

## BOOK

### Spaces of Disappearance: The Architecture of Extraordinary Rendition

By Jordan H Carver, UR (Terreform)  
Review by Thomas Wensing

Recently Gina Haspel, a CIA operative who ran a so-called black site in Thailand as part of the Detention and Interrogation Program under the George W Bush administration — known for its use of ‘extraordinary rendition’, meaning kidnapping — was appointed as the Director of the CIA. The codename of that particular site was ‘Green’, and its alias ‘Cat’s Eye Prison’. According to Jordan H Carver’s *Spaces of Disappearance — The Architecture of Extraordinary Rendition*, the site’s location is still unknown, but it is suspected to be either the Udon Thani Voice of America broadcast facility, or somewhere close to Chiang Mai International Airport. The name of the first location is of course dripping with irony, while the latter possibility just points to the international web of covert connections of which this facility was a part. The appointment of Haspel is an indication that the use of torture, euphemistically called ‘enhanced interrogation’, has not been sufficiently addressed and abdicated by subsequent US administrations. In spite of the release in 2014 of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program (also known as the ‘Torture Report’), no one has been held accountable or brought to justice. Secrecy and obfuscation continue to surround the programme.

President George W Bush officially acknowledged the existence of the CIA Detention and Interrogation Program in 2006. Established immediately after the attacks of September 11, it consisted of a worldwide network of secret prison facilities, the so-called black sites. In Carver’s words, the title of the book refers to the ‘reversal of Hannah Arendt’s conception of “the space of appearance”’. For Arendt, the space of appearance denoted a space in which politics and democracy is enacted. In its opposite then, the black sites, habeas corpus is suspended; suspects are rendered invisible from society, kept without representation and restrained in action. It creates a climate in which people are dehumanised, and can be tortured and killed with impunity. These spaces ‘are revealed as spaces beyond politics, beyond civic life, and beyond humanity,’ writes Carver.

*Spaces of Disappearance* is an attempt at a reconstruction or representation of this classified incarceration network of the early years of the so-called War on Terror by way of maps, diagrams, photographs, witness statements and redacted government and legal memos. It aims to not only reveal the physical nature and experience of these spaces of disappearance, but also to lay bare the political spectacle, the bureaucratic edifice of obfuscation and secrecy, and

to show the architectural logistics of the network. Ultimately the book is an attempt to challenge the claims to US sovereign power which supported or attempted to justify these abuses.

The book is organised in two parts: the first is structured as narrated history, whereas the second is dedicated to the presentation of the physical evidence of the incarceration network of the War on Terror through visual means. The first chapter opens with the history of Guantanamo Bay, the infamous US prison, and Spanish colonial war tribute, on the southern coast of Cuba. The site functioned as the central hub of the incarceration network and to this day still holds 31 prisoners indefinitely and without charge. Guantanamo is technically on Cuban soil, but is controlled by the US. It was chosen as a central site of the extraordinary rendition programme precisely because the jurisdiction within Guantanamo with respect to US and international law could be made ambiguous and opaque. A large part of the book is dedicated to the way in which the government devised a system of self-referential executive memos to rewrite established jurisprudence.

The final part of the book is dedicated to the architecture and design of the incarceration facilities, which through the lifespan of the War on Terror moved from ad hoc and improvised to industrialised, demountable, prefabricated,

bland and generic environments. The aim was of course to cloak the existence of these facilities, so a common feature of the black sites was to use existing infrastructure in to which torture facilities were ‘plugged in’. Imagine for instance, Site Violet in Lithuania, which was a former riding academy. In the riding area a thick concrete perimeter wall was built, and a building within this building was constructed. Here US-imported prefabricated incarceration pods were placed. It is deeply unsettling to see the drawings of torture equipment and incarceration facilities, but this feeling is then followed by the realisation that someone, somewhere, was sitting at a desk to design this, to devise the most effective torture devices, and large government bureaucratic infrastructures were used to build and legally justify it all.

Jonathan Carver’s book is a haunting and essential read. If the government of the United States is able to render its human rights abuses invisible, to use its massive bureaucracies to subvert openness and truth, then democracy has truly become a simulacrum. What Carver does, by following the paper trail, by recording and representing this international web of extraordinary rendition, and by documenting the physical structures, is to make the abstract concrete, to visualise the truth. In so doing, he turns the spaces of disappearance into spaces of appearance again.

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