaster Project*, 2009.  
Photo: Daniel Alexander.

*The Toaster Project*, (Rep-  
lica, 2012) as installed at  
the 2012 ZERO1 Biennial.  
Photo: Patrick Lydon.

