HOME WORKS II

A FORUM ON CULTURAL PRACTICES

October 31 - November 6, 2003
Beirut, Lebanon

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A Project by
The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, **Ashkal Alwan**

Home Works II: A Forum on Cultural Practices

A book by **Christine Tohme**

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Guest Curator: Rasha Salti
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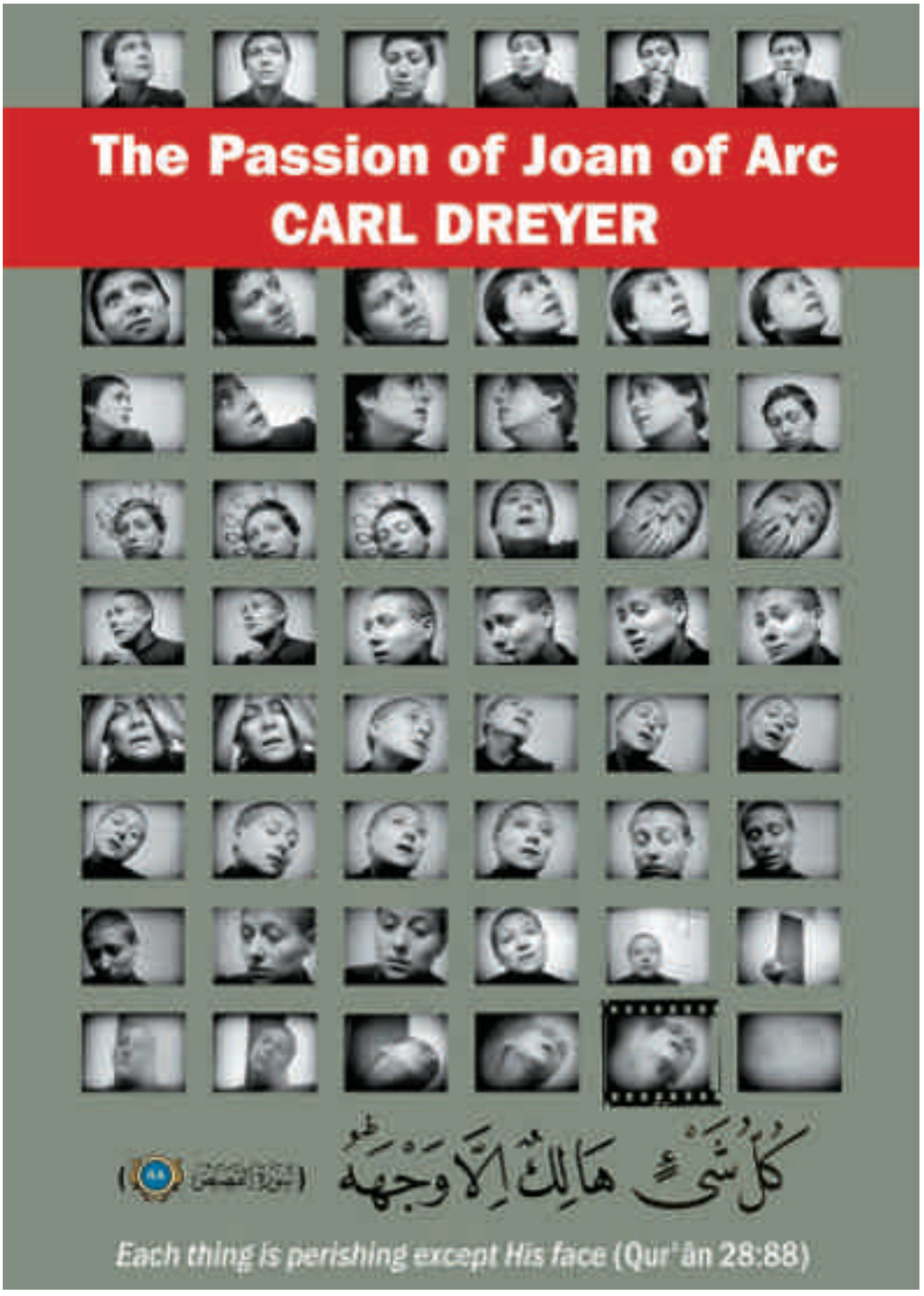
Plate 21 TITIAN
Flaying of Marsyas (c. 1570-76)
Oil on canvas, 83 1/2 x 81 1/2 inches
State Museum, Kromeriz, Czechoslovakia

Ideology
Walid Sadek
2005,16.5 x 22 cm

We travel to evade our obsessions, obsessively
Christine Tohme
Courtesy Maher Ammar



From ***Minor Art: Conceptual Film and Video Posters***, Jalal Toufic (2000-2005), © 2005 by Jalal Toufic

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The Home Works Forum is a multidisciplinary project that brings together artists, writers, and intellectuals to present their work.

Organised by Ashkal Alwan, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, the forum takes place every eighteen months in exhibition and performance venues throughout Beirut. It unfolds over the course of a week in a series of lectures, screenings, debates, publication launches, and artistic interventions. All events associated with the forum are free and open to the public.

Each edition of the forum presents the work of established artists and supports the production of new projects by emerging artists. Each forum also launches publications, including artists' books and a full catalogue documenting the previous edition of the forum. The purpose of these publications is to archive the forum's work and allow us to look back on it critically.

Originally conceived as a regional platform for cultural practices in the Arab world, the Home Works Forum has since shed its geographic/geopolitical focus to concentrate on kindred artistic and intellectual concerns that are operative all over the world.

What links the forum's participants together is their approach to a common set of urgent, timely questions. Their work endeavours to create methods of critical inquiry and aesthetic form capable of conveying those questions meaningfully and proposing possible solutions.

As a title, the term "Home Works" suggests an intertwining of public and private spheres, the outside world of work and the inside space of home. It refers to the exercises, lessons, and research problems that are worked out by students repetitively and in solitude. More broadly, "Home Works," itself an impossible plural, implies a process of internal excavation, of digging and burrowing deeper while simultaneously constructing and accumulating new practices.

On a logistical level, the Home Works Forum is in a constant state of excavation and construction. The first edition of the Home Works Forum opened in early April 2002 and coincided with the outbreak of the second intifada in Palestine. The second edition of the Home Works Forum opened in late October 2003, after a six-month delay due to the US invasion of Iraq in April 2003. The third edition of the Home Works Forum is taking place in mid November 2005, again after a six-month delay due to the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. At this point, the Home Works Forum has (we think) settled into a regular schedule of regular disruption.

This unpredictable dynamic has become a rhythm, a paradoxical routine. Because the practical and political circumstances around our work are always breaking and shifting, relevant questions about dislocation and disruption have imposed themselves repeatedly.

From the experience of organising three editions of the Home Works Forum, it is no longer self-evident for us to assume that such a platform makes true dialogue and cultural exchange possible. What the Home Works Forum allows for, rather, is a productive space in which political, social, economic, and cultural realities can be explored, reflected, and made manifest as visual and verbal articulations that occur with some consistency. These articulations have become our obsession.

Christine Tohme
Ashkal Alwan, 2005

LECTURES

Beirut Today: A Veritable City or a Mere Historical Name? Adonis
Between Abdel Halim and Amr Diab: Singing and Politics in Contemporary Arab Culture, Hazem Saghieh
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Beirut Today: A Veritable City or a Mere Historical Name?

Adonis

Odd as it is, let us first dally with language. As you all probably know, one meaning of the word *medina* (city) in *lisan al-arab* (the lexicon of the Arabic language) is *al-ama,* or the kept woman. And of a man is said: He is a son of a *medina*, meaning that he is the son of an *ama*. Thus a male slave is a *medine* as a female slave is a *medina*. Also, one uses *medani* to refer only to the illumined city, al-Medina, the prophet's city. As for all other cities the term *medini* is used instead and so to differentiate them from the illumined city.

To this linguistic dally let me add two foundational visions for cities as discussed by Michel Serres in his book *The Origins of Geometry* (Paris, 1993), which shed much light on my talk today of Beirut: The pre-Christian Roman vision and that of Saint Augustine.

According to legend, the first vision tells that Rome was founded on the severed head of Romus killed by his twin brother Romulus (753 BC); a legend which posits blood, murder, and sacrifice as the foundation for Rome. It is no mystery then that Chateaubriand named it the "City of Tombs". The second vision, that of Saint Augustine, tells that the true city, the one he named the "City of God", does not arise on murder and sacrifice but on the resurrection of Christ. In other words, it is not on death that a city is built but on resurrection, on life.

Finally, it is perhaps useful if not illuminating to indicate that the Aztecs were known to sacrifice their virgins on the pinnacle of pyramids for the sun to shine again. They believed that a new day would not dawn unless virgins sank in blood. It is then crime that insures an ever-renewed sun, as it is also crime which founds history.

Allow me now to raise a few questions inspired by these visions: Where does the ingenuity of the Lebanese and Arabs generally manifest itself? In enlivening or in deadening? In celebrating living or digging graves, funerary orations, and celebrating death? In the construction of lives or in edifying death?

Is there in each one of us Arabs an Aztec vowing to wrench the heart of another for the sake of one's own dawn?

Does the Lebanese and Arab culture generally stand upon the following axiom: Life does not spring forth nor days pass except where blood runs?

If the city is on the one hand an architectural vision and on the other hand an actual construction that actualises this vision, is then today's architectural vision of Beirut responding to the dictates and demands of its natural place?

With all due respect to all concerned architects I am inclined to answer: No. For the architecture that dominates the city of Beirut lacks a minimum of ingenuity and regional peculiarity. Beirut is an architecture of imitation and mindless replication. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, the general rule prevails and inevitably blots any rare exceptions.

This architecture translates a social reality or social content more so than it harbours an architectural artistry, a peculiar characteristic, or specific and unique architectural meaning. It is merely a functional translation of a social, economic, and sectarian reality. And so it is made of prefabricated moulds rather than architectural plans. Moulds are but one form repeated. And repetition inevitably empties the signified from its signification, thus instigating estrangement and a feeling of confinement.

Briefly said, Beirut is an architecture without planning, and in this sense it is a destruction of space. Just as sectarianism destroys the space of culture and of human beings in Beirut, so does architecture destroy the space of the place. It is another kind of place for consumption. Place is not outside of a human being but rather inside and so every spoilage of the place is damaging to human beings.

A city becomes architecturally unique through what can be called a "pleasure of the place", an extension of Roland Barthes' "pleasure of the text". Beirut is practically devoid of such a pleasure. I am referring to the aesthetic use of spatial clearings coupled with their functional use. Imparting poetic and aesthetic qualities, and consequently adding value to the physicality of the place, generates such pleasure.

For instance, a closer relation is required between architecture and the other arts — sculpture especially. Courtyards, streets, gardens, bifurcations, crossroads, and corners — all these do not simply merge in a city's structure or rather do not accomplish their urban and architectural dimensions unless punctuated by artistic or natural objects. Moreover, it is necessary to provide beautiful spaces within the city's structure using painting and all the other forms of image-making as well as theatre, cinema, and other expressive arts.

Architecture is organically complemented by the other arts. It is fundamentally in need of the other arts when constructing the city to compensate for what is inevitably functional. And it is those other arts that complete the aesthetic dimension of architecture and create what I have called the "pleasure of the place".

Thus it is easier for us to recognise that what fashions the space of Beirut does not stem from an urban architectural and aesthetic vision but rather from individual vagaries congruous only with certain mercantile

and sectarian interests. The outcome is a haphazard polluting and polluted architectural space. And such a building construction cannot be but a spatial thieving, a violation of space, a sort of violence against earth, an assassination of earth and space.

The reality is that building construction in Beirut is no more than a practical technicality that claims to answer pressing needs. What is lacking is the intimate meeting of construction and space. It is as if buildings were a series of sharp reliefs digging deep into the reliefs of nature like claws digging into the spleen of the earth.

Beirut today is like an odd and motley collection of neighbourhoods: boxes with darkened and closed tiers. The question is: Is Bourj Hammoud a veritable neighbour of Hamra or Ras Beirut? Is Achrafieh truly a neighbour of Ain al-Mreisseh or al-Chiyah? Each neighbourhood thinks itself the navel in a city made of navels with no real body. Consequently we recognise that the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods, of these darkened boxes, are nothing but shreds and fragments crossing one another in a geographical place historically known as Beirut. And as such Beirut is a scene or, at best, a stage-set but not a city. It is as if nature in Beirut were unnatural. And where there is no nature, there are no human beings. In this fragmented Beirut, statues and pictures occupy streets and squares, and slogans plunder and impose symbols, further subdividing the city. Whatever we come upon in some neighbourhoods in terms of development, services, or hygiene is inevitably tied and annexed to the particular position of a certain confession, the clout of its leaders, and the wealth of its constituents more so than to planning or urban visions that ought to include the whole of the city within a general regulating framework. Suffice it to look at what is supposed to stand as the leading institution of higher education, the Lebanese University, to blatantly see how it reflects a general dissolution of a national culture in non-nationalism, non-civility, and non-urbanity. The Lebanese University is an embodiment of internal collapse: educational, cultural, and political. Culture in Beirut is similar to its architecture: a multiplicity that quarrels rather than concords. As for social living, it is tied to neighbourhoods, which in turn are made of isolated coalitions of inhabitants. Religion is the primary basis for this culture. Beirut is a mosaic: an ensemble of neighbourhoods, of confessions, and of cultures. And from this perspective it is a non-urban city or a non-civil city. What exacerbates this non-urbanity and non-civility is the incongruous, tragic, and blatant persistence of a purportedly foundational and prevalent Beiruti discourse: democracy, human rights, emanation of knowledge, and other fallacious propaganda.

Just as Beirut is a non-urban and non-civil city, so is its dominant culture a sort of sycophancy for all its hypocrisy, boastfulness, embellishments, and avoidance of crucial issues in all domains. What makes the importance of a culture in a country where intellectuals acquire their standing not from their capabilities and ingenuity but

rather from their sectarian loyalty and belonging? The truth is that the political, administrative, and cultural institutions in Beirut do not evaluate a person according to his or her personal capacities but according to his or her confessional or sectarian credentials. And by extension he or she gains standing according to the extent of his or her closeness to the leader of a confession. How scornful of humanity are such standards, standards which invariably reflect the culture. For in the Lebanese culture there is no real dialogue among its parts, just a vociferous verbosity made of praise and defamation.

In this perspective, one sees that it is the space of Beirut that is scorned and fragmented into a collection of enclaves each fenced by its own customs. Yet as contradictory as it may be, the invisible act of quarrelling and excluding the other carries a propensity toward convergence that seeks ultimately to re-mould the other into one's own semblance. But when I insist on making the other similar to me, I am in fact insisting on cancelling him; for the propensity towards convergence in Beirut is about approximation more so than about cohabitation. It is the will to cancel or exclude, dissolve and smelt. And the aim is invariably to conquer and to dominate under the guise of cohabitation.

The space of Beirut is a sacred place, not because it is a national unifier but rather a collection of confessional incorporations. That is why it is unfeasible, in principle, for it to be a place for equality, for there is no equality except in the worldly and secular. A place divided confessionally is but a world of cleavages, frontiers, and obstacles; inevitably resulting in wars, latent or manifest, according to the logic of particular situations. It is as if the womb of Beirut is vowed to continually beget Cain.

In fact, confessional clans do not live in Beirut "the city". Rather, they merely scuttle across and prefer to live deeply in the church, the mosque, in addition to the pub of politics and mercantilism. That is why time in Beirut seems exclusively that of these three places and not the time of an urban culture — as if Beirut lived outside the creative time of humanity, the time of civilization. It is a mere observatory for mere expectations. Because of this, the geniuses of these three places or these three spaces persist in making the future a form or image of the past, meaning that they persist, practically, in destroying the Beirut of the present and of the future. And what of a human space struggling to turn the future into a past, or in which the past seems as if it were the future?

In Beirut we have nothing but its name and the lingering reputation it evokes. And if a name is all we have then how can it face prevalent and superficial modes of consumerism?

Are we then also in the right to say that Beirut does not constitute one social network but rather layers or human agglomerations raised on confessional and religious foundations? We all know that the civil war was a savage explosion that rent the veil off the politico-religious volcano that is Beirut. The civil war was resounding evidence

that the human and cultural concept of a city is of no importance to its inhabitants. Everyone in this war, except for a marginalised minority, rode the wave of his or her confessional loyalties and gave full reigns to his or her repressions, devouring and raping the land of Lebanon, in every way and means possible. And there it is, for all to witness, the manifestations of those released repressions piling up in Beirut and along the Lebanese coastal mountains of despicable cement edifices blinding eyes and vision; horrible mountains that murder nature and suffocate the beaches that once witnessed the sails and masts of the alphabet.

A city, any city, is not accomplished, is not a veritable city, unless human creativity dialogues with its identity — in its being and its perpetuity. And it is precisely in the arts that such creativity is present. For it is art, sculpted and painted, rhymed and put to music, that constitutes the only human endeavour that gives a quiddity that transcends humanity and time. Through its perpetuity and perennial influence art is different from all other human works. It is as if art were a temporal order that founds a human and aesthetic cosmology. And it is in this sense that the city becomes art or else remains a bundle of blind accumulations: To become art a city should break through functionalism and be filled with art, statues, research centres, science, and gardens to establish an aesthetic balance between the architecture of dwelling and the architecture of daily public life.

The only part that constitutes a spot for what can become the urban and civil kernel for Beirut is Maarad Street and its vicinity that was destroyed by the civil war and then recently rebuilt. This spot, aside from its lack of artworks, through its architecture, archaeological digs, space and elements of its ordered structure, can afford to both the inhabitant and the passerby, a specific felicity charged with aesthetic emotions that results in a sense that the city is built to serve humans and cater to their mental and physical comfort. It is a spot that practically embodies the architectural theory that proposes a variety of aesthetic dimensions to continuously surround humans in the public and the private space. That is why it is no coincidence to see this spot, more so than any other part of the city, filled every day with groups of people of all ages, all confessions, and from all neighbourhoods seeking leisure and comfort. There lies in this specific show a generous shattering of the confessional and cultural web of Beirut and an implicit longing for another urban and civil space.

Of course that is tenable only in principle. For in practice, people stroll about in that spot in proximity but do not truly meet. They cross each other but do not interact, collaborate, or engage in a cultural exchange, in the broadest sense of the term. Perhaps we should remind ourselves that the reconstruction project for the Beirut city centre is primarily geared toward foreign exploitation. And although people may concoct in the future their own mode of exchange, the plan, as it is implemented, is unconcerned with profound and productive cultural exchange. It is

solely concerned with the exchange of goods of all kinds. It is a plan for restoration and beautification for a post-civil war peace, and perhaps also for its potential. So far, it does not exceed this set limit. And we all ought to hope that this spot, I mean the city centre, does not deteriorate under the weight of greed and be transformed into a mere collection of shops.

But what is the meaning of the word *city* in its modern usage?

Firstly, it means the upholding of shared public values, untouchable and impersonal.

Secondly, it means that it is founded on democracy that maintains this public property and the freedom of each individual. For all that is in a city, whether material or ideas, is open for debate at any time.

Thirdly, it means a complete balance between the public and impersonal and the private and specific, namely a balance between sociality and individuality.

If we return, in accordance with the above mentioned, to the ancient philosophical tradition, which proffers that the most accomplished model for theoretical thinking lies in the contemplation of earth and universe, then what of our thinking when compared with this earth called Beirut and this space called the universe?

Since this question has been coupled with a remembrance of the earliest origins of Beirut, namely the development of the alphabet, the exploration of the unknown, embracing reason, the creative receptiveness of the other, then the answer will be tragic, no matter the amount of delusional claims for which the Lebanese have become infamous.

The creative obsession in Beirut began to wane or retreat ever since the advent of monotheistic religions. This is historically evidenced in that Beirut was never able to equal what it created and produced during its pre-monotheistic epochs, not in law, philosophy, or in the arts.

Beirut was born one. But if we were to look at its parts we will find that it has succumbed and still lives a despairing history because of the fragmentation itself. And if we were to look at it as a whole we see that it is probably the worst among all the cities of the Arab world.

To that, it must be added that since the 1950s, Beirut was gradually dragged by religious politics or politicised religions toward an abyss of delusions that led in the 1970s to a savagery of internecine destruction. And so it became known as a place for non-social coalitions and for concerns founded solely on individualistic and monopolising tendencies. Beirut is internal and introverted while its arms seem to encircle the outside. It is a fertile and varied field ever exploited by others. It is a meeting place for all sorts of politics with none of its own. It is a factory of knowledge, but one that stutters, is wayward, and paradoxically ignorant. It is the tangible city and yet one that is most abstract.

It is a mere equation: one that gave birth to a body exploding with longing and craving. On the level of thought, we find in Beirut two effective ideas: religion and the politics based upon it. A religion that is oblivious to everything but

its own institutions and its needs, and politics that continues to feed upon a past founded on nepotism.

Everything else, whether art, philosophy, thinking, or social and natural sciences, is marginal, ineffective, and negligible. It is also completely absent from the level of general consciousness.

The resources Beirut has for initiating an urban and civilisational shift are represented in three unexploited and unprotected aspects. First, there are its specialised human resources, unfortunately drained by the emigration of skilled labour and accomplished minds. Second, there are its natural resources, an ecology so far demolished and polluted in sea and on land by the defacement of mountains, the pollution of drinkable water, and the general over-use of chemical fertilisers and plastic greenhouses. Its third resource is its culture, beginning with the culture of rural life, the architecture of space in neighbourhoods and the architecture of cities, and on to institutions and cultural programs. It is good to remember that Lebanon remained even in the midst of the civil war a major centre for publishing. It is also good to remember that cultural and educational programs initiated between the 50s and 70s were ripe with future promises. They were clearings for meeting and communicating outside the confessional kingdoms. They were an open space with a promise for growth and development through exchange and profound partnerships. Regulations and capital are incapable by themselves to effectuate what a free and profound cultural movement can do in breaking the ever-tightening confessional noose.

And today, after all the horrors of the civil war fed by sectarianism, although perhaps not its primary cause, the situation is clearly ruled by division, the logic of quotas, and sectarian pillaging. It is unfortunate that the eyes of those responsible roam left and right in search of solutions and claim to find some in loans borrowed for developmental programs but remain blind to those answers easily found in cultural programs. Obviously I do not simply mean publishing magazines and editing books. Cultural programs include the whole range of research, invention, development, and new visions within cooperative frameworks in the fields of science, literature, fine and performing arts, music, architecture, agriculture, educational research, ecological research, industrial research, local industries, political and legal conferences. And yet we see that these institutions responsible for promoting interactivity and exchange are reneging on their vocation, or at least are capitulating to the demands of sectarianism rather than endeavouring to secularise as schools or universities ought to.

Development cannot be without its primary capitals, which are the capabilities and potentials of the people and nature of Lebanon. Neither loans nor borrowed programs can replace human cultural force and natural resources.

It is therefore necessary to say that Beirut as a place does not have an audience that can view it as one city. There is no correspondence between its history and the history of its inhabitants. For each

coalition of inhabitants promotes and protects its own history and as such maintains a rift with the place in which it lives. As if this place in which it lives were not the home of its being, not a locus for civilisation but rather an outpost for trade.

In other words: Does Beirut have a singular memory, and what is it? How can it have a singular history? The last civil war unlike all other civil wars has increased the rift among the population rather than instigate its fusion.

Between the oblivion of a singular memory and a singular history, Beirut has no present except that of copying and mimesis, namely the present of the modernised West. Edit all that is Western from Beirut and you will find nothing but the church and the mosque. And what is disastrous is that Beirut is approaching a time when the church and the mosque will also become useless. They will become impotent and immature, a mere market among souks.

Beirut is an agglomeration of religious groups: I say religious to avoid the term confessional, which has become vulgarised. Each of these religious groups creates its own centre, its own city within the city. It creates it not only with ideas and opinions but also practices it in action and imagination. Struggle in Beirut is not only between the oppressor and the oppressed or between the rich and the poor. It is also a struggle of ideals and utopias, or shall we say in terms contrary to common opinion that it is a struggle of prophecies and last judgments. And that is why it is a struggle of passions and potentates. It is a struggle that follows the deadly beats of the modern world, beats that alienate and send us all scurrying to gather the shreds of a lost and longed for motley identity.

It is then axiomatic to say that Beirut is neither one society nor one city. Its inhabitants do not coexist as equals, sharing responsibilities and rights, but as a quarrelling bunch where each tries to be master. It is as if the energy of Beirut is pre-emptied. It spends half the time dissipating its energy outside its orbits while it spends the rest of the time trying to gather it.

There is in Beirut a variety of ethnicities and cultures unequalled in the Mediterranean basin, at least its Levantine side. That is why we suppose that such a city, considering its location, its potential roles, and its unique human and cultural composition, should stand in a distinguished position poised for a unique civilisational meeting.

Yet the realities of living in Beirut ascertain that people consider it a shelter and not a city. Each holds on and defends his own fragment of a shelter. Each practices by will or by force tactics of exclusion, contrariness, fixity, and torpor. And what we still call the state is no more than an external shell in which these exclusions and quarrels move about with a semblance of legitimacy. In this place each walks haunted by a foreigner, be it a mediator, an ally, or a patron. In this city, this foreign other is an organic part of the mind and imagination. Harmony with the foreign exterior comes as a compensation for quarrelling with the interior. And as such it is a fundamentally ambiguous compensation.

In Beirut, people manifestly live in contiguity. Yet they are separated by wide chasms. The distance between the neighbourhoods of Achrafieh and Ras al-Nabaa and Ras Beirut and Bourj Hammoud, for instance, are much greater on the level of values and aspirations than between Paris and Rome or Cairo and Mecca.

The foundational characteristic of a city lies in its efficiency to transcend its geographical limits, namely the creativity which overflows across its limits toward the other. In this perspective, if we were to look at Beirut we would see it as a body fighting and devouring itself. For Beirut the city is not faithful to its human map or to its geographical map. And thus the dysfunctionality of Beirut is not due to foreign influence but to a lack of hegemony over itself. It is Beirut that works against it being a whole city. It acts as a multifarious city, with multifarious coalitions and cultures. To contemplate the obstacles that prevail against its growth and development into a whole city — the inequalities and injustices, the rise of unemployment — is to contemplate a pile of houses disconnected from any natural and urban sensitivity, less a city than a litany of grandiose enunciations.

It is almost as if the geography of Beirut were a reduced map of the Arabic Levant, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan. In this map we read that no value is given to the earth except as a temporal throne or as an otherworldly body. In this map we read that relations amongst people are not based on citizenship but on the foundation of this worldly or otherworldly certitude. Consequently, what we call a society is nothing but an agglomeration of disjointed atoms. We also read that the struggle continues in the name of this temporal and worldly throne, which tends to integrate the world as a complement to integrating the other world. It is a struggle accomplished only through violence and therefore through tyranny and oppression. We also read timid attempts at emancipation from the outside, but aiming to make the powerful more tyrannical and the tyrannical more powerful. It is a distorted and fundamentally impossible emancipation: No people can become emancipated if not internally free.

We also read on this map that Beirut, or this Levant, is poverty in everything and poverty for everything. Poverty unalleviated except purportedly by two things: money and power. For that is the prime desire that moves individuals — go, die out so that I can replace you — in politics, religion, money, art, poetry, and literature. All want to incarnate the person of the tyrant, the person of the sovereign, the infallible one. It is a nihilism reversed, one that reduces all the dimensions of human experience to the edicts of divine jurisprudence and interdictions, incrimination of the other and acquittal of the self. We rebel against one tyranny with another tyranny, against one religion with another, against one copy with another. It is a naïve and ludicrous reduction. It is a politics of death in a world that seems founded on one exterminating the other.

A dark image of Beirut? Some might say. But even so, Beirut almost became the cultural city of the

Arabs in the 60s and early 70s. A city invented by publishers and creators, Lebanese and Arabs, flocking to reside. But this Beirut was extinguished during the civil war. All that is left now is to dream in the midst of all this darkness, to sing its dreams having been demolished by its realities. And now the dream is about to be snuffed out under the onslaught of censorship. For censorship does not only suffocate reality, it strangles the dream itself. Living thought and living humans refuse to be surveilled. Nothing and no one condones censorship unless he who is living as dead or is thought of as dead. That is how censorship pictures Beirut: a pile of straws flammable by a simple spark of words. And let us say, on the political level, that the censoring authority tells the people: You are incapable of distinguishing the good from the bad, incapable of judging and evaluating. This authority, infallible as it would like to appear, evaluates and judges in your name. And all you can do is be silent and forget knowledge.

But such an authority rules a dead city, a dead people, and is itself nothing but one of the masks of death. For those who propound censorship forget that the ideas they impose on the silenced ones are automatically pre-emptied. Any thought that is imposed is unthinking and inhuman. Each idea elevated as the sole and eternal truth, eternal as a corpse stinking of putrefaction. Those same ones forget the lessons of history: Rotten ideas are dead even if dominant. What is worse in this field is that censorship looks upon ideas as criminal. For to claim that an idea is disruptive or destructive and then censor it is a denigration of those who express it and an insult to those it claims to protect.

The lack of freedom in a society is not only an indication of a lack of a minimum of humanity but also an indication of a senility of thinking, language, and man.

We are wrong if we are to think that an idea could be imposed by force, even if it is a religious idea. We are also wrong to think that an idea can be limited through censorship. Neither imposition is worthy of man. What is worthy is for us to create the conditions that allow freedom to do away with the bad and the ugly. For the bad is a reflection of a situation. Avoiding its causes only exacerbates the issue. And so there is no other way but to strive in order to change the situation itself by eradicating the reasons that cause it. And to that end there is no other mean but freedom. In the name of this freedom I have dared to ask the question:

Beirut today: A veritable city or a mere historical name?

A Syrian poet and literary critic, Adonis was born Ali Ahmad Esber in Qassabin and studied philosophy at Damascus University and Saint Joseph University in Beirut. He established two groundbreaking literary journals, *Shi'r* and *Mawaqif*. Through his views on modernism and his radical vision of Arab culture, Adonis has strongly influenced both his contemporaries and subsequent generations of theorists and thinkers.

Between Abdel Halim and Amr Diab: Singing and Politics in Contemporary Arab Culture

Hazem Saghieh

When I typed the name Abdel Halim Hafez, searching on the internet for what I did not know about him and trying to recall what I had known, I was flooded with a stream of articles and news reports on Abdel Halim Khaddam and Hafez al-Assad.[1] It seemed farfetched, at least on the World Wide Web, for the *halim* and the *hafez* to pair in the body of a single individual,[2] despite the fact that in reality, they existed in the bodies of two separate individuals. A simple, trivial occurrence perhaps, unbeknownst to the Dark Nightingale (*al-Andalib al-Asmar*), but nonetheless revealing of the little fortune he has garnered, a quarter of a century after his passing.[3]

However much fastened to his person, the political has spilled onto to the artistry of Abdel Halim and invaded its realms. After all, he is the balladeer of Nasserism who was only 23 years old at the time of the July 23 coup in 1952. He sang for the high dam and distinguished himself as the most dynamic and only male voice in the choir carolling: *"Watani habibi, al-watan al-akbar"* ("My beloved country, the greater country"). Undoubtedly, Abdel Halim's songbook was marked with an indelible imprint by the fervour of Nasserism and its calling to build a state whose singers celebrated the achievements of its army, its workers, its peasants, and its leader.

Much in the spirit of the 1960s worldwide, songs and singing — at least a faction among them — were conceived as inextricably bound to politics, as had been the case with the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the war in Vietnam, which set the stage for the likes of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and others. Abdel Halim's lack of fortuity is partly due to the divide that shaped the experience of the 1960s, or in the most charitable of formulations, the reality of the plurality of that experience, as the above-mentioned decade exacerbated and confounded the ambiguities within every locale, despite early signs at its inception suggesting a unified tenor. Questions about sexuality and gender that marked the 1960s in the "Western world" did not find their place on the agendas in the

1 Hafez al-Assad was Syria's president from 1970 to 2000, and Abdel Halim Khaddam was his vice president.

2 The *halim* is the Arabic equivalent for the tolerant while the *hafez* is the keeper or the preserver.

3 Dark Nightingale was a title given to Abdel Halim Hafez, by which he became widely known.

"Eastern world", which seemed content in rediscovering sentimentality on a new scale.

In the political and intellectual domains, the differentiation emerged in a variety of ways. Those espousing socialism in Europe, for instance, proclaimed their rejection of nationalism and its harvest of strong states. They followed social and cultural innovations in keeping with Harold Wilson's attempt to reconcile socialism to the technological revolution. They debated at length the phenomenon of the emergence of a managerial class as the new substitute for a bourgeoisie holding ownership over the means of production. They observed closely the transformation of the petite bourgeoisie from an old class chiefly constituted by the peasantry, craftsmen, and small commerce — the "Poujadists" — into a new class comprised of salaried employees orbiting in the universe of civil service and public administration.

Conversely, soon after the Baath party rose to power in 1963 in Iraq and in Syria, with its ideology pairing socialism with nationalism, it sought to eliminate its enemies, including the socialists and nationalists. Damascus Radio, preaching the herald of a new value, found its anthem in the infamous song that began with the stanza which said: *"Al-Baath qamat thawratuhu / walthar darat dawratuhu"* ("The Baath has realised its revolution / and the time for avenging has come").

With the exception of a discreet minority of those who studied in Western schools and hailed from the upper classes and the haute bourgeoisie, the Arab 60s were par excellence the historical moment of a deep engagement with questions of wide public concern. The decade was inaugurated by the war in Yemen, Algeria earned its independence at a devastating cost in blood, violent strife ensued in southern Yemen, the PLO was established, the 1967 war broke out and, at the conclusion of the decade, Gamal Abdel Nasser passed away.

This is not to discount the Western world's share of troubling events and crises that marked its decade, between the Berlin Wall and the Bay of Pigs, and the spectre of nuclear doom only a stone's throw away. However, the generation born after World War II was intent on living and wanted others to share their calling. They proclaimed their sweeping yearning for life with a heightened awareness of their individualism and their bodies, empowered by the economic well-being afforded by the Marshall Plan for reconstruction and Keynesian welfare economic policies. True, they were primed to apprehend their 60s with the tragic death of James Dean in 1955, and embarked into their decade with the suicide of Marilyn Monroe in 1962, followed by the assassination of John Kennedy a year later. The graveyards, however, resisted becoming the conclusive end to the lives of these icons. Months before he perished, James Dean personified the "rebel without a cause", an effigy that encouraged the youth to craft its own cause from conflicting aspirations and fears they perceived as embodied in the handsome actor.

Furthermore, by the 1950s, representation of the masculine

archetype in the domains of cinema and music had begun to witness a rebellion against the prevailing machismo virility of the likes of John Wayne and Clark Gable. New faces had emerged with blurred gender differentiations, from Paul Newman to Marlon Brando — whose personas endured suffering and died in the storylines of films in which they performed — to Elvis Presley before he was afflicted with obesity, to the Beatles and Mick Jagger. In general, these figures evoked very little of that self-assured virility, their faces, particularly those of James Dean, Marlon Brando, and later Mick Jagger, were nonetheless easy to remember because their lips were prominent.

Lips, as is widely agreed, are amongst the physical features of the body that portend the most feminine evocations. To many, Abdel Halim's sexuality suggested a duality; he embodied sensitivity and gentleness, in sharp contrast with the manly aura of Fareed Shawqi, who was named *Wahsh al-Shashah* (Monster of the Screen). Abdel Halim, with his lot of little fortune, could not dream of challenging the social norms that girded his life. When he performed, he moved his head, swayed his hand, shut his eyes, or gazed with languor. All in contrast to his teacher, Mohammad Abdel Wahab, who stood with stiff rectitude like a statue behind a podium, his head coiffed with a fez, very elegantly dressed. The contrast emphasised the lamenting sentimentality in Abdel Halim's posturing, but it did not make for a sharp departure or radical break with his predecessor.

Abdel Halim launched into a song and ended it, standing in the same spot. Picturing him smoking a cigarette on stage and nonchalantly flicking the butt, for example, was beyond the realm of the imagination as was any expectation from him to use playfulness, humour, and parody, like the French-Belgian singer Jacques Brel, not to mention American or British performers. While Mohammad Abdel Wahab performed in the vein of the traditional cultural creed, underscoring reverence to the podium, Abdel Halim fell short from going as far as to undermine the podium and deride its reverence. Touting that sort of a rebellion was beyond his ability. If Elvis Presley roused the ire of conservative mores in the 1950s, which taxed his stage shows and hip gyrations as overcharged with sexual suggestion, and as a result television broadcasts filmed his performances strictly from the waist up, in the case of Abdel Halim, similar considerations could not even reach such level of discussion to begin with. Had he attempted a fourth of what adeptly became Elvis' signature, most likely Abdel Halim would have become yet another martyr among the martyrs ushered to the margins, those for whom officialdom is too embarrassed to enlist in the pantheon of martyrdom.

After the passing of so many years, it is not possible to ignore the repressive regime that Abdel Halim endured consciously or unconsciously. The youth that made up his following was partly impelled by how he drew the contours of their grief, but he also later revealed the boundaries that

corseted their universe. Part and parcel of the relationship was a pleasure extracted from divulging a certain degree of interior pain, or a relishing in its description. The still thriving currency of the Halimite musical sensibility, in contrast to the legacy of his generational peers, feeds from the evidently lingering proclivity to this dead-end sentimentality in our societies.

That relationship is, in fact, predicated on a certain degree of kitsch playing an operative role, not unlike the function the crucifixion of Christ and the pain of the Virgin perform to instigate an emotional charge amongst Christian believers. Within the finite, total sentimental circle locked in these sorts of relationships, relived over and over, kitsch is ideally suited for enabling a swift and unencumbered fusion of the re-enactment of the lived and what is sought to be relived. The excesses borne with kitsch, elevated to the lofty scale of sacrality, ensure that the reliving of the emotional state remains identical to the one described, and wards off the danger that unrelenting repeated enactments render the emotions contrived. According to Milan Kundera, the sentimentality of kitsch does not belong in the first tear shed at the specific loss of someone or something, the real expression of sorrow. Rather, it lies in the "second tear", or the meta-tear, that springs from what dwells behind that tear and all tears shed in compassion and concert with shared collective feelings and sentiments. It speaks for an emotion in lieu of others, a surrogate intimating in the interest of others, avoiding a straightforward emotional engagement with what impelled the tearing in the first place.

Thus does reality morph into a realm of complete purity, as with, for example, the emotional vocabulary inspired from the icons of the Virgin and her son, or with the syrupy pain of pure love, the sleep of a child, the motherhood of a mother, the martyrdom of the martyr. Abdel Halim — whose renditions were repeatedly described as "from the heart", and who sang: *"Damii shuhudi / garrah khududi"* ("My tears witness / they have scarred my cheeks") and *"Fi yaom, fi shahr, fi sanah / tihda al-girah weh tnam / da umr gurhi ana / atwal min al-ayyam"* ("In a day, in a month, in a year / wounds settle and go to rest / my wounds remain / longer than the days") — is the balladeer whose songbook was replete with the vocabulary of heaven, fire, tears, and wounds. His films carried titles echoing the same vein, such as *Al-Wisadah al-Khaliyah (The Empty Pillow)* and *Al-Khatayah (Sins)*, resonating ominously with the "life and passions of Christ". Abdel Halim died very young, at the age of 48, after the press had satiated itself at length with reports and rumours about his health. His premature demise imparted his aura with a romanticism of a Gibran-esque scale, which may not have matched his fusion with the world of nature — as was espoused by the hippie movement, for example — but nonetheless found inspiration for his title, *al-Andalib al-Asmar*, from nature.

When the popular Egyptian poet Ahmad Fuad Najem wanted to satirise Abdel Halim Hafez, he went for his Achilles' heel, or the

crux of his kitsch: *"Al-leylah hay yighanni wa yitnahhad wa yimut"* ("Tonight he will sing and sigh and die"). Another image was used by Arab caricaturists who represented him singing "Nar Ya Habibi" ("Fire, Oh My Love") with fire-fighters rescuing him from flames. The departed Egyptian star stands for the state of being in extremis. While others sang, he "loved singing to death", and while others fell in love, he "loved to death".

Love until death is at the opposite end of the universe that Amr Diab enacts, sings, and depicts. His songbook and showcase are replete with ballads of courtship and love, but their temperature does not rise to the soaring height of passion, and his following has never lost sight of the conventionally professional distance separating the performer and the text performed. Whereas listeners were nearly driven to weeping in concert with Abdel Halim and in sympathy *for* him — as if he were the youngest sibling in the family, afflicted with some ailment — Amr Diab's singing remains exterior, functional, essentially and basically an inducement for dancing, to the extent where dancing alongside him seems to be the paramount objective of his singing.

Unlike his predecessor, the young artist is not unfortunate. Without ambivalence to gender differentiations and with unabashed boldness, he dares to feminise his gaze. In the last decade, traditional gender functions of masculinity and femininity have changed a great deal; men are able to effeminise, seriously or playfully without the risk of calling onto themselves an inquisition of morals, as had been the convention previously. Rather, they seem to earn the admiration of women, who in turn have changed and no longer subscribe to the convention that previously had them yearning for the "manly man". If these notions, popular in our Arab social realms, do not necessarily manifest themselves in palpable findings, popular modes of dancing attest to the definitive transformation in mores. On the one hand, men, from any Arab city, never partook in dancing — the reference here is not to those folkloric dances designed for men only, nor to the professional transsexual performers — especially not the sort of dancing usually stigmatised as feminine, like oriental dance.

In fact, the stakes suggest that the traditional male archetype is teetering toward its demise, at least in urban settings, after the glory it garnered during the era of Abdel Halim, a historical bracket when nationalism reigned on the one hand, and before women's movements achieved their victories in the West on the other. The revival of Hajj Metwalli and the wide popularity achieved by that fictional yet seemingly typical character at the hands of both Islamists and non-Islamists should not confuse the television entertainment value in the representation of that character engendering that popularity — particularly during prime time in the month of Ramadan — with presumptions on how such a character would fare in an urban and civic realm that has espoused a penchant for challenging inherited tradition and the sacred.[4] We are living the moment after Madonna

4 Hajj Metwalli is a a central protagonist who was polygamous in a widely popular and famous Egyptian TV serial produced for the Ramadan season.

dared to playfully eroticise Jesus Christ, and more importantly, when every corner in the whole world is able to watch her doing it.

Amr Diab's Arab following may not have necessarily recast itself into the Westernised following of Madonna, but the opportunity for her Arabisation and his Westernisation has been made possible, now in terms unparalleled either in the 1960s or any decade since. I have heard Amr Diab's music blaring in the luxury boutiques of London's International Heathrow Airport, for example, a happenstance unimaginable, even for a diva like Um Kulthum, prior to the globalisation of the 1990s.

Those with a penchant for anthropology and advocates of extreme relativism would contest all these comparisons on the grounds that drawing such analogies and parallels can only proceed within the single field of the single experience. Their perspective, however, denies all virtue to any universalism, restricting purview to a number of unhinged locales that don't connect and cannot be gauged against one another. In that vein, it would not be possible to observe how the relationship of the Arab 1990s with the Western 1990s has become far more solid when contrasted to the decade of the 1960s, despite the fact that politically, the rift and contrast has since increased and widened. In a manner unsettling for Samuel Huntington's worldviews, cultural affinity between the two worlds, vehicled with emblems and icons, has been steadily multiplying.

These proclivities have impelled for the ushering further and further into the distant past contemporaneous cultural binds between Arabs themselves, and their dimming; Arabs today are more locked in unity over al-Mutanabbi than any contemporary poet.[5] On the one hand, when our sensibilities and our temperaments are summoned on an Arab-wide scale, as with the television program "Superstar", in which singers from all Arab countries compete fiercely, we find our convention disrupted and ruptured with feuding national identities and subnational tribal affiliations.[6] Moreover, most of the symbolic signs of our grievances with the United States and Europe agree well with ideas, mores, and tools imported from the West that cannot be ignored or done away with. In fact, some we defend as cohabiting easily within our societies. Endorsing the veil, for example, is accommodated as a tinting of the overall garb, the acquisition of computers and mastering their usage is widely promoted and encouraged, so is the notion of professional achievement and some feminist teachings within modern Islamic discourse.

Even with regards to our perception of time and the manner in which it is periodised and bracketed, the rift between the Arab world and the West has narrowed. True, there are voices in the West that coin the break-up of the Beatles in late 1969 as the hallmark to the end of the 1960s, others choose the Woodstock concert. These propositions elevate pop music and song to a cultural standing that has yet to be granted to Abdel Halim or any other performer in our culture. Obviously,

5 A poet who lived in the tenth century, al-Mutanabbi is considered the most important Arab poet.

6 The franchise of the British-made television program "Pop Idol" was renamed in the Arab world as "Superstar of the Arabs", disseminated by Future Television in Lebanon.

Amr Diab and his generational peers have also failed to successfully induce their artistry to be regarded as a central component in the historiographical study of life and mass culture in the Arab world. However, they did not drag their feet when the time came to ride the wave that carried them to the furthest corners of the world. Their travels inaugurated a levelling, the equalising effects of which reach us in echoes that resonate in the same vein that echoes are roused when our books are translated beyond our borders, multiplied with laudatory clamour. Amr Diab is the first Arab artist to produce a music video at the historical instance where "videology" — the term is borrowed from Benjamin Barber — threatens to overwhelm ideology. While both Abdel Halim and Amr Diab were cast in movies, the music video has afforded Diab with an awesome means to intensify and widen his reach, besides the fact that it represents a space for forging a new visual vocabulary and for a performativity that endows the song with an unprecedented instrumentality and increases its accessibility. Amr Diab has not been bashful about his designs to couple the worldwide purview of his ambitions with his desire to secure his share in the local market. He undertook strategic steps to reach out to the markets in the West and the East, resorting to state of the art technological tools of communication at a time when "marketing" no longer carries the negative insinuations it used to, in as far as it was able to influence a local culture that purported disdain for profit-making and celebrated what it identified as "roots".

In reality, the consideration here ought to be for the branches, rather than the roots, and by branches the reference is to the extensions created by the masses of souls migrating to Western metropoles, building for the first time in history what could be called a popular cosmopolitanism. Millions of migrant workers in the big cities of Britain, France, Germany, and the United States are able today to listen to Caribbean, African, and Arabic music, and to indulge in Indian, Thai, and Mexican cuisine, available on the market to the same degree as the national cuisine of the country in question. Admittedly, this emergent form of popular cosmopolitanism falls short of measuring up in ideological direction and outlook to its original, more complex version. It is inferior in knowledge and culture, more fragmented and dispersed in sociological definition, but it has tremendous purchasing power that does not refrain from swelling with the ceaseless flow of migration.

With Amr Diab and his generational peers, value has become indistinguishable from price, whereas with Abdel Halim, there was a clear line of distinction where price was regarded with some contempt in contrast to a value endowed with great worth. This said, marketing is no more a matter of price alone. A new audience has formed from within the diasporic communities of immigrants, transgressing the confines of the nation-state, poignant, unsettled between integration to the country it has chosen and affiliation to the country it hails from. It is that audience

locked into that liminality, and most likely it is the generation of their offspring that consumes what Amr Diab tries to sell.

In his attempts to widen the scope of his marketability to the furthest of his capacity, Amr Diab has recorded duos with the Greek singer Angela Dimitriou and with the Algerian Cheb Khaled. Moreover, Amr Diab is the artist to have mixed the most between cultural genres and musical styles: He has borrowed from the Spanish gypsy genre and from rap. He is also said to be influenced enough by the Latin pop music star Ricky Martin to have emulated him in demeanour, style, and stage performance.

Diab is one of the few Arab musical stars to have ventured into recording songs in English and French, and his extensive usage of synthesizers allows him to harmonise the coupling between Arabic melodies and Western rhythms. When the dancing that accompanies his singing performance is taken into consideration, the transformation reveals additional possibilities for interpretation. In the video for the song "Habibi Wa La Ala Balo", Diab's dancing seems like a mixture of rock 'n' roll and breakdancing, in the video for "Habibi Ya Nur al-Eyn", it seems to be more inspired by Spanish flamenco.

Far beyond all these aspects, however, the transformation in the lyrics of the songs is the most glaring evidence of compliance to the creeds of merchandising and marketing. The lyrics to Amr Diab's songs are not outstanding, and to some extent neither were those of Abdel Halim's songs. But the language of the former seems always to lighten its load, its expressions abbreviated to utterances that fit melodic sounds, accompanying music, all followed by dancing. His lyrics seem barely an alignment of words stacked with the purpose to suit the tune. The storytelling form, a tradition that Abdel Halim's audience had grown habituated to, has disappeared from Diab's song entirely. Songs like "Habibaha" and "Qareat al-Fingan", for example, were based on poems, the coherence and integrity of the story they told were grounded in a complete narrative structure. Abdel Halim sang relatively few classical poems, but Amr Diab has sung none. As such, Diab's songs are in effect shorter than his predecessor's. Thematically, the songs of Diab do not impart any departure from the legacy of Abdel Halim; he remained in the classical domain of sentimental ballads, and Diab endorses the same syntactic, traditional form of addressing the loved one in the masculine. Considering the sharp differences that contrast both icons in all other facets of their artistry, these last two observations are more telling of the disparity between lack of interest in the language of lyrics as well as the deterioration in craftsmanship on the one hand, and the efforts vested in the music and stage persona of the performer on the other hand. This last observation is not only valid for comparison between the figures of Abdel Halim and Amr Diab, it is more emblematic of a comparison between the general trend and outlook guiding the two eras the two artists hail from.

Although both performers' songbooks are perfectly suited for oriental dancing, the rhythm in Amr Diab's songs is markedly faster and more hybrid. Abdel Halim's orchestration, by no means traditionally oriental, where western instruments like the piano and the violin had a strong presence, played melodies that remained staunchly oriental and were dominated by the tabla. This is no longer the case with Amr Diab, where we find in the song "Khallik Fakirni", for example, an entirely western melody. In the song "Bahibbak Aktar", we find a light-heartedness and playfulness we never encounter with Abdel Halim, even when he sang "Dahek Wa Loeb Wa Gadd Wa Hobb", deemed as an endearing anthem to youth.

In contrast to Abdel Halim, whose public and stage persona remained unchanged throughout his career, Amr Diab has changed his look unrelentingly. He is reported to undergo a makeover and purport an entirely new image once every year. In fact, there is little of that practice in terms of tradition in the world of musical performers in the Arab world. Sabah, the legendary Lebanese musical and stage star, is perhaps the only one among the myriad figures from the constellation of the "classical" era to have showed concern for refashioning a public persona with an acute sense of fashion.

Fixity and stability are not attributes one would associate with the persona of Amr Diab and his performances. His father, Abdel Basset Diab, who worked for the Suez Canal Company, most likely joined gleefully in the chorus with Abdel Halim's singing: *"Ihna baneynah, wa ihna ha-nebni al-sadd al-'ali"* ("We have built, and we will build the high dam"). His son, however, came to consciousness under Anwar Sadat's policies of economic liberalisation and "opening" to the outside world and its markets, during the height of which Abdel Halim Hafez passed away, in 1977. In contrast to Abdel Halim, who was born to a father who was an insignificant sheikh in the modest village of al-Hilwat in the Sharqiyah province, Amr Diab was born in the city of Port Said in 1961. He has no record of any political involvement, except for accompanying his father, at the tender age of six, to a radio station on the occasion of the celebrations of the July 23 military coup, to participate in carolling the patriotic anthem "Biladi, Biladi" ("My Country, My Country"). That occasion, which happened only weeks after the defeat in June 1967, and the region-wide atmosphere of gloom that reigned then was more likely to have been spurred to entertain the young boy rather than instill in him a sense of political engagement.

In fairness, the elements used in the concoction of a look and an image have somewhat changed. In the newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi* (September 10, 2003), Diab boasted his athletic prowess, claiming he trained in boxing, practiced scuba diving. He also complained of:

> . . . enduring harsh criticism in many Arab capitals, notably, in Cairo, Dubai, and Beirut. In Cairo he is accused of running breathless after money, spe-

cifically after joining the list of singers under the monopoly of the Rotana Corporation.

The place of Abdel Halim's lean gait and asceticism has given way to Amr Diab's sportsmanship and his unashamed, proclaimed pursuit of wealth. Even on the subject of health and maladies, the same newspaper referred to a surgical procedure where Diab had "one of his glands" removed. Glands and their endocrine clinical entailments are obviously not as dramatic as clinical problems with the heart and other obscure maladies attributed to Abdel Halim. In fact, while the former attach to the "profane" and the carnal the latter attach to the spiritual and the "sacred".

As for Abdel Halim's overflowing sentimentality, soft-heartedness was of absolutely no concern to Amr Diab. In the place of the personal crises, the weeping, the wailing, we find stringing stories of success, although admittedly not as glaring and heroic. In other words, the time of peculiarity in the natural seems to have expired, when the gates have been opened wide for peculiarity in the manufactured and what is man made.

That shift is also inscribed in a worldwide framework, or at least, in a Western framework. Particularly when thinking back to how Salvador Dali was received in the 1940s and the 1950s, with that mixture of sarcasm and aversion, and how by the 1960s he became the prevailing norm; particularly considering the work of Andy Warhol that investigated the boundaries between high art and low-brow popular art intended for mass consumption, ultimately elevating the market into an end in itself. Following that transformation, "cost" and "costly" are no longer signifiers with mere functional and instrumental attributes. They have even extended beyond attaching themselves to the consumption of exclusive luxury goods of select accessibility. Rather, they invoke associations with new notions of the "interesting" and "fun".

With the expansion of the stock market, a new class has emerged, almost entirely absorbed in an economy of global financial trading, across borders, identified in popular parlance as the class of "yuppies". They consume with transitory and elusive selectivity, their whims and urges inform the spawning of rituals tailored specifically to suit each of them without necessarily relying on, or taking stock of, the consensus of established prevailing convention. This falls under the constructed new and feeds it all at once. The manufacture of stardom has acquired weight and reach of hitherto unseen proportion, no longer impeded by the gushing of a variety of elusive, short-lived stardoms, in the vein of Andy Warhol's infamous adage that in the future, everyone will have their fifteen minutes of fame. Warhol's other infamous retort — implicitly replying to Jackson Pollock's claim that he wanted to become "nature" — namely, that he wanted to become a machine, is equally ominous. As art has variegated into a plurality of species, genus, and media, born from a chemical coupling of video and rendering by hand, of image and word, and since cultural practice has appropriated fashion and

design, the attraction of the whimsical, symbolised by Dali, is lost. On the one hand, since the 1960s, individualism has been satiated and has successfully grounded its legitimacy as a value in itself. On the other hand, television and technologies of mass communication have allowed for the rapid reproduction and dissemination of the strange or moody to unlimited edition. In this vein, the uniqueness of individualism in artistic expression has been seriously undermined, as it finds itself multiplied and disseminated to a mass audience. The same is true of the idea of the artist, as a distinctive individual, producing works of art exclusively to the select elite that can afford to buy it.

These insights were first developed by the theorist Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Considering the technological ability to create limitless reproductions and the rise of the masses, art has lost its "authenticity" and "aura" in the field of cultural production in advanced capitalist societies. Works of art, once unique and rigidly affixed to their geographical location, have lost their uniqueness; their reproductions are available everywhere, their transport and travel unencumbered, their consumption and myriad interpretation possible and legitimate. Culture has itself become a realm for industry, manufacturing, and as such for consumption and merchandising.

Going back to the Arab world, in the era of Abdel Halim, Egypt was a smaller country than it is today and less bound to the world at large. At the same time, however, politics were more prominent and the country was more central in the Arab world. It exported Abdel Halim, who was heroic in his political anthems and defeated, unheroic in everything outside nationalist politics. Abdel Halim, whose songs found a wide reach with the transistor radio (the essential medium in the spread of Nasserist fervour), did not mobilise the vitality of the youth except when it came to "building" the high dam. He did not sing to his brother, as did Mohammad Abdel Wahab in "Khayyi, Khayyi" ("My Brother, My Brother"), and he did not sing to his mother, as did Fayzeh Ahmad in "Sitt al-Habayeb" ("The Most Beloved of Ladies"). There were probably more channels of connectedness between the urban environment and the environment of the Egyptian Sa'eed in the countryside and its folk songs — the *mawaweel* — in his songbook, as in "Sawwah" and "Ala Hisb Widad". It was as if he were uniting the country's expanse in his song. He sang to "the people" — *al-shaab* — and to the "nice folk" of Egypt in neighbourhoods, to the youth, the students, and those who passed their exams with success. In his films, he was one of the "boys of the neighbourhood", *al-hittah* (the block), who had intimate relationships with its residents, bound by love and complicity. It is from this patina that Abdel Nasser sought to mould a world joined in solidarity, ordered in a nationalist or socialist "unity", transcending the inherited primordial binds of family, kinship, and region.

In turn, Amr Diab stood outside that paradigm entirely. The Egyptian

state in the 1990s is no longer what it was meant to be in the 1960s, and families are no longer what they used to be, particularly after the tremendous demographic transformations that started to unfold decades ago. Amr Diab is the son of a fragmented world that does not gel, neither in politics, nor in its families, nor in its state, and not in its leader. His only political song, "Al-Quds" ("Jerusalem"), is more a tribute to the human tragedy that weighs on Palestinians, in contrast to current vulgar and populist songs, such as Shaaban Abdel Raheem's, which proclaims to "hate" Israel and "love" Amr Moussa and Hosni Mubarak.[7]

As the political purview of our part of the world drifts further and further, in hitherto unseen fashion, from the political purview espoused by the West, the present conjecture is also one marked by the dissipation of nationalisms and unparalleled intermingling of ethnicities, gender, borders, countries, and migrations. It is also less statist than it was previously, when the hold of governments over cultural production is receding, and the elite is losing significant privileges, all to the benefit of popular culture, television, and the market. Precisely for such reasons, it is easier to identify the social parameters framing Abdel Halim's song and performance than it is for Amr Diab. The core of both performers' followings was the youth. Abdel Halim's typical fan was timid, recently uprooted from the countryside and traditional values without having fully absorbed urbanity and its modernising effects yet, and had come to an acquaintance with western melodies without having fully identified with them. As for his successor, Amr Diab's audience is borne from the world that spawned him, where the boundaries between what defined the Western versus the Eastern have become blurred, and the oppositional dichotomy is no longer able to perform the functions it did.

In that atmosphere, without permission from their states, their institutions, or their "correct" policies, some Arab artists have carved themselves a space that surpasses the Arab's representation in any other international domain. In 1990, the World Music Institute, a nonprofit seeking venture, was formed in Boston with the aim of introducing and promoting the musical and dance cultures of the non-Western world. The institute organizes tens of festivals all year round for that purpose. In the globalised world of the arts, *rai* music from Algeria and France has asserted its presence, so has *gnawa* music and *jajuka* from Morocco, in addition to figures like Sheikh Yasin al-Tuhami, the Musiciens du Nil (Musicians of the Nile) from Egypt, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan from Pakistan, Youssou N'Dour from Senegal, and many others from the "third world". There are now 120 television channels in the United States, and 15 European television channels that broadcast "Afropop Worldwide" on a weekly basis. It is not possible to discount the significance of these phenomena and to presume they are mere expressions of despondency and decadence, or simply a means for America to spread its hegemony. *Rai* singers are regarded as voices

7 Amr Moussa is the Secretary General of the Arab League and Hosni Mubarak is the President of Egypt.

of dissent against fundamentalist Islamists, whereas *gnawa* is a revival of old African folklore and *jajuka* is regarded as a pioneering rock band that preceded the invention of western rock by some hundreds of years. As for N'Dour, he was the organiser of a concert in Dakar in 1985, in support of freeing Nelson Mandela. It is also not possible to regard these phenomena as simply Western manifestations that only occidentalised youth in our countries. Amr Diab's audience is restricted neither to these youths nor to the crowd transiting through international airports. His songs and those of his peers, such as Muhammad Munir, are listened to in Cairo and other Arab cities by housewives, taxi drivers, bus drivers, doormen, and waiters. Despite the acuity of the sentiment of enmity to America within the Arab world, Amr Diab was not deterred from starring in an ad for Pepsi Cola when the company wanted to expand its market share of consumers in Egypt.

Perhaps these considerations serve only to engender ambivalence and render analysis tongue-tied, but what is certain is that Abdel Halim and Amr Diab, who obviously cannot be taken as embodiments of the totality of Arab life, represent two different trends from among a plurality of constitutive ones. With a great deal of simplification, the duality between the two could be seen as an extension of the duality between homogeneity and diversity, and could be seen as a mirror of the split between fast-food and *koshari*, or perhaps, a contradiction between the reddening of the face and its livid yellowing.[8] I don't know which is preferable, in the same way that I don't know whether a higher standard of education is better or worse than a democratised education with a lower standard. If one must issue a judgment, armed with the "nature" of our times, then perhaps the moment belongs to Amr Diab. And if one judges according to his generational experience, and I am over 50, I can only be biased to Abdel Halim. He is one of us and we are part of him. We call him by his first name and when we speak of his successor we feel very contrived if we don't pronounce his first and last names. Nevertheless, belonging to a certain generation is not by itself a license for objectivity. Abdel Halim in one of his songs said: *"Wa hiya doniya bitela'ab fina"* ("And it's a world / life that plays with us"). He might be right, as was probably Chinese leader Zhou Enlai: When asked whether the French revolution had a positive or negative impact, he answered that it was too early to judge.

8 *Koshari* is a popular Egyptian meal made with lentils and pasta.

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Returning to Beirut

Anton Shammas

I'd like to preface the following remarks with a very lengthy quote from a personal letter sent to me more than ten years ago by Ahmad Beydoun. I ask for your indulgence as I do that, and apologise to the writer for breaching his confidence and dragging the personal tone of his letter into the public domain. At the same time, however, I hope that this act of betrayal could be somehow mitigated by the fact that the nature of the letter asks for and tolerates sharing, first; and, second — that the letter grants me a deferral of sorts, until I catch my breath, being the native of the village of Fassouta, the subject of the letter, who is intimidated by his first visit to Beirut in order to reminisce about the city in its own language.

> Beirut, May 22, 1993
>
> Dear Antoun,
>
> My childhood, in some respects, was a world of legend and that world had two boundaries: Fassouta and Tallouza. The latter was a measure of distance. When a Bint Jbayli was asked: "Where are you going?" or "Where are you coming from?" and wanted to convey the utmost anger in his reply, he would say: "To Tallouza!" or "From Tallouza!" And that was an equivalent to what we would nowadays say: "To Hell!" or "From Hell!" In other words, going to Tallouza, and coming back from Tallouza, assumed a passage through the whole of life itself, and through the world from end to end. But the person giving the answer most probably meant that he was coming from (or going to) a very close by place known to all and sundry, so much so that inquiring about it was nothing but pointless and redundant.
>
> …As for Fassouta, it was a measure of size. If someone asked: "Why, are you from Fassouta?" or "You think you're from Fassouta?" And the implication behind the question would be that while you are from the smallest village on earth you behave as if you were from Nayerk [ie, New York].

Some of us used this last name to refer to both Americas, Tutrayt [Detroit], Bani Saris [Buenos Aires], and all. So Fassouta was a proper name for the two measures of size, the largest imaginable as well as the smallest, and not only for the latter. It reminded one of the frog that wanted to become an elephant. And no one bothered to explain to me, those days, why Fassouta had been afflicted by the Almighty with such a disposition. For my fellow villagers accepted the will of the Creator, in general, such as it was, and seldom would any of them venture to probe the depths of divine wisdom.

I spent my childhood, then, uncertain about the existence of Tallouza or Fassouta. And until this very day, having reached my fifties, I haven't met a single person from Fassouta nor from Tallouza. And this, according to what's been left of the logic of that world of legend that my childhood was, is quite an ordinary thing. For how could a person from Tallouza cross all these continents and spheres, that separate Tallouza from Bint Jbayl, for me to see him? And how could Fassouta be enough space for the birth and raising of a person if it's so tiny and small? And I still do not know why did the Jbaylis choose Fassouta and Tallouza in order to assign them to represent boundaries, and to stand guard over the edge of the universe…

…I have to admit to you that my position vis-à-vis boundaries and edges went through a change many years ago. A friend of mine told me once that a Shaykh from Jabal Aamel went to Iran to pursue, or to acquire additional knowledge… One day the Shaykh was taking a walk with a friend of his and he was suddenly hit by nostalgia to his homeland, so he recited: "O how much I miss the life whose prime / I spend between Sel'ah, Bareesh, and Ma'roub".

The Iranian friend inquired: "And where exactly is that Sel'ah, my dear Shaykh?" And the Shaykh, enticed by the evil spirit, wished to glorify his home village, so he answered: "Sel'ah is a city between Seida and Sour". The Iranian friend lifted his eyes toward heaven and said in amazement: "Praise to Allah, my dear Shaykh, for his world is so vast and wide!"

I didn't disclose to my friend that day how awfully significant his story was. I did feel, however, that Sel'ah was no longer situated between Seida and Sour but, rather, between Tallouza and Fassouta. And that significantly complicated *jughrafiya al-wahm* (the geography of fantasy), as coined by my friend Husni Zayni, so much so that I felt the need, from then on, to be constantly on the alert. For how could Tallouza be drawn away outside this world if the world was so wide; and how could one reconcile oneself to the miniscule size of Fassouta if Sel'ah was "a city between Seida and Sour"?

Be that as it may, I realised then that I was growing old and, subsequently, ready to make the acquaintance of people from Fassouta and Tallouza. So far, no one has ever arrived from Tallouza, but Fawwaz Traboulsi arrived the other day from Paris and handed me your letter. And you are, as you may well know, a person from Fassouta… So it's all right now, I guess, to bid farewell to that entire childhood of mine…

Take care, my friend

Ahmad

I have always wanted to return to Beirut (or Berout, as we used to, and still, call it), even though I'd never been to the city before, or to any other Arab city for that matter. That's what one would go through in point of chronotopic immobility — assuming Bakhtin was right — when the wrong passport is literally imposed on one. As you may well know, unlike identity a passport is not a self-issued document, so I'm absolved of its sins. But my mother tongue, being the ultimate chronotope, used to take me there, and I mean — take me there, in the most tangible and physical manner, and to bestow upon me the unconditional, the no-strings-attached gift of a Beiruti past; a past like my mother's.

But my mother was born in Sour, long before the city was reinvented (or should I say, "recreated") by Sa'id 'Aql, a couple of months after her father had passed away. She spent an orphaned adolescence in Beirut and al-Batroun, alternately, in the 1930s. That adolescence ended with a three-year ebb and flow of a love story with my Palestinian would-be father. And that love story culminated in a wedding early in 1940, with "just a peasant from Palestine" (that phrase must have set tongues wagging between al-Batroun and Beirut). And that wedding took place in the Maronite church of Saint Estefan in al-Batroun, because the Catholic priest in Beirut, for reasons you must be more familiar with, refused to marry the couple. My mother would of course vehemently oppose the usage of the compound "love story" in this context — that is an imaginary construct, she would say, invented by *kuttab*, book writers, and real life as we know it has nothing to do with it. Besides, contrary to what Elias Khoury tells us in *Bab al-Shams*, it's really impossible to have a love story with a Palestinian. But I'll take the liberty of naming it as such, *kuttab*-style, simply because we are in Beirut, where fantasy is permissible, let alone all the other things. . .

She lives all by herself now in Haifa, the city created in the Palestinian imaginary by Ghassan Kanafani. Her Lebanese accent has long eroded, except for what could be termed as "code words". As if she wanted to diminish the patch of her nostalgia to a place she could never go back to by repressing the unconscious "tongue" of that place, diminishing the space which that place occupies in her language. Nonetheless, when asked what she misses the most in her eighteen Lebanese years, my mother would say, rather apologetically, with an eightysomething-year-old

sigh: "I wish I could stand again on the beach of Sour, being eight years old, and breathe in the sea wind, *hawa 'l-bahr*". And the word *hawa*, the way Arabic words tantalise us, turns the soft wind into desire and love and longing and nostalgia; turns the vertical, diachronic *alif* into an *alif maqsurah*, a synchronic, horizontal cradle of warmth and tenderness.

What follows, then, are my personal variations on *hawa 'l-bahr*, and a nostalgic return to one of my personal capitals of fantasy — Beirut; a return to my mother('s) tongue, at more levels than one; a return to the unconscious of that mother tongue; an attempt to sort and map out the itineraries of my cultural imaginaries of Beirut, few as they might be, from the allegedly safe, and equally imagined distance of exile. After all, we, the orphaned children of the Arab *nahdah*, and as Jurji Zaidan taught us, are all *Biyaarteh*, Beirutis, in some way or another; we are all the virtual citizens of Beirut, the Arab capital of the nineteenth century, attempting perpetually, with a stretch of the imagination, to make our way back to it.

When she was eight, breathing in the *hawa* of Sour, my mother took a secret journey to Haifa, where she would end up, eventually, so many years later. The family of her Haifawi uncle was visiting Sour, and when they left back they took little Hélène, my future mother, with them, to spend the summer vacation in Haifa. At Ras an-Naqurah checkpoint, and since little Hélène wasn't registered in any travel documents, her cousin Alice hid her under her skirt, and the *darak* policeman didn't suspect a thing. Now, sixteen-year-old Alice was, from revealed tip to skirt-hidden toe, madly in love with Fouad, my mother's other cousin, whose family was also living in Sour.

So, on a hot Haifawi summer day, Alice couldn't take the longing any longer, and decided to travel all the way to Sour to see her Fouad, even though the young, blue-eyed chap wasn't at all aware of this all consuming love, and "wouldn't even look in her direction", as my mother would claim, even if he was aware of it. But love was blind and, contrary to what Aristophanes believed, so were the neighbours, who were supposed to keep "ten eyes" on the young woman in love when her parents were out and, alas, failed to. Around noon that day she took little Hélène with her and, without telling anyone else, tiptoed to the service station to Sour. At Ras an-Naqurah, the same trick was repeated — little Hélène was concealed under the invisibility skirt of Alice… And you can imagine the rest of the story, when the family in Haifa discovered that Alice had disappeared, together with little Hélène, to an undisclosed destination.

In a certain sense, then, her act of border crossing was never registered, her smuggling never recorded at the checkpoint, not even by herself. Haifa for her, to this very day, still is a mere geographic extension of that childhood of Sour and the adolescence of Beirut and al-Batroun, all being capitals of fantasy for her, as she is still hiding under Alice's skirt. My continuous returns to Beirut were always conducted, as is the

case today, through a reading of her nostalgia, across borders that language can sometimes render invisible. Unfortunately, though, I'm not lucky enough, like her, to be able to cross borders while hiding under Alice's skirt. (If my mother were here, I wouldn't have dared to say this last sentence. But we are in Beirut now…)

My first image of Beirut has nothing to do with that wonderland of Alice, nor with her invisibility skirt; rather, it had a military march-like, anti-nostalgic and almost carnivalesque tinge to it: *"Saff el-'askar tout tout/ wehna rayheen 'a Beirut" ("*File of soldiers, tout tout / we are going to Beirut").

This was a refrain we used to sing in northern Palestine in the 50s, as part of a weird game whose details escape me now. We would march in Indian-file (no pun intended), putting our hands on the shoulders of the kid in front of us, singing our lungs out, going in circles, marching in place, and, in effect, going aimlessly nowhere in particular, but somehow reaching Beirut at the end. That was Beirut for us as kids — going nowhere, yet moving inside language constructs and, years before Derrida, moving inside a signifier that was nothing more than a "trace", not tracking anything tangible and substantial but, rather, looking for more "tracks" of that trace. Beirut was there all right, in our song but, simultaneously, it was not. Because, though we were playing at a two-hour driving distance from the actual place, we — that "file of soldiers" — were actually light years away, and the only thing we could have of it was (as a Bakhtinian take on Derrida) merely an imaginary chronotopic trace. This was in the late 50s, probably around the same time that this city was going through its first major civil war less than a century after the *hawadeth*, events, of 1860, or the *idhtirabaat*, disturbances, as Jurji Zaidan, whose parents married that year, refers to it. In his autobiography he writes:

> During that year the well-known disturbances occurred and the people of Beirut feared a general upheaval like that which had taken place in Lebanon and Damascus. They began to make preparations for flight. Grandmother said to my father: "We find ourselves in great distress and the city is in danger. So, either you marry the girl and take care of her or you dissolve the engagement and we take her with us". He preferred marriage and they were wed in the same year.[1]

And as a result of that "fortunate" turn of events, Zaidan "was born on December 14, 1861, which is the day Prince Albert (the husband of the queen of England) died".[2]

I first came upon the name of Jurji Zaidan in one of the books that were stuffed inside our bookcase, together with books that my mother had brought with her from Lebanon, across the border, to a small village in northern Palestine called Fassouta. The people of Bint Jbayl, as mentioned in the preamble, considered Fassouta part of what Husni Zayni calls "the geography of fantasy". Our bookcase was embedded in the southern, stone-

1 Thomas Philipp. *Gurgi Zaidan: His Life and Thought* (Beirut, 1979), p. 130, English translation of *Mudhakkiraat Juiji Zaidan*, edited by Salah al-Deen al-Munajjid, (Dar al-Kitaab al-Jadeed, 1968)

2 Ibid, p. 131

built, double-wall of our house (*killeen* wall), right above the couch, with its back touching the outside wall from within, its door the colour of olives. I used to spend hours on end under that magic door, lying on the wooden couch (*kanabye*, as we called it), slowly devouring its contents. There was a series of Lebanese text books published in Beirut that belonged to my brother, who attended the local Catholic, private school, called *Al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah* (The Arabic Language), and a reader called *Al-Mushawwaq*. It must have been in one of these textbooks that I read Jurji Zaidan for the first time — a short piece that used to make us laugh a lot. It had an illustration of a teacher sitting idly on the floor behind a wooden box, dozing off, and surrounded by a number of little kids whose faces expressed mischief and wretchedness. Or maybe that's how we saw that expression, as a reflection of our own world. But we never thought the scene could have taken place in Beirut. Many years later, I came across that text in Zaidan's *Mudhakkiraat*, and was shocked to discover that that school had indeed been once upon a time in Beirut:

> The thought would not have occurred to anybody that the teacher Elyas was a learned philosopher: Even the gospel he could hardly read properly. His school consisted of a wide vaulted cellar room… It resembled more a cattle pen than a school. There the children of the neighbourhood between the ages of four to ten — boys and girls — would convene and sit on the mat… The teacher would sit in front of the room on a hassock, in front of him a small box…upon which he put his book, his inkwell, and his pens. At his right he had assembled a number of sticks varying in length and thickness. He would use each of them appropriately, according to age and sex of the child, and according to his closeness or distance to him.[3]

The other illustrations in *Al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah* were of landscapes and city life and interiors of houses with people in suits and fancy dresses and nightgowns that we hadn't seen even in our dreams. They were so strikingly different from what we could see around us, in that world of shabbiness, wretchedness, and poverty, in Palestine of the 1950s. But that was Beirut for us, as if another planet, where people were sitting in luxurious armchairs, enjoying the warmth of the fireplace in their houses, and where pupils attended schools that had spacious rooms, lit by electric lights, taught by teachers in three-piece suits. Even the illustrations of rural landscapes in those books, accompanying excerpts from Amin Nakhleh's *Al-Mufakkarah al-Reefiyyah* (*The Countryside Diary*), were so different from what we could see around us, in that mountain village in northern Palestine. And even the goat, prostrating next to "The Goat's Prayer in the Countryside" from the *Diary*, looked gentler, more elegant, and indeed more "goatish" than all the goats around us put together. Then

3 Ibid, p. 136

the years elapsed, and we discovered that those illustrations may have been copied from European schoolbooks, and that goat may have been of an *ifranji*, European pedigree. But we were content with fantasy, and content with what language could offer us in point of imagination and deceit.

And there was a photo in the family album, taken most probably in the early 50s, of my two- or three-year-old maternal cousin, walking in Sahat al-Burj, a partial view of the Martyrs Monument behind her, as my mother used to tell us, and in the deep background on the left — a partial view of a cinema, a billboard hanging on its front, carrying a huge poster whose details were completely blurred. This was the scene as we deciphered its signification years later, but in the 50s we were still ignorant of what the word *cinema* meant, and what would cause people, who were presumably far more intelligent and knowledgeable in the matters of this world than we ever were, to hang a picture of such dimensions so high up on the façade of a building.

Imagine, then, Mr. Mohamed Soueid, a Fouad at heart, who didn't know what cinema it was! My mother, who hasn't seen Beirut since the mid 40s, tells me now when I ask her that the cinema was called KitKat. But Mohamed Soueid, who hasn't left Beirut yet, tells me that the KitKat was actually in al-Zaytouneh, and that it got the name after it was turned into a nightclub, and that it had a different name altogether before that.[4] Is it Cinema Rivoli, then, in the picture? And where is the "sign" of Rivoli in this sliding game, this "slippage", between the signifier and the signified; and has it left any "tracks" behind? And do we believe Soueid or, rather, my mother? Or do we believe both simultaneously? Or, better still, do we turn to Monsieur Foucault who tells us that:

> The imaginary now resides between the book and the lamp. The fantastic is no longer a property of the heart nor is it found among the incongruities of nature… Dreams are no longer summoned with closed eyes, but in reading… The imaginary…is a phenomenon of the library.[5]

And that's what we used to indulge in, lying down, daydreaming under the olive-coloured door of the bookcase. Actually, I remembered that picture of my cousin when I read the memoirs of Jurji Zaidan, and al-Burj Square, which haunted the fantasies of our childhood, was conjured up all over again. This is how the Square seemed to the eleven-year-old Jurji, in the early 70s of the nineteenth century:

> …When I was eleven years old and my knowledge was still faulty, my father needed me in his restaurant to render him temporary help in writing down the names and payments of customers… He told me "Jurji, come assist me for seven or eight days until I find someone to replace you!" I went there against my will because I enjoyed my studies very much. I obeyed him, but still cherished the hope of

4 Mohamed Soueid. *Ya Fou'aadi* (Dar an-Nahar, 1996)

5 Michel Foucault. Afterward to "The Temptation of Saint Anthony", in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume 2*, edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley et al, (Penguin, 1998), p.105-106. In Amin Nakhleh's *Fi al-Hawaa' al-Talq*, I later find the following lines, which I read under the light of the lamp in my library: "We were once sitting on the roof of 'Miramar' in Beirut, which is called the KitKat Club these days, and it was summer, and the sun was about to set, and the sea stretched itself out as far as the eye could see…" Amin Nakhleh. *Fi al-Hawaa' al-Talq* (Maktabat al-Hayaat, 1967), p. 76

returning to the school. These seven days stretched into seven or eight years. I spent them in the markets of Beirut amongst their crowds and was forced to associate with the lowliest groups amongst them, because our eating place — or restaurant — was in the areas of the al-Burj Square. It was moved from one location to another but never was far off this Square. The al-Burj Square was in those days the meeting point for the crooks, the rowdies, and the idle — amongst them drunkards, gamblers, pimps, and quarrelsome people.[6]

Things remind us of other things; things collapse over other things; things refer us to other things, away from their original referentiality; and the meaning these things signify for us within language becomes contingent upon what they mean to us in a different linguistic context. So a square in a book reminds us of a square in a picture, and the square in the picture is reminiscent of a square in a tale which we are reminded of by a casual scene, an utterance, that ignites the sparkle, then ebbs away. For the al-Burj Square in a map of Beirut may no longer provide the referentiality for all of this, or maybe it never did. And when I read what Jurji Zaidan says about a signified he refers to as al-Burj Square, the Square around which he used to walk never crosses my mind; what does is, rather, the Square around which my cousin walks in a photo from the 50s, some 80 years later.

What happens to the signifier, then, when its signified disappears, becomes extinct; and does the disappearance of al-Burj Square from a map of Beirut make the Square somehow disappear from that picture and from my memories that are, in effect, a picture of the memories of my mother?

> Of all the names, Khan Antoun Beik was the least in circulation. Because no one ever heard it anymore since the woman announcer had stopped mentioning it.

That's how Hassan Daoud starts off his text "Khan Antoun Beik", (dedicated to Muhammad Abi Samra). Then, in a series of flashes exchanged between two "taciturn men", taking a stroll on the Corniche, he goes on to dissect the relationship between objects and their names, as the relationship becomes disjointed and the ties that connect signifier to signified unravelled. He is also wondering how memory relates to this rupture. The two "taciturn men" recall, in Hassan Daoud's fully diacriticised language, splinters of the vanishing name after the Khan itself has disappeared but remained present in the commercial of the woman announcer and in a photo published in a book containing other photos of old Beirut:

> They said names were older than their places. And that street they had lost was in fact two streets: The one was in the old photo, and the other in the commercial of the woman announcer. Two places for a single name. And they couldn't bring the two places together

6 Philipp, p. 139

> within that name unless they wiped out what had existed in both, unless they turned the name into a vacant lot, and that was the price that places paid when they carried names that had already abandoned them… For in those days, the days of the woman announcer, the Khan was no longer there and Antoun Beik, the owner after whom the Khan was named, wasn't around anymore. And of that person, Antoun Beik, nothing was left except his name, except the utterance of his name, rid of all that usually adheres to all things… And a name like that wouldn't in any case drape itself over its street — sidewalks, asphalt and all, as if it were the separating membrane between street and space.[7]

Though all texts in the collection *Nuzhat al-Maalak* (*Angel's Stroll*) are diacriticised, the diacritic marks, or the *harakaat*, movements, in this particular text, instead of merely adding Arabic vowel sounds to the letters, seem to perform a different role. For instead of adding "movements", the diacritic marks in this story add a touch of immobility and groundedness to the language employed for telling us the story of the evanescent and vanishing street. The diacritic marks look as if they were miniature nails meant to commit words to paper, literally, and turn them into a substitute for the disappearing things they represent. Or, as if they were the old paving stones of the Khan, concealed now under the asphalt, being paved again, by a master's hand, on the page that replaced the street.

When I first read this text many years ago, it didn't take me to Beirut much as it referred me, instead, to the City of Brass, mentioned by the twelfth-century al-Ghirnati's *Tuhfat al-Alabaab*,[8] along the tradition which Husni Zayni calls "the geography of fantasy", in a book of the same title (*Jughraphiya al-Wahm*), which was my companion while writing these comments.[9] Then *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* (*A Thousand and One Nights*) picked it up where al-Ghirnati had left off: It let Prince Mousa Ibn Nusayr enter the City of Brass, after he had almost despaired. And it added a rather brilliant sentence to the Ghirnati version:

> They asked him where was the road leading to the City of Brass, and he pointed the way for us, and we realised that there were 25 doors between us and the City, none of which was visible and none had left any tracks.[10]

The sentence, in point of narration, is a prolepsis, or a flash-forward: The doors' enigma is unravelled later on, for the 25 doors cannot be seen and, subsequently, opened, except from inside the city walls. In other words, the door could be called a door only from the inside!

Would the imaginary that brought me to Beirut manage to find a door for me, and open it up from the outside?

Or should I, rather, wish for one of your keys?

7 Hassan Daoud. *Nuzhat al-Malaak* (Dar al-Jadeed, 1992), p. 75

8 Al-Ghirnati. *Tuhfat al-Albaab* (Al-Mu'assasah al-Arabiyyah lid-Dirasaat wan-Nashr, 2003), p. 44-47

9 Husni Zayni. *Jughrafiya al-Wahm (The Geography of Fantasy)* (Riad El-Rayyes, 1989)

10 "City of Brass", in *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah, Volume 3* (Dar Maktabat at-Tarbiyah, 1987), p. 175

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Toward Extraterritoriality: The Dilemmas of Situatedness

Stephen Wright

"The real is merely the imaginary confirmed". — *Mahmoud Darwish*

Full Disclosure

When in English we say: "Where are you coming from?" or "Let me tell you where I'm coming from", we don't mean: "Where were you?" or "Where are you from?" In an extraordinarily subtle and comparatively recent shift of syntax, which I want to contend is emblematic of a shift in ideological control of the subject, the present progressive "to be coming from" has become a marker of situatedness. We are using a territorial metaphor to ask the speaker to flesh out explicitly the embedded suppositions which we detect implicitly in his or her discourse. We are asking for details about self-affiliation or rootedness that will allegedly help us clarify why the person is saying what he or she is saying. We are asking for what is known as a "full disclosure" of self-interest and belonging. It is the intellectual community's way of saying: "Passport please!"

As such, it turns every conversation into a border control. The phenomenon has become so prevalent, both in learned and everyday parlance, that its suppositions have been assimilated into our intellectual habits and gestures, embedded in our discourse. We no longer wait for the border guards of thought to ask, but rather voluntarily and almost compulsively preface our speech acts with the expression: Speaking "azza…" Or with the almost protocol-like permission to situate: "Let me situate my argument". In so doing, we contribute to laying down partition lines, and voluntarily placing ourselves behind borderlines of our own invention. We pre-emptively territorialise ourselves, so as not to submissively allow others to do it for us.

It seems to me that this often makeshift version of what in contemporary philosophy is called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" has become so widespread that it has almost become second nature. We assume that the possession of this sort of information will almost in and of itself enable an adequate decoding of what is being said — on the assumption that self interest, adequately framed, provides a meta-discourse that ultimately

shapes all content. The assumption is that if one can properly situate one's interlocutor's ontological landscape, then one need scarcely listen to what he or she is actually saying. And in this case, the grammar is quite peculiar: The speaking "azza" formula is always a preamble to telling us where someone is going with their arguments, never really where they are coming from — which suggests we don't really know much about it even as we assert that we do.

Disarming Aggressiveness

In composing this context-specific lecture, I felt a strangely pressing, puzzling, and almost irresistible urge to pre-emptively situate myself at the outset, as if to justify my being here. This is learned behaviour: Speakers invariably take pains at once to circumscribe and ironically bolster their position of authority by saying who they are, or with deferential assertiveness and feigned humility, who they are not. Beyond empirically justifiable self-description, what does this sort of foregrounding accomplish, I asked myself, beyond pre-empting not so much the accusation that one is ill-informed about the context where one is speaking, as the accusation that one is not adequately self-aware, and to frame one's position in such a way as to limit one's authority as speaking from a designated situation. In other words, like everyone, I was tempted by an intractably paradoxical situation: Desiring to please the demands of a hegemonic ideology, as David Simpson has written in an interesting study of this whole issue,

> . . . requires the subject's self-descriptions to be at once abject, made by others, merged into prior formations, and at the same time to bear all the marks of a recognizable *agency and responsibility*.[1]

Simpson, I think, is dead on: There is something disarmingly aggressive about situating oneself. It strikes me as crucial to question the meaning of this compulsive, pre-emptive self-situating that has infected the rhetorical and conceptual apparatus of contemporary intellectual creativity and virtually structures the discursive economy of art today.

I want to unzip some of the central aspects of situatedness, both in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and in terms of its consequences, because it seems to underpin a whole way of thinking, and as such has serious implications for intellectual creativity. Perhaps you are thinking, Well of course, "azza" white, male, Canadian-born, Paris-based whatever-he-is, he would want to do that. His situatedness, if not his background alone, gives us the full matrix of reference points we need in order to map out his discourse; what he will say will merely confirm, and at best perhaps refine, what we know. The point is not that you would be wrong in an empirical sense: It is obvious that people are situated, and that their situatedness consciously or inadvertently conditions their representations. The question is: What is important? What are salient factors in mapping a situation? What tools would enable us to measure degrees of context-

1 David Simpson. *Situatedness* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 195

specificity? This present-day logic of self-demarcation, self-affiliation, and self-specification — so self-assured in its rejection of the universal human subject — needs to be reconsidered from top to bottom.

Marketable Identities

Situatedness, of the voluntary kind, is very different from ideology, which, in the Marxist sense of the term, is construed as a coercive form of situatedness that prevents people from seeing the truth about their lives: When one cheerfully offers to situate oneself, making use of a reflexivity that the term *ideology* does not provide, one is making clear to one's interlocutors that one does see things as they are, that one has already done the cognitive mapping work. It is almost as if one could will one's form of embeddedness: It projects as an option that which it immediately implies is predetermined (occupation, subculture, ethnicity, and so on). Much work has been done in the social sciences around *subject positionality* (a knowledge of where one stands, along with one's successfully achieved intention to stand there). Locatedness is a more objective embeddedness, something imposed rather than assumed. But *situatedness*, with its rhetoric of self-affiliation, seems to occupy a slippery place between the two — and it may be that it is precisely this slippage that greases the gears that allows contemporary capitalist ideology to function by fudging every corner. For once one notes the conflict built into this tic of state-of-the-art thinking and approved moral seriousness, it is more easily seen for what it is: a risk-management tool for pre-emptive damage control, a way of flashing our credentials to ward off objection before it is deployed, diffusing responsibility to some community, while still leaving the legal subject intact. "The odd duality of empowerment-disempowerment to which the rhetoric of situatedness commonly speaks", writes Simpson, "is not so odd when it is seen for what it is: the authorized, flexible subject position" of globalized capitalism.[2] In this respect, it preserves rather than resolves the tension we experience between being in control and out of control, between being agents of change and passive recipients: It tends toward closure, while remaining always open. And it is this very slipperiness that leaves us tongue-tied when we are asked: "So who are you?"

It should by now be clear that what is called a situation is in fact a predicament. The predicament of oscillating between the rhetoric of self-determination and passive response is not somehow innate to life itself but is historically generated, and extends back to the emergence of possessive individualism in seventeenth-century thought, with Locke and Descartes, trying to conjugate the language of individualism with the stolid facts of social existence. As John Dewey argued, there was nothing inevitable about this evolution (though there were powerful interests behind it to be sure):

> There was no logic which rendered necessary the appeal to the individual as an independent and isolated being. In abstract logic, it would have sufficed

2 Ibid, p. 8

> to assert that some primary groupings had claims which the state could legitimately encroach upon. In that case, the celebrated modern antitheses between the Individual and Social, and the problem of their reconciliation, would not have arisen. The problem would have taken the form of defining the relationship which non-political groups bear to political union.[3]

This is a profound insight. It stands in stark contrast to how utilitarianism — the source for mainstream political liberalism — construes persons using territorial metaphors. As Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams emphasize:

> Essentially, utilitarianism sees persons as locations of their respective utilities — as the sites at which such activities as desiring and having pleasure and pain take place. Once note has been taken of the person's utility, utilitarianism has no further direct interest in any information about him… Persons do not count as individuals in this any more than individual petrol tanks do in the analysis of the national consumption of petroleum.[4]

I shall come back to petrol tanks in a moment. But I should first make it clear that self-specifying is relative luxury: The radically dispossessed — who constitute the silenced majority of humanity — know all too well where they are coming from; they have for the most part inculcated the knowledge that they are not to talk about it, and that at any rate their situatedness has no exchange value in the symbolic economy of authority. Because that is what self-situating is all about, and why it is so ostentatious: I may not have any real power, but nor do I feel myself void of any marketable or recognition-worthy credentials. It's my passport — the lack of which, as we know, is one of the defining features of dispossession.

It should by now be clear that self-situating — at least as I have been using the term — is at once pragmatically, grammatically, and ethically very different from taking a stand. For whereas self-situating is a pre-emptive posture, made by prefatory self-proclamation in order to obtain the sort of audience focus most beneficial to one's purposes, a stance cannot be verbally wished into existence in advance. It is the outcome of one's acts and statements and emerges from the ethical positionality they reveal. It does no good to announce one's stance, for without at least a minimal web of confidence that it presupposes, it merely lapses back into situatedness. And though one may occasionally hear people claim to speak "as a friend of the downtrodden", such gesturing smacks of facetiousness and condescension; sincerity behooves the speaker to actually take a stance. Because a stance has to be constructed, it cannot be articulated except through reconstruction.

One might ask: Situatedness in what exactly? Human life is a flux between overlapping situations, never an escape from situatedness nor ever an absolute situatedness. Jean-Paul Sartre's "situation", like Maurice Merleau-

3 John Dewey. *The Public and Its Problems* (Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 87-88

4 Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams. *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 4

Ponty's, is analogous to Martin Heidegger's being-in-the-world and Wittgenstein's language game: We cannot think ourselves outside of it — indeed it has no "outside". I refer to this type of shifting but inescapable situatedness as an "ontological landscape", for this term allows us to see that it is not only human subjects who are forever being preemptively bracketed off; fiction too is cordoned off from non-fiction, art from non-art, and so on. An ontological landscape is experienced, by those who dwell in it — be they fictional or non-fictional subjects — as a space for producing, exchanging, and sustaining coherency and meaning. But when we acknowledge our containment in such a landscape, are we really capable of living in the full light of that acknowledgement? Can the containment, in other words, be contained? This problem points, I think, to one of art's debilitating errors, in its desire to bring the real into its folds by containing it in a picture, or framing it as an object of veneration.

Can the Containment be Contained?

Let me take the example of the Xurban Collective, for their extraordinary project *The Containment Re-Contained*, carried out in eastern Anatolia and exhibited at Espace SD, is exemplary of a sort of extraterritorial practice, both in terms of its strengths and weakness. I quote from their brochure:

> In the recent past, almost all of the trucks transporting goods between Turkey and Iraq were equipped with special steel tanks (custom built to fit underneath the trucks) used for the off-the-books transportation of diesel fuel back into Turkey. Now outlawed and hence useless, these tanks lie sprawled along the highways as the remnants of a once-prosperous barter economy of sorts.

Xurban has sought to draw our attention to these fuel tanks, which have a great deal to tell us about free trade and mobility, about territory and perception on the one hand, as well as about containment and restriction, and seeing and oversight on the other. They have used art-related techniques (film, documentary photography, research and writing) to focus our art-informed gaze on the fuel tanks. It is not the architectonics or form of the fuel tanks per se that make them meaningful symbols, but rather their embodiment of a whole range of politically determined actions, their ability to anchor a whole slew of issues regarding visibility, inscription in a conflicted territory of geopolitical and art-related issues. Rather as if they were unauthored monuments. Of course monuments have always been built to provide symbolic and tangible evocations of events of memory-worthy significance to a community. But they invariably fail, politically if not aesthetically, because the willful sign, so fraught with intent, obdurately refuses to yield to the event, concealing precisely what it was supposed to evoke behind its own opacity. The authored sign obscures the transparent event. If art's own internal logic is founded on parti-

tioning, transforming politics into an image, its real and potential force is defused. Where Xurban failed, at least in part, was in making concessions to the usual framing strategies of the art world: that is, of reterritorialising perception in an art object. It is the recontainment of the container in a picture frame, which blinds us to the collective's radical insight: to see art not in terms of its specific ends, but of its specific means, as a set of perceptive habits and skills rather than objects.

We live in partitioned times — in my opinion, this is almost certainly a more apt description of the spirit of our times than the more prevalent "postcolonial" times. The rendering asunder of common territories and histories in the name of imaginary ethnic imperatives has been the bane of this region and most others, so let us not fall prey to laying down symbolic barriers between authored and unauthored, advertent and inadvertent art. The real question concerns the fuel tanks' artistic legibility and visibility. We are not accustomed to seeing such things at all — let alone to looking at them as art. To claim — the way the art world often does — that the picture of the object is actually the artwork is to dramatically miss the point and to allow politics to recede into what my friend Brian Holmes calls mere "picture politics". How to make these monuments visible remains an unresolved question; one, indeed, that may defy resolution altogether, at least as long as the art world has any say. But once Xurban makes those fuel tanks the object of the sort of sustained scrutiny enjoyed by art, they become richly legible in an unforeseen way.

The Vernacular and the World

Obviously, then, the dilemmas of situatedness are particularly acute in that realm of contemporary creativity known as the visual arts. In the face of the proliferating number of "anxious objects", which, were it not for the conventions of the art world, could by no means be identified as art, many have been tempted to reterritorialise art itself, trotting out norms establishing an essential borderline between what is art and what is not, reproducing a territorialising logic in the realm of the imaginary; others have cordoned off great tracts of diffuse creativity as being suitable and ripe for colonisation by art. Because, as I said at the outset, we are dealing with a territorial — or territorialising — metaphor, let us take that metaphor at face value and consider the ways in which art is bound up with territory, and first of all with the territory of art itself. Though not necessarily undisciplined, art seems to have become an extradisciplinary practice, sprawling far beyond the circumscribed borders of any given "territory". It is in this expanded sense of the term that I want to consider the various relationships between territorial belonging and contemporary artistic expression.

To this end, I propose to define two basic postures, which very roughly correspond to two historical moments as well as two kinds of art-making, both of which coexist within contemporary artistic production. But because

I think this binary opposition has almost entirely suffocated what is interesting and genuinely creative about art, I want to suggest a third possibility as a way of overcoming such a stale opposition. Let us suppose a certain axiological neutrality and admit that in each of these three "families", one finds more or less the same number of eminent artists. For situated or what I shall call *vernacular artists* (using Tony Chakar's phrase), activity is situated, territorialised, vernacularised, the context being an integral part of the productive framework; what I shall call *world artists*, on the other hand, seek to wrest art free from any territorial rootedness, concerned with pitting origins against subsequent development; *artists of reciprocal extraterritoriality* (to borrow a term from Giorgio Agamben) deliberately expatriate themselves not only from their geographical territory but from all the usual symbolic terrain that is customarily reserved for art: By refusing both territorialisation and deterritorialisation, their propositions are animated by a constitutive mobility. In practice, of course, one finds a good deal of overlap and interpenetration between these three aesthetic (and profoundly ethical) attitudes — just as one does among territories themselves. But that need not prevent us from delimiting them more closely.

Vernacular artists perpetuate age-old traditions which they invigorate and enrich with formal innovations taken from other cultures, thanks to the intermingling made possible — indeed inevitable — by modernity. Many artists today live their historical moment with deep intensity even while using the visual vernacular specific to their origins. Their work — whether installation or painting and so on — integrates and in one way or another reflects on the symbols of a consciously accepted heritage and identity. For them, art depends upon its inscription in a context that is at once more extensive and more intensive than what art alone can provide. As I understand his eloquent notion of "the pleasure of the place", Adonis is making a plea for a renewal of the vernacular, without which we run the risk of not only urban but indeed psychic and social disintegration.

Drawing upon a modernist paradigm, *world artists* are immersed in the present of rapidly changing societies. They see their work as reflecting the confusion of a world which has lost its bearings. Generally speaking, however, this loss is experienced without anguish or despair. On the contrary, these artists — in keeping with the modern insistence upon individual freedom — seek to free themselves from any geographical or social determinism. Their aspiration is to produce work that is autonomous with regard to context, emphatically breaking ties with their formal and cultural heritage — without necessarily renouncing it per se — thereby giving free rein to autonomous expression.

Breaking with the modernist paradigm, artists of *reciprocal extraterritoriality* undermine the whole issue of topography inasmuch as they refuse not only geographical borders but borders of all kinds, including those separating art from other and sundry social undertak-

ings. Like vernacular artists, they are suspicious of any talk of autonomy; like world artists, they decline any inheritance. Their artistic practice does not necessarily culminate in the production of works, but nor is it exclusively process based. Rather, these artists see art as a system for producing meaning, which is most effective when engaged in overstepping borders and setting up interdisciplinary "work sites". By displacing the creative centre of gravity toward artistic activity — originating in an artistic attitude or idea, before spreading among the public — these artists seek to challenge the specificity of art as work on a unique object (painting, sculpture) by activating other domains and inviting other currents of knowledge to irrigate the field of art. As they see it, art has now integrated everything — other disciplines and materials of all orders — and no longer needs to retrench itself behind borders of any kind. Nothing whatsoever links art with a specific geography, and all that links it to its own history is a certain aesthetics of decision-making, specific to each artist.

Typically, vernacular artists accuse world artists of encouraging the emergence of a sort of consumerist multiculturalism: World music and world fiction are not seen as the expression of universalisation but as symptoms of a planet-wide standardisation that barely tolerates — here and there, like unavoidable ripples on an otherwise seamless surface — the odd flash of regional identity. As territorial artists see it, the meaning of an artwork is intrinsically bound up with the time and place of its production: The artist is at best the co-author of his or her work, which, like the artist, bears the indelible stamp of a particular time and place.

Conversely, world artists adopt a normative and aggressively hostile position toward any notion of vernacular rootedness. They have nothing but sarcasm for those whom they see as snugly at home in the quiet mass of a particular culture, clinging to the visual idiom typical of a particular region; they rail against those who take no account of the boundless labyrinth of cultures and languages, through which Caribbean poet Édouard Glissant invites us to wander and blaze new trails. They explain the recent proliferation of identity politics as ultimately due to a universal depletion of the resources of collective hope. And as they are quick to point out, it is often toward regional or national origin that identity turns when suffering from a lack of confidence, creativity, and singularity.

It would be abusive, however, to portray vernacular artists as the fundamentalists of the art world, just as it would be overly hasty to depict world artists as the jet set of contemporary art (although jet aircraft do tend to figure prominently in their visual vocabulary — as if their privilege were outstripped only by their cynicism); on the contrary, vernacular artists stress the need for cultural relativism in the face of the massive homogenisation that they see occurring on a planetary scale. And this attitude is by no means confined to art. "In order to progress", wrote French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss,

> . . . people have to work together; and in the course of their collaboration, they gradually see an identification in their relationships whose initial diversity was precisely what made their collaboration fruitful and necessary.[5]

What interests me in this remark is less the crypto-Hegelian logic of identity which informs it (whereby initial difference is necessarily eroded through association), than three ideas that are implicit to it, and which are important to understanding what is at stake in extraterritorial reciprocity: firstly, that collaboration emerges and flourishes under certain sets of circumstances; secondly, that it is diversity, rather than commonality or similarity, which makes collaboration "fruitful and necessary"; and thirdly — and on this point, I profoundly disagree with Lévi-Strauss's utilitarian perspective, though I think it underlies most contemporary political theory and seems virtually self-evident to most artists — that collaboration is founded upon mutual interest. This myopic identification of utilitarian reason and free association — whereby otherwise mutually indifferent individuals interact on the basis of calculated reciprocal gain — seems all too reminiscent of contemporary political liberalism. I will come back to this.

For the world artist, the vernacular artist's obsession with constantly bringing art back to its context of origin is tantamount to saying that it is impossible for art to function outside this context. In fact, maintains the world artist, it is precisely its ability to affect us through a combination of emotion and knowledge — and to do so independently of any context — that is the defining quality of autonomous art. However important the conditions of its emergence may be, the effects it produces here and now are infinitely more so. With staunch allegiance to the precepts of modernity, world artists may even go so far as to argue that an artwork is meaningful only outside its original context, leaving the initiative to the constitutive gaze. The white cubes that characterise the architecture of our galleries and museums, devised for the neutral exhibition of artworks, seem to fit hand in glove with the purposes of world artists.

Like vernacular artists, artists of reciprocal extraterritoriality situate art in a bigger picture. But for them, this broader context is not given: It has to be created. Their practice consists of implanting certain aspects of the general economy into the symbolic economy of art, encouraging the creation of a broader, interdisciplinary context. Their point is to transform the alleged autonomy of the artwork into an operative autonomy of human subjects, and to confront the know-how specific to the field of art with competencies stemming from other fields of knowledge, thereby establishing a reciprocity between art and the sciences, for instance, and in so doing, dislocating borders and the conventions and habits they were set up to protect, and prompting innovative collaborations. It is an art without a territory, which operates in the intersubjective space of collabora-

5 Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Anthropologie structurale deux* (Plan, 1973), translation is the author's own.

tion. Yet that "space" is really no space at all, or only in the metaphorical sense of the term; it would probably be more accurate to speak of a "time" of collaboration and intervention. But the geographical model, with its cartography of partially overlapping territories, has the advantage of providing a tangible picture of what artists of reciprocal extraterritoriality are really after. Constitutive mobility; elusive implication.

From Where We're Coming From to *Where We Come From*

These two qualities are best illustrated by an example I recently came upon, quite unprepared, in the recent Istanbul Biennial. Among the 80-odd examples of world art, assembled by world curator Dan Cameron, one project stood out, in that it embodied what might sincerely be understood as "Poetic Justice", the title of the exhibition. I refer to Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir's recent project entitled *Where We Come From*. I situate Jacir as a Palestinian American, because it is precisely her slippery situatedness that is at issue in this project, and which makes it possible. The artist asked 32 Palestinians, perhaps more, the following question: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" Her double and uncomfortably incongruous situatedness made it possible for her (at the time, for it is doubtful that it is still possible today) to slip between interstices, cross borders in both directions, dodge between ontological landscapes, and carry out the different tasks, ranging from the sublime to the banal. And because the premise of the work was a question (that is, a lack, a need, an incompetency), those providing the proposal (a gift, a competency) came to be vectors of cross-border collaboration. Jacir documented her project with the written text of each co-author in Arabic and English, juxtaposed with a photograph documenting the execution of the task. Go see such and such a house; drink water from such and such a well. Or, for instance:

> Eat a *kinafa* from Jafar Sweets in Jerusalem. Whenever I apply for an Israeli visa, they reject me. I have been trying to enter for two years now. I feel insulted as a Palestinian for even having to apply for a visa to visit a land where my family has lived for centuries.

With sobriety, rigor, and a pared-down economy of means, yet without any trace of pathos or anger (which would have been all too understandable given both the subject matter and the highly personal nature of her approach), the artist gives a devastating account of the tragedy, the absurdity, of partition in Palestine. One task is so vexingly absurd that one is at a loss as whether to laugh or cry:

> Go to the Israeli Post Office and pay my phone bill. I live in Area C, which is under full Israeli control, so my phone service is Israeli. In order to pay my phone bill, I have to go to an Israeli Post Office which doesn't exist in Zone C. Because I am forbidden from going to Jerusalem, I am always looking for someone to go and pay my

phone bill.

The work stubbornly yet subtly confronts us with that which is, in a way, common and close at hand, but which is also, in its significant strangeness, the object of both profound ignorance and steadfast emotional refusal. Using her constitutive mobility, her artistic skills, her elusive implication, Jacir manages to renew our — or at least my — confidence in art's potential use-value. For its ethical underpinnings seem less rooted in a symbolic economy of exchange than in an economy of the gift, free from considerations of any return. What could be less situated than a gift? For a gift, as Marcel Mauss understood it, is a mixture of freedom and obligation, interest and disinterest — the true bedrock of human sociality. So the paradox of extraterritorial reciprocity in art is thus the paradox of the gift: Just as the gift presupposes the sort of confidence that it contributes to establishing, so too collaboration presupposes the very sort of solidarity that it is part of reinforcing. Circles of this kind are vicious only from a theoretical point of view — the important thing is setting the process into motion.

What I have been suggesting, here, without quite saying so, is that self-situating is not merely a way of pigeonholing oneself into a category; it is a performative operation, not so much describing as enacting. One of the most powerful forms of performative situating, and the one that interests us most here, involves art. For of course art is not merely an ever-expanding category of objects and processes which obey that description. Art is, or rather has become in twentieth-century usage, a performative. As such, *it makes things happen*, romantic things, and generates endless amounts of the most extravagant sorts of claims, using its institutions to lend them not only a largely unchallenged semblance of truth but all the trustworthiness of convention. And by the same token, it prevents things from happening — including meaningful collaboration.

One might ask: What could be more normal than the fact that artists produce art? After all, they're just doing their job, and there seems to be no stopping them. Besides, who would want to stop them? So they go on and on — and on — making art. What is more unusual, and far more interesting, is when artists don't do art. Or, at any rate, when they don't claim that whatever it is they are doing is, in fact, art; when they inject their artistic aptitudes and perceptual habitus into the general symbolic economy of the real. In the wake of the radical deskilling that has characterised art practices over the past decades, art can now be seen — and is seen, at least implicitly — as a specific set of competencies, skills, aptitudes, and perceptions. Over its long history, art has had the opportunity to hone that set to a very sophisticated level.

The most radical shift implied by art understood in terms of its specific competencies, rather than its specific performances, is its *impaired visibility* as art. Outside the legitimating framework of the art world, the deployment of artistic competencies simply does

not generate art. They are visible, they contribute to enhancing our perception of what is overlooked, but they are not necessarily seen as art. Art-related initiatives on the threshold between fiction and documentary use their wavering visibility as art heuristically: I am thinking here of the online Atlas Group, initiated by Walid Raad, which invites artists and non-artists, and indeed fictional and non-fictional collaborators, to participate in research projects on the history of the civil wars in Lebanon. Raad doesn't believe in impermeable borderlines between fictionalising and factualising; he just doesn't believe that facts are out there in the world as pre-existing, pre-constituted entities, anxiously waiting "discovery", contrary to what we all too often suppose. So the Atlas Group produces its documents, which makes their status properly extraterritorial. Their definition seems to defy current vocabulary, as we struggle to find words to describe them. *Ficts* or *factoids*, they function as a wedge, opening an extraterritorial space between current typological and ontological demarcation lines. Simply put, the logic of such ontological fission is that were the real ever to receive the sort of sustained and attentive gaze that artworks enjoy, justice would not be poorly served. In such works, art, and the holy trinity upon which it is founded — authorship, the artwork, spectatorship — all manifestations of oneness and unicity are not struck down but rather assimilated into collaboration, and so disappear as such. So this, I suppose, is my stance.

Born in Vancouver in 1963, Stephen Wright is a Paris-based writer, theorist, and teacher. He is the former European editor of Montreal's contemporary art journal *Parachute* and serves on the editorial board of the interdisciplinary magazine *Mouvements* in Paris. He is currently working on a long-term project on the use-value of art.

The Archaeology of the Catastrophic

Guven Incirlioglu

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said almost never touches on the role of the Ottoman state of Istanbul as the subject or agent of an orientalist construct. There appears to be several reasons for this neglect (or resentment), the most logical being that the Ottoman imperial presence in the Middle East was problematic in many ways. While being a domination in the imperial sense, it contradicts (but eventually conspires with) the colonial interests of England and France in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, and complicates issues of nationality, territory, and ethnicity. Some of the most troubled regions and peoples in the world today, namely the Balkans and the Middle East, are the remnants of complications in the late (and weak) Ottoman Empire, and the conspiracy of various colonial powers attests to this.

Apparently, the affinity and affection of the Ottoman court for the rest of the Middle East never went beyond a shared Islamic faith (albeit based on clerical superiority), Koranic script, and the regular collection of taxes. A similar connection can be found among Ottoman subjects of various nationalities: Any attempt to glorify the history of the unified eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman rule is immoral. Said's resentment stems from this long period of domination, capped with an air of conspiracy and complication before the whole system collapsed, leading the way to the desperation everyone feels now.

In between the Balkans and the Middle East, we, the peoples of the young and xenophobic Turkish republic, are caught in a schizophrenic state of affairs as to whom we should pledge allegiance. Arising partly from this contextual background and situating itself globally, the Xurban Collective tends to be overtly political through the production of collaborative expressions, mostly of an artistic kind. More and more, we see that the problems of oppression and world domination converge, that the catastrophe is global, and that no one is safe.

In the new order of the world, the discourse of hegemonic world domination is franchised through

the practices of locally governing bodies. To pit unholy terror against the holy trinity of the state, the military, and the multinationals is a cover for continuing oppression worldwide. In these conditions, we stress the impossibility of turning inward, the subjectivity of artwork that misses the catastrophic existence, the scar of social consciousness. Xurban tends to keep a distance between the work and the individual self, externalises issues but moving to specify and localise a situation in order to avoid a broader rhetoric of resistance that will vanish into thin air. Only in these circumstances can the artist avoid being part of the global spectacle and escape the profession for the production of culture as such.

Each artistic endeavour is, for us, a research project, and our sources range from historic instances (distant and recent, to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger", in the words of Walter Benjamin) to critiques of power (as in Foucault, Deleuze, and others). As autonomous as it can be, within the multiple layers of the works we produce, we try to bring forth the possibilities of a collective existence that opposes the official, military, technocratic, and corporate organisation of time and space. In short, we search for a truly civil (and civilised) means of conduct. We are well aware that the poetic vistas of artistic expression are a world beyond the outcome of scientific research, so dear to the institutions of enlightened civilisation, and for everything we do, we try to avoid being "literal" in every sense of the word. The process-based artistic collectivity dispenses with the need for inspiration of a divine kind, dreams, childhood memories, and the personal experiences of a lifetime. The dialogue within the collective becomes an intellectual projection. For us, inspiration comes, to quote Benjamin again, from "despair and desolation which was ours".

The Xurban Collective started out as an initiative on the World Wide Web (www.xurban.net) in the year 2000, and from the beginning we were involved in bringing together exhibition space and the space of the web. We have maintained a web version of all our gallery installations in order to further explore the possibilities of artistic expression and the dissemination of ideas and attitudes. Each project comes with an elaboration of ideas and a contextual statement, but there is no benefit in repeating them here. We have also developed cooperative web projects without physical counterparts to be shown in an exhibition space (www.turbulence.org/Works/Knit++). Born in a land where there is a dubious record of democracy and freedom of expression, we value the anonymity of collective power and the means offered by the internet, even though everything of substance tends to be more and more diffused through the murky space of the web. We detest the commercialisation of public domains and try to maintain a network, a community of people dedicated to remaining autonomous.

The project we realised for the 8th Istanbul Biennial in 2003, entitled *The Containment Re-Contained*,

Central Intelligence
A Xurban Collective online and installation project, 2001
Photographs, vrml projection, and mixed media
Dimensions variable
From "Im zeichen der Stadt: Contemporary Art from Turkey" at the Kunstmuseum Bonn, December 2001 through February 2002
www.xurban.net

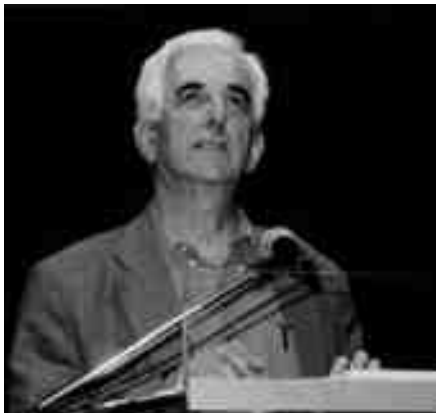
provides clues to our future field of interest, and raises key issues for understanding the current situation in parts of the Middle East. For this, we exhibited an extensive record of a journey we made from southeastern Anatolia all the way to the Iraqi border. That recording (through photographs) was accompanied by a fuel tank that we brought over the border, one representative amongst thousands sprawled around the area. They were once used for the clandestine but halfway legal purpose of transferring diesel fuel from northern Iraq to Turkey. As a container holding a prized substance, it sparked for us a number of associations related to the nature of "containment", that is, of territory, of bodies and populations, and, of course, of the situation. For us, the southeast was known as a high-alert zone for a long time due to a civil war, thousands (mostly Kurds) killed, villages evacuated and burned, and a population suffering exile. The extreme militarisation and containment of the area through checkpoints has apparently eased up in recent years, while across the border the occupation of Iraq was going full force. Today, the militarisation and privatisation of the country and its resources is confronted with increasing resistance, as can rightly be expected in a country under occupation and from a people with dignity.

The "archaeology" we allude to in our working methods brings up instances of the past for the purpose of mapping an alternative history of a given situation. Treating the fuel tank as an archaeological object was well in tune with the consideration given to vessels of all kinds that have travelled back and forth in this region for millennia. But what the mute objects of archaeology do not make manifest has to be filled in, meaning has to be attributed. Any student of Ottoman history (and by the same token of all empires) is well aware that this was a time of periodic insurgency and counterinsurgency, that is, of containment. In that sense, the legends of revolt are sung for the heroic/romantic seekers of justice up on the mountain (so dear to Anatolian folklore) as well as for an entire people as the subjects of empire. With archaeological references, we try

to dig into probabilities other than militarisation and the containment of territories. The ethical stance we take suggests that the observation/sampling of these probabilities is more important than a reactionary position, when we face the siege of our livelihood by the military/economic apparatus of empire.

A Catastrophe / On the Outside, Same as Inside, 2000
A Xurban Collective online and installation project, 2000
Photographs and vrml projection
Installation view at Kassa Galeri, Istanbul, October 2000
www.xurban.net

Guven Incirlioglu is an artist who studied architecture, photography, and art theory. He lives and works in Istanbul. His many installations using photographs and computer technology have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout Turkey and the United States. Since 1997, Incirlioglu has been involved in a number of web-based projects with an urban emphasis, including the Xurban Collective (www.xurban.net). He is currently a faculty member in Yildiz Technical University's Faculty of Art and Design in Istanbul.



Jerusalem Walls: Real and Imagined

Salim Tamari

Jerusalem's modernity is linked, both in the public imagination and as a social process, to the movement of the city's households at the turn of the last century from within the confining walls of the old city — the Holy Basin — to the green suburbs that lay to the north and west of the city. It is no accident that this modernity, and the social freedoms accompanying it, was an escape from the walled "social ghetto", but also from the religious iconography associated with it.

The trajectory for the city's growth was deflected by war and the Zionist enterprise, but also by a colonial (British) modernity that undermined what was about to develop into a vibrant and cosmopolitan urban culture, transforming the lives of its ethnic and religious communities. In this context the city's historic walls, built by Suleiman al-Qanuni (the Magnificent), were being reconstituted as ethnic-sectarian walls of nationalist separation and subjugation. But this process was hardly inevitable.

Jerusalem: A Provincial Capital

In contrast to its sacred status, Jerusalem had been primarily a provincial capital throughout the late Ottoman period. It was only until 1839, when the city was the seat of the *Mutassarifiyyeh*, accounting to Istanbul directly, that a class of local *ulema* and *ashraf* assumed a status vying for equal footing with Damascus and Beirut. Even then, however, Jerusalem remained a town of pilgrimage and associated religious services.

With the establishment of Ottoman security outside the city walls, with mammoth gates used to seal the movement of inhabitants after sunset until the last third of the nineteenth century, the merchant classes and the *ashraf* began to venture into living in exclusive villas in Bab al-Sahira, Sheikh Jarrah, Sa'd wa Sa'eed, and Musrara. Towards the end of the century, Orthodox Christian endowments and Jewish philanthropy established modern middle-class neighbourhoods in the western part of the city: Baq'a, Nammamreh, Yamin Moshe, Mea She'arim, and the Russian Compound. And during the

British Mandate, the more bourgeois outposts for civil servants and the professionals: Talbieh, Rehavia, and Qatamon.

Jerusalem's modernity was paradoxical. The end of the city's ghettoisation produced a more pronounced sectarian (confessional) system than the one it replaced. The British introduced a clear delineation of religious quarters to replace mixed *mahallat* of the pre-war period. Whereas the Ottoman city was a hybrid mixture of confessions and ethnicities living — and coexisting astonishingly well — in communal neighbourhoods, Christians were now associated with Haret al-Nasara, Muslims with the Islamic Quarter, and Jews with the Jewish Quarter. Only Armenians continued to live in their historic locality, unperturbed. At this time, religious identity and turf overlapped in a disturbing reversal of liberating trends. The significance of moving to the new neighbourhoods outside the city walls was deemed a rebellion against this definition of one's residence with one's locale. Moreover, the combination of Zionism and religious endowments *(awqaf)* meant that the nationalism that emerged in the mandate period was a nationalism reinforced by religious zeal.

There were countertrends to this retrogression. The historical reputation of Jerusalem as a conservative antidote to the emancipated secular culture of the coastal region (Jaffa and Haifa) is not entirely deserved. Although its economic base was based on pilgrimage and religious endowments, it had become the seat of a new bureaucratic class of civil servants and professionals that made the city an attraction for immigrants. As the capital of the Holy Land, it also brought in a modern system of education that generated a new cosmopolitan elite: Ottoman *nizamiyyah* schools, Catholic and Orthodox seminaries, and Protestant colleges all vied for the soul and heart of the native population. Jewish migration, as Najati Sidqi noted, brought with it Bolshevism as well as Zionism to the Holy City.

The cultural rejuvenation of the city had two dimensions. On the one hand, the celebration of religious traditions and quasi-religious rituals turned into nationalist revival(s) that combined popular festivity with recasting saints who were given the status of national heroes: Nebi Musa, al-Khader (Saint George), and Nebi Rubeen. On the other hand, the dissemination of modern technology (newspapers, electricity, cars, and a network of road systems) forged the foundations for secular culture, paying only lip service to religious ritual.

The new cosmopolitan culture manifested itself through the emergence of neighbourhoods distinguished by class differences and new modes of social insulation. In western neighbourhoods, unlike in the communities of the old city, the economic status of the family, not its religious affiliation, was increasingly becoming the determining consideration for its residence. By contrast the walled city now contained the poorer households, dependent on convents and *awqaf* endowments, that could not afford to move outside.

The main mechanism of eman-

cipated lifestyle was the insular milieu protecting upper and middle classes, regardless of religious affiliation. Two items go unnoticed in the popular saying of the period: "*Mawt al-faqir was taaris al-ghani*" ("The death of the poor man, and the debauchery of the rich"). It was this insulating mechanism — that social distancing that comes with privilege — more so than the walls of the bourgeois villas which allowed the *ashraf* of Jerusalem and their nouveau riche retinues to flaunt convention and impose their own normative ethics. Those were manifested in the culture of cafés and bars, in the access to *odahs* (garçonières) for dilettante bachelors, and in their own single-dwelling villas when they moved outside the crowded city walls to their own separate neighbourhoods. It was not the ethos of privacy that allowed such permissive latitudes — a notion that was still embryonic if not absent — but the inability of the street, the public at large, to reproach their privileged elites for what they considered unacceptable or undoable.

Elsewhere in the Arab East and the Levant, it was the anonymity of the big city that allowed this condition of protective insularity. This was certainly the case for Damascus, Cairo, Alexandria, and Istanbul. Coastal cities like Jaffa and Beirut had a large mercantile class and a substantial number of ethnic minorities with European proclivities and penchants who buffered their behaviour from the "street" or the "masses". The masses, the collective agency articulating monolithic social control, probably did not emerge in these cities until the 1940s.

In any case, one should not confuse the introduction of modernity with the presence of European elements. In many eastern Mediterranean cities, it was either the state or the native mercantile groups — or sometimes the urban *ashraf* — that acted as the agents of modernity. In Jerusalem particularly, it was neither size nor the cultural presence of European communities that allowed for these latitudes. A town of about 70,000 inhabitants — such as Jerusalem

The Musrara neighbourhood, one of the first modern Arab housing projects outside the old city walls, 1910

at the turn of the century — was a virtual extended village as far as invisibility was concerned. The European presence in the city was primarily one of proselytising groups and pietistic Jewish communities — hardly the material for a cosmopolitan ethos. It was the aristocratic privilege of the native upper classes and their emerging middle class periphery, buttressed by a new and energetic civil service that created the social base for a modernist cultural milieu. They articulated this milieu in the schooling system, in newspapers, theatres, social clubs, and family-based factional political parties. Above all, this urban privileged class was on its way to becoming both a regional and national class, linking its aspirations with its equivalents in Jaffa, Haifa, Nablus, Damascus, Beirut, and Tripoli, until it was undermined by the rebellion of 1936-39 and dealt a death blow by the war of 1948.

Against this cultural milieu of privilege, we observe the popular culture of religious ritual, which united the whole community — across class boundaries — through the networks of neighbourhoods and *mahallat*. Here popular culture was celebrated during the *mawasim* of saints and prophets, in the street processions of Sufi orders, in the chants of Orthodox Holy Saturday, *Sabt al-Nur*, and in the recitations of *fada'il al-Quds*, of medieval origin. It is not that one culture was modern and the other traditional. Rather the modernist streak was national and global, while the popular tradition was local and communal.

Biography and the Transformation of Urban Consciousness

I have been attempting to trace changes in the texture of the Holy City's urban social consciousness through autobiographic literature — that is, with the subjective narratives of actual people. This allows for the examination of the emergence of new mores, normative ethics, and the decline of old conventions and solidarities with the presence of a variety of actors in the early and later modern periods in two epochal eras of

The Russian compound, as seen from inside the city walls

the city's history: the transition from Ottoman decentralism and the emergence of a separatist Palestinian nationalism — separate from the wider Syrian and Arab nationalism and defined by the struggle against Zionist colonialism.

The main problem with this paradigm is that it leaves us at the mercy of individuals who experienced modernity from a relatively privileged position, since it was mostly professional and upper class men (hardly any women) who left memoirs and diaries. The main advantage is that the city's social and cultural transformations can now be understood in the context of both structural change and the subjective experience of that change.

We have here six Jerusalem characters, downtrodden and elevated, who have bequeathed us written narratives of their lives that illuminate transformations of the city over the last century:

The career of a feudal lord who became part of the city's governing elite (Sheikh Omar al-Saleh, 1894-1965)

The life of an old city educator and pedagogue who pioneered the establishment of free secular education (Khalil Sakakini, 1887-1953)

The stormy life of a militant Bolshevik, who became the Comintern representative in Palestine, in charge of Arabising the PCP (Najati Sidqi, 1905-1979)

The story of an Ottoman medical doctor who devoted his life to the study of peasant lore in an attempt to establish primordial roots for Palestinian nationalism (Tawfiq Canaan, 1882-1964)

The predicament of Ishaq al-Shami (1888-1949), a Jewish novelist from Hebron who wrote about the religious ceremonies of Nabi Musa but found his salvation in secular culture and epitomised the dilemma of an Arab Jew on the eve of Zionism

Nabi Musa procession, 1910

> The eccentric biography of a popular musician from Haret al-Sa'diyyeh, who was also at one time an Ottoman naval officer and who entertained in public weddings, and in the palaces of the city's aristocracy (Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1887-1967)

One can hardly imagine five out of six characters that were further apart: a musician, an educator, a defrocked aristocrat, a doctor, and a professional Bolshevik. In each of these lives we see a different facet of the city. What is astounding, however, is that their lives actually crossed: With the exception of Najati Sidqi, the communist leader, each of them knew the others — some intimately — and interacted with them socially if not professionally.

They uncover for us a city that, despite its grim reputation and communal warfare, is surprisingly alive with intellectual, cultural, and political debates. What is more surprising is that religion played a very minor role, if any at all, in those debates. The sacredness of the city was an element of fate that set the scene for the coming wars at the end of the century. It defined the economy of the city. For the period under discussion, it was simply a source of livelihood for a substantial segment of the city's population: hoteliers, food and drink manufactures, administrators of pilgrimage, *awqaf* management, *yeshivot*, souvenir crafts, portrait photographers, carriage drivers, candle makers, prayer book printers, and so on.

Furthermore these six biographies present us with lives that, while contemporaneous, nevertheless reveal worlds of contrasting possibilities. As one would expect in a relatively medium sized town that can be crossed from one end to the other in less than three walking hours, or one hour by carriage, they shared the common life of the intelligentsia. Yet they exhibited contrasting ideologies, tastes, inclinations, and hopes, unthinkable in the world of homologous globalisation.

The reason for this diversity lies in a simple feature of early modernity. The loss of confinement inside the city's walls, as well as avenues of intellectual mobility emerging from the physical move to the periphery of the city and beyond (to Jaffa, Istanbul, Cairo, Europe, and the Americas) led into uncharted intellectual territory. Some claimed their destiny in the struggle for the nationalist reconstruction of society in a country that was far more manageable (or so it seemed) than the limitless parameters of the Ottoman Empire. Some (like Siqdi) chose the socialist revolution, allying himself with Republican Spain, and then with the movements of the Lebanese and Syrian working class over the struggle for Palestinian independence. Some, like Canaan, found his calling in the search for the "soul of the nation", in its peasant culture and lore, and in the proto-nationalism of Biblical, Cananite, and Jebusite origins. Some found their calling in the search for cultural affinities between Egypt and Greater Syria, Bilad al-Sham, as we witness in the musical repertoire of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, who saw Palestine as the bridge between the Nile Valley and the "Land of the Cedars".

Against the backdrop of these voices and trends, we hear Khalil Sakakini proclaiming, as the Great War of 1914 is coming to a close, his anti-nationalist humanism from the debris of Jerusalem's communitarian ghettos:

> Why do the authorities want to exile me from Jerusalem? I am not a Christian, nor a Buddhist, nor a Muslim, nor a Jew. I do not see myself as an Arab, nor an Englishman, nor a Frenchman, nor a German, nor a Turk. Above all I am a member of the human race.

Perhaps Sakakini was unique within his intellectual class in proclaiming himself to be above nationalism, but he lived and worked in a milieu that allowed for the free expression of this sentiment. The prevalent atmosphere at the turn of the century was pregnant with intellectual and ideological possibilities in which a number of identities were imaginable: Ottoman constitutionalism was definitely on the decline, but which crucible was going to inherit its mantle — Arab nationalism, Syrian nationalism, socialism, Islamic reform, or a narrower Palestinian regional identity? All these contested identities were legitimate and members of the local intelligentsia (as was the case in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham) adopted them eclectically and in combination with one another. They also shifted their loyalties without feeling a sense of hypocrisy or betrayal.

Right
Khalil al-Sakakini, an educator and pioneer of the Palestinian literary renaissance, 1907

Below
Hizb al-Sa'aleek (The Party of Vagabonds), gathered in Jerusalem, circa 1919. In the front row are Khalil Sakakini, Achille Saikally, and Adel Jaber. Jaber was a pro-Ottoman figure who became a noted professor at Salahiyyah College, which was established in Damascus and Jerusalem by Ahmad Jamal Pasha. The men standing in the back row include Musa Alami, one of Sakakini's students who later played a major role in the Palestinian national movement.
The Jawhariyyeh Collection, IPS

War and the Loss of Metropolitan Status

The emancipation project that Jerusalem was undergoing at the hands of its intelligentsia was short lived. War and Zionism contributed to transform the city's (as well as the country's) destiny in the direction of nationalist exclusivity and physical dismemberment.

The war of 1948 ended with the redrawing of boundaries along the city's east-west axis, skirting the southern and western walls of the city. These walls came to delineate national and religious boundaries. Palestinians who happened to live on the wrong side of the armistice

lines were forcibly transferred to the Jordanian-controlled side. Similarly, Jews living in the old city were evicted to Mea Sh'arim and other western neighbourhoods. With this dismemberment, not only did the city lose its physical unity and cosmopolitan character of ethnic-religious diversity but also its access (and openness) to the coastal culture of Jaffa and Haifa. Until then, those twin port cities constituted a social safety valve and intellectual and cultural stimulus to Jerusalem's control by the tax-farming ideology of the city's landed elites.

Within two years the city was totally marginalised. It turned inwards and played second fiddle to the capital city of Amman. It was transformed from being a national capital, with a national political class, to a regional market for Bethlehem, Hebron, and Ramallah. Demographically it became a city of migrants and refugees. The migrants were petty merchants and itinerant labourers from Mount Hebron, and refugees from its western rural hinterland and the vacated cities of Ramleh, Lyddah, and Jaffa.

The war of 1967, while "uniting" the two parts of the city under Israeli rule, furthered the cultural marginalisation of Jerusalem from its remaining Arab environment. It created a *cordon sanitaire* of Jewish colonial settlements around the north, east, and south of the city, ensuring the rupture of the city's urban continuity with its own villages and townships. The remaining Arab population was given legal status equivalent to Dante's limbo. They were neither Israeli citizens nor Palestinian subjects, acquiring pariah status not only among the Israeli Jews but also among their compatriots.

Jerusalem's walls were reconstructed (from ancient ramparts) by Sultan Suleiman al-Qanuni to fortify the city from external invasion. The city walls continued to be closed for centuries after sunset, ostensibly to protect the city dwellers from intruders and invaders. But they also performed the function of preventing people from escaping the confines of the city. One of the great features of Ottoman modernity was the permanent opening of the city walls day and night. The event accompanied the movement of the city's new classes — just before World War I — to their suburban villas, and started a process that linked the city to its rural hinterland and to the national economy. It also hastened the process of integrating Jerusalem's economy to the world economy.

Spiritual Jerusalem was seen in medieval cosmology as the centre of the world. During the first half of the twentieth century it was on

The Montefiori neighbourhood outside the city walls facing the Jaffa Gate (Bab al-Khalil)

its way to becoming an important regional urban centre and the capital of a nascent colonial country on its road to independence. In between, it became a worldly city where pietism, pilgrimage, and endowments and religious ceremonies gave way to an urban nexus for a new notion of citizenship.

A century later this emancipation project has come to an end. The city's physical walls remain open, and they do not close at sunset. But they might as well. New walls — more formidable than ever — have been erected:

The walls of legal residency separating Jewish citizens from Arab residents

The walls of demographic limitations, which create housing restrictions for the growth of the city's native population

The walls of colonial encirclement, sealing the inner city from its hinterland through some nineteen settlements that create an apartheid system of separation

The wall of military checkpoints (68 of them), making sure that some three million Palestinians enter either the worldly or the secular city only by military pass

And now the new physical wall: a complex monstrosity of electric wires, early warning systems, and concrete barriers, twelve metres high to ensure that the other walls become hermetically sealed

Jerusalem's new wall has become a monstrous mockery of its historic walls — rendering them a quaint subject of nostalgia for a time when enclosures were erected to protect the urban ethos from external invasion, and a delineation of the civic solidarity of the city's internal neighbourhoods. The new wall, instead, acts as a strangling noose for both its subject population and their lords and masters.

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Baghdad: A Metonymy for a Capital

Mohammad Mazlum

There I was, after thirteen years of exile, roaming in Baghdad with my brother or a relative for a guide, seeking the places I always longed to revisit. I was like a stranger in a city visited only in dreams, trying to decipher what truth they hold, wishing to distinguish visions from nightmares.

I was not alone in trekking with mandatory guides. I crossed many Iraqi returnees, all accompanied by relatives, usually a generation or two their juniors, trying not to lose their way as they searched for places — their past paradises — in a city that has become unrecognisable. Moreover, even those who never left found themselves as if in another city. "Baghdad changed much after the 9th of April" is a saying often heard. For me, these changes began long before that date.

Were it not for the persistent ambiguities summoned by its name, ancient Baghdad seems lost. Over the ruins of Persian cities, Aqr Kouf and the Babylonian Tell Hermel, arrived Abou Ja'far al-Mansur. He founded Baghdad, a city that carried, in one of its appellations, his legacy: Madinat al-Mansur (City of Mansur). Not only in the ambiguity of its name but also in the confusion of its urbanity and population, the true Baghdad remains, as always, lost. The search for the city of Baghdad, the origin of its name and its history, resembles a process of excavation for all the cultures that once lived in Mesopotamia.

To begin with, the name carries a plethora of explanations: Some see it as Chaldean, others believe it to be Babylonian, while for others still it is most likely Aramaic. Urban historians like al-Khatib, al-Baghdadi, and Yaqut al-Hamawi and lexicographers like Ibn al-Manzur and al-Razzi argue that it is Persian, or perhaps even Chinese. Overall, they agree the name is a composite. It refers to an ethnic or racial god such as Baal Jad, Bagh Dad, or Beit Qadad, to name just a few examples from an extended list with various philological references. Nevertheless, with all these appellations, it is clear that many a people landed in its vicinities. We do not know if the city centre itself existed before the Abbassid epoch. Regardless, it is the lateral

expansion of the city that eventually overlapped with the various peoples who lived and occupied the Mesopotamian region and can account for the persistent racial and ethnic interlacing of Baghdad's population.

The ambiguity of the city's name sets us in the midst of a complex and still current map. That is why history, in this sense, is not merely a passing event, but an event that begs explanation. Because it is incumbent, it is important to inquire whether or not it is relevant to recall history in the face of current events.

It is said that al-Mansur, while surveying the land before building Baghdad, looked for someone to identify that corner of the world for him. He found a secluded priest and another man who, ignorant of Arabic, told the caliph in Persian: "Bag dad!" ("This grove is mine!")

Religious jurists generally despised the city's first given name. And so they persisted in avoiding the name Baghdad with various nicknames and metonymies such as Madinat al-Salaam (City of Peace), Madinat al-Zawra (City of Untruth), and Dar al-Khilafa (Residence of the Caliphate). The other, older names were of foreign descent: Chinese, Persian, Aramaic, Magian, or otherwise. And because they all carried pagan meanings, such as Beit al-Mashiya (Stable), Mu'askar al-Aliha (Encampment of the Gods) and Hadiqat al-Shaytan (Garden of the Devil), they were obviously not considered proper by religious jurists. Some such as Ahmad Ben Hanbal and Abu Hunayfa al-Na'man prohibited land ownership in Baghdad because it was considered territory won by coercion. Furthermore, they considered it licit for those who owned homes to sell them even if in ruins. As for the land, it was deemed unlawful to own but permissible to rent.[1] Some jurists went as far as to prohibit praying on the land or harvesting its yield.[2]

A map made with fire, such was Baghdad the day al-Mansur saw it for the first time — as he was probably the first to see it. On that fateful day the caliph called engineers, architects, and craftsmen from the four corners of the empire to build the "enflamed" model of the city he saw in his mind.[3]

Dreams of men, ashes, fires, and oil are eternal, shared by all, seeking to redraw Baghdad over the vestiges of that foundational enflamed plan.

Since its inception, Baghdad was populated by the troops of the caliph. Its architects were solicited for various cities under his aegis. One can only imagine the breadth of knowledge and skill that fed into building the city. The primary materials used for construction were diverse. For instance, stone was brought from the palace of Taq Kusra (or Kisra). As for the four gates, one was imported from Zanda Ward in the south, a second from al-Sham, a third from al-Kufa, and the fourth, called al-Khurasan, was expressly built on site and known by historians to be the weakest of the four.

All four gates went through many changes. Upon the making of the city, they opened up to neighbouring cities, only to be renamed in changing epochs. All the while,

1 Islamic law stipulates that territories can be conquered either by arrangement or by force. If by arrangement, then taxes are levied. If by force, then the fate of the land is given to the governor to decide. Either he hands it to the warriors as booty, leaving one fifth to the state, or keeps it as entitlement, which is what Omar Bin al-Khatab opted for in all of Iraq or what was then known as Ard al-Sawad (Land of the Multitude).

2 Al-Fadil Bin Ayad was one of those who prohibited prayer in Baghdad. He was known to be an ascetic who lived his youth as a bandit and womaniser before becoming a renowned Sufi during the reign of al-Rashid.

3 In the fourth part of his historic account, al-Tabari recounts a memorable incident when al-Mansur first ordered Baghdad to be drawn on the ground with ash so that he would be able to see it. Once delimited, he walked it alleys, crossed its thresholds and stood in its open spaces. He then ordered these lines be dug, stuffed with cotton balls, and filled with oil. He then had the troughs lit so he could see and understand its plan. Finally, he ordered that the foundations of the city be built accordingly.

these gates never stood firm in the face of enemies nor kept the population within from escaping. They remained precarious in the face of conquerors, used as gateways through which many were exiled. But to the ruler, they meant something different. Only he could enter the City of Mansur on horseback; everyone else had to cross on foot through other minor entryways.

Today, nothing remains of these gates, not even the names, except for the east gate and another known as al-Mu'azzam.[4] Rather, they remain, if at all, loaded with contradictory symbolic meanings. It was at the western gate of the city that Saddam Hussein reviewed a parade of more than one and a half million soldiers, dubbed the Army of al-Quds, parading under the so-called Qaws al-Nasr (Arch of Victory). The Americans, recognising the visually strategic location, broadcast some of the first images of the invasion and later set up one of their bases there.

Baghdad was first built for military and security reasons, after the insurgence of al-Mansur's former followers, an episode known as the Rowandian incident. This tendency, which binds Baghdad with military security, persisted throughout the Abbassid era.

No one thought the city would fall so easily to the Americans. After all, it was encircled by a great concentration of military bases: al-Taji, al-Rashid, Abu Ghraib, al-Habbaniyeh, and Mansuriyat al-Jabbal. All expected a great battle, based on what was in fact a fallacious, imaginary historical representation. After the city was occupied by the Americans, many avoided using the expression "The fall of Baghdad". Rather they tried vehemently to differentiate between the fall of the regime and that of the city. Others saw that same expression as fateful and indicative of a greater capitulation, one exceeding the circular boundaries of the city.

Many are not aware that Baghdad has fallen often, and always easily. Whether at the hands of foreign conquerors or internal conspirators, Baghdad has known many masters: several times between the time of its foundation by al-Mansur and its fall to Holaku, and many more times between the time of the Moguls and that of the marines.[5]

Long before this last war started, Baghdad was a main target for the Americans. When the hostilities broke out, the British were delegated the task of securing the southern front while American convoys headed straight towards Baghdad. Once fallen, the city earned an additional name, another metonymy: Bush-Dad, a name following and building upon the series of variations on the ancient name, certainly a more appropriate name than Blair-Dad, the anecdotal appellation entertained for a while by the British press. Bush-Dad is the newest name that incorporates all the sultans, caliphs, and generals who passed before. All of them were again summoned and appropriated as the American president, its latest emperor, set out to redraw the city, the city first opened by al-Mansur, planned within a perimeter of flames, and then conquered, always, in billows of smoke and raging flames.

If the map of fire is the old-

4 Among the gates on the two sides of Baghdad are: al-Kufa, al-Khurasan, al-Basra, al-Sham, the eastern gate known as the Gate of Darkness, al-Talsam, al-Wustani, al-Mu'azam (Gate of the Sultan), al-Anbar, Harb, Kluaza, al-Shamasiyya, al-Burdan, Abraz, al-Zafariyya, al-Halaba, al-Basaliyya, al-Mahul, al-Marateb, al-Jadid, Katarbeyl, al-Da'er, al-Hadid, Banbari, al-Ghirbeh, Suq al-Tamr, al-Badriyya, al-Nubi, al-Amma, Ammuriyyeh, and Bustan. Most probably there were several different names designated for a few gates.

5 In addition to the two waves of Mogul invasion, Baghdad always solicited foreign invaders to shake off internal despots. The city seemed to repeat this pattern, starting with the struggle between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun, when its poor called on the dynasty of Beni Boueih and then the neighbouring Persians to fend off the wanton destructiveness of Turkmen tribes, while the caliph fled each and every time with his entourage, abandoning the city to conquerors.

est imaginary representation of Baghdad, cemeteries are the oldest markers of the city's ruined neighbourhoods, as they are also putative survivors of catastrophes, eclipses, and recurring apocalypses.

These cemeteries offer an alternative set of coordinates that still indicate the old plans of the city. Although neighbourhoods and quarters are in constant change and often lose their architectural and urban character, burial grounds endure to testify, such as the burial grounds of Abu Hunayfa, al-Qazem, Ahmad Ben Hanbal, Sheikh Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, Bushr al-Hafi, Mansur Ben Amar, al-Junayd, al-Chebli, al-Kilani, al-Khalani, and al-Tusi. These burial grounds have remained constant with some aggrandising architectural appendices added to minarets and domes. Cases in point are al-Athamiyya and al-Kathimiyya, two of the oldest neighbourhoods in Baghdad, so-called for having been erected in the vicinity of two of the oldest burial grounds for Abu Hunayfa al-Na'man, known as al-Imam al-A'tham, and Musa Ben Ja'far, the seventh Imam of the Shiite Jaafari sect, known as al-Kathem. It is noteworthy that all of those laid in these burial grounds were victims of the successive rulers of Baghdad. Imprisoned, tortured, murdered, or simply made to vanish, all came to the city from other places and fell victim to the wrath of the City of the Sultan. Its main Abbassid rulers all perished, in a historical anachronism worth investigating, outside its gates.[6] The city nevertheless carried the names of two of its more enlightened caliphs: al-Mansur and al-Rashid. It was then that the anxiety of succession took hold of Baghdad. It was a city built by the Abbassids, the seat of their authority, a centre from which to conquer and subdue surrounding regions. And a question arose: Was Baghdad a military encampment or was it a house of wisdom? It was this tenuous entanglement of authority and culture — the seat of power and the city of a cultural diversity — that forced contradictions to surface. This unresolved duality marked Baghdad since its inception and rendered it a city that embraces and expels at once, with equal force, never a city for interaction or for the promotion of an intelligentsia.

And so how is it possible to draw the cultural map of a city that lacks that element of chemistry binding its population, when its neighbourhoods are segregated according to sectarian, racial, and ethnic quotas?

Although the city diligently regrouped after each catastrophe, it was no longer a capital. As a result of the first and second Mogul invasions, known as the Dark Epoch, surviving plagues, floods, and the destructive wantonness of Turkmen tribes, the city's population was reduced to a mere 15,000 by the middle of the seventeenth century. To say that the inhabitants of Baghdad have faced the threat of extinction more than once is no exaggeration. The threats have been more than man-made. Historian Ahmad Susa dedicated three volumes to tracing the city's long history of floods.

When looking into the unfolding process of subrogation and expulsion, it is important to consider the effects of incoming and occupying

6 Al-Mansur died and was buried in Mecca. Al-Hadi died in Issa Abad. Al-Mahdi died in a little known town in Persia. Al-Amin was deposed and killed at one of the city's gates. Al-Ma'mun died in Tartus in Syria.

forces on Baghdad as the capital of the state, a capital even if without a state.

In the second chapter of the city's history as the capital of a state, Faisal I came along with his entourage and a few of his father's friends. That period is known as the Arab revolution against the Ottomans. Faisal's entourage was a diverse group and later constituted the basis of an Arab intelligentsia that regarded Baghdad as its centre. All the while, the myriad cultural elements — Indian, Polish, etc — within the British colonial occupying force persisted in building their military, social, and cultural presence in the city, as opposed to the previous contingent of the Ottoman elite. Outside the city, Bedouin and tribal culture remained dominant.

With this heterogeneous mix, an approximate image of the state's capital was proffered by the occupying power for a period of 37 years, spanning from the mandate up to the foundation of the republic: 37 years of Arab legacy that approximately replaced the model of the caliphate. And this time, Baghdad was the metaphorical city chosen to implement this model. Amongst its components was the figure of the Arab searching for a vacant throne, in this case Faisal I, born in Mecca.

As the Iraqi state gradually began to form alongside the establishment of the new British occupying forces, Baghdad the capital, slowly embarked on its social reconstruction. It also embarked on its own metaphorical reconstruction as the king sat on his throne in a city that represented a territory without a national people — to be manufactured later and accordingly.[7]

When Army General Abdel Karim Qasem, known for his partiality to the poor, announced the foundation of the first Iraqi Republic, he lacked an entourage to inject into the city to vitalise it. That is perhaps why he opened the city to immigrants from the south who flooded through its gates. These new recruits seemed no more than a demographic encampment. Today, however, they constitute a third of the capital's population.

As a matter of fact, rather than governing the peripheries from the capital, Baghdad was always governed by its neighbouring towns. Such was the case in the 1960s with al-Ramadi during the rule of the brothers Aref. It was the case with the people of Tikrit during the ascent of Saddam and the Baath party. The biggest influx of new immigrants into the city from the north and west traces back to that time frame. It was then that one could notice changes occurring in the attire of men and women, a prevalence of conservative architectural styles, and the spread of Bedouin mores and tradition, quite foreign to what had been previously common in Baghdad. When reconsidering the dual model of the Bedouin-urban set by Ibn Khaldun as a foundation for his theory of history, this point becomes relevant. In the case of Baghdad, the theoretical model is only true if reversed. Our capital was never successful in taming the ferocious wilderness in the hearts of those rulers flocking from governorates, their mindset shaped by a puzzling

7 In a letter sent to a close associate and published by Abdel Razzaq al-Husni in his third volume of the history of Iraqi governments, King Faisal writes that he does not consider there to be an Iraqi people. Rather, he considers there to be quarrelsome and rebellious agglomerations of people who will be formed, he promises, into a proper Iraqi people.

mix of the desert and the ruler, unfamiliar with the urban and civic. According to Ibn Khaldun, civilisation becomes the embodiment of the Bedouin's aspirations. Through its effects he becomes inclined to pacifism and comfort, thereby becoming vulnerable to an external predator. In the case of Baghdad, the situation was the opposite. Its rulers, fiercely loyal to their tribal origins, imbued the city with two traits attributed to Bedouin culture, namely hostility and savagery.

In spite of the fact that the city was reorganised as a capital of a state, it is significant to question why Baghdad never witnessed the formation of an active social group to defend it from capitulating too easily to the traditions of the desert and the rural.

The impossibility of such a formation is emblematised in the lingering duality of expulsion and colonisation that marks the history of the city. Let us remember that al-Mansur first built Baghdad as an encampment for his troops. This inaugurated a tradition whereby each new caliph would bring in his own entourage and expel the previous one. Arabs, Persians, and Seljuks were all but andirons on which the pot of social fermentation never took hold.

And so, to this day, Baghdad is marked by waves of expulsion. And since the population usually bears the damage of such violent processes, the city could never embrace continued social development. Thus its social fabric was unevenly woven and easily transgressed, and thus Baghdad lived from one capitulation to another, from the hand of one conqueror to the grip of another sultan. Today, the city is composed of peripheral agglomerations in an urban sprawl that exceeds 700 square kilometres. In this lateral expansion, neighbourhoods fell increasingly into isolation, maintaining among them only those links that bind the tribe. The tribal immigrants who have successively occupied the city constitute today the majority of its population.

Just as the religious authorities maintained their seats outside the city, so did the tribes with their own referential authorities. The true body of the tribe lays invariably elsewhere; the capital is no more than a temporary shelter for the dispersed extremities of that body. Tribes are known to look down on those who identify themselves with the epithet "Baghdadi", they suspect them of hiding something dubious about their origins. That is why most residents of Baghdad append their belonging to the city with a more foundational nickname that locates them once again under the aegis of a tribe or territory. "Baghdadi" is a borrowed epithet, useless for identifying anyone.

Baghdad, in fact, with its tenuous racial and ethnic mix, condenses in itself and projects the image of the country as a whole. It is the image of Iraq, yet at the same time it is peculiar to itself. It is a capital only in this sense. Diversity in the rest of the country, however, remains governed by geography: The north is predominantly Kurdish, the south and centre are Arab.

Alone, Baghdad remains an anxious geography. Like the Tigris River, it is a cosmopolitan reservoir that

pumps and receives not water but the blood of births and murders.

Succumbing to conquests, tyrants, and waves of migrants, in addition to growing local birth rates, Baghdad continues to change relentlessly. Not a single group has succeeded in rooting itself, not the Kurds (whether al-Filiyyah, Bakhtaree, Karamanjee, or Suranee), Jews, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, or Sa'iba. Neither the capital nor the state were able to anchor any group into a stable social realm; none became contextualised in the city proper. Rather they were expelled violently as the city was repeatedly drained of its diversity. In the last half of the past century, Baghdad saw the expulsion of more than two million people. It was during that period that most of the Iraqi Jews were forced to emigrate according to a well-rehearsed scenario written and performed by the Iraqi state, the British government, and Zionist organisations well-established in the capital. It was in fact from Baghdad that the Jews left for the south upon the establishment of the modern state of Iraq.

Between the year of al-Farhud and the unfolding chapters of this scenario, more than 100,000 Jews left Baghdad, a fifth of its population.[8] They had constituted an integral element in some of the city's traditional classes, yet they were forced to leave under pressure from Zionist terrorism perpetrated with the tacit collaboration of the state. They left behind a tangible absence in the life of the city. Since Baghdad had always compensated through borrowing, other groups tried to fill the gaps left by the Jewish population after its expulsion. So the al-Filiyyah Kurds moved into Suq al-Shurjah working as merchants and porters, while Arabs from the west side — al-Qabissiyya especially — took over the main arteries. Once again, a forced replacement of one group with another postponed the growth of a coherent social coalition capable of resisting authority. And that was not even the last episode. Again, in their turn, the al-Filiyyah Kurds were dispossessed, leaving the city vulnerable and disempowered against the continuous influx of rural immigrants. Yet the Kurds did not succumb to their greatest catastrophe until the onset of Baath party rule. Consistently expelled from various cities, the numbers of dispossessed reached a record high of 250,000 in 1980, the year the Iraq-Iran war began. Half of those expelled were from Baghdad.[9]

The general modality by which authorities viewed people was accusatory and destructive. Following each insurrection or protest, authorities cracked down ruthlessly and silenced voices of the opposition.

The events in the aftermath of the insurrection known as the March Revolt, which erupted at the end of the war named Desert Storm and the expulsion of Saddam from Kuwait, are cases in point. In the pages of their publishing organ, *Jaridat al-Thawra* (*The Journal of the Revolution*), the Baath authorities claimed that southern insurgents were actually brought by Mohamad Bin al-Qassem, along with a herd of buffaloes, during the Islamic conquest of India, and were

8 *Al-Farhud* is a vernacular term meaning acts of looting and stealing. It goes back to an insurrection by the movement of Rashid Ali al-Kilani against the British in 1941. Jewish communities stood with the British and favoured the return of the crown prince forced to abdicate by the army. Consequently, Jews in Baghdad, Mousol, Basra, and other cities were the targets of acts of looting and killing. And although some try to paint the events as another holocaust, it is most probable that no more than 200 perished. Notwithstanding the exact number, these occurrences were demagogical even if connected with specific events.

9 The numbers included in this paper are a summary of many comparative studies of reports by international and Iraqi human rights organisations.

known to have copulated and multiplied with them, thus carrying some of their traits.

Through numerous occupations and a putative independence, the image of Baghdad has endured as a clear expression of the ambiguity that lies at its core. It is an image that remained elusive, often reduced to an absence or a fact, but it was never considered as that of a metonymic city, namely, a city deadened and occulted behind stereotypes and therefore always prone to suicide just to shake off the deadly weight of the metonymy.

Accounts by renowned Arab chroniclers like Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta support the dramatic contrast between on the one hand the image of the city and its people, and on the other, its image as confabulated from memory. In more concise formulation, both travellers agreed that except for the Tigris River, nothing in the city was remarkable. Yet even this mighty river has been the subject of radical transformations. The Tigris used to flood and overwhelm — as in the root meaning of its Arabic name, Dujla. But it is no longer a term borrowed and used comparatively by analysts and novelists (such as the Baghdadi-Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra) to conjure the unpredictable upsurge of the Baghdadi sense of humour. Rather, in Baghdad, it has been rendered narrow, dragged like a weakling towards improvised towns, with small dams and partial canals becoming waste dumps and mass graves.

It would be irrelevant for us to gaze at the image of the city as refracted in the mirror of *A Thousand and One Nights*. That is an image only worthy of entertaining the sultan, a stratagem manufactured during long nights weaving stories and sex to defer a death sentence. It was this image, however, along with the image of an enflamed map, that the marines carried with them when they entered the city in the midst of chaos, like a human flood churning with the aggressive sentiment of the population toward its own city.

The Americans had to find some explanation for the looting and destruction that took place and made the city, once again, reflect the map of its founder. Ali Baba provided such an explanatory description, shared in contradictory ways by the locals and the invaders in this new Baghdad, or Bush-Dad. Contrary to the legend which tells of an Ali Baba who fought 40 thieves to prove his goodness, the Americans reduced him to a mob of 40 thieves, reversing the symbol.

To me, "You are no longer yourself, home is no longer itself", the verse by Abi Tammam, summarises well the perplexing sight of today's Baghdad. Nothing remains fixed. Places and streets have changed their names leaving no clues or memories for returnees or even locals. All has changed as abruptly as our holidays: our National Day, the Day of the Martyr, the Day of the Unknown Soldier. Movie houses have changed as well; they all seem like sites from antiquity even though they date from the recent past, from a few decades past. Aqd al-Nasara, Harat al-Yahud, Darbunat al-Ajam, Hayy al-Akrad, Camp al-Arman, Beit al-Turkman, all obvious and once familiar appellations

for locating a quarter or a street, are no more. None of Baghdad's Jewish population and only a few Christians remain. Most of the al-Filiyyah Kurds are still waiting for permission from the occupying forces to return to their homes, while the rest hide behind applications for a change of ethnicity.

The Ministry of Defense has been relocated and streets don new names. New martyrs kill old martyrs as they expel them from their boulevards to take their place. Monuments fall and others are quickly concocted before others still claim the location. Fires erupt everywhere, according to a strange plan, consuming entire buildings. Railroads once hung, as I remember, like the gardens of Babylon, with trains passing along as if flying through Baghdad's navel at al-A'zamieh and crossing the Tigris towards al-Karkh. The railroad has been stripped to rebuild destroyed bridges and construct new ones. All that is left are huge cement columns that signal elsewhere, which is exactly how one feels when one is there. One feels confused as one senses a belonging to all this ruination. Unsurprisingly, because this is a country where spare parts from MiG fighter planes are sold in secret auctions, where some of their left-over metal sheets end up as tea kettles or traditional and folkloric objects sold in Suq al-Safafir, and where engines are smuggled to other countries. The building stock of places we once loved was used during the siege as primary materials for the construction of other buildings. As for friends, almost none remain. Most have left; others died in the fighting or were captured, only to return as if lost, wandering the streets, looking for someone, for someplace. Such is the capital today.

The only remaining movement is the rhythm of demographic ebb and flow that seems to have replaced the episodic flooding of the Tigris. In general, occupants of the capital seem to be in a race to buy and own land, shops, and any other asset that could assist new racial or ethnic incursions into the city. And so in the face of the manufactured demographic shifts of the past, other shifts, just as contrived, are being concocted today.

Not only has the urbanity of the city changed through the transformations of streets, residents, and neighbourhoods, so too has the experience of this grand withdrawal from a history not made by deserters. If cemeteries, bars, mosques, souks, and hammams are the expressive markers by which the living and dying of a city are studied, then it must be said that the preponderance of mosques and cemeteries is a clear (if temporary) indication, even, that Baghdad is a city metaphorically dead.

The night is a target for a stray bullet, a story, or some legend. The marines came to invent a new *A Thousand and One Nights* or perhaps to experience the ancient one. In any case, theirs has a whole new cast.

Yet the night is still latent with many mysterious stories, hidden behind the light of days, enclosed within large and arbitrarily deployed cement walls, fences of barbed wire, and metal obstacles. A new vocabulary for security helplessly seeks to defend the city from

enflamed maps approaching from all sides.

Baghdad was twice a capital. And twice it was a metonymy in name, in population, in urbanity, in legend, in living, in residence, in exile. It is a metonymic city, as much in its details as in its conception.

Born in Baghdad in 1963, Mohammad Mazlum is a published poet whose work has been translated into English, Spanish, and Polish. He earned a degree in Islamic studies and following graduation, he was drafted into the armed forces. He fought in the Iran-Iraq war, taught Arabic in Kurdistan, and subsequently went to Syria to escape persecution and censorship.

Of the Theatrical Act: A Matter of Speech and Distance

Lina Saneh

In this essay, I plan to restate interrogations, at once simple and difficult questions, that have accompanied my practice in theatre from its beginning until this present moment. Questions such as: What is represented in theatre? What is offered to be seen? By which means? What is action? What is, or what could still be today, the role of the body of the actor? And lastly, how does representation on stage relate to image, speech, and space? My engagement with these interrogations is grounded in our experience as actors, directors, and playwrights; an experience albeit modest and brief but nonetheless rich in discovery, tremor, evolution, and revolution — the latter used here to refer to its circling movement.

First, a note of precision: When I say "our", I mean to speak for myself and my partner, Rabih Mroué, with whom I have embarked from the onset and continue, on this arduous work of research, the difficult path of perpetually questioning our practice, for some fifteen years now, surrounded by attentive and committed friends.

In the beginning was the verb; image is mere a product of the verb.

With the verb, God created Light: "Let there be light! And so there was light!" That whatever thing should be, there it was. And so on and so forth, until man was created in His own image. Thus is man a mere image. An image of God.

This is the version according to religion. The religious does not interest me in itself in this story but rather man's intellect which has rendered speech a creative act, the act at the root of creation of all things that make up the world, and most importantly, the act of creation of images. Speech does not replace image, neither does it continue its significations, nor complement, nor operate in parallel, nor explain, nor comment, nor analyse: It creates it.

In the story, the intellect identifies two steps in the history of the evolution of society. The first is religious; the second, political. In the first, everything is but an imaging of everything, image of the unique,

selfsame source-origin, image of God. Everything, not only man, because all that God has created, he has done so in His own image. And when all was created, God asked man to name things in their name. And man did so without any hesitation. These things were then so close to the Truth, to the Original Source, so transparent to the Verb that created them, to the image of that Verb. Thus was it at the instigation of God that man looked at things around him, and whatever he saw was an image that was glued to his eye. Only when he began to name things, things began to acquire identification and depth in relation to what surrounded them, singularity, individuality. Only then were all things granted distance from one another, and space emerged around man, outside man, between his sight and all things making up the world. Man was no longer the world, and the world was no longer man. God created all things in the world, and man named them, and as such they became distinct from one another. God created things in the thousands, apple trees in the thousands, in one fell swoop, undifferentiated one from the other; man took time to identify every single tree, wielding volume to the flat image created by God, creating space around every single one. More to the point than the apple trees, man learned to differentiate men from one another, naming and identifying each one individually, creating space around all and every single one. Thus, men acquired consciousness of their plurality, and acquired freedom vis-à-vis "man" — a mere and infinite reproduction of the selfsame specimen. Man is no more than a genus, a species, but men are political individuals, efficient, with agency for action, capacity for enterprise in the new, as Hannah Arendt explains so well.[1]

According to the dictionary, space is "an indefinite expanse that contains and surrounds objects".[2] "Vital space" is the "space needed to not feel disturbed by others".[3]

It is widely accepted that what differentiates man from animal is the attribute of the political, in other words, his capacity to establish bonds that are not grounded in the familial, tribal, or any other such communitarian solidarities where space lacks to the extent of asphyxiation, rather with "strangers", with people at a distance from him. In his political being, man creates space between himself and other men, as well as between him and the things in the world, through speech.

When social relations between strangers are regimented by distance, social space becomes public space. Public space is precisely that spacing, the distance necessary between people, binding and separating them in the same instance. It is also, and mostly, an abstract space constituted of words — hence invisible and intangible — words that precisely, as Arendt notes, pertain to the objective world that surrounds men and lies between them: "Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between", says Arendt.[4] She adds that this objective world is common to all and interests us all. "Inter-est: which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together", and

1 Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958)

2 Translation is the author's own. Definition borrowed in French from the *Petit Larousse Illustré* (1996)

3 Ibid

4 Arendt, pp. 182-183

yet "prevents our falling over each other".[5]

Action and speech, *praxis* and *lexis*, two acts, political par excellence, constitute what Aristotle described as *bios politikos*, and concern a world made of space that binds and separates men. They are also two theatrical acts, par excellence.

Theatre is the product of the human consciousness of space. Obviously, theatre is also the product of the political and of the city, of the polis, of the urban; but the city and the political are themselves, in turn, products of that same consciousness of space. Despite the recognition and success we have earned from the onset of our work in the theatre as actors and directors, we have harboured a lingering sentiment of dissatisfaction. Something essential, we felt, was amiss. Our discomfort was not a matter of artists' spleen, born from the overall situation of our country or our region, even less so from the threat of globalisation. Neither was it born from the lack of interest from state and official institutions, nor from the general tendency of the media, intellectuals, artists, and critics to cast us in reductive categories: We were at once lumped in the same bag as the young generation, the new generation, or the post-war generation, the bracketing of which included artists who range from twenty to 45 years of age and sometimes 50 years of age (!). These categories overlooked all aesthetic considerations — in the broad meaning of the aesthetic — opinions, worldviews, positioning vis-à-vis the métier, the history of theatrical practices; they aimed at pointing to influences. In the case of considering the history of theatrical practices in the country, they looked to unearth filiations and similarities. In short, to determine all that is same, to remain in the selfsame, where one is merely an image of the other. The other, different, singular, does not exist. The same process holds for religious dogma: Rather than identify and name things, separate them and distinguish them, look for differences more meaningful and more significant than similarities. This trivial and trivialising discourse, this depoliticisation of theatre and of culture in general, this reticent or ill-intentioned effort at rendering a precise and accurate reading, none of all that was the cause of our dissatisfaction.

Indeed, it is possible that on the face of it, various practices in theatre, art, and culture could bear resemblances to one another, but this is strictly at first glance, superficial. However — and thankfully, I repeat it because it is vital — profound divergences separate practices of artists; in the same vein, despite our close collaboration, our intellectual agreements, our artistic and aesthetic affinities, the work I have done is different from the work Rabih Mroué has done. That is the instance when Rabih and I began to interrogate our practice. We were compelled to radicalise, theorise with clarity, and sometimes violence — a violence that, I doubt, is ever detached from art which, amongst other things, renders difficult but certainly not impossible a cooptation by official and political forces. Have we succeeded?

5 Ibid, p. 52

I cannot tell, but this is where we stand now. Surely, things are never as clear or obvious as they might seem further in time, when we undertake looking back and analysing. From the purview of the retrospective lens, we often gloss over the torturous difficulties, persistent doubts, and mistaken paths which seem as if without a trace.

When we began working in theatre, Rabih and I displayed a clear and confident penchant for the theatrical practice centred on the body of the actor, the visual unravelling on stage. We also felt the urge to reflect on the social and political context in which we were living. For a long time, our research seemed to concentrate on the visual face of the body and the physical work of the actor, the mise-en-scène and scenography, which we perceived to serve the expressive power of the body of the actor, etc. It is only later that we came to understand there was work to be done on how we approached the world in which we lived, in which we were embedded, that summoned us perpetually to be redefined, rethought.

In our early years, we were emboldened by all that we had learned at university about modern theatre, including the avant-garde, the experimental, Meyerhold's bio-mechanical, the image-theatre, going through the physical and cruel theatre of Artaud (where the actor sends signs from the bonfire on which he burns), Kantor's theatre of death, the Living Theater, the Bread and Puppet, the happening, Grotowsky, and so many others that made the glory of the twentieth century. All that we learned about the theatre of the body, the *gestuelle*, the liberation of the body from bourgeois psychology, the exploration of its abilities, movement, stylisation, the integration of forms and techniques such as dance, mime, acrobatics, all of this to distance ourselves from the literary theatre, the academic, bourgeois, and psychological theatre to the theatre of action, a visual and dynamic theatre… The word *theatre* itself takes root in the Greek *teatron*, meaning the place from which we see. What could possibly be seen, if not action, especially since the word *drama* means action, or what we do. I was not aware then of the degree to which I was bypassing the essential, overwhelmed by the urgency to escape the literary and the *ennui* of theatre. We had no idea that action in theatre could possibly signify anything other than physical action, the object of which was to bring scenes to life, enact beautiful visuals that rendered the piece more agreeable and easy to follow. In brief, the acting and the staging were equivalent to soda ingested to facilitate the digestion of a meal that threatened to be too heavy. Without these scenes, theatre threatened to be arid, intellectual, elitist, non-organic. Particularly if that theatre did not seemingly bow to the exigencies of the social consensus — itself confounded with expression of popular will — although in reality, it remained in conformance with the ideology of the Lebanese bourgeoisie.

With the progress of time, projects accumulating slowly and we began to realise that our stage work that had willed itself as very

physical was not enough to usher literature off stage, nor could it avoid the narrative, the illustrative, or even the psychological. Neither could it eliminate clichés, worse yet, the pathetic melodramatic antics catering to the fans of martyrdom, nor could it avoid the ostentatious.

We felt it therefore necessary to develop our work in acting, action, movement, the *gestuelle*, we also pushed stage direction into unventured territories. The more our work evolved and produced results, the more evident it seemed that it was not what we were looking for. It was not only a question of ameliorating the quality of acting and the stage direction, nor was it to permit a better vision of what we believed that theatre was supposed to reveal. Our practice ventured in the territory of re-asking ourselves precisely: What does the theatre lend to see?

In fact, we were becoming conscious of a new problem. Rabih addressed the subject in a long article that appeared in 1999. We were becoming aware that, with the rare exception, few projects were noticed as they were confused with the rest. I am thinking of Raïf Karam and Siham Nasser, whose theatrical practices then continued to present a body that corresponded in fact to the official ideology and to the modern myth of the ideal body. Ideology and myth transmitted chiefly through the media, borrowed by practitioners, even those who claim to subvert bourgeois capitalist civilisation. What body is that?

Before answering this question, let us first note that never has the body been more solicited than in the twentieth century. With the enormous technological progress that has improved people's lives, far beyond anyone had ever hoped, liberated from countless chores, and afforded free time to engage in leisure, people have been increasingly called on to dispense their technical intelligence rather than physical labour; paradoxically, with all this progress, the body has never been more solicited! As we rely less and less on our bodies (now more so with the internet and virtual images, computer games, etc), the body is expected to liberate itself, to be beautiful, strong, svelte, and healthy. It is expected to perform, give evidence of physical energy as well as prowess, for no utilitarian purpose or function.

Theatre could not always remain protected from the injunctions of official culture. If in the beginning of the last century, the body was the weapon, par excellence, against the static conservatism of bourgeois convention, today, things have changed tremendously. What was deemed revolutionary and vital at a certain period has become today fatal sclerosis. Effectively, looking with fresh eyes on our theatrical practice, it seemed that our work often had a tendency to move in a meaningless excess of physical action and *gestuality*, short of saying gesticulation and agitation. The actor expended effort to prove how well he/she knew how to use his/her body, bending it in all directions, stretching it to the limits, rolling, dancing, singing, miming, grimacing, being expressive, adopting all sorts of postures, remaining vital, energetic, enduring, never breathless… Pure performance,

spectacle, Olympic games, circus, that represented nothing, despite all often redundant and illustrative, mimetic efforts to represent. What does the body represent? Nothing existed besides the nostalgia for a performing body.

We resorted then to venture in another direction; we sought to understand how the war marked our bodies. We did not want to tell the story of the war, its horrors; neither orally, nor through the bias of a corporeal mimesis, that could not be more than illustrative and narrative, or worse yet, a pathetic drowning in martyrdom. We wanted to understand how this body of ours moved, after enduring fifteen years of war, how it moved, how it ate, how it went to sleep, how it loved, how it worked, how it thought, and how it acted…

This body defeated by war and regressive ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, Islamism, political systems, military and/or religious, local and regional, and finally with the fascist and impossible summon of modern performance still extended to it through liberal, official, and global culture. It was around that time, in 1997, when we presented Rabih's *Extension* 19 and my own creation, *Ovrira*.

With *Ovrira*, I tried to go to the end of the experience of the corporeal. I rid the theatre of everything except the bodies of actors. And I tried to shatter these bodies. On stage, the bodies did not dance, they did not sing, they did not speak, they mimed nothing, performed no acrobatics, they did not act, meaning they represented nothing; I mean to say that there was nothing in the play of actors that could suggest, for example, the actor was drinking his coffee, or that he was a thief, etc. The actors' bodies unravelled and moved in a non-chaotic manner that was not arbitrary. They unleashed, unbridled, without hope, promise, or the portend of any illusion; moving until collapsing from exhaustion, soft, useless, admittedly defeated, or rather to be more precise, not seeking to mask their defeat in this part of the world where defeat is never acknowledged; if they did not hide their defeat, there was nothing in their attitude to evoke heroism, modesty, or complacency.

They neither had the strength nor the will to benefit from anything; a simple factuality the spectator had to evidence on his/her own. In falling they were not victims of anything, they were merely exhausted by their desires that were going to be crushed against the wall delineating the space or collide violently between themselves. There was nothing to find for the gaze seeking pleasure, nothing also for the senses in quest of emotion or goose bumps. Even the technically very arduous bodily work by the actors was barely perceptible. The spectators walked out disappointed, disconcerted, irked, or even angry.

These two instances of Rabih's experience and my own, we deem amongst the most rich and interesting for the both of us. But in both cases the theatrical practice centred on physical stage work was, by then, over for us. We turned a page. It seemed the time had come, perhaps it may have already been too late, for us to distance ourselves from this primary means

of the practice, the body of the actor, which was in reality merely an accessory.

Besides, what could this body pretend to do still, what could it offer to be seen, what living experience would it still be able to propose today for sharing, at least 30 years late compared to theatrical experiments such as the happening, amongst others, and the non-theatrical experiments, such as performance art (of which the body performance had essentially explored to the limits of death). If the theatre is the place from which we see, where action is seen, there is no single assurance that the action will come to life in the body of the actor by necessity, nor through sensationalist scenography, or bombastic stage direction. Surely, there is something else, and more important, to see in the theatre. The opaque layering of the visual, the corporeal as well as the drive to create beautiful images and frames, serves to confound sight and distract the mind rather than promote a better vision of what the theatre is supposed to reveal.

Greek theatre shrouded the physical, real, carnal, presence of the actor behind a mask, a costume, the *cothurn,* and other *prothesis*. In other words, Greek theatre masked all indicators that reminded the actor, and as such the spectator, of their theological condition and biological being as man. This practice was contrary to some trends in Roman theatre, contrary as well to what some of the most modern and radical theatrical experiences and forms of the body performance. It should not be surprising that a number of the radical adepts of the body amongst the practitioners of the physical of the twentieth century ended up converting to different religious sects and spiritual rituals.

Turning this page on our practice, what were we proposing as an alternative to action, understood as strictly a play of the body, often arbitrary and chaotic, and whose visual effects become confused with theatricality? What does theatre offer to be seen? We were, and remain, conscious of what we do not want, rather than having ready answers to what we want or ought to have done.

We were confident of the urgency to radicalise our practice in a manner clearer than we had done previously, more pertinent as well as more impertinent.

We aspired to push further in trapping the clear, readymade ideas we had endorsed, for a long time and with a lot of laziness, on the level of theatre but also in terms of culture in general, the political, social, as well as the civil war. It seemed important for us to radicalise our reflection on the world around us, which is common to all, and render it more effective. We were not animated with the belief we could change the face of the world, but our thoughts had to be effective in preventing Rabih and I from finding comfort in new answers, from sinking into new certitudes. Every time we sensed we had something in hand, we were impelled to question and interrogate it.

It was necessary to tackle the remaining set of the taboos which, without our realising it, prohibited escaping the dichotomous political

divisions that paralyse the country; divisions reducing the other to an absolute alterity, isolated in space, captive of a distance that is all except that space and distance necessary to create and nurture political binds between strangers. For that purpose, we deemed necessary, amongst other means, to delineate themes increasingly precise, concrete, actual, circumscribed, rather than aim to rewrite history: the history of Lebanon, Beirut, the war, or even the future… It was not that subjects less laden with epic portends (sometimes even an epic religious portend, because only the religious worldview can claim to embrace the entire world with its sovereign gaze, as for example with the religious theatre of the Middle Ages) could facilitate uncovering truth, and denouncing falsehoods, rather they had the ability to reveal internal contradictions better.

And this was not for the purpose of bringing them to a resolution but rather to evidence the complexity of things and the complexity of the world, irreducible to binary schemes such as executioner/victim, power/people, the good versus the bad, black versus white… A complexity that does not allow an abbreviation of power to a transcendental exteriority that has befallen on us from wherever, another world, another space, completely independently of will, work and action of the people who endure it, in the vein of the Arabic saying *"La hawla wa la quwwa"* ("Without any means and power except…that of God"). A complexity that allows understanding the extent to which it is difficult to identify the enemy, contrary to a practice in theatre, and in politics, well ingrained since the 1960s, that consisted in criticising, denouncing, and confounding the other, the enemy — always well-identified, recognisable, with a pointing finger. A complexity that would rather point to the pressing need for critical self-insight, against settling for a camp endorsed a priori, and lastly, a complexity that does not address an audience that has already endorsed our own convictions. For all these reasons, we deemed it important to proceed from real and personal experience that interrogated our convictions and views. Interrogation that will remain unanswered but speaks to so much more.

That was the mindset guiding Rabih, who, in collaboration with Tony Chakar, presented a play entitled *Enter Sir, We Are Waiting For You Outside* in 1998. In this play, the actors did not attempt to dispense the illusion of playing a role or character, nor did they belabour to impress the audience with their technical and physical performance. Quite the contrary, they turned their back to the public on stage, showed impassible faces on television screens installed in front of them on a black wall that obstructed the opening of the scene and forbade any depth. Their voices were heard through microphones, commenting on the images, instructing the audience to remain in their seats without moving and to accept the images unravelling on television as identity because Palestine will not be freed. In 2000, Rabih presented another play with Elias Khoury entitled *Three Posters*,

where the actor was furthermore absented to the benefit of the image and speech. The play dealt with a theme regarded as an even worse taboo, namely, the suicide operations organised by the Lebanese Communist Party against the Israeli occupation and the manipulation of Lebanese political life by the Syrian regime. Finally, in 2002, Rabih and I presented *Biokhraphia*, where the actor present on stage made use only of his voice and spoke through a microphone to avoid any strain.

These three works roused a similar discomfort, anger, and disappointment amongst spectators. Some wondered, was this theatre? Where is the actor? Do we go to the theatre to see videos? Images from the television? There were also screams of outrage that theatre was being lost, invaded by new technologies. Theatre had to remain faithful to what it had always been! But what had it always been? It had to remain virgin from this impure invasion, which is none of its business in the first place, and safeguarded in its natural and original purity. It implied forgetting that there is nothing either natural or original in theatre. These are religious conceptions; theatre and religion are two entirely distinct practices. Theatre is all about the artificial, the constructed.

Often, in those plays where we eliminated all dramatic performance, or to be more precise, where the status of representation in acting was very ambiguous, the video image was granted an enormous space. We were not proposing that theatre should reveal images manufactured in the media in lieu of the actor and his living presence, or his physical activity. Neither were these images there to create beautiful effects on stage, attractive tableaux, nor a place, a scenography, an ambiance. These images forged from the same everyday routine in which we are immersed, and from official culture, we used them to interrogate their mechanisms and functions, as well as our desires, fantasies, unsuspected ideological complicity, the complexity and fluctuating relations of power between those holding power — or powers — and those that endure this/these power(s), between governors and governed.

It is possible to deem these last works to be outside the realm of theatrical practice per se, as many who were outraged claimed. I don't have the answer, but this is not the relevant question here. I am more interested in investigating notions of the theatrical act, of action, of representation beyond the boundaries of theatrical practice, extending to all forms of representation, including the political, which unveils something beyond duplicating what is already there.

So what does theatre, the theatrical act, the representation, offer to be seen? To go back to the example of Greek theatre, or the etymological definition of term, namely, the place from which we see, what did the Greek see in theatre? (If I choose to talk about Greek theatre, it is only because of the clarity afforded in that example and not because I want to find a model to follow or an original source. The purpose is rather to unearth those elements that will help with research and reflection.

We could find many examples in the domain of dance, plastic arts, the novel, cinema, etc, but I prefer to remain in the example of theatre to finesse a better exit).

In Greek theatre, only those dances performed by the chorus around the alter created a representational action that addressed the eye of the spectator. Besides the dancing, the choir told the story of the saga, peopled with an intensely intertwined alignment of heroes and gods, retraced back to generations and generations of ancestors. The dramatic scenes where principal protagonists confront one other directly, in the present and through dialogue, resemble mostly pleading or a political debate. The stage is relegated to speeches on political problems, democratic values, civil rights and human rights, military strategy, etc, all combed carefully with the *logos*. These ethical debates surrounding abstract concepts were not propitious for the manufacture of images, action, and visuals.

The same can be said of the messengers, the epic "reciters", par excellence. Entrusted with announcing news, they had a dramatic role in the unravelling of the scene on stage. The news, however, could be easily abbreviated in a few words: So and so died, and the other committed suicide next to his fiancée, the other city lost the war, etc. That didn't prevent messengers from coupling their delivery of the news with long stories that described in meticulous detail what happened. Their accounts were precisely those rich in events, in action, situations worthy of the most sensational American action films. Battles, combat scenes, struggles, death, agony, the young lady who at the moment of sacrifice transformed into a goat, the old man who regained his youth, and another who blinded himself (we only see him after he has blinded himself, never in the act), etc, representational stories par excellence that were in no way directly perceptible to the eye on stage. They summoned the personal and individual imagination of the spectator. Only in his/her head images were born and moved.

Was that, then, all that people wanted to see in the theatre? Mental images, products of their own imagination? There are wide references to the spectacular scenic effects that the Greeks had recourse to with the help of machinery, like the famous *mèchanè* and the *ekkyklèma*. But what did these machines show? The *mèchanè* were used to show gods that had lost their sacred aura. The *ekkyklèma* showed cadavers, never agonising, never death in its workings. Greek theatre did not give much to see, anyway it showed little in the literal sense of "seeing". "Life is not in itself representable" says Artaud.[6] Or, to be more precise, the act itself, any act, the event, any event, is not in itself representable. All representation, theatrical or otherwise, will never be able to capture and reproduce the event, the moment, when it happens; it can only be an account.

If theatre cannot represent the event, it could, nonetheless, constitute in itself an event:

A: Through the distancing it creates in human and social relations

6 Antonin Artaud. *Manifeste pour un theater avorté, Complete Works, Vol. II*, p.31

B: In the fact of revealing what is invisible, and not the visible, life, the quotidian.

What distancing are we referring to? I began my discussion arguing that theatre is the "product of space". On the one hand, its virtue as a matter of speech and action deals with the objective world in which we are embedded, which separates and binds us at once. On the other hand, the theatrical space is in itself very particular:

A: Theatre is construed in reflection to the image of the democratic city, itself an ideal conception, grounded in the Greeks' new abstract, scientific, geometric, spherical understanding of space and cosmos; a new conception where notions of distance, symmetrical, equal and reversible relations replace the archaic, mythical hierarchical vision of the world as an enclosed, finite space, despite its size and where things are collated to each other.

B: Similarly, the theatrical space is in correspondence with the space of the agora, itself a virtual reproduction of the city and the cosmos.

It is important to note here that the correspondences between the theatre, the agora, the city, and the cosmos are not linear. They are not duplicate images, deriving from the selfsame image-source as in the religious discourse. The correspondences are dialectical in their casting of the rapport between spatial and social entities. That rapport is articulated along abstract rational, democratic notions such as reciprocity, reversibility, equality, etc, all essentially human conceptualisations, predicated to transform, evolve, and diversify, and subject to critique. This also applies to the patterns of relationships that derive from them.

Finally, considering that theatre is the place from which we see, well in order to be able to see well, the viewer has to take some distance.

> The *zôon politikon*, or political man, is no other than…the one that has distanced himself to see…that has understood that all is not tightly stacked, collated to each other.[7]

Theatre is hence born when the first protagonist takes a distance from the chorus, and goes to stand far and above to declaim the role of a single character, and what a character! A single individual, the first to have distinguished him/herself, in his/her affront to the gods, and having to endure their wrath. One of the first individuals to have distinguished his/herself for having dared to take a distance with regards to mores, traditions and conventions of the family, for having dared to resemble no one else. The collective recanting of the chorus, that impersonal voice, which narrates without distinction the acts, the speech of various roles and characters was done with. A new speech was taking place in a new space borne from a distancing, a distance that binds and separates strangers. Space and speech. Political speech. A speech that creates images.

7 The translation is the author's own. The citation is originally in French: "L'homme politique, le *zôon politikon*, n'est autre que celui qui…s'est éloigné pour voir à distance…qui a compris que tout n'était pas serré, collé". Quoted from Jean-Christophe Bailly, "Théâtre et agora, aux sources de l'espace public", in *Prendre place, espace public et culture dramatique: Colloque de Cerisy,* edited by I. Joseph (Recherches, Plan Urbain, 1995), p. 56

We find ourselves again asking the question, what could theatre possibly lend to be seen, this theatre that is a political product of the city, construed in correspondence with the agora and the city? Three spaces (theatre, city, and agora), all of them conceived from ideal notions of reciprocity and equality. What do we offer to be seen in theatre, in this public space constituted of speech and action regarding the outside objective world that separates and binds men?

According to Denis Guenoun, contrary to popular belief, the rounded shape of the stage in Greek theatre did not enhance the representation of equality, "democracy".[8] At least not with regards to what was being staged, the spectacle itself. In clearest sight of the spectators were other spectators; and we all know they were not ordinary spectators, they were all citizens, nothing other than citizens! Thus, what the citizen/spectators of Greek theatre would see most clearly was the sight of the assembly of citizens, images of God rendered political individuals by the strength of the distance, and by the achievement of an immense effort vested by Greece to rupture the close binds, too close, of the archaic world. These citizens/spectators had come to that very particular space to witness a representation, an image, an image of themselves. What did actors on stage represent, actors who were also themselves citizens? Precisely an assembly of citizens, the chorus, and a few individuals debating on stage, as they would in the agora, on matters of politics, which concern all citizens here present.

Once man was able to clear enough space around him, and around everything else, and to rid himself of his status as an image, he was empowered to create in his turn images and representations.

In summary, this was what the citizen came to see at the theatre: images that had become citizens, convened to see other citizens, themselves images, because they represented characters, played roles, and who, by virtue of speech spoken in this singular space made up of spacing, allowed for the creation of images. Only the latter were mental, interior images. Greek theatre lent to see the invisible, the emergence of the individual, of distance, public space, political action, expressed essentially through speech. A speech critical of old and archaic images, representations and conceptions of the world, a speech embedded in the present. Spoken by the individual, theatre lent to see the emergence of men who had at last freed themselves from their theological and biological condition — that rendered them as "man" undifferentiated from other men — in their least unusual demeanour, singular men, political, free. And contrary to Genesis, where the image born from the Verb was glued to the eye, here all attempts to display images that were formed first in our imagination in this space will fail.

Things have changed enormously since the time of the Greeks. Today, under the aegis of globalisation, digital technology, computers, the internet, a new virtual space is bringing the world closer to itself. The world seems tightened in a

8 Denis Guenoun. *L'Exhibition des mots. Une idée (politique) du théâtre* (L'Aube, Collection Monde en Cours, 1992)

centripetal movement that runs counter to the immense centrifugal effort at distancing vested by man in his political agency. Globalisation promises to transform the world into a village. Should we be rejoicing? The most alarming of the transformations in the world as we live them today are not the hegemony of one culture over another, nor the erosion of the local and regional particularisms of culture, nor even the loss or death of theatre or the invasion of the stage — as well as our lives — by technology. Rather, it is the loss of the political, of that public space that binds and separates us, of speech and action concerning the world that lies between us, that in-between, that *inter-est*. In lieu of that apocalyptic, romantic, martyrologic vision of the globalised future, we ought to reflect on how or where and with what means could we construct pockets of resistance, where speech, spoken in a loud voice in front of an assembly of citizens, concerned for the world around us and between us, can continue to be. Would it be sufficient were it not spoken loudly and in front of an assembly of citizen? Maybe… Why would it not? But then, how? How can virtual space become a space that binds and separates strangers at once? How could it not be?

Lina Saneh was born in 1966 and studied theatre in Beirut and Paris. She has been actively working as a director, actor, and teacher since 1990. Her works include *Biokhraphia*, *Ikhraj Kaid A'elee* (*Family Civil Register*), *Ovrira*, *The Chairs,* and *Little Gandhi*.

PANEL

Panel: Three New York Projects, Emily Jacir, Moukhtar Kocache, and Sina Najafi, Rasha Salti
Transcription of a Lecture Given at Home Works II, Emily Jacir
Up in the Air, Moukhtar Kocache
An Apology for Curiosity: An Imaginary Conversation Between Two Editors at *Cabinet* Magazine, Sina Najafi

Panel: Three New York Projects
Emily Jacir, Moukhtar Kocache, Sina Najafi

Rasha Salti

Amongst the Forum's chief objectives is to provide a platform to introduce works by cultural practitioners in the world. In the first edition of the Forum, Solange Farkas was invited to curate and present a video program from the 13th International Electronica Festival, Videobrasil, which takes place every two years in São Paolo, Brazil. In this second edition of the Forum, we hosted a panel, entitled "Three New York Projects", for which we invited artist Emily Jacir, curator Moukhtar Kocache, and editor Sina Najafi to present New York-based projects.

In their locatedness, their interpellation of site, local culture, and extraterritorial articulation, all three presentations are at once emblematic of the cultural life of the City of New York, as well as deeply conversant with its many faces: New York City as one of the main transit ports of entry to the USA, the capital of cultural life in the country, the capital of capitals, or the financial centre for the American global economy, etc.

Emily Jacir, a Palestinian artist living and working between New York and Ramallah, presented three projects, conventionally perceived as site-specific that interpellate the historical, political, and cultural mapping of sites in New York. Moukhtar Kocache, former director of the visual arts program at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, located until September 11, 2001, in the World Trade Center, presented the artist-in-residency program at the World Trade Center, which he developed during his tenure. The residency program invited artists worldwide to interact with the plural significations the World Trade Center site carried, providing the opportunity to produce work in open-space studios inside the building. Lastly, Sina Najafi, editor of *Cabinet* magazine, was invited to present the publication, whose bold, innovative, and imaginative approach takes root from the simple premise, namely to give voice to artists and consider artistic practices from the purview of the artist, rather than from the purview of the spectator or critic.


HOME WORKS II


HOME WORKS II


DAYR YASIN
HOME WORKS II

Transcription of a Lecture Given at Home Works II

Emily Jacir

It's a little bit strange to be asked to present only the works I have made in relationship to one specific place. I moved to New York at the end of 1998, and I live there part-time. In any case, I am just going to discuss three or four projects that are site-specific to the City of New York.

My America (I am Still Here)

This is a piece I made in 2000. The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council had a residency program on the 91st floor of the World Trade Center, and I was an artist-in-residence there in 2000. During my time there, I did a performance in which I went shopping everyday for a month, into each and every store that existed inside the World Trade Center Mall. The piece is called *My America (I am Still Here)*. Each time I purchased an object, I took it to my studio and photographed it, and then I returned it to the store. There were 33 stores, and the project took one month. I exhibited the photos (which were close-ups of the tags stating where each object was made) and then the receipt (which was the refund). I was marking my existence through time and space within the space of the credit card system. Each time I returned an object, printed on its receipt was the exact time and day when I returned it, which created this direct linear trajectory marking my steps in the system. They let me keep the shopping bags for free when I returned the items I

Below
My Amercia (I am Still Here)
Documentation of the purchase and return of goods from every store in the World Trade Center Mall
February 2000

Right, detail
33 purchases and returns
Photographs, receipts, and shopping bags

had purchased, so I used them to make an installation on the floor. The shapes echoed the architecture of the buildings below from the view from my window in the World Trade Center.

Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948

This is a piece I started in the beginning of 2002. It's called *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948*. It is a refugee tent in which I stencilled the names of all the villages Israel destroyed upon the foundation of the state. I opened my studio for three months and invited people to come work on the *Memorial* with me. Each village name was hand-embroidered into the tent using black thread. The majority of the people who came daily, night and day, to work on this piece were Palestinians, some of whom were born and raised in NYC, and some of whom were in New York to study. There was also a large group of transient people coming in and out of New York, visiting from Palestine, who also joined us. Over 140 people came through my studio to sew and socialise. Oftentimes there was live Arabic music. There were lawyers, bankers, filmmakers, dentists, consultants, playwrights, artists, human rights activists, teachers, etc.

It became a social space where people were coming everyday. There were several Arab musicians in the city who used to come at night after they finished their gigs to play for us while we sewed. For me, the piece took place during those three months when we were working on it. Now when I exhibit the piece, it functions the way a photograph does documenting a moment of time that has passed. It's a document (or the remains) of a three-month, community-based project. I also kept a daily log of the people who came in and this is always exhibited with the piece.

We used as the reference for the 418 villages Walid Khalidi's book *All That Remains*, which we kept in the studio all the time and which people were constantly opening and reading to each other the story of what exactly happened with each village. I chose to make the tent in English but for some Israelis and Europeans this was problematic as they didn't think it was "authentic" because it was not done in Arabic. There are several reasons it was done in English, first and foremost was obviously because it was made in New York. Some of the Palestinians who come from these villages could not read or write Arabic and this is their history. Nothing changes that, English or Arabic. It is the same pain, the same struggle, the same injustice. Also, in the context

Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948
Refugee tent and embroidery thread, 2001
8 x 10 x 12 feet

Right
Today, There are Four Million of Us
Reprint of the *Mural of a Refugee* brochure from the Jordanian Pavilion of the 1964 World's Fair
Comissioned by the Queens Museum of Art, 2002

Right and below
In this Building
November 12, 1947
33.8 x 10 inch photos
2002
Jewish Agency leaders study a map of the proposed partition of Palestine.
Left to right below are Dr. Nachum Goldman, David Horovitz, Emanuel Newmann, and Rabbi Wolf Gold.
Courtesy the Archive of the United Nations Department of Public Information

of New York City, if the piece had been in Arabic it would have been a completely unreadable, beautiful oriental object. I did not want that reading of the piece. I wanted the viewer to be able to read the names and say them out loud and question why he or she has never heard these names before. (Another thing I forgot to mention is that I left the *Memorial* unfinished. There is space to add more names.)

Six months after completing the *Memorial*, the Queens Museum of Art invited me to participate in a show called "The Queens International". About three or four months before that, a friend of mine had done an exhibition in the Queens Museum and part of it involved inviting people to spend the night inside the museum. When I spent the night there, I discovered that the very same building was itself the United Nations building in 1947, when the UN partitioned Palestine. I was completely shocked by this revelation and I knew that I had to exhibit the *Memorial* inside that space. I went to the United Nations (now located in a building on Manhattan's West Side) to do research for a couple of months before the exhibition and researched all the photographs in their archive of the day they partitioned Palestine, all the delegates inside that building (which is now the Queens Museum) and inside those corridors. I was fascinated by the fact that they had all these photographs of all these delegates talking to each other, and if you know the history, then you know that the Americans had to twist the arms of many Latin American

countries to get them to agree to partition Palestine. So you see all these strange photos of delegates from Guatemala, Argentina, and Columbia talking to the Americans and speaking in corners.

This picture shows David Ben Gurion, executive chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, chatting with Asa Ali, chairman of the delegation from India in the delegates' lounge. Another shows Jewish Agency leaders studying a map of the proposed partition of Palestine.

This picture shows Herman Santa Cruz, the permanent Chilean representative to the United Nations, talking with Jorge Garcia-Granados, the Guatemala delegation chairman. Chile abstained from voting and Guatemala voted in favour of partition.

By the way, I exhibited the photos in historical cases that already existed in the Queens Museum. The photographs appear as documentation of a crime scene by the way the photographs were taken and the delegates were framed. It is incredible.

This picture shows Warren R. Austin, permanent US representative to the United Nations, talking with Dr. Alfonso Lopez, Colombia's permanent representative and delegation chairman. Colombia abstained from voting.

Here you see Dr. Mohammed Fadhil Jamali, Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, with Dr. Jose Arce, Argentinean delegation chairman. Argentina abstained.

In this photograph taken right before the vote, B. Shiva Rao, alternate Indian representative, talks with Alexandre Parodi, permanent French representative to the United Nations, and Roger Garreau. The French, of course, voted yes, and India was against.

In this photo, Dr. Mohammed Fadhil Jamali, the Iraqi delegation vice chairman, talks with Dr. Alfonso Lopez from Colombia. As I just mentioned, Colombia abstained.

Here is another photo from after the vote was taken and the decision to partition Palestine was made. Here, Jewish Agency representative Rabbi Dr. Abba Hillel Silver is embraced by Marcus Wulkin.

This picture is a real mafia-looking photograph: Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver receives congratulations from the Guatemalan delegates, as the General Assembly President, Dr. Oswaldo Aranha of Brazil, looks on.

Here is an image of Aranha, embracing the executive assistant to the UN Secretary General Trygve Lie.

This is Wasif Kamal from the Arab Higher Committee for Palestine, Camille Chamoun from Lebanon, Mrs. Alice K. Cosma from Syria, Najmuddin Rifai from Syria, H.R.H. Amir Faisal al-Saud from Saudi Arabia, and Aouney Dajany from Iraq, all speaking in the corridor.

In this photograph dated April 1948, the man pouting over his suitcase is Gen. Andrew G.L. McNaughton of Canada while Professor C. Jessup, the US alternate, explains to him the details of the Draft Trusteeship Agreement for Palestine, submitted by the US delegation.

In this picture, Muhammad

Zafrulla Khan, the chairman of the Pakistan delegation, Toff of the Jewish Agency, and Mr. Rodriguez Fabregat of Uruguay, examine the Palestine exhibit in Flushing, Queens.

Here Mr. Mahmoud Kamal, the Libyan advisor, his hand raised, elaborates on "Ten Human Facts on the Tragedy of the Palestine Arab Refugees". Mr. Kamal said that further aid for the refugees was needed.

And lastly, in this photograph dated May 11, 1949, members of the Israeli delegation are shown their seats in the assembly chamber immediately after the roll-call vote which admitted the new state to the United Nations.

The other thing about being asked to show at the Queens Museum is that the Queens Museum is actually on the grounds of the 1964 World's Fair. Here is a picture of the Jordanian Pavilion and from what I have read it was one of the most magnificent buildings in the World's Fair.

My mother, along with nine other women, lived in Queens for the summers of 1964 and 1965 to work as guides for the Pavilion of Jordan. All of them were Palestinians from the West Bank. A column from Jerash now marks the spot where the pavilion once stood. King Hussein donated it to the City of New York and today it stands as one of the oldest antiquities in a public space in New York City.

My mother told me that during the summers of 1964 and 1965 there was a huge controversy with this pavilion because of a painting by the Jordanian artist Muhanna Durra. It was a mural called *Mural to a Refugee*. It is a Palestinian mother holding her child with a poem written by Salah Abu Zeid.

Some in the Jewish community in New York tried to pass a resolution (and I am quoting from *The New York Times* here from Friday June 19, 1964) calling for "the immediate removal of the controversial mural in the Jordanian Pavilion which acts as a daily and constant irritant and a source of insult to millions of people in this city, the state, and the world".

King Hussein defended the mural and the official Jordanian response was that they would rather close the pavilion then take down the mural. The controversy was on the front page of *The New York Times* for months. Alex Rose, the vice chairman of the Liberal Party on New York's city council, resigned when the fair refused to act against the mural and he said the mural was "sheer war propaganda".

One morning, when the members of the Jordanian Pavilion arrived, they saw that someone had taken down the Jordanian flag and replaced it with the Israeli flag.

In the America-Israel Pavilion they made a mockery of the mural by reproducing it and by altering the words of the poem. For example, the beginning of the poem in the Jordanian Pavilion read: "Before you enter, have you a minute to spare to hear a word on Palestine and perhaps help us right a wrong". Harold Caplin changed it to: "Before you enter, have you a minute to spare to hear a word on Israel and enjoy seeing our Dream" for the America-Israel Pavilion.

While researching the archives of the World's Fair in the Queens Museum, I found the brochure that my mother and the other women were distributing to people in 1964. Inside this brochure is actually a picture of the mural with the poem. I decided to reprint the brochure and re-activate it as an object, with this strange 38-year time-lapse. The refugees are *still* not allowed to return home, more refugees have been made, and things have become worse. I reprinted the brochure exactly as it was distributed in 1964, and it was supposed to be passed out during this exhibition. My idea was that people would have this brochure in their hands and then, when they would leave the museum, they would be walking through the exact same fairgrounds decades later. Once again, 38 years later, there was a controversy. After several people contacted the director of the museum, I was asked to cease distribution, but I was allowed to have the brochures on display in a Plexiglas box. Unfortunately, this made the brochures an inactive, dead object, which was not my intention and thereby destroyed the piece.

The director of the museum allowed me to distribute the brochure only on the day of the opening but only if I personally passed out the brochures and as long as they had a sticker on them that stated: "I reprinted this brochure as my artwork. Emily Jacir".

Sexy Semite

Before I tell you about the last piece, which is called *Sexy Semite*, I have to explain a little about a publication in New York City called *The Village Voice*. This is a free weekly publication that has various articles and listings for music, art, dance, etc. In the back, there is a personals section in which, if you are looking for boyfriends or girlfriends, marriage or sex or whatever, you can advertise yourself or describe what you are looking for in a small ad. Usually, when I am bored, I read them just for fun. I decided to do a piece where I asked 60

Below and right
Sexy Semite
Documentation of an intervention, 2000-2002
Palestinians placed ads seeking Jewish mates in order to be able to return home utilising Israel's "law of return".


press 3.

PALESTINIAN FLAMENCO DANCER

Palestinian Female in search of Jewish soul mate.

Palestinian Woman Seeking sexy Jewish man for romance and marriage. My dream is to move to Israel and raise a family. Prefer non-smoker

SUBMISSIVE

SWF 45. FUL


W. BANKY PANKY IN PERSONAL AD BLITZ

Sexy Semite
Documentation of an intervention, 2000-2002
Palestinians placed ads seeking Jewish mates in order to be able to return home utilising Israel's "law of return".
Photo: O-K Center

Palestinians living in New York to all send in personal ads at the same time. I wanted to pollute the space of the personal-ads section so that one issue of *The Village Voice* personals section would be full of Palestinians looking for mates. I asked the people who participated in the piece to adhere to a couple of simple guidelines. The guideline that was the main goal and point of the whole piece was to bring up the right of return. To bring up the fact that Palestinians who are actually from the land, indigenous to the land, do not have the right to return to their own country while any Jew on earth, from any country, of any race, has the right of so-called "return". So in the ads everyone was looking for a Jewish mate. In this way we could return back home through marriage. Another guideline was they had to use the word *Semite* to describe themselves. I wanted to address the fact that in the American context "Semite" only pertains to Jews, but we are Semites. Whenever you say anything critical about Israel you are immediately called an "anti-Semite". I did this intervention three times: once in 2000, once in 2001, and once in 2002.

I wanted it to be threatening in a way. I wasn't interested in the responses to the ads themselves. I was interested in polluting the paper, in taking over the personals section. (By the way, it's free to take out these ads in the paper.) The last time I did this intervention was in 2002 and this very strange thing happened where the media actually noticed and went crazy. This article appeared in *The New York Post*: "West Banky Panky in Personal Ad Blitz". They had no idea what it was. They thought it was a terrorist threat from Palestinians who were going to kill Israelis. Stories about this so-called threat appeared in three publications that I know of. I will share some quotes from some of the others. *US News & World Report* called it "Fear Factor: Palestinian Valentines or Ambush":

> Love-Starved Jews desperate for a Valentine's Day date should look sceptically on personal ads offering long walks on the beach with Palestinians back in the Holy Land. The reason, warn US officials: It could be a trap. That's right, Desperately Seeking Susan is now a terrorist how-to movie. "These appear to be some kind of setup, a hustle", says Democratic Rep. Gary Ackerman of New York. That's because they sound so much like the ambush last year of sixteen-year-old Ofir Rahum allegedly after a Palestinian woman he met on the internet offered him sex.

This is from an article that appeared in the *Jewish Press* called "Romancing The Home(land)":

A new weapon may have emerged in the Palestinians' battle against Israel: the "siren" call. Kenneth Jacobson, associate national director of the Anti-Defamation League had this to say: "It's as if some in the Palestinian world may be looking for ways to inject more and more Palestinians into Israel proper". Ido Aharoni, the spokesman for the Israeli Consulate in New York said that the ads are a "kind of guerilla warfare that reflects negatively on those who placed them".

Emily Jacir is an artist who divides her time between Ramallah and New York. She employs a variety of media in her work, including video, photography, performance installation, and sculpture. Jacir has shown extensively throughout Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East. Her work was featured in the 8th Istanbul Biennial, and she has held recent solo exhibitions at Debs & Co. in New York, the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah, and the O-K Center for Contemporary Art in Linz, Austria. Jacir also conceived of and cocurated the first Palestine International Video Festival in 2002.

Up in the Air

Moukhtar Kocache

Ritual

Imagine yourself arriving via subterranean transportation. Muffled loudspeakers announce destination, doors open, you step over the gap and land on a platform. Crowds hurry past in all directions. You navigate a maze of tunnels, stairs, corridors, and escalators, sceptical as to whether you are heading in the right direction. Soon you emerge into a vast environment that looks like a transportation terminal but feels like a mall: The artificial lighting, dizzying array of signage, and the hard floors and walls make the space feel strangely and utterly insulated, protected from the natural elements.

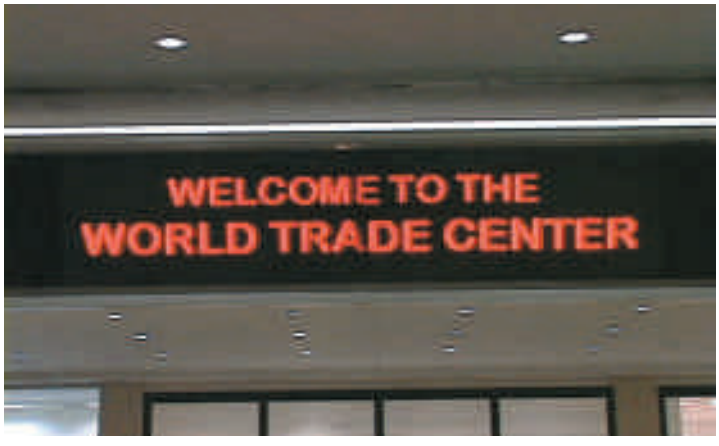
Morning rush hour. An overwhelming hum reverberates through the passageways; the clamour of thousands of hurried footsteps, distinctly herd-like. You need to move quickly or you will literally be swept away. As you navigate the shop-lined space, littered with vendors and services, you notice more ephemeral elements: someone's perfume, a haunting glance, the muzak that blasts throughout the space, the homey smell of coffee and cinnamon. You head toward Tower One. The mirrored architecture that leads to each tower makes the journey confusing, even for a long-time adept. Ahead, the bank of revolving doors squeak rhythmically, and you feel the strong draft hollering past their airtight openings, sunlight bouncing off glass and metal as you swiftly enter and find yourself ejected into a massive lobby. The low, suspended ceiling gives way to a disproportionately gigantic space, carrying your gaze toward a balcony above. The building begins to emerge. Flags representing the nations of the world hang from a mezzanine into the lobby. Utopian internationalism. We are the world.

The journey has so far been horizontal. Electronic bells repeatedly signal the arrival and departure of elevators. Perfunctory security procedures ensue: Wait in line at the desk for a pass or head straight to the elevator banks and use your WTC ID card. Elevators arrive. You and a group of strangers pack in and begin your vertical ascent. The initial acceleration triggers nausea; the pull contin-

ues, strong and determined. The chamber rattles and shakes and you hear the sound of wind again. Before you know it, the elevator has slowed down, regaining a sense of gravity. Doors open and you crowd into the Sky Lobby, a transitional room on the 78th floor with another set of elevator banks that will deliver each of you to your final destination. Wait. The lobby is flanked by a row of windows, benches, and circular metal planters with colourful flowers. It is sunny and the Sky Lobby is so drenched with light that you have difficulty opening your eyes. A short ride. When the doors open, you are in a typical office building: long, narrow, carpeted hallways, drop-ceilings with fluorescent lights. Doors lead to unexpectedly open spaces divided into cubicles. Windows surround the room on all sides the only separation from sky, air, and clouds. You get as close as you can to the pane and with trepidation you take in the astounding panorama, the landscape beyond, and the metropolis that lies beneath. Welcome to the World Trade Center.

Profile

From the beginning, the World Trade Center was laden with controversy and politics. The seeds for its construction were planted in the post-war era of the late 1940s, when the victorious country began to prepare for unprecedented economic growth. In the mid-1950s, David Rockefeller created the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association, which subsequently hired the firm Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill to develop a plan for a new Lower Manhattan. Heralded by Austin Tobin, the Port Authority director, the initiative picked up steam and in 1964, Seattle-born architect Minoru Yamasaki unveiled plans for the Twin Towers, estimated then at $525 million. Despite severe opposition by city planners, business owners, community



Left
World Trade Center
Information Panel
Photo: Christian Nguyen

Left
Signage of the
World Trade Center
Photo: Christian Nguyen

Below
World Trade Center logo
Photo: Christian Nguyen

groups, and politicians, on March 25, 1966, demolition began, displacing, among many others, "Radio Row", which consisted of 26 buildings that housed a concentration of electronic shops.[1] Two quintessential New York populations, small businesses and immigrants, were displaced as merchants and store owners had to relocate or go out of business, and immigrants from the eastern Mediterranean (who had made their home on Manhattan's lower west side, or "Little Syria", since the late 1800s) were moved to Brooklyn and New Jersey to give way to the "new" city.

In late 1970, tenants moved into the northern Tower One and, in January 1972, into Tower Two. When completed, the buildings, each at 110 stories, stood at 1,353 feet (412 metres) tall. Using a unique engineering technique, in which the structures of the buildings were also their skeletons, the custom-made steel grid of the towers contained windows that were designed to fit the shoulder width of an average human, thus limiting the sensation of vertigo. Over the years, the World Trade Center struggled for financial viability. Many of its spaces remained vacant and its concourse level remained unattractive to shoppers and city dwellers. Slowly, the neighbourhood began to change as more financial institutions moved to Lower Manhattan and services for workers and commuters began to take root. The World Trade Center underwent several face lifts. In the 1990s, a major effort was made to render its spaces and functions more corporate and to turn its lazy, terminal-like concourse into a first-class shopping mall. Owned and operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the towers were leased in the spring of 2001 to real-estate developer Larry Silverstein. A new future seemed destined for both the World Trade Center and the neighbourhood.

1 For a fascinating and in-depth history and analysis of the World Trade Center, see Eric Darton. *Divided We Stand* (Basic Books, 1999), as well as James Glanz and Eric Lipton. *City in the Sky* (Time Books, 2003).

Right
Invitation to the Open Studios

Below
The view from the World Trade Center
Photo: Christian Nguyen

Studios in the Sky

The studio program was launched by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC) as a temporary project in 1997. Following the vision of an artist who was seeking a window pitched high above New York to paint the city below, a group of "perceptual" painters were invited to work with the most inspiring views. Artists were provided unrestricted access to temporarily vacant, raw space in both towers, at various elevations. In the summer of 1998, I joined LMCC and, along with colleagues in the field, began to imagine this

project in a new light. Amazed and baffled by the site and its multiple sociopolitical layers, we recognised that it would be a fertile environment for artists whose work related to issues of institutional critique, architecture, modernity, supermodernity, globalisation, urbanism, and popular culture. In November 1998, the residency program welcomed a group of emerging and mid-career artists with diverse backgrounds and interests, working in a variety of media. In addition to perceptions and views, the program's emphasis had now evolved to encompass the artists' experience of the environment and the aesthetic dynamics created by the site. The program was conceived as an artists' colony: Participants shared raw communal space with limited dividing walls on the 91st floor of Tower One, and they were allowed access to different spaces throughout the building for special projects. Isolation, contemplation, dialogue, exchange, and collaboration were encouraged. In 1999 the residency expanded once again to include artists working with new media and technology.

Applicants from around the world proposed projects and a jury of art professionals, critics, artists, and curators selected approximately fifteen artists for each six-month cycle. Consideration regarded the quality of the work, the actual proposals, and the need for this particular opportunity. Occasionally, artists were invited individually to pursue special projects. Visits by critics, curators, art professionals, and students were organised to create a dynamic space of exchange, learning, and exposure. At the end of each cycle, studios were opened to the public and thousands of visitors were able to experience the eccentric, alternative, and daring qualities that characterised both the program and the city in which they were embedded.

This residency afforded artists the rare opportunity to experience the intense rhythm and environment of the financial district and produce work in situ in one of the world's most renowned landmarks; it also offered corporate employees the chance for informal, spontaneous engagement with cultural producers and insight into their creative process. The Open Studio events brought cultural producers, critics, collectors, writers, and a variety of influential

Left
Open Studios
Photo: Moukhtar Kocache

Below
Open Studios
Photo: Moukhtar Kocache

and esteemed individuals to a site they would most likely not have explored otherwise. LMCC partnered with many museums and arts organisations to expand audiences and to help weave this workspace program into the city's cultural fabric. In promoting the Twin Towers as a contemporary space worth experiencing for its cultural relevance, the program invariably helped thousands to revisit, recontextualise, and reconsider the World Trade Center anew. As a site loaded with symbolism and metaphorical meaning, the World Trade Center provided an unparalleled vantage point from which both artists and others examined and reflected on our ever-expanding and rapidly changing global landscape.

Lab

We have traditionally come to think of site-specific art as an artist's specific intervention in a particular locale in the landscape (Robert Smithson), the public realm (Richard Serra), and, to a lesser extent, the gallery (Mel Bochner), where site and its specificities lie at the centre of the work. Not all the artists in the program created work that engaged with the World Trade Center site; many chose the diverse opportunities the program provided to delve deeper into their work, which was often identity-based and personal. A few produced site-specific work in the original sense of the term; these were place-bound and to move them was to destroy them; but most artists experimented with the context the World Trade Center generated, where site and setting became both subject and stimulus.

Using a variety of means and media, the majority of artists engaged with the location, exploring and extracting its formal characteristics, its sociopolitical relations, its layered historic narratives, as well as the activities pursued within it. Drawn from a common site, their individual interpretations help to reposition our notion of "place" and demonstrate the emergence of a variety of artistic and theoretical operations, including site-determined, site-oriented, site-conscious, site-responsive, and site-related.[2]

Most people experienced the Twin Towers as structures that dominated the skyline, and in most instances, they were critiqued as architectural objects and cultural icons. Three distinct conceptual areas or frameworks have emerged from my thinking about this place and the works produced within it: supermodernity, vision, and the iconographic. These three notions

Open Studios
Photo: Moukhtar Kocache

2 Miwon Kwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2002)

combined to provide a broad matrix for understanding the research artists undertook while in residence, and for reading the works reproduced in this publication. Meanings begin to emerge from the confluence of the physical specificity of a site, the world that it inhabits, and the collective perceptions of it.

Supermodernity: The Internal

In contrast to its iconic presence on the landscape, the internal public spaces of the World Trade Center were not special or unique. Apart from their own peculiarities and specificities, they ultimately resembled spaces in which we spend an excessive amount of time: generic, soulless, transient spaces for commuting, communication, consumption, and commerce that have increasingly come to represent late capitalism. In *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Marc Augé defines such spaces as emblematic of supermodernity – a contemporary condition of general excess and acceleration with an overabundance of events, space, and time.[3] If anthropologists have defined "place" as a space where there is a strong and cumulative relationship between culture, society, and the individual, they have more recently begun to refer to a space that cannot be primarily defined in those terms as a "non-place". A considerable number of artists in the program seemed to plug in to certain types of anxiety and alienation generated by these spaces. Others worked at uncovering what lay beneath the surface; the hidden histories, political realities, and human conditions of the space.

Augé states that the contradiction and accelerated transformations of the contemporary world represented through supermodernity "offer a magnificent field for observation and, in the full sense of the term, an object of anthropological research".[4] Many of the artists in the program took on the roles of field researchers, social surveyors, and investigators. However, the artists' experiences of the World Trade Center were not transient; they were not simply passing through. They inhabited the space for an extended period of time and gained access to its many layers, which in turn allowed the place's contradictions to challenge their assumptions. It is obvious that the artists did not pursue authentic and exhaustive anthropological research. Rather they presented interpretative generalisations and subjective contributions about this place and its conditions.

Many of the artworks completed at the residency explored the social and psychological implications of the architecture. It is important to note the spaces of supermodernity; these non-places are not entirely or irrevocably alienating.

3 Marc Augé. *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (Verso, 1995)

4 Ibid, p. 30

Basement Memorial
Photo: Douglas Ross

There is much to be said about the human spirit and individuals' abilities to personalise their experiences and mark their differences in a seemingly oppressive and controlling system. Although forms of resistance were active throughout the seamless and finished areas of the buildings, they were mostly visible in its hidden and non-public spaces: the staircases where employees smoked, the freight elevators where smells and detritus were found, the loading docks where a docker's sharp tongue ruled, the walls of the basement levels where graffiti ranged from the base (sexual drawings) and the benign (a calculus assignment) to the personal (love declarations) and the political ("This is hell" and "Eat the rich"). Often, it is in such spaces that organic culture is present and meaning is released. Employees in the basement built their own private memorial in honour of their friends who perished in the 1993 bombing. This construction was a testimony to the natural possibilities that lie beneath the surface of non-places and the kind of rich human resistance that is possible to counter the flattening effects of supermodernity.

Vision: The External

A critical eye quickly reveals that landscape imagery does not simply denote nature's topography; it also represents how geography is shaped socially and culturally by human activity, as well as the ideology integral to the act of viewing. In the act of looking, there is a convergence of the physical specificity of a place, culture at large, and individual perception. In other words, we do not simply record landscapes; we interpret and envision them as a reflection of our own state of mind. The distance constitutional to observing a landscape from above induces a kind of melancholy. It was common for the artists-in-residence to endlessly stare out the WTC windows. From the towers, the act of looking became a gesture in itself and produced a very modern form of solitude. Some artists produced meditative projects, personal notions of how landscape has an ability to connect us with our core.

The dominant form of perception in a city is visual. Through looking we attempt to contend with the built environment. While it is true one cannot intimately experience a city without being in it — navigating it horizontally and being immersed in its civic and cultural matter — the perspective from above provides us with the critical opportunity to unravel our collective and cumulative ideologies, traditions, plans, and visions.

It is hard to imagine that views provided by skyscrapers did not eventually become part of their function. Aside from traditional associations of height to spiritual achievement, there is a connection between the information and knowledge that such heights imply — an authority of the view seems to emerge. The gaze has often been associated with power; not just the power to control one's surroundings and the destiny of others, but also the power to have a sense of one's domain and its limitations. However, in New York, "to look down is not always to look down on".[5] Rather, it is a more

intrinsic and collective experience of belonging to, and participating in, the metropolis. In *Delirious New York*, Rem Koolhaas finds a direct correlation between New Yorkers' geographical self-consciousness and the intense culture of congestion, between the creative energy and megalomaniacal goals of its citizenry.[6] He attributes this dynamic to a constant desire for spectacle, not only from inside the skyscraper looking out, but also from outside looking at.

Indeed, no other city in the world has been "looked at" and re-imaged more than New York. The mythic New York as it has been constructed in films and popular culture — Gotham adds an irrefutable ideological dimension whenever one attempts to come to grips with New York's skyline and its identity as a metropolis.[7]

The Iconographic

Although it existed within New York City, in many ways the World Trade Center, which prided itself as being a city unto itself, was separate from it.[8] It was an internal universe for a select few. For most who lived in (or visited) New York, it was an icon to be observed from afar, a symbol. As such, its potency as a sign was not only projected onto the world by those who conceived and built it, but its potency was imbued with aesthetic, political, and cultural significance from the outside. It is clear that the Twin Towers were built to convey a certain ideology. The developers aimed at making a physical imprint on the New York skyline a bold statement about American ingenuity and human possibility.

Believe
Tim Hailand
Courtesy the artist

The towers came to represent the United States' dominant position in the global economy and identified New York as the hub of that power. Their extreme height, their doubling, and their minimalist forms marked the city's psyche at the end of the twentieth century as we slowly became accustomed to the shadows they cast onto us. The towers became the monument to "the system"; they were a modern version of the ziggurat, the obelisk, the pyramid, or the citadel. Advertisers and Hollywood filmmakers harnessed these qualities and used the towers to illustrate Machiavellian political strength, humankind's victory over nature, utopian idealism, and dystopian vision. Critical representations of the Twin Towers began to emerge as artists and cultural producers tapped into the content and metaphors they exuded. Many artists in the residency program worked with the towers as signs, objects, and sometimes as surfaces.

5 Adam Gopnik. "A Walk on High Line", *The New Yorker* (May 21, 2001), p. 44

6 Rem Koolhaas. *Delirious New York* (Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 25

7 For more on this, see James Sanders. *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

8 The World Trade Center was marketed as a place where one could work, shop, transact, and access transportation without ever leaving its premises. It is interesting to note that the WTC had its own zip code, 10048.

Erasure

The attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001 were unprecedented in the histories of terrorism and architecture. The horror and scale of the event will forever remain unfathomable to me. While most people around the world experienced the events coldly and from a distance and their comprehension of the attacks was in a sense neutered and mediated via television screens and ideological prisms, to us who were there, the experience was utterly guttural and visceral. My friend Michael Richards was working in the studio on a new sculpture, part of his series on the Tuskegee airmen, African American WWII pilots who never received their heroes' welcome. He perished with thousands of others. The piece he was working on depicted a pilot cast in his likeness, riding burning debris and falling at great speed; man, metal, and elements merging into one. Other artists who were in the building managed to escape just minutes before the towers collapsed.

Past resident artists Julian Laverdiere and Paul Myoda conceived one of the most celebrated commemorative public art works following the attacks. The project, two powerful beams of light shining upwards from Ground Zero, used light to create matter, referencing Albert Speer's architecture. Its name changed three times to acknowledge the discrepancy that emerged between the loss of the towers and the individuals that perished within them. The project was first called "Phantom Towers", then "Towers of Light", and finally "A Tribute in Light". It was as if the towers were more significant than the thousands of lives that had abruptly been lost within them. To most people, the monumental erasure that occurred in the city was more real, more concrete than the disappearance of all those lives. It is intriguing that for culture at large, the towers eventually took centre stage, and in the months that followed 9/11, they were fetishised endlessly. Their destruction in material form furthered their iconographic and symbolic states; experts, philosophers, and media critics worldwide jumped at the task of analysing, deciphering, and critiquing them. In a strange way, the residency program and its objectives gained considerable legitimacy and weight following the attacks. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the World Trade Center's destruction was perceived not as a mere attack on an architectural space, but rather an attack on a value system with its ideological, political, and economic trappings. It was an attack on supermodernity, and the Twin Towers represented the quintessential archetype of that concept. In his book, Augé notes that non-places — airports, aircrafts, big stores, and railway stations — are particular targets for terror-

Phantom Towers
Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda, architects John Bennet and Gustavo Bonevardi of PROUN Space Studio, architect Richard Nash Gould, and lighting designer Paul Marantz

ism, not only because of the large number of people who frequent them but because "in a more or less confused way, those pursuing new socialisations and localisations can see non-places only as a negation of their ideal. The non-place is the opposite of utopia: It exists, and it does not contain organic society".[9]

In an article about peculiar personas and activities at the World Trade Center that appeared in *The New York Times* a few months before 9/11, I was quoted selectively to say as though admiringly: "We no longer build things like this".[10] What I had been talking about was that we no longer need to build structures like the Twin Towers, just like we no longer need to put a man on the moon; that the modernist era and state of mind which culminates in such endeavours is over. Following the attacks, I stumbled upon the Harper Collins *Atlas of World History*, printed in the early 90s, and hardly a politically correct edition. I noticed that each chapter was illustrated with an iconic photograph, a symbol of that civilisation. The first chapter featured Stonehenge and the last chapter, titled "20th Century and Modernity", featured a picture of the World Trade Center with the Statue of Liberty in the background. If the Twin Towers came to represent modernity and the American empire that brought them to us, clearly their destruction must beg the question: What will become of this empire, what comes next and in what form?

Conclusion

The World Trade Center's atmosphere gave artists many views to reflect on our contemporary landscape, our city, and our notions of America while instigating a critical and playful look at urbanism, corporate and consumer cultures, and global politics. Most importantly, though, this residency program gave us insight into artists' creative process and encapsulated the many methods and manners that artists use to record, examine, display, and reinterpret the world we live in.

I carry with me the memories of this great adventure and the many anecdotes and experiences that emerged from this program. I witnessed so many spectacular sunsets in our studios, feeling like Saint-Exupéry, when as on clear days, I swear I could see the curvature of the earth. I smile when I recall the wonderful exchanges with tenants and workers in the building and the many private and ephemeral moments that they held; like the time when standing in Tower One, I waved at someone staring out the window from Tower Two and they waved back at me.

Moukhtar Kocache is a curator, arts manager, and the former director of visual and media art at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, where he developed residency programs, public art projects, and exhibitions. He has worked with numerous galleries, museums, and non-profit organisations throughout Europe, the Middle East, and North America. He is currently the program officer for media, arts, and culture for the Middle East and North Africa at the Ford Foundation.

9 Augé, p. 111

10 Shaila Dewan. "Twin Peaks Make a Vertical World of Their Own", *The New York Times* (February 27, 2001)

An Apology for Curiosity: An Imaginary Conversation Between Two Editors at Cabinet Magazine

Sina Najafi

A: When we started *Cabinet* in 2000, there was a quote from Nietzsche that we discussed, which in part framed how we were thinking of the project as a whole. It's a passage from *The Genealogy of Morals* where Nietzsche complains that aesthetic theory is never framed from the perspective of the artist. It's instead based on the perspective of the spectator who is isolated from the conditions of making an artwork and so harbours a distance that Nietzsche condemns. Maybe it's worth quoting the text in full here:

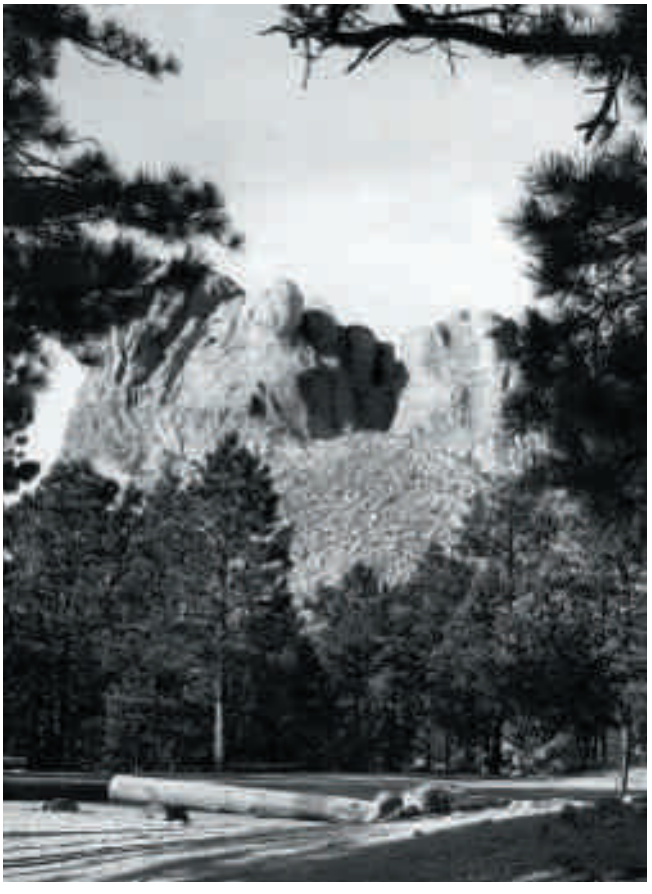
> Schopenhauer made use of the Kantian version of the aesthetic problem — although he certainly did not view it with Kantian eyes. Kant thought he was honouring art when amongst the predicates of beauty he emphasised and gave prominence to those which establish the honour of knowledge: impersonality and universality. This is not the place to inquire whether this was essentially a mistake; all I wish to underline is that Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the "spectator", and unconsciously introduced the "spectator" into the concept "beautiful". It would not have been so bad if this "spectator" had at least been sufficiently familiar to the philosophers of beauty — namely, as a great personal fact and experience, as an abundance of vivid aesthetic experiences, desires, surprises, and delights in the realm of the beautiful! But I fear that the reverse has always been the case; and so they have offered us, from the beginning, definitions in which, as in Kant's famous definition of the beautiful, a lack of any refined first-hand experience reposes in the shape of a fat worm of error. "This is beautiful", said Kant, "which gives us pleasure without interest". Without interest! Compare with this definition one framed by a genuine "spectator" and artist — Stendhal, who once called

the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*. At any rate he rejected and repudiated the one point about the aesthetic condition which Kant had stressed: *le désintéressement*. Who is right, Kant or Stendhal?[1]

I think *Cabinet* has always implicitly assumed that Stendhal's definition is of greater value than Kant's. One of the simple ways in which this has manifested itself is that we encourage artists to write, or people to write from a perspective of the artist, which simply means establishing a relationship to the abundance of experiences that the artwork calls for. This would presumably mean occupying the position of the maker or at least a good spectator. The bad spectator has a different relationship to the work; one of abstinence, distance, universality, impersonality, whereas the good spectator or artist would be engaged, involved, and open to all the fascinations that traditional art history and art criticism dispense with.

The artist's bookshelf today looks very different than it did 50 years ago. It might have books about heraldry, spider webs, lunar craters, dermatology, intellectual property law, or nurses' uniforms. In fact, almost anything can become a legitimate object of inquiry. And the artists that we've published in *Cabinet* are exemplary of this new diversity, the worldliness of artists today. For example, in issue seven, we published a text-and-image art project by Matthew Buckingham, which is composed of two parts. First, there is a poster; an image of Mount Rushmore as it might look 500,000 years in the future. The American empire has presumably fallen apart by then and the elements have eroded all the presidents' faces. All we are left with is a semi-recognisable, uncanny image of faded hubris. Alongside this image, Buckingham offers an elegant text outlining the fractious history of the Six Grandfathers, the Native American name for the mountains that house Mount Rushmore. About a spiritual location for Native Americans, the text provides a background for us to understand how contingent and contested Mount Rushmore is. Clearly, this is an artist's project

1 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (Vintage, 1969), pp. 103-104



The Six Grandfathers, Paha Sapa, in the Year 502,002 C.E.
Matthew Buckingham
Courtesy the artist and *Cabinet* magazine

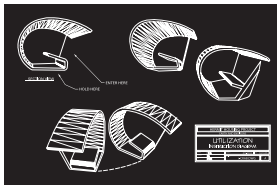


Photo and diagram for Elizabeth Demaray's proposed artificial shell for homeless hermit crabs unable to find natural abandoned shells
Courtesy the artist and *Cabinet* magazine

that can no longer be reduced to aesthetic concerns, or even some notion of the familiar and the strange resulting in the uncanny. It is all those things and also political in the most direct sense of the word. Or, for example, take Elizabeth DeMaray's project in issue twelve, proposing how to make artificial, and improved shells for homeless hermit crabs unable to find shells to take refuge in. With designs based on fascist architect Terragni's concepts, it turns out that crabs massively prefer the artificial shells to the natural ones. Again, here we have a set of fascinations that refuse to be neatly placed in one category. DeMaray's text could be published in a biology book, but it also comments on architecture, ill-fated environmental policies, and consumer culture. Its interests spill over too much to be addressed adequately by any of the traditional concerns of art criticism. Which leads us to ask, do Buckingham and DeMaray's projects need art criticism in order to fully exist? They openly offer committed and passionate perspectives. What would be the function of a supposedly distanced and neutral commentary on these projects?

B: In contrast, at *Cabinet* we have this idea that engaging artists in the writing process reduces the level of false impersonality, activating the kind of involvement which Nietzsche's argues make for a better sort of spectator.

A: This should be distinguished from nepotism, which is a lack of distance from the *mechanisms* of the art world, the social environment, and the market. The ability to sidestep nepotism is traditionally the promise of the independent critic, someone who is not a curator or an artist.

B: This is probably the place to bring up an interesting essay by Boris Groys called "Critical Reflections", about the history of the critic, in which he points out that the location of the critic has changed fundamentally since Baudelaire invented the genre in the 1840s.[2] The critic was originally on the side of the public, whom he was trying to educate (albeit sometimes contemptuously), and had no involvement with the artist. Groys claims that at some point the critic abandoned his affiliation with the public in order to befriend the artist. The problem was that the artist didn't want the critic as a friend. And so the critic has since been left homeless and in limbo, despised by the artists, and no longer trusted by the public he betrayed. The fact that the critic is marooned, of course, means that his or her texts are not read by anyone (except perhaps by other critics). The public doesn't care and

2 Boris Groys. "Critical Reflections", *Artforum* (October 1997)

nor does the artist.

A: Certainly artists are not so interested in these texts. I've seen artist friends flipping though art magazines; after looking at the ads to see who is exhibiting where, they flip to the back and read a couple of reviews of shows that colleagues have had. Those long articles in the middle, which the editors pored over, are usually left unread. This may be somewhat exaggerated, but as Adorno said of psychoanalysis, only the exaggerations are true.

Art magazines are typically made from the critic's perspective, relying on the notions of judging, evaluating, excluding, canon building, and myths such as "critical distance". It is true that artists' books still plod on, but at this point they are usually only available in the ghetto of super-specialised stores, either at exorbitant prices in editions of 50 or in cheap, photocopied editions that are stapled together. But why are art magazines no longer a primary venue for presenting ideas that artists will find interesting for their work? Who is the intended reader of these glossy publications that travel the world?

B: There is a surprising twist at the end of Groys's article, though. Groys finally reads the lack of audience as a potentially interesting way out of the conundrum of art criticism today, insofar as having no audience allows you to write the things that you want, to take risks, and to be daring. It allows you a space where you can abandon the usual safety nets. I don't think he imagines that art criticism is doing that, but he says that it at least has the potential.

A: I think this sense of being marooned is not an unfamiliar one for us at *Cabinet.* Some people think of the magazine as a kind of artists' project, but we're not artists, we're making a magazine. At the same time, we don't do the typical things that magazines or critical organs do; we don't review shows, we don't write about artists in that way. So in terms of the way people perceive the magazine, this is a strength. But it's also a weakness or a challenge for us, in terms of what — for lack of a better word — might be called branding the magazine, because it's in between these spheres.

B: We don't have a natural, pre-existing constituency. Since we do not poll our readers or ask them to humiliate themselves by confessing their salaries, their hobbies, and so on, it's always been hard for us to know who our readers are. But one place where

A map of Cabinetlandia, *Cabinet*'s 1/2 acre of desert land in New Mexico Readerland is composed of 6,700 parcels of land, each exactly the size of a copy of *Cabinet* and offered to readers for one penny each.
Courtesy *Cabinet* magazine

Above and right
Photos of Cabinet National Library, designed and built on Cabinetlandia in the summer of 2004 by *Cabinet* reader Matthew Passmore with help from three friends
Courtesy Matthew Passmore and *Cabinet* magazine

our diverse and motley audience became visible was when we did our New Mexico land project in issue ten. We purchased — sight unseen — half an acre of scrubland outside Deming, with the idea that we'd give part of it away to all our readers and then designate various other uses for the rest. We created a map of Cabinetlandia showing these functions and regions, and the issue came with a contract that readers could return to us with a penny in order to claim their parcel of land, which happened to be exactly the size of the magazine. On our online interactive map of Cabinetlandia, each of the more than 1,000 people who have claimed land can write a little bit about themselves. And it turns out our readers include dentists, rocket scientists, shoe designers, firework technicians, the head lawyer for *The New York Time*s, and supermarket managers, in addition to artists, cultural critics, academics, and historians. Somehow, a wide variety of people feel "hailed" by the magazine as its intended reader. And the project has now acquired a life of its own. Just last month, three somewhat insane readers went to New Mexico and spent a week on Cabinetlandia building the National Cabinet Library. Such a grand, extravagant, and inefficient project makes you hopeful that the desire for community is still alive in the US, even if it usually negated by the self-serving rhetoric of capitalism.

A: We've often discussed the idea of writing the readers into existence — again this is from Nietzsche — that we're working in a terrain which doesn't already exist in a prefabricated way, that you have to make it up as you go along. I think this is part of the appeal for all of us who work on the magazine. In our other lives, we all have access to or involvement in these other spheres. We make things or we write in more traditional critical environments or we teach. But the magazine is, quite intentionally, in between these things. I think this is part of its appeal.

B: We wander from place to

place, and the only firm criterion seems to be if what we're examining unravels a little of the world around us and shows our relationship to it. This is why I like the quote of Foucault's that we sometimes smuggle into our mission statement:

> Curiosity is a new vice that has been stigmatised in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity, futility. The word, however, pleases me. To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes "concern"; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervour to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential. I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means for it; the desire is there; the things to be known are infinite; the people who can employ themselves at this task exist. Why do we suffer? From too little: from channels that are too narrow, skimpy, quasi-monopolistic, insufficient. There is no point in adopting a protectionist attitude, to prevent "bad" information from invading and suffocating the "good". Rather, we must multiply the paths and the possibilities of coming and goings.[3]

In academia, this notion of curiosity that Foucault puts on the table is discouraged. It produces jacks-of-all-trade. And in English, we say: "Curiosity killed the cat". It's assumed that a serious intellectual would be driven by a logic that is internal to the discipline, one which keeps him or her within the bounds of the field.

A: This is part of the modernist approach, this establishment of disciplinary boundaries, and this sense that you can't write from the position of the generalist.

B: So if you're studying something and you can see these interesting routes that lead you out of the discipline, you're not encouraged to pursue them.

A: This would suggest a lack of focus, a lack of discipline.

B: I hadn't thought about the dual meaning of the word *discipline* before. *Discipline* is a very different register of word than, say, *happiness*, which is the word Stendhal introduces to the discussion. Even if you disagree with Stendhal, it makes for a stronger statement when compared to the idea of disinterestedness that Kant proposes. And once pleasure and interestedness are admitted, then curiosity becomes a kind of compass to guide you. This does not suggest selfishness or a lack of care for the world, however. On the contrary, it means caring about the world very much, as Foucault points out.

A: I don't think Stendhal means happiness in the simple sense of being jolly or joyous.

3 Michel Foucault. "The Masked Philosopher," *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961-1984*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, translated by Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (Semiotext(e), 1996), p. 305

B: There is a utopian dimension that also implies engagement. I think that in the US, the notion of happiness is always read through the anaemic pursuit of material goods, which allows some measure of autonomy and independence from others. Being happy almost means not caring for the world at large. But to get back to curiosity, I think part of the frustration of reading art essays is that artists are very curious about the world around them — they are "worldly", as it were — but the critical apparatus around their work doesn't allow for curiosity to be staged and appreciated.

A: So maybe this is an argument for a more belletristic writing, rather than a theory-based writing. In practice and theory, the belletristic approach allows you to bring in the stuff of the world, more so than you would be able to in any kind of theoretical framework. I think that's the balance we are always going for in the magazine, to know there is a theoretical framework for the kinds of discovery that goes on in the magazine, but not to have the magazine wear it on the sleeve, to let it emerge from the unexpected collision of things, from following the pathways you might not feel as free to explore in another context.

B: And that's why I think there should be room in every publication for failure — and there usually isn't, given the economic conditions of the industry, especially in the US. We ourselves have been scared of failure many times, but certain kinds of writing — the belletristic mode or the essay in the traditional sense — encourage more risks. The word *essay* etymologically goes back to the French for "a try", meaning you try out something. It's the same with the word *project*, which is related to *projectile*. You throw out something and you don't really know where it's going to land and you don't care where it's going to land; it's a project.

We've had more failures than we can possibly list, and some of them constitute the proudest moments of the magazine. In issue four, we launched the "Travelling Interview", an idea that we imagined would become a central statement of the magazine. The idea was simple: We'd pick someone, A, to do an interview with someone else, B. A would have carte blanche to choose B. In the next issue, B would choose another person, C, to interview, and so on. Every issue would have some content over which we'd have no control. We were very happy to pick Dean MacCannell, the founder of tourist studies, to kick off the series. He picked Lucy Lippard, and we published the interview in issue four. Lippard picked a second person for issue five, but this person broke her promise and the whole thing fell apart, perhaps in instructive ways. Another interesting failure was when we decided that we would interview a philosophy professor at West Point Military Academy, the college where America's future generals are trained. The interview turned out to be two parallel monologues, but even this failure of communication could be read symptomatically, if you wanted to be generous.

A: And the sense of an open project does not only exist within the context of single pieces, either. It also exists in the way we try to order the magazine, the way the content is combined with the various parts of a particular issue. It's the writer's responsibility to produce these effects within the piece, but it's our job to put them all together. It's like montage and the idea of producing a third state. That's a very chancy thing because we don't telegraph it. We don't try to create a frame that highlights these relationships, although our themes are meant to produce certain readings of how things are put together. But at the same time, I think there's a lot of room for individual impressions based on adjacencies and collisions and connections that are set up between pieces.

Sina Najafi is editor-in-chief of the New York-based magazine *Cabinet* and director of Immaterial Incorporated. After studying comparative literature at Princeton and Columbia, he worked as editor of the magazines *Index* in Stockholm and *Merge*, based in Stockholm and New York. Najafi recently curated "The Paper Sculpture Show" at New York's Sculpture Center and is currently at work on an exhibition devoted to the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, in collaboration with White Columns and the Queens Museum. At present, Najafi is also preparing an anthology on the cultural history of colours.

PERFORMANCES

The Room, Amal Kenawy
Looking for a Missing Employee, Rabih Mroué

The Room

Amal Kenawy

Amal Kenawy was born in Cairo in 1974. She studied fine art and has shown her paintings and performances at numerous exhibitions and festivals throughout Egypt. Since 1996, she has collaborated with her brother, fellow artist Abdel Ghani El Kenawy, on nine projects involving sculpture, installation, and video. In 2002, she created a video installation called *Frozen Memory* and in 2003, she presented *The Room* at Cairo's Ismalia International Festival for Documentary and Short Films, where it won a prize. It has since been shown at Dak'art 2004, Senegal's international biennial, and the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels.

The Room explores a room that hides behind the physical body. This room reflects larger, less obvious rooms that exist outside the body, such as society, its customs, and its conditioning. Kenawy approaches these rooms through the institution of marriage. In more ways than one, marriage is an arresting experience, the moment when a woman's personal and social situation changes. Although often considered the beginning of a new life, it is also an overwhelming event that dilutes a woman's world, altering even her face, of which nothing remains but a memory. In *The Room*, Kenawy represents these alterations in visceral fashion, as a lone performer on stage assessing the physical changes that marriage has impressed on her body.

"I might have a beating heart, a heart that functions regularly, but I cannot confirm that I am alive. Emotions inhabit this human frame and make of it a vessel, a form, a liminal space that lies between interior and exterior. I attempt to tailor my understanding, to perceive the human self within a wider context, to exist in the abstracted emotions fluctuating between memories and dreams, and to comprehend the reality we experience. That understanding approaches me and appears as my true self, as that which I can see clearly beyond the narrow confines of the body".

Produced by the Young Arab Theatre Fund

Looking For A Missing Employee

Rabih Mroué

Rabih Mroué was born in Beirut in 1967. He studied theatre and started producing his own projects in 1990. He has acted in, directed, and written several plays, performances, and videos which have been presented in Beirut and in many cities in Europe, among them: *L'Abat-Jour* (1990), *The Lift* (1993), *The Sand Prison* (1995), *Extension 19* (1997), *Come In Sir We Are Waiting For You Outside* (1998), *Three Posters* (2000), *Face A/Face B* (video, 2001), and *Biokhraphia* (2002).

Written and directed by
Rabih Mroué

Set design
Samar Maakaron
and Talal Shatila

Assistant director
Maya Zbib

Actor 1: Rabih Mroué
Actor 2: Hatem Imam

Interview recorded by
Mohamed Soueid and
Pamela Ghoneimeh

Produced by
Ashkal Alwan, November 2003

Duration
2 hours, 20 minutes

Looking for a Missing Employee is a play that investigates the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of R. S., an employee in the Ministry of Finance in Lebanon. The play stages the conflicted political, social, judicial, and security complications that accompanied the proceeding of the case, based on a daily register of what was made public in newspapers, including news reports, articles, analyses, interviews, commentaries, and pronouncements.

The Set

Two large screens are placed toward the back of the stage; they are of equal size, divided by a black void. One, screen 1, is placed to the left edge of the stage, and the other, screen 2, to the right. In the middle of the stage stands a wooden desk, rectangularly shaped, painted white. A wooden chair, painted white, is placed behind it, facing the audience. Behind the chair, in the middle of the stage, hangs a medium-sized screen at the level of the desk.

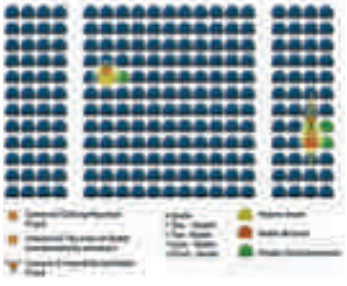
An image of a face without features flashes on the middle screen repeatedly, ceaselessly. The appearance and disappearance of the image are accompanied by a faint sound of breathing.

The projection of the flashing image begins before the performance and continues as the audience is allowed into the theatre and as spectators take their seats.

When the seats have been filled, the lights are turned off; the image continues flashing on the middle screen, while the two large screens on either side of the stage are drowned in darkness.

Actor 1 enters the theatre by the same route as the spectators. He is carrying notebooks pertaining to the performance and a remote control device. He walks toward the stage and with the remote control he stops the projection of the flashing image on the middle screen.

At the same instance, a light projector is directed on two seats in the audience. The first seat, where Actor 2 is seated, is to the right of the stage, among the front rows of the theatre. The second seat, where no one is sitting, is to the left of the stage, among the back rows.



In front of Actor 2 is a small table with a white board placed on top of it. Actor 2 puts coloured pens on the board, and an image of them is projected on screen 2.

Actor 1 walks toward the empty chair and sits. In front of him is a small table on which he lays his papers and notebooks, and an image of them appears on screen 1. On the middle screen, the image of Actor 1 appears, as if he were sitting on the chair in front of the desk, facing the audience.*

* A note of clarification: A camera is placed in front of Actor 1, to the level of his head, capturing his face and projecting his portrait on the middle screen throughout the performance. Actor 1 looks into the lens of the camera affixed in front of him. As he talks directly to the lens, his image on the middle screen appears as if he were looking straight into the eyes of the spectators, addressing them.

Actor 1: I have been collecting photographs of missing persons as they have appeared in newspapers since the year 1995. I cut them out and keep them in a special notebook. It was not clear to me why I was doing this, but I felt somehow intrigued by the issue. It confused me, occupied my mind, and I always found myself asking the same question: Where could these individuals disappear to, particularly in a country like Lebanon, so small, where it is said that everyone knows everyone else, where the least said on its society is that it is confessional, communitarian, tribal, and so on and so forth…

It seems that no matter how strongly control and authority are established in this country, or any country for that matter, there are always cracks and fissures into which individuals disappear. To them, they escape; in them, they elude, get lost, maybe even commit a crime. All this without leaving behind a single trace for us to find.

In all cases, the disappeared has a singular attribute that distinguishes him from everyone else. He is absent, absent with the promise to come back, meaning, he is present here and not present, present and not seen, he is not dead yet he is not alive… He catches tears welling up in eyes, but prevents them from overflowing to roll down his cheeks. Everything is suspended, postponed, in a state of waiting… Expectant… Waiting, and waiting for what? What could anyone wait for except a happy ending? But often, the end has been sad, gruesome, dragging in its trail crime and death. Death, death… Yes, death.

The death that interests me is the death of the idea not the death of the body. What I mean by death is that which relieves us from the pain of waiting, the idea of waiting, the idea of searching… That which will liberate us from "looking for the missing". That is a death that can only happen inside the head. A death premeditated, a death pursued with purpose.

Doesn't the law say that any person absented for more than four years is declared dead? These four years might as well be four hours or four centuries, four hundred centuries, or less, or more…

The missing is a manifestation of latency, whether purposefully or not, he represents the fertile grounds for narrative, fiction, imagination, storytelling…

Actor 1 opens his first notebook and shows it to the camera, commenting on its contents. The notebook contains newspaper cuttings of persons missing since the end of the Lebanese civil war, as well as reports relating the circumstances of the disappearance. The photograph and report appear on screen 1, in full view for the spectators.

As Actor 1 is going through the presentation of the performance, Actor 2 begins to write on the board placed in front of him. His text appears on the large screen:

This performance does not attempt to search for the truth, nor any other truth… Nor for the accused, nor the innocent… Nor for the criminal, nor the victim… It is not motivated to flatter anyone, nor does it intend to insult anyone… Between truth and lies there is a hair, and I am trying to pull that hair. A verse by al-Akhtal al-Saghir rings in my head:

يبكي ويضحك لا حزناً ولا فرحا
كعاشقٍ خطّ سطراً في الهوا ومحا…

"He cries, he laughs, not from sadness, nor from happiness / like a lover who has drawn a line in the air and then erased it".

The First Notebook

Actor 1: Disappearance of young man: Jean. Here is the picture of Ahmad. Ahmad went missing in Beirut. Pema worked as a house maid and ran away. Ali has a speech impediment; he can't speak intelligibly: he is missing without any identity document. Sami was in the Rawdah Café, he left and a day later he has not come home yet. Hala left without her young daughter. Artin, Su'ad, Farid… Huh! By the way, regarding that young man, the Sukleen Company has lost him. Faten, Suleiman, Jamil, and many, many others…

On screen 1, hand-drawn images attempt to reproduce the style of photographs of missing persons from newspapers.

Actor 1: And here there is supposed to be a picture of R.S. and a news piece about him, a fourth-level employee in the Ministry of Finance. In truth, R. S. was never the object of a report in the paper; like all the other people in the notebooks, his wife published a plea urging the government to reveal the fate of her husband. The plea was published in the newspapers in September 1996. It was a very small piece in the paper, and the next day, another small piece came out related to the disappearance of the employee. The third day, another news report came out, and on the fourth, fifth, sixth, and so on and so forth…

As for me, since I was already collecting reports on missing persons from newspapers, I began to follow this story as well. So I would cut out stories and stick everything I found in a special notebook. I cut and pasted, cut and pasted. Until I found myself with two complete notebooks, all on the case of this missing employee. These news reports I collected from the newspapers *as-Safir* and *an-Nahar.* In the year 2000, I read them and felt there was something incomplete, missing, with this story. That is why I resorted to the newspaper *ad-Diyar*. At the offices of *ad-Diyar*, I was allowed into their archives. I burrowed and searched for this missing employee and I found a lot. They photocopied everything I found. I cut and pasted it all into a third notebook. I cut and pasted, cut and pasted, and that's what I kept doing until I had this notebook filled with news of the missing employee, the same one.

After a while, I read the three notebooks and came to the decision that the time had come for me to tell the story so I could rid myself from its hold, kill it, and bring closure.

Looking for a missing employee.

Actor 1 opens his second book and begins displaying newspaper cuttings. He reads from some of them, summarises, comments, digresses, edits, hides, and improvises others when he feels he needs to.

He tries his best to be neutral, in other words, he tries not to impersonate the characters he is reading about or imitate their voices. He tries not to exert any physical effort..

The Second Notebook

Actor 1: The first report appeared in both *as-Safir* and *an-Nahar* under the title: "زوجة تناشد الرؤساء الثلاثة كشف مصير زوجها" Translation: "Wife Appeals to the Three Presidents to Reveal the Fate of Her Husband". As you can see I am not a certified translator, nor am I qualified, and I choose to speak in English, a language that you might understand, so we can skip the subtitles. This will allow me to look into your eyes, and you into mine.

Actor 1 looks into the lens, and in the projection on the middle screen, he appears to be staring at the audience.

Actor 1: Now we start again. Looking for a missing employee. The first report appeared in *as-Safir* and *an-Nahar* on Monday, September 30, 1996, a plea from the wife of a missing person appealing to the three principal chiefs to investigate the fate of her husband. She said: "To those who have rescued the country from all the tragedies that have befallen it, to those who have steered Lebanon on the road to liberation and reconstruction, to those instituting a state of law in lieu of the law of the jungle, rescue me from my tragic predicament that will not go away. In the afternoon of this past Wednesday, September 26, 1996, my husband disappeared, leaving behind a family. If the authorities have him, it is my right to know, and if any other faction disposes of him, it is also my right to know. His disappearance is the hardest of sufferings, an extreme case of disregard for human life and citizenship. All I ask for is my natural right to know, I beg of you to grant me that right". The next day, another article reads…

Actor 2 flips the board over to show its clean white face and begins following the details of events. He sketches a diagram in order to clarify complexities of the case:

In black, toward the top of the board, he draws a line to quantify the articles on the subject that have appeared in newspapers, along with the date of publication and size of the article.

In the middle of the board he draws the figures of the chief missing persons in the case.

In blue, he draws a broken line that tallies the amounts of money stolen that were rendered public.

In red, to the right of the board, he writes all the names of those implicated in the affair, noting the date of their arrest and release in the last case.

In green, toward the bottom of the board, he notes all the scandals in the state institutions.

In black, he notes the attributes of the chief missing person in the case.

In red, he draws lines extending from one end to the board to the other, in different directions, following the places and locales to which the chief missing person was claimed to have escaped.

In black, to the left edge of the board, he lists all the names of politicians that have commented directly or indirectly on the case.

Notes

Considering the length of the text and the legal complications pertaining to laws of printing and publishing which I cannot handle, I have decided to publish only the first part of this stage-play, despite the fact that the text is based, principally and directly, on news reports, articles, and cuttings collected from three newspapers, *as-Safir*, *an-Nahar,* and *ad-Diyar*, from September 1996 to February 2004.

There is no physical human presence on stage throughout the entire performance.

As the missing person in question is declared dead, his body discovered, and a few minutes before the end of the play, during a screening of a prerecorded interview with the sheikh — a relative of the missing person — Actor 1 swiftly, and without attracting anyone's notice, leaves his seat.

When the interview is finished, the image of Actor 1 appears again, this time replaced by a recording on videotape, suggesting to the audience that the actor has not left his place or the theatre. He summarises the events quickly, the room is lit announcing the end of the performance, and the image of Actor 1 is still staring at the audience while Actor 1 is nowhere in sight. The audience discovers the absence of Actor 1.

On screen 1, there are no traces of the notebooks, while screen 2 is busy with numbers, names, and diagrams. Actor 2 paints the board white so that it too becomes white like screen 1, yet remains soiled with traces of the story…

EXHIBITIONS

The Containment Re-Contained: A Xurban Collective Project, Guven Incirlioglu and Hakan Topal
Lasting Images, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
Zoorkhaneh, Peyman Hooshmandzadeh
Beirut Caoutchouc, Marwan Rechmaoui

The Containment Re-Contained: A Xurban Collective Project

Guven Incirlioglu and Hakan Topal

Guven Incirlioglu is an Istanbul-based artist who studied architecture, photography, and art theory. His many installations using photographs and computer technology have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout Turkey and the US. He is currently a faculty member in Yildiz Technical University's faculty of art and design in Istanbul.

Since 1997, Guven Incirlioglu and Hakan Topal have been involved in a number of web-based projects with an urban emphasis, including the Xurban Collective (www.xurban.net). With members spread across different geographic locations, Xurban poses a challenge to notions of site-specificity and globalisation. Its members explore what is desolate, neglected, ruined, or derelict in various urban environments. They juxtapose the contemporary and archaeological layers that exist in cities, extracting objects and photographic evidence for their artworks. As a collective, Xurban's purpose is to find alternatives to oppressive regimes and reveal a civil means of existence.

Hakan Topal was born in Turkey in 1972. He studied civil engineering as well as gender and women's studies at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. Now based in New York, he works as a freelance web designer and programmer. Since 2000, has been the new media coordinator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art. His artworks include photo-based essays, installations, performances and videos, all of which have been shown in solo shows and group exhibitions throughout Turkey.

In the recent past, almost all of the trucks transporting goods between Turkey and Iraq were equipped with special steel tanks (custom built to fit underneath the trucks) used for the off-the-books transportation of diesel fuel back into Turkey. Now outlawed and hence useless, these tanks lie sprawled along the highways as the remnants of a once-prosperous barter economy of sorts. The Xurban Collective conducted an archaeological field survey of these vessels and brought back a chosen one as an object of high plasticity and veneration.

Project Team: Guven Incirlioglu, Hakan Topal, Atif Akin, Mahir Yavuz, Akin Gulseven, Simge Goksoy, and Zeki Aslan

A major issue for Xurban is the flow of information over various networks, while the physical movement of its members is not been necessary. Along the globalised systems of transfer existing today, goods of high value (such as oil) have an overwhelmingly high priority, while people are restrained from international mobility as subjects of "containment". Xurban appropriated an object that traveled long distances, across borders, in times of customs control and containment.

The journey was a reflection on geography and the impoverished existence of people. Nevertheless, it was illuminated with empathy. For 21 days and over 7,000 kilometres in Turkey during July and August 2003, Xurban members tried to gain a sense of this chosen object's terrain, its contents, and the conditions acted upon the lives of the people around it. Xurban's travel itinerary, along with the photographic documentation it collected along the way, covered a number of Neolithic and archeological sites, following ancient trade routes.

The principal sign of containment was the checkpoint, where flows (of bodies, languages, and expressions in general) are controlled or made possible within a defined territory. If violence rages within this closed and contained system, it is opposed by armed force. Language is constrained, but every so often a product is left free for trade. The nature of the containment becomes a curfew, a self-imposed martial law. In the meantime, trade routes continue to facilitate the existence of checkpoints. The container itself is the object that can penetrate, while the contained is the thing restricted within an economy of inhibition.

The archaeological layering of political and circumstantial evidence blended together as the collective travelled east. Unlike the Western inheritance, unrecorded histories of fusion and reversal (oppression and resistance) require in situ observation and excavation. Instead of the structural differences characterising artistic production, Xurban concentrated on the observable side of this layering — how layers fuse together and whether observation is possible among members of the collective who live in the East and the West.

Lasting Images

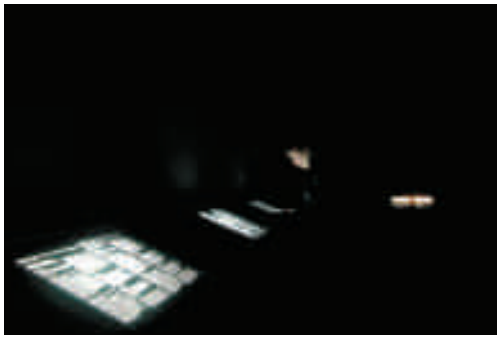
Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Both born in 1969 in Beirut, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige are filmmakers, artists, and university teachers. Together, they have created installations and videos such as *Wonder Beirut, Don't Walk*, and *The Circle of Confusion*. They have directed features such as *Al-Beyt al-Zaher (Around the Pink House)*, shorts such as *Ramad (Ashes)*, and documentaries such as *Khiam* and *Al-Film al-Mafkoud (The Lost Film)*. Amongst their publications are *Beyrouth: fictions urbaines*, *OK I'm Going to Show You My Work*, and *A State of Latency*. They've just finished their second feature, *A Perfect Day*.

"In March 2001, we stumbled across the archives, photographs, and films that once belonged to Khalil's uncle who was kidnapped during the Lebanese civil war on August 19, 1985. He is still officially reported missing today. Among his things we found one 'latent' film, a Super-8 as yet undeveloped. It had been stored in a yellow bag for fifteen years, surviving the ravages of the war and a fire that devastated the house where it was kept. We considered for a long time whether or not to send the film to be developed, whether or not to take the risk that these latent images might reveal nothing. After much hesitation, we decided to send it to the lab.

"The film came out veiled and white, with a barely noticeable presence that vanished immediately from the screen. We searched within the layers of the film itself, attempting to create the reappearance of a presence, of lasting images.

"The installation consists of six luminous cases presented in a dark room. Each seems to be floating in space. These cases are accompanied by a Dolby 5.1 surround-sound system, playing various sources such as broadcast noise. The individual sounds can hardly be identified or located, but together they produce articulations of meaning, suggesting a presence and creating a virtual centre in the space. One of the six cases presents a continuous loop of the three-minute Super-8 film. A second case features images of the envelope in which it was found. The four other cases show texts: Chapter 3 of the Lebanese law on missing persons, pertaining to those kidnapped during the war; an excerpt from Jalal Toufic's book *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, 2nd ed.; a quote by Nadar from *When I was a Photographer*; and a text inspired by an article by Philippe DuBois entitled 'The Body and its Phantoms', which was published in *La recherche photographique, no. 1*".



Title Three: Provisions relating to missing persons

Article 33: The missing person is the person whose whereabouts are unknown and of whom no one knows whether he is dead or alive.

Article 38: Should the missing person reappear within a period of five years as of the judgment declaring his death, he shall recover all his estate from his heirs as well as any inherited shares or bequest remaining in abeyance.

When the ghost is banished or repressed, people turn into zombies, act insouciant in the weirdest and most alarming of situations. Henry Miller: "Once you have given up the ghost, everything follows with dead certainty, even in the midst of chaos" (the opening lines of Tropic of Capricorn).

Therefore, according to Balzac, each body in nature is composed of a series of spectres, layered and endlessly superimposed, a folio of infinitesimal pellicles. And so, every daguerian operation, every photograph, comes to surprise, detach, and retain, by peeling away and onto itself, one layer of the objectified body.

In 1870, the physician Vernois, a member of the Society of Forensic Medicine of Paris, undertakes a series of researches seeking to prove that the retina of assassinated people does retain an image of what they saw last, namely the image of their assassin. According to the physician, it is then possible to obtain the image of the assassin by simply developing the retina.

Zoorkhaneh

Peyman Hooshmandzadeh

Peyman Hooshmandzadeh was born in 1969 in Tehran. He studied photography and has worked as an editor and photojournalist for nearly fifteen different publications. He is a founding member of the 135 Photos agency in Iran, and he has penned two short story collections: *Two Dots* and *When Sundays Meet.* Hooshmandzadeh has shown his work in some twenty group exhibitions worldwide.

These photographs explore the space of the *zoorkhaneh*, a traditional gymnasium where men gather for sport, exercise, and leisure time. Each *zoorkhaneh* has four *iwans*, one *cupola*, and two *gouds*, or gymnasium pits. Once a fixture of Iran's social and cultural landscape, it is an institution that has recently become almost obsolete.

"In the beginning, my mother was determined to send me to a school for gifted children. But later she would pray, 'Please lord, let him pass his diploma and I won't ask for anything else!' I finally received my diploma in 1987, without failing any exams, only to be told: 'A diploma? Scratch a dog and he will shed two of them!'

"Then my mother began talking about university. At first, she wouldn't hear of anything less prestigious than medicine or electronics. But gradually she took pity on me and settled for art. I took the entrance exam thirteen times before finally getting into the Open University in 1993. When my name was published in the list of successful university entrants, my mother serenaded me with 'I saw a man who looked like a ray of sunshine'.

"I resisted taking up my place until 2000, but then the 'ray of sunshine' took the better of me. Previously, I had managed to publish a piece here, a text there. But afterward I was saddled with donkey work in various snooze newspapers.

"My mother is grateful even for this. Rosary in hand, she blesses her daughter-in-law with the words, 'Thank you for tolerating my son!'"

Beirut Caoutchouc

Marwan Rechmaoui

Marwan Rechmaoui was born in Lebanon in 1964 and studied fine art in the United States before returning to Beirut, where he now lives and works. As an artist, Rechmaoui has participated in a number of exhibitions and projects, including Contemporary Arab Representations and the 1998 Cairo Biennial. He has also shown his work throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Australia, in exhibition venues and public spaces.

Modern Lebanon is a small republic, composed of two rugged mountain ranges that run parallel to the Mediterranean coastline. The western range slopes toward the sea, at times in sharp declines, fracturing the coast into small and isolated fragments. The city of Beirut falls within the largest of these parts, splitting the otherwise thin coastal strip in two.


BEYROUTH CAOUTCHOUC
بيروت كاوتشوك

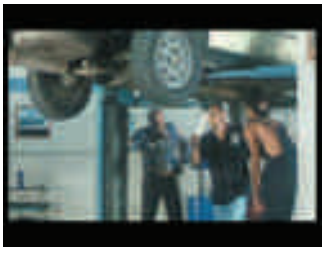
FILM

Chronicle of a Disappearance, Elia Suleiman
Of Conversations, Elia Suleiman

Chronicle of a Disappearance

Elia Suleiman

Elia Suleiman was born in Nazareth in 1960. After twelve years in New York, he moved to Jerusalem, where he initiated the department of film and media studies at Birzeit University. He has directed several short films and videos, including *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, *Homage by Assassination*, *The Arab Dream*, and *Cyber Palestine*. His first feature, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, won the award for best first feature film at the 1996 Venice Film Festival. His second, *Divine Intervention*, won the Jury Prize at Cannes in 2002. Suleiman is a recipient of the Rockefeller Award.



An investigation of the liminal zone between narrative, history, and autobiography, *Chronicle of Disappearance* transgresses the boundaries of many genres. After living in New York City for many years, Elia Suleiman returns to Palestine to film the quotidian routine of Palestinians living in Israel and under the occupation in the West Bank, after the launching of the peace process. Lucidly structured with a scathing critical lens, Suleiman weaves a chronicle made of vignettes, anecdotes, and conversations charged with humour. He casts himself as the principal protagonist and moves from character to spectator, mediator to narrator. At the same time, the film shifts among documentary and fiction, reminiscence and present.

35mm film, 88 minutes, 1996

Of Conversations

Of Beginnings

It is pointless to look for a starting point. My films are never driven to embody a central idea or theme. Beginnings are born from myriad small moments, recorded in notebooks, sometimes as briefly as in a single line. The moments can themselves be a mere sound.

Notebooks accompany me wherever I go; at some point they become a hefty pile, from which I extract a structure. The collection of these moments does not mean that my films are factually autobiographical. If I am the witness of these moments and the author of the notes, my "self" is present only in so far as the trace of a being in the world. The scribbles transform into tableaux; they are worked and reworked, gradually thickening with layers until they have enough gravity to stand on their own, until the image holds together and can unravel into a scene. And scenes follow one another. This is the process I can consciously describe. There is also a voyage; it is never predetermined. The script guides this voyage, and eventually I find myself engaged in a poetic montage. Only then does a direction begin to emerge, and I discern where I am going, how the wander will end. The only constraint that binds me is the fact that feature films have to fit within an approximate length of time, so I know I cannot go on forever. Therein a script emerges.

To believe there is an overall, all encompassing narrative requires an act of faith; accidents constitute narrative. In my case, narrative is in effect my "self" as I am the guide to the voyage in the process of crafting the film. From within the larger disorder, I manufacture an order by shifting elements and putting them together. There is an instance however, where if you throw elements in a "space" without gravity, they will fall into a certain order. I have faith in that order. I think it was Antonioni who once said that if there were no constraints binding time spent in

an editing room, a lifetime could be spent on a single film. It is true in my case. Things need to be carefully gauged but according to what principle is hard to determine, in other words, whether what works for me will work for the spectator is not science. Rather, it's a poetic sense of temporality, in addition to the magic of communication. Images, or visual compositions, that are not inscribed in temporality are also produced from within this sense of poetics; their manufacture and gradual cumulative layering reaches an instance of open-ended achievement, where its conclusion is in itself another departure. The departure is a new lease on the signifying power of that image, it endows it with a life of its own, allows it to play by itself. The presence of the spectator is the predicate for the film to be continually remade.

The original impetus behind drawing an image is not at all intent, rather it is a fascination, a desire. Something in the reality I witness and live sparkles. The ninja sequence in *Divine Intervention*, for instance, was born from a moment during the first intifada. I was driving on a highway in Tel Aviv and saw a huge billboard advertising a shooting range with the slogan "Come to Shoot" and an image of a Palestinian clad in a kaffiyeh. I took a picture of that billboard, horrified that human figures were used to represent targets. The idea came to me later that a real human being would step out of the image as in a parody — ie, that the real person should appear and that the shooters would be euphoric about the fact that the figure has become real, and that in the manner of a parody they would shoot at the human being after their training was completed.

Later still, the image took on another dimension. I began to add more layers, with humour in the second degree, and symbolism. In the making of that particular sequence I had yet a third motivation, entirely unrelated the story of the film. I wanted to challenge the distinctions that compartmentalise the film production industry, between what auteur filmmakers are expected to do, and what "commercial" filmmakers are expected to do, and the fact that complicated actions sequences are prohibited to auteur filmmakers. The financial considerations are such that an action sequence would consume 25 percent of the total budget of an auteur film, and the production cannot handle the equation because it would never "earn its money back". It is a risk producers never want to take. With commercial blockbusters, it's a simple formula for entertainment, and the action sequence always appears in the trailer, "coming soon to a theatre near you". I wanted to make a film that had weight and I wanted to transfer that weight in the action sequence. That's why I always say I wanted to "Bressonize" *The Matrix*, make it work and make it entertain.

Of Absence and Presence

I don't really cast myself, I get

cast. There is a difference. In the initial drafts of the script I put the initials E. S. In the notebooks I use the first-person singular all the time because I am not a character in my real life. As the work evolves and a structure begins to emerge, it is the script that either draws me in or not. At least that has been my experience so far, I cannot say for sure what the next film will do or whether I will consciously cast myself. It may happen because all the notes I have so far have me wandering in streets, hotels, and airports. Moreover, there are a lot of things that I want to tell and for which I want to use my body in front of the camera as a mediator.

The representation of myself that appears on the screen is certainly one manifestation of my plural "selves". It is entirely an extension and identification of who I am, projected on the screen. I am not a protagonist; I have no psychology. I am translucent, a present absence and an absent presence, depending on where you stand. I am a see-through body, an element in the frame, a reference to the director, a hint, a guide that does not instruct what should be seen, but what can be seen.

My cinema seems to remain contemplative, action remains outside the image. There was an attempt in *Divine Intervention* for my character, or my presence, to take action, but it stayed in the realm of stasis, because all the acts the character performs unravelled in the realm of fantasy. In retrospect, I surmise that choosing the contemplative allows for action to take place outside the image, because the instant action is enacted is when a linear mode comes into play, and the film begins to dictate what must be. The contemplative mode provides the possibility for interrogation, for diffusing the frame into several clusters and several points. With *Divine Intervention* there was a summon for action because in the realm of real life, when the overall circumstances become intense, when daily life is interrupted, when an outside force causes a rupture, no one can sustain a mode of contemplation. In the realm of cinema, however, it is possible to circuit aggression and create another realm, from dream and fantasy where another sort of action happens, a sort of counteraction.

Of Fiction and Fantasy

Doing what is not expected is never intentional. Desire carries within it the promise of the unexpected. Otherwise how else would one secure the terrain for love to not tire, expire, or lose interest, except by constantly attempting to renew oneself to surprise one's lover, to escape the predicament of the predictable, the expected? In some respect, the spectator is a lover waiting to be seduced. And that may not seem always the rapport I seek to establish with the spectator. Rather, my driving motive is: How can I bring a surprise, something new? And more specifically, how can I tell anew the story of Palestine? Or how

can I cast it in a new frame?

This is what brings the stories of my film into a "here and now", a present tense. On the other hand, going against the grain of the predictable, or the expected, allows, structurally, for a profound questioning of reality. Are my films not a reality? The fact that they have been made makes them a reality. The general presumption claims that documentary filmmakers represent reality, but is whatever remains outside their frame deemed a reality, or not reality? Are they not denying it to their spectator? What is it in the choices they make that determines their film is not fiction? These questions are among the reasons why I do not make documentary films. I could not stake the claim that I am able to envision a reality, because the process of envisioning is the first step in a departure from reality. I could write an essay, but I could never make a documentary film, because ultimately the composition, montage, and manufacture of a film are potentialities of a reality, perceived by the filmmaker, that attempt to capture that reality.

One could also ask the question: What is fantasy? In real life, when one is driving and dreaming, or thinking about things that need to be done, is not the totality of the experience a reality? Is the act of dreaming or thinking not integral to the reality of the experience? These distinctions are purposefully blurred in my films. In *Divine Intervention*, the sequence of Nazareth is consciously structured to parallel — in terms of time — the subsequent sequences. The yellow slips stuck to the wall are the elements that mediate the blurring. By the middle of the film, they suggest a flashback, shortly thereafter, they read "Father dies" and "Father gets sick", suggesting they are the script. Are they the script? Are they the memory? Is that father real? The seamless to and fro between both realms is also obvious in the sequence with the explosion of the tank, clearly a fantasy, which merges without rupture or interruption into the narrative, as the protagonist is next seen in the hospital. There are no "dreamy blurry" effects to indicate the end of the fantasy and return to reality. When imagined fantasy is made to merge with the invented reality and to intermingle in the same realm, the spectator is granted the freedom to decide for her/himself what is real and what is not. And that remains an open question that cannot be answered.

Of Silence

If language is not spoken by characters, it does not mean there is no dialogue in the films. There is, in fact, a lot of dialogue; movement speaks with sound and movement speaks with images. This movement that enters and exits, all of that I consider dialogue. There are two reasons for "silence" in my cinema. The first has to do with my own biography as a filmmaker in that I never really studied cinema. I did not come to the métier with a conventional academic

training. It occurs to me sometimes that because of that, and as I have only just started making films, my approach has been like the pioneers of filmmaking, namely, a minimalist approach where I try to say things using images, as with silent films.

I am also fascinated by how silence can speak, or leave space to be filled, blank strophes to be spelled out, defined and redefined. Dialogues underscore the linear construction of a frame and take attention away from contemplation and meditation on an image. Especially when dealing with the layered composition of a tableau, a profound, undivided concentration allows for multiple readings. It is not a question of strategy; it is more a sensibility, especially, for instance, when the sequence depicts a moment close to death, the image has more force without dialogue. Silence is more respectful of death. In silence, death seems less frightening, it indicates an acceptance.

In Hollywood films, characters babble on endlessly, to the point where dialogue, mostly meaningless, produces a pollution of language and creates enough noise to confuse the possibility for contemplation, or coming to terms with change. I usually become confused when a film has non-stop dialogue — preaching — tirelessly pointing to a linear construction. It is profoundly a political choice, because the spectator is not allowed to stake their claim on the image they see. The spectator is bombarded with what is being said, one is told what is being told, asked only to accept what is being told. An elitist posture. Not only has the spectator paid the price of a ticket, they are also forced to hear what is being said rather than engage in a coproduction, a collaborative participation, an experience of sharing — and of dreaming.

Of Love, War, Humour, and Irony

Love and war, the most intense and charged contradictions. Love is poetic, undefined. Love cannot be assigned an identity card. Love cannot be controlled. Like poetry, it leaks, it has no material form with defined outlines and edges. Love threatens regimes of control, soldiers, people who build checkpoints. Love frightens because it cannot be confined, locked in a ghetto. In *Divine Intervention*, I specifically cast this intense contrast, two people who love each other at a checkpoint. There emerges the power for transgression, the potentiality and possibility to actually allow a crossing. That's exactly what happens in the film. The two characters may not be physically able to do it at every instance, but they have the force to dream it as a possibility, empowered by love. Love is a poetic realm that cannot be determined or located. A human being's bones can be broken, his body can be thrown in a cell, but his heart can never be captured entirely.

I don't know if the underpinning of humour is invariably despair. I can say that irony and humour are too often found in

the homeland of tragedy and despair. Humour has the ability to unburden — as in the "unbearable lightness of being" — a heavy load weighing on certain circumstances in life, endured or witnessed.

But this is not the exclusive function of humour, nor are such circumstances its exclusive residence. Humour comes in genres, but I am not vested in categorising them. It comes in colours as well, black. The fiercest humour is born in ghettos. Be they urban ghettos or concentration camps, they are fundamentally enclosures, where humour brings a cathartic relief from stasis. Barriers, barbed wire, whether real or illusory, are broken with humour; self-mockery allows a space for the fantasy of transgression to be dreamed. When one is in stasis, when one feels it is impossible to break the barbed wire, one can sit and laugh at it. Laughing at it might just break it.

I have had a deep yearning to stab Santa Claus for a long time. I hate Santa Claus, and I say it plainly. I hate Christmas. It depresses me. Nazareth, my hometown, has a syrupy sweet biblical and holy aura that I hate, because in reality, it is a dump, a ghetto, a provisional city, plagued with unemployment, frustration to unimaginable extent. Children are not naïve, and Santa Claus comes back year after year, and it's so nauseating. The candy he brings is awful, cheap, and miserable. He is in fact an image manufactured and reproduced from a world that has not come to terms with itself. The Santa Claus from America and Western countries that appears with so much "happiness" and "gifts" for children is particularly enraging. I just wanted to stab the guy and chase him out of Nazareth. I chose that vulgar image, using specifically a kitchen knife to make it funnier. As you notice I did not kill him, and he escapes — just in case I would be prosecuted for murder, I thought.

Of Chronicling

Most titles hold a note of humour in the second degree. With *Divine Intervention* there is also poetic license, because the film is not about anything holy, but something I consider close to being holy, namely, imagination. The idea being that in the most cloistered of all spaces in the world, imagination is freedom, hope, and the potentiality of something happening. The prisoner imagines his freedom; the person who cannot cross a checkpoint imagines he can. And that is the "divine intervention". And if you consider the film director in the film who has lost his father and his lover has deserted him, he imagines her returning to him, victoriously, a heroine. She is his imagined feminine, aesthetic, violent otherness. That is exactly his own "divine intervention". These are two scales to the title, there are most probably a few more.

Chronicle of Love and Pain is the second title. I added it because I was not content with just one title on its own, and

that second title has its own story. My first feature, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, was also a document, a chronicle, and this second feature is in some ways its sequel. The first was about a specific time bracket, the "silence before the storm", and the second is about another, "all things broken loose". The chronicle continues, the tableau is a chronicle. I enjoy the tension between the notion of "divine intervention" and the notion of "chronicle", because conventionally one is not supposed to be able to chronicle a divine intervention, or chronicle imagination. The film attests to the opposite, that imagination can be chronicled. The second title complements the first; it grounds it; it chronicles it.

Of the Political

If cinema is not political, that means life is not political, and whatever we do to improve it, the hope we have in making it more bearable, is not political. Politics and cinema, political cinema and *cinéma politique,* are all one and the same. They are as intimately knit as are form and content. Form and content are politics and cinema. The way we wake up, talk and walk, eat and exercise, all that constitutes our everyday is political. The way we love is political.

When people ask if a film is political, they don't realise that the film embodies the political. I am often asked if my next film — and it is always about the next film — will be political, or if it will be about Palestine, the presumption being that if a film is about Palestine then, de facto, it will be political. I am a filmmaker because I am politicised, and Palestine is not the exclusive residence of the political. And politics in Palestine are not about how cinema is manufactured, nothing in the technique is itself political. It's the construction of the image. It's not in the camera, it's everywhere else.

Of Lineage and Authenticity

I do not feel a particular filiation with Arab cinema, it has not influenced my approach to filmmaking, and this is not said in jest with provocation. Rather I have been influenced by Asian cinema, particularly cinema from Japan and Taiwan. I absorbed it like a sponge, ironically because it felt so Arab. The first time I watched a film by Hou Hsiao-Hsein I remember being amazed by how Palestinian the film's characters seemed to be.

Take Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, for example, or his other films, men and women seem to be gazing at scapes, alienated by the sight of modernity. Their calm, contemplative passivity, faint smile, these were all things I watched my uncle do sitting in his garden. It just seemed very familiar to me. I saw reflections of myself in the visual sensibility of frames, the body language and mannerisms of protagonists.

Just recently someone observed there was something about the character who comes out of his house to throw away a bag of garbage in *Divine Intervention*, something about the

way he walks, that is reminiscent of the way characters in Tsai Ming Lian's films walk. I have seen these films only a couple of years ago. I could not have been inspired by Tsai, but it is uncannily true. The manner in which the actor drags himself to perform the act is exactly the manner in which I had asked him to drag himself.

Perhaps I am in the same realm of poetics as these filmmakers. I can consciously claim to have been influenced by literature, more Western than Arab. I can think of one or two Arab authors that I have absorbed completely, and there was nothing specific to their "Arabness" that attracted me to them. I can name one, Adonis, a Syrian poet whose critical purview fascinated me from the second I started reading him. The attraction was precisely that he was not "authentic", in the negative sense of the term.

VIDEO

This Day, Akram Zaatari
Here and Perhaps Elsewhere, Lamia Joreige
Mounzer, Samar Kanafani
Chic Point, Sharif Waked
Letters to Francine, Fouad Elkoury
The Lost Film, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
Untitled for Several Reasons, Roy Samaha
Paradox: A Story About Phobia, Rita Ibrahim
Mon Corps Vivant, Mon Corps Mort, Ghassan Salhab
Saving Face, Jalal Toufic
Pilot for an Egyptian Air Hostess Soap Opera, Sherif El Azma

This Day

Akram Zaatari

Akram Zaatari was born in Saida in 1966. An artist and curator who lives and works in Beirut, he has made more than 30 videos, including *In This House, How I Love You*, *Her + Him Van Leo*, *Crazy for You*, and *All is Well on the Border*. A cofounder of the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, Zaatari has produced a number of exhibitions and publications, including *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices*, cocurated with Lisa le Feuvre, *Mapping Sitting*, in collaboration with Walid Raad, and *The Vehicle*.

The outcome of a three-year long research on the circulation of images in the Middle East, *This Day* is at once an extroverted voyage in geography and an introverted voyage in the recording of everyday. It uses video and photography to communicate the states of mobility and closure in the contemporary divided geography of the region. It starts in the desert, where presumably Arab civilisation(s) originate, and unfolds into a reconstruction of desert landscapes. *This Day* is conceived as a laboratory for the study and production of images.

"There's a camel in the picture and there's a broken down jeep, white? I mean beige? Light coloured jeep. And the jeep is broken down, clearly broken down because it's being looked into. So the picture is a perfect picture of the East meeting the West because the Western jeep breaks down in the desert and taking photographs of the desert and of the camels is looking at an Eastern object with a Western optic — a camera.

"Grandpa's [J. Jabbur's] relationship with the camel, Syria, the desert, and everything comes from something personal. It comes from a very happy childhood or one that anyway… he talked about his childhood devoid of any negative content to it. So he has this relation to the place he comes from. He had also affection for it, then an intellectual interest. I think these two overlap, even aesthetically, if you live in al-Qaryatayn, you develop an aesthetic sense for the desert". —Norma Jabbur

Desert Panorama
Akram Zaatari, 2002
Based on Manoug and Jibrail Jabbur's photographs of the Syrian Desert in the 1950s
AIF/Norma Jabbur

Left
Photographs by Manoug and J. Jabbur in the 1950s in Al-Qaryatayn, Syria

Top to bottom
Women with jars
From right: Jana, Kawthar, Aafifeh, and Najibeh
From right: Jana, Kawthar, Aafifeh, Najibeh, and Hoda

AIF/Norma Jabbur

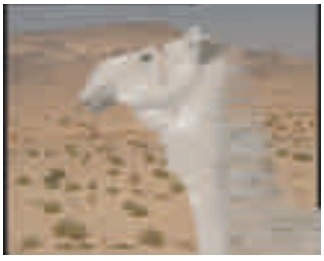
"The atmosphere of early morning in a rural place; it is suggestive and it's pleasant. It's a picture, again of less vaguely defined women, but it's the same ones, carrying… You could see one tin, and you can see one jug, and there's a third figure that you can barely see. It's taken underneath trees so the effect of leaves showing through is very intense and the lighting…rather than the four figures, being very well lit with sharp shadows; they are already in the shadow of the tree. And the light streams in long lateral streams across the picture. And…again the good thing about the photograph is that the eye first seems to narrow in, at a point about one third over, but then it looks out again.

"Either clay jars or tin over their heads, carrying water presumably. They are dressed in long typical dresses, with headdress as well. Their hair is covered. Their shadows are perfect. And it is early morning. Though perfectly symmetrical in the middle of the photograph, because there is not a central figure, the photograph is not monotonous.

"And she is carrying a tin jar but she's unable to carry it on her head she has it posed on the shoulder with her two arms; one arm curling around her to her right, and the other one across her shoulders. Therefore, and I think her head is slightly tilted. She looks added on to the photo." —Norma Jabbur

Opposite page
Perfect Timing
Akram Zaatari, 2003

Below
This Day
Akram Zaatari, 2003
video stills



"Camels. The second thing he photographed most. He likes them. They are a good symbol of the environment in which they come. They represent a whole atmosphere and environment. The desert meant a great deal to him. As the camel, the whole context of Arab civilisation, which is the desert, was what he studied, what he was interested in. He believes that Arabic culture stems from Bedouin life, and that they are linked to understanding something that is vanishing; the sources of this culture. You have a living lens to look at what the sources of such a culture is. And they are what remain of the Bedouins, and their way of life, their way of speaking, their way of their morals are the basis of Arab civilisation, and there is something whole and noble to them. It was important to document them. He saw them as vanishing."

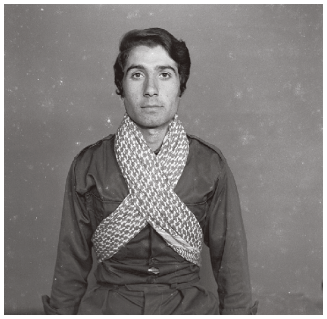
"Two of my three favourite paintings of his is a portrait of a moment in the life of a Bedouin in the desert: a moment of standing still, but a moment of his life. The other one is a small painting only of the head of a camel, and I call it portrait of a camel. I think he probably liked the creature. I think if you live with creatures you miss them afterwards. You do.

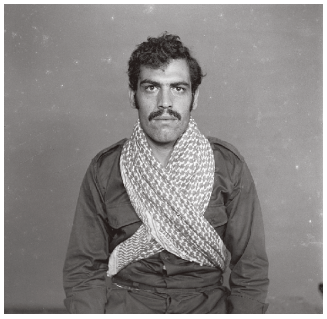
"The photograph of my grandmother with aunt Hoda, who is also Jibrail's niece, wearing the clothes of the Shaalan's wife. They look like they're children trying on clothes. Because if you don't know them you have no idea that that's not what it is, that they are actually trying somebody's clothes and their smiles are radiant".

—Norma Jabbur

Opposite page
Beirut 2003
Akram Zaatari, 2003

Photographs by Hashem El Madani
Pro-Palestinian and Syrian militants
Saida, Lebanon, 1970
AIF





In 1970, Palestinian resistants grew their beards in mourning for Gamal Abdel Nasser. They went to get photographed in Studio Hashem El Madani in Saida.

Keep the weapons at hand,
Ready, ready
If the whole world goes to sleep
I wake up,
With my weapon at hand
My weapon at hand
Ready day and night
Calling: Rebels!
Our enemy is perfidious
Keep the weapons at hand
Ready

—"Khalli e Selah Sahi", lyrics written by Ahmad Shafik Kamel, music composed by Kamal al-Tawil

The dark days of fear
Increased my faith
Every time it rains bombs
Lebanon stays steadfast.

—Ronza

We are unafraid to die in
The roaring sound of war
We are unafraid to die in
The roaring sound of war
Unafraid, unafraid
If after our deaths
Unafraid, unafraid
If after our deaths
Someone will hold the arms
Continue the struggle
Someone will hold the arms
Continue the struggle
And carry the revolution
To victory
If we find others,
Then we will never die

—"Ma Hamma", lyrics written by Che Guevara, music composed by Walid Gholmieh

Militant songs played frequently on the radio during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

In 1982, while watching an air battle over south Lebanon, I saw an Israeli plane launching a missile onto a Syrian one, which exploded immediately. That was the most spectacular scene I saw in my life.

Since then, I have tried to photograph attacking planes when possible, and to audio-record sounds that relate to war and its news.

Three Syrian MiG fighters entered the sky over the Bekaa, where they fought for five minutes against the Israeli air forces over Dahr al-Baidar. Two Syrian strikers crashed; the first over Aammik in the Bekaa and the second over Daraoun valley in Kesrouane. Two pilots parachuted to safety. A few moments ago, the Israeli chief of staff, Rafael Etan, confirmed the loss of the two Syrian MiG 23s following an air battle with the attacking Israeli air force.

Radio news report, Radio Monte Carlo, 1981

Saida, June 6, 1982
Akram Zaatari, 2003

Opposite page
Book of All Accounts 01
Akram Zaatari, 2003

Below
Samples of subversive images distributed for mobilisation purposes by email during the Israeli invasion of the West Bank, 2000-2002

June 6, 1982

Today air strikes continued heavily, starting at 6:15am on Darb al-Sim. At noon, the Israelis advanced on the Lebanese border. Air raids continued to target the Palestinian presence in the South and Chouf areas, with one raid every five minutes. Nabatieh was bombed at a rate of fifteen shells per minute. In the afternoon, Saida was bombed from the sea, [and] so were all the coastal roads; air strikes hit Awaly, Charhabil, and the Zahrani oil refinery.

January 28, 1983

This morning, we heard that the French actor, Louis de Funès, had died.

February 18, 1983

We woke up today with cloudy weather that soon transformed into a storm. Wind speeds reached 90km/hour, which kept the Lebanese delegation in Netanya. The glass broke in our classroom due to the wind. I watched my third film of the year, *Serpico*.

June 18, 1983

Today we bought a Mercedes 250, 1977 model.

Translated from the personal notebooks of Akram Zaatari, 1982 and 1983

October 24, 2000

The helicopter felt like it was in the room with me and I felt like I was in a game of Russian roulette. What is their next target? Will Dheisheh be on their list tonight? Will our house get bombed? Should I get out of bed and try to hide somewhere? Where?

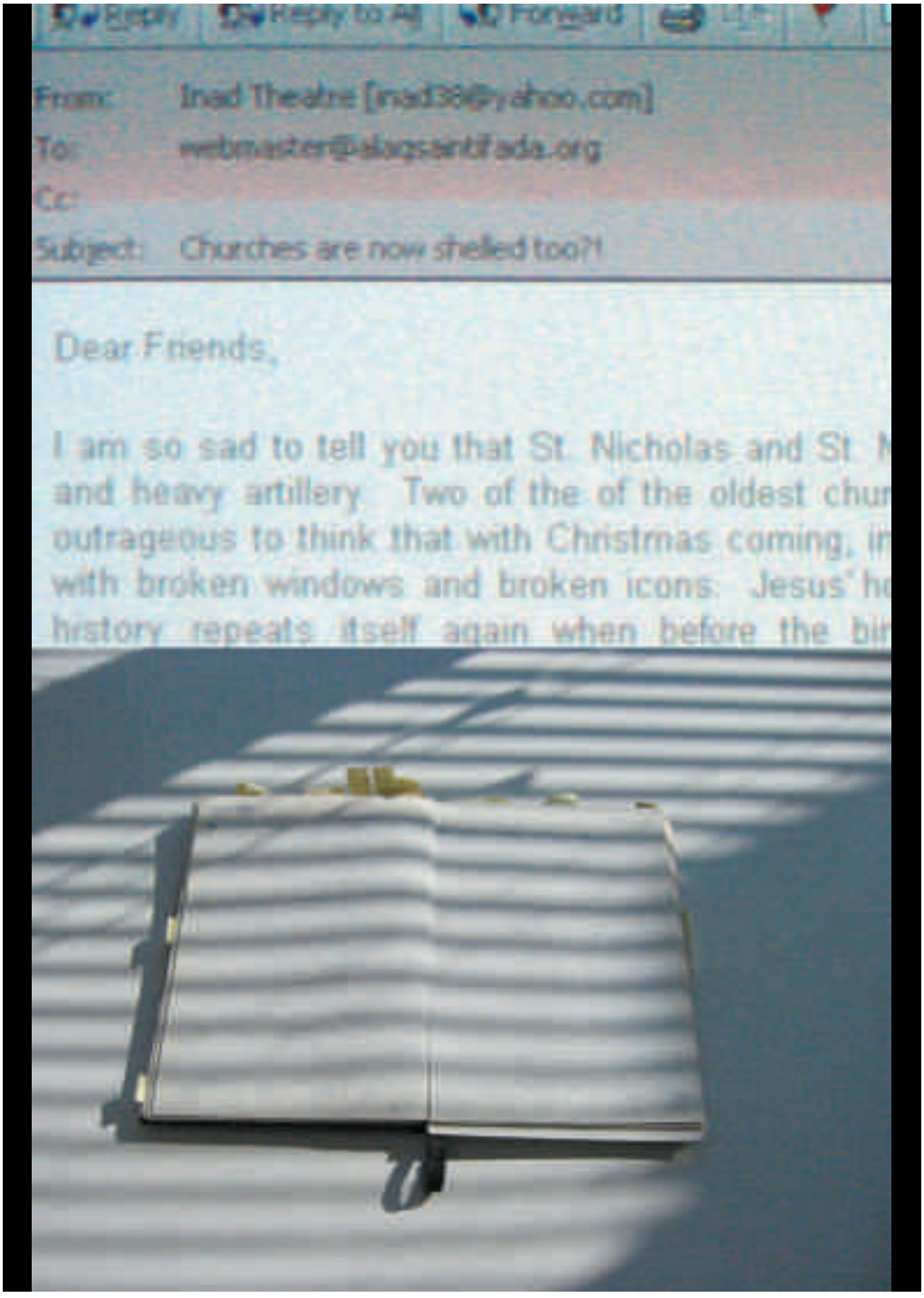
Type my fingers, type. Hurt my heart, hurt. Throw up, my stomach, throw up. Throb my head, throb, and get used to it. This is only the beginning of more days and more weeks to come.

I cheat just now. I can't stand keeping my ears away from the sound the helicopters and I get tired of running to the window whenever I hear a sound. So I put the headphones on and play some gay music really loud. Oh hello gay music! I've missed you. You resemble a normality I no longer know. You resemble what real life should be like but is no more.

Count, Muna, always count. Count so you don't forget how to add the numbers. Soon you may not know what one plus one adds up to. Count and throw up. Throw up and count. Lose weight. Lose your mind too, if you dare. This is just the beginning. They haven't killed enough of us already. Hello. Are you there? This is Palestine calling…

P-A-L-E-S-T-I-N-E

Excerpt from the daily accounts of Mona Hamzeh Muhaissen, distributed during the Israeli invasion of the West Bank, 2000-2002, by Inad Theatre, Beit Jala, through the Free Palestine Network


Reply
Reply to All
Forward
From: Inad Theatre [inad36@yahoo.com]
To: webmaster@stopsantifada.org
Cc:
Subject: Churches are now shelled too?!
Dear Friends,
I am so sad to tell you that St. Nicholas and St
and heavy artillery. Two of the of the oldest chur
outrageous to think that with Christmas coming, in
with broken windows and broken icons. Jesus' ho
history repeats itself again when before the bir

Opposite page
Book of All Accounts 02
Akram Zaatari, 2003

Left
Desert Panorama 02
Akram Zaatari, 2003

On her twentieth birthday,
A girl from the
Land of Palestine
Stood meditating her present
In a land covered with mud
Behind barbed wire,
She has lived for days, years
Between the dark past
And a heart-buried nostalgia.
Behind barbed wire,
She has lived for days, years
Between the dark past
And a buried nostalgia.
I challenge you, my future.
I will return back home
Wipe my mother's tears
Put a knife in her hand
Bring life back to her brother
Put a gun around his shoulder
To grant him the shining hope
My hope that one day we'll return
To the beloved land, my land
To the dewy roses, to the flowers
Force doesn't terrorise me anymore
For I have it in my own hands.

—"Fi Zikra Al Milad Al Ishrin",
lyrics written by Zayn Elabidin Fouad,
music composed by Sheik Imam

Video, 86 minutes, 2003

Commissioned by Musée Nicéphore Niépce (France)

Here and Perhaps Elsewhere

Lamia Joreige

Born in 1972 in Beirut, Lamia Joreige studied painting and cinema at the Rhode Island School of Design. In addition to the video installations *Objects of War*, *Objects of War 2*, *Untitled 1997-2003*, *Replay*, and *The Displacement,* she made the short fiction video *Replay (bis)* and *Houna Wa Roubbama Hounak (Here and Perhaps Elsewhere)*, a feature documentary on the subject of the disappeared during the Lebanese war. She also wrote a short story on the same subject, *Ici et peut-être ailleurs*, published in 2003. Her most recent publication is *Time and the Other.*

Sodeco passage
Photo: *as-Safir*

"My grandfather. Not here. In Karantina, he disappeared. Some say he was killed. Some say he was left for dead. His name was Mustafa Ahmad Daou".

"If you want precise names, you should go directly to the source, to the militias. They each have lists. But unfortunately, three-quarters of those kidnapped…no one ever admitted having them. So as not to admit their crime, they committed an even bigger one. They liquidated them, killed them".

"His name was Mustafa Daou. He took down the mill wall, and helped about 70 percent of the Arabs from Maslakh to escape. But finally, they caught him. His mother was on his shoulders. He was carrying his mother on his shoulders. They made him put down his mother. They let his wife, the children, and his mother go. And they took him".

Ring checkpoint
Photo: *as-Safir*

"Here, in this neighbourhood, I don't know of anyone who was kidnapped."

"Would you know in other places?"

"In other places, I know… Yes. But here, I don't know of anyone".

"Where, for example?"

"I know in Dora, for instance. I know in the mountains. I know my son, killed during the troubles… They slaughtered my son. These things I know. He was at my sister's. They slaughtered him. They drew him out and slaughtered him".

"Who? Why?"

"I don't know. I don't know. We smuggled him out of here, from Achrafieh. We sent him up to Beit Mellet in Akkar. And they killed him up there. Because he was from a different sect. That's the whole story".

"How old was he?"

"Fifteen years old".

"I don't remember. I don't remember. I forget a lot".

"How could there be no kidnappings? There were so many. Here in Achrafieh so much happened…so much…so much. But as to remember who kidnapped who!"

"I have a brother who was kidnapped. He was about 23 years old".

"He was a civilian?"

"Yes, a civilian… Look, there wasn't anyone who wasn't involved in a militia. But he was a civilian, not a soldier or such".

"You and your family still have hope?"

"Of course we have hope. No one ever gives up. Look at Imam Moussa Sadr, how long has he been missing? People still have hope. Who ever gives up? Our hope is with God, not with the kidnappers. What God wants will happen".

"There are many stories, but I can't tell you here".

"You're scared of them being recorded?"

"No. I'm not scared of them being recorded. But there's no reason to record them, because they may be true or they may not. You see? Because they won't give you the answer you're looking for".

"He was kidnapped during the troubles, during the Israeli attack. His family name is…his father's name is Abbas. His house is over there, at the bridge. One of my brothers went missing as well. It was during the days of the resistance. He was in the resistance".

"What's this about?"

"She's asking if you have anyone who went missing".

"No…no".

"I told her I lost my brother".

"What channel are you filming this for? Television? Television?"

"No, it's an independent film".

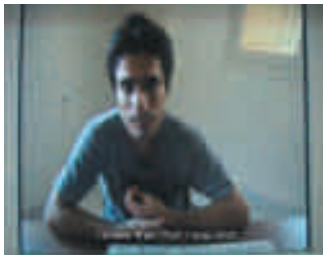
"Ah. Okay. When are you going to broadcast it? It's not going to be broadcast on TV? Ah. Okay".

Video, 54 minutes, 2003

Mounzer

Samar Kanafani

Samar Kanafani was born in Lebanon in 1976 and studied sociology and anthropology at the American University of Beirut, graduating in 1998. She worked for three years as a reporter for *The Daily Star* before returning to AUB to pursue a master's degree in anthropology. She has since been involved in a number of social and developmental research projects. Her first video work was entitled *Street-Play*.



Seen through a webcam, a man from occupied Palestine, a casualty of Israeli attacks, reveals his scars and recounts the episodes that caused them.

Mounzer is a fictitious interview with a constructed character dealing with issues inspired by real conversations with former Palestinian combatants. In this work, the simulation of a webcam image is used as a means to generate a discourse on the relationship between the damaged male body and male subjectivity. The aim is to critique hegemonic notions of masculinity, whereby dominant discourses associate or equate physical and/or emotional injury with veritable cultural emasculation. Masculinity here is taken to imply the constellation of meanings that a given culture attributes to biological males, which in turn shapes their experiences and self-presentations as men.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has inspired the production of an abundance of images. It is also the site where notions of masculinity (both Palestinian and Israeli) are shaped and renegotiated. In hegemonic terms, war is an ideal site for the making of men: Emerging from death-threatening perils, they wear their scars like medals of honour and tuck their pain under their skin.

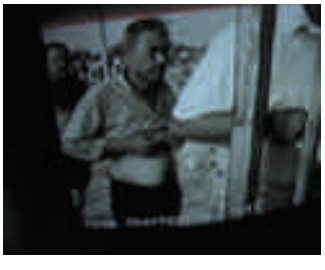
Some of the central issues that are tackled in this work are: What happens to the men who do not emerge as victors and who do not manage to infiltrate the vast body of images of "manly man" or "war heroes"? How do we create redeeming images about the physical and emotional defeats of these men? What kind of masculinity is constructed in the process of such image making?

Video, 13 minutes, 2003

Chic Point

Sharif Waked

Born in Nazareth in 1964, Sharif Waked is an artist and designer who studied philosophy and fine art at Haifa University. He has participated in the Venice Biennial, Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria, "Construction in Process" in Lodz, Poland, and the Art Focus 3 International Biennial of Contemporary Art in West Jerusalem. His mixed-media installations include *This Is How It Was, This Is How It Happened* (1999) and *Jericho First* (2001).



Chic Point is a seven-minute film that ponders, imagines, and interrogates "fashion for Israeli checkpoints". Set to the backdrop of a heavy rhythmic beat, men model one design after another in an exploration of the form and content of torso-bearing clothing. Zippers, woven nets, hoods, and buttons provide for the unifying style of exposed flesh. Body parts — such as the lower back, chest, abdomen — peek through holes, gaps, and splits that are sewn, torn, or built into readymade silk and cotton T-shirts, robes, and shirts. Raw materials and standard items of clothing are transformed into pieces that follow normative fashion trends while calling them into question at the same time.

As the sight and sound of the catwalk presentation close, the viewer is transported to the West Bank and Gaza. A series of video stills, taken between 2000 and 2003, display Palestinian men as they approach profoundly violent but very mundane Israeli checkpoints. One man after another lifts his shirt, robe, or jacket. Some kneel topless, others naked, with guns poised at their skin. Men in Jenin, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Kalandiya, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus, and Gaza City are shown wrangling with the Israeli state's security apparatus.

Chic Point brings the catwalk and checkpoint together in a reflection on politics, power, aesthetics, the body, humiliation, surveillance, and nudity. The world of high fashion is an interlocutor for the stark reality of imposed closure. The body of the Palestinian, understood by the Israeli state as a dangerous weapon, is brought to the viewers' eyes in the flesh. *Chic Point* reveals the loaded politics of the gaze, documenting thousands of daily moments in which Palestinians are forced to denude themselves in the face of interrogations and humiliations while trying to move through an intricate and constantly expanding network of Israeli checkpoints.

Video, 7 minutes, 2003

Letters to Francine

Fouad Elkoury

Born in 1952 to Lebanese parents in Paris, Fouad Elkoury studied architecture in London and then turned to photography, where among other projects, he captured the details of daily life in Lebanon during the civil war. Elkoury produced a number of landmark books, including *Beyrouth aller-retour*, *Beirut City Centre*, and *Palestine, l'envers du miroir*. In 2003, he returned to Beirut and now focuses his efforts on filmmaking.

"As a photographer for the Rapho agency, I went to Istanbul. I knew nothing about Turkey. I wanted to escape from Paris and its daily routine, learn another language, work, and discover a new world between West and East. The trip was set as a two-year challenge. Unexpectedly, it changed the course of my life. This film is the story of that journey but also of an illness I was diagnosed with at the end of my trip.

"*Letters to Francine* begins with the diagnosis: 'We have the results of your biopsy, the biopsy is positive, this means that you have cancer'. Straight away, one is thrust into the reality of severe illness. Through the interrogations and torments of sickness, one senses the patient is alone.

"There are two framing devices at work. There is the journey itself, the black-and-white pictures I took in Turkey, and my voice-over, extracted from emails I sent to a friend (Francine, hence the title), telling my impressions, relating situations I experienced during my stay, eventually revealing suffering and my inability to carry on. Then there is life in Paris. Capturing conversations among friends during my illness, the second framework consists of scenes shot from home (buildings seen through the window, a tree) and the hospital (the room at night, the ceiling of a corridor).

"The two frameworks weave together and overlap. The scenes seem disconnected at first, the voices detached and superficial. Then images blend together and the voice-over runs parallel to the conversations among friends, fusing a story more telling than the journey itself.

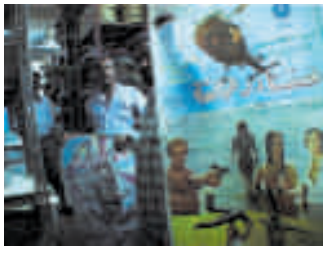
"*Letters to Francine* ends with the enigmatic yet hopeful line: 'Listen, you are going to recover and we'll take care of the house in Var; you'll have a convalescence place. I want a red-stone house'".

Video, 43 minutes, 2002

The Lost Film

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Both born in 1969 in Beirut, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige are filmmakers, artists, and university teachers. Together, they have created installations and videos such as *Wonder Beirut, Don't Walk*, and *The Circle of Confusion*. They have directed features such as *Al-Beyt al-Zaher (Around the Pink House)*, shorts such as *Ramad (Ashes)*, and documentaries such as *Khiam* and *Al-Film al-Mafkoud (The Lost Film)*. Amongst their publications are *Beyrouth: fictions urbaines*, *OK I'm Going to Show You My Work*, and *A State of Latency*. They've just finished their second feature, *A Perfect Day*.



"It all began with an email, on the day marking the tenth anniversary of the reunification between North and South Yemen, telling us that a copy of our first feature film has disappeared in Yemen, on a bus going from Aden to Sana'a.

"The disappearance raised a question: Who in Yemen was interested enough in our first feature film to steal a copy weighing 35 kilograms?

"A year later, we decided to go to Yemen to trace the lost film. During our investigation, we followed and recorded the trail of the film — the cinemas where it had been shown, the film archive where it had been deposited, the bus route on which it had travelled from Aden to Sana'a.

"After that trip, we were unable to return to Yemen again. We continued the search, basing our work on location scouting and the few images we collected. With these documents, we tried to palliate for absences and the lack of images, we resorted to evocation, slow motion, black pictures.

"Neither an analysis of Yemen nor an accurate attempt for knowing and interpreting, *The Lost Film* is a wandering, a search for ourselves, a search for the way we, as filmmakers in the here and now, relate to our history and to this part of the world. It articulates the notion of the anecdotal, in the etymological sense of the word, as 'the thing kept secret'. As Hannah Arendt describes them, anecdotes are 'moments of truth… moments [that] arise unexpectedly like oases in the desert'".

Video, 42 minutes, 2003

Untitled for Several Reasons

Roy Samaha

Born in Beirut in 1978, Roy Samaha received his bachelor's degree in fine art from the University of the Holy Spirit in Kaslik. He is currently working on his master's degree in film studies, specialising in video art. The video works he has made over the past three years include *Super Attractive Black Device*, *Apartment Stories*, *Motion at Dawn*, and *Pharmakon*.

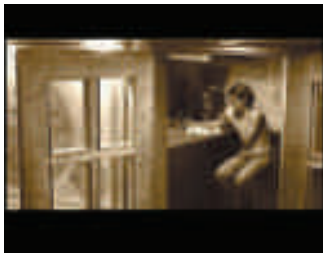
Serge Daney said: "It is not because the remote-control pad generalised zapping that it invented it". In this flux, the attempt was to reinvent the use of zapping for it to be an aesthetic medium and not only another control tool. That is when and how one learns to insert the intention between a news broadcast and a pornographic film.

Video, 11 minutes, 2003

Paradox: A Story about Phobia

Rita Ibrahim

With a background in theatre and short film, Rita Ibrahim studied directing and acting at the Institute of Fine Art at the Lebanese American University in Beirut. After graduating in 2002, she trained and worked for two television stations: Future Television and Zen TV. Ibrahim is currently writing and directing short films.



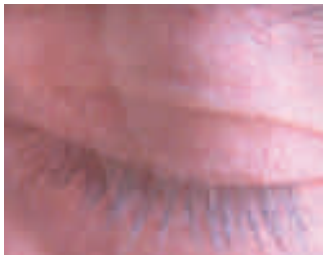
Though she decided to live alone, the cocoon she created could not protect her solitude. The shadow of a male was invading her small universe. Was he a creation of her phobias? Or was he the product of the weight of her solitude? Did he want to increase her fears? Disturb her calmness? Or was he just offering his companionship? Duality or duel?

Video, 21 minutes, 2002

Mon Corps Vivant, Mon Corps Mort

Ghassan Salhab

Ghassan Salhab was born in Dakar in 1958. He moved from Senegal to Lebanon in 1970, and then to France in 1975. He currently lives in Beirut. Salhab has directed two feature films, *Beyrouth fantôme* and *Terra Incognita*, as well as numerous videos, including *La rose de personne*, *De la seduction* (with Nisrin Khodr), *Baalbeck* (with Mohamed Soueid and Akram Zaatari), and *Narcisse perdu*. He is finishing his third feature film.



Body: The main part of a plant of animal body distinguished from limbs and head; the main, central, or principal part; the nave of a church; the bed or box of a vehicle on or in which the load is placed; the organised physical substance of an animal or plant either living or dead; a corpse; a human being; a person; a body of water, celestial body, body of evidence; legislative body; text; force; fullness of flavour; resonance of musical tone.

Video, 15 minutes, 2003

Saving Face

Jalal Toufic

Jalal Toufic is the author of *Distracted* (1991; 2nd ed., 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), and *'Âshûrâ': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005). His videos and mixed-media works have been presented internationally, in such venues as Artists Space in New York, Witte de With in Rotterdam, and Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona. He has taught in Amsterdam, California, and Lebanon (www.jalaltoufic.com).

Were all the candidates' faces posted on the walls of Lebanon during the parliamentary campaign of 2000 waiting for the results of the elections? No. As faces, they were waiting to be saved. Far better than any surgical face-lift or digital retouching, it was the accretions of posters and photographs over each other that produced the most effective face-lift, and that proved a successful face-saver for all concerned. We have in these resultant recombinant posters one of the sites where Lebanese culture in specific, and Arabic culture in general, mired in an organic view of the body, in an organic body, exposes itself to inorganic bodies.

Video, 8 minutes, 2003

Pilot for an Egyptian Air Hostess Soap Opera

Sherif El Azma

Sherif El Azma graduated from the United Kingdom's Surrey Institute of Art and Design in 1997. In the same year, he made the short film *Satellite City*. Since then, Azma has made a number of videos, including *Donia: Amar*, *Interview with a Housewife*, *Prayer to the Sound of Dogs*, and *Fish Soup*.

Using the code of the soap opera, *Pilot for an Egyptian Air Hostess Soap Opera* is a drama that attempts to depict the lives of young Egyptian women within their modern work environments. The focus is on the process of initiation, the everyday life of a small group of young women working as airline attendants. Using true accounts and diaries from real-life attendants, the video merges the objective and subjective realms of young women in Egypt today, while it deconstructs the soap opera format, blurring the lines between protagonists and antagonists. The video attempts to engage with the various connotations of "women's liberation" with its contradictory implications in modern day Egypt.

Video, 58 minutes, 2003

Produced by the Young Arab Theatre Fund and Ashkal Alwan

The Journal of Illustrated Niceties

Author: Samer Abou Hawach

Translated from Arabic: Masha Refka
Editor: Ghenwa Hayek
Copy editor: Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
Artwork and design: Maya Chami and Ali Cherri
Publication director: Lina Saneh
Produced by: The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan, in conjunction with the second edition of the Home Works Forum

Globalization and the Manufacture of Transient Events

Author: Bilal Khbeiz

Translated from Arabic: Walid Sadek
Editor: Ghenwa Hayek
Copy editor: Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
Artwork and design: Maya Chami and Ali Cherri
Publication director: Lina Saneh
Produced by: The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan, in conjunction with the second edition of the Home Works Forum

The Eyeless Map

Author: Tony Chakar

Editor: Ghenwa Hayek, Mona Abou Rayyan ,Warren Singh-Bartlett
Copy editor: Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
Artwork and design: Maya Chami and Ali Cherri
Publication director: Lina Saneh
Produced by: The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan, in conjunction with the second edition of the Home Works Forum

جورنال اللطائف المصّورة

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ترجمه عن العربية: ماشا رفقة
تدقيق: محمد حمدان
تصميم وتنفيذ: مايا الشامي و علي شري
مدير المطبوعات: لينا صانع
الناشر: الجمعية اللبنانية للفنون التشكيلية، أشكال ألوان، ضمن إطار منتدى «أشغال داخلية ٢»

العولمة وصناعة الأحداث الزائلة

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تصميم وتنفيذ: مايا الشامي و علي شري
مدير المطبوعات: لينا صانع
الناشر: الجمعية اللبنانية للفنون التشكيلية، أشكال ألوان، ضمن إطار منتدى «أشغال داخلية ٢»

الخريطة المتحسسة

تأليف طوني شكر

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تحرير: بلال خبيز
تدقيق: محمد حمدان
تصميم وتنفيذ: مايا الشامي و علي شري
مدير المطبوعات: لينا صانع
الناشر: الجمعية اللبنانية للفنون التشكيلية، أشكال ألوان، ضمن إطار منتدى «أشغال داخلية ٢»