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Shibboleth: Policing by Ear and Forensic Listening in Projects by Lawrence Abu Hamdan

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The juridical and conceptual field of critical forensics, situated at the juncture of security studies, art, and architecture, has distinguished itself by the task of bringing "new material and aesthetic sensibilities to bear upon the legal and political implications of state violence, armed conflict, and climate change."[1] Hailing "new visibilities" that "have emerged with the development and widespread accessibility of digital data derived from activist imagery and their accelerated dissemination via mobile phone, cloud, and social networks," forensis has branched into the area of "new audibilities," with a focus on the politics of juridical hearing in situations of legal identity profiling and voice authentication. Adopting investigative procedures and methods of analysis that mirror and appropriate those of forensic calculation, critical forensis reframes the issues of "free" speech, freedom of expression, and "free translation" not as, strictly speaking, issues of human rights, but as a technics of expression. Accent monitoring and audio surveillance, voice recognition, translation technologies, sovereign acts of listening, and court determinations of linguistic norms emerge as so many technical constraints on "freedom of speech," itself a malleable term ascribed to discrepant claims and principles too numerous to summarize, yet taking on performative force in site-specific situations.

Audio politics are playing catch-up to visual politics in the diversified medial arena of critical forensics. In *Images à Charge. La Construction de la preuve par l'image* (roughly translatable as "Image for the prosecution: The construction of proof by image"), an exhibition at Le Bal gallery in Paris during the summer of 2015, visual politics remained uppermost. The show explored the historic use of visual metrics and protocols in the evaluation of crime scenes, the prosecution of crimes on the basis of visual evidence, and the mapping of borders under conditions of warfare, supranational surveillance, colonial occupation, and environmental violence. But in a pendant volume—*Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth,* in which architecture is expansively construed as a "microphysical analysis in which the part or detail becomes an entry point from which to reconstruct larger processes, events and social relations, conjunctions of actors and practices, structures and technolo-

1. *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth* (Sternberg Press and Forensic Architecture, 2014). Further references to this work will appear in the text abbreviated F.

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gies"—technologies of the ear are attended to through projects that deal with digital eavesdropping, the legality of noise intimidation (drone buzz, sonic booms), and judicial hearing in the double sense of court hearing and evaluative listening.[2] In an essay, for example, on the "aural contract," punctuated by subheadings like "just voices," "auscultation," "juris-diction," and the "right to silence," Lawrence Abu Hamdan tracks how the technics of forensis shades into the politics of unfree speech. What comes to the fore in his work on judicial hearing is the problem of the shibboleth, an accent test dramatically rendered in the Torah and reinterpreted for modern politics by Jacques Derrida. The shibboleth proves to be a locus of what is at issue in the travails of judicial hearing.[3]

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In "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," initially presented in English at the International Paul Celan Symposium at the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1984, Derrida zeroed in on several lines of Celan's poem "In Eins" (As one): "Thirteenth of February. In the heart's mouth / An awakened shibboleth. With you, / Peuple / de Paris. *No pasarán.*" ["Im Herzmund / erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir, / Peuple / de Paris. *No pasarán.*"][4] Derrida was fascinated by the plurality of languages running into each other even as they orbited around the theme of obstructed border-crossing. There is notably the Spanish imperative *no pasarán*: You will not pass! This "barred passage," Derrida observes momentously, "is what the *aporia* means" (S, p. 22). And then the word *shibboleth*, written with an *sch* in French and an *sh* in English, as if in echo of the whisper-command "Shhh! Don't ask, don't tell! Protect the secret! Keep your voice down!" Shibboleth literally denotes "river, stream, ear of grain, olive twig," and, more metaphorically, "password." In this last sense, it is a word whose pronunciation gives away the identity of a person or group. Consisting of inflections, catchwords, expressions, or marks of dialect—differences, as Derrida puts it, that become "discriminative, decisive and divisive"—shibboleths function as aural biopolitical signatures (S, p. 26).

The biblical episode of the shibboleth describes an accent test administered by a military leader to weed out suspected enemy Ephraimites (who had difficulty pronouncing the *sh* sound) from his own men, the Gileadites. ("The men of the Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto

2. *Forensis* includes an essay by Susan Schuppli, titled "Uneasy Listening," on drones and the sonic dimension of remote-controlled warfare. It takes up questions of judicial hearing in relation to the mental-health impact of drone noise on targeted populations in Pakistan, and the illegality of sonic booms deployed by Israel in Gaza as a weapon of intimidation and collective punishment. *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, pp. 386–87.

3. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, "Aural Contract: Forensic Listening and the Reorganization of the Speaking Subject," in *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, pp. 65–82. Further references to this essay will appear in the text abbreviated AC.

4. Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," trans. Joshua Wilner, in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 21. Further references to this work will appear in the text abbreviated S.

him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce *it* right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan; and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.")

Derrida underscores the political consequences of the shibboleth's unpronounceability:

> . . . *shib* is a word that is unpronounceable, in the sense that it *cannot* be pronounced by one who does not partake of the covenant or alliance. The Ephraimite *knows* how one *ought* to pronounce it but *cannot* pronounce it. . . .
>
> It says the name of God, which *must* not be pronounced by whoever partakes of the covenant or alliance. The Jew *can* pronounce it but *must not*; he may not pronounce it. The law commands the fact—it says the name of the Jew, which the non-Jew has trouble pronouncing. (S, p. 50)
>
> Let the word pass through the barbed-wire border, through, this time, the grid of language. (S, p. 51)

Manifold discussions and controversies would issue from this reading of the shibboleth as the trace of acts of religion, as the arbiter of the friend/enemy distinction, as the separator of the proper from the foreign, as the circumfessional Jewish signature par excellence, comparable to the physical mark of circumcision (the word *shih*, Derrida writes, is the "sign of the covenant, of community before the law, doorway, place of decision for the right of access to the legitimate community" (S, p. 59). Of particular interest here is the conjunction of the "ought to know" with the "what is able to be said," productive of multiple possible orders of relation between "oughtness" and "abling" within the governing strictures of speaking and hearing (S, p. 26). There is the "ought-to/cannot" conjunction, which fells the outsider with the wrong accent; there is the "can/but-must-not" condition of the Abrahamic subject, prohibited from uttering sacred names despite access to correct pronunciation; and there is the "can-and-ought" status of the law, positioned exceptionally outside the covenant even as it endows the covenant with its powers of sovereign inclusion and exclusion. Because it bears the power of exception, much rides politically on the shibboleth, from the most generalized forms of "oppression, exclusion, fascism and racism" to the most site-specific "grillwork of policing, of normalization, and of methodological subjugation" (S, p. 30).

In medial terms, this grillwork refers us to technologies of what Eyal Weizman calls "prosthetic sovereignty," or "political plastic," or "politics in matter."[5] Such a politics includes translation and language tests administered at border stations, as well as the inchoate jumble of technologies and people routinely

5. Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 144–46.

assembled at hot spots and checkpoints: activists, protesters, NGOs, international-border monitors, humanitarian organizations, military personnel, settlers, cellular-network providers, architectures of security.

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The projects of Lawrence Abu Hamdan, a British-Lebanese artist and researcher currently based in Beirut, propel the politics of the shibboleth into the field of creative and critical audio practice. His work since 2010, sometimes done in collaboration with Eyal Weizman and a group working at Goldsmiths, University of London, on forensics in military targeting and drone warfare, consistently investigates how language politics contribute to the contested sovereignty of border zones. *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley* (2013), a fifteen-minute audio essay and audiovisual installation, explores how territorial borders introduce questions of translational inequality and injustice, focusing on members of the Druze community who live on or near the border between Palestine/Israel and Syria. Interspersed with recordings of Druze interpreters—an ethnicity commonly recruited for translation work by the Israeli military-court system in the West Bank and Gaza—is footage from the Shouting Valley in the Golan Heights, where Druze family and friends yell back and forth, producing an equivocal "oral border," equivocal because it blurs the line between protest and collaboration. As Abu Hamdan notes, "In one voice we can simultaneously hear the collaborator and the traitor; the translator and the transgressor."[6] Allusions to topographic unevenness in the project's caption—"gulf," "valley," "heights"—only reinforce the impression of translational inequality at checkpoint stations, calling up gulfs in communication, highs and lows of incomprehension, and a landscape dotted by checkpoint surveillance towers.

Abu Hamdan delves further into the politics of the broken oral contract in exploring juridical uses of "forensic listening," a science (or pseudoscience) that took off in the early 1980s when it began to be used in cases like *James Vance v. Judas Priest.* The issue brought to light in the case was whether the rock band Judas Priest could be held accountable for encrypting a suicide exhortation in one of its albums. The sounds emitted when the album was played backwards were alleged to resemble a language worthy of being taken legally as speech. The idea that any sound or noise carries linguistic interpretability became the operative premise in the case, according potential evidentiary status to any kind of sound, sonic resonance, accent, or voice inflection.

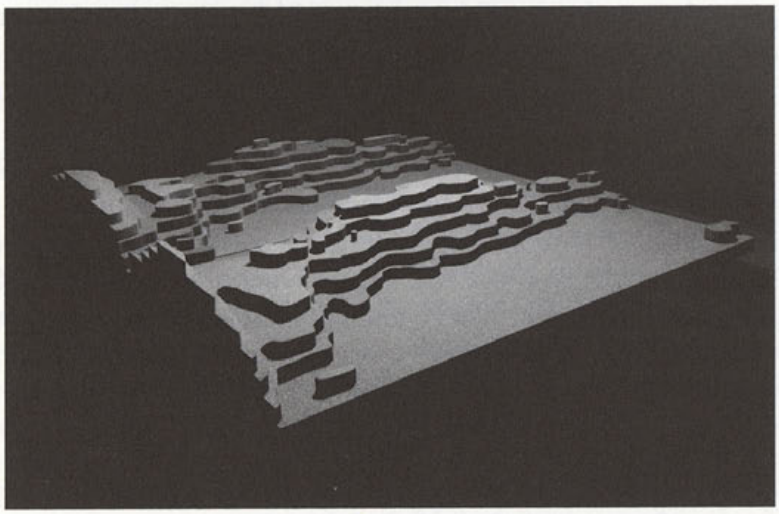
Under conditions generated by the site of the courtroom, acts of listening credentialed by the specialized ear training of the phonetic analyst became fully vested with the force of law.[7]

In the installation and documentary audio essay *The Freedom of Speech Itself*

6. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, description of *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley: About the Voice and the Border,* http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/language-gulf-in-the-shouting-valley.

7. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, "The Freedom of Speech Itself," *Cabinet* 43 (2011), p. 83.

(2012), Abu Hamdan investigated the listening skills of the phonetic expert, critiquing them as technologically sophisticated versions of the shibboleth test applied by immigration officers to the vetting of asylum seekers. One dimension of the work involved making sculptural forms of voice-prints that model the frequency and amplitude of voices saying the word *you*. The cartographic rendering maps the origins of phonemes while the acoustically absorbent foam slabs become a listening agent; both give material form to the fusion of voice and territory. The audio-essay portion of the piece includes interviews with language specialists who challenge the institutional practice (relied on by departments of immigration, courts of law) of speech analysis as it is applied to asylum seekers. Official interpreters, often employees of commercial agencies subcontracted by government agencies, analyze voice recordings from a distance, without the supplementary information provided by facial and bodily cues or nuances of affect. The aural document, literally disembodied, becomes a smoothed-out, partial object, navigating between the part-objects of the subject's vocal organs and the ear of the other, violating the principle of habeas corpus, which, as Abu Hamdan reminds us, stipulates that the body of the accused be brought physically before the judge in recognition of the fact that "the voice is a corporeal product that contains its own excess," an excess containing evidence "that may evade the written documentation of legal proceedings but does not escape the ears of the judge and of those listening to a trial in the space of the courtroom (AC, p. 68)."



Abu Hamdan. The Freedom of Speech Itself. *2012.*

It is not unusual for professional, subcontracted interpreters to have translation skills but no training in linguistics, putting them, as one commentator in the audio essay observes, in the comparable position of a tennis player with a skilled swing who is suddenly expected to offer an informed breakdown of how his mus-

cles work. Many interpreters operate from distant locations and lack crucial information on the applicant's family, regional community, migration history, facility with languages, or degree of exposure to other languages via global media. They hail from countries where monolingualism is the standard and bring with them a reflexive tendency to regard hybrid speech as aberrant, outside the norms of language. Midway through the audio portion of *The Freedom of Speech Itself,* Abu Hamdan makes us aware of the complexities of vocal biography when, in a teasing tone, he conducts a Q&A with a subject whose "native tongue" is virtually impossible to determine. Like a stand-up routine, the dialogue gives the lie to the presumptive correlation between mother tongue and nation of origin. The simple and seemingly innocent question "Where are you from?" opens up a wormhole to cosmopolitical worlds of constant migration, forced relocation, and infinitely possible configurations of cultural belonging:

—So, where are you from?
—I'm from Hackney.
—But you're Danish, aren't you?
—No, I'm Palestinian.
—So where are you from in Palestine?
—I'm not from Palestine.
—So where are you from?
—We're Palestinians from a refugee camp in Lebanon.
—So you were born in Lebanon?
—No, I was born in Dubai.
—Why do you have an American accent?
—What do you mean?
—You speak English with an American twang.
—It's because, you know, because of Eddie Murphy, Stallone.
—So you're from Hollywood?
—No, no, I'm from Hackney.[8]

Where is the shibboleth in this no-man's-land of language histories and errant identifications? How could his consonants and vowels be held legally accountable as testaments to his origins? The young man's self-taught mastery of Eddie Murphy–style American English leads his bemused interlocutor astray, but the consequences of such proficiency in another situation could prove dangerous to the speaker, taken as proof that he could be an illegal resident of England or, worse, a spy or American jihadist ripe for questioning, detainment, or deportation. As the narrator says at the end of *The Freedom of Speech Itself,* "We are not free to choose the ways we are being heard." Abu Hamdan alerts us to the political unfreedoms of speech that arise from not being heard, or from the ironies of the petitioner who wants his or her speech listened to, only to find it evaluated without consent or foreknowledge. One thinks here of Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-

8. This is an approximate transcription of the interchange; https://soundcloud.com/forensic-architecture-1/the-freedom-of-speech-itself.

Claude Milner's pamphlet *Voulez-vous être évalué,* which underscores a kind of absurd Stockholm-syndrome logic in which the question "Do you desire evaluation?" is answered with a resounding "Yes! Absolutely! Evaluate me!" Exposed in this instance is the condition of unfreedom produced by a hypothetical evaluative demand predicated on the power of denied entry and withheld credentialization.[9] Yet another unfreedom of speech arises from being *over*heard, as when the social order uses "freedom of speech" to justify a lie, an act of censorship, or the commonly heard Western assertion that rigorist Islamic strictures appeal to would-be jihadists because they promise an escape from a Western surfeit or overburden of freedom.[10]

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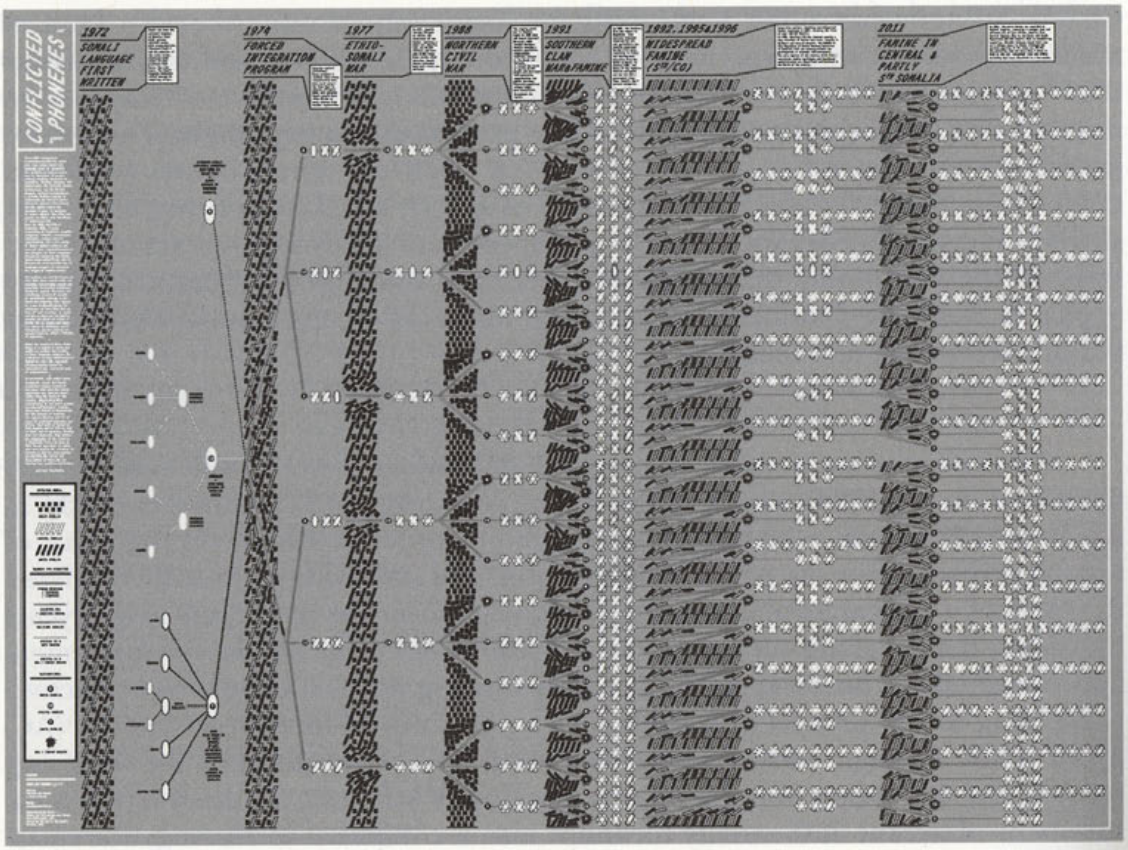
The reliance on a cadre of certified translators to vet accent authenticity dates back to the 1984 passage of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) in the United Kingdom, which mandated audio-recorded testimony in the place of textual transcription. As Abu Hamdan notes, the law "unintentionally catalyzed the birth of a radical form of listening that would over the next twenty-eight years transform the speaking subject in the process of law. This legislation fundamentally stretched the juridical ear from simply hearing words spoken aloud to actively listening to the process of speaking, as a new form of forensic evidence" (AC, pp. 65–66). Though PACE was intended to reduce opportunities for falsifying records, the fact that it bolstered a presumption of scientific accuracy in the measurement of accent authenticity turned it into a compliant technology for racial profiling and ethnic pigeonholing. In *Conflicted Phonemes,* a 2012 project that brought together linguists, researchers, activists, refugee and art organizations, graphic designer Janna Ullrich, and a core group of Somali asylum seekers, Abu Hamdan excavated these methods of policing by ear, drawing on the voice-maps of audio tests used by Dutch immigration authorities. The installation includes an atlas indicating how, despite adoption of a standardized version of Somali as an official national language of Somalia in 1973, the plethora of dialects together with politically induced mass migration has made it virtually impossible to classify people by accent or distinct usage. The installation also includes diagrams coding circuits of language competence and cultures of linguistic exposure that, as in other projects, dismantle the presumption of a one-to-one correspondence between digital voice recognition and identity. The black-and-white maps show how the voice is a dynamic variable, shifting constantly in relation to who is speaking or being addressed, while the large blue diagram presents voice as a living archive, compositing accents accumulated over time and in different places. *Conflicted Phonemes* challenges the legitimacy of data coding as a scientifically

9. Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Claude Milner, *Voulez-vous être évalué? Entretiens sur une machine d'imposture* (Paris: Grasset, 2004). p. 55.

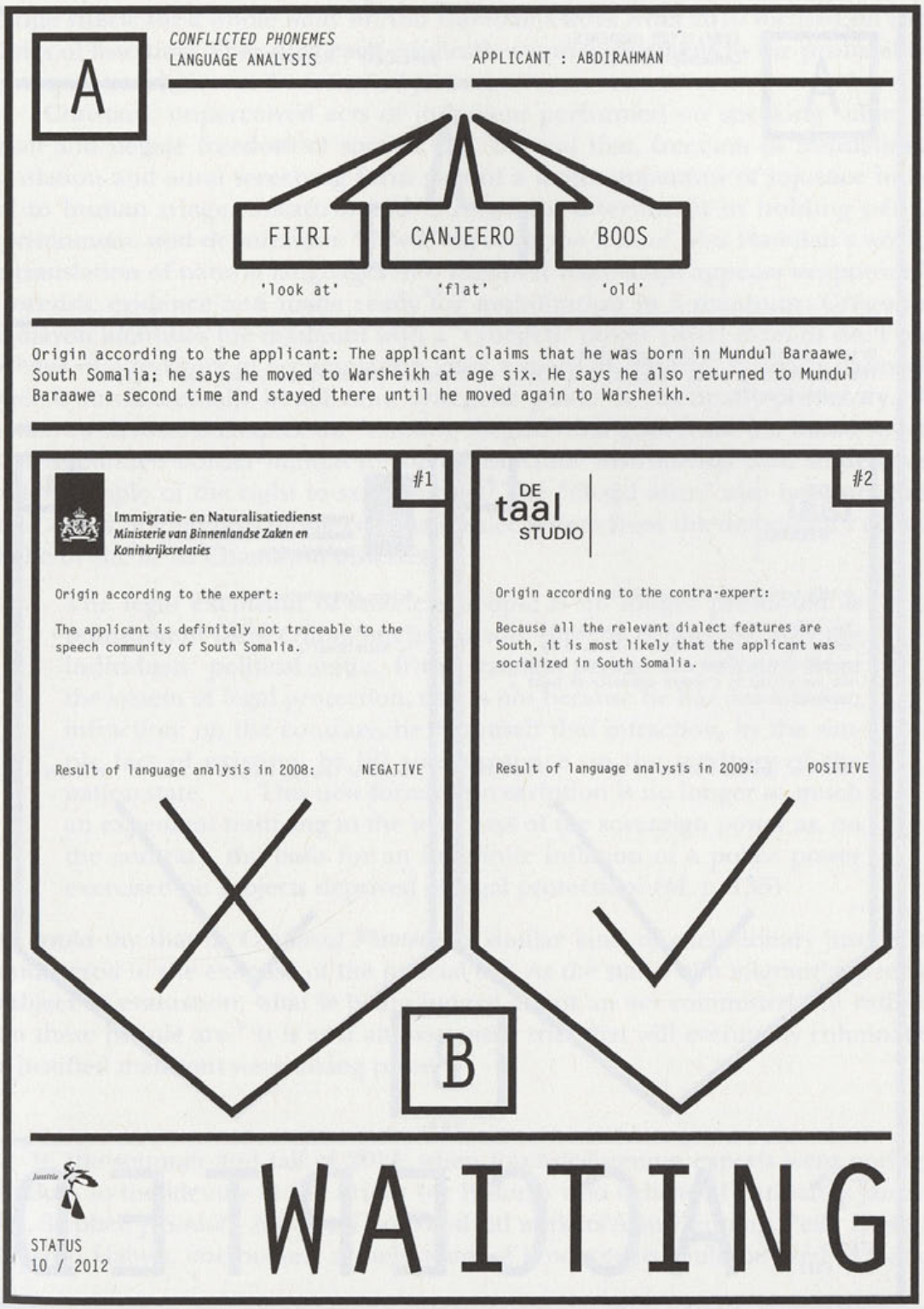
10. Roger Cohen, echoing the assertion by Mark Lilla in his review of Michel Houellebecq's novel *Submission* in *The New York Review of Books,* April 2, 2015. See Cohen, "Why ISIS Trumps Freedom," *New York Times,* August 15, 2015.



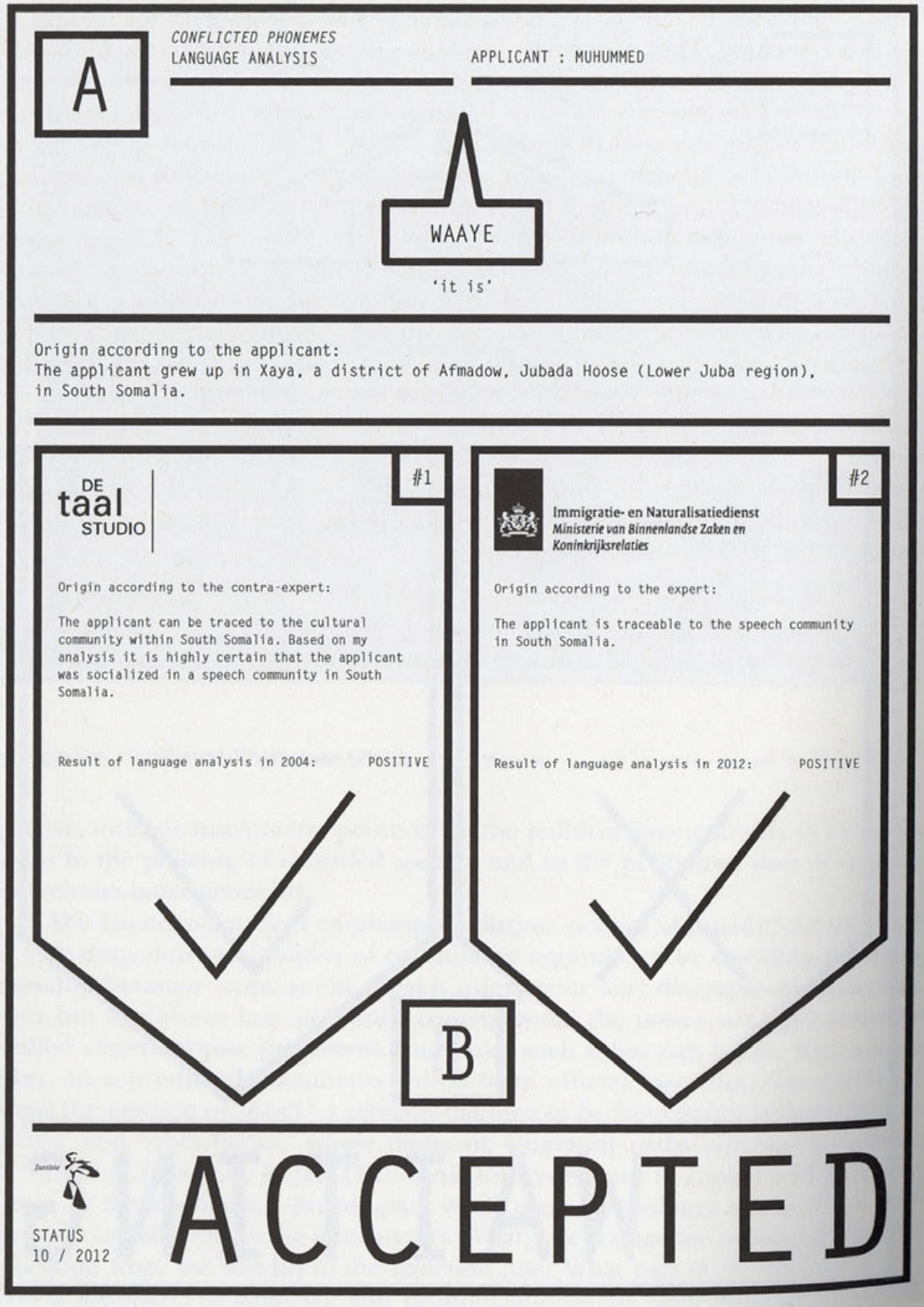
Abu Hamdan. Conflicted Phonemes. *2012.*

objective, forensic instrument, pointing up the political *non*-neutrality of its applications to the policing of recorded speech, and to the politicized uses of translation technics more generally.

Abu Hamdan's project emphasizes a distinct politics of translation, one that not only disqualifies the validity of quantitative equivalence by revealing the rank inequality between empowered speech interpreter and disempowered asylum seeker but also shows how politically consequential the power struggles between so-called experts whose judgments contradict each other can be for the asylum seeker. In reproduced documents culled from official case files, the spectator reviews the petition of "Abdi," a refugee claiming to be from South Somalia who is rejected, and "Abdirharan," whose diasporic biography earns him wait-list status. The words ACCEPTED, REJECTED, WAITING jump out in capital letters at the bottom of the application forms, grim verdicts on the balance sheet of *x*'s and check marks delivered by the interpreters. What, one is impelled to ask, propels an application from the wait-list to the rejection pile? What part of the migrant's history—as measured in language and pronunciation—has been misinterpreted or



Abu Hamdan. Conflicted Phonemes. *2012.*



Abu Hamdan. Conflicted Phonemes. *2012.*

elided? These unaccounted details compromise the terms of the "aural contract," the title rubric for a whole body of Abu Hamdan's work from 2010 focused on the politics of listening. They turn each application into a testament to the probability of unequal translation and miscarried justice.

Constant, unperceived acts of judgment performed on speaking subjects curtail and negate freedom of speech and, beyond that, freedom of translation. Translation and aural screening form part of a larger apparatus of injustice integral to human triage, misattributed citizenship, internment in holding pens, imprisonment, and deportation. Viewed through the lens of Abu Hamdan's work, the translation of natural languages into digitized voice-maps appears weaponized as forensic evidence and made ready for mobilization in a manhunt. Grégoire Chamayou identifies the manhunt with a "cynegetic power [that] extends itself on the basis of a territory of accumulation, over a space of capture. Whereas pastoral power is fundamentally beneficent, cynegetic power is essentially predatory."[11] Chamayou devotes a chapter on "hunting illegals" that goes from the blood sport of self-appointed border militias to the bureaucratic instruments used to deprive stateless people of the right to safe conduct. The "illegal alien" also becomes the site of a shift in emphasis in the criminal-justice system from the defendant's act to who he or she is. As Chamayou observes:

> The legal exclusion of stateless people is no longer presented as punishment for a crime, but as a *status,* directly connected with the individuals' political status. If the stateless person is excluded from the system of legal protection, that is not because he has *committed* an infraction: on the contrary, he *is* himself that infraction, by the simple fact of existing, by his sole presence on the territory of the nation-state. . . . This new form of proscription is no longer so much an expedient testifying to the weakness of the sovereign power as, on the contrary, the basis for an indefinite inflation of a police power exercised on subjects deprived of legal protection. (M, p. 135)

One could say that in *Conflicted Phonemes* a similar kind of exclusionary justice is administered in the exercise of the judicial ear. As the status of a migrant's speech is subject to evaluation, what is being judged is not an act committed but rather "who these people are." It is as if an existential trial that will eventually culminate in a justified manhunt were taking place.

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In the summer and fall of 2014, when forensic-listening experts were poring over clues to the identity of the Briton (or Britons) who beheaded journalists James Foley, Stephen J. Sotloff, and Kenji Goto and aid workers Alan Henning, Peter Kassig, and David Haines, one became acutely aware of how accents could be used to mark

11. Grégoire Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History,* trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 16. Further references to this work will appear in the text abbreviated M.

people politically—predators as well as plaintiffs who are on trial. The ISIS executioner dubbed "Jihadi John," who also acted as judge and PR agent, seemed to brandish his accent as a signal both to willing followers and hostile auditors that the West is vulnerable to one who operates in its own language.[12] One could say that in this instance the shibboleth test has been turned back on Western security states, for in this case "speaking in British" confounded the voice-profiled typologies of "terrorist with an accent." The executioner's speech became a defiant enactment of vocal treason, weaponized in a viral video of trial and punishment.

Conflicted Phonemes does not venture into how the accent test cuts both ways in contests for power. Nor does it address situations in which the authentic pronunciation of a language is subject to politically motivated efforts at delegitimation, as when American "English-only" jingoists, abetted by the vatic trumpetings of Donald J. Trump, challenged the right of bilingual anchorwoman Vanessa Ruiz to roll her *r*'s when delivering "American" broadcast news. But it does illuminate how specific actors in the process of forensic listening—translator versus linguist, specialist in ear training versus legal adjudicator of voice and identity matches, asylum-seeking speaker versus authorized listener—are constitutive of the political stakes of translation. These political concerns are relevant to critical work in art and language insofar as critics are constantly performing as judges of the narrative authenticity of voice, or adjudicating, within university systems and arts institutions, the limits of freedom of speech and the violation of human rights. Abu Hamdan's projects reconceptualize "free" translation as "freedom of speech," though not in the sense of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the spirit of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling, which perversely assigned money, in the guise of corporate campaign donations, legal recognition as a form of free speech. In *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself*, a live audio essay delivered at the New Museum in 2015 in connection with the exhibition *Surround Sound*, Abu Hamdan explores how "free translation" is affiliated with something silently freed from censorship or covertly translated under one's breath in circumstances of coerced conversion by an occupying army (the specific context in *Contra Diction* was ISIS's claim to successful mass conversions of Druze minorities in northern Syria). At issue in the project, once again, is the shibboleth, treated not as a biopolitical signature taken to truthfully represent the identity of the speaker, but

12. "Jihadi John," possibly referring to the nickname "The Beatles" used for the ISIS commandos in charge of prisoners, had his accent closely analyzed by forensic voice and speech analysts. Sometimes his accent is identified vaguely by the media as multicultural London English, sometimes as West London, sometimes South London. One expert diagnosed a South London accent, with English as a first language and possible inflections of Farsi, suggesting a family link to Afghanistan. This would seem to undermine the surmise that the prime suspect is Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary, a rapper from West London, whose father is the Egyptian-born refugee Abdel Bary, extradited from the UK when "John" was six years old and still awaiting trial in New York for the 1998 American-embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Elizabeth McClelland, a specialist in voice-identification techniques cited in the *Daily Telegraph*, acknowledged that it is far from being an exact science: A computer is unable to produce a unique voice-print, and the trained human ear, while an important supplement to technology, is also far from infallible.

as a correctly pronounced decoy that permits the utterer to survive unharmed. The word is *taqiyya*, a term of Islamic jurisprudence meaning "fear" or "guarding yourself against danger" that serves as a legal dispensation absolving people from the offense of blasphemy in the case of renunciation of faith under duress.[13] It carries the sense of keeping one's own counsel, preserving faith inwardly despite the outward appearance of compliance with the enemy, or speaking truth to power in

Abu Hamdan. Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself. *2015.*

the medium of vocal dissimulation. Like a private password to an aural contract with oneself, *taqiyya*, Abu Hamdan stresses, grants the subject freedom from submission and the right to silence conceived as a self-authorized right to retreat from the "all-hearing" society. This is Abu Hamdan's rubric for societies that "listen in" invasively in the most diverse ways: from eavesdropping and auditory surveillance to "loudspeaker libertarianism" to the stipulation of aural transparency and guaranteed access to "free" speech as unconditional rights.[14] "Both an "infrapolitics in

13. An exhibition titled تقية *(Taqiyya)—The Right to Duplicity* ran at the Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland, from July 11 to September 13, 2015.

14. *Contra Diction* was made with the creative production and video direction of Nesrine Khodr. lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/contra-diction/.

the minutiae of human utterance" and a tactic for "reclaiming control over the very conditions under which one is being heard," *taqiyya* in Abu Hamdan's ascription is aligned with auto-response, itself posed as antidotal to fatal forms of autoimmunity.[15]

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"Free speech," or "free translation," may thus be defined as heightened *responsiveness* to what is heard, with responsiveness understood in Samuel Weber's sense of a hearing that addresses a looking or, more precisely, an overlooking of something that might be "otobiographically" identified with Derrida's "ear of the other" that is also in you:[16]

> The word responsive has a connotation of being sensitive to what has been overlooked. It involves weighing in a comparative sense, but without a universal equivalent. Weighing in this sense is irreducibly relative and relational. All there is, is a series of responses. There is no going beyond this. Being born is responding. From birth to death, you're responding. But there is no initial, founding statement—no "creative" word.[17]

Weber's relative and relational responsiveness brings us back to Derrida's description of immeasurable, debt-free translation and to the politics of friendship embedded in a sympathetic ear. In "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," it is Peter Szondi's ear that is the hearing aid of choice, belonging as it does to a brilliant critic who happened to be a close mutual friend of both Celan and Derrida. Thanks to Szondi's assistance as friend-translator-mediator, the shibboleth goes from oral passkey, exclusionary of asylum seekers, to a structure of poetic singularity that is *parlante*—"speakable"—at least to the ear of the translator gifted with a responsiveness unbeholden to a universal equivalent.[18] Derrida puts it this way:

> Szondi was the only one able to bequeath to us the irreplaceable passwords of access to the poem, a priceless *shibboleth*, a luminous and humming swarm of notes, so many signs of gratitude for deciphering and translating the enigma. And yet, left to itself without witness, without a go-between, without the alerted complicity of a decipherer, without even the "external" knowledge of its date, a certain "internal" necessity of the poem would nonetheless *speak* to us, in the sense in which Celan says of the poem, "But it speaks!" beyond

15. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *The All Hearing*, http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/the-all-hearing/.

16. Jacques Derrida, "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," trans. Avital Ronell, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken, 1985).

17. Samuel Weber, blog-post interview with Aaron Levy, https://slought.org/blog_posts/on_the_ethics_of_responsiveness.

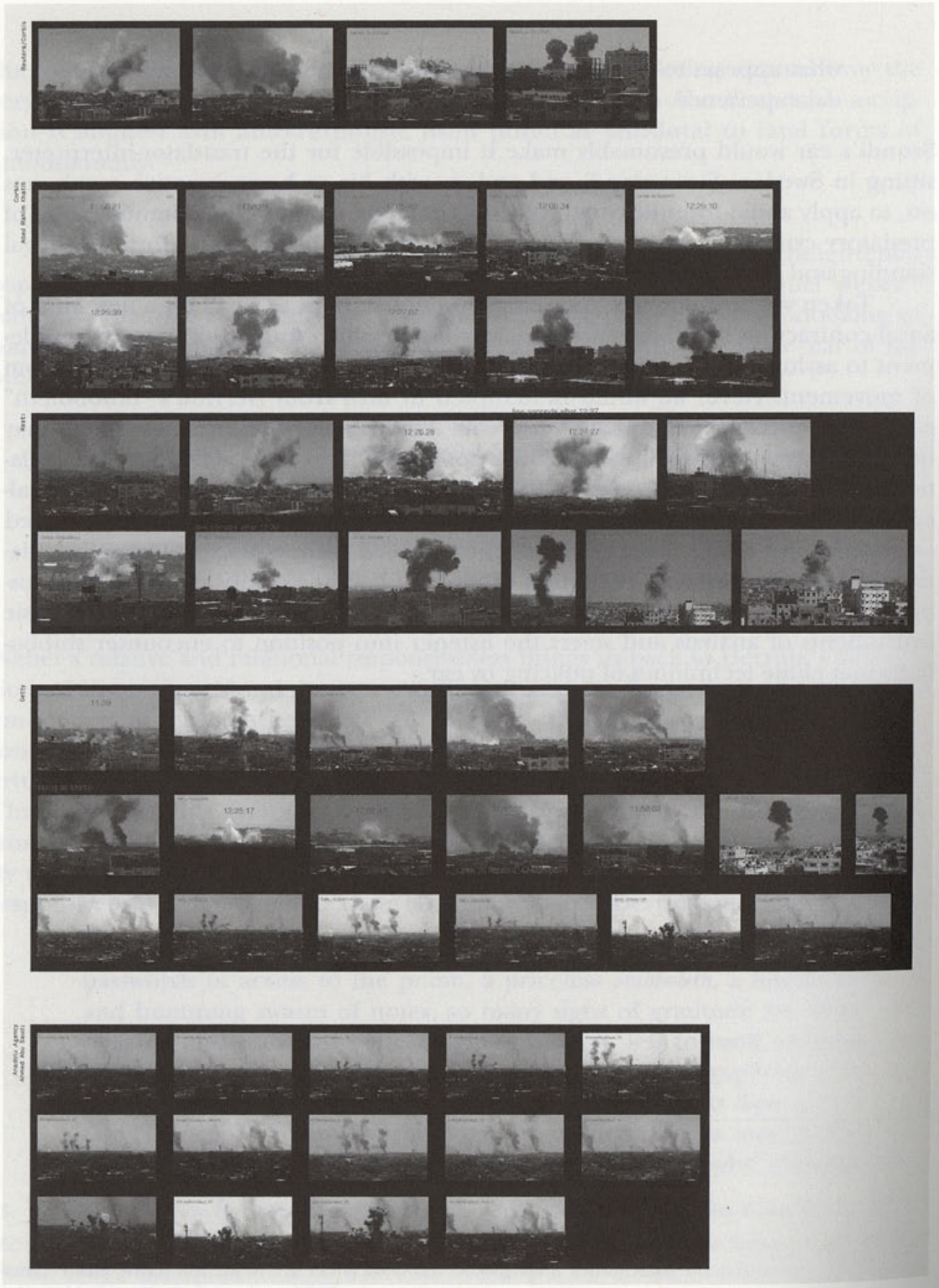
18. Jacques Derrida, *Schibboleth: Pour Paul Celan* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1986), p. 35.

> what appears to confine it within the dated singularity of an individual experience. (S, p. 17)

Szondi's ear would presumably make it impossible for the translator-interpreter, sitting in Sweden, Switzerland, or London, with his or her normative earphones on, to apply audio forensics neutrally to a vulnerable target. The administration of predatory cynegetic power on the basis of a shibboleth test would forfeit its legal standing and be classified as an infringement of free translation.

Taken yet further, "free translation" would amount to a call for a new kind of aural contract, or sonic citizenship, according to which translation ensures entitlement to asylum, access to citizenship, the right to sovereign passage, and freedom of movement. Here, we would be tempted to turn from Derrida's "Shibboleth" essay to his piece "Force of Law," where he famously affirmed "that law (*droit*) may find itself accounted for, but certainly not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable."[19] Following this distinction, legal translation, based on voice-maps, audio forensics, and other medial technologies of micro-calculation, belongs to Derrida's definition of force of law, at a distinct remove from justice. "Just" translation, by contrast, strips out the force of law embodied in forensic instruments of analysis and steers the listener into position to encounter shibboleths that elude techniques of policing by ear.

19. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfield, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 25.



"Bomb-cloud atlas" for Rafah, August 1, 2014 ("Black Friday"). Forensic Architecture, 2014–15.