HOME WORKS III

A FORUM ON CULTURAL PRACTICES

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A Project by Masha Rafka, Chaza Charafeddine and Christine Tohme
The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, **Ashkal Alwan**

Home Works III: A Forum on Cultural Practices

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Detail from ***Prière au Mont des Oliviers****, by Fra Angelico (1395 – 1455)*

Detail from ***l'Institution de l'Eucharistie****, by Fra Angelico (1395 – 1455)*

A face like many others;
or the solitariness of seeing death.

Walid Sadek

Still from Michael Powell's Peeping Tom (2006)

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For years he has been haunted. He wakes up every morning, snatches up all the local newspapers in Beirut, rushes to his office, perches himself over his desk and commences his excavations. He sifts through every last newspaper, gleaning here a headline, there a caption, a line or parody on RS. He starts by highlighting his boxes, parsing the pages, combing through the intricacies of the paragraphs, dissecting pages upon our faces.

For years I have watched him collecting newspaper cutouts, dating them with severe punctuality. For fear of being unfaithful to daily events, he has selected, compiled, dated and stockpiled it all in a notebook; a notebook that suspends facts from everybody; a notebook full of history's gaps. Aren't we subject to history's gaps? Don't we too participate in producing them, in piercing them in our timelines? How we enjoy history's hysteria; how fond of it we are.

The knowledge notebook grew vigorously; pages bloomed from its thresholds, heading nowhere. I began to fear Rabih's pages – pages of knowledge, of data, random information, obsolete records. Seated amongst the audience, he rifles through the pages of his notebook. His image tucked away on the theatre platform competes with his other, seated one. Unsure of what to make of the two images, I am taken over by unrest and anxiety. I tremble, shiver: He cannot be reached. Both are ghostly.

Christine Tohme
Ashkal Alwan, 2008

* A note of clarification: A camera is placed at head level in front of Actor One, capturing his face. For the duration of the performance, his portrait is projected onto the screen in the middle of the stage. Actor One looks into the lens of the camera in front of him; as he speaks directly into the lens, his image on the screen appears as if he were looking straight into the spectators' eyes, as if addressing them.

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Fatal Equality: Islamists and *Istishhadiyyat*

Islah Jad

Previously, I spoke of how Islamists have been depicted by both old and new Orientalists as the "Other" and as "uncivilised" in order to justify their control and subjection. The renowned Zionist historian Benny Morris recently supplemented this discourse with a new and dangerous terminology in which Palestinians are represented as "pathological serial killers"[1]. According to Morris, this "criminality" is a genetic abnormality.[2]

Istishhadiyyat (female martyrs) add a new dimension to what is seen by Morris and others like him as the utter abnormality of "pathological terrorists". Such "abnormality" and "criminality", once again, are explained using a cultural language wherein Islam, Islamism and Islamic and Arabic cultures are demonised in general. On the other hand, for the Palestinians, the emergence of *istishhadiyyat* raises questions related to the role of women in the armed resistance; since armed resistance is considered legitimate by Palestinians in many of their national and religious movements and in particular, Hamas.

Despite the fact that the concept of female martyrdom, similar to male martyrdom, is very much linked to political Islam and fundamentalism, Hamas was late in recruiting females for this type of action. On January 15, 2004, the first female martyr was recruited by Hamas and the military wing of Fateh, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. It marked a change in Hamas' strategy on the recruitment of women[3].

In fact, Hamas' prior refusal to recruit women for military operations was in line with what numerous studies have revealed, namely that women are discriminated against by the policies that underpin or reinforce a strong military force. Peterson and Runyan write, "Most male-dominated societies have constructed elaborate sanctions and even taboos against women fighting and dying in war. As a result, men have gained almost exclusive control over the means of destruction worldwide, often in the name of protecting women and children, who are either discouraged from or not allowed to take up arms to protect themselves"[4]. As indicated earlier,

1 Benny Morris, 2004. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*

2 This reminded me of the numerous questions put forth to me by Israeli feminist and "leftist" audiences in various *kibbutzim*, during the first *Intifada*, when groups of Palestinian women gave touring talks to explain their lives. One frequently asked question was, "How come you, as a mother, push your children to be killed by our army?" I remember how I, along with many of my colleagues, used to feel furious at such a question for its subtle and implicit racism. We understood the question as insinuating our "deviance" from "normal" mothers who would be keen to "protect" their children from exposure to such a death.

3 Mahmoud al-Zahar, www.al-jazeera.net, 15/1/04.

however, Hamas would, as in other matters, change its position with respect to women.

In the book *Shahidas: Les Femmes Kamikazes de Palestine,* Barbara Victor presents and analyses the lives of five *shahidas*, or female martyrs[5]. After researching their social backgrounds, she concludes that they were double victims of the prevailing gender order which generally discriminates against women and their own marginal and frail social backgrounds. Victor claims that in addition to their victimisation, these women were then manipulated by a few cowardly, fanatical patriarchs. In the same vein, female martyrs were portrayed as "indoctrinated" by the Palestinian Authority which undertook a very public campaign against this new phenomenon and programs that encouraged women to see themselves as potential martyrs[6].

Meanwhile, the majority of more sympathetic writers see suicide bombers, in general and women, in particular, as committing an act of desperation provoked by an occupation from which they see no way out[7]. In brief, they are seen as "dead-enders". Even in certain secular national movements, female martyrs are considered by many as persons invoking their right to self-defense. Rabiha Diyyab, of the Fateh movement and the Palestinian Women's Union emphasises that the participation of Wafa Idris (the first woman martyr) in battle shows the "determination of the Palestinian woman to participate as a full partner in the national struggle, alongside her brothers"[8].

The same is true for many young women who view martyrdom as "their right". Based on recordings of the last will and testaments *(wassaya)* of various Palestinian female martyrs, I would argue that their acts were committed out of a sense of "over"-empowerment and feeling of uniqueness and that they were in full control of their actions and their senses. Contrary to claims that the drive to commit such acts is the result of "desperation" or "dead-ender syndrome", these women were driven by a wish to open up a new space not only for their gender but, more importantly, for their men-folk to regain a sense of lost manhood. Through these acts and from within the hierarchical gender order, they wished to transcend the power relations that exist between the Arab peoples and their leaders, as well as between the Arabs and the Israelis. I argue that their acts do not seek total equality with Arab men, let alone the men of Hamas, but rather aimed to supersede and activate the lost role of men as the "protectors" of women. In summary, through what I call "fatal equality", these women rise above the male-dominated gender order and gain power over all the power structures affecting their lives, whether they are patriarchic, despotic or occupational.

Twenty-four women volunteered to commit such acts of "martyrdom". An additional 16 provided logistical support. Out of this number, eight women (almost five percent of a total of 157 men and women by the end of January 2004) implemented successful suicide bomb attacks; all were dis-

4 Peterson and Runyan, *Global Gender Issues*, 1993, pp. 81-82.

5 Victor, 2002, p. 12.

6 Marcus, 2003.

7 *The Independent,* 27/5/2003.

8 *Al-Ayyam* Palestinian daily newspaper, 1/2/2002.

patched by Fateh's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade or the Islamic Jihad's Jerusalem Armies (*Saraya al-Quds*)[9].

Until the last female martyr (the first was from Gaza), Reem Rayashi, blew herself up amongst a group of Israeli explosive experts at the Erez checkpoint in Gaza, Hamas and its *Ezz el-Din al-Qassam* military wing had refused to use women for such operations. This rejection reflects the mentality of Hamas with regard to gender and the roles which they deem suitable for women. The rationale provided by the leaders of Hamas is that "women can be active in other fields whether political, social, economic or educational. Our strategy now is not to involve women in such activities of *istishhad* (martyrdom) since that would require women to travel inside Israel; and for religious reasons, women are not allowed to do so if unaccompanied by a *muhharam* (male guardian)"[10]. In this quote, Aisha al-Shanti, who is also a member of Hamas' Higher Islamic Law Council *(Majlis Al Shura)* of the Salvation Party, confirms the official gender politics of Hamas without paying any heed to the rising urge of women to overturn the status quo.

Nevertheless, on the 15th of January, 2004, the first female martyr was recruited by Hamas. This day would mark a change in the party's strategy and recruitment policies with regard to women[11]. Hamas was heavily criticised for having chosen a mother of two young children to commit such an act. Its response to the criticism (mostly by Palestinian journalists who favor the Palestinian Authority) was to state that they (Hamas) were the "first" to ask women to stand side-by-side with men in the struggle[12].

Although each female martyr had a unique life history, they all had strong characters, showed sociability and sensitivity and came from relatively well-off backgrounds. They were all driven by a strong feeling of injustice as is evident from Dareen Abu Aishaâ's last will and testament: "The criminal Sharon wants to kill our children in their mothers' wombs at his checkpoints, but we will survive"[13].

All the female martyrs sought revenge; and all believed and openly stated that they were the equals of men. In Dareen's words, "A Muslim woman's role is not less than that of our *mujahedeen* brothers. The Zionist tyrants must understand that they are worth nothing in the face of our pride and determination; and that the Palestinian woman's role is no longer just to weep for her husband, brother or father, but that she will transform her body into a human bomb to destroy the illusion of security for the Israeli people"[14]. Dareen was a student in her final year at Al Najah University in Nablus before turning to Fateh to assist her in carrying out her operation. In 1999, she had asked a leader of Hamas in Nablus if she could join their military wing but had been turned down and told, "When we run out of men, we will ask women to step in"[15].

The different last wills and testaments left by all the women do not conform to the theories of despair or depression, nor do they reveal "dead-enders". As Ayat el-Akhras' mother recalls, for example, "My

9 *Haaretz,* Israeli daily newspaper, 16/1/2004.

10 Aisha al-Shanti in www.al-jazeera.net/*Lil-Nissa' Faqat* (for women only) 6/2/2002.

11 Al-Zahar, www.al-jazeera.net, 15/1/04.

12 *Falastin al-Muslima* /Islamic Palestine, February, 2004.

13 Dareen Abu Aishaâ's testimony, www.palestine-info.info, 27/2/02.

14 Ibid.

15 Jamal Manour, assassinated in 2001, quoted by Ibtissam, Dareen's sister, *Al-Markaz al-Felastini lil A'lam* (The Palestinian Information Centre) www.palestine-info.info, 27/2/2002.

daughter was distinguished in her studies; she was engaged, lived an easy life and did not suffer from poverty or depression. She sat for an exam in which she got full marks just before committing her act. She was full of life and loved it. She and her fiancé had even chosen names for their future children''[16]. In her last will and testament, she asserts that she was driven to her final act by the "call of the martyred blood of orphans and mothers of orphans *(thakala)* and all those oppressed on earth", Ayat el-Akhras also addresses the Arab leaders, ridiculing them, as she states, "Enough of your torpor, enough of the relinquishing of your duties to defend Palestine. I scorn your armies that watch Palestinian women fight in your name while you watch them on your TV sets. This is my call to you and may each proud Arab Muslim hear me''[17]. Andalib Taqatqa, another female martyr, echoes el-Akhras, writing in her last will and testament, "I said with my body what Arab rulers could not say with their tongues''[18].

These provocative statements directed at the Arab leaders who are perceived as failing to protect "their" peoples, made their point. In response to the statements of the female martyrs, the Islamist Egyptian writer, Fehmi Huweidi, was astonished by these "iron women, with steely hearts and nerves, solid like mountains." He stated, "In the past, the cry of an Arab woman to the *Khalifat el-Mu'atassem* (an Abbasid ruler) moved armies to her support; but in our dark times, the calls of Reem and her kind fall on deaf ears''[19]. Another male writer expressed bitterly, "As a man, I felt as if she wanted to say, 'I am the frozen honour in your veins. I apologise that my femininity pressured me to sneak behind your masculinity to blow itself up in the face of your murderers. I did what I did in the hope that my act would wake you up, would help to silence the snores that fill Arab space. I hoped to wake the conscience buried in your hearts'." He concludes by calling Reem "a feminine mine who embarrassed the swollen Arab tribal masculinity. She wrote you a message cut deep with blood''[20].

Thus, the acts of female martyrs or suicide bombers carry with them multiple meanings and levels of meanings, including the rejection of their parents' tears and passivity, a celebration of their femininity in the face of the perceived impotence of male Arab rulers and the stretching of the boundaries of the meaning of "sacrifice". This time, the subject of sacrifice is no longer their freedom but their own lives. As all their testaments show, they do not seek to imitate men. Rather, they seek a full realisation of their femininity, not only as something to be protected (in the traditional sense) by Arab men and rulers, but also as something they can use to defend themselves until the men wake up. The symbolic use of femininity is deployed to shame the masculinity of Arab men, in general and Arab rulers, in particular.

It is a spectacular act of self-sacrifice not only for Palestine, but also for all Arab and Muslim nations. Without entering into a debate over the morality or the efficacy of this form of action or "resistance", female martyrs are

16 www.palestine-info.info, 22/1/2004.

17 Ayat el-Akhras, who died on 29/3/2002 www.palestine-info.info, 22/1/2004.

18 Andalib Takatka testament www.palestine-info.info, 22/1/2004.

19 *Al-Ahram* Egyptian daily, 27/1/2004.

20 A file compiled by Abdel Rahman Abu Farha on women martyrs, www.palestine-info.info, 28/1/2004.

seeking, through their deaths, to become super-empowered women, to achieve what their men did not (in mobilising the Arab rulers and masses to come to their support). In this respect, it is a rational, political, national act of self-sacrifice undertaken for the survival of their nation.

November 19, 2005

Islah Jad is a professor of Gender and Cultural Studies at Birzeit University, where she helped establish the Women's Studies Institute, among a number of other women's research centers in Palestine. Jad is a member of the administrative board of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), a coalition of individual activists and women's organisations founded in 1992 in Palestine. The WATC advocates and works on the issue of discrimination against women. She has written numerous publications on the evolution of the Palestinian feminist movement and the political participation of Palestinian women. She received the British Academy's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Visiting Fellowship for South Asia/Middle East Award in 2007.

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A Memoir of Identities: I am of this World

Dalal el Bizri

My African nanny carries me and cradles me, gently rocking me; perhaps she breastfeeds me. My skin colour is different from her skin colour: I am white, she is black. I am barely three years old. We are different. We meet and part many times throughout the day. I rely on my white family while she is busy with other tasks, perhaps with the dark-skinned others of her soil, of her earth. The light-skinned and the dark-skinned are perhaps the oldest markers of my identity.

A part of what I call home still remains in the countries that lie beyond the vast African desert. I was born west of Dakar. Till today, I continue to eat and thoroughly enjoy its spicy foods and juicy fruits. I mingle with Senegalese salespeople on the streets of European cities. I recognise their distinct features which set them apart from the other Africans. I speak with them in their dialect, Wolof, with its rhythmic intonations and spontaneous expressions. I still use Wolof often to communicate secrets across a crowd with my mother or other members of her *émigré* family.

Sidon, Lebanon: A family visit to Sidon for several months. My father's family is in Sidon. Sidon… with its dew-filled dawn and breeze carrying a deeply iodised scent of jasmine into the family home's windows, open to the sea, so close… In the back, beautiful orchards of lemon and orange trees. The image of my grandfather; dignified; passing prematurely, in the middle of the parlour room, frowning, wearing his *tarbush*[1]… My grandmother, with her captivating blue eyes and the tingling sensation of her warm affections. I am the daughter of an *émigré*, visiting her father's family. Sidon, from the first moment, becomes another home where senses and emotions coalesce.

The return, by sea, to our next place of emigration: Casablanca[2]. It is night and the city lights recede, further and further away, giving way to the darkness of the sea; something terrible is happening. My father is listening to the radio; he is full of a strange anxiety. I feel, from what I manage to hear, that an attack is taking place on an Arab place. It is the tripartite offensive on Egypt. It is the year 1956. My

1 The *tarbush* is a traditional headwear, inherited from the Ottomans, worn by men (usually from the upper classes) in the Near East.

2 A city in Morocco where we were staying at the time.

father's anxiety is passed on to me, as well as something else. Arabism[3] enters my veins… warm, anxious.

I grow up a little in Casablanca. The French language connects me with my friends at school. There are no differences between us. Except for my close friend, Joelle Amselem, a Moroccan Jew, who looks like Enrico Macias.

A ring of poverty encircles my route to school. Girls my age sell eggs on the sidewalk, poor Moroccan girls. I cannot buy the eggs. But I give them items from my mother's luxurious wardrobe; my sisters and I perform "entertainment shows" for them. To them, I'm the Lebanese girl who lives in the CTM[4], a building belonging to the transport company that operates all over Morocco. Travellers dressed in their ornamental traditional clothing teem in and around the building all day.

I live near the port. From my room, I hear the rumbling of departing ships. There is a travel agency under my house. For me, travel becomes a daily routine of meeting and parting.

I am aware of my "Lebaneseness" which is, in reality, my "Sidon-ity". Lebanon, for me, is Sidon. I love Sidon and dream of it from afar. It is my home… In Casablanca, Fairouz[5] becomes part of my Lebanese identity. "You are Lebanese? Oh how I love Fairouz!" And the person asking begins humming… Fairouz is one of the oldest cornerstones of my Lebanese identity.

Arabism and Nasserism[6] mean the same thing to me. My Arabism is enthusiasm, hope, defiance and pride in my being what I am. I do not understand a single Arabic word, but I am taken by the voice of Jamal Abdel Nasser and by his charisma. My father is proud of my "Arabism"; as is my mother. Their Arabism is smitten by an anti-French sentiment set by the French colonisation of nearby Algeria. I do not understand Arabic; but still, it takes me into a world where I do not need language. With it, I gain my first insight: That I exist is confirmed by my Arabism.

I am, to a certain extent, also of Morocco: The Henna sessions; the "Arabic" bath; the Ramadan rituals and its exaggerated tastes; the deep, sparkling blueness of the skies of Casablanca and its ocean; the Straits of Gibraltar – the last image – as my sisters, my mother and I pass by sea, on our way back to Beirut; the nobility of the ocean and the mountains capped by the clouds; the ships entering the Mediterranean. All these, of Casablanca, remain in me. When one of its images returns to me, or one of its aromas, or its colours… I do not know how… I realise I miss a part of my many selves.

The ship is American and is full of Americans – the crew and the elderly passengers. The Americans are our friends. Only the French are our enemies. We spend almost a week with them, until the port of Naples, where we embark on another ship – a Greek ship, much less extravagant than the American one.

Many stories pass between the Americans and us. Some of the passengers enjoy my sister's lightness of spirit and quickly begin to enjoy her company. Meeting them is entertaining, fun. Our mother

3 "Arabism" is the term used to symbolise the prevailing Pan-Arab sentiment at the time; the feeling of being one and part of the Arab nation.

4 *Compagnie de Transport Marocain*, or Moroccan Transport Company.

5 Fairouz is one of the most famous female Lebanese singers, diva of contemporary times.

6 "Nasserism" refers to the Pan-Arab movement under the leadership of Jamal Abdel Nasser who was Egypt's head of state during the 1956 war and who led the 1967 war against Israel.

translates their heavily-accented English for us. "People of the East" is what we are to them. Perhaps, because they are sea travellers, they measure the distance from their homes with a compass.

In the restaurant on board the ship, a black waiter understands we are Muslim; perhaps my mother asks him to make sure that pork will not be served at our table. Our being Muslim becomes increasingly obvious in the restaurant. The black waiter pampers us and brings us more of everything. He is also a Muslim, although he is an American. He is the first black American that I meet.

The Mediterranean is a sea-home, its gardens the land, its borders the ports. I spend two weeks on it, from Casablanca to Beirut. The port of Naples. The port of Alexandria. We are getting closer to the sea's east.

Naples' port is teeming with pickpockets and bandits. Its ancient pillars rising from near the side-walks and its ruins "blow the minds" of the American tourists. Their wonder and amazement increase as they move further east.

We dock in Alexandria aboard the other ship, the Greek one. Most of the passengers spend one or two nights on board. They do not appear to be tourists. They are not amazed, nor are they much fun. They are probably workers or returning students. We disembark at the Egyptian port for a few hours. We only find porters and dockworkers. I do not make a connection between Alexandria and Abdel Nasser.

Tomorrow, we arrive in Beirut. The distance is short. The Mediterranean is a vast sea-home. I later learn the significance of the similarity of its borders, its ports. But, right now, I am too busy trying to compare the colours of the sea and of the ocean… Which one? Which one touches my soul? The first? The one in whose depths I spent two weeks, moving from one of its borders to the other? Or the latter? The ocean with its familiar shores of my childhood… Casablanca, Dakar, Monrovia? … The question comes to me time and again… and never once can I answer that I prefer one over the other. The Mediterranean, with its land so close and its shores so similar; the ocean, fearsome and alluring, its expanse fraught with surprises.

It is dawn. We near the Lebanese "border". Dawn and autumn. From the sea, I feel happy. I shall see my father to whom I sent many poems and letters. How many months did my missing him last? How many years? I climb onto the deck of the ship. From the sea, I see Lebanon. The sun emerges slowly, as slowly as our approach to Beirut's port. A slow, enduring sight. The image is constant. Lebanon from the sea… then Beirut… a long shoreline and hills extending towards us. Mountains rising and bending, bowing. Clouds merging with one another, white and orange. One can almost hear them moving. A generous nature, it sets my soul at ease. Something of the supernatural and something of the natural exude from within it. This is the image of Lebanon I keep with me. I wish I could paint it. I see myself melt into it so many times in my dreams.

In Beirut, I grow up to the stories – legends, rather – of our family. They are passed on to me by my mother's family with *Karbala'i*[7] pride and tormented grief. The story of Um Hussein, or Miriam al-Cassis, my mother's grandmother, a Syrian Catholic from Yabroud. On her way to Latin America with her father and her siblings, their ship docked at the port of Dakar, where she disembarked with her family, yearning for land. There she met my mother's grandfather. She fell in love at first sight, staying behind and marrying him, leaving her family, who went on to Argentina without her. The story would be a common, typical story if my mother's grandfather had not been unfaithful to her in the first years of their marriage… and if she had not packed what few things she had into a sack and fled towards the unknown of the African capital… had she not vowed silence for the rest of her life until her death in her nineties…had she not refused her husband's plea from his deathbed for her forgiveness… had she not raised snakes, had she not been a clairvoyant, had she not given assistance to all those who crossed her path, had she not bathed the dead and prayed for them, out of nothing but goodwill.

A photograph of Um Hussein, or Miriam al-Cassis, hangs in the main living room. She is standing next to her daughter, my grandmother. She appears tall, lofty to me… like her story: Pride accentuated by deep wounds. Every time I hear a part of her story, I see that look of pride on her face that tells of her own personal struggle to exist. My mother's grandmother converted to Islam and performed the pilgrimage *(hajj)* to the sacred house of God – for love's sake, or for faith's sake – there is no difference. She is a secret source of strength, of inspiration – for me, from my family, supporting my newfound "Christianity".

My mother's grandmother's Christianity, Miriam Cassis' Christianity, it seems, absolves me of any guilt for being attracted to the Christianity of the nuns, whose schools I attend when we return to Lebanon. It appears strange to me, the daughter of the Lycée Mirabeau in Casablanca where Christmas was no more than decorating a tree, gifts and Santa Claus.

Throughout my six years with the nuns, I am captivated by the prayers, the hymns and saints' day and by the aromas of incense and holy water. With the Franciscan nuns, I am free to attend (or not) religious classes. I go with great earnest … As earnestly as I listen to the story of the Virgin Mary and the lives of Jesus Christ and the saints. I shed many tears over Saint Barbara, killed by her pagan parents. It feels as though I am Christian at the Franciscan school. My close friend, Marcelle Aqel, is Christian also. My Muslim friends eagerly ask, "Are you Muslim or Christian?!" There is no answer. Nor any search for an answer, because at home, I am also Muslim. I fast during Ramadan, memorise the *fatiha*[8] and other short verses. But at school and especially in church, I feel that I am Christian. And I do not see a contradiction. Or, I do not want to see it. I close my eyes and see the Virgin Mary as she appears in the paintings. I imagine

7 The reference here is to Karbala, the city (in present-day Iraq) where in the 8th century a battle took place between the followers of the Caliph Ali and those of the Governor of Damascus Mu'awiya. Ali's younger son, Hussein, was killed. *Ashoura*, the commemoration of the battle, is a day of mass mourning for Shiite Muslims.

8 The *Fatiha* is the opening verse of the Koran, recited at the beginning of prayers and for the souls of the dead.

her in her worst suffering.

Here I must confess: My bout of harmony with Christianity does not last. I am transferred from the French Franciscan nuns to Lebanese nuns. The rules change: I no longer attend religious classes. I do not participate in prayers. I am one of the Muslims in the school. During prayer-time or religious classes, we are gathered by the priest, Father George, into his office where he speaks to us with exaggerated niceties about how great our religion is.

We are in the early 1960's. Arabism is like fresh air which I breathe in, here and there. I am in my last three years of intermediate school. The history and geography teacher asks to meet my parents; he offers to teach me to write in Arabic. Another Arabic teacher follows… mysterious, attractive. He pushes me onto the language. I am infatuated with him.

When he speaks in Arabic, it is as lyrical as Kulthumic[9] music. He gives me *'Al-Atlal'*[10]. I listen to it; memorising most of its musical refrains without understanding it all. My young poet teacher extends to me an Arabism different from that of those around me. The Arabism of a Christian poet, serene and morose… its intensity derived from within… lofty, romantic. Sated by the ambience of Gibran Khalil Gibran and the spirits of *émigrés* past from the renaissance *(al Nahda)*[11]. With him, I begin to read in Arabic.

There is no love lost between the Lebanese nuns and me. Arabism spurs my rebellion against their severity, their ugly habits, their hatred for kohl-lined eyes and the plank of wood called the *signal* which we carry as punishment if we dare utter a word in Arabic. It is the antithesis of the Arabism that I seek. And although my fluency in French is beyond a doubt, I intentionally speak in Arabic as part of my subversive, personal struggle with the nuns. Whether I am "Arab" or "not Arab" becomes the backdrop for many a fight and many a punishment and even numerous suspensions, to my father's mortification!

Despite the above, the nuns make us write a phrase – which, till this day is engraved in my mind – we handwrite it and embellish it on the front page of every notebook, *"Dieu me voit"*, or "God sees me", which means acts unseen are not acts without sin – and which, over time, becomes a sort of personal moral or ethical guide.

I am still drawn to churches. Monasteries are still among my favourite places, with their psalms, hymns and chanting, their incense and their bells – joyful or sad. Wherever I may be, if I find a church, I enter.

I pretend – after beginning to read female anthropology – that I live in a different categorical era in human history – a period where I carry the name of my female ancestral line. My name is Dalal Miriam Cassis, an *émigré* to Argentina of three generations past. In this version, my great grandfather follows my great grandmother to her American destination.

All of this is a fantasy, an imagination game, a space outside the logic of its time. It allows and brings to life the ability to live in places of identity crises, discontented with

9 Um Kulthum is the most famous Egyptian female singer of modern times. She sang deeply moving love songs and was loved en masse by the entire Arab world. She was strongly associated with the modern Arab world's golden age. Her funeral was attended by one of the largest crowds in history.

10 One of Um Kulthum's famous songs, whose name refers to places reminiscent of something gone forever, the proverbial ruins of nostalgia.

11 A period of renaissance or enlightenment which is called *al Nahda* in contemporary Arab history which took place between the mid-19th century and the Second World War.

everything, unable to feel secure about anything… salvation and torture… simultaneously imprisoned and free.

It is not enough to be a Muslim in the face of Christians who deny their Arabism and my Arabism; or, that I am an Arabist because I am a Muslim. For me, being Muslim was separate from my mother's Shiism. I am the daughter of the Shiite; at times, they call me a *mutwaliya*[12].

At first, I understand this term as a mark not to be associated with any pride, a sort of subordinate social status. Shiism is borne to me thus: A sign of marginalisation and weakness, magical in the romanticism of its weeping and the art of its legendary sadness. Through it, I love an image of one of my self-images: The daughter of the returned *émigré*, outside the frame of dull scenarios. Shiism places me on the same plane as those discontented with this kind of world, extending to me its world of passion and heroics.

The attraction of Shiism for me is also a class attraction. My father does not return from abroad with the great wealth amassed by the other returning *émigrés*. I am the daughter of another sort of *émigré*: He was wealthy, but lost his fortune. In Beirut, I am here… born of the naive, the ones unable to swindle… just like the Shiites. Yet, I am also connected with the "French speakers" by the same language and attitudes, the same tastes and education. It is a forced union: I am of them culturally, but not of them in terms of class[13].

Over a period of 12 years, I go from the golden spoon that fed me in my early childhood to the wooden pencil case that I throw in protest at not having got the leather one. Between the spoon and the pencil case there is also a journey in shifting social classes. It is the journey from Casablanca to Beirut, from the centre of one class to its periphery.

There is little, if nothing, of the Sunni in me – unlike Shiism, so fervent in its meanings, history and invulnerable rituals – it is prudence and security somewhat exaggerated by historical and social luck or chance. But it also is a "belonging"; it is an identity. In my mother's family and milieu, I am a Sunni, especially during the times of *Husseiniyat*[14] wakes and *Ashoura*[15]. Amongst my father's family, I am Shiite, the daughter of the Shiite: It seems to me that I am to remain at the sectarian periphery as well.

I forget the image of Lebanon I envisaged on the deck of the ship. I forget it completely during this period. I sense something is intervening between my Shiism and me, my Arabism, my socio-economic status, my Christianity: Something like a missing link. I will discover part of that link two or three decades later. Meanwhile, I am busy in two places that pave the way to this missing link. The two places are the Communist Labour Organisation and the Faculty of Education (at the Lebanese University).

The First Place: The Communist Labour Organisation[16]

After the 1967 defeat, Beirut is filled with a flurry of student demonstrations, condemning the Balfour Declaration, the occupation of new territory, the Vietnam War. They do

12 *"Mutwali"* is a derogatory term used in Lebanon to denote those of the Shiite sect.

13 Here the meaning is socio-economic class.

14 A *Husseiniya* is a space for Shiites, much like a mosque, used for funerals and commemorations.

15 *Ashoura* is a symbolic ten-day period of mourning held by Shiites commemorating the murders of Hassan and Hussein, the sons of the Imam Ali, culminating on the tenth day – they day they were killed.

16 Founded in 1968, this was the radical Marxist offshoot of the Arab Nationalist Movement and the parent organisation of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Its leader was Muhsin Ibrahim.

not see any means to victory or to liberating occupied lands without wars led by a popular, armed resistance. Nasserism is still dear to all, but the defeat undermines the trust in its ability as a regime or system. Anything to do with the "system" is detested. The Palestinians now are the catalysts of the revival of Arabism… for it to remain Arab despite June 1967. This means that victory for the Palestinians will be had through money, support, motivation and military training… It is time for action to replace words; action is to be the cornerstone of victory which is the total liberation of all of Palestine, or nothing.

"Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh! Che! Che! Che Guevara!" The former is the Vietnamese nationalist leader who triumphs over America in 1975. The latter is the Argentinean leader of the Bolivian guerrillas (gangs) fighting the Americans. I fall in love with Che's enduring futuristic ideals and his red-starred beret. I wear a similar one on my head and convince myself that I am a freedom-fighter.

In one of these demonstrations, in which we always manage to weasel our way out of school (and which also finally gets me expelled), I meet some other students. We plan to meet – a revolutionary meeting – in one of the Arabist cultural centres: The Rawad Club in Ras al Nabaa[17] on the ground floor of a spacious old building.

We are now in the early 1970's. "Palestinian" becomes the identity of all those who want to achieve what Abdel Nasser could not with his thunderous cry: "That which was taken by force can only be regained by force!" Streams of enthusiastic youth flow into the intertwining alleys and corners of Beirut to the spirit of this beckoning call.

I become involved in the Communist Labour Organisation through fund-raising activities for the Palestinians. I go around with my donation box to restaurants, homes, parks… and always return to the club with the biggest collection. My enthusiasm has no boundaries. They call me the "bulldozer" and the "Bolshevik" (as opposed to "Menshevik" which according to our organisation's insider jargon alludes to lazy).

I get more and more involved… Demonstrations against pacifism and a peaceful solution… Endless speeches at political rallies… Military training in Palestinian camps… Administering a medical clinic in one of the camps. I scream out "freedom or death!" to myself and others without mercy against the betrayal and cowering from Israel and the Western conspiracies.

My first chapter in the organisation is spent getting prepared for membership in the general assembly: The "Cell". I read much on the theories of popular resistance and revolution (especially those of the Chinese school of thought), the Vietnamese "model" and Guevara's letters from the jungles… All this on the eve of the war in the early 1970s.

The Communist Labour Organisation no longer remains of purely "Palestinian" nature. On the eve of the war, it becomes "Lebanese". It starts to focus on local unions and the situation of workers through its party base of original cadres and new recruits; it

17 A neighbourhood located between East and West Beirut.

provides an opportunity for releasing the eager activist energies of its new recruits.

We begin to mingle with the workers. We wait for them at the factory gates in Kfar Shima, Al Hadeth and Shiyyah. We pass out flyers on the "working class struggle"; in small notebooks, we write the names of workers who have agreed to meet with us. In the early evening, we meet with them. We explain to them the theories of surplus production to show the extent to which capitalism exploits them and the workforce. We persist in provoking them to reject their situation and push them to join us in the fight against the status quo, at times going as far as taking over political power, the economy and authority. A foggy notion in our minds suggests something reminiscent of Soviet satellites.

In the name of the workers, we camouflage ourselves – my friends, Nadine and Nathalie and I – in workers' clothing; although, in reality, the style is closer to the hippy look we are more familiar with: Long, baggy skirts and a scarf on the head tied behind the neck, with locks of hair dangling around the face and forehead, the way we imagine a working woman would dress. The workers whom we are trying to educate about their rights laugh at us. They toss delicate French words at us; one of them tries to ask one of us out on a date.

This Lebanese-ness of the organisation – or action in the name of the workers – does not last long… Wardeh, the first of the workers' martyrs, is mortally felled by army bullets during a demonstration in Shiyyah.

The civil war erupts and every day I increasingly feel I am losing my sense of belonging to a multi-confessional organisation. It has become part of the "national and Islamic front". It shifts further and further away from its secular foundation. Beirut is divided into two: Christian and Muslim. Between them are the battle-lines… lines and rites of war. The Christians in the organisation rapidly decrease in numbers. They return to live in their original neighbourhoods, now segregated; or they emigrate to far away countries. A minority of "nationalist" or "patriot" Christians, as we call them then, stay in the Muslim camp. Almost all of them are leaders or principal cadres.

I leave the organisation at the end of 1981, after the Syrian army's siege of Zahleh[18]. Why after Zahleh? Because the organisation's position towards the siege – so clear in its words and in its silence – resembles the logic of the Islamists, while secular words are considered to be the talebearers of the contrary. It does not take a genius to understand them. Zahleh is the crowning moment: Prior to Zahleh, calls insisting on a general meeting are ignored; matters are settled by decisions made from above; promotions are made by appointment; hasty political calculations are made, in the spirit of the Soviet experience which is beginning to dissipate amongst people. Most importantly, the first signs of corruption in the organisation's leadership begin to appear in their new, luxurious cars, in the new purchasing power of their wives, children and bodyguards and in

18 A major city in the Bekaa valley with a large number of Christian inhabitants.

their empty politics.

Many years after leaving, I am amazed every time I think back to how long it took me to understand that the organisation was neither my destiny nor the right choice. I spent 14 years of my youth in it, being moved around, at times, reluctantly, from one "sector" to another: From the workers' sector to that of the peasants… youth… security… women… information… tirelessly. I remained in one sector only for a short while (the youth sector is the only one that lasts); being transferred to another sector at a whim, a party decision, always coming from above.

Despite all this, I persevered and always with renewed obstinacy. Why? Why did I remain in an organisation that did not have a need for me anyway? I fought to stay and was allowed to remain because I accepted the punishment of being demoted in rank. Every time I was transferred from one sector to another, I went down a notch in rank. How could I have accepted being so sidelined, so debased amidst all these comrades who were supposed to be my family and my community? I had joined the organisation seeking a sense of belonging after being shunned by my sects and by my class; and here I was, again, left at the sidelines for most of the time I spent in the organisation. I should have lessened the number of years of commitment, the way others did – to two or three years… that should have been plenty of time to see through its illusions and the harm it often inflicted on the self.

However, I was afraid of leaving. And this fear was justified. The instant I would leave, I'd lose a community, a milieu and friends. The Lebanon I had ridiculed with my friends… the weakness of its army, the feebleness of its government and the "broccoli" at the centre of its flag… is the Lebanon I return to after I leave the party. It is ravaged. Only one hope remains: That it will return to its former self – to the entity that I had never taken seriously.

Today, it is in jeopardy. I make a plea… I don't know to whom… to protect what remains of it. I live the rest of the war seeing it as an assault on its beauty… the beauty of that first image from the deck of the ship, a warm autumn dawn, twenty years ago.

The Arabism so fused to the Palestinian cause returns to me six months after breaking away from party life. Israel invades Lebanon and Beirut is under siege[19]. I hear the call of our secretary-general to rise up to arms in defence of the nation. Like an idiot, I go to the "headquarters" and put myself at the disposal of the party's "field command". Everyone makes fun of me and rightly so. I have heeded a command not intended for me. Every time I remember that story I thank God that they were not victorious over their enemies or we would now be destined for life under their simple-mindedness.

The end of the Israeli invasion represents an end of one chapter in the civil war. I am submerged in the rubble and glass shards left by the Israeli shelling on the westward balcony of our home. In the shabby work clothes I am wearing to fix the house, I take the car and with my son, we follow the convoy all

19 The siege took place in 1982.

the way to the port, bidding farewell to the Palestinians. We cannot stop crying, my son and I. He is barely ten years old. Finally, I am free to express my grief and sadness, unrestrained by ideological convictions; I am unafraid to betray optimism; an optimism that is used like a shield, protecting the political line… I cry in lusty and genuine *Karbala'i* fashion.

The Second Place: The Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University

It is 1972, three years before the civil war erupts. The Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University is a building on the peak of a hill, facing the sea. One enters the building from the top of the hill. From there, one descends to the point where it most pulsates with life: The cafeteria. To go back up, one has to take the long, literally breathtaking stairs. And the less time left for a student at the faculty, the higher one has to go up the staircases… but then again, one's share of the sea is also greater. Vast, picturesque expanses unfold on the way down to the cafeteria. Wooden benches are set here and there; and the breeze goes every which way. The library is attached to a large hall used by general student associations and unions as well as the cine-club.

This faculty's system is different from the others: Admission is based on a competitive entrance exam *(concours)*. Students receive generous scholarships based on a commitment to teach in public high schools after they graduate. More importantly, students are obliged to attend classes, sometimes all day; they must follow strict rules and regulations or face certain penalties. We respect these rules and regulations, most of the time.

The student body at the Faculty of Education is diverse, representing all of folkloric Lebanon. The interaction is lively yet disciplined. This period is afire nationally; and the country is at "a dangerous and historically-decisive junction"… as would soon become apparent (and is still so). The walls are full of inscriptions and antagonistic statements and slogans between the Right, the Left and the Centre. The cafeteria is teeming with the music of Fairouz, cigarette smoke, the exhilaration of ping pong players, voices in debate, discussion and meetings between small groups at the tables – or on the large planks of wood that are placed everywhere after heavy rains flood the cafeteria.

In the student union, intense political disputes take place depending on participants' political views or position. In the cinéclub, we debate the significance of the more complex films: By Fellini, Pasolini and Bergman, in particular. Poetry readings are common… a group of poets who call themselves "the poets of the South" are confronted by their critics… some of "the poets of the South" are from the South while others are not. Their charm and charisma is enlightening… their allure exudes from the strength of their desire and daring, a sort of Baudelairian elegance.

The faculty's atmosphere is a perfect setting for romance: Its breadth and poetry of space so close to the sea, the daily encoun-

ters, the tradition of belonging to one table or another in the cafeteria, enjoying its smoky air and the voice of Fairouz… the debates about contemporary poetry, the concepts of secularism, feminism… until we get our grant dispersal at the end of the month… giving us time… And time is of essence when falling in love.

Love stories begin… some end, some last. All of them hold a promise of some sort. The very character of love finds those who shape it: The Don Juans, the ones who are always remarrying, "the magnets"[20], the hypnotisers, the wild. The female students are the most beautiful on earth. The love stories produce "kidnapped" marriages[21]… mixed marriages, mixed friendships… stories that tell the tale of infidelity and faithfulness.

I major in French Literature. This is one chapter of my many affairs with French. I have read so many novels in French that I pass my entrance exam. My spoken Arabic is easy on my tongue. But my reading is slow and my writing is weak. My period of studying in French limits my love for it; perhaps because it has to co-exist with my Arabic studies. I put on airs and impulsively write slogans – our slogans, the slogans of the students from the organisation. I do not succeed. But I am stubborn. I cheat and I take excerpts from articles by a renowned author and take credit for them as mine. I am always in a rush; I insist on proving my value to the organisation, to force them to acknowledge my Arabic.

Today, I discard French as the colonial competitor of Arabic. Today, I am a Francophone, somehow; but I feel no sense of belonging to France. I am not French, but rather, one of the ranks of humankind whose countries' histories are similar to mine, turning them – at one era or another – into a French mandate or colony… A collective memory or collective existentialist identity in a way.

All these moments at the faculty last no longer than two years. On the eve of the civil war, one of the students, a Pan-Syrian nationalist, is shot. Our last demonstration ends in fist and gun fights between the Right and the Left. I am arrested. I spend three nights and days in jail. I am thrown in with the prostitutes; one of them takes me under her wing. She has an old relationship with the female wardens; she knows how to get me cigarettes and sweets.

We do not believe war is near. We do not want to believe it. But, the eye cannot deny the approaching flames. When the first round of the civil war breaks out, the university is shut down for a year and a half. When we return, it is split into two parts: Muslims in the original campus and the Christians in East Beirut. The faculty is like a ghost town. There is nothing in it but the Muslims and some progressive Christians. Where are the rest? News of them is sporadic then stops altogether. The war is a teacher in division. The latter years are quick to lose the sparkle of the former; they pass in sadness, without celebrations or elections.

Now I can explore the similarities between the organisation and the faculty of education. Both are pluralistic environments or settings (well, at least the former was for

20 Literally, the Arabic word is "puller"; the one who "pulls" women to him or is always trying to "pull" women to him.

21 This term is used for eloped marriages, or when a man is forced to symbolically "kidnap" a woman from her family; this is usually the case when the parents do not approve of a marriage or the two are from different religions.

a time)… mixed marriages and mixed friendships. They embrace all the diversity of Lebanon in one frame… a mix that Lebanon will never again witness, neither during the war nor in its aftermath.

What is the difference in diversity? In the first – the organisation – the diversity is similar to that found in ideological communities or environments: It is subject to a political line or stand. This ceiling cannot be breached without the risk of finding oneself out and completely alone in this world.

But, at the Faculty of Education, the boundaries of diversity are more welcoming. And they are the borders of Lebanon itself, embracing and open to every and any kind of political belief, region, city and sect.

The other difference: In the organisation one often comes across the faces of frustrated and power hungry and thus, authoritarian people. The fight in the organisation – its harsh, violent and often destructive criticism or self-criticism – can be devastating to a comrade's image of him or herself, leaving behind marks of disappointment and fatigue on these comrades' futures and even in their facial features.

At the faculty however, one comes across all the possible faces of the sons and daughters of this scattered and ambitious class, the middle class. And the fights at the faculty are in good humour: Fights about politics, a rare book – which I "kidnap" from the library – of claims of understanding a Bergman or Pasolini film, or the competition over poetry or lovers.

One leaves the organisation, upset, angry and aggressive, disturbed, used. Whereas, even before graduating from the faculty, one senses that what the future holds is nothing more than nostalgia over those too few golden years.

To be continued.

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Normalisation and its Discontents

Natasa Ilic

Over the last few years, cultural practitioners in former Yugoslavian states have lectured extensively on the Balkans, local art scenes and on the war in ex-Yugoslavia and its causes. They broached issues such as the special character of Yugoslav socialism which opposes any discourse about homogenous post-communism and transition and so on. They lectured so extensively that they started to believe their enlightening mission had probably been accomplished and that the basic facts of the Yugoslav situation had become widely known, only to discover that this is actually not the case.

As a result, my introduction to today's screening programme will take into account the possibility that the facts and notions crucial for understanding the contexts and specific contents and processes of the films I am presenting are not as familiar as I had believed them to be – and I apologise in advance because this is perhaps the least suitable place for such an experiment.

My screening programme was announced as a "Balkan screening programme" and the films you will see do come from a cultural space that is unanimously described as Balkan – I say this because as we know, the boundaries of the Balkans are malleable in accordance with the political, economic and cultural interests and viewpoints of those who control them. All the countries of "South-East Europe" which is the current politically correct term for the Balkans, are fighting for a privileged position in relation to the European Union. The Balkan border is therefore always positioned somewhere else, on the eastern border with other Balkan countries.

The films screened here come from the space that, for better or worse, never lost its status as Balkan (unlike, for example, Slovenia which, with the advancement of negotiations with the European Union in a geo-political sense, has gradually ceased to be considered a Balkan country). The most important fact about the cultural space of the films you will see – Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia (or more precisely Croatia, Serbia & Montenegro and Bosnia

& Herzegovina which are the full names of these three independent states) – is that these countries are three former-Yugoslav countries which were directly involved in the war from 1991 to 1995, including against each other. Things get even more complicated when one is dealing with a war that never officially began and was not proclaimed to be over.

A brief note on the war: After a two week long war between the Yugoslav People's Army stationed in Slovenia against Slovenian Units of Territorial Defence which ended with the withdrawal of the army and the subsequent separation of Slovenia, the war started in Croatia in the summer of 1991. It began with conflicts between the Croatian territorial defence troops and paramilitary forces from the Serbian minority who were then joined and backed by the Yugoslav army in Belgrade. The mutual liquidation of civilians and massive relocations of people began, later to be termed "ethnic cleansing". In November and December of 1991, the world watched the images of the cities of Vukovar and Dubrovnik being bombed, and by January 1992, Croatia was internationally recognised as an independent state.

In the spring of 1992, the war in Bosnia began, including conflicts between Muslims and Croats – Croatia, just like Serbia, tried to achieve its territorial claims in Bosnia. Incidentally, the nature of the Muslim – Croat conflicts in Bosnia is still being discussed at the International Court for War Crimes in the Hague which aims to establish definitively whether the conflict was the consequence of the systematic policies of the Croatian government at the time, or whether it was the result of individual excesses which in turn should influence how to determine individual responsibilities. The war in Bosnia finally ended in 1995 with the Dayton Agreement that established the constitution of Bosnia & Herzegovina and with "Operation Storm" in Croatia, in which – under the unspoken patronage of the US government – the Croatian army expelled 150,000 Serbs from Croatia, thus finally "solving" the latter's ethnic issues.

These three ex-Yugoslavian countries are perhaps the most blameworthy for the negative image of the Balkans in the last 15 years. The word "Balkans" is never merely a geographic label. The signifier "Balkans" has become separated from its original signified and from all subsequent signifieds with which it had become associated. The geographic label has been transformed into one of the strongest derogatory terms in history, in international relations, in political sciences and even today in general intellectual discourse. During the 1990s, the word acquired social and cultural meanings which, on the one hand, transformed it into a symptom that embodies all that is wrong in the utopian notion of the aseptic (multi)cultural consensus of the "European Union". On the other hand, it bore connotations of a virgin soil whose dynamism, vitality and "authenticity" could challenge empty Western consumerism and its decadent art world. As a European Other, in fact, the Balkans' role is to secure Western identity as a single and coherent

unity, covering up for the fact that the West is also a heterogeneous, inconsistent system with its own mutually antagonistic centres and peripheries, and that these very antagonisms are constitutive of every contemporary society.

Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Serbia & Montenegro are the three countries that share both war trauma and post-war normalisation processes. In the light of the Yugoslavian model of socialism, it is hard to explain how the intellectually immature political classes with old-fashioned ideologies and schematic programmes managed to suffocate the social movements that had, during the 1980s, threatened the balance of public discourse. It is equally hard to understand how these same immature classes also destroyed the public and devastated social space by introducing an autarchic nationalist discourse and wild capitalism. During the 1990s, those performing "the social function of intellectuals" mobilised extreme right wing ideologies by engaging the "intellectual establishment" in the struggle for the uniqueness of national culture. This was realised by the struggle against leftist cultural hegemony, which became re-interpreted as the foreign, external element that threatened the purity of national culture and national identity. The Croatian version of the democratic revolution (in different versions known also as the "Velvet Revolution", the "Singing Revolution", the "Candle Revolution") was finalised with the triumph of capitalism and the rediscovery of the market economy as the tool for the distribution of resources. The pathos of the human rights revolution reached "broader society" through the filter of nationalistic ideologies since it was perceived to be both enlightening and politically correct.

However, in 2000, a few years after the end of the war, both in Croatia and in Serbia, extreme right wing nationalist governments lost parliamentary elections and the "normalisation" process started. "Normalisation" as a term has been used at various times and in different contexts, varying slightly with each situation, to refer to different socio-political programmes. A few specific cases come to mind, like the post-World War II normalisation in Germany and the occupied countries with the help of strong quisling movements, or the "socialist normalisation(s)" after events such as the Yugoslav break up with Stalin in 1948, the Budapest uprising in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, the liberal/nationalist movements in Yugoslavia in 1971, etc. More recently, it conjures up examples such as the dismantling of welfare states in some Western European countries, the "post-communist normalisation" in Eastern Europe, and normalisation after military coup d'états, dictatorships or even fascist regimes (Greece, Turkey, Spain...) etc. Obviously, normalisation can be a productive notion, acting as a trigger for discussion and the development of critical thought about the social, political and ideological state of affairs in our societies.

The term "normalisation" in our local circumstances is especially interesting in terms of looking at the contexts in which normalisa-

tion is used in political discourse, how it is activated and how it has changed over time. The term today serves to legitimise liberal capitalism and the political system of parliamentary democracy as the only natural and acceptable solutions, the optimal norms of political consciousness.

This way of presenting matters derives from the idea of false universalism, where something particular is (ideologically) established as universal – "natural", "normal" or the "only possible" path towards the "development of mankind". In that sense, so-called "transition" is seen as gradual but determined and rather quickly moves from the "unnatural communist totalitarian order" (as Franjo Tudjman, the Croatian president during the 1990s, called it) towards the obviously "natural" and "normal" state of capitalist liberal democracy and multi-party parliamentary systems with free elections, free market, the rule of human rights, etc.

Liberal-capitalist normalisation works as ideological interpellation - we were not "forced" to become "normal" liberal – capitalist, free - market subjects, we "want(ed)" to become such, with the ideological fantasy that we will immediately become like the rest of the "normal world". During the Croatian elections in the year 2000, one of the pre-election campaign slogans of the Social-Democratic Party was "To live as in a normal world". In Serbia, Vojislav Koštunica, who beat Miloševic in the 2000 presidential elections, promised during his pre-election campaign that Serbia would become a "boring society", such as the societies of the liberal order of the European Union. Obviously, nobody had ever asked what the price of all that "normalisation" would be. Consequently, all its ugly results – unemployment, poverty, crime, the widening of class differences, decrease of social and health benefits, conservative backlashes and the rise of ethnic, racial and sexual intolerance – have not been understood as regular products and symptoms of the liberal– capitalist system, but as mere "side-effects".

As I said, the right wing nationalist politics of Miloševic in Serbia and Tudjman in Croatia were disguised in promises of a "normal" life. This normalcy secured the self - proclaimed role of the victim – which was very difficult to claim for those parties who had been involved in the war – and was expressed with very bourgeois undertones (functioning similarly to the power struggle between "the civilised spirit" and "barbarism"). Getting rid of the nationalist governments of the 1990s meant the acquisition of liberal normalcy which late capitalist societies in the West, as welfare states in which human rights are fully respected, have supposedly reached. This normalcy was the product of a Western neo-liberal ideology, a promise of a society in which no extremism makes life difficult or produces social antagonisms.

In some situations, it is clear that political processes after the fall of the Berlin Wall promoted the retrograde functioning of arts and culture. When this occurred, arts and culture were used as tools for mediation between the developed, liberal-capitalist West and (post-

communist) Eastern European societies that needed to be integrated in this liberal-democratic world of free markets and human rights. Consequently, questions about the relationship between arts and normalisation – how art institutions are engaged as agents of normalisation and how art is used as an instrument of ideological interpellation – seem to be of crucial importance. It is interesting to note that after the decades-long Cold War, during which Western art and theory stood for the "valuable autonomy of arts" – as opposed to the despised ideological, didactic instrumentalisation of art in the countries of so-called "real-existing socialism" – the very same Western art institutions reduced art coming from former communist countries to "documents" about the social situations of countries-in-transition. On one hand, these are regarded as "authentic, first-hand documents", almost anthropological/sociological material about the conditions of the societies in which they are produced. On the other hand, they are seen as ideological apparatuses for the realisation of proclaimed political goals. Simultaneously, the process works its way from the inside. Cultural policies in countries whose psycho-geography has been formed in relation to Europe also instrumentalise art whose role is reduced to testify and prove that "we" are "cultured", not only that "we belong to Europe" but that "we have always belonged there".

Normalisation is also interesting in relation to the position and role of an independent cultural sector in societies that ideologically and politically identify with one (specific) culture. The question of normalisation allows an examination of how non-institutional practice relates to what we usually term "mainstream" and how to define that mainstream. Although in the past decade, we have witnessed significant changes in the vocabulary used by decision-makers and representatives of institutional "state" culture, cultural domains in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia are still characterised by the logic of identity, particularly national identity. The independent cultural sector is generally opposed to dominant models of representation and the newly acquired central position of representative culture in the transitional economy. It works against the local mainstream in which the institutions, capital and markets are based in the Western world, but many elements of modernist paradigms that have long been removed from the Western world – such as notions of utopianism, formalist aesthetic values, the idea of artist heroes, the transcendent character of art, the separation of art and life, art as opposed to theory, etc. – still essentially inform Balkan art institutions. There are of course cracks in this construction of what art is, but basic notions and ideas of art have not changed at all with the shift in social, political and economic systems. In this context, validation from the West is often the only channel open for securing and increasing cultural capital at the local level.

Thus, normalisation works as ideology; that is, it is especially concerned with the field of symbolic

cultural production, the production of meaning, namely the production of consent and consensus. Current liberal – democratic, free – market normalisation is a process that operates on such a large scale and time-span that it passes almost unrecognised and is not reflected upon. One of its main ideological traps is that it is represented as a process of an almost natural kind – a slow, gradual, unstoppable, irreversible and inevitable process which human forces and longings simply cannot affect.

The films and videos presented here, by five authors from different generations, are tangentially related to the topic of normalisation, but are otherwise autonomous productions dealing with many other issues as well.

Vlatko Gilic is a filmmaker who lives and works in Belgrade. His short films from the 1970s were rewarded at international film festivals (like the two included in the screening programme – *Love* (1973), which was awarded first prize at the Oberhausen Film Festival and the Golden Globe by the Union of Foreign Film Critics in Hollywood; and *In Continuo*, (1971) which won the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and was nominated for an Oscar in 1972). But in Yugoslavia, his films are recognised only among film connoisseurs. This is probably because of the myth that circulates about him that after 1982, he fell out of favour with the communist regime, which recognised anti-communist and anti-state elements in his films.

Another artist, who also emerged in the 1970s is Sanja Ivekovic, one of the best internationally known Croatian artists. Although she may not have been the first artist to produce performance and video art in ex-Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1970s, she was the first to use performance and video for juxtaposing representations of the body, female sexuality and politics. She was not a dissident artist, but the first to take a clearly feminist position. She started as part of the collaborative known in ex-Yugoslavia, after 1968, in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Beograd (Belgrade) and a bit later in Sarajevo, as the "New Art Practice" which abandoned the modernist traditions accepted in 1950s communist Yugoslavia as "Official Art". Sanja Ivekovic often appropriates and quotes pieces of collective memory produced in the public realm, and in the 1990s worked extensively on collective amnesia and erasure of the past, especially the anti-fascist Croatian past. Her video 'Personal Cuts' from 1980 which we will see, exemplifies many elements of her work.

Films by both Gilic and Ivekovic are politically engaged, not as "battles against the darkness of communist totalitarianism" but, paradoxically, by taking socialist ideology more seriously than the cynical political elite in power did, and by fighting for the complete self-realisation of individuals and culture, against real bureaucratic limitations. While artistic practices from the 1970s (and 1980s) were driven into more or less direct confrontation with ideologies of domination, younger artists are questioning the present social situation of the rapid march of "normalisation" and their coun-

tries' transitions to a neo-liberal "heaven".

Jasmila Žbanic is a Bosnian filmmaker. The focus of many of her short films is the relation of female subjects to war trauma, including her film *Images from the Corner*, to be shown in this screening iprogramme. She is considered the most important Bosnian woman filmmaker. Goran Devic describes his film, *Imported Crows*, as a "film on natural sciences and society". The film looks at the problematic relationship between the socialist heritage and the current social climate that provokes various types of exclusion, and constitutes a very direct and revealing commentary on intolerance towards the Other. We never see this Other, but the film is actually the most accurate Croatian film on the intolerance, ethnic mythologies and prevailing ideology of present-day Croatia.

The video *Scene for a New Heritage* by David Maljkovic is a fictive story about a group of young people who go off in search of their heritage in the year 2045. Their journey ends at Petrova Gora, a location with a strong historical significance (it was the place where the last Croatian king was killed in the 11th century. It was also a place marked by mythical battles both for the national liberation struggle in World War II and the war of the 1990s, where the Serbian minority lived and battles between Croatian Serbs and Croats were very strong). The modernist memorial for partisan victims by Vojin Bakic which was erected there in the 1970s in the modernist style (the official Yugoslavian style), is a monument in honour of the partisan resistance. It also stands as a sign of the devalued and abused anti-fascist heritage, just as it stands for the ideas of modernist progress. Maljkovic's fiction provokes surprise expressed through the incomprehensible language from the so-called *gangi*-folk songs which, in the urban racism of Croatia in the 1990s, are linked with refugees and immigrants from rural areas who "contaminated" Croatian "Europeaness".

November 20, 2005

Screening Programme from the Balkans

Curated by Natasa ilic

Imported Crows
Goran Devic (Croatia)

Using documentary film elements, this concrete story about the unsuccessful attempts at exterminating a crow-parasite in a small town in the pauperised Croatian countryside is transformed into a very direct and revealing commentary on intolerant relations towards the Other.

Video, 22 minutes, 2004.
Goran Devic was born in 1971 in Sisak, Croatia. He lives and works in Zagreb.

Love
Vlatko Gilic (Serbia and Montenegro)

"On many building sites where workers spend years away from their families, every visit is an event."
Video, 24 minutes, 1973.

In continuo
Vlatko Gilic

An artist either bypasses or answers the questions raised by living. *In Continuo* is a film answering the question: Who has the right to take one day of life away, not to mention a whole life?

"I tried to metaphorically realise this continuous shedding of blood through history in a real slaughterhouse with authentic workers, who every day slaughter animals in an old, primitive way.

The sound in the film is also authentic. Nothing was recorded outside of the slaughterhouse. The sound turns into music, which helps dramatisation and the realisation of the metaphor I had in mind when making this film".

Video, 11 minutes, 1971.
Vlatko Gilic was born in 1935 in Podgorica. He lives and works in Podgorica and Belgrade.

Personal Cuts
Sanja Ivekovic (Croatia)

The video consists of one continuous sequence in which a woman is

cutting holes into a black stocking which covers her face. Each "cut" is followed by a short sequence of documentary footage that represents 20 years in the history of Yugoslavia. The video ends when the face is completely uncovered.

Video, 4 minutes, 1982.

Sanja Ivekovic was born in 1949 in Zagreb. She lives and works in Zagreb.

Scene for a New Heritage
David Maljkovic (Croatia)

Scene for a New Heritage is a fictional story about a group of young people who go off in search of their heritage in the year 2045. Their journey ends at Petrova Gora where the modernist memorial for WWII victims stands to immortalise the resistance of the allies.

Video, 5 minutes, 2004.

David Maljkovic was born in 1973 in Rijeka, Croatia. He lives and works in Zagreb, Croatia.

Images from the Corner
Jasmila Zbanic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Trying to articulate relations to traumatic aspects of her own war experiences, Zbanic sets off to search for an acquaintance wounded at the very beginning of the war in Sarajevo. This wounding marked the exact turning point in Zbanic's understanding of the war – her first confrontation with death and destruction – with her own mortality and contingency. The search for the acquaintance who left Sarajevo after the war and who nowadays lives in France turns out not to be "successful": At no point in the film do we see the image of the acquaintance, and the closest the author and viewers come to her is through a maximally alienated voice (...)

Nebojša Jovanovic, excerpt from *We Light the Night*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, 2004

Video, 38 minutes, 2003.

Jasmila Zbanic was born in 1974 in Sarajevo. She lives and works in Sarajevo.

Natasa Ilic is a freelance critic and curator based in Zagreb. She is a founding member of What, How & for Whom (WHW), an independent curatorial collective that organises productions, exhibitions and publications. She is also the director of Galerija Nova. She has co-curated a number of international exhibitions in Zagreb and abroad including *Collective Creativity* at Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, 2005, the *Cetinje Biennial 5* in Serbia and Montenegro, 2004; *Looking Awry* at Apexart in New York, 2003 and *Project: Broadcasting* at the Technical Museum in Zagreb, 2002. As an art critic, she has contributed to numerous catalogues and magazines.

Some Paradoxes of Political Art

Jacques Rancière

It would appear that politics once again enjoys a place of pride in artistic projects and in discussions about art. The era of denouncing the modernist paradigm is now behind us; instead, we are seeing art reasserting its vocation to respond to forms of economic and ideological state domination. But we are also seeing this reasserted vocation appearing in increasingly divergent if not indeed contradictory forms. Artists are making monumental statues out of media and advertising icons, as if to spark our awareness of the power of these icons on our perception, whereas others are silently burying invisible monuments dedicated to the century's horrors; others are set on revealing to us the "bias" within dominant representations of subaltern identities, while still others propose to refine our gaze with regard to images of those whose identity is unstable or indecipherable; some artists choose to infiltrate provocatively the meetings of world leaders, while others produce banners and masks for the demonstrators who stand up against globalised power; some take advantage of museum spaces to demonstrate new ecological machines, while others head for the most impoverished suburbs, where they place little stones or discrete neon signs intended to create a new environment and trigger new social relations; some transport museum masterpieces into forlorn neighbourhoods; one even pays a wage to immigrant labourers for them to demonstrate, by digging their own grave, the violence of the wage-labour system, while another works as a teller in a supermarket in order to involve art in a practice of restoring social bonds. The list goes on.

The point of the list however, is not to heap scorn on anyone but rather to make two points. On the one hand, the desire to politicise art materialises in a wide range of strategies and practices. And on the other hand, these divergent practices have one point in common: They generally take for granted that the politics of art can be identified with a certain type of efficacy. Art, that is, is supposed to be political because it shows the stigmata of domination; or because it makes mockery

of the dominant icons; or yet again because it is wrested from its own specific realm and sites to be transformed into a social practice, etc. Following a good century of supposed critique of the mimetic tradition, this tradition still continues to prevail right down to those forms that seek to be artistically and politically subversive. It is supposed that art incites us to foment revolt by showing us revolting things, that it mobilises us by the mere fact of moving out beyond the studio or museum walls and that it turns us into opponents of the dominant system by negating itself as an element within that system. It invariably takes as self-evident that there is some kind of relationship between cause and effect, between intention and outcome. The "politics of art" is thus stamped with a strange schizophrenia. On the one hand, artists and critics invite us to situate art practices and reflection on art in a constantly new context. They are all too happy to tell us that the politics of art have to be rethought from top to bottom in the context of late capitalism or globalisation, data communication and digital cameras. But they massively continue to presuppose models based on the efficacy of art which was arguably laid to rest a century or two before all these novelties. I would therefore like to invert the usual perspective and to take some historical distance in order to raise several questions. What exactly are the models of efficacy which our hopes and judgements in the realm of the politics of art based upon? To what era do these models themselves actually belong?

I will thus deliberately take myself back to 18th century Europe, more precisely to the time when the dominant mimetic model was facing contestation in two different ways. By dominant mimetic model, I mean this model of efficacy or efficiency illustrated in particular by the classic theatrical stage: The stage was supposed to be a distorting mirror where viewers were invited to see, in the form of fiction, human behaviour, virtues and vices. The theatre proposed logics of situations that were to be recognised in order to help one find one's way in the world and foregrounded models of thought and action to imitate or avoid. Molière's *Tartuffe* taught viewers to recognise and to spurn hypocrites, while Voltaire's *Mahomet* incited them to shun fanaticism and to love tolerance and so on. This edifying calling may seem to be quite removed from our ways of thinking and feeling today. What remains very close to us, however, is the causal logic underpinning it: According to this logic, what we see – on the theatre stage, of course and to the same extent in a photography exhibition or an installation – are the signs of a certain state of affairs, as laid out by the author's will. To recognise these signs is to involve oneself in a certain reading of our world. To become involved in this reading is to sense a feeling of proximity or of distance which pushes us to intervene in a situation of the world thus signified just as the author wanted it to be. We no longer believe in correcting mores through theatre. And yet we are still all too happy to believe that the sculptural representation

in resin of some advertising idol or other will harden us against the media empire of spectacle, or that a series of photographs on the representation of the colonised by the coloniser will help us today to thwart the pitfalls of the dominant representation of identities.

The fact is, however, that this model was subjected to double-barrelled critique as early as the 1760s. The first critique was direct. Here I am thinking of Rousseau's *Letter on Spectacles*. Above and beyond Rousseau's personal concern with denouncing the morality of Molière's *Misanthrope*, his polemics emphasised a far more essential rupture: The rupture of the supposedly straight line taken for granted by the representative model between the performance of theatrical bodies, its meaning and its effect. Does Molière side with Alceste's sincerity against the hypocrisy of the worldly society in which he moves? Or does he side with worldly respect for the requirements of life in society in the face of his intolerance? It is an open question. How is theatre ever supposed to be able to unmask hypocrites when the law governing it is exactly the same law that governs the behaviour of hypocrites – that is, the staging by living bodies of signs of thought and feeling which they do not actually share? The logic of mimesis is contradictory, never ceasing to claim for itself alone the effect that it is supposed to produce on the behaviour of those to whom it is addressed. Let us now transpose this logic to our own era: What is to be expected of a photographic representation of the victims of some ethnic cleansing operation when it is shown on gallery walls? Revolt against the perpetrators? Inconsequent sympathy for those who suffer? Anger toward the photographers who make the suffering of destitute populations the object of an aesthetic manifestation? Or indignation toward their complicit gaze which sees nothing in these populations but their degrading status as victims?

The problem then has to do not with the moral or political validity of the message transmitted by the representative device. It concerns this device itself. It seems that the efficacy of art does not consist in transmitting messages, providing models or counter-models of behaviour or teaching us to decipher representations. It has above all to do with the arrangement of bodies, the divvying up of singular spaces and times which define ways of being together or separate, facing or amidst, inside or outside, etc. This is what Rousseau's polemic points out. But at the same time, it short-circuits the thinking behind this efficacy. For what it opposes to the dubious moral lessons of representation is quite simply art without representation, art that does not separate the scene of artistic performance and that of collective life. What it opposes to theatre audiences is the people in action, the civic festival where the city presents itself to itself, as did the Spartan ephebes celebrated by Plutarch. This paradigm designates the site of the politics of art, but only to immediately whisk both art and politics away. What it opposes to representation's dubious claim to be able to correct the mores

and thoughts of the audience is in effect an archi-ethical model; archi-ethical in the sense that the thoughts are no longer objects of lessons borne by represented bodies or images but are directly embodied in mores and the community's ways of life. This archi-ethical model went hand in hand with what we refer to as modernity, as the thought underpinning a form of art which had become a form of life. The chorus of the people in action or the futuristic or constructivist symphony embodying a new mechanical world are now doubtless behind us. But what is not behind us is the model according to which art must eliminate itself, of a theatre that has to overthrow its own logic by transforming the viewer into an actor in the contemporary art centre, or of the wildcat exhibition as a site of identification between art performances and political demonstrations.

But during that same period of the 1760s, the representative model was subjected to another critique which, though more discrete, was perhaps to prove more decisive for the future of the relations between art and politics. This critique can be detected in those passages where Winckelmann characterises as a supreme realisation of Greek beauty and freedom the statue known simply as the "Torso", in the Belvedere in Rome. The rupture brought on by his analysis is this: The statue is stripped of everything that in the representative model would make it possible to define either the figure's expressive beauty or its exemplary character: It has no mouth to deliver a message, no face to express a feeling, no limbs to give orders or carry out any action. Yet Winckelmann decided to make this the statue of the greatest action hero of all, Hercules – the hero of the Twelve Labours. More precisely, he made it into a Hercules at rest who, after his labours, was welcomed amongst the gods. And it is this eminently lazy character whom he elected as the exemplary representative of Greek beauty, daughter of Greek freedom. What this description proposed was thus a paradoxical efficacy – an efficacy requiring not an adjunct of expression or a supplement of movement but rather, on the contrary, an efficacy through subtraction, an indifference or a radical passivity. This is the paradox that Schiller would develop in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man,* commenting in this case not on a body without a head, but on a head without a body, that of the Juno Ludovisi, also characterised by a radical indifference, a radical absence of concerns, will and purpose.

This paradox effectively defines the configuration and the "politics" that I call the aesthetic regime of art, as opposed both to the regime of representative mediation and to the regime of ethical immediacy. What aesthetics means most fundamentally is not the contemplation of the beautiful but rather the suspension of any direct relationship between the production of forms of art and the production of a determinate effect on a determinate audience. The statue that Winckelmann and Schiller discuss had been the figure of a god, the element of a religious or civic

cult – but it was no longer. It no longer illustrated any faith and signified no social grandeur. It produced no further correction of mores whatsoever nor any bodily mobilisation. It was no longer addressed to any specific audience, but to the indeterminate and anonymous visitors of museums and readers of novels. It was offered up to them in the same way that a Florentine Virgin might be, a scene from a Dutch cabaret, a little Spanish beggar boy, a dish of fruit or the seafood laid out at a fishmonger's stand; in the same way that the readymade, reappropriated commodities, posters torn from billboards, would later be. The double temporality of the Greek statue – which became art in museums because it was not seen as such in the civic ceremonies of earlier times – defines a double relationship of separation and non-separation between art and life. It is because the museum – understood here not as a mere building but as a form of partitioning of common space and a specific mode of visibility – was constituted around the disaffected statue that it was later able to accommodate any form of disaffected object whatsoever from the profane world. This is also the reason that it has more recently been able to accommodate alternative modes of circulation of information and forms of political discussion which tend to stand in opposition to dominant modes of information and discussion on common affairs.

The aesthetic rupture thus established a singular form of efficacy: The efficacy of a disconnection, a rupture, a breakdown in the relationship between productions involving artistic know-how and of defined social objectives, between sense-based forms, the meanings that one can read in them and the effects which they are liable to bring about. In other words, it established the efficacy of dissensus. What I mean by dissensus in general is not the conflict of ideas or feelings. It is the conflict of different regimes of sensoriality. It is in this sense that dissensus is at the very core of politics. Politics is in effect first and foremost the activity that reconfigures the sense-base frameworks within which common objects are defined. It shatters the sense-based self-evidence of the "natural" order that predestines individuals and groups to giving orders, or to obediently receiving them, to public life or to private life by assigning them first of all to a specific type of space or time, to a specific way of being, of seeing, and saying, and to ways of being. This logic of bodies remaining in their places in a distribution of the common and the private which is also a distribution of the visible and the invisible, of speech and of noise, is what I have proposed to refer to as the "police". Politics is the practice that breaks down this police-enforced order. It does so through the invention of an instance of collective enunciation which redraws the space of common things. As Plato has taught us *a contrario*, there is politics when beings destined to remain in the invisible space of work which does not leave them the time to do anything else, take this time that they don't have in order to assert themselves as co-sharers

of a common world, in order to give visibility to that which was not seen, or to make audible as speech – as speech discussing the common – that which was heard only as the noise of bodies.

If aesthetic experience touches on politics, it is because it too is defined as the experience of dissensus as opposed to the mimetic or ethical adaptation of artistic production to social purposes. Artistic productions lose their functionality in such circumstances; they leave the very network of connections that gives them a destination by anticipating their effects; they are proposed in a neutralised space-time and are offered up to a gaze which finds itself separated from any defined sensorial-motor prolongation. The upshot is not the embodiment of any knowledge, virtue or *habitus*. It is, on the contrary, the dissociation of a certain body of experience. For the issue was never that the dominated should become aware of the mechanisms of domination, but rather to bring together a body intended for purposes other than domination.

From that perspective, it is possible to point to the very core of the paradox in the relationship between art and politics. Art and politics hold to one another as forms of dissensus, as operations of reconfiguration of the common experience of the sensible. There is an aesthetics of politics, that is, a reconfiguration of the sense-based data through political subjectivation. There is a politics of aesthetics, that is, the effects of reconfiguring the fabric of common experience which are produced by the practices and forms of visibility in the arts. And in spite of that, or rather because of that, it is impossible to define a direct relationship between the intention consummated in an artistic production and its effect in terms of its capacity for political subjectivation. What is known as the politics of art is the intrication of several different logics which can never be reduced to the univocity of a politics specific to art or a contribution of art to politics. There is a politics of art which precedes the politics of artists; a politics of art involving the singular wresting of objects from common experience which functions on its own, independently of artists' wishes to serve some cause or other. The effect of the museum, of the book, or of the theatre, is based on the dividing up of space and time and on the modes of sense-based presentation which they establish before ever being based on the specific content of one work or another. And these forms contribute to the formation of a new sense-based fabric. They create a new landscape of the visible, new forms of individualities and connections, different rhythms and new scales for the apprehension of data. They do not do it in the specific way political activity creates a "we" – that is, forms of collective enunciation. But they form this dissensual fabric from which can be cut and tailored the forms of construction of objects and the possibilities of subjective enunciation specific to the action of political collectives. One might say that politics in the strictest sense consists in the production of a subject who gives voice to the anonymous, whereas the politics specific to art in the

aesthetic regime consists in the elaboration of a sense-based world of the anonymous, of modes of the "that" and the "I", from which emerge worlds specific to the political "we". But it must also be added that insofar as this effect has to do with aesthetic rupture, one is hard pressed to calculate it in advance.

What is known as the politics of art is thus the entwining of heterogeneous logics. There is first of all what might be called the "politics of aesthetics" in general; that is, the effect in the political field of forms specific to the aesthetic regime of art: The constitution of neutralised spaces, the loss of the works' destination, the overlapping of heterogeneous temporalities, the indifferent availability of works, the equality of represented subjects, the anonymity of those to whom the works are addressed and so on. Then there is within this framework, the strategies of artists who propose to change the frameworks and the scales of what is visible and sayable, to confer visibility on what was not seen, to give different visibility to things that were all too easily seen, to establish relationships between what was unrelated, with the goal of producing ruptures in the sense-based fabric of perceptions and in the dynamics of reactions. This is what I shall refer to as the work of fiction. Fiction is not the creation of an imaginary world that stands opposed to the real world. It is the work which produces dissensus which changes the modes of sense-based presentation and the forms of enunciation by changing the frames, the scales or the rhythms by constructing new relationships between appearance and reality, the singular and the common, the visible and its meaning. There remains an insistent temptation to produce a form of art eluding the limits and contradictions of representation, able to intervene directly in the real by short-circuiting the artistic production of the "that" and the political creation of the "we". The nodal point between the aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics is always a singular and contradictory weave between the three logics I have mentioned: The representative logic which seeks to produce effects through representations; the aesthetic logic which produces effects through the suspension of representative ends; and the ethical logic which holds that the forms of art and the forms of politics directly identify with one another.

This tension was for a long time hidden in the model of critical art. Critical art is an art that claims to produce a new gaze upon the world and, thereby, a decision to transform it. It thus presupposes the adjustment of three processes: The production of a sense-based estrangement, a growing awareness of the reason for this estrangement and a mobilisation resulting from this awareness. When Brecht represented Nazi leaders as cauliflower peddlers and had them speak about their vegetable business in classical verse, the clash of situations and heterogeneous modes of discourse were intended to produce an awareness of the market forces hidden behind the grandiose discourses about race and nation and the forces of domination hidden behind the sublime quali-

ties of art. When Godard had his characters attending a fashionable dinner party engage in conversation by having them repeat, while standing against a monochromatic background, advertising slogans boasting up cars or undergarments, this rupture of the visual and aural continuum was supposed to make palpable the dispossession of personal life and the alienation of relationships between individuals caused by the language of the commodity. When Martha Rosler mixed images from the Vietnam War with advertising photographs of middle-class American homes, the photomontage was supposed to show the reality of the war behind standardised individual happiness and the all-pervasive empire of business behind the wars waged by the "free world." But the apparently simple logic behind this estrangement effect is in fact a contradictory logic. It seeks to bring about a shock of the senses, a mobilisation of bodies through the combination of heterogeneous elements – that is, through the presentation of this strangeness. But it also intends that this perception-shifting estrangement effect be identical with an "understanding effect" of the reasons for this strangeness and thus its de facto dissipation. It therefore seeks to transform in a single and unique process the aesthetic shock of different sensorialities and the representative correction of behaviour, aesthetic separation and ethical continuity. This contradiction does not mean that the critical work's device is without any effect. It can in fact contribute to transforming the map of the perceptible and the thinkable, to creating new forms of experience of the sensible, new distances from the existent configuration of the given. But this effect cannot be a calculable transmission between sense-based artistic shock, intellectual awareness and political mobilisation. There is no particular reason that the clash of two modes of sensoriality should translate into an understanding of the reasons for the order of things, any more than the understanding of the order of things should translate into a decision to change that order. One does not shift from the vision of a spectacle to an understanding of the world and from an intellectual understanding to a decision to take action. One moves from a sense-based world to another sense-based world that defines other tolerances and intolerances, other capacities and incapacities. What is operative are the dissociations: The rupture of a relationship between feeling and meaning, between what one sees and what one understands; the rupture of sense-based bearings and orientation making it possible to find one's place within the order of things.

This gap between the ends of critical art and its real forms of operativity was tenable as long as the system of understanding the world and the forms of political mobilisation it was supposed to favour were powerful enough in and of themselves to support it. It is laid bare once the system itself loses its self-evidence and when its forms are stripped of their power. This is something we observe more and more often: The intentions, procedures and justifying

rhetoric of the critical apparatus have remained unchanged for decades. Today as yesterday, it claims to denounce the reign of the commodity, its ideal icons and its sordid by-products: Parodied advertising films, misappropriated mangas, disco sounds remixed, characters from advertising screens made into resin statues or painted in the heroic bold strokes of Soviet realism, Disneyland characters transformed into polymorphous perverts, montages of vernacular photographs of household interiors comparable to advertising in magazines, sad leisure and all the trash of consumerist civilisation, gigantic installations of tubes and machines representing the intestines of the social machine absorbing everything and transforming it into excrement and so on and so forth. These devices continue to occupy our galleries and museums, shored up by a rhetoric claiming to reveal to us the power of the commodity, the supremacy of the spectacle and the pornography of power. But as no one in our world is so inattentive as to need to have this pointed out to them, the mechanism merely spins idly, playing on the very undecidibility of the device. It was thus possible to show the selfsame exhibition in the United States under the soft-pop title *Let's Entertain* and in France under the hard-edged situationist title *Au-delà du Spectacle* (Beyond the spectacle). Yet Maurizio Cattelan's huge fussball game or Charles Ray's merry-go-round didn't change in any way. Simply, in one place, the wall text invited viewers to take part in a playful form of art. In the other, it invited them to see the exhibition as a critique of the spectacular world of the commodity. The device is based on the equivalence of critique, the mockery of critique and the undecidibility between them. It used to be that the undecidibility of the critical apparatus was resolved by the clear opposition between two worlds. With the collapse of this opposition, critique today tends to identify with maintaining itself at a distance and the staging of its own futility or magic which is the mode of presentation of the commodity, its own art.

This transformation of critical doubling-up into a mere double-lining of the configuration of the existent world translates the paradox that currently characterises the situation of art and its politics. This situation can be globally characterised by the weakening of the political scene. Confiscated in one instance by authoritarian powers, ethnic identitarianism or religious fanaticism, it is neutralised in another by consensus – that is, by the reduction of the political scene to arbitration between the interests of groups in the context of the world economic necessity set out as an unavoidable given. This global deficit of political subjectivation and invention actually has a contradictory effect on art's performance: On the one hand, it eliminates the dissensual horizon which upholds the efficacy of critical procedures. It thus often leads artists to denounce their past claims, to repudiate the critical model based on the shock-value of the heterogeneous and of the revelation of hidden contradictions and assigns artists the more modest task of

documenting the world or establishing mini-devices of sociability. But on the other hand, this erasure of the political scene has the converse effect: It tends to give a substitutive role to artistic devices and thus revalourises the idea of an art sundered from itself, becoming an intervention in the real world, if not indeed a creator of political situations and collectives.

On the one hand, then, one sees various strategies of critical shock replaced by strategies of testimony, archiving or documentation which replaces us in the presence of traces of the history or the signs of a community. Thirty years ago, Chris Burden put up his *Other Monument* – a monument to the Vietnamese dead – by writing on large plates of bronze the names of unknown Vietnamese picked at random from telephone books. Thirty years later, Christian Boltanski once again had recourse to anonymity, but this time stripping it of its polemical function in his installation entitled *Les Abonnés du Telephone* (Telephone subscribers list): Visitors were invited to pick out at random in telephone books from around the world and to make contact not with names bearing a polemical charge but with what the artist himself referred to as "specimens of humanity". These specimens of humanity were presented in Paris in a large memorial exhibition of the past century where they were placed side-by-side, for instance, with the one hundred photographs of individuals produced by Hans Peter Feldmann and Fischli & Weiss's gigantic installation, *The Visible World,* comprised of a multitude of slides of tourist attractions.

The great mosaic or tapestry representing the multitude of anonymous people or of the frameworks of their lives is a genre one sees a lot of today. I am thinking for example, of the tapestry made up of some 1600 passport-style photographs all sewn together by the Chinese artist Bai Yiluo in a tapestry that seeks to evoke, as the artist puts it, "the delicate ties binding families and communities." It is quite true that this unanimism is frequently scorned by the tenants of a documentary form of objective photography and art, stripped of both any humanist pathos and any activist claim. But the objectivism in question itself produces a problematic balancing act between the inside and the outside. I am thinking of the role assumed in politically intended exhibitions by the photographs of water towers, blast furnaces, smokestacks and other industrial buildings produced by Bernd and Hilla Becher. The photographs are presented as documents objectively depicting the world. But the world in question is obviously double: On the one hand, it is the world of work and industry, a world which yesterday underpinned the dream of a radical transformation of the world. But on the other hand, this world is deserted twice over: The industrial sites shown are deserted and the symbolic world which was organised around them has vanished. On the one hand, then, the series of photographs is like a sculpture, embracing within itself the lost world of work and of working-class struggle, just as Winckelmann's *Torso* embraced within itself now-absent Greek freedom. On the

other hand, this absence appears as the mark of formal rigour, the emblem of an art that refuses any sentimental effusion or decorative embellishment. As if the watchword of yesterday's struggles echoed on in a certain number of formal imperatives: Series production, an enduring framework, the absence of any empathy for the subject. The documentary watchword thus seems to cast upon the very meaning of the "document" the same silence that post-critical art has cast upon the meaning of critique. It tends to play another form of the double game between the negation of art in favour of the subject and the negation of the subject in favour of art.

In the face of this double game, the past several years have witnessed the reaffirmation of an activist art which no longer presents doubles of objects, images or messages of the world, but which intervenes directly: An art that directly produces objects of the world or situations in the outside world; an art that either leaves its specific places or brings the world into these places. This can include relational art practices, creating in galleries or museums various devices of conviviality or bringing about modifications in the urban décor capable of transforming the perception of the environment; photographic or videographic documentation in museums of actions carried out beyond museum walls or instances of a politically committed art, intervening directly on the billboards, costumes and banners of demonstrators or offering direct solution to social problems, such as Lucy Orta's clothing-tents that transform into means of immediate rescue and survival the complex technological and dialectical devices with which, a generation earlier, Kristof Wodiczko sought to problematise the place of foreigners and the homeless in the city. These devices verge on a limit that strikes me as being illustrated by a video installation presented at the Havana Biennale in 2003 by a Cuban artist by the name of René Francisco. The artist used the money of an artistic foundation to carry out an enquiry into conditions of life in a poor neighbourhood and decided, with some of his artist friends, to undertake the restoration of the home of an elderly couple in the neighbourhood. The work thus featured a screen on which had been printed an image of the elderly couple in profile watching a monitor on which a video showed the artists working as builders, painters or plumbers. The relationship between the museum-based device and direct social intervention falls into the logic of relational aesthetics. But the very fact that the intervention takes place in one of the last countries on earth to still lay claim to communism obviously situated the work within a different history. He produced a derisive follow-up to the desire expressed by Kasimir Malevich at the time of the Soviet revolution: To no longer make paintings but to directly construct new forms of life. He brought us back to the point where the will to politicise art takes the form of shedding its very self, a direct intervention in the real whose consequence is the conjoint elimination of art and politics.

It thus seems necessary to reassert that the problem is not about politicising art in the form of an exit toward the outside or an intervention in the real. There is no real that might be described as the outside of art. There are folds and refolds within the shared sense-based fabric where the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics join and rejoin together. There is no real in and of itself, but rather configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions, our thoughts and our interventions. The real is always the object of a fiction, that is, of a construction of a space where the visible, the sayable and the doable connect. It is precisely the specificity of the dominant fiction, the "police" fiction – in the sense in which I use that term – to claim to impose a real that is highly isolated from appearances, representations, points of view and utopias. This oneness and univocity of sense-based data is what is meant by the term "consensus". The work of politics as well as that of art is to introduce dissensus, to burrow, to double up and to multiply the real. This is what I understand by fiction and, in this sense, the politics of art links one to the other like two forms of fiction working on the same material. A certain will to move to an outside or to join up once again with the real thus tends to identify the politics of art with its opposite: Consensual ethics. This is why the work of fiction richest in political potentiality today is perhaps one that complexifies the coordinates of the real. It is one that works on the borders, transitions and sites marked by a border – non-places, spaces in the throes of restructuring. Some of these works are closely bound up with the history of this country and this part of the world. I am thinking, for instance and amongst others, of the work of Paola Yacoub and Michel Lasserre on the aspects of landscape in South Lebanon or the overlapping aspects of destruction and reconstruction in Beirut, or the photographic series entitled *WB* which Sophie Riestelhuber devoted to the Israeli checkpoints on the Palestinian roadways. But I am also thinking of Chantal Ackermann's film and video installation, *From the Other Side* which deals with the Mexican border; of Pedro Costa's film, *Vanda's Room*, about a group of marginal people living in a down-and-out suburb of Lisbon which is increasingly devoured by bulldozers; or the video *Dammi Colori* which Anri Sala made about the project undertaken by the artist-mayor of Tirana: To change the city and the image of the city in the minds of those who dwell in it, as well as the image they have of themselves, by having them paint the facades of their buildings in a variety of bright colours.

What interests me in these works stemming from different political and artistic perspectives is above all the way in which the documentary form is the site of a confrontation of fictions – that is, of a confrontation of ways of allowing the real to be read and seen. I am thinking for instance, of how Chantal Ackermann runs counter to the usual ways of dealing with the border in film. Typically, filmmakers will focus on what connects and links: They focus nar-

ratively on the dramatic episode of crossing the border and intellectually on the study of the economic logic which integrates both the illegal emigrants and those who chase them down even as they need their labour power into a single world economy. Chantal Ackermann, quite on the contrary, breaks this narrative and conceptual relationship. Instead of showing border crossings, she shows them separated into three elements: The material and inhuman reality of the wall; the discourse of those who want to cross over; and the discourse of those who, on the other side, want to keep them out. And instead of showing a successful crossing, bearing witness to the economic inter-dependency of all involved, she ends her film with the narrative of a disappearance: The story of an emigrant woman who one day disappeared as silently as she had lived. What the film provides us with, then, is not the testimony of an art in the service of politics, but the elaboration of this fabric of anonymous people where they meet one another. I am thinking in the same way of Sophie Riestelhuber's decision not to photograph head-on the huge separation wall constructed by the Israeli state, but rather to photograph it from above – in keeping, that is, with the point of view from which it blends in most with the landscape (small stone roadblocks cutting off country roads, etc.) as if in order to shift away from scenes of great affect with their fake ability to mobilise general indignation toward scenes of individualised curiosity.

Work focusing on barriers raised by oppressive powers is thus at the same time a way of working on the borders between the document and art. This approach is obvious in a video such as Anri Sala's *Dammi Colouri* which both allows us to understand the artist-mayor's project and to see the way in which the construction workers implement it out on the walls, in some occasions reduced to abstract colour fields and, at other times brought into perspective with the mud and garbage on the streets where roadwork is underway and with the movement of passers-by. But the same effect is used more subtly still in the case of Pedro Costa's film, based on the tension between a background of poverty and the artistic possibilities it contains: The faded colours of the walls make the interiors look like murky aquariums but take on a new vivacity when the bulldozers tear them open and expose them for a moment to direct light; voices stifled by drug use, by work and by the noise from outside which penetrates the inside realm, suddenly find words which rise to the occasion. It also manifests itself through the myopia of a gaze that closes itself in a closed universe which thus leaves aside the objective reasons for the existence and elimination of the shantytown in order to present us with the relationship between the potency and the impotency of bodies alone. The absence of any explanation confronts us with what is perhaps specifically political: Not the knowledge of the reasons that produce such and such a life, but the confrontation between this life and what it is capable of. The film

does not elude the immeasurable tension between aesthetic indifference and a political gap. It does not elude the fact that a film remains a film and a viewer a viewer. Film, video, photomontage, installation or any other art form, all displace the framework of perceptions and the disposition of effects. They thus create new crossovers toward possible forms of political subjectivation. But none can elude the aesthetic rupture which separates the effects produced from the intended ends and thus stands opposed to any test-tried recipe of critique as well as to any felicitous crossover to the other side of images and words.

In raising these examples, it is not my intention to state what a political art should be in my opinion. On the contrary, I sought to explain why no such norms can be established. Not, as often alleged, because art is somehow foreign to politics but because it has its own politics – a politics whose forms anticipate the will of artists but also a politics composed of the interweaving of several logics, of the tension between contrary forces. I tried to show that this politics held taut between two poles is not without a certain undecidibility. But there are two ways of playing with this undecidibility: One that uses it for the demonstration of artistic virtuosity; and another that takes it as its object and seeks to explore its very tension. In any case, the attempt to eliminate these tensions and to force this undecidibility in order to define what good politics for art should be, leads, inevitably, to the conjoint elimination of both art and politics.

November 21, 2005

Jacques Rancière was born in Algiers in 1940. He is a French philosopher and emeritus professor of aesthetics and politics at the University of Paris VIII, where he taught from 1969 to 2000. He has written numerous books on politics, aesthetics, cinema and literature. He also writes regularly on cinema for the journals *Trafic* and *Les Cahiers du Cinema*. His recent books include *Politique de la Litérature* (2007), *La Haine de la Démocratie* (2005) and *Malaise dans l'Esthétique* (2004). His latest books translated into English are Film Fables (2006), *The Future of the Image* (2007) and the *Hatred of Democracy* (2007)

Repression and the Information Boom

Zuhair al Jezairi

Humans have, since time immemorial, exchanged information. To say and to listen have been as basic and as instinctual as breathing and eating in forestalling death. The earliest forms of communication predate spoken language. Cave paintings were already messages about hunting and various dangers. Packed in caves seeking shelter from the changing weather and other looming threats, a primitive tribe used to delegate one of its own to keep watch and inform the rest of any imminent danger. When such an eventuality did arise, one elder or an assembly of elders were then responsible for taking a decision, issuing orders and informing each of the tribe's members of their tasks and duties. The course of action was not decided by one or more in reaction to a pressing danger. Rather, much of what was decided followed established rules, rituals, laws and beliefs. Accordingly, teaching youths and novices these rules and regulations was of a crucial importance in leading and managing the needs of the group. It is therefore possible to posit that information in primitive societies played three roles: That of observation (keeping watch and notifying), that of policy-making (decision-making, leadership and drafting laws) and that of teaching (inducting individuals into the group through rites of passage).

Iraqi Curiosity

According to one local anecdote, it was "*Chako mako?*" the Iraqi idiomatic equivalent for the American "What's up?" which burst the computer. Such was the need of Iraqis for news in a country swept in unexpected upheavals. Were the Iraqis living in less exceptional and less repressed times, *souks* or markets would have provided a space for the exchange of information along with the exchange of goods. In such spaces, information is not only the stuff of intimate conversations, but also that which can be announced by one to a multitude. In addressing an anonymous crowd, the herald performs one aspect of modern news media. In fact, he is a persistent figure whose role can be traced back to the Babylonian age, announcing to all the decrees of the authorities. Until recently, the

herald would canvas the streets and *souks* informing citizens of new laws, religious legal opinions or *fatwas* as well as of the latest movies shown in local cinemas. Besides the *souks*, mosques have remained a central space for instruction and channeling information to the faithful while outside the reach of civil authorities. They also played, most notably during the 1920s, a central role in communicating the tenets of ideologies. For instance, it was in a mosque that I first heard of Coca Cola, a non-alcoholic and therefore religiously sanctioned drink. Following the demise of the 1920s revolution, mosques receded and were partially replaced by cafés. It was there that people congregated around the *effendis* and the literate who read the dailies and listened to the radio in search of world news.

Modern communication media broke the monopoly of ruling elites, clerics and the learned few over knowledge. Fast and available, it multiplied the speed of information exchange. It also promoted impersonal informational exchange, be it audio, visual or printed, over direct oral and interpersonal communication. The following anecdote is telling: At the frontiers of the dry lands, by the Al Houwaiza lake, we were received as guests of the Bou Mouhamad family. In the large guest room, a television occupied a central place exactly as an elder would have. Prominent and central, that television replaced the roles usually played by the clan leader, the wise elders and even the local "bully". This new tele-Sheikh condensed, in its flow of sounds and images, the roles of the storyteller, the wise and the companion. Even the actual elder seemed to have relinquished some of his privileges as he followed the news broadcast. Sitting in front of the television, this remote little village seemed current and part of the world.

Newspapers were the medium of the literate and the learned. Television, on the other hand, is defined by its availability. It seeks an audience, enters private dwellings with vivid audiovisual drama that fulfills the needs of the illiterate villager. More than a mere box which broadcasts sitcoms of Bedouin themes such as honour, betrayal and vestal love, television is a bridge that links the tribal world to the modern world. It broadcasts the world live: Watching the news of Blair's visit to a European nation, the Sheikh by my side addressed me with a loud voice meant for everyone to hear: "Tony is wiser than Bush… Do you not think so?" I, of course, had to agree with this piece of wisdom imparted to all his subjects.

Television communicates experiences from far beyond the limited world of the villagers. It opens unto the unexpected and challenges what is orally transmitted and what is physically and sensorially known. In fact, television tests the limits, traditions and givens of the closed tribal environment. And although great leaps have been taken between the time of the cave tribes and our so-called global village, information media still carries the same tasks: Keeping watch and scanning the horizon is now the task of news departments with their armies of reporters, investigators, high-tech communication

hardware and broadcasting units, while modern governments and parliaments now carry the task of sounding popular opinion and drawing future policies. And while the caller or herald used to inform the multitudes, his task is now performed by populist information services.

It is quite noticeable that what used to be decided swiftly among a few is now open to endless public debates. But, as in previous tribal eras, the task is one and the same: Informing, observing, exploring, deciding and teaching. All this is now within the domain of the printed and audio-visual media.

Curious Authorities and Curiosity Killed

If people needed to know of what happens above them, the authorities needed to always be informed about what happened beneath them. Recognising that information can turn to acts, activism and social practice, the authorities planted an endless numbers of informers in public spaces such as mosques and cafés. The role of these secret agents was to keep those in power aware and in touch with the pulse of the streets.

In the mid-1980s, a campaign to survey and control Iraqi society required that all citizens fill a questionnaire containing questions about one's family and relatives up to the fourth degree of kinship. It also contained questions about relatives who were possibly imprisoned, executed or on the run. It also contained flagrant threats to those who would refuse to disclose (or provide incorrect) information, or even be late in submitting them. These questionnaires were to be submitted every six months. Such was the level of surveillance in Iraq.

Under threat, and forced to tell on friends and relatives, citizens were constantly interpolated so as to make mere silence an infraction of the law. In fact, citizens were gradually made into unpaid volunteer informers working under that infamous slogan put out by the Ministry of the Interior: "In a society where each does not police everyone else, we would need a policeman for each". In such a society of informers, fear prevails. Trusting no one, each person is prey to doubts and avoids "confiding in friends and relatives fearing that one improper word could be relayed to the internal security forces."

The Censor and the Forbidden

The web of professional, coerced and volunteer informers forcefully applied a series of laws which prohibited the publication of material which "promotes defeatism, serves colonial or Zionist interests, does not fulfill the aims, interests and aspirations of the people, harms the concerns and goals of the Arab homeland, causes injury to allied states, slanders the reputation of national liberation movements across the world or is of low artistic quality and harmful to good taste". Such a long litany of interdictions tended to multiply and was kept open-ended for both the authoritarian ruler and more so for individuals caught in the bind of fearful self-censorship.

Under such a constant threat of death and fear of punishment,

Iraqis learned to sublimate and repress the pre-linguistic human instinct for exchanging information. Living under the shadow of a "total informer", exchange was purged of anything deemed sensitive and as such was reduced to very little. Accordingly, it was the authorities who then monopolised information. Everyone else was cut-off from communication and reduced to becoming subject to surveillance. What was allowed was carefully measured and rationed. People were prohibited under threat of death from listening to "enemy" radio stations and from watching satellite television.

In such a reign of terror, communication is reduced to mere whispers within the closed circles of trusted friends. And yet, Iraqis gradually came to prefer silence in their personal world of cautious deafness, choosing to speak not, nor to listen: Fear of punishment is ideal for killing the curious search for knowledge.

The Information Boom

Upon the fall of the regime, a dizzying informational boom occurred. The world of repression and secrets was suddenly divulged to all. The streets were littered with the files of the secret services. Secrets, once carefully protected, became available to all. Sold for a few dinars, these files which had cost many their lives were now read and discussed, often in amazement at the private information they contained. Alas, those informers were more often than not the closest of friends and relatives.

The world was turned upside down. The authorities which once monopolised information and knew the smallest details, were now exposed to everyone. The exorbitant lifestyles and practices of the ruling family were eagerly viewed on DVDs sold in Liberation Square. Tabloid newspapers could now run these stories with impunity, whereas not long before, during the bitter and lean days of the international embargo, similar stories about profligate parties were overheard and duly swallowed like ill fate.

To wander around Liberation Square, I used to wear my worst clothes. Everywhere, one could find little makeshift studios for copying and recording CDs and tapes of the atrocities committed by the authorities. Why did they document all that torture and violence? Within that authoritarian hierarchy, each wanted to prove his work accomplished. All the way to the highest leader, documents were made and sent. A long history of violence was now available on tapes. A secretive past has awakened and was in public view. And a people, once in denial, picked it up and embellished it. An imagination once repressed was set loose.

No matter the cruel conditions and pressing demands of a present in turmoil, a mere exchange with a neighbour or taxi driver would inevitably bring stories of that past flooding in. Emaciated and unshaven, the missing stepped out of burrows and secret dens. With waxen faces, they walked onto the streets carrying the banners of their parties.

Yet some remained missing. A few days after my arrival in Baghdad, a rumour spread about a prison dug underneath the tun-

nel of Liberation Square. Men and women hurried to the site. Amongst them, fathers, mothers and that unforgettable bereaved villager running as if in two directions, her black cloak lagging in the wind behind, with arms outstretched. Inside the tunnel, young men attempted to break open a steel door. One of them calls: "We've come!" And hears in the mere echo the response he longs for.

The Return of the Dead

All at once, the dead awoke. All those that were kidnapped, or perhaps one should say flagrantly collected, surfaced again in communal graves. These men and women who were not allowed a funeral or a mere prayer were found again. Found and then properly buried. Relatives could now do what was once prohibited: They could grieve. At least a corpse was now available whereas there had once been no more than a mere printed notice which informed the parents that their sons and daughters had "betrayed the nation". Without a corpse there is no evidence of death. And an empty grave is just that.

The streets of the city were lined with posted notes of those still missing. Not everyone was fortunate enough to find the corpses of their loved ones. This land is replete with the unknown dead. My uncle Abdel Amir was one among those who refused to believe these ghastly notices. He would wander the streets searching for a name or picture that could lead him to his missing son Samer. He had an intimation that his son was still alive, perhaps abroad and that he would reappear. An intimation that occupied his days and on which he built illusory hopes that comfort and torture.

The return of the dead awakened vengeance; and in the absence of any deterring force, the dead hunted the executioners who attempted to flee, most often with their looted wealth.

In such a situation, satellite television became vital. People wanted to know everything there was to know of this violent past that was flooding the gates of the present. Myriad stories were told of forgotten persons reappearing from the tenebrous dungeons and of thieves and criminals controlling the back streets and alleyways. Kidnapping became a lucrative occupation. Depending on identity and status, the release of a captive could cost between 15 and 200 thousand dollars.

To drive around the city, I used a run-down car, a "Brazilian", in order to avoid the attention of car thieves. I saw nightmarish scenes: A wounded man hunted by an armed one; two boys thrown on cardboard boxes, bleeding to death; passers-by asking questions without stopping for answers; a woman screaming, asking for help as a car raced against traffic firing gun shots in the air. The city was a jungle where brute force ruled.

News, News, News

Discussing the news was not a mere pastime. News meant life or death. It was not about what was happening elsewhere. The news was everyone's. Close and personal, the news told of imminent dangers. And in the absence of police, each

had to fend for him or herself. It demanded a quick decision and action early the next morning. News was hotly debated among family members: Should we move to another location? Should we consider going shopping for goods? Should we send the kids to school? Should we abandon our homes? What about the future, after all this senseless violence? Questions that could be only answered, even if temporarily, by whatever news were at hand.

The long bloody years of the regime spent the Iraqis' ability to hope in a better future. The flagrant discrepancies between the ruling class and the rest of the population lay to waste the patience and diligence of the people. Now, in this sudden and unheralded moment of complete and wanton openness, dread reigns. Accordingly, the dissemination of information is pivotal in increasing or decreasing tensions. Whether the media will exploit and thrive on sensational news or promote discussion will, to a large extent, impact the situation to come. If the media can buttress the confidence of the people, then it should. For it is inevitable that genuine and coherent change can only come from a real transformation of the general public.

November 23, 2005

Zuhair al Jezairi was born in Al Najaf in 1945. He is a novelist and journalist who studied German literature in Baghdad, then worked as a journalist in Baghdad, Beirut and London. He has several published books and has contributed to a number of documentary films. Previously editor in chief of the newspaper *Al Mada*, he currently acts as editor in chief of the independent Iraqi news agency *Awsat Al Iraq*.

Lebanon in Two Camps: A Partisan Fear of a Free Citizenry

Mohamad Abi Samra

Perhaps no one in Lebanon could have foreseen that the huge explosion and immense blast echoing throughout Beirut on February 14, 2005 would signal the end of a humiliating and degrading era and promise a new dawn for the country and its depressed inhabitants.

Prior to this blast, people – those who later became the Lebanese of March 14[1], the human catalysts of the Cedar Revolution – had been drowning in their own pessimism. They despaired of ever being rid of the suffocation plaguing the country. It would take the tonne of explosives targeting Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's convoy as it left parliament to wake them up and unfurl a series of epic stories, whose extensive chapters may one day be written in the chronicles of history.

A short anecdote of an otherwise lengthy story features a 17-year-old student, who was as interested in Lebanese politics as she was intrigued by her Arabic lessons at school. Her feeling was that her lessons resembled the routine of the daily news broadcasts her father mundanely followed during a quiet evening at home. But the events which followed the blast would inspire the young girl with a new sense of awareness of what her country was experiencing and of what really mattered to her countrymen and women.

Citizens' Fury

The extent of the shock of the assassination was as immense as the shock of the response to the act and the political will which rose in its wake, trying to find a way out of the grey period of its post-civil war reality (1989-2005) – a period where the Baathist clutches of Syrian rule controlled all that was Lebanon.

For two days, the trauma of the assassination led to paralysis. But the trauma gave way to a determination in communities, groups and individuals to rise to the challenges before them and face the options; to continue living under the same oppressive and repressive force that assassinated Hariri, or to rise up against it and shake off its grip on them, once and for all.
They would answer with their newfound will.

1 March 14, 2005 was the day when approximately a million protesters gathered to demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

The young girl said Lebanese political issues used to mean "nothing to me; and never distracted me, for a moment, from my personal or social life." The girl who comes from a typical middle class Christian family, said that, after the assassination of Hariri, "the person I was changed fundamentally […] The wave of fury that came over me when I heard the news of the assassination was unlike anything I had ever experienced before in my whole life. I sensed something huge was going to happen and change the entire course of the country… because I knew that my anger was not just my own, nor a personal feeling. I knew that it was going to take me and so many others like me, out of our state of isolation into public action"

She insists that her anger was not a result of any feelings towards the former prime minister as a political figure. In fact, she says "I had no real or specific position with regard to his 'politics'; the only real connection to him was our citizenship and the fact that he was the former prime minister of my country. And he was brutally killed in the centre of my city, along with 20 other Lebanese citizens – who were like me… or not like me… and the only thing that spared me their fate was pure coincidence."

Twenty of her friends gathered on the evening of February 14, 2005, "motivated by the same anger. As we watched the newscast together, we all agreed that we would participate in the public funeral procession called for by Hariri's family. We began to discuss the nature of our participation and whether or not we would have the courage to say, in a loud voice, that we blamed the Syrian regime for this crime." "It's obvious, don't you think?" was Saad Hariri's response in English to a British journalist, who asked him who was responsible for the killing of his father. This statement in English would be "the slogan we would write on the banner we carried at the funeral which was attended by over 150,000 other people. We, the twenty friends, would call on all our friends and march together in the mass funeral procession on the day of February 17, 2005."

A Grave Turned Shrine

As Hariri and his bodyguards were commemorated and brought to their final resting place at Martyr's Square in downtown Beirut, the young student, who attended the funeral with her parents, met some friends and acquaintances. She took photographs of that majestic, yet painful event. In the days that followed, she would continue to visit Hariri's grave, like so many other individuals and groups. There, they would stand silent, sad and despondent, whispering or weeping, lighting candles and laying flowers near the grave. It was as if by attempting to understand the man – the person and the politician, his life and his fate – they were somehow trying to comprehend the fate of their own destiny.

Day after day, the wave of visitors to the grave increased in the vast space which they renamed "Freedom Square". The grave soon turned into a national shrine – a symbol of the possibility of the birth of a new Lebanese nationality which became manifest in the

breathtaking human scene on the day of March 14, 2005, celebrating the beginning of Lebanon's liberation from the suffocating Syrian grip.

On the day the human mural of the Lebanese flag was created, the young student forced her father to stand next to her and carry one of the red placards, along with all the others involved in this symbolic endeavor. Meanwhile, her uncle returned from Cairo to see for himself what was going on. When his young niece convinced him to raise the Lebanese flag, he became part of the making of these spectacular scenes – at the square, at the scene of the crime. It was the same flag he had rejected in his adolescence and youth, as a member of the revolutionary left. He had demonstrated in the streets of Beirut against the raising of a "nationalist symbol" of a country – whose people would soon become divided and prepared for the wars of the long "years of ashes" (1975-1989).

Deliverance from Shame

As the girl and her uncle walked side by side in the square, he told her a story from his past as a young fighter in the armed revolution, at the onset of the war – which he referred to as the "years of ashes".

The uncle told the story of a girl who came to the military office of his organisation (where he was posted as a fighter in Shiyyah, a Muslim neighborhood in the southern suburbs of Beirut), accompanied by a group of internal security service officers. The internal security officers had taken the girl from her house which lay in the direct line of fire on the Christian side of the Green Line (demarcation line) in Ain el Rummaneh. They brought her to Shiyyah in an attempt to save her from the crossfire of the warring parties from both sides, during the Two-Year War (1975 – 1976).

As soon as the fighter saw the girl, he realised she looked familiar. He quickly remembered that she was a former classmate at the high school he had attended before the war erupted, just over a year ago. After looking into each other's eyes and without exchanging a single word, they instantly recognised one another. The uncle-fighter suddenly felt outside himself; he was overcome by a cold rush of shame and humiliation at the situation in which he found himself.

The girl had reminded him of himself as a student – a person he had forgotten in the madness of the war and its deadly enmities. It was as if her gaze instantly disengaged him from his present state and condition as a fighter in a warring militia. The halo of heroics that the war had imparted to its fighters suddenly turned into a symbol of disgust and shame – the uncle/former fighter told his niece that the Lebanese men and women of March 14 had taken to the streets to rid themselves of this legacy of shame after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri.

Realities Linked by Images

In the few days following the explosion and Hariri's funeral procession, television cameras were placed throughout Martyr's Square. They revealed the multitude of images and scenes taking place:

Daily visits to the grave-shrine, daily visits to the gaping hole left at the scene of the crime; the raising of party flags and symbols and of Lebanese flags; a candle lit; a rose tossed; prayers; a teardrop; a passing epitaph posted on the mosque's public bulletin board; people lining up in a human chain linking the gaping hole with the grave-shrine; the rotating shifts of protestors at "Freedom Camp"[2]; as well as reports by the likes of Yussef Bazzi[3] and the subsequent deluge of daily reports by so many local and international journalists.

The nightly candlelight vigils – where strangers stood, side by side, hoping and praying for minister Bassel Fleihan[4] to emerge from a pending death by third degree burns – became a silent testament to the feeling of solidarity amongst the strangers, touched by one another like the whispering flames of candles.

"Their footsteps were light," and like "never before, silence enveloped the crowd", Hassan Daoud would write in his beautiful account of this gathering.[5]

The novel spectacle and the sights, sounds and emotions associated with this new experience were broadcast live to the small-screen televisions in peoples' homes. These daily realities and scenes would make a direct connection with people, touching them with their warmth. The painful event, the public's experiences and individual incidents would appear instantly and continuously in every home.

The stream and world of sights, images and sentiments linked private homes to the large square and the scene of the explosion. It was as though the event had, spontaneously and simultaneously, created the reality and its representation, in addition to the viewers and makers of these representations.

The impact of this shocking event, its effect on the consciousness, core, streets, squares and images of Lebanon turned the space, in the blink of an eye and in the aftermath of the explosion, into a place of public national declaration, unprecedented in the once-mute centre – a centre that, for three decades, had been ghost-like, the cursed and murderous arena of a 'Lebanised' civil war (1975).

Between Murder and Fire

Those were the decades of the "years of ashes" – the ashes that we licked off every house, square and street, every instant, until we became a seized, confiscated country. Day after day, we accepted to become malleable material moulded by the events, news, images and "political" discourse manufactured by public ghosts (the Baathist Syrian oligarchy) and their agents from the subservient Lebanese political ranks in dark, secret places as clear and public as the light of day.

That is how we lived, bowing to political death, social erosion, corruption, human and cultural hemorrhage throughout the war years, then under Syrian dominion. It took the blast of the colossal explosion to wake us from our long slumber.

Not only did this sudden awakening create a vast, vibrant Lebanese space for a political and

2 Freedom Camp was a campsite set up in Martyr's Square (later referred to as Freedom Square by the writer) by young members of the March 14 coalition, who were calling for the resignation of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud and the removal of Syrian and pro-Syrian elements from the Lebanese military, security and intelligence services.

3 A journalist at *Al-Mustaqbal* newspaper, writing on March 20, 2005.

4 Bassel Fleihan was a former member of parliament and Minister of Economy and Commerce. He died on April 18, 2005, succumbing to burns he incurred from the bomb blast that killed Hariri. He was sitting beside the former Prime Minister at the time of the explosion.

5 *Al-Mustaqbal* newspaper, March 27, 2005.

public national declaration, it also produced extended "television" days for the new globalised "reality TV" – televised days whose instantaneous images magnified the power of the live reality and its daily events in the streets and squares and around the shrine.

In those long days of new realities mixing with overflowing images, the young student became addicted to that which she used to find boring: Her father's habit of watching the news. Her mother begged her not to spend too much time in front of the TV to try to push her daughter away from what the event had awakened in her consciousness, in the streets and in the public spaces. The girl refused, crying out, "They did not just kill him… they burned him to death! Do you realise what burning him means?!"

General "Joyous Strategy"

We arose from our slumber and onto the streets which once resembled empty models and monuments before being brought back to life by a human appetite for public political declarations against assassinations secretly planned by public ghosts. Our coming out also brought out our republic's President, Emile Lahoud – the general-appointed president, so thrilled by the joyous strategy of the "unified path and destiny" of the Lebanese with the Baathist Syrian occupation – from his silence. He would speak. And, with his customary ineloquence, he described the crime as "a base (or vile) act", as if he were describing a brawl between two kids in a village square – mimicking our tedious schoolbook history that attributes the start of the Mount Lebanon War of 1860 to a fight between two boys.

Speaking at one of his sessions with reporters – mouthpieces for the public ghosts – the Lebanese General-President, so concerned with appeasing the "glorious strategy", made a public announcement calling for the streets and public spaces to be cleared, for "people to seek the refuge of their homes", grossly forewarning them of a civil war of ghosts.

A War Threat

Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, the "master" of Hizbullah and its resistance, would also be forced out of his silence during the course of these events. The toppling of the Karameh government[6] in Freedom Square forced him out of the Hizbullah "Military Zone" in the Southern Suburbs for the first time. He would lead a demonstration of loyalty to Assad's Syria and Baathist party in Riad el-Solh Square[7] on March 8.

Those who took part in Hariri's funeral procession and who protested near the grave they continuously visited, would never have imagined that what they were doing would be met by such anger, fear, bitterness and loathing by any other Lebanese. That is, until they witnessed the March 8 demonstration crawling, as if towards war, led by Hizbullah to Riad el-Solh Square, the square adjacent to the grave-shrine.

Lebanese flags, waved by the masses of this angry demonstration, appeared to come directly from a culture of kitsch and parroting, like

6 So named after the Prime Minister Omar Karameh, who headed this government's cabinet.

7 Riad el-Solh Square is located in downtown Beirut, a few hundred metres away from Martyrs Square (renamed "Freedom Square" by March 14 and the writer) and Hariri's grave.

mummified masks, in comparison to the new, crisp and clean flags of the free camp in "Freedom Camp" – the camp where students demonstrated near the grave of its ill-fated owner – a fate which steered the course of Lebanon's independence from the Syrian Baathist regime.

The March 8 demonstration resembled those of countries run by fossilised dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, similar to the former Soviet Union, where miserable people marched in demonstrations carrying petrified banners and slogans bearing simultaneously a mixture of obeisance, loyalty and loathing.

Building on this example and rooted in the Assadi Baathist regime, rallies in Damascus turned out in juxtaposition to the Cedar Revolution, harbouring their bitterness against the Lebanon of freedom and independence and against the report by the international committee investigating the Hariri assassination. Lebanon cannot be free and independent according to Baathist ideology – unless it is "secretly" and "publicly" governed by a Syrian intelligence officer, entrenched in Anjar[8], the headquarters of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon. For over two decades, it was this officer and his security apparatus who were the guarantors and governors of the Lebanese political administration. Hariri could no longer tolerate the ramifications of this governing apparatus. He would distance himself from it, slowly and warily; his punishment would be execution – to set straight the "unified path and destiny" and as a lesson to anyone who would think, for a moment, to attempt to do the same.

To put a quick end to the events and frighten Lebanese citizens from trying to rid themselves of the control of the Syrian Baathist occupation, Hizbullah, or the party of *al Taklif al Shar'i* (official command by religious law), sent its constituency to the streets on March 8. The result would be the intensification of the will of Lebanese to turn out and demonstrate in Freedom Square, on March 14, 2005. The act of March 14 infuriated the "chief of resistance and liberation", Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. His immediate response was to offer a prize, from his endless resistance campaign and its most holy symbol (an Israeli rifle captured by his movement in one of its military operations), as a letter of credit guaranteeing loyalty and devotion to the Syrian intelligence officer – who would pass through the streets of Beirut, in fear and for the last time, to say farewell to the chaste and loyal beloved of his intelligence services.

How beautiful and breathtaking was the way that the people of March 14 snuffed out the flame of the March 8 demonstration called for by the official command of religious law and war. They (March 14) were gathering for Lebanon and the living in it, a colourful horizon, without anger, fear, enmity, bitterness and war, supporting the political process, unity and strength.

A Rally of Deception

The student, whose days of boredom with the news were over, agreed with her schoolmates that they would participate in the March 8 demonstration, thinking it

8 Lieutenant-General Rustom Ghazali was the Syrian Chief of Intelligence in Lebanon from 2002-2005, succeeding Ghazi Kanaan, who had served in that post for two decades, before becoming Syria's Interior Minister in 2004. Officials claim that Kanaan committed suicide on October 12, 2005. Ghazali was named a suspect in Hariri's assassination by Judge Detliv Mehlis, who headed the first phase of the international investigation into the assassination of Rafiq Hariri.

was yet another demonstration or protest in the series of colourful and liberating protests which had taken place in "Freedom Square". But her school (a girl's school) did not cancel classes for that day, so they were unable to participate in the resistance party's large demonstration.

That evening, after listening to Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah's speech and watching excerpts of the demonstration in the evening news, she couldn't believe that the resistance leader's rally to Riad el-Solh square was about loyalty to Assad's Syria and its cronies, threatening the "makers of the scenes" from Freedom Square with the ghosts of the past civil war.

The Grey Demonstration

As a fearful observer of the March 8 demonstration, I walked with it from Bechara el-Khoury Street towards Riad el-Solh Square. A glimpse of Freedom Square shockingly revealed to me that it had reverted back to its state of grey, eerie desertion. When I reached the tents of Freedom Square, I found them eerily empty of all but a few silenced protestors. Fearful of the cold and the eeriness, many scenes from the grey years came back to me. I did not realize then that Hezbollah's grey demonstration – which marched with the strength of its human shields and the power of their weakness and their fear of freedom, eternalizing the Sultan of Weakness and Fear upon them, and his mastery over others – resembled a "stroke of a sledgehammer on water", to quote Waddah Charara[9].

I asked the women from "Freedom Square" if the Riad el-Solh demonstration frightened them. One of them replied that what worried them and what they were thinking about was not "fear", but rather finding the difficult means and ways that will allow them to live in the same country with those participating in that impenetrable, belligerent and hijacked demonstration.

Hassan Daoud wrote[10] that a woman named Afaf told her friend, on the day of Rafiq Hariri's funeral, that she had decided to leave her place of residence in the Southern Suburb (Hizbullah's stronghold and headquarters/fortress). She was feeling that she was in the midst of a formal mourning period for the deceased, while the people of Dahiyeh (the Southern Suburb) were "so distant, as if Hariri's funeral had happened in a different country." But on their day, they exited their Dahiyeh – their ghetto – to Riad el-Solh Square, in another country. They came out under official religious command from Iran and cried out, "Berri, Nasrallah and Dahiyeh (all of Dahiyeh) …!"

The Leader Appears

Some of the Lebanese media was not taken over by the Sufi spell, or hijacked by the presence of the *(Sayyid)* master and leader of the resistance – the magnate of its slogans, masses and rituals. This Lebanese media was not deceived by the "official religious command" manifested in the likes of a "war public", into which Hizbullah melted the Shiites of Lebanon… until it (Hizbullah) was able to assemble them, encircle them and mobilise the sons of the poorest and weak-

9 *Al Hayat* newspaper, March 12, 2005.

10 *Al Mustaqbal* newspaper, February 27, 2005.

est among them, towards arenas of death and a celebration of death in its "demonstration of shrouds" (the famous demonstration where the Khomeinist-party dressed its participants in the grave-shrouds which were handed out as holiday gifts).

Akin to that "demonstration of shrouds" – and the tactics of assembling, encircling and mobilising – the March 8 demonstration set forth from Dahiyeh, the ghetto and fortress, to the other (new) square in Hariri's monumental construction project, so dazzling, stunning and bewitching – like the unveiled femininity so vilified in the doctrine of Hizbullah. This bedazzlement became clear by the crowd's reaction to the place; they were visibly fascinated, but equally unsettled and startled by it. This was the feeling the Secretary-General must have had, passing through the dark halls of the huge (now closed) Buddha Bar[11] – the sort of place which comes to us from the land of the 'Great Satan', to corrupt us and divert us from the righteous path of resistance and martyrdom which is the only guarantee for the crushing victory over the West and the destruction of their evil, decadent civilisation.

Radwan 'Akil described the scene as follows, "From behind protective, bulletproof glass, fitted inside a window of the Asseily building, the head of the resistance emerged, making his secured-ghostly appearance, to address his enraptured crowd, introducing them as members of his war community and describing them as the 'families of the martyrs, the maimed, the liberated prisoners[12] and of the imprisoned'[13].

Setting the platform's security took an entire hour prior to the appearance. Meanwhile, the master of ceremonies entertained the crowd with his own brand of *zajal*[14], empty in form and entrancing at the same time, until the long awaited moment finally came…

The master of ceremonies declared, "Do you know that the leader Sayyid Nasrallah is here among you?!"

The reply was typical, with cries of praise and loyalty, "God is Great" and "Death to America" (their "Great Satan").

During this moment, the private security of the "master-leader" was secreting him from building to building throughout new downtown Beirut, after "the mayor of the capital had instructed the relevant infrastructure engineers, the day before, to facilitate the work of Hizbullah's security apparatus. Hizbullah's security people investigated the downtown sewage network under the Riad el-Solh square, aided by police dogs" (according to an eye-witness account by Radwan 'Akil himself).[15]

Fear of Being Orphaned

All of this alerts us to the fact that Hizbullah's war community is also a police community – perhaps this police-nature is at the core of its militancy. It also alerts us to the fact that the legendary strength associated with the master-leader and the intimidation emanating from the belligerency and impenetrability of his crowd was solely produced at Riad el-Solh square in order to "apologise to Assad's Syria and the Baath" – after the injury done to this regime's fragile and transparent

11 A nightclub in the downtown area, near the Riad el-Solh square, site of the March 8 demonstration.

12 Martyred, maimed or imprisoned by Israel in this context.

13 *Annahar* newspaper, March 9, 2005.

14 A traditional folk genre of improvised poetry that is usually accompanied by a rhythm from musical instruments. It is especially popular in Syria and Lebanon.

15 *Annahar* newspaper, March 9, 2005.

feelings by the "obscenities" hurled at them from some of the protestors of Freedom Square.

The constituency of Hizbullah let loose the reins of their hysterical and superstitious imaginations. There wasn't an indecent rumour that they didn't attach to the other protesters – using their endless repertoire of vilifying women or any male with a feminine trait, as is the norm of this "martyr culture". The first party speaker placed the assassination of Hariri within this culture's framework, by adding to Hariri's description as a "giving man", a man "having given his blood" – transforming the man into a party "martyr". It was as if Hariri went to his death willingly; as if he was on a suicide mission on the sacrificial altar of the "brotherly relations" between Lebanon and Syria.

Meanwhile, the scared orphan of Assad's Syria and Baath would proclaim, "Nobody can force us out of Lebanon, its mind, heart or future." Yet, Assad's Syria would withdraw from Lebanon, without a trace of gloom or fear – except in the hearts of its "orphans".

Fouad Siniora, the friend and lifelong companion of Rafiq Hariri, predicted, "The world would only turn on the criminals", after the series of assassinations and rash of ad hoc bombings afflicting the country in the aftermath of the Syrian army and intelligence withdrawal from Lebanon.

The Purge from Disgrace

The language of General "Joyous Strategy" about the "vile act" and the March 8 mass congregation of the scared and irrational war community were meant to intimidate the feeling of free public expression in "Freedom Square". Instead, they contributed to an even greater demonstration of solidarity and strength by the Lebanese of March 14 and its Lebaneseness in its great, million-person festivities – a celebration of the final purging of the fear, humiliation and disgrace which had rested in their hearts for so long.

And if the celebration of March 14 rectified the inability of past attempts to end the war, the March 8 demonstration only reinforced its loyalty to the community of war and its public ghosts. According to Hazem Saghiyeh, this "wolf-posture" was the embodiment of a political sense drawn from hostility, recalling the definition of nationalism and politics emanating from Arab junta[16] regimes.[17]

Saleh Bashir was dubious about terming "what the Lebanese did after Rafiq Hariri's assassination as demonstrations". According to him, "they do not belong to one set group, nor do they manifest primitive behaviors, nor do they engage in rallies with a discourse of war – of compensating for it, of maintaining it, of vowing for it or of finishing it"; unlike Hizbullah in the March 8 demonstrations.

Familiarity among Strangers

I – who walked in the midst of the free Lebanese men and women citizens at large, on the day of March 14, 2005 – understood why I had never before been overcome with such strong and confident feelings. The demarcation lines of the war society had been removed, really and truly, 15 years

16 Regimes which took power through acts of *coups d'état.*

17 *Al Mustaqbal,* 27 March, 2005.

after the war's end. These feelings overcame me; and, it felt to me like a full cycle of Lebanese history had come to a close between 1975 and 2005. As I looked into the faces of the joyful young men and women around me, I recalled how depressing my modest and uncertain role had been in drawing the features of the Lebanese war society, when I succumbed to the revolutionary songs and depressing discourse of our Pan-Arabist youth, during the first two years of the war.

I – who had walked with the crowds in Hariri's funeral almost a month earlier – noticed the mourners looking into each others' faces, in a different way, in a way they were not used to… or, in a way that made them forget the long, miserable war, the years of ashes which had scattered and imprisoned them in defeat, humiliation, degradation and fear. They had spoken to each other; they had known each other before; they were clear to one another… from another life.

It was as if the first time they had ever gone into the streets and squares was when they walked in the funeral. And, in the funeral, these strangers, silenced by grief, would move forward as a gathering of people similar, different and united. Each individual and person displayed a novel familiarity, fragile presence, spontaneity and impulsiveness, while remaining resolute – incapable of being "dispatched" and absorbed by a dense mass assembly demanding power and calling on "the one, higher sultan", whose inspiration comes from signs delivered by a Sufi-like and hallucinogenic trance.

There was a sense of faint familiarity – tearful, questioning, bewildered and angry. They did not call for revenge, but rather the chance to participate silently, or in partial silence, in the injury and the sadness that their individuality felt, en masse. Nor was this group fed by a harsh power controlling or robbing the feelings and cores of individuals and groups – unifying their gestures, nuances and words; transforming them into a mass or collective in one, in the singular tense.

In the tranquil, tearful funeral, they were aware that, with their participation in this pain, they would be capable of reconciling themselves and between themselves, so that they could thrust off the subjugation of that unjust power that demeaned them and had tried to kill their will to live and to be independent.

The Coloured Fragility

In a quick comparison between the two demonstrations of March 8 and March 14, based on observations and the many journalistic writings accompanying them, one can establish the following:

What the Lebanese of March 14 did was born of a contemporary present. Their cultural and social sources are diverse: A connection with the outside world, immigration and return, television and globalised satellite broadcasts, Monnot street and the new downtown Beirut, Internet and new communication tools, new fashions and trends and modes of contemporary expression, nightlife and entertainment – restaurants,

cinemas, seeking pleasure and joy, contemporary music and the culture of physical freedom – and an abundant female presence, indeed, the presence of the feminine in all her colours, her fashion and her fragility… All of this and others is beyond politics, especially with regard to the Arab meaning of politics manifested in political party festivals and rallies, military training camps, revolutionary youth and the "cubs" of the one party.

In opposition to the above, the March 8 demonstration emerged: Veiled bodies shackled in their movement, tamed into a petty way of life constructed by an ideological and militant party framework… so that nothing remains of the person but a body steeped in the party spirit and its masks – incapable of concealing this laden, miserable weight that creates masses herded from a higher pulpit relaying the empty discourse of its flawless, infallible speakers.

Could this be the reason why Fadi Tufayli[18] wrote – from Holland, far from the Lebanon of March 14 – a letter apologising to the Lebanese for the shame he had brought upon them and himself for having been a member of the Pan-Syrian Nationalist Social Party?

It was an apology – a confession to having taken part in turning the Armenian School in Zkak el Blat[19] into a military base belonging to a party, where party members mingled with Syrian intelligence personnel. There, they would write reports and collect and map information on neighborhoods, its residents, their relationships and their visitors which they would present to the intelligence officer stationed nearby. This was done for the sake of "unifying the mythical nation" which assassinated Rafiq Hariri because he finally rose up against it and sought its removal from Lebanon. His tragic assassination, without our paying attention – we, who had rejected his policies for so long – was the beginning of ridding Lebanon of its tragedy.

November 24, 2005

18 *Al Mustaqbal,* March 6, 2005.

19 An area in the centre of Beirut that borders downtown.

Mohammed Abi Samra was born in 1953. He is a Lebanese novelist and journalist whose books include *Pauline and Her Phantoms* (1990), *The Previous Man* (1995), *Image Dwellers* (2003) and *Lands of Fear and Shame: A Journey* (2004). He currently works at the *Annahar* daily newspaper.

PANELS

Whither Lebanon?, Hazem Saghieh, Wissam Saadeh, Nahla Chahal, Kamal Hamdan; Moderator: Bilal Khbeiz
Lebanon and the Many Returns of the Repressed, Hazem Saghieh
After the Syrian Withdrawal, Whither our Lumpen-Democracy?, Wissam Saadeh
Lebanon: Compromise or a New Social Contract?, Nahla Chahal
Whither Lebanon?, Kamal Hamdan

Pulling Focus: Art and Curatorial Practice Reconstruct Science, Carol Squiers, Steve Kurtz; Moderator/Coordinator: Lynn Love
Science in Images: From Eugenics to Human Cloning, Carol Squiers
Crime, Art and the Life Sciences, Steve Kurtz/Critical Art Ensemble

Whither Lebanon?

Hazem Saghieh, Wissam Saadeh, Nahla Chahal, Kamal Hamdan
Moderator: Bilal Khbeiz

Since February 14, 2005, the date of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the situation in Lebanon has been undergoing a process of reformulation along new and unprecedented lines. This reformulation is evident in the level of thought, as well as in the politics and economics of Lebanon and on both its internal and external fronts.

How do we formulate a discourse around the decisive events – the withdrawal of the Syrian troops, accompanied by the series of political assassinations – which have led to the political polarisation of the country over the past year? Furthermore, to what extent is it possible to claim that the direction of the country's future is determined by these events? We should perhaps begin by asking: How can the way in which we understand these events have an effect on the country's future course and destination?

The subject of this panel which the four participants have attempted to tackle, is timely and relevant. In fact, "where is Lebanon heading?" or "whither Lebanon?" has been a recurring question that has constantly resurfaced since the founding of Lebanon in the 1940s. But, not since the 1970s has the country witnessed events like the ones that took Lebanon by storm after Home Works II, in the autumn of 2003.

In the wake of these events, the question and title of this panel became the subject of much-heated debate. The participants of this panel were probably able to intuitively deduce that certain perils would threaten Lebanon following the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri on February 14, 2005; but

surely no one could have foreseen or predicted the extent and scope of the catastrophic events that the country would face in the ensuing months.

"Whither Lebanon? Where is Lebanon heading?" This question provoked great anxiety and fervour in 2005 and was at the centre of an increasingly intensifying debate throughout 2006. Today, it is the subject on almost everyone's mind and of almost every discussion. Perhaps we need to append to the original question – which, in 2006, took on an extremely pessimistic connotation – a simpler, yet more worrisome question: "Whither the Lebanese?"

Bilal Khbeiz, 2007

Bilal Khbeiz was born in 1963, in Lebanon. He is a writer, poet and journalist. His books of poetry include *Of My Father's Illness and the Unbearable Heat* (1997) and *A Memory of Air, Perhaps* (1991). His collections of essays include *The Moment You Open Your Eyes is the Moment of Disaster* (2007); *The Enduring Image and the Vanishing World* (2005); *Globalization and the Manufacture of Transient Events* (2002); *That the Body is Sin and Deliverance* (1998). He has participated in various exhibitions including the Sharjah Biennale in 2007 and 2003; Venice Biennale (2003); Witt de Witt, Rotterdam (2002); and the *Hamra Project*, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2000). Since 1994, he has worked as an editor for the cultural supplement of the daily, Arabic language newspaper, *Annahar*, in Beirut.

Lebanon and the Many Returns of the Repressed

Hazem Saghieh

In 1975, during the early days of the war, a Syrian intellectual residing in Beirut wrote: "When Lebanon caught fire, I felt the calamity twofold: Personally and nationally. I, bent on Arab nationalism, felt fire consuming not only my country but also my own home. Although there are many direct and original causes that led to the destruction of Lebanon, this war is nevertheless gratuitous. Yet, I cannot but think that Lebanon was fated to such wanton destruction. For no matter how soiled and rutty, this country was a small window open unto democracy. It welcomed the winds of modern culture which turned it into the intellectual laboratory of the Arab world and foregrounded Beirut as its cultural and political capital. The target was precisely this window." Elaborating further, he wrote that not only did Lebanon "offer me shelter after more than nine months spent in prison (and it is in prison that the realities of the Arab political structure are exposed), it also made me feel, following a brief spell of estrangement, the warmth I, for so long, had sorely missed. I slept like a child and forgot the insomnia that kept me on watch for late night visitors. It was in Lebanon that my books were published and distributed. Moreover, through Lebanon, I became intimately aware of modern culture. I learned how to interact with my wife and children in ways less oriental. I learned how work can be organised and regulated. I learned the management of time. While it was in the West that I first encountered modernity, it was nevertheless in Lebanon that I attempted, successes and failures aside, to practice it even while under the pressure of an oriental environment."

It is Yassine al Hafez. A writer who experienced a range of radical Arab politics, from nationalist to Marxist, until he came to stress on modernity and rationalism without reneging, like others of his generation, on Marxism and Arab nationalism. And it is safe to presume that had he lived longer, had he not succumbed to cancer in the late 1970s, he would have eventually dropped whatever remained of his unique version of Marxism and Arab nationalism. Such a presump-

tion can certainly be hotly debated although, perhaps, to no avail. Yet, what is certain is that he, unlike other Marxist and Arab nationalists, did not castigate this country. Rather, he saw in it a democracy that lacked elsewhere. He, born of an Armenian mother and raised in a rigorously masculine and tribal environment, was certainly attuned to notice what others missed. What is remarkable in how al Hafez praises the Lebanese experiment lies in his belief that this country was being punished for having embarked on a journey that, no matter its many failings, was conspicuously advanced.

Can this Lebanon, as described by al Hafez, be retrieved?

It is my opinion that Lebanon's sectarian factions and active forces be invited to agree on the nature of this question before attempting an answer. If they agree that the question is as such, a light will then glow at the end of the tunnel. But political reality leads us elsewhere. For whenever we ask: "Whither Lebanon?" We find ourselves asking: "Lebanon, whence?", thus folding the suggestion culled from al Hafez's observations.

To say that a current event in sectarian societies is, in fact, always a previous event should by now be well rehearsed. Such of course is the consequence of a structural calcification in sectarian formations which makes of every future a restart, or an objection to a start. It is most probable that the most active and weighty element in inter-Lebanese conflicts was begotten with the birth of modern Lebanon. And because it had previous origins and preambles, it successfully camouflaged its actual mechanisms with fragments borrowed from current and novel ideologies such as Arab nationalism, state nationalism, socialism, liberalism and others. The marriage between the nation-state and the many clannish partialities released the repressed and repressed the free. The Christians and more precisely the Maronites, were the formerly repressed. It was they who, following a number of historical junctures and cultural circumstances were to play the role of the local intermediaries for the advent of the nation-state carried on Western wings, following what seemed like an interminable Ottoman rule under which they suffered the brunt of regulations tailored for non-Muslim subjects. Yet, this Maronite led nation-state pressed the other communities and clans to receive this imperious new fact as a bitter defeat. Protests filled the 'Syrian' coastal cities and violence spread across the South, perpetrated by those who came to be known as *"al 'Isabat"* or gangs. Eventually, the defeated had to repress their other aspirations and capitulate to a de facto situation.

The Druze could not but feel the defeat. For the 19th century which gradually carried forward the birth of modern Lebanon was already, for them, the start of an inevitable regression which had started with the murder of Bashir Joumblatt. As for the Sunnis, they had to relinquish clannish extensions and trading posts far within Syrian cities and moreover, to succumb to non-Sunni and non-Muslim rulers. On the other hand, the Shiites measured their defeat in terms of the demotion of Jabal

'Amel and its forced separation from Northern Palestine.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of an independent nation-state could not form an untainted progressive subject. For, it must be said that progress and regression could not have figured on our agendas back then. Clans and sectarian communities cannot tax their inflated egos with any search for objectivity. Also, the progressive trend, represented in the nation-state, was already tarnished by the monopoly of one sectarian community. And so the Maronites, delegated by local history to play the role of the intermediary, appeared as cruel teachers exacting high fees from all the late applicants.

When scanning modern Lebanese history, it appears that the repressed is summoned by one sect after another. With each summoning, a shock postpones, yet again, the already difficult coupling of modernity with clannishness and the nation-sate with sectarian identities. These repressed identities would launch one return after another, as the nation-state led by the Maronites was increasingly narrowing and fixing the meaning of the nation and its concomitant version of modernity. And, although this process of exclusion which employed a number of softened mechanisms such as disavowal, suppression and repulsion, was practiced and almost accomplished between 1920 and 1975, it was nevertheless clear that the unwanted components of the new nation-state could successfully resist liquidation and formulate their own self-conscious discourse.

In following both a chronological and conceptual order, the first of the repressed to return were the Sunnis. Cut off from the expanse of Sunni Islam across the Arab lands, they returned first as Nasserite Arab nationalists before morphing, a few years later, into solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian resistance. But the Sunnis, tied to their occupations in the public sector and to the domains of private business, were always inclined towards stability and as such, were ambivalent in their politics regarding the Lebanese nation-state. By the time Rafiq Al Hariri appeared on the political scene, it was already the tendency for Sunnis to speak of expression and gratification instead of repression. Although this shift came late,years after a civil war that was particularly destructive to urban centres and after equally strenuous years spent with their "objective allies", who ruled over them in the name of "regional custody", the assassination of Rafiq Hariri was crucial in exposing the limited repression they had to endure as Lebanese citizens, relative to the exorbitant repression they had had to endure under the various versions of populist Arab nationalisms.

In turn, with the Druze, the repressed returned in the details of a political rhetoric which tells of a deep-seated anxiety concerned with demographic disadvantage. Often, this problem was avoided through a diligent search for strong allies or, as was once the case, through the formation of a "National Movement" which inflated and expanded that small

sectarian group.

After a short social-demographic exercise led by Moussa al Sadr, the Shiite version of the repressed returned explosively in the form of a fundamentalist Islam, following the Iranian model and then through an essentialist mystification of the resistance, long after it had already accomplished its objective tasks.

Undoubtedly, the Sunni transformation which began in February 2005, engendered a wider but also fundamental base that can enrich and finally embody that old call to participate in the sovereignty of the Lebanese nation-state. It also set in motion a process which, if successful, can undo the Christian monopoly over the state and replace it with a more diverse and complex consensus. Yet much has to happen before we see the fruition of this transformation; above all, an equal transformation and partiality to the state by the Shiites, who may then find a way to mitigate their anxieties and move away from repression towards a stage of expression and gratification.

As in the tango, this dance requires more than one dancer. Even if apparently paradoxical, every time Christians voice their welcome to the Sunni transformation, they, in fact, obliquely encourage the Shiites to do the same. This welcome is multi-layered:

- In terms of ideas, it replaces a folkloric nationalism which is often chauvinistic if not racist towards Palestinians, Syrians and other non-Lebanese, with a constitutional nationalism.

- In terms of national culture, it acknowledges the symbolic capital of other groups and ceases to assume the task of representing the others; and therefore ends the centrality of the romantically assumed rural and Christian identity of Lebanon.

- In socio-economic terms, it intimates an openness and willingness to share posts and status, as well as fairly distribute the fruits of economic growth. Particularly in view of the last thirty years which have shown that holding primary positions within the state such as the presidency and the army's chief command are no guarantee against grave frustrations suffered within society.

The Christians never had such an opportunity during the years of tempestuous radicalism which frightened the minorities. Today, there is such an opportunity. And, it behooves the Christians to partake in the adventure with added confidence. It is of great importance to call on the Shiites to shift from gazing at a horizon mobilised by communitarian forces and defined by regional forces to one that is internal and Lebanese. In fact, all are eagerly called upon to take the initiative and avoid the well-known calamities that will arise if the Shiites were to wait for their transformation until after they had lived and suffered a disaster such as that which befell the Sunnis.

Now that Israel is out and none depend on the roles it may still play, the Lebanese are invited to organise their own versions of patriotism within one general national bond, thus avoiding transgressing the natural diversity of this nation and its given place within the world. A

sobre and reasonable patriotism is coloured by the various sectarian communities. But when each group believes itself to be a nation and a people, we will once again become what one Western diplomat described us as in 1860: "Two equally barbaric tribes."

The repressed, the lot of them, must return in order to be divulged and gratified. Only then can this nation regain some of the features described by Yassine al Hafez, albeit mixed with that bitterness we know so well from having to walk the tortuous paths of a past we can claim as an entrance to the future.

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After the Syrian Withdrawal, Whither our Lumpen-Democracy?

Wissam Saadeh

The political trend that prones *"mumanaa"*[1], or the discourse of forbearance from the treacherous seduction of notions such as democracy, used by western powers to lure masses into subservience and the advancement of their interests or desires, presents itself as a wide front of resistance against the colonial assaults of our day. When it charges against the forces pressing for widening the realm of democracy, or the severing of the sway of despotism, it is not unlike the dissident who has been left to the gaols of humiliation, torture and forgetting for years and who ventures on a hunger strike on the "intuition" that his tormentor – a seasoned patriot himself – is caught at that moment in a diplomatic impasse, or subjected to concerted international pressure – purportedly an "imperialist offensive". We are to trust that this dissident – perhaps a masochist – was able to determine right from wrong and keep his compass sharp. He may very well have undertaken the hunger strike in protest of his continued incarceration to continue his nationalistic struggle and join the movement of resistance.

Empowered by the moral high-ground, this discourse of resistance affords itself a scope where the pristine icon of the masochist dissident is countered with the image of the corrupt collaborator licking boots at the gates of foreign embassies. From within this scale, it has granted a motherly clemency to the political movements, who by and large have elected democracy, freedom and the end of the state of exceptionalism[2] as their prime battles. They are not branded with the charge of treason, rather, they are regarded as having been duped, as not having been aware of the consequences of their acts, mindless of who is manipulating them from the backstage.

To have been charged with treason would have been easier. The problem is that such charges cannot be simply slapped onto all those who have lost patience with the discourse and its dark repute. In the unraveling of its logic, the struggle against colonialism ranks second to the struggle against sedition and the struggle against

1 *"Mumanaa"* was first used by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*, in reference to a collective mindset disposed for resistance to the temptation of refinement. Ibn Khaldoun observed that once social groups settled in cities and acquired sophistication and the appreciation for luxury, they lost their power to rule and defend their standing against outside invaders.

2 States of exceptionalism are prevailing over regimes of governance in the Arab world (Egypt, Syria). Enacted at various stages in their contemporary history under the guise of their "wars" (or truce settlements) with Israel, these supra-legal measures suspend regulations pertaining to democracy, freedom of expression and civil liberties. In Lebanon, the postwar era has been marked with "exceptional" (each one was deemed to have been the first and last) constitutional amendments to fit the political order.

treason itself ranks second to the struggle to prevent the masses – us – from being duped and captivated from within the nation. The edifying paradigm of the resistance front is the fortification of the self against all that can dupe or deceive. First and foremost, it stands as a defense against usurpation by colonial and imperialist ventures (no matter the scope of its designs), a brace against the lure the usurper inspires in the object of his coveting before, during and after the event.

It is pointless to retort to this discursive representation by asserting proof of our maturity and of the strength of our moral defenses, or simply by noting that there is no political value to the notion of "the duped". The modus operandi of the resistance front rests on three predicates, namely, staving off *fitna* or discord, exposing treachery and vigilance to confront attack.

There are no duped. Neither were those masses marching to redeem "the path of resistance"[3] duped, nor were the masses demanding that "the truth about" on the assassination of Rafiq Hariri be exposed, duped. Demanding the truth be exposed is not merely a demand for spelling out what the majority of Lebanese suspected from the first moment following the crime. It is a demand for a public process of recording that begins with the successive reports of the Fitzgerald Commission[4] and Detlev Mehlis' investigation[5] and the ensuing steps of accountability and penalty. Its chief virtue is to regenerate memory and institute a precedent memory to level between the historiography of the second republic and the need for foundational myths that will not come back to haunt us.

There are no duped. Communities make decisions to blind themselves either to the cause of accepting despotism, or the cause of "endorsing colonialism". This act of blinding, be it shallow or sagacious, is borne within the duplicity of the discourse mobilising the community. It is instrumental to its presentation, cogency and diffusion.

The duplicity reached significant heights when communities had to deal with events such as the March 14th commune[6] that mobilised Christians, Sunnis, Druze and democracy activists to band together at Martyrs Square. The opposition front represented all those gathered, whose number exceeded a million souls, as a mass of duped, unaware of what they were doing, or at least, unaware of what was in store of them. Soon after the hypocritically regretful regard was bestowed onto those one million "duped", the loyalists of March 14th became regarded as loyalists of a revolution betrayed; and thus were the duped transformed into the betrayed.

The attempt to rescue the March 14th event from the double charge, first as being an object of deceit, second as an object of betrayal, is not futile. The importance of March 14th 2005 lies in its being a historic event with implications for democratic practice, or with enough significance to support the assertion that an Arab country is able to bring into being its own "spring of democracy" in the spirit of Eastern European countries and without the cover of American gun

3 In the year 2000, the Israeli army pulled out of the territory it occupied in the southern tip of Lebanon (a bordering zone it referred to as a "security buffer zone" that had been occupied since 1978, totaling 12% of the Lebanese territory), except for a small hamlet of pastureland known as the Shebaa Farms. The "path of resistance" refers to the coalition of political movements and parties, with Hizbullah at their helm, branding a slew of slogans that include the liberation of the Sheb'a farms hamlet.

4 The Fitzgerald Commission was appointed by the UN Secretary General's office to gather preliminary field findings in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (February-March 2005). It was headed by Irish investigator Peter Fitzgerald and included a team of international investigators. It was mandated to publish a report with recommendations to lay the ground for a full-scale investigation that would lead ultimately to a trial by an international court.

5 Shortly after the Fitzgerald Commission was presented at the UN, German judge Detlev Mehlis was appointed by the UN Secretary General to lead the UN-sponsored investigation into the assassination. His appointment came into effect in June 2005. It was renewed several times until Mehlis was replaced by one of his colleagues in the investigation team, Belgian-born judge Serge Brammertz.

ships. What emerged on March 14th was a mere potentiality or a latent possibility: The event itself was profoundly democratic even though it was not the product of genuine democrats. The importance of its democratic potentiality lies in that it was able to thwart successfully the irresponsible political maneuvering of the March 8th event whose consequences posed a real threat to the Lebanese body politic as well as to its social construct. This potentiality should be preserved and protected and there is no way to do that without a radical rejection of the logic guiding the resistance front, beginning with a rebuttal of its rhetorical tools. The process is not as simple as Walid Joumblatt would have it, namely by agreeing to counter "colonial desires" but disagreeing on the means and the overall cataloguing of priorities.

Surely the encroachment of "colonial desires" is a notion that needs to be unpacked because it stands on fledgling grounds. Evaluating the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq as a historical undertaking in comparison to the European colonial experience or, going even further back, to the Crusader invasions of the Middle Ages is pointless. In that regard and at the risk of digression, it is useful to recall the wisdom of the Ottoman sultan, Selim III, who at the end of the 18th century, had the clarity of mind to caution against drawing comparisons between the Crusader invasions and Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798. In this vein, we are compelled today to make lucid distinctions between the "state of war" whose reaches are expanding in our region, beginning in Palestine and Iraq and "colonialism" as a bracket in the history of the world that has definitively lapsed. This "state of war" contains within it colonial (and imperial) undertones, just as colonialism carried within it crusader dimensions.

The March 14th event would not be able to identify itself in its own terms, if the perception of a colonial offensive and its implications are not fully refuted. Instead of vesting energy in the pointless exercise to differentiate between despotism and colonialism, we ought to be pondering the practical means to develop national and democratic defenses to thwart the sweep of the state of war and its cycle of chaos and terror that stunts efforts of democratisation and social leveling of markets and derails peace in the Middle East. The state of war is responsible for transforming this region into something akin to a pile of refuse in the geopolitics of the Cold War, with cancerous bulges metastasising in its body and eventually hitting the social constructs of western democracies.

It is conceptually impossible to avoid wholly rejecting this notion of an "imperial offensive", in order to imagine different ways of apprehending useful strategies to bend its sway, or resist it. Moreover, it would be impossible to evaluate the real significance of an event such as March 14th, whose profoundly democratic features are glaring in spite of the dearth of democrats who shaped it and to understand that it cannot betray itself, nor can it be betrayed.

6 Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated on February 14th, 2005, when his car and convoy were blown to smithereens as it drove on the seaside road from the parliament building to his residence. Just hours after the news spread, people started to convene around the site of explosion, shocked, panicked and mournful. The spontaneous gatherings grew into a daily ritual, the crowds swelling gradually. There was wide conviction that the Syrian regime was behind the assassination and the demand for the end of Syrian tutelage (or hegemony) over Lebanese politics grew louder and louder. As an "anti-Syrian" front was becoming cogent, so was a counter "pro-Syrian" front. On March 8th 2005, the anniversary of the Syrian Baath Party seizing power in Syria in 1963, the pro-Syrian front (comprising chiefly Hizbullah and a constellation of smaller political parties) organised a massive protest in Martyrs Square, in support of Syrian tutelage over Lebanese post-war political life. They gathered a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people. On March 14th 2005, the anti-Syrian front organised a counter-protest, gathering an equally-sized crowd, demanding the pull-out of Syrian forces from the Lebanese territory. While the former was a predominantly Shiite crowd, the latter was a distinctively more plural crowd (in sectarian or communitarian terms).

True, in some respects, it may seem as if the largest majority of Sunnis, Druze and Christians gathered at noon on that sunny day to pose for a photograph for posterity, as they had never had the opportunity to do before. The splitting of that alliance on the eve of parliamentary elections was a felicitous event, it saved them from smothering the gathering. It is most felicitous that the alliance of Sunnis, Druze and Christians opposite the Shiites went awry[7] and led the groups astray after March 14th. Otherwise, thwarting the structural *problématique* that the March 8th protest brought to the fore would not have been possible. The splintering of this independence front is thorny in another respect, namely, that it took place right at the instance when an awakening to the realisation that what had been set in place was different from what was being said, hit widely. In other words, that the Syrian tutelage of the post-war state was the final guarantor buttressing its sectarian structure, the defining feature of the Lebanese state since the French Mandate and until this day. However, this does not imply that the Lebanese state and its margins of democratic practice, that had fostered its particular breed of cosmopolitanism in the pre-war era, would collapse in the absence of an arbiter or guarantor.

The particularism of the Lebanese sectarian regime is such that between threadbare democratic virtues and the tutelage sponsoring it, it is very difficult to ascribe it epithets from conventional usage. The most useful I have found would be "lumpen-democracy'". For one, the word construction makes apt reference to political systems where rule does not obey methodology, but also a system that does not rest on standardised conventions of representation, nor a regular renewal of authority. This is not necessarily due to its liberal purview, but rather to the fact that the will to prevail is split from within, incapable of imposing itself consistently and cogently over time.

Obviously, within this lumpen-democracy, or communitarian state[8], a particular sectarian group (or *millet*[9], community) has to prevail. This role had been the monopoly of the Maronite sect from the establishment of the Lebanese entity up until the eve of the civil war which erupted at the instance when its hegemony failed to regenerate itself. Indicators of its potential failure became clear when it was unable to maintain the state of exceptionalism in 1969[10] and again in 1973[11]. Until then, Maronite political and cultural hegemony had been accepted as the grounds in which the Lebanese entity was moored. It occupied the central paradigm. While other sectarian groups overtly criticised its chauvinist dominion, rejecting how it marginalised them, they essentially bargained for recognition and power-sharing. Even when they attempted to overrule its authority and imagined themselves other central paradigms, they were mere mirrored reflections. To illustrate the measure of the political hegemony of the Maronite sect, it is interesting to observe how the dual trends that competed for power within the sect itself (the

7 The March 14th 2005 protest demanded also the resignation of the cabinet and the holding of parliamentary elections. Eventually, the cabinet resigned. After negotiation and diplomatic mediation between all the protagonists involved directly in Lebanese politics, parliamentary elections were held in late May and June of 2005, under the purview of the election law promulgated in the year 2000. Prior to the elections, the various political protagonists aligned in a binary pro- and anti-Syrian configuration were concocting alliances beyond that divide in order to secure seats in parliament. The cohesiveness of the pro- and anti-Syrian blocs was quite shaken during that time. This "reshuffling" in the overall political landscape de-emphasised the grouping of the Shi'ite community in a single block in the face of a Sunni-Maronite-Druze alliance.

8 Power-sharing between religious communities is mapped in the writ of a national covenant, drafted at the moment of sovereignty. Purportedly founded on the demographic principles, it was more a reflection of economic and political power between communitarian groups. It grants the presidency of the republic to the Maronites (with extensive power to arbitrate between executive and legislative branches), presidency of the executive branch to the Sunnis, presidency of the legislative branch to the Shiites and leadership of the army and the central bank to the Maronites.

9 *Millet* is Turkish inflexion of the Arabic *milla*, meaning religious community or religious sect. The notion was salient throughout the period of the Ottoman empire, when the sultanate had the power to determine the standing of non-Sunni Muslim religious communities and regulate the conduct of their lives. *Millets* were recognised inside the polity.

Constitutional Bloc[12] versus the National Bloc) became salient for the entire polity and referenced political trends within other sects. This situation remained until the end of General Shehab's mandate[13].

At the conclusion of the civil war, the hegemony of the Maronite community was no longer tenable[14]; however, none of the other sects presented a viable alternative to take over at the helm. This vacuum was compensated by the "Syrian tutelage"[15] of the country's post-war state. The impact of the authoritarian regime's (authoritarian politically but totalitarian ideologically) tutelage did not curtail the country's frail democracy, it merely increased its frailty. More significantly, it codified the rules of the deliberative process, not in the sense of renewing authority, but more so in the vein of instigating a teetering imbalance between contenders at the helm. This was the case for the span of its *aegis*[16]. In spite of everything, it was the Syrian tutelage, as well as dynamic entities opposed to its dominion, that sustained the country's lumpen-democracy. The dynamic entities impelled the Syrian regime to strengthen the authoritarian hold of the local security forces network, bit by bit, but short of establishing a security regime outside the framework of the lumpen-democracy.

The power conflict that prevailed during the first phase of the second republic, born under the aegis of Syrian tutelage, opposed the head of the legislative branch (i.e. the head of parliament, Nabih Berri) with the head of the executive branch (i.e. the head of the cabinet, Rafiq Hariri). This conflict, connoting a Sunni-Shiite rivalry, was not centred on filling the hegemonic seat, still vacant since the waning of the status of the Maronite sect. Rather, it was located in a marginal realm, borne in the failure of sects to regenerate their role in the polity. Neither Beirut's rehabilitated city centre nor South Lebanon were able to supplant the foundational and paradigmatic centrality of Mount Lebanon. In this vein, the provenance of General Emile Lahoud, formerly head of the army, to the presidency of the republic in 1998 is deemed a turning point. On the one hand he hailed from the institution that the majority of Christians deem to be their lot and on the other hand he held one of two positions allotted – by convention – to Maronites in post-war Lebanon, namely leadership of the army and directorship of the central bank. The two men who had presided over the republic prior to Lahoud, René Moawad[17] and Elias Hrawi, did not hail from Mount Lebanon. Thus the mandate of General Emile Lahoud, a military man from Mount Lebanon's heartland, mark the end of the reigning conflict between the heads of the two realms of governance. In his inaugural address, he presented a new reading of the Taif Accords[18], reversing the standing of the presidency at the margins vis-à-vis institutions. The Maronite community did not take full stock of what Emile Lahoud had reclaimed to the authority of the presidency until March 14th 2005. The Maronite Patriarchy's sustained rebuttal of March 14th protestors' demands for Lahoud's resignation was not

10 Clashes between the Lebanese army and PLO fighters (in alliance with Lebanese political movements) had broken out off and on, in a pattern that would herald one of the major schisms of the civil war. After the PLO announced the launch of armed struggle to liberate Palestine (in 1965), countries where Palestinian refugees were settled were exposed to violent retaliation from the Israeli army. A conference, instigated by Nasser, organised in Cairo, framed a consensual agreement between participating Arab states to extend support to the Palestinian armed resistance. By then, General Fouad Shehab was president of the republic and he endorsed what would become known as the Cairo Agreement. This marked a reversal in the power struggle within the two main political sensibilities dividing the Maronite community. The first was staunchly pro-American, anti-Arabist, promoted the endorsement of the Pact of Baghdad (for example) and led by president Camille Chamoun. The second was pro-Nasserite (hence pro-Arabist) and not as vehemently pro-American, led by General Shehab, who succeeded Chamoun to the presidency of the republic.

11 More alarming clashes broke out in 1973. By then, it was clear that the hegemony of the Maronites could not stunt the increasing power (military and popular) of the coalition between the PLO and the Lebanese leftist, progressive, secular front.

only in defense of the standing of the presidency in the absolute, it was also a defense of the extended scope of power re-appropriated to that seat by Emile Lahoud.

This instance marks the first sign of the restoration of the centrality of Mount Lebanon. The second instance of restoration occurred during the 2002 parliamentary elections with the alliance of the Christians and Druze. Oddly enough, this second initiative was motivated to counter the first, but ultimately both impelled the push for the revitalisation of Mount Lebanon as a central referent. Above and beyond these considerations, communal groups were divided in their bias between the two trends. The first group included a minority within a minoritarian trend amongst Christians, still pledging support to Syrian tutelage, allied to the "national and Islamic resistance"[19], self-appointed with the task of mobilising the Christian community against the remarkable leadership of Sunnis emblematised by Rafiq Hariri. The second group included the majority within the majoritarian trend amongst Christians, calling for independence from Syrian tutelage and seeking pro-actively to weave dynamic alliances with Sunnis and Druze, beginning in the year 2000[20].

If we compare the events unfolding in the year 2000 with the present moment, we notice that the trend towards re-centring the focality of Mount Lebanon has gained step. It remains the oldest and most salient signifier of the discourse that prioritises sovereignty and independence. And this is precisely how the Sunni community came to regard this emblem during the month between February 14th and March 14th when the "Independence *Intifada*"[21] gripped the streets. After the crime on February 14th, the Sunni community was caught in a dilemma and could no longer reconcile between pledging loyalty to the rhetoric Hariri upheld versus his political maneuvering. This rhetoric, at the cost of his own death, never dared to spell out the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Thus was the Sunni sect prematurely thrust into the drift of the movement demanding sovereignty and has labored to the best of its ability to mask its lack of maturity. After the attempted assassination of May Chidiac[22], the independentist pull of the Sunnis seemed to reach a midway point it has yet to transgress, when Fouad Siniora[23] spoke of an "enemy" fighting Lebanon. By definition, the enemy is the entity that the group ought to be prepared to fight, or expect to be guarded from in the eventuality of a war and yet the Sunni leadership insists at the same instance, that Lebanon's enemy is Israel. Is it conceivable for Lebanon, as an entity, to survive with two enemies?

The reversal of roles is paradoxical. On the question of sovereignty, beyond claims and counter claims of demographic superiority, the country is overrun by three trends. The first trend expresses gratitude to the Syrian regime and the men entrusted with security and intelligence (the gist of the March 8th protest)[24]; the second cheerfully bid its farewells to withdrawing Syrian forces (the majority of the Christian communities); the third

12 Prior to independence, under the French colonial mandate, in the 1920s and 1930s, the independentist movement was divided between two main trends. The first, led by Bechara el-Khoury and Michel Chiha, formed the Constitutional Bloc and the second, led by Emile Eddeh, formed the National Bloc. The first advocated for a clear-cut independence from France, the latter, for a slower transition towards sovereignty.

13 General Fouad Shehab was elected president of the republic in 1958. He hailed from the intelligence service, but had headed and founded the army in 1943. He represented a trend in the country's élite (including prominent figures from the Maronite community) with a positive bias towards Nasser's pan-Arabism.

14 The 17-year long civil war was ended by a truce negotiated in 1990 by most of the protagonists involved in the war, brokered under American, Saudi and Syrian sponsorship, in the small Saudi town of Taif. The "Taif Accords" proposed serious reforms to the constitutional text addressing structural inequities in power sharing and curbed some of the power allotted to the Maronites. The Taif Accords were voted in Parliament in 1991 and integrated into the constitutional text.

15 The Taif Accords mark the victory of the pro-Syrian factions in the war. The Syrian regime, long implicated in the civil war, with military and intelligence corps present on the ground in Lebanon, was able to wrestle a link between the postwar Lebanese state (stability and security) and the maintenance of a "Syrian tutelage" in the country. The Accords stipulated a redeployment of the Syrian military leading to an eventual pull-out.

watched the pull-out with an "until we meet again" message (the Sunnis, Druze and their Christian allies). So the three options are "thank you Syria", "goodbye Syria" and "until we meet again Syria". This is the outcome of the collapse of Syria's tutelage over Lebanon's lumpen-democracy. Might these be the labour-pains for birthing a new communitarian hegemony?

Rather than answer in the affirmative immediately, it might be more useful to start by unpacking the question in its two implicit interrogations: Why have both the Sunni and the Shiite communities, respectively, failed and continue to do so, at morphing into the central, or foundational sects in the country? Why have neither the Sunnis nor the Shiites inherited the role billed by the Maronites?

The Shiite community cannot become the referent or foundational community in the Lebanese configuration because it is circumscribed in its being a "total community". As a communitarian formation, it is the last to have constituted itself in discursive and institutional terms within the Lebanese polity as late as the 1960s. Moreover, it was not an active constituent agent in the construction of the sectarian state; rather, its coming into being was congruent with the moment of disarticulation of that state. The sectarian state possesses the means to produce and reproduce relationships between sectarian groups, which has guarded against their reification into total communities or closed ethnic entities, politically and institutionally. As such, the boundaries of each sectarian community, determining what is within the purview of the sect and what is outside, were always blurred. In this context, the Shiite community constituted itself by contrast and differentiation, compelled towards a self-contained totality, with a ceaseless back and forth movement of rural and urban migration inside it[25].

Under the leadership of Hizbullah, the pull towards self-contained totality has reached its acumen, to the extent that the question regarding Lebanon's future echoes the question regarding Hizbullah's future, or perhaps the question, "where is Hizbullah leading the country to?", or "where will the Lebanese and non-Lebanese reactions to Hizbullah's actions, lead the country to?". How can there be any solution if there is no resolution with Hizbullah?

It is impossible to please Hizbullah by agreeing to the postulate that the liberation of South Lebanon[26] was the necessary ground for launching the battle for independence. This would imply that when it set out to liberate the south, Hizbullah was in effect laying the ground for its own dismantling. Furthermore, it is not true that there was consensus in support of the national-Islamic resistance until liberation[27] and that it disbanded afterwards. It is important to note also that the showcase of the Shebaa Farms has been very badly scripted. The point remains that the Islamic Resistance has failed at achieving what any movement of armed resistance can claim or aim for, by virtue of its being confined to its sectarian nature and its discursive universe anchored in transcendental thought.

16 UN Security Council Resolution 1559, promulgated in October 2004 (a couple of days prior to the parliamentary vote extending the extra-constitutional mandate of reigning president Emile Lahoud by three years), stipulated the end of all foreign intervention in Lebanon and the pull-out of all foreign armies stationed in the country. Resolution 1559 came when the crisis dividing the forces aligned with Lahoud's mandate extension and the forces opposed to it, reached its acumen. It is deemed to have come as a result of joint lobbying by Jacques Chirac and Rafiq Hariri. The Syrian army units stationed in Lebanon as well as the political team entrusted with the "tutelage" pulled out from the country in April 2005, by diktat of the Resolution and by popular demand from the March 14th Bloc in Lebanon.

17 René Moawad hailed from the north of the country. He was the first post-war president of the republic, but was assassinated almost immediately after he was sworn in. Elias Hrawi hailed from the Beqaa valley and was elected president after the assassination of Moawad. His tenure ended in the year 2000.

18 See footnote 14.

19 The pole in the Lebanese scene headed and mainly comprised by Hizbullah.

Neither would the majority of the Lebanese regard it as the canon for patriotism, nor would Hizbullah's constituency accept it as such. Movements of armed resistance usually hold the yardstick for measuring patriotism and claim the high-ground of authority to rule the country after they have successfully liberated its territory. Not in the Lebanese case. If the resistance were to uphold the yardstick for national valour, then the country would be divided. In order to avoid trudging down that path, the Lebanese resorted to the chimeric notion that "lending support to the resistance is in effect the measure of patriotism". Our duty today is to unpack this potentially explosive notion and rather than belabour, along with Hizbullah, at making conceptual differentiations between "armed resistance movement" and "militia", we ought to impede the movement from portending as a militia. First and foremost should be the implementation of the rule of law over the totality of the territory and that should be prefatory to negotiations with Hizbullah. The period of summoning to internal dialogue has lapsed and we have now reached the instance for negotiation, knowing that internal negotiations are never far from external negotiations. If the dialogue deliberated on the acceptable modalities for Hizbullah to relinquish their arms, then negotiations should be focused on the manner in which Hizbullah will defer to the supremacy of the rule of law throughout the entirety of the country, with no exceptions afforded to the leadership and high-ranking cadres of the resistance.

The Sunni community could not perform a hegemonic role, as did the Maronites, because the heartland of the community failed to come together and claim a stake in the polity (in the guise of a majoritarian entity), as it did, for instance, in Syria[28]. While the Sunni sect could not regenerate its role and portend to appropriate itself the weight of a majority, the leadership of its scion, Rafiq Hariri, was remarkably different from its traditional leaderships until then. Unlike previous figures, Hariri succeeded in legitimising his leadership of Sunnis in urban centres as well as the rural heartland. Hariri's popularity has been too hastily attributed to his liberal politics (a positive attribution) or his neo-liberal politics (a negative attribution). He also represented a moderate version of "political Islam", as illustrated for instance, in his tenacious rejection of legalising civil marriage, or in his sustained support for the construction of mosques. In that regard, he can be compared with Turkey's premier, Racep Tayip Erdogan, although Hariri's bent for the patrimonial contrasts him with the latter. In the present polarisation of the country, with a crisis opposing a "majority parliamentary bloc" with a "majority demographic bloc" (most of the Christians and most of the Shiites), the Sunnis have to become aware that the more their demand to know the truth about Rafiq Hariri's assassination is brandished as the exclusive domain of their sect, the more it loses force and credence as a national demand.

The concert of Lebanese sectarian communities have to

20 In the year 1998, Elias Hrawi's extra-constitutional term (extended by three years after it had concluded in 1995) had to end. There was wide disagreement amongst political protagonists as well as regional and international powers (Syrians, Saudis and Americans) as to the most suitable candidate. Emile Lahoud, the head of the army and the Syrian regime's preferred candidate was elected president amidst some wrangling. His tenure marked the end of Hariri's presidency over the executive branch. He was appointed prime minister again in the year 2000. The rising discontent against Emile Lahoud, as well as the overt disaffection of Hariri with him, marked the beginning of the formation of a pluri-communitarian front against Syria's management of Lebanese politics.

21 In the year 2000, Emile Lahoud's term was due to end, according to constitutional writ. It was extended for four years, amidst increasing controversy and wrangling. His relationship with Rafiq Hariri being too tense to effectively work, the front of disaffected protagonists began to take shape by 2001. It gelled around opposition to a second extension of Lahoud's tenure (and implicitly against the deepening dominion of Syrian tutelage) in 2004. This front was the core of what would become known as the "March 14th Bloc". After the assassination of Hariri, that front styled its popular street protest as an "Independence *Intifada*" precisely because it pressed for the end of Syrian tutelage and reclaimed Lebanese sovereignty.

let go of the illusion that only a historic compromise will save the country from complete chaos. In the absence of a dominant group or discourse able to uphold and guarantee it, an all-inclusive, bold compromise is an impossible undertaking. It is more useful to vest our energies in a series of partial compromises that aim at expanding the democratic realm of this sectarian system, inching the state of lumpen-democracy closer towards the model of liberal democracies. In addition to the overall development of institutions and structures, the liberal democratic model would free the market-economy from the grip of the mindset of plundering and quick-fixes and safeguard the mercantile purview of the country with a more equitable growth, based on methodological, cyclical and interactive distribution of wealth.

In order to expand the democratic realm of the sectarian system, it might be useful to imagine innovative constitutional amendments, such as changing the sectarian-based leadership positions ascribed by the National Covenant in the various realms of governance. As the hold of a sect over a particular institution is unfastened, the actual purview of the institution will be resized to fit its appropriate scope. It will also resolve the problem of extending mandates of the leadership of the republic (which entails a breach of the constitution), the parliament and the cabinet. As for the electoral law, at present, the wisdom of "good representation" that has guided the shaping of electoral laws is as pointless as the wisdom of "fostering national fusion". The more beneficial model for an electoral law is one that consecrates competition, not consensus. In the present context, regarding the entire territory of the country as the single geographic unit for representation seems the most appropriate proposal. This said, the more important innovation would be to institute wide and regional decentralisation.

The expansion of the democratic realm of the sectarian regime is the only means to lead the country, step by step, to this formula: A country with an undeniably Muslim majority and a strong inclination for western values of modernity.

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22 May Chidiac, a well-known news anchor at the Lebanese Broadcast Corporation International (LBCI) was the target of an attempted assassination in the summer of 2005. She survived miraculously in spite of serious injuries to her body. The attempt on her life followed a string of assassinations that targeted figures that were not part of a cohesive group. Fingers invariably pointed at the Syrian regime. The assassinations included columnist and historian Samir Kassir and former Communist Party General Secretary Georges Hawi, important political figures in the March 14th Bloc.

23 Fouad Siniora was one of Hariri's closest and most trusted advisors, the chief architect of his economic policies. Appointed minister of finance and minister of state for finance during Hariri's multiple tenures as prime minister, he was appointed prime minister after parliamentary elections in 2005.

24 One of the main slogans of the March 8th protest was "thank you Syria".

25 The model of an ethnically cogent, total community, is not absent in Lebanon. Perhaps the most glaring exemplar is illustrated by the Armenian community. The Armenian community was integrated into the sectarian strucure at the moment of its formation. The Druze, by contrast, waver continuously between mobilising and dissolving as an ethnic entity depending on interest and conjecture.

26 The Taif Accords postulated that all armed factions in Lebanon lay down arms. Hizbullah were 'self-appointed' (exclusively) with the duty to liberate the Israeli-occupied southern tip of the country. There was a gradual build-up in the consensus around their self-appointed role which reached its peak between the years 1996 and 2000. In the year 2000, Israel pulled out from the entirety of the territory except for the Shebaa Farms hamlet. Hizbullah has pledged to maintain armed resistance until that small piece of territory is freed and thus has not yet relinquished its arsenal or disbanded its military units.

27 There was never a complete consensus to Hizbullah's exclusive monopoly over resistance to Israeli occupation. Some political movements deem the security and liberation of the entire territory to be the role of the army rather than that of a political movement confined in a single community. After the Israeli pull-out, there was growing and overt dissent against Hizbullah maintaining that exclusive monopoly.

28 At the end of the Ottoman rule, Sunni communities from the rural hinterland and mountains of Syria mobilised to integrate the polity as a majoritarian entity. Furthermore, emboldened by nationalist rhetoric, they unseated the authority of urban Sunnis on the grounds of suspicious ethnic filiations to Turks, Turkomans, Circassians, Kurds and Bosnians, hence the potential for disloyalty to Arabs.

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Lebanon: Compromise or a New Social Contract?

Nahla Chahal

Confessionalism in Lebanon is not only a legacy; it is a constructed system – I would almost venture to call it a rational construction. What follows is not a historical overview which can often be tedious when they come in the guise of an indispensable introduction. This is not even an introduction. If the current debate is about the options available to Lebanon and the way in which each of us positions ourselves *vis-à-vis* these options, then let us start by determining the nature of this particular junction.

I will venture, first, to say that the assassination of the late Prime Minister Hariri, the withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon and all the events related hitherto, do not constitute "the nature of the present junction", but rather, only some of its manifestations. This nature and its manifestations, although related, are not one and the same thing. This assumption presupposes our ability to distance ourselves from that which we may feel strongly about. Perhaps exercising caution or rational judgment is the only thing left for us to do today.

The second point is that Lebanon, like all other countries in history although perhaps to a greater degree than others – and this assertion is open to analysis and argument – does not exist in isolation. Rather it is affected by and indeed accessory to, what transpires around it in its global geographic context. The country's urgent need to reconstitute its internal dynamics according to new definitions and new agreements is occurring at the same time that political storms are raging throughout the entire region – turning the country's state of affairs on its proverbial head and exposing it to a host of unknown possibilities.

Tumultuous Posturing, yet Ingrained Lebaneseness

Let me begin with the disparity – which has become somewhat old and even more firmly rooted – between Lebanon's perception of itself and its actual reality. This disparity, wherever it surfaces, becomes the source of numerous crises.

Lebanon is not a self-evident nation. Although one may argue

that this condition is the same as that of many other national entities in the region, our present concern is with Lebanon.

The positioning or posturing of what can be termed Lebaneseness went through a founding moment then took a tumultuous course, or path. I think that now, at the end of this path, we can put forth the idea that Lebanon is no longer a subject of questioning or reconsideration. This fact is a precious and measurable accomplishment, evident in the numerous boundaries that even the civil war was unable to breach. However, this does not mean that Lebanon is an absolute entity; this is an afterthought that becomes increasingly important in view of the potential consequences of turbulent regional events on Lebanon, in particular and on the region, in general.

We should start by looking at the context of Lebanon's founding stage: The creation of Lebanon required a social contract in the truest sense of the term. Indeed, if Lebanon shares with other countries in the region this lack of self-evident nationhood, it nevertheless is unique in having been established on a clearly negotiated social contract, duly ratified through general consensus and defined in terms of articles and principles.

This social contract – known in its political/legislative form as the "National Pact"– rested on a regional function that Lebanon performed or was able to perform. The region was in dire need of such a role-player at that juncture in its history. Palestine, due to the features of its social structure, geography and history, could have also played this role had its national project not been derailed.

This required role, its defining features and how it converged in the "Lebanese model" are well known: Lebanon was to be a mediator or arbiter between the Arab interior and Europe. This particular role presupposed some crucial features:

- An extensive degree of domestic freedom, beginning with free trade and capital mobility, including high levels of banking secrecy and freedom of thought and lifestyle. To proclaim diversity and plurality in Lebanon is to state the evident; however, it was an important element of the contract. Diversity and plurality require consensus; and the consensus which was required and actually occurred in the making of the contract, in turn, safe-guarded diversity and plurality.
- An extensive degree of neutrality with regard to the region, in the form of the margin required for enabling the role of mediator.

Lebanon's role of arbiter or mediator between the Arab interior and Europe (or the West) not only dealt with finance, business and trading goods, it also extended to education and publishing and hence to ideas and politics. Furthermore, there were several other secondary services: Tourism, healthcare, etc…

Lebanon, therefore, conducted its role in addition to creating a venue; and the two functions were co-related and interdependent. However, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that this role of mediation was inevitably temporary; and, the need for it by the Arab interior would, obviously

and eventually cease. International relations changed on all levels, commercial and otherwise, as did centres of influence.

Meanwhile, and for a multitude of interrelated reasons, once the role of mediation dissipated, Lebanon's second nature – as a venue – in turn, was brutally violated. Lebanon lost its neutral status after the Palestinian armed resistance movement arrived and rooted itself on Lebanese territory.

Years of protracted civil war would finalise the collapse of the role of mediator which was the main feature underpinning the Lebanese formula. The vacuum left by Lebanon's forced absence allowed for numerous other regional centres to emerge and thrive in their assumption of the various aspects of that role.

Other indications that Lebanon's role as arbiter had ended and had become expendable are that the situation in Lebanon was left to culminate in civil war, with the total absence of any decisive Arab or international intervention to stop it – whether out of sheer neglect or for reasons related to other regional struggles.

In other words, the civil war may not have been, after all, the cause that ended this role and its demand in the region. Rather and more specifically, it may have been a sign or indication of the waning importance of this role, due to regional and international developments and transformations. I am not looking to solve the conundrum of the chicken or the egg, but I am seeking to discern the multiple layers of meanings of one event.

An additional factor must be considered: In the past period and indeed the more recent past, since the beginning of the 1990s and official end of the civil war, we have been caught in a period of waiting. The original project for Lebanon, represented in the person of Prime Minister Hariri, was in crisis because it was based on the resumption of Lebanon's role as mediator, with, of course, some modifications of its features. This assumption was premised on what I shall briefly term "the Madrid frame of reference" which had ambitions of establishing a stable and open region, including a successful and thereby practical, settlement with Israel.

Subsequent developments, however, shattered this frame of reference: The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the First Gulf War, the assassination of Rabin, the arrival of neo-conservatives to the U.S. presidency, September 11 and finally, the war on Iraq and its subsequent occupation. It is immaterial which of these events had more impact; nor are the conspiracies, or the sequences of events relevant when we consider their overall outcome or impact on existing structures.

What was ultimately at stake was that Prime Minister Hariri had gambled on building all these highways and bridges, rebuilding the famed downtown and so on, on the premise that the advent of the Greater Middle East was imminent. And, he went on with his undertaking utilising dubious means leading to a "constructive instability" – which in itself amounts to a war project and a recipe for protracted wars in various forms; furthermore,

the kinds of business suitable under such conditions differ from the kinds of business suitable during peacetime. The rise, spread and even dominance of primitive sectarian feelings – precisely in the past decade and noticed by all with great anxiety or disdain – can be explained not as an emotional extension of the conditions of war, but rather as an expression of this particular period of anticipation and alienation. This context has generated a kind of sectarian fanaticism devoid of the usual functions of confessionalism in Lebanon and therefore, totally crude.

The period of waiting, labeled the status quo and embodied by Prime Minister Hariri, finally came to an end. It ended not only by his assassination, but also because it actually lasted longer than it should have, feeding on a combination of illusions and foreign aid which only the man – and maybe no-one else – could have provided. I shall not dwell on the elements that made this exception possible, for this lies outside the scope of this topic. However, I will go off on a tangent concerning one particular matter: The violent death of Prime Minister Hariri cannot become a pretext for changing what he represented, or conceal the dilemma Lebanon – and with it, Prime Minister Hariri's own project – was already facing.

Keeping the above in mind, many of the factors pertaining to certain events do not vanish with the end of these events, but extend to subsequent periods, accumulating and mutating as they stray from the path in which they originated. This complexity, among other things, means that Lebanon's reality is naturally more intense and intricate than the consecutive points under review here; and, it is equally difficult to isolate a single decisive factor that determines the particular direction of this reality. Finally and because of this complex interaction and the many factors involved, there is always the possibility of emphasising one determining factor over another. Therefore, it would be unwise not to take into account the importance of the role of the person, or the inevitable subjective and its ability to influence the way a reality and its inner actions are interpreted.

A Task Postponed: Renewing the Social Contract

We currently stand before a task that has been postponed for some time: Renewing the social contract. This task requires firstly, renewing the notion or definition of the contract; and secondly, the foundations that enabled it to come into existence, in particular, Lebanon "as a role" (I am aware that this expression is more aggressive than "Lebanon's role").

Finally, the task requires renewing the contract's inherent features or concepts, including: "Freedom" as a form of mutual tolerance and recognition of differences; and "limited" which is different in meaning from neutrality and all the other characteristics that formerly constituted a single interconnected, functional and rational entity. The omission of any of its components impairs the whole and requires a redefinition and reconstruction of the whole Lebanese formula – a fundamental point which I raise

and leave open for discussion.

The Taif Agreement[1] did not accomplish this task; besides, we cannot place the National Pact and the Taif Agreement on the same footing. Nor can we consider that the latter revised the former and renewed it in conformity with the new requisite, namely grabbing the historic opportunity for such a renewal. The Taif Agreement is a milestone intimately bound to the circumstances in which it came about and consequently bears the traces of these circumstances. Of course, that does not raise any doubts or questions about its legitimacy. But, it is essential to state this point in order to fully grasp what has been achieved and what has yet to be accomplished.

Another point I want to broach – this may seem a departure from the subject, although I think not – is democracy. Certainly, there are general principles that define democracy. However, each democracy is based on foundations particular to itself. In France, for instance, democracy and republic are one and the same, even if they may contradict each other widely in practice. French democracy is a militant and ideological democracy built on the idea of secularism and citizenship from which the idea of integration derives its force. In Great Britain, democracy rests mainly on the idea of public or civic freedoms. Democratic extremism in the French model – and what I mean here is the deviation that follows the concept and its implementation – leads to the need for enforcing unification and prioritising homogeneity, based on the conviction that a paradigm that conforms to and accepts these conditions exists. Contrary to this approach, solidifying democracy in France requires the acceptance of diversity and the legitimacy of diversity. Meanwhile, certain realities develop (not just hypothetical situations) which confirm the need for alarm and for review. The many crises of French secularism, including the affair of the *hijab* (headscarf or veil) and the angry youth riots of the *banlieues* are but examples of this dichotomy.

Democracy in Lebanon is based on its own mechanisms and dynamics which deteriorate when they are utilised in the mere management of confessional equilibriums. In the past, many dealing with this issue submitted an analysis and deconstruction of the concept – and found it reasonable to describe the Lebanese political system as "political feudalism". Since then (and even at the time), no real serious analysis of the value of this notion has been (or was ever) made. Nor was any serious analysis conducted on the alterations that affected this political system and the multiplicity of features inherent in its framework.

At least two of these alterations or features are the renewal of the political, social, economic and cultural elites and the weakness of any movement that does not conform to the mechanisms and dynamics of the Lebanese political system, i.e. the relegation and marginalisation of secular movements to the point of political insignificance.

Indeed, this is not an attempt to promote such movements with a value statement. Rather, it is an attempt to show that the existence

1 The Taif Agreement, (also known as the "National Reconciliation Accord" or "Document of National Accord") is an agreement that was reached to provide "the basis for ending the civil war and the return to political normalcy in Lebanon". (wikipedia.org).

of such movements is sometimes vital to stave off the catastrophic effects of a system in crisis.

It may be the case that no movement developed that was capable of confronting and putting an end to the civil war in Lebanon. Yet, the absence of such a movement is significant. And I do not mean a word here or an article there, since these were available. I'm talking about the lack of any social, political and intellectual conditions which merged to put an end to the war and offer a practical agenda or instruments for implementing that end; which is significant in itself. There are many other examples of this kind, in addition to examples that prove that there is an absence, or non-existence of the structures and resources required to manage crises and the means or instruments to prevent them. This absence of structures, resources, means and instruments invariably effects the processes or workings of public consciousness itself, as well as the kinds of environments that can create within themselves exciting analyses and perhaps the ability to come up with potential solutions and resolutions. And, so as not to be misunderstood, I do not think that social and political structures are built voluntarily, but rather according to a given framework. Yet, I also do not believe that they can be built by virtue of themselves, or that their outcomes are predetermined by their own pre-conditions.

The Current Crisis is not the Result of the Assassination of Hariri

Finally I want to invest the above in Lebanon's present crisis, with the following points:

Firstly, the present crisis is not a consequence of the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, despite the significance of that event, not to mention its horror. Neither is it the result of the Syrian withdrawal. Nor was the Syrian presence, despite its hideousness, its cause. Rather, it is the outcome of finally being confronted by the necessity of renewing or revisiting Lebanon's social contract with all its underpinnings, to the extent that conditions render this difficult task possible.

Whether the conditions for this possibility are available is not exclusively a Lebanese question, but one closely related to the situation in the entire region. The dilemma for Lebanon is that its internal crisis is taking place while the region is moving towards the edge of the unknown. This regional condition is an essential factor as far as the previously-mentioned task is concerned.

By the same token, the presence and power of the American stratagem cannot be ignored. The United States is a major player and its vision, interests and objectives are essential to the unfolding of regional – and thus, Lebanese – events. It will utilise Lebanon as an item on its agenda, according to what it deems its best interests.

Second, the conditions required for implementing the task of renewing the social contract may not be within reach. In other words, neither the conditions nor the possibilities are clear. What is required now is to find ways to keep moving forward, not in a comprehensive or consistent way but rather, in eclectic patterns. By understanding

this reality, we must understand and acknowledge the relativity of the truth that each party is holding on to so firmly, while we wait for conditions in our environment to settle. The importance of this notion or strategy lies in how critical it is that we reach a collective acknowledgment of the legitimacy of all viewpoints and tone down the radicalisation of issues on all sides.

Third and as a consequence of this environment, we are facing an extremely complex and complicated situation. It would be catastrophic to reduce this situation to an oversimplified dichotomy – as the prevailing trend has been in Lebanon in the past period. The demarcation line between attitudes, opinions and allegiances cannot be broken down into two bipolar slots: "With or against the Syrians" as is commonly the case. That is besides the issue. Others have experienced this problem before us. Here, Iraq comes to mind which for among other reasons is a good example of my point. There are many who vehemently and absolutely opposed Saddam's regime, including those he cruelly pursued and persecuted; nevertheless, they rejected the first war on Iraq in 1991, the ensuing sanctions and the American war of 2003 in addition to the present occupation of Iraq by American troops. This stance was extremely difficult because it symbolised a refusal to accept within absolute limits a choice between dictatorship and American colonisation. The people who maintained this stance may have seemed irrational during a time dominated by these two powers. Their claims that both powers were destructive and neither held a promise of deliverance for Iraq were dismissed – in spite of their veracity – as unrealistic. We all know how the story ends. Today, Iraq is in the midst of a destruction of untold years. It has become clear that local forces cannot call on the Americans to act on their behalf. It has also become clear that even if they could employ the Americans, they would not be able to dismiss them at will, as they are not a charitable organisation. The Americans have their own strategy and interests; and they are more capable and stronger than any of the local players.

In the end, I have no desire to make arbitrary comparisons and projections that ignore the particularities of countries, such as predicting that Lebanon is a candidate to become Syria's Kurdistan, i.e. its backyard for assault. Nor do I take the threat of impending chaos brandished by Arab regimes – chief among them the Syrian regime, with its attempt to inflate the legitimacy of its continuity when it has lost all the foundations for that legitimacy – very seriously. It will prove impossible for Syria to deal with the Lebanese crisis on this basis; and I think certain democratic forces in Syria are doing their best to come forth with certain clear statements and alternatives to this position. Finally, and taking into consideration all the preceding points, can we, in Lebanon, agree on recognising and accepting our differences and avoid slipping into violent confrontations of any kind, while we wait for the right moment to reconcile our social

contract with a new definition of its components and the necessary conditions for presenting it and adopting it, locally and regionally? Can we agree on making a spirit of public debate the prevailing spirit, rather than categorically polarising ourselves into fervent partisanships?

The menace and danger looming over Lebanon are much greater than that threatening others. It may be that we cannot prevent major and turbulent events from ravaging other parts of the region, but perhaps it is within our means not to make light of the challenges ahead.

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Whither Lebanon?

Kamal Hamdan

I confess that, as an economist, I have – in vain – tried to respond to the following questions more than once: What is the future of Lebanon? Where is it heading? Which economic approach should be used to try and answer this question; should it be dealt with from a micro-economic perspective; or should we focus on the alarming public debt? Do we look at the real or at the 'projected' economy; or should we examine economic disparities, emigration, unemployment, confessionalism, economic structures, infrastructure allocation and uneven regional development?

Indeed, all these subjects deserve research and further examination. However, the country's confessional structure and alignments elicit the statement – which I will try to defend – that "there is no positive, or optimistic response to the question presented here: 'Whither Lebanon?' or 'Where is Lebanon heading?'". In fact, a positive response can only be linked with the long-term emancipation of the state from sectarian institutions.

I am convinced, at one level and in principle, that Lebanon's confessional diversity or plurality could be a source of wealth and enrichment; that an understanding between the sects based on the interactions between confessional social realities, a collective memory, diverse cultural genres, rites and heritage could all be undoubtedly positive. However, despite this supposition, one must not forget that principles are one thing and the confessional reality in Lebanon is another.

The means through which the sects were married to the state, in addition to this confessional marriage itself, have created a fertile ground for breeding a fundamental dichotomy and a form of schizophrenia – almost a quasi-collective schizophrenia – in the more general strata of the public and in the more innocent and benign of people. It has clouded the power of the rational mind; and it has promoted incentives for every kind of foreign interference, whatever the nature, beginning with Syria to Israel and the United States, i.e., tutelage in all its forms. With the tense confessional real-

ity of the state and the proverbial "marriage" of the sects to the state, however, the issue is far greater than merely being a collective condition. The state is now a hostage of the relationship; subsequently, the stakes have risen and wagers on the victory of a new form of hegemony over the state have flourished (whether the form of that hegemony is singular, dual or multiple). Moreover, these wagers adapt to the patterns of change of both internal and external political, economic and demographic factors. After all, it is widely understood that hegemony in confessional systems is a fundamental issue, since there can be no balance in a confessional system unless one party is dominant within the framework of this balance.

Several formulas were attempted, leading up to the 1970's and a number of partial-formulas were tried in the 1990's, after the civil war, when illusions were fostered that one system of confessional hegemony could be exchanged for another. It is precisely in this type of climate that we find the prevailing conditions that feed upon and tempt certain minds to wager on the victory of yet another (new) hegemony of a third kind. The danger of such a gamble is intensified as sects become further inclined towards total "purity", or internal homogeneity and increasingly rigid internal alignments which in themselves cancel out diversity. Such posturing also eventually eliminates the opportunities to return to the side of the "Other" in a pluralistic confessional reality, regardless of whether or not this confessional reality can be positive or present positive challenges such as encouraging us to excel at creating a strong model for multi-confessional coexistence, fortified by the art of communal living in the pursuit of happiness and equality. If the danger intensifies with the confessional inclination towards "purification" within the sects, then, today, we are at the apex of this trend within each sect. I am of the opinion that, with the loss of diversity on both the national and confessional levels, the cost to Lebanon – and to each sect would be exorbitant. The emergence of the "Christian" project in the 1970s hints at this great cost; and, today, the same appears possible with the intensification of the confessional mobilisation in the Muslim milieus – whether Shiite or Sunni. If I ask myself, "what can be done?", the possibility of an answer becomes more of a delusion than a fantasy with regard to this complicated given.

I have not yet discussed an economic outlook or prospect because the issue at hand is political, in all senses of the term. But in this context, the most pressing economic issue for Lebanon is linked to the capacity to revive the project of a centralised state – not in the strict, totalitarian sense, but rather in the sense of a modern, centralised state, complemented by broader forms of administrative and economic decentralisation. Obviously, there has been a great deal of discussion about Lebanon's class disparity, uneven regional development and sectarian idiosyncrasies, among others. However, if we pooled our resources and strength behind the project of a centralised state – a just and fair

state (and I will elaborate on some of the fundamental requirements of such a state later) – we would make significant, tangible strides to this end. We will succeed if we remain loyal to our aspirations of building a strong, exemplary state, setting the example for a pluralistic order and excelling in creating the art of communal living, reinforced by equality and prosperity.

All the political parties raise slogans against sectarianism and in support of national unity and state-building. However, in reality, they are all exposed by an analysis of their practices and their networks of alliances and vested interests. That said, if we could bring to the fore some of the groups or associations who focus most on "building the state first and foremost"; and if we abandon our slogans, then perhaps there is hope for once more linking and consolidating that which, in its present form, is pushing us towards disintegration.

The first proposition for this course of action is a new electoral law based on the principle of proportional representation in the absolute sense, without confessional quotas or restrictions of any kind; electoral districts also should be defined and demarcated at the governorate level and perhaps gradually reduced to smaller units within governorates in progressive stages.

Second, we propose a change in the state's administrative structures and divisions, for we are prisoners of a system of administration dating back to the Ottoman period. This project is a guarantee for placing the new generation, with its progressive outlook, as the natural commanders of this battle – instead of the financial "houses" whose calculated alignments and balancing acts date back to the 19th century. Who will have the courage to change this situation?

Third and most importantly, we propose a new, modern law defining the notion of "residence": One-third of Lebanese citizens live, willingly or unwillingly – and some have been like this for decades – in areas outside those where they were registered at birth. Yet, we ask them to participate in public, political and municipal life and to partake in elections according to laws that do not reflect the realities of their area or place of residence. This, in all honesty, is a (political) farce. Citizens cannot participate in improving their representation, their life conditions, environment, employment opportunities – such as repairing the sidewalks they walk upon, ensuring the cleanliness of the air they breathe – without laws that are compatible with the modern concept of residence. Therefore, a new and modern law dealing with residence and all that it entails is required. Based on this law, proper electoral laws and efficient administrative structures can subsequently be designed.

Fourth and without further delay, we ask that a civil law be legislated for dealing with the jurisdiction over the personal affairs of citizens – even if this entails resorting to the street and exercising our right to challenge the status quo using the various forms of non-violent con-

frontation available to us. Indeed, the absence of civil law has been the key impediment to integration, unity and progress.

Fifth, in pursuing the national and state-building project, we must work on developing a more modern definition of "Arab identity" that would not only break with the Arabism or Arab identity of slogans, but also with the Pan-Arab unity project. Such a definition would allow us to see and remember it for what it is, based on all that we have experienced over the past 50 years; i.e, a project replete with its martial and neo-security orders and systems, autocracies, monarchies and secret police mentality. At the same time, we need to ensure that we move forward without slipping back, consciously or subconsciously, into subservience to other, newer forms of colonialism and their crudity. We must develop a more modern and contemporary conception of Arab identity; one that is more compatible and equipped to deal with the realities of the age and economic realities we live in. This new Arab identity must also be prepared to deal with the more positive manifestations of globalisation which in itself would reduce the impact of its negative effects on our society. Coming to terms with this reality is a great challenge; it is a battle whose outcome could help us resolve issues, including our relationship with Syria and the compatibility of armed resistance and state.

The sixth point – and here is where economics plays a role – is to try to liberate the state from the sects and render a positive role for sectarianism. An environment of cultural pluralism through which people's freedoms are strengthened by living their rites, rituals and daily affairs requires a proper economic program. One should not underestimate the importance of liberating the public sector and its services from the monopoly of sectarian agents (or middlemen), their traditional confessional leaders and the state bureaucracy. By emancipating the public sector and its services, it will become possible to realistically implement the principles of the right to healthcare, education and social security through a concrete action plan. There is an enormous amount of study and research which has already been conducted on this subject, with administrative and management protocols nearly ready for implementation. However, the chances for this implementation are doomed as long as there is an absence of a national bloc which in itself goes beyond sectarian lines and confessionalism and changes the balance of power in the status quo.

It is Lebanon's new generation which must undertake this mission. Yet, in order not to fall into a demagogic trap in our vision of any socio-economic program, we must pay special care and attention to the reality that we too are a part of this society. Therefore, we must adopt the principle of shielding our position, while at the same time become more accommodating and open to others. We must also pay attention to maintaining a competitive edge which requires

certain sacrifices and mandates giving the utmost that we can in the transition period, according to each person's capacity and potential, in order for our economy to become viable.

November 18, 2005

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Pulling Focus: Art and Curatorial Practice Reconstruct Science

Carol Squiers, Steve Kurtz and Lynn Love
Moderator/Coordinator: Lynn Love

Public discussions of science are often dominated by a "gee-whiz" attitude that does little to engage its claims or implications. At times, members of the non-scientific public recognise the cultural authority of science but fail to question it. Who can blame them? Science is vast, spanning such disciplines as ecology, forensic pathology, genetics, applied and theoretical physics, zoology, palaeontology and more. The claims of science are strengthened by a unifying set of methods for gathering data, organising and presenting it. Couple these methods with the highly-specialised language and tools of research and an informed response to science seems daunting. Must it be? What political ground does the public sacrifice by avoiding an active engagement with science and all that it claims?

For the amount of power it wields, science is the least examined mode of representation in mainstream culture. Sure, science fascinates and there are numerous examples of our predilections for a good discovery story in newspapers or magazines, or gee-whiz science education programs on television. For example, on any given day, in almost any place in the world with television, one can find programming that weaves into the picture scientific facts about extreme weather, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes; or notable creatures, sharks, spiders, reptiles, gorillas, elephants, bacteria; breakthrough medical solutions, treatments for cancer, heart disease, AIDS and other infectious diseases, or those that will help us defy the process of aging. Sometimes these topics constitute the programming, as on the Discovery or National Geographic channels, for instance, and sometimes these topics round out the news: Extreme weather reporting is often accompanied with informative reports about weather in general and profiles of the scientists who study it. It doesn't take much examination to realise that our collective enthusiasm about science and its progressive contributions to culture sells, even if it does not always buoy the intellect. On the whole, however, we the consuming public take for granted our ongoing

exposure to science as the basis of explanations of who we are, or as it is used to persuade us to buy certain products or embrace certain policies. We recognise that the potency of scientific explanation, for example, the "script of life" as revealed and promoted by the Human Genome Project[1], offers a profound new definition of life, identifiable as a shared set of classified inscriptions. Yet we do little to question the practices and implications of the science that produced the "Human Genome". Why? Why do we take for granted what the purveyors of science tell us? Why do we permit scientific explanations as an authoritative source for stories about ourselves?

Well, there are strong conceptual incentives. Science, as most other intellectual pursuits, as life work, has become highly professionalised. Like lawyers or engineers or architects or historians for example, we understand that scientists too train and apprentice for many years before becoming professionally sanctioned to work as contributing professionals, either in academia or industry.

We devalue ourselves by allowing professionalism to stand in for authority about science and therefore reduce our participation in the traffic in meanings that science projects. More reasons for opting out exist: Science is vast, spanning dozens of disciplines from anthropology to forensic pathology, molecular biology, physics, zoology, to name but a few. Just consider the breadth of two major scientific publications: The weekly journals *Science* and *Nature*. And yet, while science is vast in its purview, it contains a unifying core, a method for formalising inquiry, gathering quantitative data, organising it in similar fashion across the scientific disciplines, vetting it for publication and dissemination and eventually presenting it as true. This is called the scientific method. Couple the method with constantly evolving tools and means of producing data, as well as critical evaluation of the specific projects and assertions of science seem difficult.

But perhaps more than any other reason for our trepidation with science, we simply are unwilling to imagine that science lacks a given reality, beneath its inscriptions. It is too hard to think that there really is no untouchable sacred centre to ground and authorise an innocent and progressive order of knowledge. I make this claim not as a cultural relativist, but as a writer who has been interviewing scientists and documenting the scientific enterprise for years, with the rich recognition that science is a set of disciplined practices deeply enmeshed in narrative, politics, myth, economics and technical possibilities. In other words, I believe that scientists genuinely get at things that enable concrete ways of life. But I am not convinced that the scientific method is the only means that scientists use to get at those things. Based on my experience in science as a writer, I suspect that fact and fiction share the space of science; because scientists and those who actively rely on science for making meaning of the world are specified human subjects and therefore performative as social and political agents. And fiction, even in science, offers

1 The Human Genome Project (HGP) is a "project undertaken with a goal to understand the genetic make-up of the human species by identifying all the genes in the human genome and mapping how individual genes are sequenced. The project began in 1990 and by some definitions, it was completed in 2003". (wikipedia.org).

an escape into a better world than that which actually exists or has happened. And finally, because fiction easily shares the limelight with those seemingly irreducible notes from which a reliable understanding of the world can be built: Those things we call facts. Despite the incentives to do otherwise, it needn't be so difficult or daunting to engage the specific concerns and assertions of science and to be fair, many academics and a few public intellectuals and journalists managed to do so. But I am impatient and disturbed by the authority and stability of science, so impatient that I've quit my job in science to write differently about it: To be willing to imagine a science that tells stories at least partly based in fiction and enables concrete ways of life at the same time; and to participate in crafting a science that non-professionals, dilettantes and even amateurs can participate in.

We risk certain perils if we ignore our own hand in the cultural potency of science or if we accept it uncritically. Consider for a moment the trend in many small towns across the United States that public schools stop teaching the theory of evolution and instead adopt the theory of intelligent design. Intelligent design, as you probably are aware, is essentially religion masquerading as a scientific explanation of the origins and development of living organisms. If ever there were a reason to be steeped in the value and the pitfalls of the theory of evolution in the United States today – including how molecular biology relies upon evolution in both practical and theoretical terms –, now would be a good time. Scientists, I have learned firsthand, often carry out their political lives in their science, rather than becoming spokespersons for why a scientific theory should not be replaced with a thinly veiled religious dogma. At times, navigating science and its claims is as much a defensive cultural practice as it is an assertive strategy for remaking, or re-routing, meaning. For me, this is not a question of literacy so much as it is a question of strategic and creative resourcefulness.

I said at the beginning that this is a discussion about science which is true. But tonight this is also a discussion about art. And since I've organised this programme under the intended provocation, "Arts and Curatorial Practice Reconstruct Science", I owe you an explanation or at least an introduction to what I mean. In a few minutes, Carol Squiers, who is a curator at the International Center for Photography in New York and Steve Kurtz, a professor and artist based in Buffalo, New York, will describe their work. Both Carol's curatorial practice and Steve's artistic practice take on science, for better or for worse. Though very different as practices, I admire Carol and Steve's work for an important reason. Their work is part of what can be understood as a reconstruction in progress of science. But what do I mean by this? In the academic world of cultural studies and sociology of science, there exists a notion of change within a given scientific discipline, or across science as a whole, that has always intrigued me. This is the concept of reconstruction, also variously called restructuring.

This concept hails primarily from feminist critiques of science. It's not necessarily a surprising concept. Basically, through case studies of minority groups within science, particularly women, scholars of science have described a reconstruction of certain disciplines due to the specific visions and concerns of these groups of scientists.

For example, in primatology, the discipline of science that studies the behaviour and physiology of monkeys and apes, critical science scholar Donna Haraway has argued that starting in the 1970s, women scientists discovered different social dynamics among apes and monkeys than previous generations of white European and American male scientists had observed. The women scientists' interpretations challenged the parallels of primate behaviour to social norms of human domestic behaviour such as monogamy, or gendered division of labour in the family or even the very notion of "the family". And within a period of twenty years, women scientists in primatology re-routed the scientific narratives about primate behaviour that resulted in significant changes across the discipline. By extension, the work of these women in primatology provided the public with a different source material for using primates and their behaviour as a basis for or confirmation of stories about ourselves.

The case study of primatology is famous within science studies and very dramatic, but there are others, both historical (such as women working in X-ray crystallography) and current (such as women scientists in Telomere research). It seems no surprise that groups of women or ethnic and racial minorities within science, or even scientists working without the economic privileges of scientists in the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany and even Israel, would literally discover different facts about their natural material while following the same method. What is remarkable, from my perspective, is that they do not set out to do so in a determined way. All the case studies follow several generations of scientists who do not enter the discipline with a particular intention such as to change our perception of monogamy and primate behaviour. In other words they're not organised as a political force; their data even contradict. Nor are these scientists anywhere close to asserting that all facts are relative or that science is merely a social construct. On the contrary, the reconstructing scientists profiled in various case studies are professionals who abide by the truth-value enterprise of science. But the challenges they collectively make within their fields point to the lack of a dominating authority within science.

The work of these scientists and the cultural critiques about them are a source of inspiration. I think it is productive to examine places other than science, places that are professionalised and subscribe to various shared methods, to determine whether there are other reconstructive possibilities or trends that impact the cultural authority of science. And since this question has been simmering for me during the past half dozen years, as I have moved professionally between the world of science and the world of art, it's logical for

me to look to the art world for evidence of reconstruction. More and more, I see artists and curators taking up issues in science. Since I began working in the 1990s, feminist video artists have produced work on assisted reproduction; AIDS activists, many of them artists, took on issues of the medicalisation of the body and the politics of drug development. As the year 2000 approached, many curators organised exhibitions about the impact of genetics and the Human Genome Project. And the arts and curatorial practice that takes up science is still ongoing. I don't find every attempt by artists and curators rich in the ways that I am seeking to complicate science and render it an actual currency for non-scientists. But there are examples, two of which would be Carol and Steve's work, that I believe form a kind of basis for a reconstruction located in arts and curatorial practice. Their work has the power to engage a wide audience and to demand a revision of prevailing beliefs, not just within science, but about science as well. It has the power to and has already involved and engaged scientists themselves. But I would argue that this effort is not now a fulfilled reconstruction. The reconstruction of science through arts and curatorial practice require an ongoing examination of science in thoughtful terms and require the attention and flexibility of critics and writers to sustain it.

Please allow me to introduce Carol Squiers and Steve Kurtz. Carol is a critic and curator of contemporary art. She'll discuss some of the issues and images from an exhibition series that she's been working on which appeared at the International Center for Photography in New York. Steve Kurtz is a cofounder of the art collective Critical Art Ensemble. He is the first artist investigated for bioterrorism under the US Patriot Act. Kurtz will discuss the privatisation of knowledge and how artists use public space and critical intervention as a means to expose the processes, biases and truth claims of science and technology.

Lynn Love
November 19, 2005

Lynn Love writes about media arts, science and technology. From 1999 to 2005, she was affiliated with The Rockefeller University in New York, first as a science writer and then as the university's Media Relations director. Love is based in New York.

Science in Images: From Eugenics to Human Cloning

Carol Squiers

Between 2001 and 2004, I organised a group of exhibitions at the International Center of Photography in New York in a series entitled, "Imaging the Future: The Intersection of Science, Technology, and Photography". The exhibitions were loosely inspired by the scientific prophecies and PR promises generated by the Human Genome Project[1]. This is an ambitious effort by scientists and biotech entrepreneurs in the U.S. and the U.K. to decode the entire human genetic code. The idea is that with such a code in hand, scientists and medical professionals would be able to read the chemical building blocks of each individual. Then they would be able to design medical treatments and genetic tests that would immeasurably improve our lives and allow us to remove from future generations any genetic errors – including aesthetic ones – that we desire. Many aspects of this essential idea have been attacked as simplistic and even dangerous, but its promoters toiled onward until April 14, 2003, when scientists announced that they had finished decoding the human genome.

Some of the questions that arose for me while I contemplated this series of shows were the following: How do you make photographic exhibitions about an area of science which is so new that images of it might not yet exist? And even if they did exist, how do you go about finding them? Looking for the answers to these and other questions has taken me into fields of inquiry and archives of images that were both compelling and disturbing. It was nevertheless clear to

1 The Human Genome Project (HGP) is a "project undertaken with a goal to understand the genetic make-up of the human species by identifying all the genes in the human genome and mapping how individual genes are sequenced. The project began in 1990 and by some definitions, it was completed in 2003". (wikipedia.org)

me that the new genomic research was probably going to provoke a revolution in human health and that exploring its history and implications would be timely. I'm going to take you through some of the images, the research and the concepts that helped construct these shows.

The first image shows a photograph by Arthur Fellig (better known as Weegee) entitled, "Showgirl, Sherry Britton, Reading *Apes, Men, and Morons*", circa 1944, from *Perfecting Mankind: Eugenics and Photography*, the first show in the series. I'll explain the photograph's relevance to the topic in a bit.

The pseudo-science known as eugenics is one starting point for the modern history of human genetics which is why I chose the topic for the first exhibition. In the 1995 preface to his important book on the history of eugenics in the United States, Daniel Kevles wrote, "The spectre of eugenics hovers over virtually all contemporary developments in human genetics…, [which]… originated with the eugenic idea that the physical, mental and behavioral qualities of the human race could be improved by suitable management and manipulation of its hereditary essence. During the heyday of eugenics – much of the first half of the 20th century – social prejudice often overwhelmed scientific objectivity in the investigation of human genetics."[2] Kevles' observation was compelling to me when I first read it and its implications have only become more significant to me as the years have passed.

Historic eugenics – as opposed to contemporary eugenics – combined isolated and little-understood bits of scientific knowledge with class and racial prejudice, as well as the political expediency to produce a pseudoscience that has had a profound impact on the U.S. and many other countries. The leaders of the eugenics movements in the U.S. were scientists or other well-educated people allied with powerful institutions like Stanford, Columbia and Harvard University, as well as the American Museum of Natural History in New York. In this image, Sherrie Britton, a well-known strip-tease dancer in Manhattan in the 1940s, is shown reading a popular anthropology book by Earnest Albert Hooton, a professor of physical anthropology at Harvard who wrote several popularising books on anthropology commingled with eugenic messages.

Hooton tried, unsuccessfully, to become a celebrity intellectual, appearing in publications such as *LIFE* magazine. The image of him

2 *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity,* 1985.

Left:
"Showgirl, Sherry Britton, Reading *Apes, Men, and Morons*", Arthur Fellig, 1944.

Right:
Dr. E.A. Hooton, Harvard, *LIFE* magazine, August 7, 1939.

posing with a collection of skulls ran in *LIFE* in 1939.

Like some physical anthropologists, eugenicists were obsessed with measuring the human form as a way of trying to find ways to quantify and define both desirable and undesirable people. Huge collections of skulls were assembled in order to measure the supposed brain size of various groups of people, and to measure such things as the angle of the forehead. The more pronounced the angle, the closer you were to apes. This was considered a negative association. *LIFE* magazine called Hooton "witty" and described his belief that a "biological purge" of the human race was necessary to protect it from defects.

Anyone who knows the history of photography probably knows something about eugenical photography, especially through Allan Sekula's 1986 essay, *The Body and the Archive*. In this essay, he discusses the composite portraiture and eugenic theories of the British statistician Francis Galton. Galton occupies a seminal position in my research because he coined the term "eugenics" and then tried to use photography to prove his theories. So, I began my first exhibition with a few examples of his photographic work.

Galton pursued scientific investigations in a variety of subjects including heredity, physical anthropology, geography and meteorology. In 1883, he coined the term "eugenics" from a Greek root meaning "good in birth." In the book *Hereditary Genius* (1869), Galton claimed that it was possible to produce "a highly gifted race of men" by the process of selective breeding which he later termed "positive eugenics". Policies and theories that discouraged the reproduction of "undesirables" were subsequently termed "negative eugenics".

Galton began to use photography in around 1878. He invented a technique that he called "composite photography" in which he superimposed photographic portraits of various individuals. This was based on similar work he had done with maps and meteorological images. Galton thought that facial characteristics correlated with mental traits and that composite portraiture was a kind of "psychological inquiry." He first used head shots of British prisoners, looking for the "typical" physiognomic features of each criminal group by re-capturing several of the portraits onto the same photographic plate to make a composite portrait. But Galton was disappointed with the outcome: His pictures seemed to have eliminated the negative irregularities in the men's appearances, leaving only "the common humanity that underlies them…" On the screen is his 'Comparison of Criminal and Normal Populations' (from circa 1878), the "normal" people being officers and men from the Corps

Composite Photograph: 'Comparison of Criminal and Normal Populations', Francis Galton, ca. 1878.

of the Royal Engineers.

Following Galton, the upper class of American society avidly took to composite photography both for fun and intellectual amusement. Henry Pickering Bowditch, Professor of Physiology and Dean of the Harvard Medical School, made composite photographs after reading Galton's influential articles on the subject which sparked a craze for such images. Bowditch followed Galton's line of thinking that composites could be used for serious scientific study. In an 1894 article on some of his research, he took 12 portraits each of Boston horse-car drivers and horse-car conductors and then superimposed them. Another set of images was taken of Boston physicians. In the article, he claims to have discovered a hierarchy of "intellectual expression" written into the composite physiognomies with the doctors at the top, the conductors below them and the drivers at the bottom, neatly arranged by class position. While this seems amusing now, it is important to understand that in Bowditch's mind and no doubt in the minds of many readers at the time, these images and his conclusions about them were completely acceptable and constituted a valid scientific practice.

Just as composite photography was popularised through the print media, so too was eugenics which was promoted in lectures, books and exhibitions. In the U.S., eugenicists had substantial influence on public thinking, educational curricula and congressional lawmaking. They drew average Americans into active participation in eugenics with events such as the "Perfect Baby" and "Fitter Family" contests.

The "Fitter Family" contests were staged at state agricultural fairs throughout the U.S. in the 1920s and early 1930s, where local families came to be measured and questioned by eugenicists who awarded prizes for eugenic excellence. This is the "Eugenics and Health Exhibit" put on by the American Eugenics Society in Topeka.

This is a "Small Family" winner at

Top:
'Eugenics and Health Exhibit', Topeka, Kansas, 1930s, Unidentified photographer, Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

Bottom:
'Small Family Winner', 1927. Fitter Family Contest, Kansas State Free Fair, 1927, Unidentified photographer, Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

Top:
'America Needs…', ca. 1927, Unidentified photographer, Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

Bottom:
'Medium Family Winner', Fitter Family Contest, Kansas State Free Fair, Wolcott's Studio 1927, Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

the Kansas State Free Fair in 1927.

To compete for the title of 'Fitter Family', a family had to submit to a physical exam, syphilis test and psychiatric evaluation. The information was entered on an examination form as grades in categories like "physical, mental or temperamental defects" and "special talents, gifts, tastes, or superior qualities." First-place winners received silver trophies, like the winners for 'Best Couple' at the Texas State Fair in 1925. Many of the surviving portraits of award-winning families, like this 'Medium Family' also at the Kansas State Free Fair, were taken by professional photographers. They were probably distributed to local newspapers where the winners might have gotten front-page coverage.

In contrast with the 'Fitter Families', there were "unfit families", who were the people eugenicists wanted to eliminate through negative eugenics. This practice took its most extreme form with sterilisation laws that were in effect in 24 states by the early 1930s. The attention-getting flashing lights on this contraption were used to dramatise the differences between the "fit" and the "unfit." The installation was sponsored by the American Eugenics Society whose mission was to propagandise eugenics. It targeted schools from the elementary level up through university and hosted exhibits that had popular appeal. The members of the American Eugenics Society came to range from progressive reformers to well-born, rabid racists.

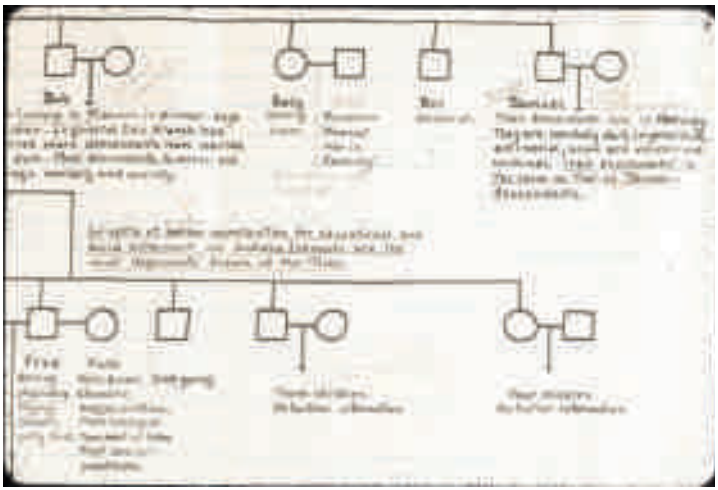
The "unfit" were avidly studied by the eugenics movement which looked at families who exhibited what it defined as social and physical pathologies. After locating appropriate subjects – people who were extremely poor or who were in jail or mental institutions – eugenicists traced their family trees by interviewing doctors and other healthcare workers, friends and family members. Invariably, such people were found to have relatives who were paupers, criminals or "feebleminded," a catch-all term of the day used to refer to anyone who seemed somehow mentally deficient. All of the families featured in the most famous studies are from rural areas where eugenicists felt the "feebleminded" were reproducing unchecked. This is a detail from a genealogical chart made of one family. It gives an idea of the kind of derogatory language that passed as scientific observation.

This photograph is from a five-part series published in 1930 on the "Bungler" family – like all such families, they were given a pseud-

onym. These members of the clan were obviously less fit because they were illiterate. This couple was deemed more advanced than other relatives.

One thing that struck me while researching this was the resemblance between family study photographs and those that were carried out for the FSA (Farm Security Administration) a few years later by Walker Evans and others, depicting poor rural folk posed with roughhewn wooden backdrops.

Now I'm going to leave the rural southern United States in 1930 and jump to somewhere in Western Europe in 1998. This is an image by Hans Danuser entitled *Frozen Embryo, Series II* and it is one of the photographs in the exhibition entitled *How Human: Life in the Post Genome Era* which was on exhibit in 2003. Unlike *Perfecting Mankind* which displayed images made for and by advocates of eugenics, *How Human* is comprised of images mainly made by artists who engage scientific topics related



'The Tribe of Ishmael',
Ca. 1921.
Unidentified photographer,
Courtesy of the American
Philosophical Society.

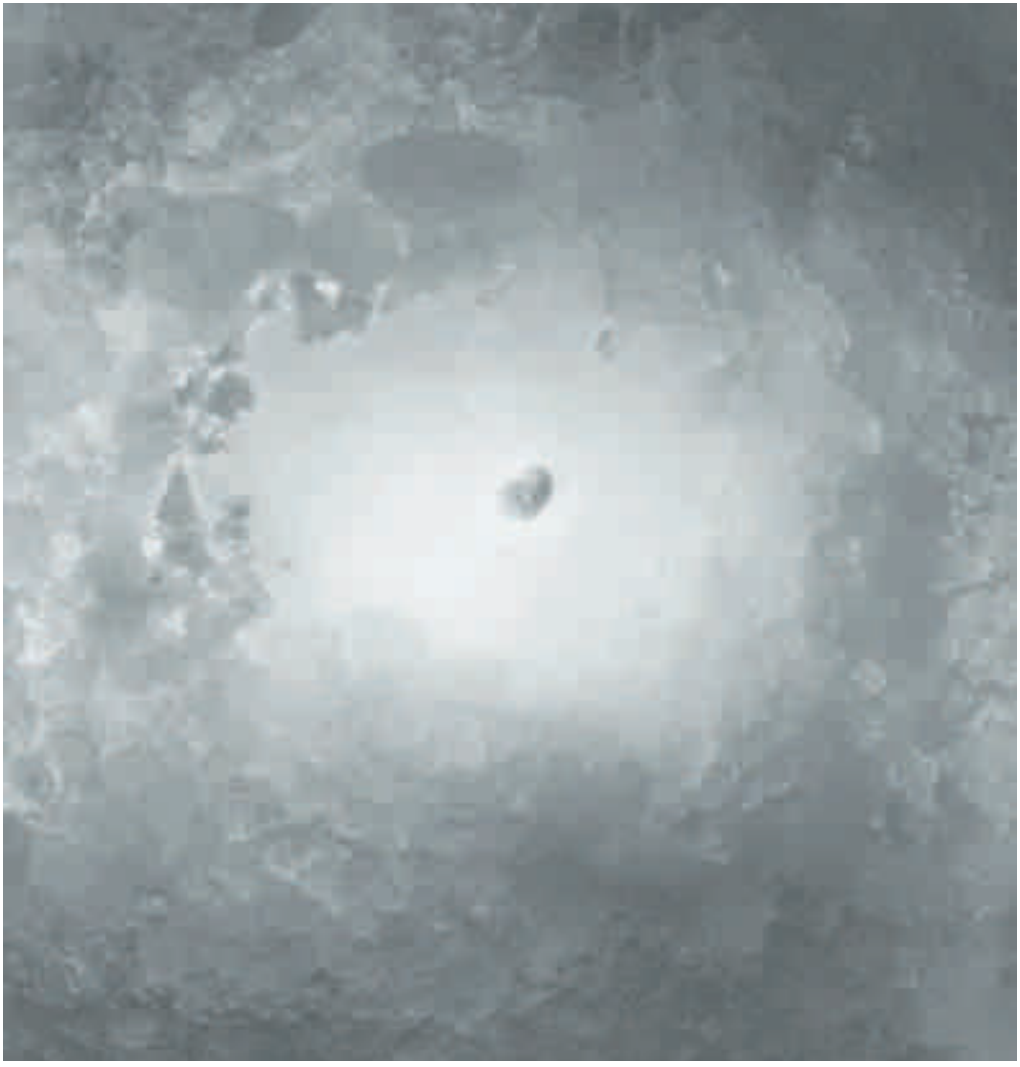
'A Bungler Family',
I.S. Caldwell, 1930.

to the Human Genome Project.

For this series on the prenatal body, Danuser went to various research facilities that specialised in human embryos – doing surgery and testing pharmaceuticals on them, or extracting stem cells from them. The frozen embryo is a by-product of the assisted reproductive technology known as "test tube" fertilisation. Any "spare" embryos that are not used to create children may be preserved for future use by the couple that created them, using freezing methods that would preserve them for decades.

Eugenicists would probably have favored this technology over others. It would have given them the ability to intervene in one of the most basic of life's processes: Deciding

'Frozen Embryo, Series II', Hans Danuser, 1998–2000, Collection of JGS, Inc.



which potential human being is good enough to bring to term and which should never be born. But they could not have imagined the complexities of this technology and its products and the many uses to which it could be put.

Those uses have provoked contentious debate in the U. S., especially around the issue of stem cells which are derived from fertilised embryos less than a week old. At that stage, the embryo is a cluster of cells smaller than the head of a pin. Because embryonic stem cells can be developed into any other kind of cell, they are prized by scientists who see in them the potential to treat or cure diseases including Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and heart disease. Although Danuser seems not to take an overtly political stance regarding frozen embryos, it is worth noting that he has been photographing certain highly contested environments and techniques of modern science and technology since the 1980s, including atomic energy production, nuclear waste sites and animal testing facilities. The *Frozen Embryo* series are perhaps his most visually abstract works in which he seems to ask the viewer to image the freezing depths to which the potential for human life is consigned.

Reproductive technologies and the manipulations that are or will be possible with their use are among the themes that ran through the exhibition. One artist in the exhibition who has been using ideas about genetic research in his art is Larry Miller. The piece he showed in 'How Human' was 'Genomic License No. 8 (Ars Manifestus)', from 1998-99, consisting of photographs, a "Genomic License Agreement" text and body tissue samples on micro-slides (blood, cheek cells). Miller's interest in these issues began when he read a news article in 1980 about a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision that allowed the patenting of genetically engineered micro-organisms, thereby creating a major shift in the scientific marketplace. Miller reasoned that if bacteria could be patented, then animals and humans could be next. So individuals would be well advised to secure the legal rights to their own genomes before anyone else did. In the mid-1980s he began considering the possibility of copyrighting human DNA. Although he could find no legal precedent for it, he started by claiming copyright over his own genome. Then he distributed his own "Genetic Code Copyright" forms internationally by mail and over the internet, attracting thousands of people who then claimed ownership of their own unique genetic makeup.

For the "Genomic License" series, he developed classifications for hypothetically licensing DNA codes. He obtained what he calls the genetic "rights" to certain desirable characteristics from his subjects which he then has the right to sell. In this piece, he displays the licenses for the specific creative traits of eleven artists, having collected blood or cheek cells from which DNA could be extracted. Although cloning an entire human being using only these DNA samples is prohibited in Miller's agreement with a

buyer, he permits that the DNA that carries the desirable traits be mixed into a genetically engineered human being.

It is all too facile to host an exhibition that is wholly critical of the genetic revolution. While it might be difficult to see anything progressive in the seemingly avariciously out-of-control biotech industry, there are areas in which genetic technology can play a beneficial role.

One of them is in the area of DNA identification which is utilised for a number of different reasons. This photograph is by Richard Press, a former forensic photographer for the New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

It depicts New York City police and other searchers at the World Trade Center site after the attacks of September 11. They were gathered outside a makeshift tent where forensic specialists worked to identify remains. Nearly 20,000 human remains were found, some as small as a fragment of bone or a scrap of skin. Only 292 of them were whole bodies, so DNA and other kinds of testing were crucial for identification. But by the end of February 2005, using all the methods at their disposal, they identified the remains of a little over half of the 2,749 people who were known to have been killed at the World Trade Center. This image from the series shows a technician with vials of frozen remains waiting to be identified.

Another situation in which DNA identification can play a progressive role is in law enforcement. Since 1989, 163 falsely convicted people in the U.S. have been exonerated of serious crimes with the help of DNA. One of them is Ronald Jones, a Chicago man who was accused of rape and murder and convicted and sentenced to death solely on his own coerced confession. This photo by Taryn Simon is one of 50 portraits she took of the people who were exonerated through the efforts of the Innocence Project at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York. She asked the subjects to pose at the sites of their arrest (which is what this specific picture shows), the sites of their alibi or the scenes of the crime.

Top:
Office of Chief Medical Examiner #3,
Richard Press, 2001,
Collection of JGS, Inc.

Bottom:
Office of Chief Medical Examiner #8,
Richard Press, 2001,
Collection of JGS, Inc.

But there are also major privacy concerns about DNA testing for identification. The creation of DNA data banks by government agencies and the use of DNA dragnets by police have aroused particular protest. The DNA dragnet practice first emerged in Britain where 4,000 men were rounded up and tested in the 1987 rape and murder case of two girls. In the U.S., such dragnets have had less successful outcomes than elsewhere and have caused more controversy.

The fifth and final show in my series was *The Art of Science* which contained images made both by scientists and artists who collaborate with scientists. The idea for the show is that in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, science has increasingly become driven by astonishing methods of visualisation. Whether the subject is the surface of Mars or the interior of a human cell, scientists look at images not so much as documentation but as sites of discovery.

This revolution has occurred in large part as a result of the computer which has had a profound effect on the scientific imaging of the body since the early 1970s. With it, scientists can capture

Ronald Jones, scene of arrest, South Side, Chicago, Illinois. Jones served 8 years of a death sentence for rape and murder.
From *The Innocents* series, Taryn Simon, 2002.
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

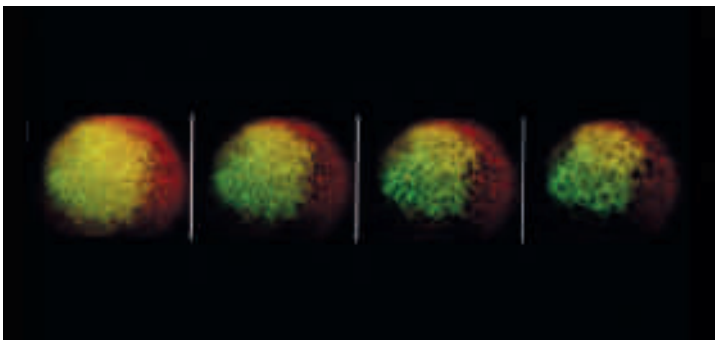
electronic signals with an array of different instruments.

The images in this exhibition were produced in order to understand how human and animal biology functions and how and why it goes wrong. All were created in digital form and with but a few exceptions, projected as digital files. They represent a small sample of the enormous range of scientific visualisation. I'll talk briefly about one piece from this exhibition which features the action of quantum dots.

Quantum dots are a new and extraordinary technology developed to enable scientists to investigate the beginnings of life by studying the cells of living embryos. Quantum dots are human-made, nanometre-scaled semiconductor crystals that can emit light of any colour in the spectrum depending on the size of the dot (a nanometre is one-billionth of a metre). Scientists can inject up to a billion quantum dots into a single cell in order to illuminate the progression of cell development and behaviour and record their findings in digital images.

These stills, from Ali Brivanlou's time-lapse movie, show experiments using quantum dots to label and light individual cells in frog embryos. Frog embryo cells split and double every 20 minutes for approximately the first four hours of life, moving from fertilised egg to a few thousand cells. The movie follows the lighted cell divisions as the quantum-dot illumination moves from the periphery of the cells to their nuclei, demonstrating that cells can move information to their DNA. Within 24 hours, the embryo contains some 40 million cells. In the movie, scientists can see the exact point at which DNA transcription begins in a new life.

I'll end by saying that I learned a number of different things from doing this series of exhibitions. One thing I learned is that making art about science is difficult, especially art that engages people on a visual and an intellectual level simultaneously. I have a newfound respect for science and an abiding distrust of what can be done in the name of science to make a profit, especially in areas like genetic modification, about whose long-term effects we have no real evidence. While fueling important scientific discoveries, scientific imaging and other techniques raise significant issues as well. Primary among them is the disquieting fact that all of



Quantum dots,
still photo from a movie by
Ali Brivanlou

life, including our genetic code, has been reduced to pixels and processed as data. As science rushes ahead to its remarkable discoveries, we must continue to probe the impact of the computer on the very core of our humanity.

Genetic and biotech revolutions have developed largely under the radar of average and even non-average Americans. By the time serious protests started against genetically modified food, for example, Monsanto already controlled 90% of the world market in genetically modified seeds. The fearsome promise and hopeful anxiety of the genetic era unfolds each day. Astonishing news items regularly appear, with headlines like 'Scientists Cross Pigs with Spinach' or 'Stem Cell Mixing May Form a Human-Mouse Hybrid' which surely indicate that our lives are going to be profoundly affected by new science. How and when that will happen is unknown. But Daniel Kevles' words continue to haunt me: "The specter of eugenics hovers over virtually all contemporary developments in human genetics, perhaps even more now."

November 19, 2005

Carol Squiers is a critic, a writer and a curator at the International Center of Photography in New York. She has published *The Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness, and Healing* (2006), *Over Exposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (1999) and *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (1990). She has also contributed to several publications such as *Artforum, Vanity Fair, Village Voice* and the *New York Times* and to numerous exhibition catalogues, including *Peek; Photographs from the Kinsey Institute* (2000) and *Barbara Kruger: A Retrospective* (2000).

Crime, Art and the Life Sciences

Steve Kurtz/Critical Art Ensemble

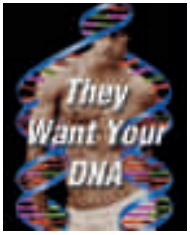
What I'm about to discuss very quickly are public myths and monsters and the enterprise of investigating linkages between art and science. I should start off by saying that the Critical Art Ensemble's investigation into science is just a means to an end. To us, science is just another set of knowledge systems, methodologies and processes we can marshal for our own purpose which in almost every case is to root out various authoritarian tendencies in the public landscape, whether scientific, political, economic, cultural or anything else one could name. CAE attempts to expose these tendencies and hopefully develop the tools and the tactics to be able to effectively resist them. That's always been the core of our practice.

One reason we began examining the politics and representations of science is that it appeared to us that the activist community was not using many of the scientific resources available. These materials weren't being investigated with any kind of enthusiasm or rigour. There were certain key issues that were very compelling to the ecological movement, the green movement, but in terms of using breakthrough science in direct action campaigns, particularly in molecular biology and in proteomics[1], we found nothing. I don't think that it ever was believed that there actually might be tools that could be useful to those of us constructing a resistance to new authoritarian applications of biotechnology; and it appeared very unfortunate to us that all of these resources were being given over to corporations and militaries. So that's where we started.

What led us to this starting point – because for its first ten years or so, CAE was mainly interested in information and communication technology – was a photograph. In 1995, I was at a photo conference. I was out for lunch with one of the artists and she said, "Would you like to see a picture of my child?" I said, "Yes, sure I would like to see that." And it was a charming picture of a little four-year-old on a swing. And then she said, "Would you like to see my child at eight cells?" and I said "What?" In her wallet she had a

1 Proteomics is "the large-scale study of proteins, particularly their structures and functions" (wikipedia.org).

laminated picture of her child in a petri dish just prior to implantation (she had had the child in vitro) and that was when I realised, "There's something going on here that has to be thought through from a radical perspective", because I really didn't even know how to process this photo in any reasonable way. Yes, I recognise what cells are and I understand the development of an embryo, but that's when it really hit home, that for me, most of this science and its related processes was a complete reification. What are scientists actually doing in a concrete sense? I really had nothing but a fantasy of it. And so that's when I thought, "If there is going to be a political ramification, what would it be and how could I know if all I have to examine the situation is my fantasy about it?" Immediately, the CAE became concerned with reproductive technology, quickly followed by eugenics and its current second wave. We came to believe



that positive eugenics is inherent to the institutions of capital; and we thought this was the place to start making this politics visible by creating a living microcosm of a flesh market.

In 'Flesh Machine', we wanted to take molecular and cell biology labs and put them in cultural spaces.

We wanted to have everything in them completely accessible,

including the technicians who would be putting them to use. This image is our cryopreservation lab[2]. Cryopreservation is one of the processes we learned to do for this particular project. We also had the ability to extract DNA on site. Our hope was to create a situation in which an audience/participant could get an idea, very quickly, that such work is not something out of the 'X Files'. Rather, the process is really plain, mundane work that anyone could do with minimal training. The first task a visitor/participant was asked to do was to take an actual egg or sperm donor test. Once you have a look at one of these tests, you see your stake in new reproductive technology right

Right Up:
Steve Kurtz (F. M. Project).

Right Down:
Donor Profile (F. M. Project).

Left:
DNA Boy (F. M. Project).

2 Cryopreservation is "a process where cells or whole tissues are preserved by cooling to low sub-zero temperatures, such as (typically) 77 K or −196 °C (the boiling point of liquid nitrogen)". (wikipedia.org)

away. You can see what the flesh market is going to sell, how it will be marketed and what will be your place in it. Honestly, we did not change anything in this document.

This is not a "détourned" or collaged medical form; this is an actual medical document. Here is what it reads: Weight at age 25, hair colour, hair type, present hair loss (because God knows you don't want a bald baby), eye colour, skin colour, country of origin, special interests and hobbies, – and now, here we really get into it – what describes you at age twenty: Active, average, inactive; musical abilities, skills in the fine arts. (Actually, while doing this research, we found one fertility agency which offered, as part of its guarantee of quality, the promise that they would not accept donations from artists). It continues: Physical stamina, physical activity and finally – it does get there finally – conditions that actually have medical impact. But primarily, as you can see, this document is about qualities that can be aestheticised and marketed. The second element you will notice is that what is being offered are all qualities a person would need to be a good capitalist worker. You find nothing about empathy, sharing or "is this a loving person". Forget all that stuff. "What's your stamina? Are you going to be

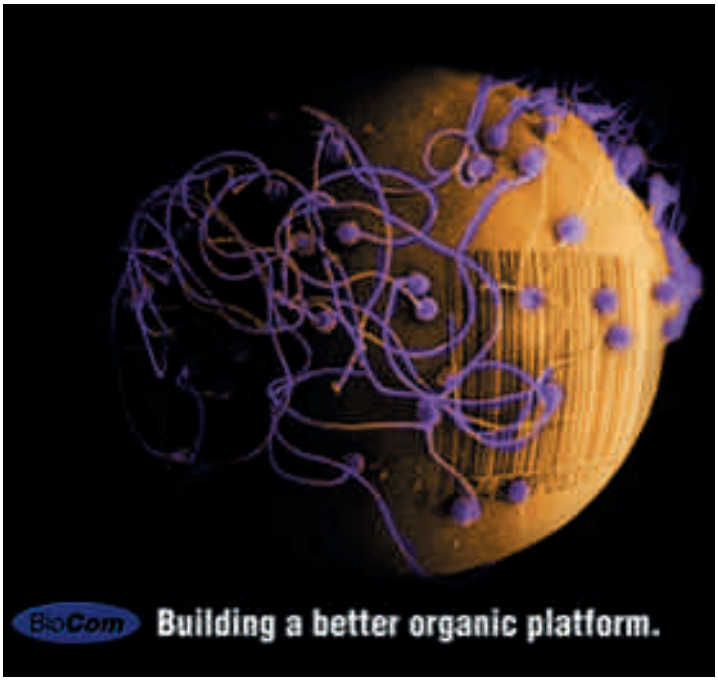
Up Left:
Behold, graphic. (Cult of the New Eve)

Up Right:
Poster (F. M. Project)

Down:
Behold, graphic.
(Cult of the New Eve)

able to work all day or not?" That's what a client needs to know and that's what these future parents are buying. According to the market, they're buying genetic advantages for their future children for a specific economic system. When audience members took that test, they were either rejected or got a "certificate of genetic merit" which we used as a means of separation: Who could go on with the process and go on to other labs and who had to stay behind was determined by the first test result. And even though everyone knew it was just a performance, it still had the effect of creating a rather disturbing form of separation.

Cult of the New Eve was a project where we looked at the rhetoric of bio-technology and in particular that of the Human Genome Project[3] which is quite unusual for technology. For the most part, when we think of the promissory rhetoric of technology, we think of the Enlightenment promises: That our lives will be more convenient, we will have new communities, greater democracy and new and improved bodies. This rhetoric works well when you're selling a computer or a telephone, but it works very poorly when you're talking about genetic manipulation, because it raises concerns (rightly or wrongly) about eugenics and the manipulation of qualities that science and medicine should not be manipulating. Those associations make product development and sales rather difficult, so a new set of rhetorical tropes to market this product was necessary. If you throw out the Enlightenment



Poster (F. M. Project).

3 The Human Genome Project (HGP) is a "project undertaken with a goal to understand the genetic make-up of the human species by identifying all the genes in the human genome and mapping how individual genes are sequenced. The project began in 1990 and by some definitions, it was completed in 2003." (wikipedia.org).

The Cult Group
(Cult of the New Eve).

model, in the West there is only one remaining popular, cultural, promissory rhetoric: Christian rhetoric, whence comes all the talk about miracle cures, Edenesque abundance, "God's blueprint" and even immortality.

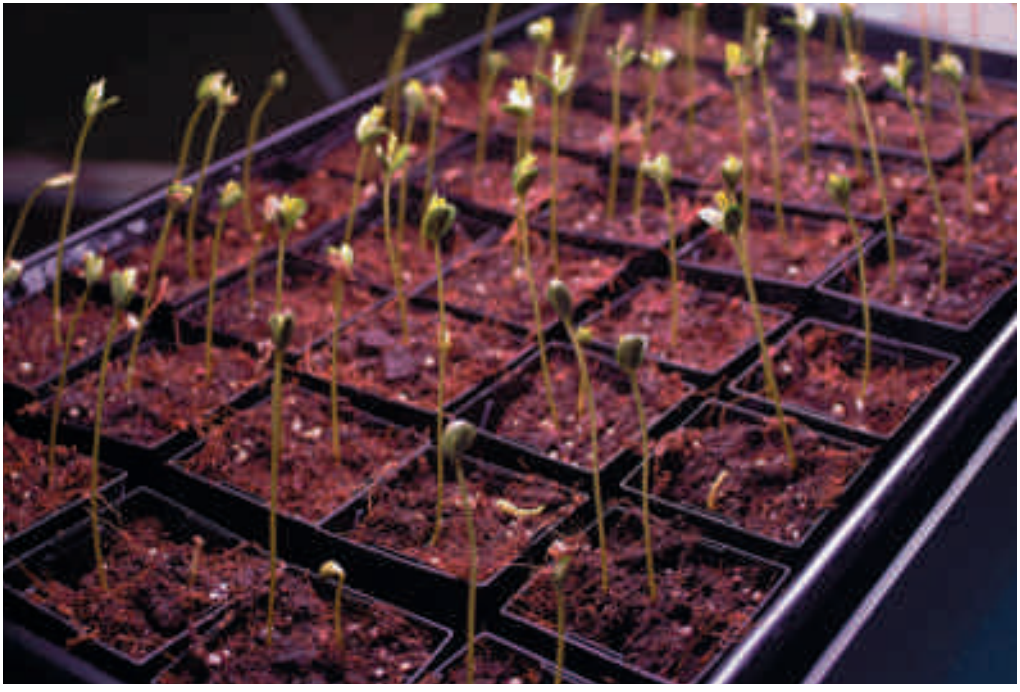
In fact, this project originated when I was attending a lecture by Lee Hood who was one of the Human Genome Project's gurus (very significant in terms of its hardware development) and he opened with: "I'm going to make you all immortal". I was stunned and could only think that is a bit of an exaggeration! I know the Human Genome Project is going to create some exciting new developments, but come on! So the CAE thought, "Why not just repeat these new promises to the public?" But instead of framing them within the authority of science, we would make pronouncements on the real using the social constellation with the least amount of authority: A cult. One of the launch points for this project was the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Toulouse. We were set up in the lobby waiting for people as they

Molecular Invasion, Installation View, 2002, World Information Organisation, Amsterdam manifestation.

came in.

It was the perfect time to be there; people from all over the countryside were coming to see the new museum; and as I said, we just repeated what was being said by some scientists and tried to get people to join the cult. If they did, we would give them our beer and wafer, made from transgenic yeast that contained a random human genome library from the first donor to the Human Genome Project, whom the cult worshipped as the "New Eve." What we wanted to show in this performance was that there could be a legitimation crisis in science if we all simply stopped and reflected upon how its products were being marketed to us. When the cult told someone they were going to be made immortal, that person was very skeptical – as I think they should have been – but we managed to push that skepticism further. For example, this is one of my favourite quotes: "Death rates go up sharply with increasing age but once you go off the edge of that ramp you reach a plateau where you are dependant on the quality of your cell repair capability (which is true). I believe there are already immortal people and immortal fruit flies. You just need to get the benefits of these genes to confer immortality on people at a younger age (because God help us if we are all walking around eternally when we're really old!) before we suffer too much damage." So while this can sound like a credible pronouncement when said at a scientific conference, when the cult said it, it was no longer a credible statement at all.

'Contestational Biology/ Molecular Invasion' was the only time we did a project that could be interpreted as doing rather than performing science. I bring this action up just to talk about limits for a minute. As you can see, in most of our performances we are making use of scientific methods and scientific processes and knowledge, but we are not really doing science nor are we scientists. We are much more interested in doing



cultural criticism of science and the political economy of science; that's our obvious endgame. No one in the CAE has a scientific background, we're all amateurs, we had to learn as we went; and I should add we use the word "amateur" in the best sense of the term: As a person who is under minimal market pressures when exploring scientific resources and one who has no direct professional or financial stake in a given structure of knowledge.

In 'Contestational Biology', we asked ourselves what products might emerge if research trajectories were not pressured by corporations, militaries and governments. As a specific example, we wanted to make a defence kit for traditional and organic farmers. We wanted to create a means for them to defend themselves against the genetic migration of transgenic products[4]. When the fields of organic farmers were contaminated with GM pollen, the Monsanto corporation[5] would sue farmers for patent infringement. You would think the farmers could sue for having their seed banks corrupted, but the law went with Monsanto. This was a way to intimidate other farmers into using their products. We wanted to do this not because of the health issues connected to the production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) which is a minor issue for the CAE. Rather, we wanted to defend them against a trend that may be too late to stop: The control of the world's food supply by a handful of corporations, particularly the ramifications of this situation on developing nations. We were interested in trying to lead the way in the construction of a defence kit that would not be easy to criminalise, as were the Earth Liberation Front's[6] tactics of burning fields, bombing labs or fire-bombing SUVs. We wanted to beat authority at its own game and use the pseudo-legal techniques the corporations use to strong-arm farmers into using their products. We believed that any genetic modification in an organism and which was supposed to function as a trait of adaptability, could be transformed into a trait of susceptibility under the right biochemical conditions: Only plants that have been modified will have a foreign gene. This gene was usually placed in the plant to protect it from something in the environment (a herbicide, an insect, etc.). Thus the gene produced a trait that makes the plant better adapted to the environment. We believed we could put chemicals into the environment that would attack that same gene. No other plants (or other living things) would be injured because they would not have this foreign gene. Thus, the gene that was once producing adaptability would be transformed into a point of susceptibility due to the shift in environmental conditions – a point of weakness that other plants would not have.

As amateurs, we had no idea how to do this, but we knew who did: The producers of the products. Once they patent a product, the research must be opened to the public. Part of the research they did was to see what could go wrong with their product on a biochemical level. With this information, we started a series of

Top Image:
Aftermath of spaying the GMO plants with the enzyme inhibitor pyridoxal 5 phosphate.

Bottom Image:
Details from the WIO installation.

4 As the pollen of GM plants blows around in the wind it can contaminate other fields and through a slow process reproduce itself in a wider and wider area.

5 "The Monsanto Company is a multinational agricultural biotechnology corporation. It is the world's leading producer of the herbicide glyphosate, marketed as 'Roundup'. Monsanto is also by far the leading producer of genetically engineered (GE) seed." (wikipedia.org).

6 The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) is "the collective name for anonymous and autonomous individuals or groups that use 'economic sabotage and guerrilla warfare to stop the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment'. The organisation has been active in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom where the movement was founded in 1992. The ELF was classified as the top domestic terror threat in the United States by the FBI in March 2001". (wikipedia.org).

public experiments to see if this research was accurate. The leads were good and hopefully we have pointed the way to a new convergence of science and activism.

'Marching Plague' is another project we were working on at the time. It involved having various kinds of harmless bacteria and trying to recreate the 1952 plague trials that were done by the British military on the Isle of Louis in Scotland. We got the same stimulants (not actual plague, but harmless bacteria that behave in a similar manner) which the British military used for their initial tests; and we went to the location where the trials were originally done. As you can see from the image, it's the middle of nowhere. The weather was horrible, very windy and our goal was to try to hit a pontoon full of guinea pigs from a mile away with spray suspension, a liquid bacterial broth. We set up base camp in the little fishing village of Stornaway. We had to bring all our own equipment with us so we kept a little makeshift lab in our hotel room – incubators and some other necessities. I have no idea what the hotel owners must have thought, but at least we didn't get arrested again. We had an SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) member on hand to make sure no guinea pigs were hurt during the experiment; and off to sea we went.

3 Images:
The *Marching Plague* project

We drove our boat a mile away, got our sprayer ready, got lined up with the wind using smoke targeting to get the trajectory we needed and launched the bacteria with the spray gun. The device is pretty much a reasonable copy of the original, except we used a block of foam instead of a triangle because we thought it would be more stable than the original one. Then we picked up our guinea pigs and tested them for our bacteria. The FBI, as you might imagine, was really keen on us not doing this. This particular recreation showed that science can be incredibly foolish when guided by military ambition. This is one of those

great examples of a true theatre of the absurd. Within the frame of scientific rigour alone, when we don't think in terms of politics or practicality, it does make sense. If you try to create a ship-to-ship tactical weapon using plague, the first thing you have to do is test if the bacteria can be delivered to a target. And, if it can't be "weaponised" in the traditional sense, you have a very difficult job, because the plague is very sensitive type of bacteria: It doesn't like to get too cold; it doesn't like to be too hot; and it doesn't like light. Their results were of course not very good; nor were ours.

You have heard the myths; now where are the monsters? What are the monsters? With 'Flesh Machine', it was obvious: If you're going to talk about reproduction, the Church will make a showing. Complain they did. It reached a peak when I was challenged by the Archbishop of Salzburg to a debate on Austrian national television. (One of the things I learned as a side note: If you don't speak the language, don't accept the debate invitation. That's the first thing to remember.)

For the 'Cult of the New Eve', we had a couple of incidents. When we went to France we didn't know cults had been made illegal the week before; this set off a real firestorm of complaint. In addition, the crisis of the real in theatre was reinstated: If you're performing a simulation of the real, should this be treated as real even though it's a performance? The mayor of the city denounced us for this in the local papers and demanded that we be removed from the exhibition. Happily, the curators did not comply. Then when we reached Germany, we discovered they have beer police protecting the local beer industry from outside competitors. It is apparently against the German beer purity laws to have a GMO beer. This whole problem started during a 'Cult of the New Eve' sermon at the ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie/ Center for Art and Media Technology, Karlsruhe, Germany), where I was getting heckled by a man yelling that he was "here to represent beer purity." At the end of the talk we found out that my heckler was a cop. He pulled out his badge and told me I couldn't bring GMO beer into Germany. I said, "Even if we used a German recipe to make it?" But he wasn't impressed by that, so I offered him a small cup of it for him to drink; but he said he had taken an oath never to drink impure beer. Luckily, he let us off with a warning because we only had a six-pack.

During 'Contestational Biology', Monsanto sent their lawyers to threaten us. That didn't work. 'Free Range Grain' was one of the projects with which we got into trouble with the FBI because we built our own molecular biology lab to test whether food was genetically modified. Of course, if you're not a professional scientist the only reason you would want to do that – and there can only be one reason – is terrorism. So a bit of trouble came our way for possessing the necessary equipment. With 'Marching Plague', my troubles with the FBI and the Department of Justice are pretty well known.[7]

Bean (Free Range Grain)

Art and science projects are done on a regular basis. Carol Squiers showed us a healthy sample; so why aren't these artists getting in trouble? It is a question of how far you are willing to go. How far are you willing to penetrate the political workings of these disciplines? First, if it's done in such a way as to place an unquestioned power under interrogation; then you offend a lot of people with an interest in keeping the discipline separate from critical discourse. There's a lot of profit to be made in the life sciences and anything that can disrupt the marketing and free flow of that capital is going to attract the authorities. Second, although this information is supposed to be part of our common culture, it is extremely privatised in the global capitalist system. For that reason, there will always be some kind of price to pay in order to obtain it. Whether one has to go

7 On May 11, 2004, Steve Kurtz's wife of 20 years, Hope, died of heart failure in their home in Buffalo. Kurtz called 911. Buffalo Police who responded along with emergency workers, apparently sensitised to 'War on Terror' rhetoric, became alarmed by the presence of art materials in their home which had been displayed in museums and galleries throughout Europe and North America. Convinced that these materials – which consisted of several petri dishes containing harmless forms of bacteria and scientific equipment for testing genetically altered food – were the work of a terrorist. The police called the FBI. For more information about the case, including the charges against Steve Kurtz, please see: www.caedefensefund.org/overview.html#kurtz.

through university and get a PhD or use one's ability for the corporate-state, somewhere, someone has to pay in cash or in labour to the benefit of private interests. If you don't, there will be trouble. The final problem for the CAE is that all our projects are always framed and filtered through the categories of the political economy which is the last straw. Once you start to say, "Science is not a value-free, objective discipline that is beyond market and political forces" and go onto perform this belief, you will meet with disciplinary agencies; if you have a different, effective way of publicly representing science and its applications, the authorities are going to come. Capital is not going to stand for the slightest friction in its profitable endeavours, even at the modest scale that the CAE is working. Our projects are not constituted by radicalised black-block gestures. They are challenging and push the boundaries; they're certainly not beyond what should have legal protection. Unfortunately, that doesn't matter. To deviate from the norm just a little bit, to invade that private sphere just a little bit is enough to bring on the monsters.

November 19, 2005

This is a transcription of Steve Kurtz's contribution to the panel.

The images featured are courtesy of Critical Art Ensemble.

Steve Kurtz is a founding member of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE). CAE is a collective of tactical media practitioners of various specialisations, including computer graphics and web design, wetware, film/video, photography, text art, book art and performance. Formed in 1987, CAE's focus has been on the exploration of the intersections between art, critical theory, technology and political activism. The collective has performed and produced a wide variety of projects for an international audience at diverse venues ranging from the street to the museum to the internet. Critical Art Ensemble has also written six books, the most recent being *Marching Plague: Germ Warfare and Global Public Health*. Kurtz is an Associate Professor of Visual Studies at State University of New York (SUNY) Buffalo.

PERFORMANCES

Who's Afraid of Representation?, Rabih Mroué
Give me a Body Then, Ali Cherri
Berlin: The Symphony of a Big City – Live Electronics, Mahmoud Refat
I Feel a Great Desire to Meet the Masses Once Again, Walid Raad

Who's Afraid of Representation?

A performance by Rabih Mroué
Performed by Rabih Mroué and Lina Saneh
Scenography by Samar Maakaron

On stage is a large white screen rolled up horizontally, in such a way that it remains invisible to the spectators. To the left of the stage are two small tables and a chair. A camera placed at the depth of the stage is directed towards the audience. Another camera, placed outside the stage, is directed towards the stage. Enter the actors Rabih and Lina. They untie the cord of the rolled up screen, it falls vertically and hides the depth of the stage and with it the camera at the back. The actors move towards the two tables, carrying a large book, a small chronometer and some papers. They play "heads or tails" and the result determines that Lina will take the book, Rabih the chronometer. Lina faces the audience still carrying the book, whilst Rabih sits sideways on a chair behind the table. Lina starts the game: She closes her eyes, opens the book haphazardly and reads:

Lina: Vallie Export, page 57.

Rabih: Page 57 means you have 57 seconds.

(Lina puts the book on the table and goes to stand behind the screen. Her image appears, life-size, on the screen, as she plays the role of Vallie Export. These motions will be repeated throughout the performance, with Lina playing the artist that she will choose at random.)

Rabih (preparing the chronometer): Top! (meaning that the countdown has begun.)

Lina (from behind the screen, in the role of Vallie Export): My name is Vallie Export… I've created a lot of performance art during my life. For example: In one of my art pieces I built a box and hung it around my neck so that it dangled over my breasts… a box like a little peep show booth, open in the back and closed in the front with a black curtain… I hung it around my neck and walked out into the street, and I stood and called out to people and told them that whoever wanted to could put their hand through the curtain and touch my tits without seeing them… and they could fondle and play with them as much as they liked… almost everyone took part.

In one of my art projects I went to a movie theatre that only showed sex films… I was wearing jeans that were completely open from this

side… I cut out the middle bit here and threw it away… and I wasn't wearing panties underneath… my hair was a big mess. I was carrying a machine gun and my cunt was on display for all to see… I walked gracefully, delicately, passing in front of every member of the audience, one by one, and I stopped in front of each person and looked into their eyes. And then I sat, facing them, my legs spread wide, the machine gun cradled in my arms.

In one of my art projects I began pulling at the skin beneath my nails… forcing paper and cardboard underneath and shoving them in as deep as I could until the nail pulled away from its bed and the blood started flowing…

In one of my artworks…

Rabih: Time out! (he stops the chronometer)

(Lina comes out from behind the screen and returns to her place behind the table. She repeats the same motions, opens the book at random and reads.)

Lina: Gunter Brus, page 22.

Rabih: Page 22, means you have 22 seconds this time.

(Lina goes and stands behind the screen again.)

Rabih: Top!

Lina/Gunter Brus: In '69 I went to Munich with my friend Muhl, who was screening his films in a theatre there… we got up together on the stage… we took off our clothes in front of everyone and I lay down on the ground and let him urinate in my mouth… he pissed….

We repeated the performance in a nightclub in Germany, but in another city… all hell broke loose… they closed the club and the cops chased after us.

But the performance I really want to talk about was…

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina picks out another page at random)

Lina: Gina Pane, page 27.

Rabih: You have 27 seconds. Top!

Lina/Gina Pane: I presented my most important art works between '68 and '75…

I pinched myself. I punched myself. I made myself bleed. I got a ladder and put sharp nails and razors on each rung. I took my shoes off and climbed the ladder barefoot. I slashed myself.

Once I ate raw meat. I bought half a kilo of spoiled raw meat. It stank. I started to eat it… I ate and ate and kept eating until I vomited everything I ate and then I ate anew until I vomited again, a second time, a third time, a fourth….

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina picks out another page at random)

Lina: Kim Jones, page 102.

Rabih: Page 102? (he gives it some thought.). Page 102 means you have one minute and two seconds.

Lina/Kim Jones: I got an empty jar of mayonnaise and shat in it. Then I invited everyone to come see my latest art work. The exhibition was held in a gallery.

People came in… I came in. I took off all my clothes. I opened the jar and started to smear the shit all over my body. My own shit. Slowly, daintily, tenderly, I approached the crowd and began to hug them… embrace them … clasp them to my bosom and squeeze.

I had lit some green twigs and leaves… something like incense. After a while, the smoke became very thick. It filled the air and people

started to flee… whether from me or the shit or the smoke, I don't know. At the end, I remained alone in the gallery. I was about to choke and die from the smoke, had I not fled in the nick of time…

(Silence)

Rabih: Time isn't up yet.

Lina/Kim Jones: I got a razor and a blank canvas… and as usual I invited everyone to come see my latest art work. I held the show in a gallery.

People arrived… I came in… I took off all my clothes. I picked up the razor and started cutting myself. I followed the path of the veins on my body. Twenty-seven wounds.

I started bleeding. Very calmly, I walked towards the canvas and pressed my body against it, as hard as I could. Then I stepped back. My blood was printed on the canvas. It was a self-portrait. This piece could have had another name, 'In Memory of *Ashoura*', but this was unthinkable at the time.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina picks out another page at random, falling on a picture from a famous play.)

Lina: Picture

(Lina moves towards the camera at the back of the stage and holds up the picture which appears on the screen. Rabih stands up. He hesitates, then moves towards the front of the screen. Before reaching it, Lina closes the book. Rabih is disturbed. He returns to his chair before Lina returns to her place behind the table.)

(Lina picks out another page at random.)

Lina: Peter Stembra, page 18.

Rabih: You have 18 seconds. Top!

Lina/Peter Stembra: When the war in Lebanon first began, I planted a red rose. I planted it in my arm… here. I kept stabbing, stabbing and stabbing until I punctured the flesh… the wound bled, swelled, got infected and I had to go to the hospital to treat it.

Rabih: Time out!

(Again, Lina opens the book at random and falls upon a picture from a famous play.)

Lina: Picture.

(Lina moves towards the camera at the back of the stage and holds up the picture which appears on the screen. Rabih goes and stands in front of the screen, with the picture behind him.)

Rabih:

I got a Kalashnikov with five clips and fifty bullets.

A Scorpion machine gun with two clips and 16 bullets reserve.

A 9mm revolver with 35 bullets.

A hand grenade.

A military utility belt.

I took them all and went to my workplace in Beirut. I arrived there at around 9am And I proceeded with my plan.

There were a number of people I wanted to kill: Sonia, Samer, Issa, Carl. The others were incidental casualties, Abd el Razzaq, Paula and others…

By the end, I'd killed eight people and injured four.

I am not a criminal. I have nothing to hide. I planned and executed everything on my own initiative. No one had an inkling about any of it.

I was in a financial bind and wanted revenge, even though I feel faint at the sight of blood. And I normally always avoid fights… all my colleagues at work can attest to that, even the ones I killed.

During the war, I joined the Amal

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Movement. I was a regular member, so I only received basic weapons training. I took target practice only once. I took part in the 'Battle of the Camps' but I didn't fire a weapon then.

Twelve years after the Lebanese war ended, I can say that I managed to transform my workplace of 25 years into a battleground.

My name is Hassan Ma'moun

(Both Rabih and Lina return to their places. Standing behind the table, Lina closes her eyes and picks a page of the book at random. She reads:)

Lina: Marina Abramovic, page 104.

Rabih: You have a minute and four seconds. Top!

Lina/Marina Abramovic: When the 'Battle of the Hotels' began in downtown Beirut, I laid out a table and placed 72 items on it, like scissors, a saw, a razor, a fork, knives, glass bottles, a tube of lipstick, a whip, pins, bread, an axe, a bottle of perfume, paint, matches, candles, nails, a comb, a newspaper, a mirror, needles, honey, grapes, tape, a real gun and a real bullet.

And I put up a big sign which read:

On this table are 72 items you may use on my body as you see fit.

I stood before the audience and waited.

These items were displayed for six hours and the audience was allowed to use them in any way they wanted.

After the first three hours, my clothes were all torn. Some people ripped my clothes off… cut them to bits, some stripped me, some tried supposedly to "dress me", some pinched me with the pliers, some combed my hair, some put lipstick on me, some threw water on me, stuck me with the pins… Until one guy picked up the gun, put a bullet in it, cocked the barrel and put it to my head.

People got really scared. I got scared. But I didn't move and didn't show it. Someone lunged at the guy and pushed the gun away from me….They got into a fight, punching and yelling. People got involved in the fight and it turned into a big brawl. At that point I got really scared that the bullet might hit someone from the audience…it's a huge responsibility. I stopped the performance. Not too long after that, the massacre in Damour took place.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: John Duncan, page 33.

Rabih: You have 33 seconds. Top!

Lina /John Duncan: I went to Mexico. I bought a woman's corpse. I had sex with the body and filmed the entire act on video. Right after that I traveled to California, checked myself into a hospital and got a vasectomy.

I needed to make sure that I could indeed no longer have children and the last chance of that happening was with this dead woman, the corpse. I took pictures of the surgical procedure to prove that I was now sterile. A sterile human being.

I worked on the pictures and the video I shot in Mexico and turned them into a performance which I entitled 'Blind Date'.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a

page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Chris Burden, page 37.

Rabih: You have 37 minutes. Top!

Lina/Chris Burden: In '73 I covered the floor with 14 metres of broken glass. I lay down and started rolling on it, my hands behind my back. I called the piece *Through the Night Softly*. Fourteen meteres of glass, my body rolling over them slowly, as if my body were waiting for something to happen to it… poised in a state of caution and readiness for the possibility of something big happening… or on the verge of happening… or about to happen, but not happening. Like for instance, a sliver of glass entering my eye and blinding me, or like the attack carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in Munich the year before. Or like what happened this year, the year of the performance, when Lebanese fighter jets circled the skies above Beirut and bombed the Palestinian camps.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina opens on a picture from a famous play again.)

Lina: Picture.

(Lina moves towards the camera at the back of the stage and holds up the picture which appears on the screen. Rabih goes and stands in front of the screen, with the picture behind him.)

Rabih:

- I shot Marc with nine bullets in his chest and hips and back… they entered him from behind, came out the front, hit the wall… he died.

- Mariam: I fired a bullet in her head and another one in her neck. The first got her in her left eyebrow, drilled into her skull and stayed there. The second bullet pierced her neck on the left side and came out from the right. She died.

- Sonia: Several bullets… one of them in the head, leading to the fracture and pulverisation of the skull and leakage of brain matter. I used exploding bullets. She died.

- Carl was also shot with several bullets: In the head, in the neck, the upper chest and various other parts of his body. I also used exploding bullets. He died.

- I shot Buthayna with two bullets: One got her in the neck, the other in the chest… both bullets shot right through her body and hit the wall. She died.

- Issa: Four bullets in the head, the neck, stomach and thigh. This resulted in a crushed skull and leaking brain matter. He died.

- Gladys: I fired one bullet through her right shoulder, it came out the other side; another through her right leg, it came out through her hip. She died.

- Samir: In his chest and head and all other parts of his body. He died.

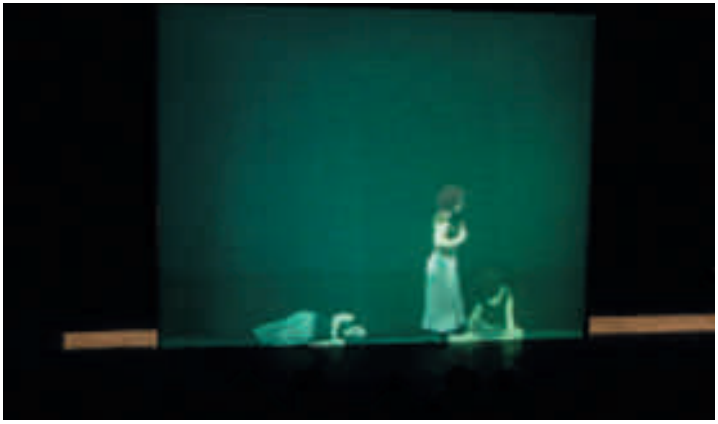
- Abed el Razzaq: In the hip. The bullet entered his left hip, travelled in the direction of his stomach and came out of his thigh, on the right side. He did not die.

- I shot Amira in the waist which resulted in internal lacerations and bleeding. I also shot her in the left thigh: Her hip shattered, the bullet ripped through to her stomach and large intestine. She did not die.

- Nuha burned her hand because she touched the Kalashnikov when it was hot. She definitely did not die.

- I shot at Paula's waist. The bullet just grazed her and burned her pants. She did not die.

I was quiet, saying nothing. Calm… shooting without saying any-



thing to anyone.

My name is Hassan Ma'moun

(Rabih returns to his place behind the table)

(Lina resumes her post behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Franko B, page 5.

Rabih: You have 5 seconds. Top!

Lina/Franko B: I was born in 1960… when the Arab Syrian *Rade'*(Deterrence) Forces entered Beirut…

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Marina Abramovic, page 21.

Rabih: You have 21 seconds. Top!

Lina/Marina Abramovic: During the war, I stood in front of the audience and started brushing my hair and saying:

Art must be beautiful. Art must be beautiful. I kept brushing my hair and saying: Art must be beautiful. Art must be beautiful. It must, it must. I repeated this as I brushed my hair. Brushed and brushed until my scalp was scraped, until my hair began to fall out, until my face was scratched and bleeding.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Gina Pane, page 45.

Rabih: You have 45 seconds. Top!

Lina/Gina Pane: I started working on my most important art works at the beginning of the 1970s, that is, before the civil war began in Lebanon… at the time there were a lot of people wagering on the support of the Soviet Union.

I got a razor and cut myself with it here, here and here (indicates the artery along her arm). I bled. Then I started playing with a tennis ball. Suddenly I approached the audience with the same razor in my hand. I put it to my face, here. I heard gasps from the audience, as if it's all right to cut your hand but not your face. Anyway, the performance demanded that I cut my face. And so I did.

I was wagering on my body holding up. I put glass in my mouth and sucked on it like it was candy, began to grind it with my teeth. I spit it into a glass of milk. Glass in milk. And I lapped it up in front of the audience. Then I got a bouquet of flowers and stuck it here, on my cunt. Of course, it was never my intention to predict the fall of the Socialist Bloc, I wished rather to confirm and underscore pain… pain as a message in its own right, unfettered by symbols… all of this happened before the war you see…

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Hermann Nitsch (she closes the book).

Rabih: Which page?

Lina: I didn't pay attention! I forget. What do we do in this case?

Rabih: Forget Hermann Nitsch. Pick another page. But pay attention to its number.

(Lina picks a new page and falls on a picture from a famous play.)

Lina: Picture.

(Lina moves towards the camera at the back of the stage and holds up the picture which appears on the screen. Rabih goes and stands in front of the screen, with the picture behind him.)

Rabih:

At first I was anxious. When I

fired the first bullet I heard this howl of guilt from within me because I knew I'd got her.

The first bullet hit Gladys, I hit her by accident. She was coming out of Issa's office. I can't remember how many bullets I shot her with. But when I hit her I felt this wave of shock because she didn't have anything to do with it.

After that I don't know what happened. I went on without being aware of anything.

When it was all over I stood amongst them… some dead, some injured, some hiding… I lit a cigarette and walked slowly down the stairs and then I turned myself in to the security forces.

I felt that what had happened was a dream, not reality. Until this day I can't believe I did all that. I don't know what happened.

I see Marc hiding behind a desk… I aim and shoot him nine times and then I move towards the office of the manager, Sonia. Suddenly Mariam crosses my path and I shoot her twice. Then I turn towards Sonia, we're standing face to face, she's next to the wall and without saying a word to one another I put the gun in her mouth and fire…

I was searching for Raymond when I saw Carl hiding in the archive room. I shot him several times, then doubled back towards Bilal's office. I wanted Raymond. The door is locked from the inside. I shot at the lock; the door did not give…

Some of my colleagues who were on the same floor start running away. Hana threw herself on the ground and begged me not to kill her. Amira… I forget how she crossed my path and where.

I used the Kalashnikov and I don't recall whether or not I used the machine gun or the revolver or how many bullets I fired. I didn't have a plan when I set my gun to shoot single bullets. It seems I shot at several of the bodies after they were dead but I'm not aware if I did this on purpose or not.

As for why I fired nine bullets into Marc, I have no answer. Frankly I am shocked, surprised at myself.

I was anxious but it didn't show.

I started shooting erratically above people's heads, at people's feet, just randomly…

I was in a moment of unconsciousness, a moment of rage, out of control…

What I did was a dream, nothing more…

My name is Hassan Ma'moun.

(Rabih returns to his post behind the table.)

(Behind the table, Lina closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Philippe Sterlac, page 59.

Rabih: You have 59 seconds.

Lina/Philippe Sterlac: I was in Tokyo in 1978, when the battle was raging between West and East Beirut. More precisely, it was on March 12, before the beginning of the Camp David negotiations under Carter's patronage. My body was dangling in the air, swinging between earth and sky. I had hung myself by 17 meat hooks. Seventeen hooks caught in my skin, attached to cables that hung from the ceiling… and I, swinging… there definitely was pain (he pinches his skin and pulls it away from his body). Something like this. The hook enters from here, is attached to a cable. And I wait. I wait for as long as I can stand it, while everybody looks at me. The skin no

longer separates the material world from the spiritual world. The issue is no longer the border that divides the body from the soul. What is certain, in my opinion, is that there is no such border. What I'm trying to say about our skin is that it is no different from the demarcation lines within a city. The demarcation line does not define a "here" and a "there". On the contrary, it exists between "here" and "here". Between the interior and the interior. There is no exterior. And this is what's important (he is still pulling his skin between his fingers).

The performance did not last long. I couldn't stand it for long.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Joseph Beuys, page 10.

Rabih: You have 10 seconds. Top!

Lina/Joseph Beuys: After the October war and Arab defeat, I stood up and announced:

I like America and America likes me.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Mike Butler, page 29.

Rabih: You have 29 seconds. Top!

Lina/Mike Butler: You can't talk about any of my artwork without knowing the background behind each piece: The political and social context, the philosophical ideas of my time… and all the factors, psychological and financial that pursued me throughout the creation of my oeuvre. You also have to read the texts I published. You even have to read the books that inspired me, or at least look through them. It's a shame that all that remains of a work is its image from the outside. A damned shame that people only remember the scandals in art and forget the critique we were trying to impart, forget art history and art from a feminist perspective.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her post behind the table, picks a new page and falls on a picture from a famous play.)

Lina: Picture.

(Lina moves towards the camera at the back of the stage and holds up the picture which appears on the screen. Rabih goes and stands in front of the screen, with the picture behind him.)

Rabih:

I took out an 18 million Lebanese Pounds (L.P.) advance on my salary, in installments. I used to donate to the clubs and charitable organisations in my village, host feasts at my house, organise athletic tournaments, help poor families. No one was overlooked.

I borrowed 4 million L.P. from the treasurer and took a five-day vacation to Egypt with my wife. I bought gifts for my entire family and for the villagers, as well as for some of my colleagues at work, like Paula and Carl.

I borrowed $8,000 from a relative on condition that I would pay him back at the end of the next month. I was unable to return a cent, but I gave him an IOU for the amount with the understanding that I would eventually pay him back.

I bought furniture for the whole house on an installment plan but I couldn't make the payments. Everything was repossessed …

I bought a Daewoo from the car dealership on an installment plan,

$238 a month. I couldn't finish paying for it. It was repossessed.

I started to get around by taxi, with a chauffeur from the village, Jamal. He would drop me off and pick me up, each trip at a cost of about 20,000 L.P.

I borrowed 6 million L.P. from my colleague Samer so I could get my Daewoo back. But I used the money for some social services in the village. It was gone.

Samer, and Sonia – my boss, helped me to cash in my severance pay from Social Security so I could pay back all my debts, especially those of the advance pay at work and the money I owed Samer. The severance pay came out to about 26 million L.P. I used the money to buy a Mercedes SLK.

Samer and Sonia found out, they reclaimed the car, they forced me to give it back to its former owner and they took the money back from him. They called my brother-in-law and told him everything; they exposed and humiliated me in front of my family.

As a result, I have debts totaling more than 45 million L.P. And my monthly salary is no more than 800,000 L.P.

And my name is Hassan Ma'moun.

(Rabih returns to his place behind the table.)

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Orlan, page 106.

Rabih: You have one minute and 6 seconds. Top!

Lina/Orlan: Cosmetic surgery hurts, shocks, messes everything up. It can also kill you. I had a lot of surgery done on my face. Not for the typical purpose of self-beautification. Not at all. They were more like "constructive" surgeries. For instance, I got this procedure done in order to have the same forehead as Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, another one so I could have Europa's lips as Boucher drew them, a third one to obtain Venus' chin from Boticelli's painting and so forth…

Dürer talked about constructing the ideal human body which would be a model for painters. He would bring the most seductive eyes he had ever seen on a woman, join them with the most beautiful breasts from another, join them to the most attractive legs from a third, the slenderest fingers from a fourth, the ideal height from a fifth, a part from a sixth, one from a seventh until he had put together the supreme human body – a body that glorifies the human being. But which human being exactly? Who is glorifying whom? Someone should have told Dürer that his work doesn't really work.

In '93, after the Lebanese war had been over for two years and in the midst of the reconstruction of the Beirut city center, or rather, its construction following Dürer's paradigm, I held a live broadcast of one of my cosmetic surgeries, broadcasting from New York to over 15 sites across the world. People could ask me questions before and during the operation, and I would of course answer. I always liked to be awake during my operations so I could see and talk. This is why I asked for local anesthesia, so I could still direct the performance. It was just like a play: That is, I had a set designer, wardrobe, lighting and accompanying texts, music and poetry. We had

simultaneous translation in English as well as closed caption translation for the deaf-mute. People could see how my face was being cut and stitched up again. They could see the attachment of two horns to my forehead.

They could see how my body was being transformed, how I was sculpting myself, inside and out. Pay close attention: These operations are against God and His Party and not at all against cosmetic surgery. Against nature, sure. They are a salute to morphine and a celebration of the defeat of pain. A defeat akin to the one suffered by Israel in South Lebanon. And myself.

(Rabih moves during Lina's performance and stands in front of the screen. He suddenly interrupts her).

Rabih:

My motives were financial, no more, no less: High cost of living, no money, debts… what was I supposed to do?

Did they forget that I am Mr. Hassan Ma'moun, brother-in-law of the mayor?

Did they forget that I am the head of the Amal Movement division in the village?

Did they forget that I am the one who used to organise all the village festivals, under the theme of "Lebanon, a Nation for All Citizens"?

Did they forget that I am the one who founded the village football team, that I bought them shorts and cleats and tracksuits and everything else they needed?

Did they forget that I erected a billboard in my name saluting the Lebanese army and the Syrian army on their national days?

Did they forget that I would always be the one to reconciliate two people who had fought?

Did they forget that I would help all the area teachers to get their retirement funds at the end of their tenure?

Did they forget that I borrowed money in order to help poor families pay their children's tuitions?

Did they forget that I would buy them gifts on all the holidays, Christian and Muslim alike?

Did they forget that I was selfless in my services to all the people of my village as well as to my colleagues at work?

Why would they refuse me an advance payment?

Why would they stop my salary?

Why are they insisting on disgracing me in front of the whole world?

When they took away my Mercedes, I felt I had lost my dignity, lost everyone's trust: My parents, my family, my colleagues, my fellow villagers.

I felt that they had destroyed me and that I had nothing left to lose.

They killed me financially, so I decided to kill them in return.

My name is Hassan Ma'moun

(Rabih turns towards the screen and shots are heard. Lina falls on the ground. Silence. Rabih very slowly turns towards the audience.)

Rabih continues:

My motives were sectarian, no more, no less. Financial matters are unimportant and inconsequential. Everyone at work knows the story: Samar, Issa, Amira and Nuha and Amal, Ibrahim, Thuraya, Samer and Gladys, everyone.

There are some things a person just can't accept.

Two months ago, a fight broke out between Raymond and these

two other guys I didn't know that were following up on their papers. People from work got involved, tried to break them up. So then Raymond stands up and announces in front of everyone, loudly and clearly: I want to crush Islam and all Muslims.

At work we became divided into three groups: Those who were with Raymond and who supported his view, those who opposed and were outraged and a third, neutral group. I was of this neutral group. And anyway I was one of the people who broke up the fight.

Then my Muslim colleagues started reproaching me for not standing up to Raymond. And they started asking me what should be done in such a situation. They accused me of being a coward and I responded by telling them that we shouldn't aggravate such sensitive issues. But then every time they would see me they would repeat their urges and their accusations until the issue became huge in my mind, until I became the scapegoat for their rage.

This is why I decided to kill Raymond and the whole group that was siding with him. Sonia, our Christian boss; Carl and Issa, who were spurring Raymond on, also Christians; Samer, a Christian who was implicitly on his side.

The images in my head bled into each other, images of war and images of peace.

I had to defend my sect, defend its dignity.

I had to take my vengeance upon those who would insult Islam and Muslims.

(Rabih returns to his seat behind the table. Lina rises slowly from behind the screen, leaving the image of her fall - her corpse - imprinted on the white screen which will remain until the end of the performance.)

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Rudolf Schwarzkogler, page 55.

Rabih: You have 55 seconds. Top!

Lina/Rudolf Schwarzkogler:

I threw myself out of a window and died.

In fact, I'm not quite sure if I threw myself out or if I fell by accident. I don't remember anymore. But I definitely didn't die when I castrated myself. That was just a rumour.

I remember I had this project I intended to carry out where I wanted to peel the skin off my body piece by piece, in little pieces using a razor, taking pictures of the process. Maybe I began working on this project and when I couldn't stand the pain anymore, I committed suicide. Actually I'm not sure if I killed myself. Maybe I fell by accident. I don't know. But I definitely didn't cut my dick off the way everyone says I did. It's true I had an art work planned around the issue and in some of my other pieces I'd cut myself with razors and glass, shrouded myself in gauze. But I definitely didn't die because I cut my dick off.

In any case, it's unimportant whether I killed myself or fell by accident. In the end, they found me in 1969, having fallen out of my window and died. That was at the height of the student and popular movements in Beirut, the rise of the leftist tide, the Palestinian struggle and of course the national democratic plan that was supposed to provide an alternative to political sectarianism. And my friends have, until now, not

made the connection between what I was doing and the failure of the national movement at the beginning of the civil war and the consequent death of the Lebanese left and the demise of its dream for change. They were associating my death with the War of the Mountains and the April 17 accord. This is why they wrote to all the newspapers, to dispel the rumours that surfaced after my death, even though at the time, I wasn't opposed to any of them. The rumors say that I pulled my dick out onto a chopping board and started to cut it into little pieces with a sharp knife. That I bled profusely and died.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Bob Flanagan, page 43.

Rabih: You have 43 seconds. Top!

Lina/Bob Flanagan:

I wrote this poem after the drafting of the Taif Accord:

I've been a shit and I hate fucking you now

because I love fucking you too much;

what good's the head of my cock inside you

when my other head, the one with the brains,

keeps thinking how fucked up everything is,

how fucked I am to be fucking you and thinking

these things which take me away from you

when all I want is to be close to you

but fuck you for letting me fuck you now

when all that connects us is this fucking cock

which is as lost inside you as I am, here,

in the dark, fucking you and thinking – fuck,

the wallpaper behind you had a name,

what was it? You called it what? What?

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina goes back to pick a new page. Rabih stops her.)

Rabih: You know? I have nothing against poetry, but I prefer that we talk about performances in this performance.

Lina: You didn't like the poem?

Rabih: Yes I did, I did, I liked it very much, but I prefer that we talk about artworks. Work. Action. So you can go back to Bob Flanagan and his performances.

Lina: I have no problem with that. (Lina goes behind the screen and continues as Bob Flanagan):

I wrote many poems, but I'm not going to read them to you.

Once I threaded a needle, then threaded the needle through my upper lip and then my lower one. Then I tied the thread into a knot. Three stitches: Here, here and here. I took a picture of myself.

Another time I pierced my balls and the head of my dick and stuck rings in them. To these rings I attached a thick chain from which I dangled weights of over 5 kilograms. I let the chains go, my arms up in the air, and I stood and took a picture of myself.

Once I shaved off all my pubes. I pulled the skin of my balls and wrapped it around my dick… like a little roast I stitched it up, with three wide stitches. Then I dissected the skin on top so that my dickhead was exposed with two loose flaps of skin

on either side. I got this piece of wood and nailed my dick to it, one nail on either side so it was affixed to the wood. I took a picture of myself. Once I stood…

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns behind the table. Before she opens the book, Rabih interrupts her.)

Rabih: Next time let's stick to the poems.

Lina: Picture. (Lina leaves the book aside and goes to reappear behind the screen. She sits on the floor and takes the position of the fall again. She freezes.)

Rabih (from in front of the screen):

My motives were psychological, no more, no less. I carried out a mass killing in broad daylight.

I used to go see Dr. Tony, a psychiatrist, Dr. Jaber, a psychiatrist and Dr. Kamil, a psychiatrist. They all prescribed anxiety pills. I used to go through periods of taking these pills. Two months ago, I went to Dr. Tourabi, a psychiatrist, to have him examine me. He said there was nothing wrong with me, even though I told him I was anxious all the time, depressed, terrified of heights and of dark enclosed spaces. My thoughts were unfocused and sometimes I would hear strange voices. The pills I took regularly were Sepram and Prozac. I never lost control of myself despite having blood pressure problems and diabetes. I don't sleep well and when I do, I often have horrifying nightmares that wake me up and leave me shaking.

He told me that 60% of the Lebanese suffer from the same symptoms. All because of the war. I am from the South and it's Israel's fault, it's the cause of all my psychological problems. And the cause behind the crime I committed. I place full responsibility on Israel for my terrible crime.

(Rabih returns to his place behind the table. Lina rises slowly from behind the screen, leaving the image of her fall – her corpse – imprinted on the white screen which will remain until the end of the performance.)

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Chris Burden, page 30.

Rabih: You have 30 seconds. Top!

Lina/Chris Burden: It was a very simple performance, hinging on a single moment. A moment that went down in history. November 29, 1971, a year and a bit after Black September. At a gallery in California, at a quarter to eight, a small audience assembled. I entered with two friends, one carrying a camera, the other carrying a gun. The three of us stood there, the audience watched. I screamed out: "Shoot!" And one friend filmed as the other shot me in the hand. It was severed, blown away. Blood spraying everywhere. A gorgeous moment. This is the moment I'm talking about. The second the bullet entered my hand, the image entered history.

Rabih: Time out!

(Lina returns to her post behind the table, picks a new page and falls on a picture from a famous play.)

Lina: Picture.

(Lina leaves the book aside and goes to reappear behind the screen. She sits on the floor and takes the position of the fall again. She freezes.)

Rabih (from in front of the screen):

After the paratrooper mission carried out by the Israeli commandos on the town of Ansaria, my mental state went into decline.

That time they fell straight into a Hizbullah ambush and a violent battled raged between them, with Israeli tanks participating in the carnage.

All the Israeli commandos were killed. Their bodies were blown to bits, and the Hizbullah fighters went around the area's towns and villages, displaying their parts for all to see. All the newspapers took pictures of Hizbullah fighters holding up dismembered heads by the hair for the camera. It was a great victory for the nation. And the whole battle took place behind my house.

Right before that was the Qana massacre. And before and after the Israelis shelled our towns and villages. And the collaborators and bombardments, the clashes between Amal and Hizbullah… what could we do? How much can a person take?

The commando operation in Ansaria was burned into my mind. I went into shock. I started to cry every time I saw the mutilated body parts on display. People thought I was moved by joy, but I was having a nervous breakdown. I became terrified of armed men. Terrified of Hizbullah. Terrified of the sound of bullets and aircraft, sonic booms. My nerves were shot to hell, I was degenerating, all because of Israel. What were they thinking, embarking on such a poorly planned operation?

If there were no Israel… there would never have been the Battle of the Camps and I would have never had to carry arms against the Palestinians. And never have had to kill my Christian colleagues at work. Israel is to blame and it should be punished for this, not I. I gave so much of myself to this nation. I defended it, fought Israel for it. Struggled. We offered our martyrs. We liberated the land.

(Rabih returns to his place behind the table. Lina rises slowly from behind the screen, leaving the image of her fall – her corpse – imprinted on the white screen which will remain until the end of the performance.)

(Lina returns to her place behind the table, closes her eyes and picks a page from the book. She reads.)

Lina: Paul McCarthy, page 20.

Rabih: You have 20 seconds. Top!

Lina/Paul McCarthy: There's a big difference between ketchup and blood. This is why I decided to reproduce Yves Klein's leap, the famous leap he took into the void. Whether he jumped from the first or second floor is unimportant. We saw the picture of him airborne, his arms spread wide against the sky. In actual fact, we have no idea what happened to him. Did he fall? Fly? We don't know and he won't say. I climbed up to the second floor and I took a leap "into the void" and fell on my head. I injured myself, everyone saw this. I'm telling you, there's a big difference between ketchup and blood. Edgar Aho says, "there's a big difference between onions and tears". After the Lebanese war was over, he went up to the 14th floor and took a "leap into the void". It was the leap of a lifetime.

(Lina is done playing her role. Rabih goes and stands in front of the screen. He gazes at Lina's image, the one where she is standing. They contemplate the image, then he

aligns his body along the image of her body.)

Rabih: The information I am about to give you is inexact and therefore would not qualify as official testimony.

(Rabih falls silent and the following text appears on the screen:)

The idea began to brew in my mind on Friday.

On the same day, I brought my wife back from the hospital to our home in the village. I took her in my brother's car. On Saturday, I spent the whole morning at home. In the afternoon, I went to the football field with my wife to watch the game. On Sunday, I spent the whole morning at home. In the afternoon I went to the field as usual, alone this time, without my wife.

On Monday, there was a party in my honour, organised by the village sports club. It was postponed for technical reasons.

Monday and Tuesday, I didn't leave the house. I was putting together my plan. My wife asked why I didn't go to work in Beirut and I told her I was tired.

Tuesday evening, I called Jamal to ask him to drive me to Beirut the next morning.

Wednesday morning, I packed all the weapons into two bags and rode the taxi to work.

During this whole period, I was living on cigarettes and coffee alone, not talking to anyone.

On Wednesday, at 9:30 in the morning, I started executing my plan.

After a quarter of an hour, I had killed eight and wounded four. Two of them were unknown to me, the rest had been my colleagues for over 20 years.

On Wednesday at approximately 10 to 10, I turned myself in to the police.

Wednesday afternoon was my first interrogation by the general security forces. I confessed to everything.

Thursday, they took the first official testimony of my confession.

Monday morning was my first meeting with the lawyer.

Wednesday, they determined the first court hearing.

September 20 is our first day in court, and during this hearing I confess that my motives were financial, the result of intense economic pressure and massive debts.

September 23, the first official inquiry. The death sentence is called for.

October 1, the death sentence is officially called for and the case is turned over to the Supreme Court.

October 17, the second hearing. I confess that my motives were not financial but sectarian, the result of an insult on Muslims and Islam uttered by a Christian colleague.

October 21, the third hearing, an evening session beginning at 4 pm and lasting until 10.

During this hearing, I confess that my motives were not sectarian and that my defense was in my chronic psychological problems.

January 10, the witnesses are brought forth and all my defenses collapse, psychological, sectarian and financial.

January 16, the final hearing at the Supreme Court, I declare that the reasons for my crime were the Israeli incursions onto Lebanese soil. At the end of the hearing, the judge pronounces his final verdict: Death.

January 17, the President and the Prime Minister sign the death

sentence and in order to prevent sectarian conflict, they decide to put me to death with two others, a Christian and a Druze. All in the name of sectarian equilibrium.

Dawn, January 18, my death sentence is carried out by hanging.

During this whole time, they never once ask me to re-enact my crime, as they usually do with all the other accused.

My name is Hassan Ma'moun.

(Lina and Rabih move at the same time. They leave the images of their bodies layered on top of each other imprinted on the white screen, next to the three previous images. They move towards the screen and roll it up towards the ceiling of the stage, where it was at the beginning of the play. The reflection of the four images is seen on the floor of the stage. They exit.)

Rabih Mroué was born in Beirut in 1967. He started producing his own plays in 1990. He has acted in, directed and written several plays, performances and videos that have been presented in Beirut, in other Arab cities and throughout Europe and in Japan. His recent works include *How Nancy Wished that it Was All an April Fool's Joke* (2007) co-written with Fadi Toufiq; *Help Me Stop Smoking* (2006); *Who's Afraid of Representation?* (2004); *Looking for a Missing Employee* (2003); *Biokhraphia* (2002) in collaboration with Lina Saneh; and *Three Posters* (2002) with Elias Khoury. His video works include *Birrouh Biddam* (2003) and *Face A/Face B* (2001). Mroué lives in Beirut.

Lina Saneh was born in Beirut in 1966. She studied theater at the Lebanese University in Beirut and the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. She has written, directed and acted in numerous plays. She directed the performances *Appendice* (2007), *Biokhraphia* in collaboration with Rabih Mroué (2002), *Extrait d'État Civil* (2000), *Ovrira* (1997) and *Les Chaises* (1996). She made her first video *I Had a Dream, Mom…* in 2006. She is currently assistant professor at the *Institut d'Études Scéniques et Audiovisuelles* (IESAV) at the *Université Saint-Joseph* (USJ) in Beirut.

Give me a Body Then

A performance by Ali Cherri

I used to search for pictures of naked people, stealing glances at any nude photos I could find. There was no Internet at the time, and I did not have any access to pornography, so I would try to find these photos anywhere possible, including biology books. More than once, I found pictures of naked, often dead, people in newspapers. I did not care what the photos were trying to say; I was just looking at what they showed. I would collect these pictures and look at them every now and then. When I grew up, I continued collecting pictures of people, but not all of them were dead. These photos were pretty random; I used to keep anything I could find. A lot of them came from my family album; some I found lying here and there; others, my friends used to send to me.

(1) This photo, for instance, was given to me by a friend when he heard I was not feeling very well. I am not sure who these people are, but I kept the photograph anyhow.

(2) This photo is one in a series of three. I was told not to look for the other two.

(3-4) These two pictures were given to me as a present for a birthday I spent in bed. I don't

Left: (1)
Right: (2)

remember who sent them to me. And I don't particularly like this present.

(3) – (4)

(5)

(6)

(5) I kept this one because it makes me sleepy; I think that's because it used to hang on a bedroom wall; I forget where.

(6)This is a picture of the house I was raised in. My parents moved to this house in 1976, the year I was born, when the location of their old apartment became dangerous at the beginning of the war. If you were to go from here, you would get to my bedroom.

(7)

(8)

(9)

(7) This picture is stolen. It was not me who stole it, but I ended up with it.

(8) I stole this one. I took it from a journalist who used to write for the obituaries page. It was one of the rare pictures he had of his wife, Hoda.

(9) This is Marcel Proust, dead. I found this photo at a bookstore; and I bought it before I actually knew who the person in this photograph was. When I went back home, I read on the back that Man Ray had taken this photo.

There is something strange about this photograph, something very "real". It's almost as if photography is most faithful and real only when the subject in the photograph is DEAD. So I bought this photo and hung it in my bedroom above my bed. My friends warned me against hanging a dead person's photograph above my head. I did not listen to them and just kept it there. Some time later, something strange happened to me. I started remembering things that had never happened to me.

(10) This image is actually a laser printout. It is of a very handsome young man. He is wearing a black shirt and seems to have the German measles. On the reverse is an inscription which reads, 'David Hockney 1996'. I do not know who the subject is.

(11) This one arrived to me wrapped in heavy drafting paper with the cross-section drawings of an architectural study for a monument of some kind, as though it were being prepared for blueprinting. The beginning of a dome is evident, as well as part of a statue of a large, big-bellied man; his head is not in this section.

(12) 'Landscape'. This photo was taken in the summer of 1982 (dur-

Left: (10)
Right Up: (11)
Right Down: (12)

ing the Israeli invasion of Beirut). That same summer, the Dutch GVB (Municipality Transport Company) planned a project to renew the metro system in Amsterdam. For that, they placed cameras on the entrance of every metro station in order to see how many people used the subway every day. The survey started on Monday, June 5, 1982 and ended on Sunday, June 11. On Monday and according to the video monitors at the entrance of all metro stations, 11,290 people walked into the metro; 11,286 came out. There were 4 people missing who never made it out of the metro. On Tuesday, the number of people who entered the metro was equal to the number who left which was also the case on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. On Saturday, June 10, 1982, 15,383 people went into the metro; 15,384 came out. There was one extra person who came out of the subway. These statistics were never made public. When I told my friend about this story, he explained that given the jostling and elbowing of 11,000 people packed inside the metro, it was normal that 4 people should fade away. But he could not give me a logical explanation for that extra person who sprang out of the metro that Saturday. I told him: "You can explain someone falling out of the picture, but you can never explain someone falling into it".
That night, I cried my eyes out.

(13) I still have here a photo that was taken after a nightmare I had years ago. In fact, I find it strange that people say when they dream it is as if they were watching a film. In my dreams, everything is still; one image after the other. Nothing moves in my dreams. I hear sounds, I smell odours, but what I see is still. Anyhow, in that photo, a man stands with a dog next to him. While the man is looking straight ahead, the dog is gazing at something outside the

(13)

(14)

frame. In fact the man in the drawing is my departed uncle and Don Quixote at the same time. And the dog is his pit-bull and the old horse Rosinante. Everyone in my dream comes doubled, including me. When I am in my dreams, I'm always "me" and David Hockney.

(14) On the morning of my acquisition of this picture, I was awoken by a distressing dream. I have never had any compulsion for dream interpretation. I've always believed what my mum used to say: "A mystery should remain a mystery."

Actually, many of my dreams come back again and again. But here is the one I had that morning. In my dream, I get up, but my leg stays in bed. It's a terrible and funny feeling at the same time. So I go and get a newspaper and wrap my leg in it and take it to the doctor. The doctor just holds the leg and looks at it and everything is fine again. At first, the dream used to make me feel very ill, but later on, when it kept coming back, I just thought, "I don't need to be afraid since in the end everything can be repaired".

On the back of the picture there was a sentence done in fine calligraphy, but so crossed through and rewritten that the original text had been obscured beyond recognition. Yet, at the end, I think that I managed to make out through the scribbles, "Fish die belly-upward and rise to the surface; it is their way of falling".

Before having possession of this photograph, everything I used to collect was haphazard, without reason. After I stole this photo, I started looking for photos everywhere, among things I possessed and things I did not possess. My house was filled with worthless papers, useless junk. The smell was unbearable. That morning I woke up to a stench filling the house. I searched to see where the smell was coming from until I found a photograph lying on my desk, covered with flies. I didn't remember eating any pictures the night before. I got scared.

I remembered a story. I told you that I remember things that never happened to me, but I promise that this story I will tell you is exactly how it happened. Or how I remember it happened. Anyhow, it all goes back to the same thing.

A photographer took a picture of a dead dog on the beach. The corpse was a week old and covered with flies. He returned home, took the film roll out of his camera and sent it to a reputable laboratory. The film was developed, printed and returned by post. The photographer opened the small parcel in his study. Dissatisfied with the picture of the dead dog, he started chewing on it and then swallowed it.

That evening the photographer died of an infection. His body, covered with flies, was found by the police a week later and photographed.

The police detective in charge of the case was puzzled by the man's act. He stared for a long time at the dead photographer's picture. Moments later, he started chewing on it and then swallowed it.

That same night, the detective died of an infection. A picture of his corpse, covered with flies, appeared a few days later in a local news-

paper.

A big-bellied professor at the art school cut out the picture from the newspaper and kept it in his red notebook under the section, "Violent Deaths". He thought it might come in handy for his human anatomy drawing class.

At the morgue, the doctor who dissected the detective's corpse extracted the remains of a picture bathed in stomach fluid. The picture was decomposed but still revealed the shadow of a dead body, covered with flies.

The doctor, who always identified with the corpses he dissected, felt an urge to taste a small piece of the picture in his hand. The next morning he was found lying still at the morgue table, next to a male corpse who, it was suspected, had shot himself while sitting at his breakfast table.

The journalist who was in charge of the dead doctor's story phoned his wife, Hoda, to relate the story he was working on. His last words, before he put down the receiver, were, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

As an anthropologist, his wife never took him seriously. That day, the journalist was found dead. The police report stated that the journalist had choked after swallowing 19 pages of the following morning's paper. The newspaper's chief editor refrained from publishing his picture next to his obituary.

Hoda felt that all photographs had a repulsive vinegary smell and she never put up any in her house. So she decided to commission a young portraitist to make a painting of her departed husband. She gave the painter a brown leather suitcase containing several newspaper articles her husband had written under the initials D.H. The suitcase also contained some undated, hand-written letters, some

(15)

receipts from a local restaurant and a map of a remote town in France. The portraitist thought the map could be of great use, but found the rest of the suitcase's contents only marginally informative. Nevertheless, he accepted to produce the portrait

The portrait hangs now on the wall of Hoda's apartment, facing a fine reproduction of David Hockney's 'The Big Splash'.

I didn't like taking pictures. I didn't even own a camera. But when people started using digital photography, everyone was ceaselessly bemoaning the imminent death of print photography. That is when I went and bought my first manual camera. I thought I should be there when photography died. After all, that is why people still go to the theatre today, to watch it breathe its last breath.

Anyhow, I bought a camera and wanted to take the LAST PHOTOGRAPH; a picture that would contain all the other photos that had ever been taken, the pictures that had been developed and even the ones that had never been.

So I started going out on the streets, taking pictures randomly, until I realised that my pictures were empty. There was no one in them. I wanted to throw away all the film rolls, but my friend told me that I worried too much about what people said. Honestly I did

Left: (16)

(17)

(18) – (19)

(20)

(21)

(22)

(23)

(24)

(25)

(26)

(27)

(28)

not get what he meant, but I kept all the negatives.

When my friend saw the photo of Proust hanging in my bedroom, he sent me this image. [15] He told me it was a self-portrait of Bayard, dead. Bayard made a portrait of himself as a "Drowned Man". It dates back to 1840. In this photograph, Bayard presents himself as a victim of an act of suicide, provoked by the failure of the French authorities to recognise his discovery of the photographic process. Bayard wrote on the back of his self-portrait: "Ladies and gentlemen, you'd better pass along for fear of offending your sense of smell, for as you can observe, the face and hands are beginning to decay."

(15-9) So in that photo, there is a dead person.

While in that one, there isn't any dead person.

But how can I be sure?

I want to show you this picture, because in this picture, I am sure there is a dead person.

(16) On the back it says: "To my dear Itaf, This is a photo of your cousin Souad and me taken at the lake. Soaud sends you her regards and asks you for your photo.
Your aunt, Zahraa' El Hayek."
But there is only one person on the lake. Where could my aunt have disappeared?
Why did she leave behind this photo? I started looking for photographs with a trace of my aunt. So I found this one (17) … this one (18) … and finally, I came across this one. (19)

I've heard of people stepping out of pictures. In fact, in Stalin's USSR, people started falling out of pictures. They were ingenuously masked out of photographs when they were considered traitors to the party. (from 20 to 28)

But my aunt is not Russian and had never been to the Soviet Union.

I started to have doubts about all the pictures I had, no longer sure who had been originally there, who had come in and who had walked out. (29 – 30 – 31)

I decided to go back to the picture of my house and search to see if there was anyone hiding in it. (6)

If we look closely, there is a line that runs from the letter on the desk, to the wooden plank of the table and all the way down along the table-leg to the floor. With some effort, we see the tiles on the floor and continuing with that line, go up the wall, enter a painting by Hockney, round the shoulder of a woman who is lying on a sofa and finally escape from the room through the window to go down the street along the cable of a lamp post. Here it becomes much

(29)

(30)

(31)

more difficult to follow the line through the traffic, but if we look carefully, we see it going around the wheels of a bus heading downtown. Here it travels down the nylon socks of an artificially blonde woman, then through an apartment window on the ground floor, along the mouldy curtains to the stitches on the pants of a man sitting on a table facing a monitor, up his arm, then all the way along the creases on the palm of his right hand which is just about to pick up a gun. And the next, I saw my picture in the newspaper, lying naked and dead.

Ali Cherri was born in Beirut in 1976. He studied graphic design at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and performing arts at DasArts in Amsterdam. His work includes the videos *Slippage* (2007), *Untitled* (2006) and *Un Cercle Autour du Soleil* (2005) and the performances *Give Me a Body Then* (2006) and *As Dead as Ever* (2005).

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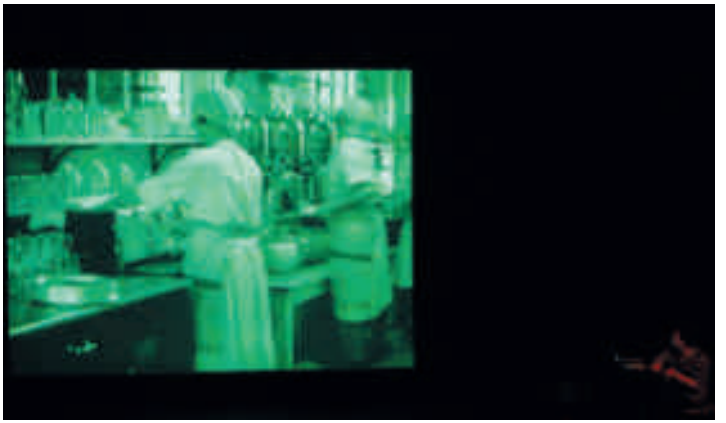
Berlin: The Symphony of a Big City – Live Electronics

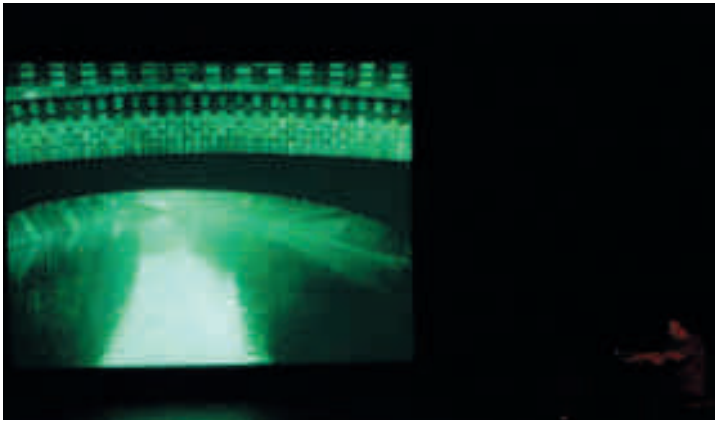
A performance by Mahmoud Refat

In the summer of 2004, Mahmoud Refat embarked on an ongoing film research project concerning experimental documentaries dealing with urban subjects and works from the 1920s through the 1940s.

The first result of this research was a live sound treatment together with a screening of the 1927 German film *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City,* directed by Walter Ruttmann.

Produced with support from the Goethe Institute, Cairo.





Mahmoud Refat is a musician /sound artist and the founder of 100COPIES MUSIC/CAIRO. He was born in 1974 and lives and works in Cairo. His work has been released on CD, performed live and exhibited in several venues. Refat began his music career in the early 1990s, playing in local jazz/experimental rock bands in different venues in Cairo. In 2000, he began composing soundtracks for dance and theatre. Refat has also worked on music for videos and films. During the past few yeaars, he has been collaborating with different musicians and sound artists. www.100copies.com

I Feel a Great Desire To Meet The Masses Once Again

A project by Walid Raad

PART I

For quite some time now, I have been trying to remember when, on what day, I left Beirut.

I can say that I have left Lebanon many times.

My family lived in Freetown, Sierra Leone for a year in 1968.

I lived with my maternal grandparents in Amman, Jordan in the 1970s. We also traveled to Eastern and Western Europe by car in 1976, and then again in 1978.

But recently, actually 18 months ago, I was asked to remember the day I traveled for the first time to the United States, the day I left – as I seem to refer to it today.

I remember leaving by boat.

I remember the shelling on that grey day as my father and sister quickly said goodbye.

I remember taking photographs from the cargo boat that was transporting others and me to Cyprus.

Others were also photographing their departure.

I remember arriving in Larnaca (or was it Limassol?) and producing this image – pleased with what my newly acquired special effect filter was producing at the time.

I also remember wandering around in Paris the next day, trying to find the American consulate there. I needed to get a visa to enter the United States.

I vaguely remember my first night in New York – in a cheap motel room – after I'd missed my connecting flight to Boston, my final destination, where my brother was waiting for me.

I recently found the date in question.

In my passport from that time, page 9:

September 18, 1983.

23 years ago.

I was 16 years old. This was a year and a half after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the deterioration of the security situation once again.

But this time, the local militia, the Lebanese Forces, was forcing young men to serve, to fight.

The Lebanese Forces controlled East Beirut, where I lived. They supported the Israeli invasion, an invasion that I watched and photographed from a parking lot in front of my mother's house.

The Israeli Army was shelling West Beirut – West Beirut is only a few hundred meters from where I was livi I should grab one of the guns and start shooting.

I am not sure I would be capable of this, even today.

In 1982, I was 15; and I clearly did not know what I was doing.

I only knew that I liked photography; that I liked taking pictures of apples and flowers, basketball games and my friends.

PART II

I was not allowed to fly from Rochester (the 3rd largest city in New York State) to New York City, on a Sunday, last December.

Earlier that day, I had dropped off my family at the airport, proceeded to return the rental car we had rented for the weekend, and headed to Jet Blue's counter where I checked in.

After the usual questions – I am sure everyone gets them: "Do you have any firearms to declare?" and "Did you pack your own bags?" I was allowed to join Lynn, my wife, and Petra, our daughter, at the gate.

Minutes later, a police officer whose name I later discovered was Officer Rick, approached me. He seemed to know what I looked like; and he certainly knew my name.

Officer Rick asked me to accompany him.

They had found suspicious items in my luggage and wanted to ask me some questions.

My initial muted reaction, as well as my wife's, confirmed to us that we had been expecting this for a while now – for the past four years I suppose.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VINCENT L. BROWNING
SPECIAL AGENT

Officer Rick accompanied me to the Sheriff's office, located on the ground floor of the airport.

As we walked there, the deputy asked me questions about what I did, where I came from.

I refused to answer his questions, informing him that I would only speak to his supervisor. "I do not wish to repeat myself several times. I do not wish to have you misquote what I say." I told the baby-faced 20-year-old.

Once inside the underground office, I was introduced to Sergeant Matt, who was going through the luggage I had checked in earlier at the Jet Blue counter.

I was asked to sit down, to face the sergeant, and to wait.

I sat; I faced the sergeant; and I waited.

Nothing happened. No questions.

Within a minute or so, a beefy man in his thirties, with a shaved head, dressed in civilian clothes, a tan Carhartt jacket, entered the room. He extended his hand confidently and identified himself as Pat Ponticello, of the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the FBI.

He showed me his badge.

I looked at it, carefully, as if I knew what a real FBI badge is supposed to look like.

He sat down, pulled his chair up behind a small table on which several items from my suitcase had been placed by Sergeant McGrath.

He asked about my name, nationality, profession, and marital status.

Then he looked at the items in front of him:

First, there were the portrait photographs – 6 of them of me – in costume, clearly younger, with hair, against blue, red, white, and dark backgrounds; in different shirts, different hair styles.

Can I explain these, asked the agent?

Self-portraits, I said. I produced them in 1985, within a year of arriving to the United States. I am an artist, a photographer, I explained. I have been making pictures since I was 12 years old.

Agent Ponticello seemed confused.

"But why would you take pictures of yourself like this?"

Now, I was confused. What can I say!
Then I blurted, "I was trying to fit in. During my first year in the US, I found high school graduation yearbook portraits fascinating. I never graduated from high school in Beirut. I thought I should make my own (American-style) portraits to celebrate my missed graduation year and my new American home."

Agent Ponticello liked the part about "trying to fit in", and "new American home."

OK, he said. "What about these?"

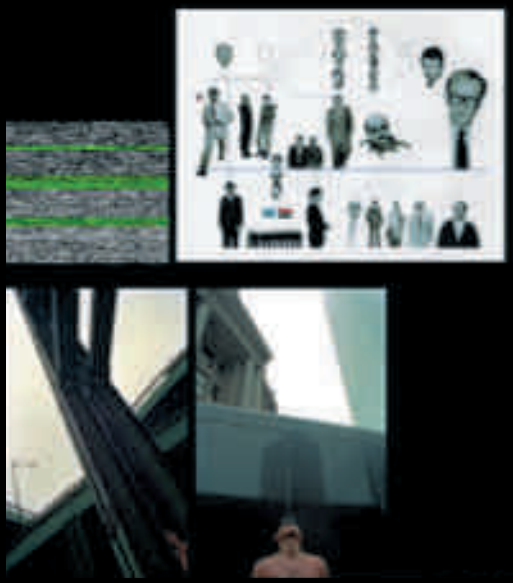
Do you have a habit of taking your clothes off in public? In public spaces? Do you know that this is a bit strange? That it raises suspicion? What's a grown man like you doing running around naked? Posing naked like that?

And then he asked, though I was not sure if I heard him right, are you gay?

Did I just hear him ask me if I was gay? Did he really just say this?

And before I can gather my thoughts, he asks: "Why are you so interested in public buildings? And bridges?"

He thinks this is surveillance, I thought to myself. Who would have thought that the building on the



464-6001
Rick Schoeberlein
deputy Monroe Sheriff
Sgt.
Matt McGrath
Pat Pontiere
Sheriff's Office

left in this photograph was of a federal building? Or, that the building on the right houses many police agencies? I just thought they would make good backdrops for my little artistic exercise.

I tried to explain this but Agent Ponticello seemed eager to move on. He seemed to know something that I did not; he had that look on his face, and that tone in his voice. He was convinced that I was lying and that he had the evidence to prove it. He knew that he was about to catch me with my hand in the cookie-jar, as Americans like to say.

And then he pulls out of my bag these photographs:

Again, self-portraits, yes, naked again, but this time with dead animals, some even quite bloodied.

Road-kill. Fish. And then, there was the one with the frog, and the one with the pigeon and the text written backwards that said, "To escape the danger of destruction. The destruction of the machine may occur in two ways: The first being the rupture of the machine."

Agent Ponticello read the text twice, each time a bit louder, each time a bit more menacing.

At that moment, I became aware that things were about to spiral out of control and that they could turn out very badly for me.

The agent looked at me for what seemed like an eternity. Then he pulled out the phone cards from Greece and Lebanon. And the bank statements, the receipts and the airline tickets. Why was I carrying receipts, hundreds of them, bank statements, airline tickets in my luggage?

I had forgotten about these as well. I had forgotten that they were in my suitcase. It was a holiday weekend. I brought all the receipts and statements with me to work on my taxes – before the end of the year. I never pay my taxes on time. I thought I would try it for once, to get it done.

The agent examined the receipts, pulling a few out and asked the deputy to photocopy some of them. I am sure to get tax-audited this year, I thought to myself.

And then Agent Ponticello asked, "Why do you have these with you?"

Now, I knew I was in trouble. I also realized that I would be in the company of these men for longer than I thought – and that I would miss my plane – and that my family at the gate were getting worried.

"How long will I be here?" I asked.

"If I am going to miss my plane, can someone go to the gate and let my wife know that I am fine, and that I will probably not fly to NYC on the same plane?"

They accommodated this request immediately – which confirmed to me that I was not going anywhere anytime soon.

It was Lynn, my wife, who wrote down the name of the men interrogating me, on a sheet of paper in my daughter's notepad.

Lynn was worried and insisted on seeing me, but to no avail. She was allowed to call me on the phone; and we agreed that they should travel and that I would join them when I was done. This was probably careless on our part.

Back to the items that got me really nervous, the airline safety brochures, 3 of them. "I collect them. I find them graphically interesting," I told agent Ponticello.

I did not think that the agent would find my honest answer suitable. But to my surprise, he did, or maybe he did not ask more questions because his phone rang. He answered. I heard him say: "Interesting stuff, very interesting…" followed by, "Don't know". Then he left the room.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
NEW YORK DIVISION

FBI

VINCENT L. BROWNING
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When he came back, he launched a barrage of questions about this photograph and a videotape that were in my backpack.

- Who are these people?
- Are any of them members of Hizbullah?
- Are you a member of Hizbullah?
- Do you know anyone who is a member of Hizbullah?
- Who is this person?
- And this one?
- Why do you have their pictures?
- And this videotape?
- Is this a fire, an explosion?
- Do you know who did this?
- Do you know what happened?
- Is Hizbullah involved?

And then he played the videotape.

The videotape in question showed a car-bomb explosion, on 21 January 1986, in East Beirut.

The explosion killed 30 and injured 130, all civilians.

Who did this?

I didn't know; but I did know that it was not Hizbullah.

The bombing had most likely been ordered by one of the (at the time) US-backed right wing Christian militias, the same one that had tried to recruit me, that forced me to flee, to America in 1983.

At this point, I was thinking to myself:

Will this man be able to understand that I work on the history of Lebanon and on the history of car bombs? And on what happens to cities when they succumb to the constant threat of assaults?

Should I tell him all this?

I was also thinking of all the heart-wrenching stories of arbitrary detention, and subsequent deportation.

At this point, I decided to ask Agent Ponticello: What is the nature of this exchange we are having here? What do you call it?

"I call it a conversation," replied the agent.

"You don't call it an interrogation, a detention?"

"No, it is a conversation, nothing else." He replied.

"Can I refuse to converse with you?" I asked.

"You can, but you will raise more red flags. If you have nothing to hide, then you should not be afraid to converse with me." He said. Then, he pulled this out of my receipts: The card of another FBI agent, the card of Vincent Browning, Special Agent, FBI, New York.

Yes, I had been visited by the Bureau before, last year, in May, in connection to what I was told was a case involving watches and the internet. Agent Browning had given me his card. I inadvertently threw it among my receipts. And here it was again.

At this point, I thought I'd give it a try. I thought I should try to explain what I do. After all, if I were in his shoes, if I had landed on a Lebanese man carrying everything I had on me, I would be equally suspicious. I understood where he was coming from.

And so, I explained myself.

They all listened patiently. They seemed to understand that I work on the history of Lebanon. They seemed to understand that I think about the effects of bombings on contemporary urban life in Beirut and elsewhere. What they could not understand was: What's an artist doing working on this stuff?

It took me a few minutes to formulate the – otherwise indefensible and pathetic – statement. I said (and I still cringe every time I have to repeat this): Like many artists, I seek beauty in violence.


N379

I could not tell whether I should laugh or cry as I uttered this statement.

I did not know whether they would laugh.

They did not.

They did not cry either – but the expression of empathy and kindness on agent Ponticello's face led me to believe that he was now satisfied.

I may not be a perverse, dead-animal lovin', gay exhibitionist terrorist in his mind, but I had now become an equally abstract individual, the other side of the caricature of the would-be-terrorist; I had become a traumatized, helpless victim, dumb about the world and its reality, seeking redemption and pathos through art; a caricature equally troubling to me.

He kept nodding his head, as he told me that he occasionally draws and paints himself, to relieve the stress of the job.

I nodded and said that I look forward to seeing his paintings and drawings some day.

Then, I was allowed to go.

I realize that I painted a somewhat simple picture of Agent Ponticello, Officer Rick, and Sergeant Rick.

For this, I apologize to you, to them, and to my text. I am certain that we all deserve much better.

A week later, in New York City, Steve Kurtz visited the art school where I teach, The Cooper Union.

Steve lives in Buffalo – also in Northwestern New York State, about 100 miles from Rochester, where my conversation with the FBI took place. Steve works as a professor and as an artist. I am quite sure that you are familiar with his case, a story that, as far as I am concerned, cannot be repeated enough.

Steve is a member of the Critical Art Ensemble, a multimedia artist collective exploring the political and social implications of science, particularly biotechnology, on and for people who are not scientists.

One spring morning, on May 11, 2004, Steve woke up to the horrible discovery that his wife of 20 years, Hope, had died overnight from heart failure.

He called 9-1-1.

Paramedics arriving at his home noticed some technical scientific equipment. The paramedics got suspicious and immediately called the police, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the FBI. The agents came, cordoned off the entire block, and later impounded Steve's computers, manuscripts, equipment, his cat, and even his wife's body.

This is how the events were reported in the US popular press.

The "goodness knows what else" in this case is that even after the Commissioner of Public Health for New York State declared that all bacterial samples found in Steve's home were harmless, the FBI decided to keep much of the equipment found in the house, equipment that was supposed to go to an exhibition in Massachusetts entitled, 'The Interventionists'.

The Atlas Group was also participating in this exhibition.

During the one week that the FBI were looking through Steve's house, more money was being spent on this one case than on any other terrorism-related case in the United States. So, after trying and failing to charge Steve with possession of biological weapons, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York charged him with two counts of mail fraud, and two counts of wire fraud, which can carry a jail sentence of up to 20 years. What this meant was that, since the US government could not get a Grand Jury to issue terrorism charges against Steve, they decided to turn a minor bureaucratic

infraction into a federal crime.
This is how they did it.

In his home, and for his art project, Steve had three biological agents, three harmless biological agents. The agents are found in most high school biology labs and were bought from a company called, ATCC (The American Type Culture Corporation). Only licensed institutions such as universities, schools or pharmaceutical companies can buy from ATCC; and so to obtain his samples for his art project, Steve called his friend Robert Ferrell, who is the former head of the Department of Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Public Health. Kurtz asked Ferrell to buy the agents for him and to send them to Buffalo by mail.

This kind of transfer of samples between colleagues is something that scientists do all the time; it has never been charged as a federal crime, especially when the injured parties – in this case, the ATCC and the University of Pittsburgh – do not want to press charges.

The lead government attorneys in the case are: Michael Battle, the US Attorney for the western district of New York, and William Hochul Jr., the assistant US attorney for the western district of New York. The two men were, by 2004, law enforcement celebrities of sorts, for having dismantled an "al-Qaeda sleeper cell," – the famous case of the Lackawanna Six.

This is the case of six low-income, first and second generation Yemeni Americans who were recruited in the spring of 2001 to an al-Qaeda camp in Afghanistan.

They went, some of them even met with Bin Laden. Within a few days in Afghanistan, they figure out that this is not at all what they want to be involved in, and they find ways to leave the camp and return to the United States.

One month after September 11, 2001, in October 2001, they are interrogated by an FBI agent, who asks them, whether they had been to Afghanistan. Afraid, like most Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians in America at the time, they said no. Months later, and under tremendous pressure from the FBI, one of them, confessed to having in fact been to Afghanistan. The six men were immediately arrested, charged and under the threat of being declared enemy combatants, and sent to Guantanamo. They pled guilty, and received sentences ranging from six and a half to ten years in jail, not for knowing, planning, or intending to commit acts of terror but for lying.

They are in jail for lying out of fear.

The travesty of the law in this case is found elsewhere, in any of the prosecution of the numerous cells that were dismantled in the US: Whether we are talking about the Alexandria 11, the Detroit 4, the Portland 7 or the Seattle 8.

The Kurtz case got even stranger last spring when it was revealed that the basis on which the FBI requested – and was granted – a search warrant from a federal judge to enter and search Steve's house on that awful day in May 2004, was the invitation to the Massachusetts exhibition I talked about and showed earlier, which included on its cover, this photograph, from Notebook Volume 38 of The Atlas group project titled, Already Been in a Lake of Fire.

The photograph represents a car; and next to the cutout photograph of the car is some Arabic writing about a car bomb. The judge was never told by the FBI about the context of the photograph or about what was written in Arabic. Partly because of the photo, the judge issued a warrant calling for the seizure of anything with Arabic writing in Steve's house. Even if a Koran had been found, it would have been seized as evidence, as prosecutors told a judge recently.

A Pandora's box has been opened in the war on terror. Not only in the US, but also in such "human-rights" friendly countries such as Sweden.

Take, for example, the case of Ahmed Agiza, an


Premier Executive Transport
Devon Holding and Leasing
Stevens Express Leasing
Crowell Aviation Technologies
Aviation Specialists
Rapid Air Transport
Path Corporation

Egyptian national who was living with his family in Sweden since obtaining asylum there in September 2000.

On December 18, 2001, three months after September 11, and based on information from foreign intelligence services (you can guess who that might be), the Swedish secret police arrested Agiza along with another suspect, Muhammad Al Zery. In an extraordinary meeting on that day, the Swedish government issued deportation orders to Egypt for both men. The men were swiftly transferred to Bromma airport in Stockholm, where American agents and Swedish police wait for them. The Americans immediately take over. I will read the testimony of Paul Forell, a Swedish police inspector who witnessed the whole event. This is what he recently stated on Swedish television:

> The Egyptian men were dressed in their own clothes. They had handcuffs and leg-irons on. The Americans took the arrested men. The Swedish police stayed behind. There were three to four Americans to each of the arrested. And, as far as I remember, the Americans were dressed normally. That is… jeans… and shirts, and then they had hoods on. In fact, the Americans had hoods on when they came in. Leg-irons and handcuffs are still on when the clothes of the Egyptians were cut apart with scissors. Once naked, suppositories of an unknown kind were inserted in their asses, a tranquilizer, and sleeping pills of some kind. Then, the men have diapers put on them, dark overalls, blindfolds, and a hood over their head. This was all done in a matter of a minute or two. The Americans acted swiftly and silently. They had clearly done this before.

The men were then driven to the plane, where they are suspended in a harness for the duration of the flight to Egypt. They landed in Cairo at 3 AM and were immediately taken to the Egyptian security services where the interrogation and torture start, that very same night. The plane that transported Al-Zery and Agiza to Egypt is a small jet, a Gulfstream 5, with the tail number N379P.
This is where things got strange and clear for me at the same time, and I hope that you can be patient with me as I continue to present this material to you.

This jet, as it turns out, is owned by Premier Executive Transport – PET for short, which became a corporation in the state of Delaware in the US in 1994.

In 1996, PET was incorporated in Massachusetts by a law firm named Hill and Plakias.

The names of the officers, owners and managers, of the company are listed as: Bryan Dyess, Steven Kent, Timothy Sperling, Audrey Taylor, and Phillip Quincannon.

In 1998, PET, orders a Gulfstream 5. About a year later, the plane is delivered with the tail number N581GA. A month later, the plane is registered with a different tail number N379P; and it begins to fly in June 2000.

Between September 2001 and March 2005, the plane will make around 600 flights. Of the 600 flights, 10 are to Uzbekistan, 30 to Jordan, 19 to Afghanistan, 17 to Morocco
16 to Iraq, and 51 to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

On November 16, 2004, the Los Angeles Times published a story about PET and N379P. Within two weeks, the plane is sold to a company in Portland Oregon, Bayard Foreign Marketing. And the plane has its tail number changed to N44982.

Wait a few seconds.

Close scrutiny of the names listed as officers for PET reveals that they are not only officers of PET, but also of another company, Devon Holding and Leasing, which also happens to own 5 planes.

The officer identified as Philip Quincannon is also the owner of another company called Stevens Express Leasing, which owns four planes; and he

is the owner of another company called Crowell Aviation Technologies, which owns one plane.

Remarkably enough, Premier Executive Transport and Crowell Aviation Technologies have the same street address in Needham, Massachusetts, 339 Washington Street, in a building that also houses the law firm, Hill and Plakias – the law firm that initially incorporated PET in Massachusetts.

A bit of investigative research reveals a web of 7 ghost companies owning 26 planes. And that all of the planes are operated by 2 larger, real corporations: Aero Aviation and Pegasus Technologies.

What is equally remarkable is that all the officers listed for Premier Executive Transport: Bryan Dyess, Steven Kent, Timothy Sperling, Audrey Taylor and Philip Quincannon, have no residential addresses, no credit history, no loan history, no employment history, none of the information that usually comes up with a brief search on most consumers in the United States.

What they do have in common is a postal box address in Arlington, Virginia, 6 km from the Pentagon.

In fact, the same postal box, is registered to 325 names, most of whom also have no residential address, no credit history, no loan history, no employment history, none of the information that usually comes up with a brief search on most consumers in the United States.

Even the company that bought the plane last year, Bayard Foreign Marketing, lists as its sole owner, a man named Leonard T. Bayard who, as it turns out, is also linked to that same postal box in Virginia,6 km from the Pentagon.

Some of this was published last June in The New York Times. In the article, the Times published photographs of some of the planes in question. One plane was of particular interest to some people in Boston, because the plane had on its tail the logo of The Boston Red Sox. The Red Sox is a baseball team that had not won the World Series (the US baseball championship) since 1918. Two years ago, the Red Sox made it to the championship game, and were playing the St. Louis cardinals, in St Louis, Missouri. During the championship series, the coach of the Red Sox, Terry Francona, needed to go from Missouri to Pennsylvania to attend his son's college graduation. One of the owners of the Red Sox, Philip H. Morse, turns out to own a plane, a Gulfstream 5 with the tail number N85VM. He sends the plane to transport Francona from Missouri to Pennsylvania. The very next day, the same plane transported Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen, born in Syria, from JFK to Jordan, on his way to Syria where he will spend 10 months in a hell-hole, detained, and tortured.

Arar's story may also be familiar to you. But it is also a story worth repeating, again, and again.

On September 26, 2002, Arar was returning from a family vacation in Tunisia. He was going home to Canada, where he lives. His flight took him from Tunisia to Zurich, and from Zurich to New York's John F. Kennedy airport, from where he was going to catch another flight to Montreal. At JFK, he was stopped by the immigration services and handed over to the FBI, who proceeded to detain and interrogate him for ten days, before being rendered, shipped to be tortured in Syria. He was transported by a Gulfstream 5 with the tail number N85VM, which took him from New York, to Italy, to Jordan. From Amman, he was driven to Syria, whereupon arrival he was handed to the Syrian security services, who proceed to beat him, torture him, and detain him for 10 months.

This is how Arar described his ordeal.

On October 5, 2003, 10 months and 10 days after his arrest, thanks to the valiant effort of his wife, Monia Mazigh, Arar was released and returned to Canada.

His story is also the story of Lebanese born German citizen, Khaled El Masri, whose case is well known in Germany, and that of Mamdouh Habib,

in Australia.
All cases of mistaken identity.

All cases of zealous prosecutors, a scared population, and vicious policies of domination through fear, killing, torture, and rendition.

I began working on this project about two and a half years ago.

By the time I had presented this material for the first time, in June 2005, the stories about the prisons and the planes were beginning to appear in the western and Arab popular press.

I suppose that anyone who has read a newspaper, or listened to a news report in the past year has already heard all about the not-so-secret secret prisons, and about the not-so-secret secret planes.

Better yet, I suppose that anyone who has read a newspaper, or listened to a news report in the past year is not the least bit surprised by the not-so-secret secret prisons and the not-so-secret, secret planes.

At various times in the past 2 years,

I was hoping that the work of gathering this material, of putting these stories together would be more difficult. "This is too easy," I kept thinking to myself. "2 billion dollars spent on intelligence, so that an artist with an internet connection and some free time can uncover all this? This can't be."

Eventually, skepticism gave way to paranoia.

I was convinced that the information I was gathering was being fed to me. I was not finding anything. It was finding me. I was certain that I was being allowed access to information, to data that organized itself into a seemingly clear PowerPoint presentation, a neat story, a story that could and would be digested with equal amounts of ambivalence, pleasure and boredom by a sympathetic audience. Or, more likely, as I have been discovering, by an audience that is just about fed-up with yet another, most-likely sincere but ultimately flawed, self-congratulatory, empty and partisan grand-standing: The by-now familiar liberal and not-so-liberal bashing of the Bush Administration and its policies in the war on terror.

As I was reminded recently by my friend Tom:

"Is there anything more de rigueur?" in fact, Tom went so far as to say: "Is there anything more fashionable anymore than to make public the contradictions at the heart of the US administration's war on terror?

To assume that these things (state torture and kidnapping) go on only because not enough people know about them is itself a problem," I was told.

"What if these policies are effective NOT because they have not been examined enough?

What if these policies are effective NOT because no one has bothered to show that they are short-sighted and ill conceived?

What if those who kidnap and torture today depend on public exposure and visibility as part and parcel of what they do?

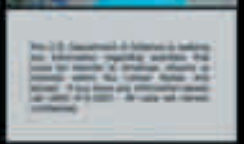
In other words, what if these things can go on today because they are too clearly visible, broadcast live, entirely predictable, In fact, they have been announced outright in advance?"

Moreover, Tom mockingly asked me: "Did you actually believe that public officials can still be shamed and embarrassed into action by this unveiling of practices that are taking place in plain sight, and not out of sight?

Do you actually believe that one more story, one more picture, one more piece of investigative journalism disguised as a lecture, a performance, or art (or whatever you want to call it), will bring you and others around? Will force you and others to stop shrugging your shoulders?


PASSPORT


12
13
USA



Can you, for a second, consider that this faith you have in the informative power of images and words doesn't just fail to stop state sponsored torture, but may actually prevent it from stopping?"

I should tell you that I was caught off guard by all of this!

I must have had faith in something to have spent two years tracing the companies owned by Philip Quicannon, and trying to figure out how many of the 325 names registered to that postal box in Arlington, VA, have residential addresses?

But faith in what, I no longer knew.

Noticing my confused and panicked state, Tom finally added:

"Didn't you stand in 1982 in a parking lot in front of your mother's house in East Beirut and watch, photograph, and cheer the Israeli destruction of West Beirut?

Didn't you stand in front of your Palestinian mother's house, and wish for the kind of destruction being inflicted on the PLO and the Palestinian and Lebanese population of not-your-part of Beirut?"

I knew that Tom was smart, but I didn't know that he could be mean as well.

Feeling aggressed and even more panicked, I hastily replied:

"Yes, I did. But I won't do it again."

Little did I know. for a while now, I have been trying to remember, on what day I left Lebanon for the last time, this past summer.

I remember leaving by boat again.

I remember the shelling on that beautiful, early summer evening as my father and sister quickly said goodbye.

I remember taking photographs from the American navy boat that was transporting others and me to Cyprus.

I remember arriving in Limassol (or was it Larnaca?) and producing this image – pleased with the effects produced by my newly acquired digital camera.

I vaguely remember my first night in Baltimore, in the United States, where the flight chartered by the American State department landed, and where I was handed a business card urging others and me to inform American officials about suspicious individuals we had encountered in Lebanon.

I recently found the date in question.

In my passport from that time, page 12.

September 10, 2006.

Almost 9 months ago.

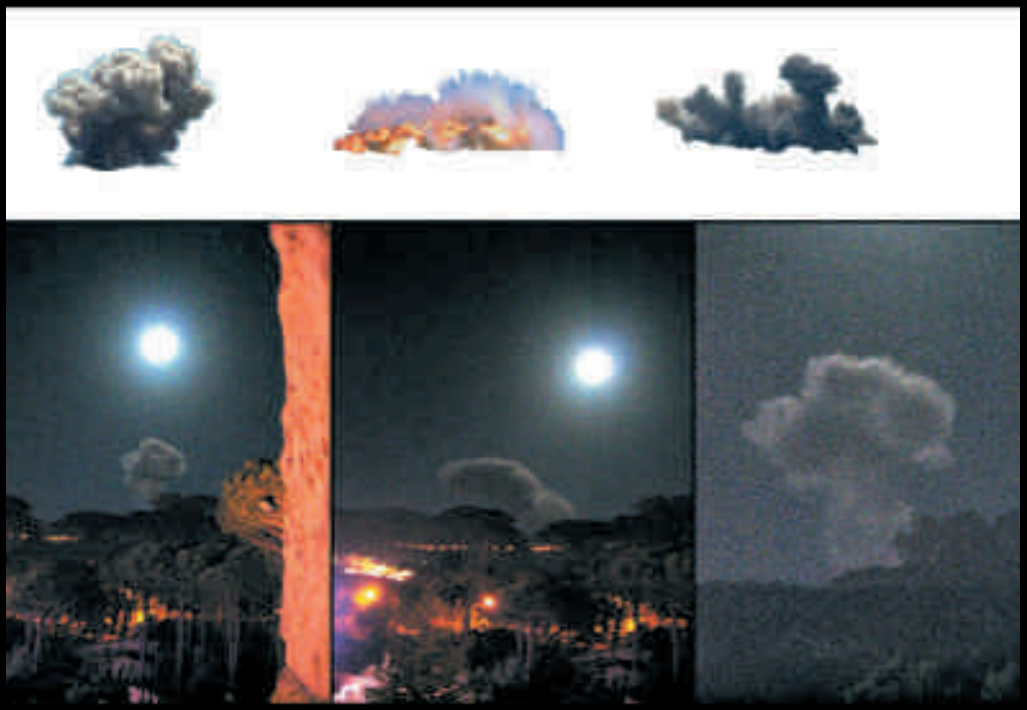
This was 21 days after the end of yet another Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

An invasion that, once again, I watched and photographed.

I watched the Israeli Army as it killed and tried to destroy North, East, and South Lebanon, to the tune of 4000 rockets and bombs per day, targeting all national airways and sea ports,150 bridges, 30,000 houses. 600 kilometers of roads, electrical power plants, factories, warehouses, dams, television and radio stations, hospitals, ambulances, civil defense centers, schools, mosques, churches, and 80 km of sea coast.

Please don't drag me into a discussion about who started this, this time.

I have been wondering lately about whether I should drag you into a discussion about who started this, this time.



I have been wondering lately about whether I should drag you into a discussion about whether Hizbullah and Lebanon deserved all of this, this time.

I have decided against it, because I was afraid that I might cause you to laugh.

And that, like my friend, Jalal, I was afraid that if you started laughing, that you might not be able to stop.

I was afraid that you might die from laughter.

As I almost did when I was interrogated by the FBI.

As I almost did when I talked to Steve Kurtz and Maher Arrar. As I mentioned earlier, this presentation is just Part I of a project that can and will probably go on.

At this point, I just need a break; I need to catch my breath.

I should also mention, that after all this, I am no longer sure what direction this project can take.

As I also said earlier, I will be here on stage for the next 15-20 minutes should any of you want to meet or talk face to face.

I would like to thank you for your patience,

And I wish you a good night.

Thank you.

Walid Raad is a media artist and assistant professor of art at Cooper Union in New York. Raad's work includes video, photography and literary essays. He has exhibited at documenta 11, the Venice Biennale, the Whitney Biennial and numerous other festivals throughout Europe, the Middle East and North America. Raad is also a founding member of The Atlas Group, Beirut/New York (www.theatlasgroup.org) and a member of the Arab Image Foundation, Beirut (www.fai.org.lb).

ARTIST TALKS

Hyphenated Identities and the National Security Panic, Naeem Mohaiemen/Visible Collective
Enamlima Sekarang (65 now)/Taking it Personally/Not Talking to a Brick Wall, Nadiah Bamadhaj

Hyphenated Identities and the National Security Panic

Naeem Mohaiemen/Visible Collective

The Visible Collective is a group of artists and activists who came together in 2004 to look at the ways in which the migration impulse clashes with definitions of national identity, patriotism and "loyalty". Since 2001, there has been an intensification of tensions between immigrants and the North American national project. One of the areas our research touches upon is the post-9/11 racial profiling and detention of immigrants, a large portion of whom are Arabs and South Asians.

Immigrants are ubiquitous in the daily lives of modern cities. In a city like New York, they are the ones who drive our taxis, sell us newspapers and coffee, clean our restaurant tables and work in kitchens. In Beirut, they work in cleaning, childcare and as guards and construction workers. As performers of these roles, they are intimately present in our physical space yet absent from our consciousness – we don't know where they came from or any of their stories. Only when they are detained do they become hyper-visible as "sleeper cells."

The desire to identify "traitors" inside American borders has a long lineage. In the past century, we saw the jailing of German-American citizens ("potential saboteurs") during WWI[1] and of Japanese-Americans during WWII[2], the detention of immigrants in an anarchist bomb scare in 1919, the execution of suspected Soviet spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Joseph McCarthy's 'Red Scare'[3], the infiltration of the Deacons for Defense and Justice[4] and the Black Panthers[5] and the rise of the border vigilantes, the Minutemen[6]. W.E.B. Dubois's question to African Americans, "How does it feel to be a problem?" has now been redirected and made freshly relevant for a new population.

My Manolo Blahnik Fetish

There is a pattern to the cases that ultimately receive national attention in the "war on terror". The horror-glamour allure of detention practices in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo as well as the extra-judicial procedures of "Extraordinary Rendition" have until now stolen the spotlight. However,

1 www.foitimes.com

2 Hayashi, Brian Masaru, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment,* Princeton University Press, 2004.

3 The Second Red Scare which took place during the presidency of Joseph McCarthy in the period of 1947-1957, refers to increased fears of espionage by communists that spurred aggressive investigations including branding (red-baiting), blacklisting, jailing and deportation of people suspected of following communist or other left-wing ideology. For more reading see: Fried, Richard, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective,* Oxford University Press, 1991.

4 The Deacons for Defense and Justice were an armed African American civil rights organisation in the southern U.S.. The group was formed in November 1964 to protect civil rights workers against the violence of the Ku Klux Klan.

5 The Black Panther Party was an African-American organisation founded to promote civil rights and self-defense. It was active within the United States in the late 1960s into the 1970s. For more reading see: Peniel, Joseph ed., *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era,* Routledge, 2006.

the majority of detention cases that we were concerned with were far more banal: A taxi driver gets stopped for running a red light and a routine check[7] of his immigration papers reveals that he is "out of status". The state is within its rights to deport such a person and the case may be accelerated if that person comes from one of the "suspect" countries. These cases do not fit within any grand, over-arching discourse. We were drawn to exploring them precisely because they were invisible even within the countercultural narrative of resistance.

Hyper-visible advertising that bludgeons its way into public urban spaces has been an influence on my own work. I was looking at the giant banners for GAP's "Casual, Fresh American Style" campaign featuring *Sex and the City*'s Sarah Jessica Parker clad in Manolo Blahnik shoes[8]. The sheer size of those billboards moved the Collective to think about representations of immigrant populations, such as licenses for newspaper and fruit vendors, or hack licenses in the cloudy, scratched glass partitions of taxicabs – all blurry micro-images that one stumbles upon. Our response was to insert the presence of people who had been targets of security sweeps into that larger-than-life GAP Americana format. The forms we used were at first images (*Casual Fresh American Style:* Wall prints), then text (*Nahnu Wahad, But Really Are We One?:* Lightbox) and finally image-text composites (*When an Interpreter Could Not Be Found*: Wall print series).

The presence of lawyers and activists in our group pushed us towards more text-based work, including work based on specific laws (*Prudent Juries, Or How To Read The Law*: Wall print). We felt we had to focus on "hard facts," so that audiences would not dismiss our work as "propaganda."

Good Citizens Make Obedient Prisoners

The Collective closely studied the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II as a possible template to understand current dynamics. A close look at four legal cases (Hirabayashi vs. United States (1943), Yasui vs. United States (1943), Korematsu vs. United States (1944) and Ex parte Endo (1944)) reveals that they presented a direct challenge to the US government's right to detain citizens during World War II. These were the only four individuals to challenge their detention in court – hundreds of thousands of other Japanese-Americans tried to be "good citizens" by going to the internment camps without protest. Although these cases reached the Supreme Court and the government eventually apologised for the mass internments and paid reparations to former detainees, the legal precedent was not overturned. Today, 60 years after that case, the law still allows the government to carry

Nahnu Wahad, But Really Are We One? Visible Collective/ Naeem Mohaiemen, Anandaroop Roy
Inkjet Print, 8'x2', 2005
(Source: Post 9/11 Detainee names from Migration Policy Institute).

6 The Minuteman Project is "an activist organisation started in April 2005 by a group of private U.S. individuals to monitor the U.S.-Mexico border's flow of illegal immigrants, although it has expanded to include the U.S.-Canada border as well. The name comes from the minutemen who fought in the American Revolution. The group's founder and principal director is Jim Gilchrist who lives 50 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border in California". (www.wikipedia.org/_Inc.). See: Gilchrist, Jim, Corsi, Jerome R. and Tancredo, Tom, *Minutemen: The Battle to Secure America's Borders*, World Ahead Publishing, 2006.

7 Local police are now allowed to run immigration checks, another post-9/11 innovation.

8 www.shoeblogs.com

out mass detentions if it decides that prevailing conditions qualify as a "time of war" or "national emergency," and if an identifiable population is deemed a national security threat.

It is extremely vital to tease out these and other historic parallels. The Muslim imaginary often contains a victim narrative that hyperventilates to the point of imagining that profiling, isolation and ghettoisation are only happening to "us". As artists committed to undermining groupthink, we feel it is essential to bring out the linkages between the present crisis and the conditions that other minority communities experienced throughout American history.

I Failed the Cricket Test

There have been far-reaching transformations in laws affecting immigrants, but equally dangerous are the changes in perceptions and attitudes such as the tactical shift in the tools used by border vigilantes like the Minutemen. Xenophobes can now re-brand themselves "super-patriots" who merely want to "protect" national borders. Much of this new rhetoric revolves around the concept of "legality" and even the standard liberal response stops short of advocating rights for undocumented immigrants. Whenever we present this project, we invariably get one audience member saying, "These people may not be terrorists, but they have broken the law by being here illegally." Once the word "illegal" is out, dialogue comes to a halt.

The conversation over national identity – hyphenated or otherwise – is very charged in North America and Europe. Questions of "loyalty", "belonging" and "core values" are evident in instruments such as the proposed "Britishness" test.[9] British politician Norman Tebbitt's "cricket test"[10] has returned in new guises. But there is also an active resistance to these ideas, such as one BBC viewer's response to the "Britishness" test in the form of satirical questions: "What side should the port be passed on? Which breed of dog does the Queen favour? If you bump into someone and it's not your fault, do

9 news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3077964.stm

10 In 1990, Tebbitt said that the true test for the "Britishness" of British Asians was whether they cheered for India/Pakistan or England at cricket matches. He also said, "If they wish to cover their faces and isolate themselves from the rest of the community and so thoroughly reject our culture then I cannot imagine why they want to be here at all. Perhaps they should just push off back to their own countries." (*Private Eye,* October 2006). After the July 2005 London bombings, Tebbitt's views became popular and he was seen as vindicated.

11 BBC reader's comments on new items described in website cited infootnote #9.

Nahnu Wahad, But Really Are We One?
Visible Collective/Naeem Mohaiemen, Anandaroop Roy
Lightbox with rice, 8'x2'x1', 2005
(Source: Post 9/11 Detainee names from Migration Policy Institute)

you still say sorry?"[11] Such takes can sometimes be more effective as methods of counter-attack than self-righteous anger.

Invisible Man

I recently began exploring the curious absence of Black Muslims from the ongoing debate on security. African-Americans make up 40% of the US Muslim population and are the fastest growing group among prison converts. By contrast, Arabs constitute only 12%[12] and South Asians 24%. These ratios are an inverted pyramid of national fears about the "nature" of "American Muslims." The discrepancy between statistics and the media hype is especially puzzling if you look at the history of rabidly racialised and essentialist attitudes towards crime. Following the notorious 1989 Central Park gang-rape incident[13], the imagined black male practice of "wilding" was introduced to the lexicon. There was also incredibly racist rhetoric around that case. Terms like "savage wolf packs", "beasts in the park" (Peter Brimelow, who also attacked immigrants[14]), "super predators" and the "full moon" effect were all used to reference the presumed culprits. Journalist Pete Hamill informed New York that the rapists "were coming downtown from a world of crack, welfare, guns, knives, indifference and ignorance. They were coming from a land with no fathers."[15] In contrast with that media hysteria, today there is restraint and a lack of hyper-racialisation in the coverage of any terrorism case involving Black Muslims.

During the Washington DC sniper incident[16], *National Review* online editor Jonah Goldberg made the following confident predictions about *al Qaeda* cells: "This is part of the fall offensive along with the attacks in Kuwait and off the coast of Yemen. Obviously, we won't know for sure. But what I find most persuasive is the possibility that this is a two-man team. That just strikes me as way too professional."[17] One of the snipers, John Allen Muhammad, was indeed Muslim but inconveniently he was an African-American and a Gulf War veteran. Similar dynamics were vis-

12 62% of Arab Americans are Christian and another 13% report no affiliation.

13 In 1989, five black teenagers were arrested in connection with the brutal rape of an investment banker who was jogging in Central Park. The case became the centre of a frenzy, as the media invented the term "wilding" to describe the imagined practice of black teenagers running wild in the city. In 2002, all five teenagers were acquitted and released after Matthew Reyes confessed to being the real rapist.

14 Brimelow, Peter, "Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster," *Harper Perennial*, 1996.

15 Hamill, Pete, "A Savage Disease", *New York Post,* April 23, 1989.

16 During three weeks in October 2002, ten people were killed and three injured by snipers who were shooting people in various locations throughout the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan Area.

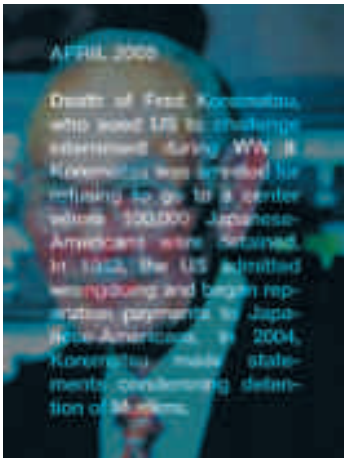
17 www.nationalreview.com, *National Review* online, October 12, 2002.

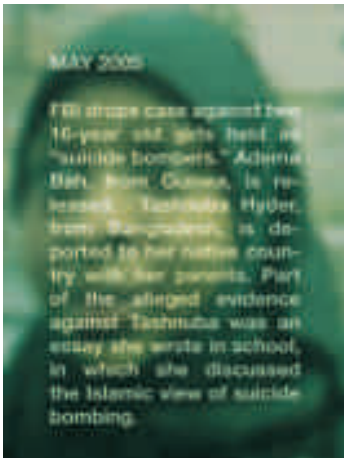
ible with the Portland cell[18], all of which involved African-Americans but did not lead to any media hyperventilation along racial lines.

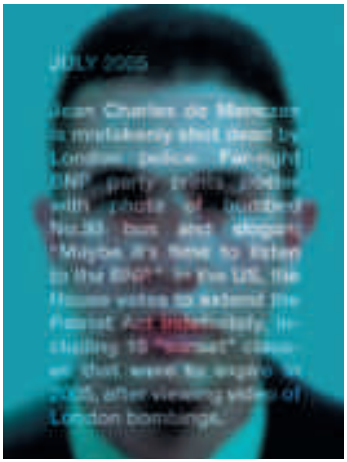
The current terror discourse sees names, accents and assimilation as indicators of whether the "wogs"[19] are here to roll an honest burrito or blow up the World Trade Center. African-Americans complicate this picture for several reasons. Firstly, you cannot easily define Black Muslims as "new arrivals" or "outsiders", so the notion of increasing security by tightening borders and increasing deportations falls through. Black Panther Party member Eldrige Cleaver's "severe new restrictions" evoke today's "no fly"[20] lists: "1) I was not to go outside a seven mile area; specifically, I was not to cross the Bay Bridge. 2) I was to keep my name out of the news for the next six months; specifically, my face was not to appear on any TV screen. 3) I was not to make any more speeches and 4) I was not to write anything critical of the California Department of Corrections or any California politician. In short, I was to play dead, or I would be sent back to prison."[21] These are historic parallels that complicate the neat picture and repel media and terror analysts.

Immigrant Representation and its Discontents

With image production, there is often a desire to locate the lived experience of the author within the work. Some audiences wanted to see the Visible Collective as "representative" of the most vulnerable group – namely, immigrants and/or Muslims. On an objective





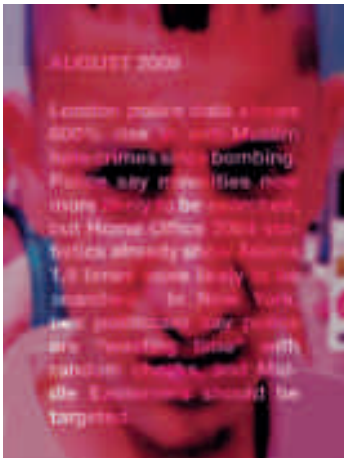


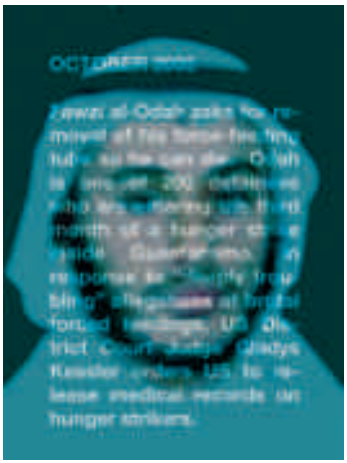
18 Sometimes referred to as "The Portland Seven", Patrice Lumumba Ford, Jeffrey Leon Battle, October Martinique Lewis, Muhammad Ibrahim Bilal, Ahmed Ibrahim Bilal, Habis Abdulla al Saoub and Maher "Mike" Hawash were arrested in Portland in 2002 and named in a 15-count indictment that included charges of conspiracy to levy war against the United States and conspiracy to provide material support and resources to *al Qaeda*.

19 "Wog" is a slang word with several meanings, some commonly derogatory, some not. It is generally used as a label for the natives of India, North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

20 The "No Fly" List is a list created and maintained by the U.S. government of people who are not permitted to board a commercial aircraft for travel in the U.S.. It buttresses the Secondary Security Screening Selection that tags would-be passengers for extra inspection.

21 *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*. A Ramparts Book, Random House, NY, 1969/ www.mindfully.org/Reform/Cleaver-33-Years-Old19apr68.htm





level, this definition does not apply to all members of the Collective. Even if it did, our level of risk is mediated by our class privilege, citizenship and access whereas communal vulnerability comes more precisely from variations in citizenship and class positions. *Newsweek International* editor Fareed Zakaria said on *The Daily Show* that he is "100% legal." It is indeed possible for the high profile Zakarias to feel safe even in times of soft war. Tunku Varadarajan of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that he was willing to pay the price of additional security checks. Ultimately, he is prominent enough to feel assured that nothing bad will happen to him. Similarly, when *New Left Review* editor Tariq Ali was stopped in Frankfurt airport, he was immediately able to contact a city mayor who was a good friend of his. However, working class immigrants with "Muslim" surnames do not share these feelings of reassurance because they lack access and security. That is the key difference between them and the elites within immigrant and minority communities.

Art & Action or Art vs. Action

The dynamics of working in an informal "collective" brought out many tensions that exist between the objectives of visual arts and those of direct activism. For those members who are fulltime political activists, there is always the question of whether creating a print for a gallery show actually furthers "the cause." During interactions with art spaces, we sometimes find a gap between interests, conversations and the final stage of

When An Interpreter Could Not Be Found, Visible Collective/ Naeem Mohaiemen, Anandaroop Roy
Series of 45 slides in window projection, 2005-2006

concrete action. When there has been a constraint on resources, some Collective members made a tactical decision to work on other projects that they felt were more result-oriented such as rallies, petitions, essays, etc. Meanwhile, there is an open-ended debate engendered by the form and content of our recent work. For instance, our interest in the conditions of immigrants in Europe and the Middle East has sometimes been interpreted as shifting the focus away from the American situation. But ultimately, we are not constructed as a "pressure group" although as individuals some of us may be involved in such activity.

Perhaps we could think of this form of artwork as triggering the "butterfly wing" effect[22]: A project may provoke an unexpected conversation somewhere in the unpredictable future. I am always hoping to have a spontaneous, unmapped, unintended and long-term effect on art-activism.

November 20, 2005

22 The idea comes from chaos theory, that small variations in the initial condition of a dynamic system may produce large variations in the long-term behaviour of the system. Meteorologist Philip Merilees presented it as a conundrum in 1972: "Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?".

Naeem Mohaiemen, artist, activist and founder of Visible Collective, works between Dhaka and New York. The Visible Collective is a collective of Muslim and other artist-activists who work to challenge and undermine distorted and limited images that are held up by media outlets and governments. With Visible Collective, he worked on *Disappeared in America* (www.disappearedinamerica.org), a project that he initiated after September 11, 2003 that looked at hyphenated identities, national security panic in the United States and Islamophobia. Collective members included Aimara Lin, Donna Golden, Josh Nimoy, Anandaroop Roy, Vivek Bald, Kristofer Dan-Bergman, among others. www.shobak.org

Enamlima Sekarang (65 now) Taking it Personally Not Talking to a Brick Wall

Nadiah Bamadhaj

I have structured this presentation to discuss three works that I produced in three countries in the last few years: *Enamlima Sekarang, Taking it Personally* and *Not Talking to a Brick Wall.* In the process of defining what is "home", I found it impossible to claim that I come from one place or have one nationality. Instead, I have chosen to present my work as emerging from the times and places that have shaped me, politically and intellectually. These times and places involve countries – Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore – as well as issues of history. By history, I not only mean my view of certain past events, but my response to the ways in which these events were constructed and regurgitated as propaganda; and particularly, my thoughts about what sort of history our present would make in the future.

Enamlima Sekarang (65 now) (2003)

During the thirty years of the Mahathir and Suharto eras, it was virtually impossible to know anything about the events in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore due to the restrictions on media. My brother Kamal was the person in my life who was truly interested in Southeast Asian human rights and alternative histories. He was the first to inform me about the massacre of the three million Indonesian cadres of the Communist Party in 1965. At the time, I did not really believe him; moreover, I tended to brush off his efforts to school me about regional history as activist condescension.

My relationship with Indonesia began when Kamal was killed by the Indonesian military while campaigning for independence in East Timor in 1991. I began this relationship by trying to understand the origins of the regime that had taken my brother's life. The massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party members in 1965 was Suharto's political introduction. The carnage was the aftermath of an alleged communist coup attempt which resulted in the deaths of six top military leaders. Suharto, who was next in command, claimed to have upstaged the coup and went on to become Indonesia's president for the next 32 years. In his six-month transition from a

lieutenant colonel to president, he orchestrated the complete annihilation of a legal political party with ten million members and affiliates. Thus, contemporary Southeast Asian politics and the formation of the Association of South East Asian Nations with its non-interventionist policies began with the Suharto regime and with one of the most violent events in our region's history.

When I went to live in Central Java on a fellowship in 2002, armed with my personal agenda, I was full of preconceived conceptions about how people felt about this event in their history. I assumed that since Suharto had been forced to resign a few years before, his construction of the events in 1965 would automatically be opened for re-examination. I began questioning people I met about the massacres in 1965.

At the end of my first year there, I produced an installation of video works that tried to articulate my perceptions of how the Indonesians I spoke with felt about the events, at the time of their occurrence in 1965 and at the time of my interviews in 2003.

The first thing that struck me when I arrived in Indonesia was how the official version of 1965 remained perfectly intact. This version of events documents the brutality of the communist coup that killed the six generals and how Suharto aborted the coup and saved the day. This version survives in school textbooks, movies, street signs, monuments, military rituals, celebrated anniversaries and communist-bashing during the month of Ramadan. The massacre, torture and detention of millions of communist party members and affiliates still did not warrant official mention.

I spoke to ex-detainees who kept using the same phrase to describe the official version of events – *diputarbalikkan,* or *putar*

Suharto at the launching of his book on the alleged G30S Movement of the Indonesian Communist Party (ICP) on April 20, 1966.

balik which means "in the official version, the events were reversed".

In the official discourse, the aborted coup was called the "Gerakan 30 September" or "G30S" movement. Those who were not killed that year were imprisoned under the broad accusation of collaboration in the G30S coup. During Suharto's presidency and even today in certain parts of Indonesia, ex-detainees are ostracised in various ways. For example, they are still issued identity papers marked *ex-tapol* or ex-political detainee. The discrimination does not stop there; it includes the ex-detainee's family whose members are subjected to similar treatment, making 1965 part of a family's identity. An ex-detainee I spoke to identified herself as coming from a *keluarga enamlima* or a "65 family".

On the other hand, the six generals who were killed in the coup were renamed *Pahlawan Revolusi*, or "Revolutionary Heroes". The Suharto government produced a three-hour feature film about how communist leaders had plotted the coup, kidnapped the generals from their wives and children and then tortured and murdered them in a frenzy. This film was compulsory viewing in schools during Suharto's presidency. Most of the young people I interviewed about 1965 expressed opinions that were based entirely on this film. Moreover, although they had not yet been born in 1965, these young people were much more afraid of mentioning communists than those who had actually experienced the events.

In almost every person I spoke to about 1965, there was a palpable fear. I was constantly questioned by other artists as to why I was asking these questions, in some cases even scolded for doing so. Even those who were interested in

Top left: Video Still, '*Putar Balik*' (Reverse), 2' 37", 2003.

Top right: 'Stepping on' the Alleged G30S Movement of the ICP, Jawa Tengah, 1966

Bottom left: Video Still, *Potret* (Portrait), 1' 04", 2003

Bottom right: The six widows of the revolutionary heroes who died in the alleged G30S ICP movement .

taking another look at that period of history maintained a united front against me as an outsider, particularly in public. However, many people eventually opened up to me – but only after several months – when no one else was listening.

It was then that I realised that it was imperative to talk to people in private, particularly to the older generation of women. Sometimes I was the first person they had ever confided in about their experiences in prison. During these interviews, I realised that feelings of humiliation, anger, vengeance and even denial were still present, four decades after the event.

At the other end of the spectrum was a resignation to the events. *"Inilah takdir kami"* or "this is our fate". Most interviewees spoke these words not only when talking about their experiences, but also when they talked about how the lives of their families were altered from that point on. This submission to fate was very pronounced in Java.

I slowly began to realise why people were so fearful of an event that had happened so many years

Left:
Video Still, '*Anak Muda*' (Youth), 1' 54", 2003.

Right
President Sukarno briefing journalists at the Palace of Independence in 1966.

Left:
Video Still, '*Beku*' (Frozen), 3' 24", 2003

Right
Still from the funeral of the Revolutionary Heroes on October 5, 1965.

Left:
Video Still, Rape, 1'46", 2003.

Right:
Capture of suspects involved in the alleged G30S ICP Movement in Central Jakarta on November 1, 1965.

ago. I had had a clear assumption, based on my own experience that the massacres were conducted by the military. However, I learnt that the murders of such large numbers of people in such a short amount of time necessitated community participation – militias of young men, trained and provoked by military personnel. Those who had killed and those who had died lived in the same neighbourhoods. This meant the environment of fear was created by and based upon not only the fear of repetition, but also on the fear of retribution. A friend of mine who was the son of a person who had participated in the killings, described himself as a *korban* or victim, rather than a *tersangka,* suspect.

At the time, the primary incentive used by the military to provoke young men to participate in the killings was to represent communists as atheists. In Java, the massacres were carried out mainly by the youth wing of *Nahdlathul Ulama* or the NU, the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia. Towards the end of my fellowship, an NU youth wing leader gave me an anguished interview about the need for his movement to confront its history including the way it was co-opted by the military. He said that *pelurusan sejarah*, or the "ironing out of history", is imperative in a country where the military is still very much involved in politics, because, as he said, "*Pada suatu hari nanti NU bisa di PKI-kan*" which roughly means that it is possible that the NU, as a Muslim organisation, may one day be "made communist".

At the workshop for this video series, some artists saw the work as revenge for my brother's death. The fellowship officials said my focus was biased. The activists were divided; my mother said it was

Left:
Video Still, '*Takdir*' (Fate) 2' 54", 2003.

Right:
Youths ready to assist in the overthrow of the alleged G30S ICP Movement at Mount Merapi in Central Java.

Left:
Video Still, '*Korban/Tersangka*' (Victim/Suspect), 1' 13", 2003.

Right:
General A.H. Nasution and leader of the religious faction, '*Nahdlatul Ulama*', Dr. Idham Chalid.

black; my father burst into tears. The show was rejected by five art institutions in Kuala Lumpur. Yet, in spite of the fact that I did not agree with this, I had come a little closer to understanding how some people can enforce their own forgetfulness and uphold a certain version of history, for the sake of maintaining a sense of peace.

Taking it Personally (2005)

The transition from creating work on Indonesian history to looking at architecture in Kuala Lumpur was quite fluid for me. I see state-sponsored architecture as forms on the landscape that will document us in the future.

If a building's design, style or placement attempts to push a certain political or social-cultural agenda, it becomes a form of propaganda. Upon construction, it becomes a government's version of history. I selected my favorite buildings in Kuala Lumpur, built within four of the country's more recent political phases. My selection was based on a combination of my interpretation of the constructed meanings of their forms and my own personal memories of those sites. In the process of challenging the kinds of history architecture was going to write in the future, part of my strategy was to situate these buildings in the past.

The Royal Selangor Club, or the RSC, was built in 1894 and was the centre of social activity for about 700 British administrators and rubber and palm tree planters in Kuala Lumpur. In those days, the club was British only, with the exception of a few Malay sultans. The British forged relationships with the sultans and other noblemen and governed various parts of Malaya through these advisory roles. In some states this worked well while in others there was a considerable amount of resistance, depending on the royalty involved. Today, the RSC is still a members-only club, with one of the last men-only bars in the city. What used to be the cricket field, in front of the club, was renamed *Dataran Merdeka*, the "Field of Independence", after independence in 1957. I was thinking about the time when the RSC and a part of Kuala Lumpur so familiar to me now, were off-limits to their own inhabitants.

Angkasapuri was built in the early 1960s and is known as one of the monuments to the nation building of the post-independence period. Many of the state-sponsored buildings of the 1960s were an attempt to introduce a

Left:
Video Still, '*Maaf Pak, Boleh Tanya…*', (Excuse me sir, may I ask…), 3' 44", 2003.

Right:
The Royal Selangor Club (RSC) or *Nahdlatul Ulama*.

modernist look to Kuala Lumpur's landscape. What is unusual about this particular building is that it is devoid of any specific religious or cultural references. It was designed as an experiment of monumentality in the tropics. It was and still is, the government's radio and television broadcasting (or propaganda) headquarters. I remember seeing this big building from the school bus as it picked up students from a village at the foot of the hill underneath Angkasapuri. It was one of the last remaining villages in the city, complete with wooden houses on stilts, where the urban poor resided. In my mind, the contrast between the village at the foot of the hill and the bulky form at the top remains vivid, reflecting an image of what we were supposed to be.

The Maybank building was one of the first skyscrapers built in Kuala Lumpur during the mid-1980s. It marked the beginning of Mahathirism or "rapid development" and the nationalisation of symbols associated with the culture and the religion of the ethnic Malay community. This building's design, as urban legend would have it, is based on the *keris* – a dagger used traditionally in ceremonies, wars and executions. Today, the keris is the main cultural symbol of the Malays, referring to their political dominance in the country. Currently, Malaysia's government policies divide the country between Malays, Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Indian and "Other". Most of those policies were formed after a period of political unrest and riots between the Chinese and Malay communities in 1969. During the Mahathir years, a standard government response to questioning the state's ethnically-divisive policies was, "you should be thankful things aren't like 1969".

The Palace of Justice houses the civil and *sharia'a* courts. It is one of many similar buildings that make up the new government complex of Putrajaya, built in the late 1990s. Many secular buildings in Kuala Lumpur have begun to use

Left:
Digital Still,
Royal Selangor Club,
'You're in My House', 2005.

Right:
Angkasapuri was built in the early 1960s and is known as one of the "nation-building" buildings of the post-independence period.

Left:
Digital Print,
Angkasapuri (Government Telecommunications Building) in a village, 2005.

Right:
The Maybank building was one of the first skyscrapers built in Kuala Lumpur in the mid-1980s.

domes and details commonly used in mosques but at an awe-inspiring scale. Architectural references cite these buildings as Moorish or Moghul and even Arabesque, but there is little doubt that in the local context these buildings are intended to represent Islam as Malaysia's national religion. In Malaysia, Islamic references have been used in most government-sponsored building projects over the last 20 years although Islam is only embraced by approximately 50% of the population. Other communities are not represented in these constructions, yet appear – or claim – to be indifferent to them.

My final piece of work combines architecture and the notions of family history. At the end of 2004, my sister had just finished making a short documentary on the history of our family whose members are mostly based in Singapore. She discovered that each family member not only had a different version of Bamadhaj history, but that some versions were so conflicting that they cancelled each other out. One of the central figures in the documentary was our great grandfather, Omar Bamadhaj. He was a second generation Bamadhaj from Hadramaut who settled in Singapore. Many stories about Omar revolved around a house he had built in Singapore at the end of the 1800s.

Not Talking to a Brick Wall (2005)

During the documentary-making process, my father, who was one of many grandchildren born in that house, spoke about it with tremendous pride. But he also remembered being afraid of his grandfather; and that he and the other children used to sneak past him without making a sound. When I finally visited the house last year, I realised my father had failed to mention that we no longer owned it. This and my father's memory of fearing Habeb Omar, made me upset. The lack of affection between fathers and their children is one of the few things the Bamadhajs have managed to pass down from one generation to the next.

I went through the material from my sister's documentary and found some photographs of the house then jotted down the idea of one generation of Bamadhajs stepping back to have a word with an earlier generation. This video is

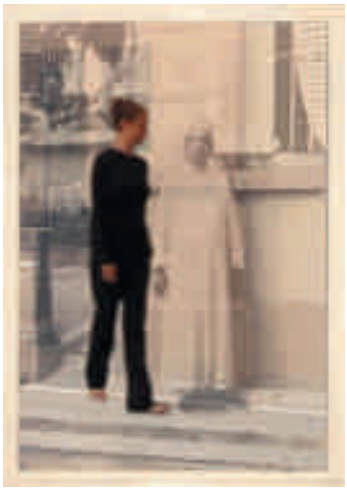
Digital Still, 'Palace of Justice in Indifference', 2005.

Left:
'The Palace of Justice that Houses the Civil and *Shariaa* Courts'.

Right:
Digital Still,
'Maybank in 1969', 2005.

based on the premise that, despite the iconographic quality of old family photographs, they are still just moments. We can neither access our history in them nor find explanations for how we have turned out.

November 24, 2005



Video Stills, *Not Talking to a Brick Wall*, 5' 34", 2005.

Nadiah Bamadhaj was born in Petaling Jaya, West Malaysia in 1968. Trained as a sculptor, she now produces drawing, video and digital images. She has worked in non-governmental organisations on HIV/AIDS prevention, human rights advocacy and lectured on art at the Center for Advanced Design, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She is author of *Aksi Write* (1997), a work of non-fiction on Indonesia and East Timor, co-written with her late brother. In 2002, she was awarded the Nippon Foundation's Asian Public Intellectual Fellowship, electing to spend her year-long fellowship period in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where she produced an art-based research project on the social aftermath of Indonesia's 1965 coup attempt. Her recent artwork looks at architecture as historical and nationalist documents, the topic of research for her PhD which she started in 2006.

EXHIBITIONS

Hôtels des Transmissions, Jusqu'à un Certain Point..., Renaud Auguste-Dormeuil
A Window to the World, Tony Chakar
Hashem el-Madani Studio Practices, An exhibition curated by Lisa Lefeuvre and Akram Zaatari/The Arab Image Foundation
The Metro, Rana el Nemr
Distracted Bullets, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
Shirana Shahbazi, Shirana Shahbazi
Spring Story, Yang Zhenzhong

Hôtels des Transmissions, Jusqu'à un Certain Point...

Renaud Auguste-Dormeuil

was born in France in 1968. He has participated in group exhibitions throughout Europe. His solo exhibitions include *The Day Before: Star System* which was shown at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2006), the Fondation Caixa in Barcelona (2005) and the Swiss Institute in New York (2004).

This video installation takes viewers on a tour of Europe looking for the spots from which to transmit information in the eventuality of war or a terrorist attack. *Hôtels des Transmissions, Jusqu'à un Certain Point* (Broadcast Hotels/Up to a Certain Point) can be seen as a guide for those news correspondents who set up base on the rooftop terraces of large hotels. The action is set in a dozen European capitals which have all become theatres of operations for terror attacks. Pointing a finger at the mechanisms of news, the artist cultivates a certain sense of ambiguity compounded with his own alarmist vision.

Hôtels des transmissions, jusqu'à un certain point…, 2004 (Athens)
Courtesy In SITU Fabienne Leclerc, Paris, France.


NOGA

Top:
Hôtels des transmissions, jusqu'à un certain point…, 2004 (Brussels)
Courtesy In SITU Fabienne Leclerc, Paris, France.

Bottom:
Hôtels des transmissions, jusqu'à un certain point…, 2004 (Geneva)
Courtesy In SITU Fabienne Leclerc, Paris, France.

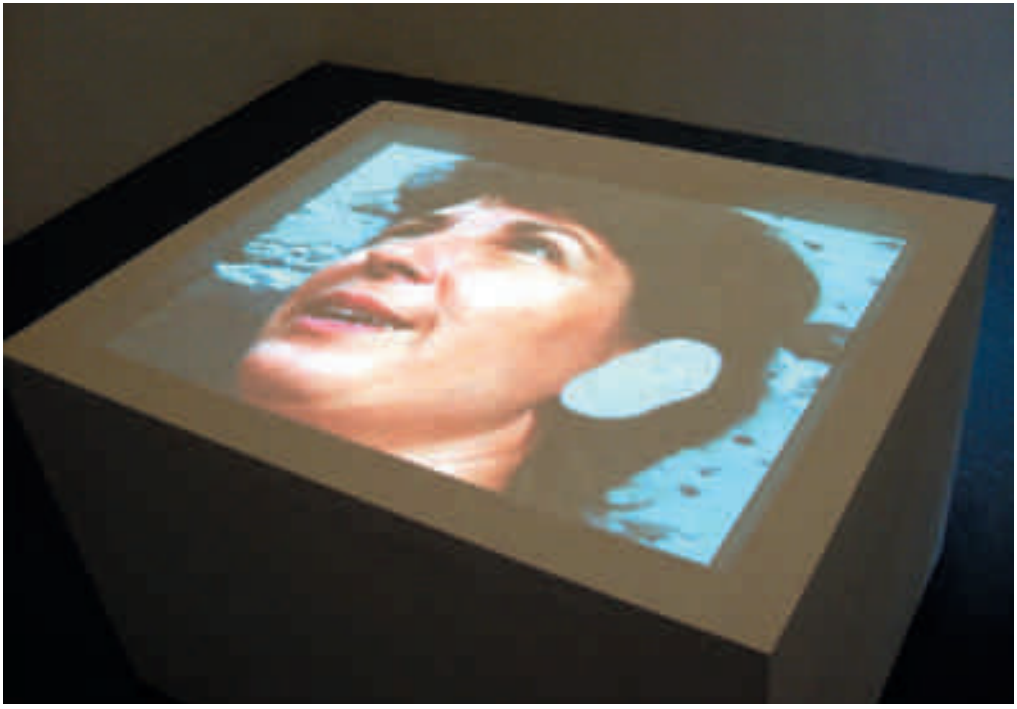
© Aukje Dekker

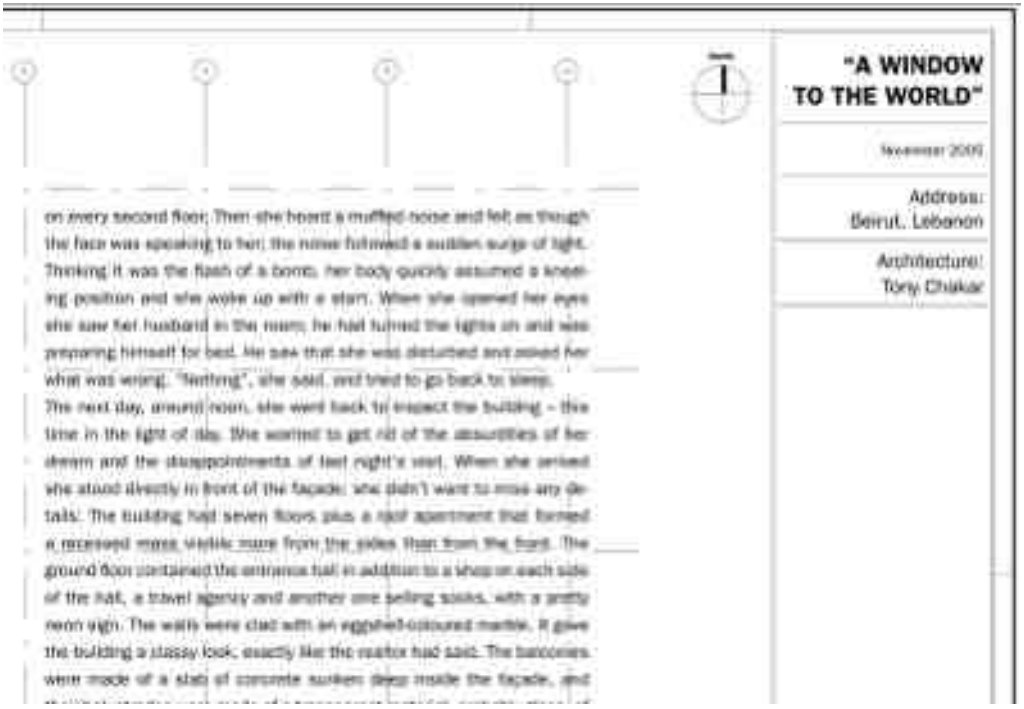
A Window to the World

Tony Chakar

is an architect born in Beirut in 1968. His work spans image-making, installation, performance and publications and includes *A Window to the World* (2005); *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair with the Atlas Group*, Walid Raad and Bilal Khbeiz (2004); *The Eyeless Map* (2003); *Four Cotton Underwear for Tony* (2000); and *A Retroactive Monument for a Chimerical City* (1999). His work has been featured in several events including the Sharjah Bienniale, the Venice Bienniale, the Sao Paolo Bienniale, the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, the Witte de With in Rotterdam, Modern Art Oxford and the Tapies Foundation in Barcelona. Chakar currently teaches History of Art and History of Architecture at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) in Beirut.

"A window to the world" is how Leon Battista Alberti described the first perspective drawings. Why a window? Who is the onlooker? What kind of world is he/she watching? Early Renaissance architects and painters (re)invented the way we look at the world around us. More than merely a simple drawing technique, the structured perspective is a conception of the world. It is also a structure of exclusion which allows the "rationalisation of the visual phenomena" to occur (Panofsky). The installation *A Window to the World* takes the form of an actual architectural project as it would be designed by an architect with plans, facades, sections and models, only to turn these forms against themselves, forcing them to reveal what is being so 'naturally' excluded: Human experience.





"A WINDOW TO THE WORLD"

November 2000

Address:
Beirut, Lebanon

Architecture:
Tony Chakar

on every second floor. Then she heard a muffled noise and felt as though the face was speaking to her; the noise followed a sudden surge of light. Thinking it was the flash of a bomb, her body quickly assumed a kneeling position and she woke up with a start. When she opened her eyes she saw her husband in the room; he had turned the lights on and was preparing himself for bed. He saw that she was disturbed and asked her what was wrong. "Nothing", she said, and tried to go back to sleep.
The next day, around noon, she went back to inspect the building – this time in the light of day. She wanted to get rid of the absurdities of her dream and the disappointments of last night's visit. When she arrived she stood directly in front of the façade; she didn't want to miss any details. The building had seven floors plus a roof apartment that formed a recessed mass visible more from the sides than from the front. The ground floor contained the entrance hall in addition to a shop on each side of the hall, a travel agency and another one selling socks, with a pretty neon sign. The walls were clad with an eggshell-coloured marble. It gave the building a classy look, exactly like the realtor had said. The balconies were made of a slab of concrete sunken deep inside the façade, and

Hashem el-Madani Studio Practices

An exhibition curated by Lisa Lefeuvre and Akram Zaatari/The Arab Image Foundation

The Madani Project studies the entire archive of studio *Shehrazade* to understand the complex relationships that bind a studio photographer to his working space, his equipment and tools as well as to the economy and aesthetics. The project also explores a photographer's ties to his clients, society and the city in general.

Initiated by Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation, the project combines Zaatari's interest in living situations as objects of study that testify to modern traditions and complex social relationships with the Arab Image Foundation's commitment to preserving, indexing and studying photographic collections in the Arab world. The Madani Project takes shape in a series of thematic exhibitions, publications and videos centered on the photographer Hashem el Madani (1928 –) and his work.

Throughout this project, the archive of studio *Shehrazade* is gradually being identified, described and preserved at the Arab Image Foundation. 'Hashem el Madani Studio Practices' studies the conventions that shape the making of portraiture studio photographs and focuses on the studio space as a space for play in a socially conservative society such as Sidon's in the 1950s and 1960s.

Pro-Palestinian resistants. Studio Shehrazade, early 1970s, Saida (Lebanon).
Madani's commentary: *"These men were Syrian. In the early 1970's many Syrians joined resistance and other patriotic parties in Lebanon. They used to come unarmed to the studio."*

Man from the Reesh family. Studio Sherazade, late 1960s, Saida (Lebanon).
Madani's commentary: *"Men in general used to like showing their muscles."*

A yound lady from the Bashasha family (left) and a friend. Studio Shehrazade, late 1958, Saida (Lebanon).
Madani's commentary: *"Films inspired people a lot. They came to perform kissing in front of the camera. In a conservative society such as Saida's, people were willing to play the kiss between two people of the same sex, but very rarely between a man and a woman. I remember only one couple who came to the studio and kissed in front of the camera, and they were not married. The rest of them were people of the same sex. One of them plays the woman, while the other plays the man."*






Hashem el-Madani was born in 1928 in Sidon, Lebanon. His father was from Madina, Saudi Arabia and was sent to Sidon as a representative of the Islamic *awqaf*. In 1947, Hashem el-Madani went to Palestine looking for a job, eventually finding work as an assistant to a Jewish immigrant photographer named Katz in Haifa. When the events of 1948 began, he returned to Sidon where he bought his first 35mm camera which cost him 200 Lebanese pounds; and began to work as an itinerant photographer. Meanwhile, he transformed a space in his parents' house into a studio. By 1953, el-Madani had raised enough money to buy new equipment and to rent a studio of his own in the same building as *Cinema Shehrazade* in Riad El Solh street. He named it *Studio Shehrazade*.

Akram Zaatari was born in 1966 and is a co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation (Beirut). Zaatari is a video artist who bases his work on collecting, studying and archiving the photographic history of the Middle East; in particular, studying the work of Lebanese photographer Hashem el-Madani (1928-) as a register of social relationships and photographic practices. His ongoing research has been the basis for a series of exhibitions and publications such as *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices* (with Lisa Lefeuvre) and *Mapping Sitting* (in collaboration with Walid Raad). Zaatari has been exploring issues pertinent to the Lebanese postwar condition, particularly the mediation of territorial conflicts and wars through television, the logic of religious and national resistance and the production and circulation of images in the context of the geographically divided Middle East particularly in *This Day* (2003) *In This House* (2005) and *All is Well on the Border* (1997).

The Arab Image Foundation (AIF) is a not-for-profit organisation established in Beirut in 1997 to locate, collect, preserve, interpret and present the photographic heritage of the Middle East and North Africa from the early 19th century to the present. To date, the research and acquisition of photographs has covered Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq as well as Arab diasporic communities in Mexico and Senegal. The collections acquired from these countries include 150,000 photographs covering the time period between 1860 to the present. Through its diverse set of activities - exhibitions, publications and videos - the Arab Image Foundation aims to encourage critical approaches towards reading and interpreting photographs.

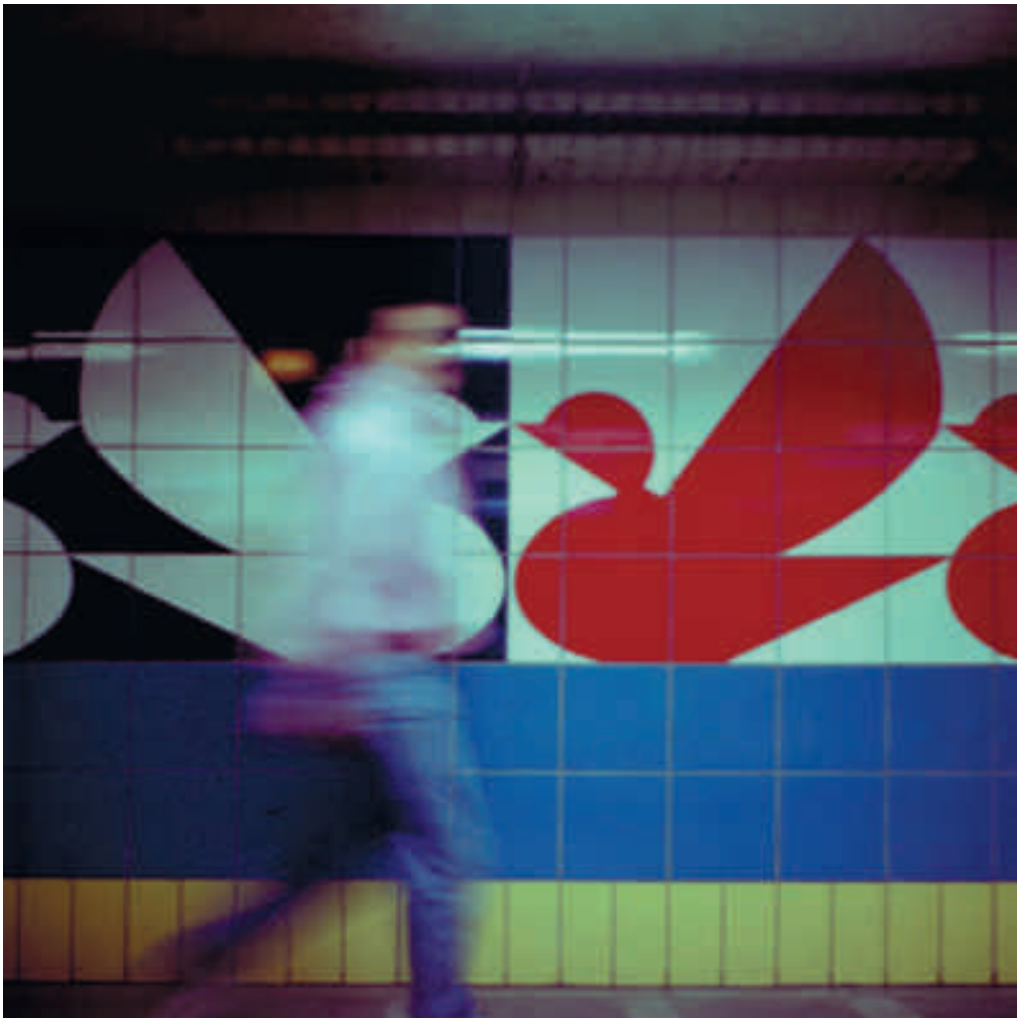
The Metro

Rana el Nemr

was born in Hanover, Germany in 1974. She studied at the American University in Cairo and the New York Institute of Photography. She has participated in several exhibitions in Egypt, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, the U.S. and other countries. Her work includes *The Metro* and *Women by Women: 8 Women Photographers from the Arab World.* In 2005, El Nemr received the Grand Prize of the Bamako Photographic Biennale and in 2003, she won the Bronze Award at the Canon Digital Creators Contest in Japan in addition to the Silver Award at the Nile Salon Photographic Exhibition in Egypt.

In early 2003, I began working on a photography project to record the rapid changes taking place among a representative section of Cairo's middle-class metro riders. In a space where strangers with many common attributes meet, middle-class Egyptians gather in a world of their own.

This documentary work is an attempt to record how these individuals are framed by and are vulnerable to cycles of depression, indifference and religious intolerance – illnesses that are both caused by and transmitted to Egyptian and Arab societies as well as the rest of the world. Unaware that they are being photographed, the passengers are captured commenting about the urban underground, the train, the station and its vibrant ceramic designs. These individuals become figures defined by form, line and colour in the midst of a congested modernity in which they no longer have a sense of place.



© Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige

Distracted Bullets

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

were both born in Beirut. Joana and Khalil are filmmakers, artists and university instructors. Together they have created installations and videos, including *Don't Walk, Lasting Images* and *Distracted Bullets*; the photography projects, *Beirut: Urban Fictions, The Circle of Confusion and 180 Seconds*; the project *Wonder Beirut* which includes *The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer, Postcards of War* and *Latent Images*. They have also directed several films, among them two feature films, *Al-Bayt al-Zaher* (Around the Pink House) and *Yawmun Akhar* (A Perfect Day), shorts such as *Ramad* (Ashes), and more recently *Open the*

Distracted Bullets is the first chapter in the Symptomatic Videos series. The term "distracted bullet" is a literal translation of the Arabic term rassassa taycheh, i.e. stray bullet. *Distrahere*, the Latin etymology of the word "distraction", means pulling in various directions. In addition to notions of distraction, the word bears additional connotations of disorientation, panic, dispersion (or scattering) and diversion.

The installation consists of five panoramic views of Beirut on the occasion of events celebrated by both fireworks and shooting. The noise of fireworks mingles with the various noises of firearms. Where do all those firearms come from? In 1994, militiamen turned in their heavy and light weapons, and were authorised to keep only one firearm in exchange for those they relinquished. On some occasions, these firearms appear, are used and then stowed away until the next time they are needed.

When, right before our eyes, Beirut is aflame with the fire of victory and filled with the crackle of fireworks and gunshots, it becomes possible to draw a divisive topography of the town by observing the quality and orientation of the display, and noticing which quarters celebrate noisily and which remain silent during the same occasions. The sound in the installation also determines the position of the spectator, that of the person filming, as well as the nature and context of the political event.

A brief history of the five events which appear in the video:

September 13, 2003: Feast of the Cross, Beit Mery, Metn area. Fireworks go off everywhere. There is an explosion of fireworks. Church bells ring, prayers rise, evoking an end-of-the-world atmosphere. No camera is available, so we knock at neighbours' doors. One of them lends us his small Hi 8. We film throughout the night.

September 3, 2004: Emile Lahoud has been re-elected President of the Republic. Beirut is ablaze with the "fires of victory". This time, the event was expected and the camera is ready. The fireworks begin early, at sunset, and

Door. They have also directed several documentaries, including *Khiam* and *Al-Film al-Mafqud* (The Lost Film). Their publications include *Beyrouth: Fictions Urbaines, OK I'm Going to Show You My Work, Latency, A State of Latency* and *Like an Oasis in the Desert* among others.
www.hadjithomasjoreige.com

go on through the night. These are a specific type of fireworks, concentrated and organised by the city councils (municipalities) rather than by individuals through popular initiatives.

December 31, 2004: New Year's Eve. As we watch, Beirut is alight; there is a muffled, continuous sound. At midnight, fireworks break out. Various sounds are heard of firearms, many firearms going off everywhere. All over Beirut, in both Christian and Muslim areas, everyone seems to either be shooting or letting off fireworks. From our windows, we see the Christian district more clearly, but we can hear the entire town.

June 28, 2005: Nabih Berri is re-elected Speaker of Parliament. As if to counterbalance the negative feelings this election produces, Beirut is rattled by rounds of machine guns, fired in celebration, bullets raining in all directions. Three people are killed and seven wounded that day. We film during the night. From where we are, the town seems silent - a small part of it is still "celebrating", though more discreetly. We cannot embrace the whole town, the perspective is warped.

July 26, 2005: Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces, is released after 11 years in prison. Before our eyes, a part of the Christian district of Beirut is rejoicing. The neighbour whose Hi 8 camera we had borrowed on the Feast of the Cross two years ago, brings out his machine gun to celebrate. He starts firing round after round, with short interruptions, and goes on and on for minutes, then for many long hours.

Watching Beirut alight on these various occasions, we wondered how many people who were happy to survive the war had now become victims of stray bullets during the various festivities for which the use of firearms is a must: weddings, graduations, elections, re-elections and religious festivities.

We decided to research the subject and entrusted it to Adel Nassar, a poet and writer. Adel visited the main Lebanese newspapers, dug into the archives, and read and photocopied certain documents. But his findings were scarce, and mainly involved a few incidents which date back to the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon via its proxy, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). For example, Assafir, in its January 4th edition, announced that a citizen had been wounded during SLA New Year's Eve celebrations. Finally, Adel realised that, although quite a few people are killed by stray bullets every year, such news is seldom published, either because the regional correspondent does not always report the case (s/he might find him/herself in a difficult situation); or because at the time it occurs, the information does not have enough weight to become "news". In fact, between 1994, when the militias were disarmed, and 2005, when this text was written, the newspaper Annahar registered 5,458 "security incidents" involving weapons and often fatal accidents. But the same database only recorded 15 events under the heading "stray bullets".

Nevertheless, Adel managed to dig out certain incidents, including the following one. After the New Year's Eve celebrations of 2005, all

the newspapers mentioned that Rafiq Hariri's plane, stationed on the airport tarmac, had been hit by stray bullets. Meanwhile, the death of Yusra Khalaf Nasrat - whose family consider her an "unknown martyr" after she was killed by a stray bullet in Burj al Barajneh, the Beirut suburb bordering the airport - was never reported anywhere.

This led us to wander how and why an event becomes a "document". Does individual history influence collective history? Were these parallel events considered too anecdotal for their imprints to appear in the archives of History? Does our location determine our knowledge? How can we keep track of the stories that are kept secret?

© Shirana Shahbazi

Shirana Shahbazi

Shirana Shahbazi

was born in Tehran in 1974. She moved to Germany in 1985 where she studied photography at the Fachhochschule Dortmund and the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst, Zurich. Shahbazi has participated in numerous group shows and has held solo exhibitions in Geneva, Zurich, Tehran, New York, Chicago, Bonn and London. She won the Citigroup Private Bank Photography Prize in 2002. She currently lives in Zurich.

The photographs in this exhibition are like words translated into different languages. They are drawn from a larger series shot in China, the U.S., Iran and Lebanon and are printed in different sizes and arranged in different groupings each time they are shown. As such, these images seem to be restless and unfixed. They take divergent photographic genres (such as tourist snapshots, street photographs and landscape vistas) along with appropriated images by Iranian billboard painters and lay them all side-by-side as a tense set of uneasy parallels.

© Yang Zhenzhong

Spring Story

Yang Zhenzhong

was born in China in 1968. He studied fashion design at the Zhejiang Institute of Silk Textiles and oil painting at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. Since 1992, he has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Asia, Europe, the U.S. and Australia. His solo exhibitions include *Foreplay* (2006), *Yang Zhenzhong* (2006), *Light as Fuck* (2002), *I Will Die* (2001) and *Jiangnan* (1998). His work has been featured at the International Venice Biennale, the Tate Modern in London and MoMA in New York.

In 1992, when Deng Xiaoping was 88 years old, he began an inspection tour of Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai. The series of speeches he gave on this tour indicated China's determination for profound reform and gave a new direction for China's onward path. *Spring Story* began to make the rounds throughout the great land of China. This twelve-minute video is part of a project entitled 'What are They Doing Here?' by the International Cultural Communications Department of the Siemens Arts Program. It was completed in cooperation with over 1,500 employees of Siemens Shanghai Mobile Communications Ltd.

TALK AND VIDEO

Who is Michel Seurat?, Ashkal Alwan
Par un Jour de Violence Ordinaire, Mon Ami Michel Seurat…, Omar Amiralay
An Abductee We Lebanese Share, Abbas Beydoun

Still from *Par un Jour de Violence Ordinaire, Mon Ami Michel Seurat...*, Omar Amiralay, 1996

Who is Michel Seurat?

It was the 22nd of April 1985 when gunmen from the Islamic Jihad Organisation[1] intercepted Michel Seurat in a car returning from Beirut Airport and abducted him.

On that day, Seurat was not on his first trip to Beirut nor was he on one of many such trips. Moreover, Michel Seurat was not one among many foreign journalists summoned then by a worsened armed conflict.

Simply said, when abducted, Michel Seurat was on his way to his house in Beirut, a city home for him since the 1970s. On that day, Seurat was long already a Beiruti, that is of a Beirut no longer determined by original stock or lineage as was possible back in the 1960s and 1970s. A Beirut where he and other French, British, Americans, Germans, Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians could, while grateful to no one, partake with the Lebanese in shaping an urbanity unburdened by deadly identities. But much has changed since. Between a city in the 1970s where a French national could live, and the city, no longer the same, from which he was barred in the 1980s, lies a chasm which tells of a inversion from one pole to the other.

It began early during the war, with mobile and transient checkpoints suddenly set-up to abduct or summarily kill anyone carrying the correct identification card marked with the wrong religious denomination. This tendency to "cleanse" one's world from the Other continued during the war and reached its peak when extremists, those who simultaneously call for, claim and promise purity, began to "wash" Beirut of all foreigners. It was then that Seurat and his fellows were turned into strangers, into unacceptables. They had to leave lest they become fodder for torture. And so compelled, most did while a few, like Michel Seurat, remained.

Perhaps Seurat believed that by being fluent in Arabic and by siding with the "East" against the "West" he could actually step out of the circle of danger. Perhaps he believed the Islamists or was even seduced by them

1 The Islamic Jihad Organisation is not to be associated with its namesake in Palestine. Knowledgeable sources consider that the abductors belong to a well-known party in Lebanon and that the so-called organisation is one of many pseudonyms such as the Organisation of Revolutionary Justice used when claiming responsibility for abductions.

as is apparent in his writings. He believed that what they despise is not the "Western" in the "West" but rather its belligerence and imperialism. Being neither he believed himself safe and at bay. And yet what he failed to notice is that abductors do not read, at least no more than when they impatiently scan the few words printed on a passport or an identification card. Hostage, he realised how his abductors coerced him back into his "Western-ness", for them indelibly marked on his passport. Nothing could intercede on his behalf. His scholarly research, translations of Ghassan Kanafani into French and support for Arab causes were all for naught. His spy-phobic abductors saw in his and every social research on Islamic movements the figure of espionage and treason.

Seurat in Beirut is a story of the city itself, from before the war and during. For in as much as Beirut of the 1970s which welcomed Seurat and other foreigners, in the legal sense of the term, tells of an open city where hybrids can live in their differences, so does Beirut of the 1980s divulge the state of a city caught in the throes of war.

A city where individuals were sent back to their stock, fixed to their lineage and made into combat targets. That was then. As for now, a decade and a half after the cessation of hostilities, Beirut remains unsettled and undecided whether to accommodate Seurat's kind or shun them anew.

Chronology of the events:

22 May 1985: Jean-Paul Kaufman and Michel Seurat are kidnapped.

22 May 1985: The Islamic Jihad Organisation claims responsibility for the abduction.

5 March 1986: A statement by the Islamic Jihad Organisation announces the "execution of the research specialist and spy" and includes three photographs of the dead body. (It was later known through cellmates that Seurat died in captivity from cancer.)

July 2005: Construction workers in the area of Al Raml al Ali-Horsh al Kateel report the finding of a corpse in a box buried just below a metre under.

25 October 2005: Seurat's wife is informed that the corpse of her husband has been found and identified.

February 2006: A public announcement is made and the body is delivered to officials from the French Embassy.

7 March 2006: Michel Seurat's remains are returned to his family.

Michel Seurat, born in Tunis in 1947, was a French researcher and sociologist. He first visited Beirut in 1973 to teach Islamic History at the *École Supérieure des Lettres*. He joined the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* in 1980 as a researcher. He translated many Arabic novels and poems and is known for a number of studies on Lebanon, Syria and Egypt that are still considered to be references. He settled with his wife Marie Mouamar Bachi Seurat in Beirut where they had two daughters, Alexandra and Leticia. His works include: *L'État de Barbarie* and *Les Frères Musulmans* 1928-1982, co-authored with Olivier Carré.

Par un Jour de Violence Ordinaire, Mon Ami Michel Seurat…

Omar Amiralay

was born in Damzascus in 1944. He studied theatre and cinema in Paris in the late 1960s. Since 1981, he has directed numerous documentary films for French television. In his work, he attempts to find a character-driven cinematic language that straddles the boundary between documentary and fiction. Neither a mechanical representation of reality nor a fantasy lying outside reality, Amiralay's work proposes a rendition of reality that is controlled by the imagination but never strays far from the real.

On May 22, 1985, Jean-Paul Kaufman and Michel Seurat were kidnapped in Beirut. Kaufman was released three years later and returned to his country, France. Eventually, he resurrected an account of those hellish days. Seurat perished after eight months in captivity. The film pays homage to a man who wanted to penetrate an Orient whose mysteries had stirred his mind from the time of his childhood.

Video, 48 minutes, 1996.
French with Arabic subtitles.

The screening was followed by a discussion between the director and Abbas Beydoun.


Par un jour de violence ordinaire,
mon ami Michel Seurat...

An Abductee We Lebanese Share

Abbas Beydoun

The following text was presented by Abbas Beydoun after the screening of Amiralay's film: *Par un Jour de Violence Ordinaire, Mon Ami Michel Seurat…*

Seeking to safeguard martyrdom from the tug and pull of warring parties, Marguerite Duras considered the German martyr a shared martyr.[1] With that thought in mind, it now seems important to remember and recollect the tragic abduction and murder of Michel Seurat. For he, the foreigner, was abducted and killed precisely by those he identified with. He alone can safeguard and foreground abduction as a cause to be remembered and defended above and beyond the antagonistic wrenching of foes. If accordingly one demands that the truth be told about the missing, Michel Seurat will inevitably come forth as the overarching symbol no matter if the accused are Syrian intelligence agencies or one of the many Lebanese militias.

The name of "Islamic Jihad"[2] is now all but gone. But those who acted under that name are not. And even if the once institutionalised practice of kidnapping has now passed, the corpse of Seurat remained for years in the custody of an organisation that today no longer carries its first name. They wanted him to vanish. They even wanted his name to disappear. They wanted to relegate the whole matter to an ontological forgetfulness, the same sort they wished upon us all. For this reason, this film is of value. It acts to salvage the absence of Seurat, as well as the many missing and living, from forgetfulness.

Upon watching the film, my daughter commented that it is not a documentary. True, Omar Amiralay intentionally avoided a documentary approach even as the presence of Jean-Paul Kauffmann, Seurat's cellmate, could have easily afforded the film with the authority of evidence. Amiralay chose to occult the speaking head of the surviving cellmate. His voice was allowed to come forth as if from a nothingness perturbed by vague shadows and spinning cir-

1 See Duras, Marguerite, *La Douleur,* Gallimard/Folio, 1993.

2 The Islamic Jihad Organisation is not to be associated with its namesake in Palestine. Knowledgeable sources consider that the abductors were Lebanese Shiites and are probably current members of Hizbullah.

cles, as if shadows of ceiling fans. Around him, a shoddy metallic food plate pushed in from under the door by non-hands. Kauffmann speaks from within an unspeakable obscurity; one from which Seurat never emerged. It is Amiralay's noted decision not to lose this fathomless obscurity to the clarity of a document; not to deliver it from its temporality and dreadful awe to the concluding and perhaps conclusive end of a narrative. Rather, the obscurity is present and suspended above the sequential structure of a story. No one in the film is asked to remember more than they wish to. Friends speak of him and of themselves. He is not an object to be spoken of. He is not outside their lives. They speak and their faces are wrapped in darkness. Only their eyes strain towards an unknown ahead. Amiralay does not want a document. Nor does he allow hegemony for the image. He wants for faces to float on that darkness which is the materiality of Michel's cell, the hell of his ordeal and loss which weighs heavily, still neither transformed nor even formed. His absence is present in its rawness, in its primary metaphor.

We can seriously wonder if in fact Amiralay wants a film at all. Does not his distancing of narrative and image intimate something else? He obviously seeks neither. Let us say that he even disables both. Are we then facing a persistent move to keep Michel mingled with his own experience, his cell and the lives and memories of his friends? Are we in front of a Michel that is not separate and therefore is resistant to denotation as information for historical, political and other sorts of instrumental discourses? Is this an act of friendship which wills the sacrifice of a film as evidence of an unbroken bond between filmmaker and lost friend? Is this Amiralay's attempt to pass through film into a kind of filmic poetry, a kind of video-art? Or is it, considering the rigorous scenography of the two beds, ceiling fan and bars, a version of Beckett's theatre? Rather than answering the purport of these questions with the definition of a genre or style, let us say instead that Amiralay has taken a risk which in fact is not unlike what is often encountered in his other works in terms of silence and a restrained use of images and narrative. Yet this film carries the added weight of a moral paradox. In facing the intention of the kidnappers to completely disappear and take with them the whole issue of Seurat whose death remains without a corpse and therefore intangible, Amiralay chose not to narrate nor document. For in doing so he would have been complicit with this oblivion so eagerly sought by the kidnappers who live, even if disguised, amongst us still. In other words, to document Seurat as someone who is no longer, amounts to the symbolic kidnapping of someone's presence and of his history.

A kidnapped individual, no matter the social status, is an unresolved matter, a wandering

affair and a question in suspense. He or she cannot be shelved in a historical past without moral consequences. That is precisely why Amiralay insists on suspending Seurat in his absence. He wants that this abducted man remains in us a dark gaping hole. He wants him to pervade our lives and memory, supine on his cell bed, always in the now, an indelible crime. It is only according to such a reading that the film's bare visual props can be understood as a constant presentation of the tools and markings of the crime; namely its corporeality.

I know not how to unravel the complicities that crisscross the film. Was Amiralay the director or was it Michel's friends, who figured in the film? The literary force which pervades the words of everyone cannot be mere rhetoric. Rather, it comes from a desire to summon their friend and postpone his departure. The usual tropes of elegy and valediction were deferred, for these friends must have felt, along with Amiralay, that in fact they were also speaking of their own selves. To employ flowery language, to bask in the attention of the occasion or to dwell in self-centered noble emotions would have amounted to a consumption of Seurat and his friendships.

Jean Hannoyer spoke of Seurat as a friend who always preceded him, a friendship in which he faithfully lagged: "He follows the fish and I follow him." It is friendship as a wound. Mary, his wife, spoke of him as that troubled cloud of a man who coloured her life. When returned to his home for an hour by his captors, she could not bear embrace him. He spent that short hour rummaging through his desk and talking mostly to his abductors. This also is love as a wound. Such were the words of his friends; a wounding honesty. In their words, they surrendered and renounced their selves as if such was the sacrifice they had to offer in order to save Michel from oblivion. Roger Nabaa offered Michel an undying name: innocent, a non-naive innocent who knows evil and confronts it. As for Kauffmann, his cell-mate, he remained absent like his friend and with him kept occulted the ordeal that cannot be communicated. Kauffmann also wants neither narrative nor conclusion. Those dark days will remain on that site with Michel. The crime will stay grounded.

An innocent, for all those who spoke, is also someone who seeks to identify himself with a cause unlike him, most often an assumed other. Jean Hannoyer spoke of him as an Arab from France who became Islamicised in order to identify further with Palestinians and Syrian Islamists. To his wife, he stood in the way of death. For causes such as these produce nothing but martyrs. She says that his picture hung on the wall among pictures of martyrs. She spoke seriously. For he, Michel the aloof and the troubled, walked his days as if overshadowed by his fate. Led forward, like a tragic Greek hero, he was fated to become the inadvertent oblation for which all

would be spared and then united.

With Roger speaking on screen, we hear the emotionally moving voice of a grieving Husseini chanter. We then see a coffin held high over hands, a woman trying to muffle her scream, the coffin once again, a fallen woman and another one screaming. In the interstices of this sequence, Michel's picture reoccurs. One thinks again of Mary's words and of that identification between Michel and the figure of the martyr. Symbolically, the coffin was his; and he was the bewailing mantra of the Husseini chanter mourning him. Yes, some of the Shiites around the coffin are most probably his murderers. But that is precisely the point. For al Hussein, the archetypal Shiite martyr was also killed by his own. Michel was, as Mary said, an Arabist killed by Arabs, and an Islamist killed by Muslims. Michel was the innocent offering sacrificed by fate in order to reconstitute and unite the group.

Everyone appears in the film as a bust. Only Jean Hannoyer has his back turned to the sea before descending and disappearing in its waters. Hannoyer was narrating Michel's passion for the sea. In what he terms as fast psychology, Jean proposes that Michel lived his originary trauma upon departing from his coastal city of Binzert, his birthplace in Tunis. That sea was his womb and that separation marked him forever. Following that sequence, the film is then punctuated by bars. As if these bars were both what fragments the continuity of a life and what binds as well its many chapters together. We also see two beds in various guises. Only they signify Michel's struggle with illness and with everything else. These two beds are the fetish and symbol of the whole experience. One must not forget that the bars of the window and bed are similarly latticed. It is precisely there, caught in this cool metallic mesh, that the experience petrified and silenced. It is also the only witness to a suspended death. And yet it is the sea again and again, the waters of birth, the cradle of Michel's passion that rumbles with an unbelievable force, the force of an unstoppable life, an inexorable passion and perhaps an inescapable revenge. This sea in which the bed of death sinks remains awake. It is the ordeal of pain and struggle which swallows all, every fetish. The sea is the cradle which returns to embrace its first boy, to send him off towards the infinite horizon of an endless adventure. The sea is the absence that conquers death.

November 22, 2005

Abbas Beydoun was born in 1945. He is a poet and a journalist. He studied Arabic literature in the Lebanese University and later at the Sorbonne. He has written and published 14 books of poetry with many translated into several languages. Among his latest are: *B.B.B*, 2007; *Shajara Touchbihou Hattaban* (A Tree Resembling a Woodcutter), 2006; *Jasad Bila Moa'allim* (A Body without Teacher), 2003; *Lafzon Fil Bard* (Enunciations in the Cold), 2000. He also published his first novel in 2002 entitled *Tahleel Dam* (Blood Analysis). Aside from poetry, Beydoun is a noted art and literary critic. He is currently chief editor of the weekly cultural page for the Beirut daily *Assafir*.

VIDEOS & FILMS

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Un Cercle Autour du Soleil, Ali Cherri
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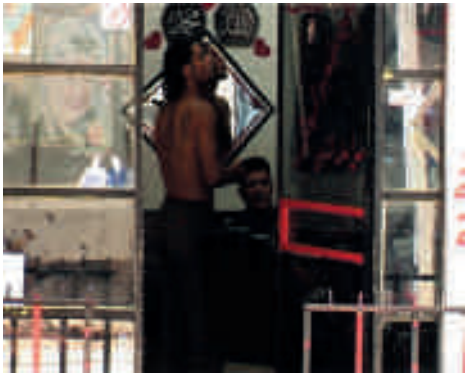
Rond-Point Chatila

Maher Abi Samra

was born in Beirut in 1965. He graduated with a degree in Dramatic Arts from the Lebanese University in Beirut and completed another degree in Audiovisual Studies at the *Institut National de l'Image et du Son* in Paris. He has worked as a photo-journalist for Agence France Presse, Reuters and Lebanese daily newspapers. He has written and directed several documentaries, including *Merely a Smell* (2007), *Mariam* (2006), *Rond-Point Chatila* (2004) and *Women of Hizbullah* (2000). His short videos include *My Friend* (2003) and *Building on the Waves* (1995).

Chatila: The place evokes massacres and the dead; this film chooses to focus on the living. It shows fragments of life taken in a certain area, 150 metres on the main road of the Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon as well as the first floor of Gaza Hospital. There is the waiting, the defence of the cause, the return of the refugees and the revolution. The characters tell us the stories of their life in the camp. The film delves into the day to day lives of these people. In Chatila, time is suspended and these people are living over an abyss. They have nothing to look forward to.

Video, 52 minutes, 2004.
Arabic with English subtitles.



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Pasolini Pa* Palestine

Ayreen Anastas

writes in fragments and makes films and videos. *Pasolini Pa* Palestine* (2005), *M* of Bethlehem* (2003) and *The Library of Useful Knowledge* (2002) have been shown internationally in festivals, museums and cinemas but have not yet been broadcast on television. 'The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary' was published in *Rethinking Marxism*, Volume 16, Number 3, July 2004. She has no affection for the proclamation of victory. Troubled by any image of herself, she suffers when she is named.

Pasolini Pa Palestine* is an attempt to repeat Pasolini's trip to Palestine which is depicted in his 1963 film *Seeking Locations in Palestine for The Gospel According to Matthew*. It turns Pasolini's script into a roadmap superimposed on Palestine's current landscape, creating contradictions between the visual and the audible, the expected and the real. The video explores questions of repetition, a term which – along with "retrieval" – Heidegger claims, signifies an appropriate attitude toward the past and establishes a dialogue with Pasolini**. The term *discutere* (to smash to pieces) is the Latin source for the modern words "dialogue" and "discussion". The video does not criticise Pasolini, but rather reveals the possibilities in his thought and works, tracing them back to the "experiences" which inspired them.

Pasolini Pa* Palestine was created in conjunction with a residency at the Al-Maamal Foundation in Jerusalem.

Produced by the artist, Al-Maamal Foundation and Ashkal Alwan.

Video, 51 minutes, 2005.
Arabic with English subtitles.

** Pier Paolo Pasolini: "My hopes were still intact then. I really thought that by repeating this trip 40 years later I would be able to shed a new light on, and gain a new perspective of, this reality. Instead, I found myself repeating the same mistakes: The heat in the summer of '63 was intolerable. I could have arranged this trip in spring, for example. They tell me that it is much milder here in spring, and I could have got a lot more out of this landscape then.

Another question concerns the path we took. The images of an ancient world, its architecture and a primitive way of life that might have been very useful for my film, were still intact in the villages of Hebron. Here we are halfway up the Mount of Beatitudes where crowds gathered to listen to Christ. Here I am, with camera reflected in the glass of a clear shop window. I obviously came here to film.

To film what? Not a documentary, not a feature picture. I've come to shoot some notes for a film about the Christ of a modern Palestine. The choice is not yet final. And the meaning of what I mean to be a modern Palestine in this film is probably wider than the geographies of political borders that were created in the past hundred years or so. I intend Palestine to mean an expression of a time past, present today in the current landscape and on the faces of these Palestinians, in their constant suffering and endless wait for a new Saviour. This idea of the Saviour has been present in contemporary Arab and Palestinian politics – perhaps it would be even more precise to speak here about the periods of resistance – since before the end of the Ottoman Empire."

Un Cercle Autour du Soleil

Ali Cherri

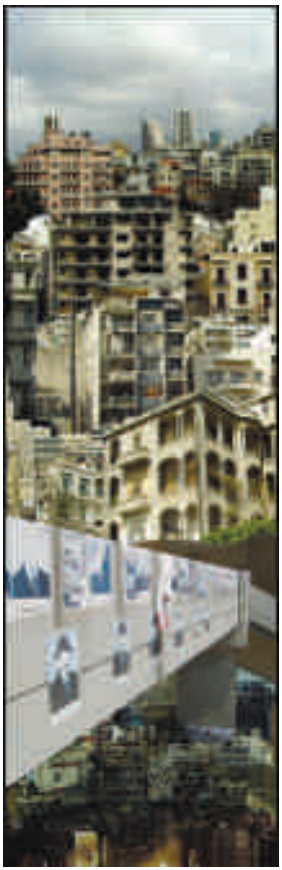
was born in Beirut in 1976. He studied graphic design at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and performing arts at DasArts in Amsterdam. His work includes the videos *Slippage* (2007), *Untitled* (2006) and *Un Cercle Autour du Soleil* (2005) and the performances *Give Me a Body Then* (2006) and *As Dead as Ever* (2005).

"I was disappointed the day they announced the war had ended. I used to be elated by the idea of living in a city that was eating itself, like excess stomach fluid that digests and gradually eats away at the stomach".

Ali Cherri, inspired by Yukio Mishima's 'Sun and Steel'.

Produced by Mellow Productions and DasArts, Amsterdam.

Video, 15 minutes, 2005. English.



Jibraltar

Ghassan Halwani

was born in Beirut in 1979. He completed a Master's degree in marketing and advertising and then went to Paris to pursue a degree in photography and a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts. He has worked on children's books as well as in aeolian industries. *Jibraltar* is his first film.

Jibraltar attempts to represent the birth of an adult person free from inheritance and background. For this man, renunciation is generally a willed act; but in certain phases of his voyage, it is unwilled. A renunciation is at times conscious, at others not, driven by the search for absolute freedom, or a vanishing – a disappearance.

In moments of hesitation, insecurity and anguish, he will turn back to cast a last look in the direction he is abandoning.

Jibraltar is an adaptation of the play *Zanbak wal Jabal* (Zanbak and the Mountain), written by the group al-Sanabel in the late 1970s.

Zanbak wal Jabal tells the story of the small rabbit Zanbak who tries to leave his cage in the safe farm where he dwells in order to go to the mountain. Despite his grandfather's opposition to his project, as he feels that life on the farm where they are fed is peaceful, Zanbak escapes.

During his voyage, Zanbak encounters many obstacles, some which weaken his resolve and others that urge him forward.

Animation, 15 minutes, 2005.

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Hopefully for the Best

Raed El Helou

was born in Gaza and currently lives in Ramallah. He has worked as a freelance cameraman with various Arabic and foreign television stations. He produced and co-directed the documentary film *Local* (2002). He also directed a short film entitled *The Tea Boy* (1998). His video *Hopefully for the Best* won the Palestinian Silver Screen prize at the International Ramallah Film Festival in 2004.

Produced in 2004, *Hopefully for the Best* relates a journey early one morning in Ramallah. It consists of images and scenes from daily life where tension lurks beneath the surface of small talk and where people live under the weight of fear and an uncertain future.

Video, 41 minutes, 2004.
Arabic with English subtitles.

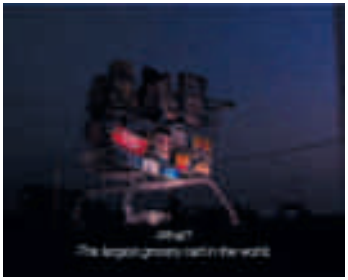
Welcome to Beirut

Fouad Elkoury

was born in 1952 in Paris. He studied architecture in London and then turned to photography. He has published a number of books combining text and photography, including *On War and Love* (2007), *Sombres* (2002), *Palestine, L'Envers du Miroir* (1996), *Beirut City Centre* (1992) and *Civilization, Fake = Real?* (ongoing project). His videos include *Welcome to Beirut* (2005), *Moving Out* (2004) and *Letters to Francine* (2002). Elkoury is a founding member of the Arab Image Foundation.
www.fouadelkoury.com

Welcome to Beirut is about daily life in Beirut, a driven promenade inside the city with a few open windows to peep through. More ironic than sarcastic, the film reveals the state of mind of a certain part of Lebanese society, a direct consequence of the "Atlas syndrome": When one opens a European atlas of the world, Lebanon is in the middle but also in the crack, central yet invisible.

Video, 52 minutes, 2005.
French, Arabic and English with English subtitles.



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Peripheral Stories

Hala Elkoussy

was born in 1974. A photographer and video artist, she has taught photography at the American University in Cairo and has organised and co-curated several projects, including *PhotoCairo* (2003 and 2005) and *In a Furnished Flat in Cairo* (2004). She is cofounder of the Contemporary Image Collective (CIC), an independent artist-run platform based in Cairo. Her work has been featured at the 9th Istanbul Bienniale (2005) and at the Tate Modern in London (2007).

Peripheral Stories uses the geographical outskirts of the city as a stage to investigate less tangible issues of marginalisation. The video takes the viewer on a journey in a Cairene microbus – the physical embodiment of perpetual movement between inside and out, the individual and the group. Roads provide a fragmented narrative, tracking characters who exist on the margins. Through exploring the relationship between the centre and the periphery, the artificial and imposed structures surface, revealing instead a shifting of already blurred boundaries.

Video, 28 minutes, 2005.
Arabic with English subtitles.

The Purple Artificial Forest

Amal Kenawy

was born in Cairo in 1974, and did her studies in fine art and film there. Her work includes video, installation, performance, animation, photography, sculpture and painting. Her solo performance/installations include *Non-stop Conversation* (2007), *The Room* (2003-2004) and *Frozen Memory* (2002). She has made the video animations *Booby Trapped Heaven* (2006), *You Will Be Killed* (2006), and *The Purple Artificial Forest* (2005), as well as the video installation, *Mum: Do the Angels Shit?* (2007). She has shown her work throughout Egypt, Europe and Canada. Her works have been featured at national and international film festivals and biennales.

I dreamt of a purple artificial forest.
I created a purple artificial theatre.
Parts of home furniture, human parts.
The bed surrounded by electricity pylons.
I was sleeping.
Parts of a human body.
Hand, legs, a face.
All looking into the mirror.
The only thing I see is a monster devouring my picture.
Parts of home furniture.
Dinner table.
They were sitting at the end of the isthmus.
They were sitting across the table eating me once more.
They eat each other.
My legs grow.
I give birth to light, and the light eats me.
And I melt into an isthmus of endless darkness.
Parts of home furniture, human parts.
All devour each other in a purple artificial theatre.

Animation, 8 minutes, 2005.

The Fifth Pound

Ahmed Khaled

was born in Cairo in 1979. He studied fine arts at the University of Halwan in Egypt. He works in painting, video and media art and since 1996 has participated in various group exhibitions and workshops in visual arts. His videos include *Fish Eye* (2007) and *The Fifth Pound* (2005). Khaled lives and works in Cairo.
www.ahmedkhaled.com

The Fifth Pound tells the story of a young man and woman whose only chance for intimacy is to get on the air-conditioned bus each Friday. This film addresses the problem of sexual deprivation among Egyptian youth and grapples with the double standards about sexuality and sexual behaviour that exist in the community at large.

Video, 14 minutes, 2005.
Arabic with English subtitles.

Devotion

Cynthia Madansky

is an artist who lives in New York City. Her recent films include *Elle* (2007), *Devotion* (2005), *The PSA Project no. 1-15* (2005), *Alex and José* (2004), *Still Life* (2004) and *Past Perfect* (2002).

Cynthia Madansky constructs a lyrical film as formal as the eight acts of devotion in Islamic prayer that leads us on a journey through Istanbul. Like Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, *Devotion* is structured in short passages, moving tentatively through the intimate spaces of this city.

As aimless wanderers and consummate outsiders, we journey with the narrator observing the everyday, the ordinary through a rectangle, a finite and universal receptacle: The fragments of a city in portrait format. The film is a formal construction of frames and lines that constitute the map of an intensely personal journey. *Devotion* returns us to the city as a site of identification and its simultaneous conspirator – alienation. As the traveler roams through a labyrinth of hotels reiterating a process of obsessive recollection and observation, she realises that, like the lost Ottoman Empire, this is a futureless memory.

In her sparing but symmetrical compositions, details within frames appear as notes on a scale. Madansky collaborates with avant-garde musician Zeena Parkins to carefully construct the sights and sounds of dissonance, generating new meaning from the debris. Poetically provocative, *Devotion* is a meditation on nationalism and Islam woven through a story of love and loss.

16mm, 34 minutes, 2004, English.

Otolith

The Otolith Group/Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun

In January 2002, artist and cultural theorist Kodwo Eshun and audiovisual artist Anjalika Sagar founded The Otolith Group as an umbrella organisation for their interdisciplinary collaborations. In 2003 and in collaboration with the London-based video artist Richard Couzins, Otolith was commissioned by Arts Catalyst to direct the digital video *Otolith,* from which their name derives. The group lives and works in London.

This film essay probes the potency of archival images, exploring the poeticisation of mediated memory and is profoundly influenced by Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1982) and Black Audio Film Collective films such as *Handsworth Songs* (1986). Taking its name from otoliths, the minute particles found in the inner ear that help us to balance and to navigate our way across space, the film aims to reorient our perceptions of the world by weaving personal and public histories together into a meditation upon the persistence of utopian aspirations. "Earth is out of bounds for us now; it remains a planet accessible only through media", the viewer is told at the beginning of *Otolith*; this suggests a post-nuclear future in which humankind is confined to outer space. Through prolonged space travel, the film tells us otoliths have ceased to function, leaving homo sapiens unable to walk the earth. Instead, the new mutants research images "sifting aging history from the tense present in order to identify the critical points of the 20th century". The film's narrator is Dr. Usha Adebaran Sagar, a fictional descendant of Anjalika Sagar, living in space in the year 2103. From this perspective, the narrator looks back at several generations of women from the Sagar family, linking her own experiences with those of Sagar's grandmother during the 1960s when she met Russian cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman to orbit the Earth. "For us", the narrator declares, "there is no memory without image and no image with-

1 This concept is developed by The Otolith Group from a reading of Giorgio Agamben's notion of potentiality.

out memory. Image is the matter of memory". Her attempts to understand multiple dimensions of the historical, the terrestrial and the evolutionary bring together existing images of very different qualities and registers: 35mm footage of mushroom cloud explosions that have indelibly seared the collective consciousness, digital video footage of London's peace marchers in the run-up to the Iraq war and private memories captured on Standard 8 film from 1970s London and Haridwar. The Group filmed Sagar floating in microgravity at Star City outside Moscow, where cosmonauts still train. Sagar's physical and temporal disorientation is echoed by the contrasting film stocks, subtly tinting the world with different shades as they refract and redefine the past. Bringing together numerous fractured histories with difficult presents represented by India and Pakistan's embrace of nuclear armament, *Otolith* projects a "potential future" thereby allowing for a different perspective on the present.

Video, 23minutes, 2003, English.

Commissioned by The MIR Consortium. www.artscatalyst.org

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An Eclipse which Dropped from the Sky

Maani Petgar

was born in Tehran in 1959. He ran a photography studio before working in the film industry. He moved to Australia in 1985, where he worked in film and television production. He returned to Iran in 1997, where he set up the production house Unexposed Films in 2004. His films include *Looking Through* (2007), *Film Lovers* (2002), *An Eclipse which Dropped from the Sky* (2000), *The Needle and the Thread* (1999) and *Cinema Cinema* (1996). His work has been screened at international film festivals in Singapore, Amsterdam, Montreal and Chicago, among other places.

On August 10, 1999, the last eclipse of the century took place and about two billion people in the world watched it on television. The narrator is no fan of the style or standard of Iranian television, but understanding that it is going to broadcast simultaneous reports from five major eclipse locations, he decides, just out of curiosity, to sit down voluntarily in front of the TV set to watch the coverage of the event. At the same time, he periodically takes his camera outside to shoot the reflections of the light on his yard. As he is switching between the TV and the yard, he notices that…

Video, 22 minutes, 2000.
English and Persian with English subtitles.

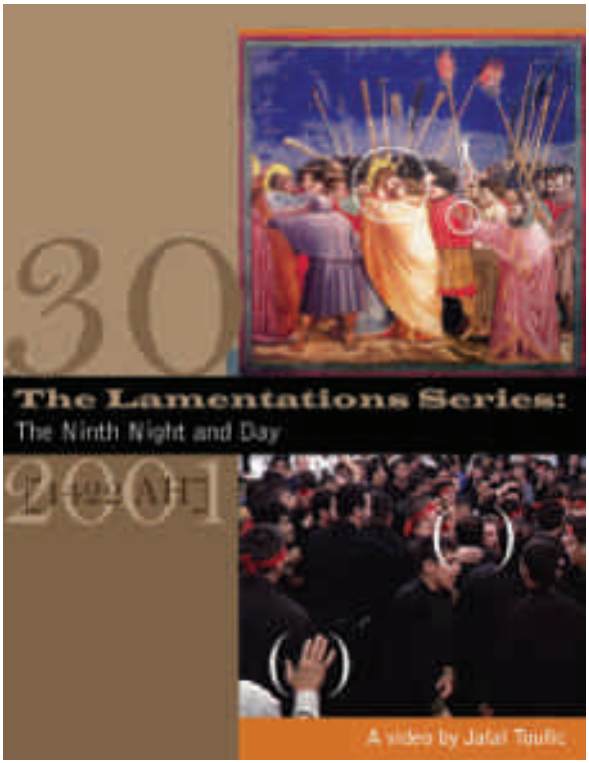
The Lamentations Series: The Ninth Night and Day

Jalal Toufic

is a thinker, writer, and artist. He is the author of *Reading, Rewriting Poe's 'The Oval Portrait'—In Your Dreams* (2006), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), *'Âshûrâ': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993), and *Distracted* (1991). His videos and mixed-media works have been presented in international festivals and biennales. He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, USC, DasArts and the Rijksakademie.

© Gilbert Hage

It would be felicitous were a Shiite to make the first great film or video on the lamentation of Judas Iscariot during the interval between his delivering Jesus to the chief priests and his hanging himself. Judas had pre-arranged the following signal for the apprehension of Jesus: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Given that Jesus had told his disciples, among whom figured Judas, "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also" (Luke 6:29), why didn't the one who was kissed by Judas turn the other cheek for another (perfidious) kiss? Given that Judas did not sin against the Holy Spirit but only against the Son of Man ("Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:32), why didn't the one who was kissed by Judas miraculously move time backward till before the birth of his betrayer ("It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24) in forgiveness? If the one who was perfidiously kissed by Judas did neither, was this because he was not actually Jesus Christ?



Video, 60 minutes, 2005.
Arabic and English, with English subtitles.

self portrait

Featuring Hind Rostom

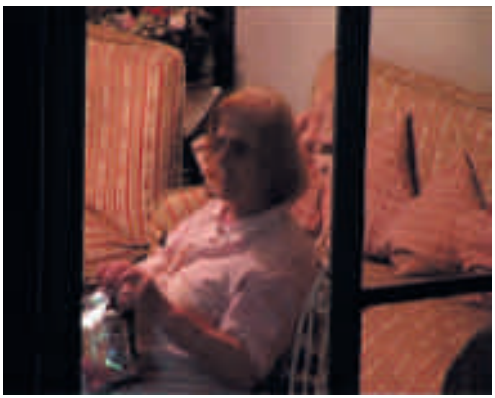
Raed Yassin

Born in Beirut in 1979. He graduated from the theatre department at the Lebanese University's Fine Arts Institute. Yassin is a video and sound artist, as well as a musician (double bass, tapes and electronics) and member of the collective for improvised music in Lebanon, MILL. His videos includes *Tonight* (2007), *Untitled, Till Now* (2006), *Featuring Hind Rostom* (2005), *Antenna Sonata* and *Beirut* (2003). He currently lives and works between Beirut and Amsterdam.

"I cannot but recall that pod of red chili pepper coming toward me, held in my dad's hand as he chided, shouted and threatened me not to fiddle with our new VCR. A memorable machine it was, the first in the building, neglected except for repeated use of two video tapes: One of an Arabic film whose title I forget and a second containing three taped episodes, dubbed in Arabic, of the cartoon series *Grandizer*. All the while, vendor carts roamed the streets of Beirut packed full of videotapes and decked with speakers blasting the song *"…Immak, Ya Loubnan"* ("…Lebanon, your mama") by Philemon Wehbe."

Produced by Ashkal Alwan.

Video, 25 minutes, 2005, Arabic.



In This House

Akram Zaatari

was born in Saida in 1966. He is co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation (Beirut). Zaatari is a video artist who bases his work on collecting, studying and archiving the photographic history of the Middle East. His ongoing research has been the basis for a series of exhibitions and publications including *Hashem el-Madani: Studio Practices* with Lisa Lefeuvre (2005) and *Mapping Sitting* in collaboration with Walid Raad (2002). His video works include *In This House* (2005), *This Day* (2003), *Her&Him Van Leo* (2001), *How I Love You* (2001), *Crazy for You* (1997) and *All is Well on the Border* (1997).

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Part of my interest in existing records comes from researching personal documents made by individuals who have been through political, territorial and military conflicts. It is also an attempt on my part to write the individual histories of wartime experiences. In addition to writing an alternative history of war(s), I am also intent on studying the geography of fear and the mechanisms of surveillance, particularly in post-war situations.

Ain el Mir is a village 45 km southeast of Beirut. Formerly on the front bordering Israeli-occupied South Lebanon, the village was used for six years as a base for military resistance against the Israeli army occupying the opposite hills. This whole region is currently under high surveillance by different Lebanese intelligence services, especially since the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000.

In 2002, I headed to Ain el Mir looking for a specific white house on a crossroad. I knocked on the door, met the owners and asked for permission to dig in their garden. I explained that I was looking for a letter addressed to them in 1991 by a former member of the Lebanese resistance who had occupied their house for six years while they were displaced from the village. The letter was inside the empty casing of a B-10 mortar buried in a one-metre deep hole in their garden. My request to find this letter was met with suspicion and provoked unexpected reactions that soon unfolded into a fascinating story of political and territorial complexity.

Produced by Akram Zaatari and Ashkal Alwan. Video, Arabic with English subtitles, 30min, 2005.

PROJECTS

On the Periphery: An Offscreen Composition, Nadim Mishlawi
I am Lost in the City/Beirut Metro Map, Hassan Choubassi
Nomadic Studio, Reine Mahfouz

On the Periphery: An Offscreen Composition

Nadim Mishlawi

received a BA in Fine Arts from the Lebanese American University in 2002 and an MA in Film and Video Studies from Holy Spirit University of Kaslik in 2006. He currently works in Beirut as a sound designer and musician. Mishlawi also teaches Sound Theory for Film at the *Institut d'Études Scéniques et Audiovisuelles* (IESAV) at the *Université Saint-Joseph*, Beirut.

'On the Periphery' is the second in a series of compositions exploring the relation between sound and territory. Constructed loosely within the boundaries of *musique concrète*, the work is a multi-layered collage of sounds ranging from found sounds to film excerpts and from television transmissions to political speeches. Intended to be played back in a pitch black theatre-like room, the layers of juxtaposing sounds create a sonic labyrinth through which questions are raised pertaining not only to sound and territory, but also to the individual's relation to his/her sonic territory.

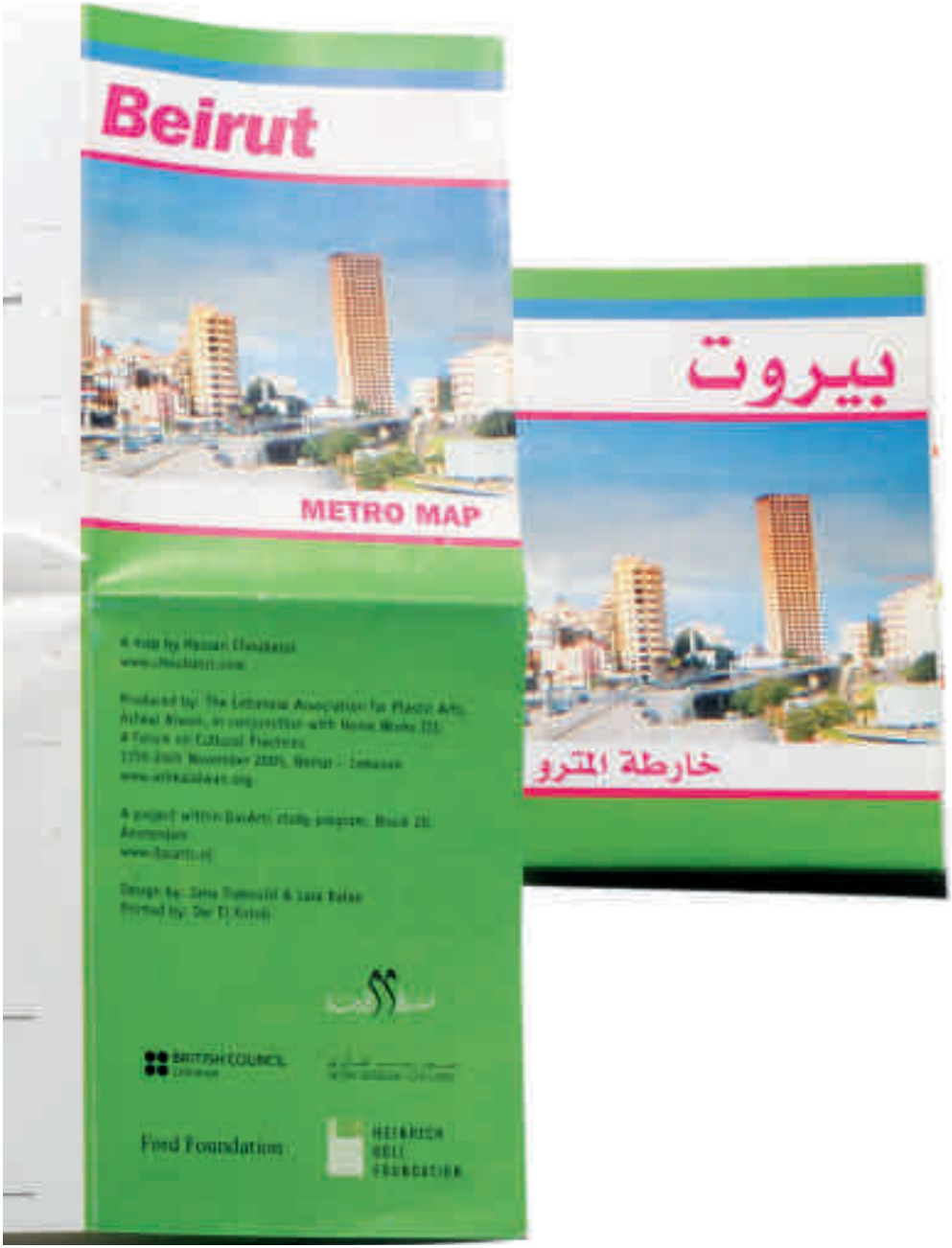
I am Lost in the City Beirut Metro Map

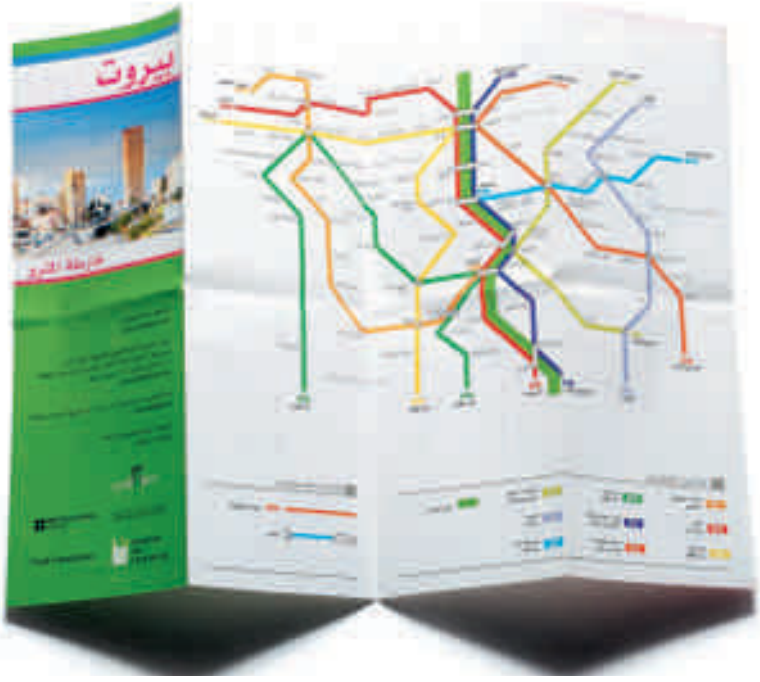
Hassan Choubassi

is a visual artist and scenic designer born in Beirut in 1970. He graduated from the Lebanese American University (LAU) in Beirut in 1996 and from DasArts in Amsterdam in 2005. His work has been exhibited in Lebanon, Egypt, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Belgium. He is currently a lecturer and a program coordinator at the Lebanese International University (LIU).www.geocities.com/hchoubassi

In his book, *Non-Places; Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity,* Marc Augé defines non-places as having no identity, no history and no urban relationships. Non-places are transient spaces for traffic, communication and consumption; but, when the city itself becomes a place of passage, when it is in a transitional waiting phase, on the cusp of another era, it becomes a 'non-place'. Beirut is passing through such a situation, caught between the end of one phase while waiting on the steps of another. It is still going through a reconstruction period, living a utopian dream of prosperity that is yet to come. Post-war Beirut is marked by a feeling of emptiness, of uncertainties and insecurities; it has undergone some abrupt changes. It is becoming a new urban space where the spatial intersects with the social and where flexibility and mobility have become key qualities; new spatial orders with a transnational range are being superimposed on familiar territorial lines. Thus, the new architecture of non-places consists of spatial flows, movement and transitional zones, while the inhabitants of the city fail to cope with the new urban vernacular.

The 'Beirut Metro Map' attempts to add another virtual layer onto the psychological and physical labyrinth of the city, focusing on the ever-present demarcation lines that split Beirut during the long period of the civil war and their relations to the social environment in post-war Beirut. Its circulation is irrelevant to the geographical urban structure of the city, such that all the metro lines stop at the old demarcation lines and passengers have to change to another line in order for them to cross to the other side. This echoes currently existing systems; for example, people using service cabs have to get out of one cab on the old 'crossing' lines and take another in order to continue to the other side as drivers on the western side of Beirut will often not cross to the eastern side and vice versa. In fact, even public buses also stop on the major crossing points of the old Green Zone. The demarcation lines still exist in Beirutis' memories and in the backs of their minds. Since the political and demographical conditions remain highly unstable, sectarianism is still rife and class distinction is sharper than ever; there is no reason to negate them.


Beirut
METRO MAP
بيروت
خارطة المترو
BRITISH COUNCIL
Ford Foundation
HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION


بيروت


بيروت


Beirut
METRO MAP


Beirut
MODCA

Nomadic Studio

Reine Mahfouz

was born in Beirut in 1975. She studied photography at The Holy Spirit University in Kaslik, Lebanon. She has been producing work on Beirut and on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon since 1996. She has exhibited her work in various venues in Lebanon and throughout Europe, including the Crypt of Saint Joseph Church in Beirut, Point Éphémère in Paris, the Kufa Gallery in London and the MAN Museum in Liverpool, among others. Mahfouz lives and works in Beirut.

I set up the first *Nomadic Studio* in 2001, on the occasion of my nephew Elias' christening. I wanted to take pictures of my entire family, so I hung up a white cloth as a backdrop, positioned the lights and the camera and placed my sister and her family in the centre of the studio. I photographed them as other members of the family stood aside and waited their turn.

Since then, *Nomadic Studio* has navigated public spaces and private parties, drawing inspiration from various people, activities and locations. Using *Nomadic Studio* as a medium, I am attempting to revive some of the practices of profes-

sional photography that prevailed at the beginning of the last century, when photographers would wander through towns and cities taking pictures of their inhabitants.

I use rolls of film and classical film techniques, so that tangible proof from these photographic moments may remain to document a past era. In this studio, there is no time to think of position or pose because the picture is instantaneous; people hardly have time to enter the booth before the picture is taken of their first reaction. The memory of our present is recorded as it immediately, instantly becomes our past. This practice is my own way of documenting the people passing through my time and place.













PUBLICATIONS

Home Works II: A Forum on Cultural Practices, Ashkal Alwan
Yasser Arafat Looked at Me and Smiled: Diary of a Fighter, Yussef Bazzi
Burning in the Past Tense, Suhail Shadoud
Sayyidi Milady, Nadine Touma
File: Public Time, Fadi Abdallah, Bilal Khbeiz and Walid Sadek