



Screen gems

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Mackintosh squares

In later life, Charles Rennie Mackintosh devoted himself to paintings. **Charles Rennie Mackintosh in France: Landscape Watercolours** is at the Dean Gallery, 73 Belford Road, Edinburgh, until February 5. Tel: 0131 624 6200.

Writings on the wall

A book on Israel's security wall has some interesting ideas but is depressingly partisan, writes Karen Glaser



The wall: successful security measure or tool of Israeli oppression?

Against the Wall, a new book on Israel's security wall, is an attempt to focus on the architecture and planning behind the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. But what eminent New York architect and critic Michael Sorkin's compilation of essays shows above all else is that it is impossible to write about any aspect of the world's bitterest conflict and not get deeply political.

This is not really surprising. The Middle East, after all, is not Scandinavia. But in this instance, the result is disappointing. *Against the Wall* is depressingly partisan. From its gloves-off title to claims that the Jewish state is guilty of spacio-cide, the architects, urbanists, sociologists and career activists who contribute to this volume claim, with varying degrees of venom, that Israel's security fence has been erected for one reason only: to demean and contain (quite literally) Palestinian aspirations. It has

not been installed to protect Israelis from being blown up by suicide bombers, but to reinforce Israeli domination.

With contributions from philosophers such as Slavoj Zizek as well as Sorkin, these charges of spatial segregation are often intellectually interesting. Sorkin argues that the wall should be seen in the context of the Great Wall of Capital that separates the world's rich few dozen countries from the poor majority. Israel's security wall is he says, a template for "a system that girdles the Earth". Think the Berlin Wall, the several walls that EU money is building around Spanish enclaves in Morocco and the barrier the US is building along the most porous sections of its frontier with Mexico. Other contributors examine the anthropological provenance of barrier building. Californian landscape architecture professor Dean MacCannell, for example, argues the wall will ultimately become a

mirror that reflects the hated stereotype of the people it is trying to keep out. It is a variation on the argument that occupation brutalises the occupier as well as the occupied.

There are the outraged voices of Israeli academics such as Oren Yiftachel and Haim Yacobi who decry what they see as the wall's implicit role as a tool of spatial control. And then there is an extraordinary chapter from Sari Hanafi, sociologist director of the Palestinian Refugee and Diaspora Centre in Shaml, who claims the Jewish state plays what he calls bio-politics, putting Palestinians "in a state of exception for the single objective of appropriating

The West Bank has become a hollow 3D space partitioned into two separate, yet overlapping, geographies

more land". A state of exception is, says Hanafi, a "permanent structure of juridical-political delocalisation and dislocation" outside fluid state borders. It creates a de-territorialised body which becomes a subject again by "exploding himself against the enemy".

But facts, as the newsroom joke goes, have a habit of getting in the way of a good story. They can spoil a good book too. It hardly needs stating that the idea of a wall separating two peoples is deeply unpleasant: the very concept no doubt offends the sensibility of every *BD* reader. But the problem with this particular wall is that it works.

Here, then, are the facts *Against the Wall* doesn't tell you: in the three years before construction began on the fence in late 2002 there were 73 terror attacks in Israel which killed 293 Israelis and wounded 1,950. From the completion of the first stage of the fence in July 2003 to July of last year there have been

only three successful attacks. Furthermore, 93% of Palestinian land in the West Bank is not affected by the fence; 80,000 Jews will find themselves on its other side; and 97% of the fence is made of wire mesh. It is a temporary architectonic-cum-geographic-cum-military solution that can be removed when a secure peace is achieved.

Tellingly, 85% of Israeli citizens support the barrier and more than two thirds support a two-state solution. The first statistic comes from Eyal Weizman, director of London's Goldsmiths College Centre for Architecture Research. His chapter "Hollow Land: The Barrier Archipelago and the Impossible Politics of Separation" is a highly critical yet interesting account of what he describes as the "frenzy of fortification" taking place in the region. He argues that the conflict has given birth to a new way of imagining territory. No longer a two-dimensional surface, the West

Bank has become a hollow three-dimensional space partitioned into two separate, yet overlapping, geographies. Security corridors, bridges and tunnels are "woven into an Escher-like structure". The geopolitical problems of the Middle East have taken on an architectural dimension.

This land, says Weizman, cannot be partitioned because Israel and Palestine are different readings of the same place — separation is politically and geometrically impossible. To this end, he proposes a non-territorial solution to the conflict, of which tearing down the wall is just the start. It is a fanciful solution that will appeal to naïve readers who think Israel's need to defend its borders from hostile enemies is overstated. Intellectually interesting, but, like this anthology, completely impractical.

● **Against the Wall**, edited by Michael Sorkin. The New Press, 224pp. £10.99.



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