HOME WORKS

A FORUM ON CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE REGION
Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria

April 2 - 7, 2002
Beirut, Lebanon

Home Works: A Forum on Cultural Practices in the Region
Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and **Syria**

A book by **Christine Tohme** and **Mona Abu Rayyan**

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This book contains more than 500 exercises, divided into six categories:

- *Warmups* are exercises that EVERY READER should try to do when first reading the material.

- *Basics* are exercises to develop facts that are best learned by trying one's own derivation rather than by reading somebody else's.

- *Homework exercises* are problems intended to deepen an understanding of material in the current chapter.

- *Exam problems* typically involve ideas from two or more chapters simultaneously; they are generally intended for use in take-home exams (not for in-class exams under time pressure).

- *Bonus problems* go beyond what an average student of concrete mathematics is expected to handle while taking a course based on this book; they extend the text in interesting ways.

- *Research problems* may or may not be humanly solvable, but the ones presented here seem to be worth a try (without time pressure).
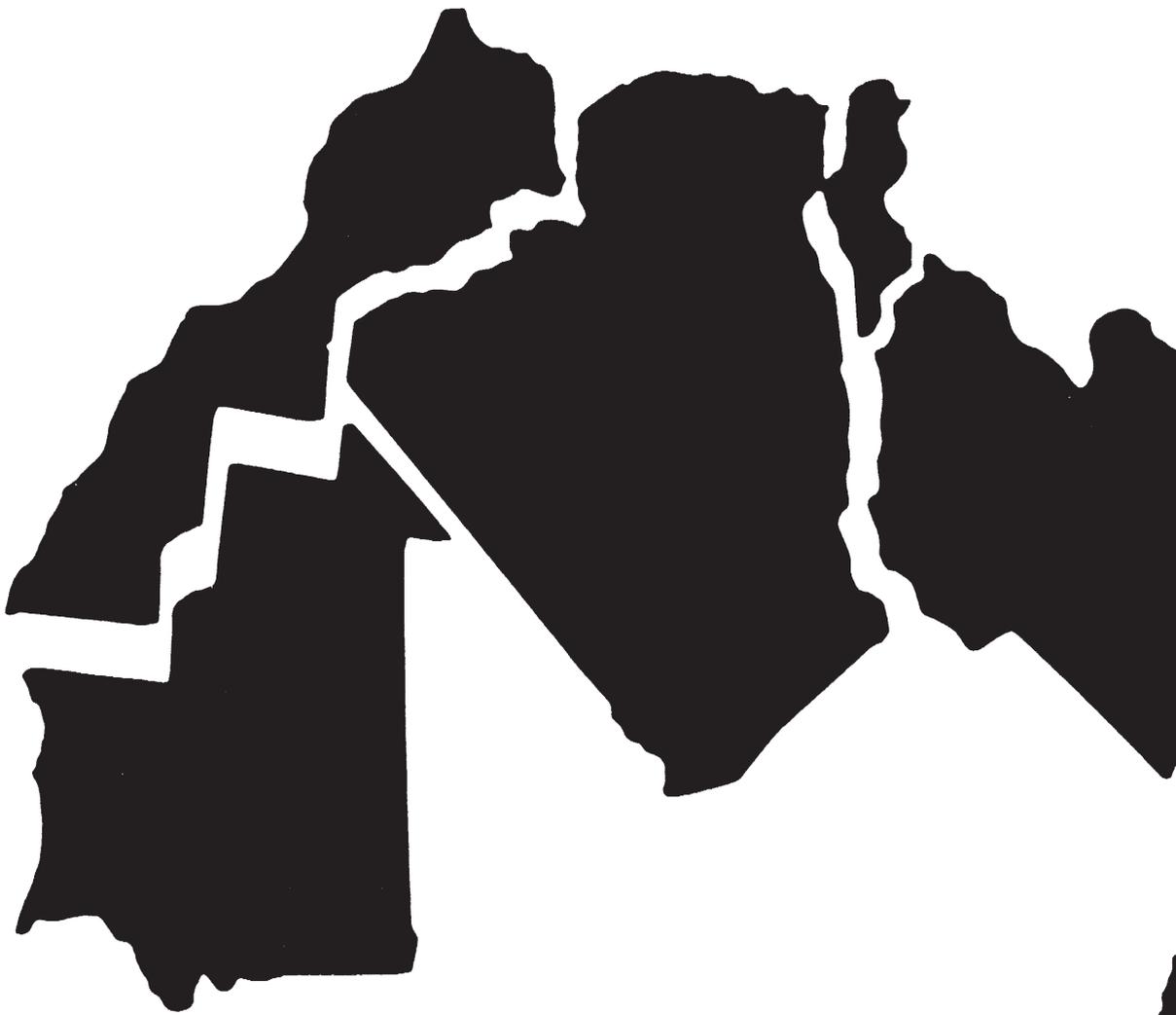
Missing Links, courtesy of Marwan Rechmaoui

Acknowledgments

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Beirut, a city just rising from a civil war, and which is threatened by all kinds of perils, is seducing artists and writers from all over the globe. It is not self-evident for Beirut to be able to support this combination of people who produce culture and art. For a long time, we have been accustomed to a sharp division between East and West, modernisation and tradition and national identities and the conditions of being open to the world. This division always puts us in a difficult position when it comes to our relationship with the 'other'. The 'other' was always defined by clear attributes: Nationality, language, gender, colour, religion and declared positions. We always had to examine these positions, and their closeness to our own, in order to be capable of greeting this 'other' with the welcome she/he deserves. Her/his ideas did not weigh much in this respect, no matter how novel or serious they were. For long decades, we only translated into Arabic the books produced by the West that we deemed convenient; and, we only welcomed and read those who sympathised with our causes, and identified with our identities. I believe that the last two decades have witnessed some thoughtful and successful attempts to break these rigid moulds, and to place the seriousness of ideas and preoccupations as the criteria for calling upon a certain intellectual, from the far ends of the earth, to come and present her/his work and ideas to us. It is to those few that we owe what we've accomplished today. They are the ones who inspired us to be courageous enough to leave the sharp divisions — that we were accustomed to — behind us, and to attempt the creation of an active and serious debate, based on the close relations between the fields of research or the identification required in determining the questions which need to be asked.

The forum that was held last year was a modest attempt to break this rigid pattern. I believe that I should thank all those who shared my dreams and ideas, and all those who helped me face the enormous difficulties that I encountered during the preparations for this event. The experience has allowed me to hope that subsequent forums and projects will be held on this basis, to allow shared ideas and related fields of research to gather people from all over the world, in this small city, as in other cities in this region of the world.

Christine Tohme
Ashkal Alwan, 2003

LECTURES

Scenes and Types

Jananne Al Ani

Scenes and Types is a generic title often attributed to early photographs and postcards, produced for consumption by a growing European market, to suggest an anthropological or ethnographic authority. Through this lecture, I intend to outline a number of concerns in my work as an artist and a curator, by examining some of my own works in relation to the traditions of Orientalist painting and photography – including 19th and early 20th century Orientalist postcards and studio portraits – and to examine this body of work in contrast with the photographs taken by Gaetan de Clerambault and Mark Garanger.

I will begin by describing two early works, which explore the construction of beauty and the representation of the female body in Western art, particularly the image of Middle Eastern and North African women in Orientalist painting. Both works adopt the strategy of appropriation in an attempt to re-contextualise the original material. In the first installation, five framed photographs hang in a gallery, a darkened space, entered through a beaded curtain. The photographs hang in elaborate gold frames, with a picture light positioned above every piece. Each image is an amalgam of a famous painting, Botticelli's *Venus*, Goya's *Naked Maja*, Ingres' *Turkish Bath* and *A Shop Front: A Butcher, A Baker or A Grocer.*

The second installation, *After Eden*, attempts to bring together two 19th century European obsessions: The fantasy of the harem in Western painting and the preoccupation with growing tender, exotic plants. What emerges as most interesting in this analogous presentation is the harem projected as a site of fantasy, in which delicate exotics are protected and nurtured. This work appropriates details from the portraits of the women in iconic Orientalist paintings by Ingres and Delacroix, which are then juxtaposed with images of orchids – flowers that have a particularly strong association with exoticism and sexuality. As a note, these large transparencies were displayed in a conservatory in a rural location in northern England. Through the installed images, the viewer looks out onto an idyllic British landscape beyond.

In recent years, I have become increasingly interested in Orientalist photography. Late 19ᵗʰ and early 20ᵗʰ century photographs of Middle Eastern women drew heavily on a pre-existing repertoire of themes, already established by the genre of Orientalist painting, among these: The harem, the odalisque, the white mistress and her black slave – images ranging from the ethnographic to the pornographic. In her exhaustive book on the representation of women in photography in the Middle East, *Images of Women*, Sarah Graham-Brown examines the relationship between the traditions of Orientalist painting and photography. For Graham-Brown, "the difference between paintings and photographs lies in the way they appear to the viewer. As Barthes suggests, this product of chemistry has a claim to "represent a reality" in a way no artist would claim for a painting. The process of photography, therefore, could transform these imaginative arrangements in the studio into 'proof' of the way in which people in the Middle East and elsewhere looked and behaved."[1]

Not only do photographic images of Middle Eastern women emerge from a tradition of painting, but they are also heavily informed by Western literature. In some of the extraordinary writings of European travelers who documented their encounters with the Orient and in particular, their experiences of encountering veiled women for the first time, the veil had become, and remains, the most significant sign or symbol of the 'Oriental' woman. The following extract from the writings of Sir Richard Burton is interesting in that it is a warning to other

European men about the danger of disappointment when finally confronting Arab women in the flesh. It also exposes the reality that many Orientalist artists had never, in fact, worked in the Middle East. Rather, they simply painted in the studio, using an assortment of 'Oriental' props and European models.

I warn all men that if they run to Al-Hijaz in search of the charming face which appears in my sketch book as 'a Badawi girl', they will

1 Graham-Brown, Sarah, *Images of Women*, London: Quartet Books, 1988, p.40.
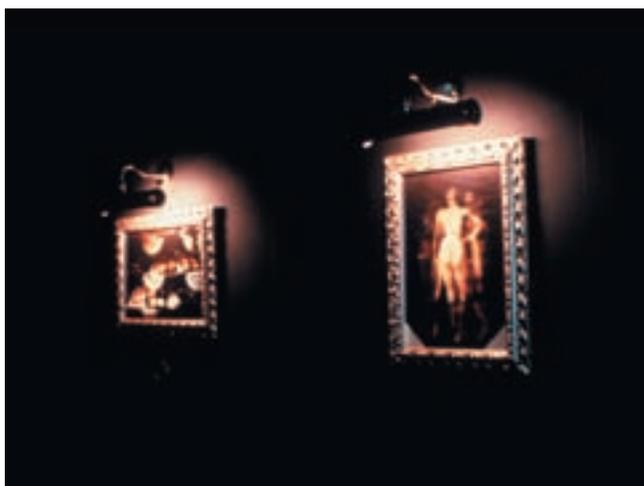
be bitterly disappointed: The dress was Arab, but was worn by a fairy of the West. The Hijazi woman's eyes are fierce, her features harsh and her face haggard; like all people of the South, she soon fades, and in old age her appearance is truly witchlike.[2]

Underpinning these images is an overall imbalance of power between the coloniser and the colonised, the photographer and his subject and between men and women. Photography is an exercise in power. Those in front of the camera frequently feel threatened by its ability to 'freeze' them into an image; and, photography was used as a threatening weapon by many Europeans to coerce their subjects to pose for them. The following anecdote illustrates this beautifully:

The photographer Maxime du Camp visited Egypt and Palestine in 1848 and 1849 with the novelist Gustave Flaubert. Du Camp described how he used Hajji Ismail, one of the sailors on the Nile steamer, which the party sailed on, to pose for him, usually only wearing a loincloth. "In this way," he remarked, "I was able to include a uniform scale of proportions on every one of my plates." To persuade the man to remain still for the required length of time, he turned the camera into a threatening object; "I told him that the brass tube of the lens jutting out from the camera was a cannon, which would vomit a hail of shot if he had the misfortune to move – a story which immobilised him completely".[3]

There were other ways in which the camera might be perceived as a threat. In cultures where the regulation of women's visibility was an important part of patriarchal control, photography might suggest not only an assertion of the photographer's power over the subject, but also a loss of indigenous male control over women. Western men's fantasies of what lay hidden out of view from them are a common theme in the writings of the time:

Sequestered within those inviolate walls are the two great mysteries of the East – its women and its wealth. Both are jealously guarded from the eye of the stranger; both are, in the most literal sense of the word, interred, for the manner of the Moor betrays nothing concerning the extent of the quality of his possessions.[4]

One of the ways in which photography worked hand-in-hand with anthropology and ethnography was by documenting what the population of a country looked like, so that a culture became represented by props, objects and costumes. Often, the titles attributed to studio portraits of native people were very generalised; for instance, *An Arab Woman* and *A Turkish Woman*. Frequently, they would be erroneously titled and pieces of costume would be incorrectly identified. Women who posed for the photographs were often paid models who acted out different characters, so that you might find the same woman appearing as an aristocratic Turkish lady in one studio portrait and as an Egyptian peasant woman in another. This whole idea of performance is interesting to me. I also love the painted backdrops in these photographs, often strange combinations of Eastern and Western landscapes, palm trees entwined with ivy, desert landscapes with Germanic follies in the distance and oak trees and ferns, juxtaposed with women posing with a range of 'Oriental' props.

2 Burton, Sir Richard F., *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madina and Meccah*, 1907, 1ˢᵗ Edition, 1855, Vol.II, p.85.

3 Du Camp, Maxime, *Le Nil, Egypte et Nubie*, quoted in Francis Steegmuler, Flaubert, G. and Madame Bovary, London: Robert Hale, 1939, p. 196.

4 Devereux, Roy, *Aspects of Algeria: Historical, Political, Colonial*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1912, pp. 6-8.

I decided to try and make a piece of work that said something about this idea – that costume or dress can represent an entire group of people or culture. In much of my work, I use my family as the 'performers'. One of the reasons I use them, particularly in the context of my ideas about anthropological photography, relates to the fact that my mother is Irish and my father Iraqi. So the family embodies a kind of cultural mixing, which I wanted to preserve in this work, an ambiguity and sense of unfixed identity that reflects, to some extent, the methods of the Orientalist painters who often used European models dressed up as 'Oriental' women. I wanted to use models who represented various stages of Arab-ness, Muslim-ness or European-ness. In the first image, the women appear in 'ordinary' Western dress and in the second image – by placing apparently Oriental costumes on them – the viewer begins to interpret the identity of the women quite differently. The costumes themselves are part reality and part fiction. Some of them are 'genuine', while others were bought from tourist shops in the Middle East, so they represent a kind of fictional 'Oriental' dress.

Photographs of Middle Eastern women produced by European – and later also by indigenous – photographers spanned a whole spectrum of functions, from the anthropological to the pornographic. They illustrate many of the European myths about veiled women and the fantasies of what might lie beneath the veil. Many European travelers described how important it was for women to keep their faces covered

because it concealed their identity. And, some have described the excitement they felt when seeing women reveal other parts of their bodies, while preferring to keep their faces hidden in order to preserve their identity:

The veil seems to be the most important piece of their dress: Their chief care is always to hide their face. There have been many instances of women who, upon being surprised naked, eagerly covered their faces, without shewing any concern about their other charms.[5]

Despite the Christian veil existing as a symbol of modesty and piety in Europe, this quote suggests that the primary function of the Muslim veil is to conceal the identity of the wearer. As a consequence, the notion of the Muslim veil being a

5 Niebuhr, M., *Travels Through Arabia*, Edinburgh: R. Morrison & Son, 1792, 2 vols. vol. I, p.118.

symbol of modesty is dismissed and according to the logic of this observation, if an 'Oriental' woman's face is exposed, she may as well be completely naked!

I started to focus much more on this particular fascination with the veil, and to investigate the complexities of what the veil represents, not just for 19th century Europeans who encountered veiled women for the first time, but its significance now. Ironically, many 19th century observations could very easily be mistaken for contemporary accounts. It has also been interesting to examine the difference between European women's reactions, as opposed to that of European men. Often, Western women would feel sympathy for the veiled woman, or would see the veil in the context of Islamic oppression, and be horrified and disgusted by it. Many men expressed an aggressive desire to tear away the veil to see what was hidden behind it, while others were seduced and unnerved by it. John Foster Fraser revealed his feeling of insecurity when he wrote:

Often I felt there was something uncanny about those great eyes of the solemn women, always bright and always black. Big, unblinking, dreamy, sensuous eyes, which filled one with a nervous curiosity as to what their owners were thinking about.[6]

In contrast, Lucie Paul Margueritte points to the relationship between looking and power, which is something I've tried to explore in my own work. What she identifies is the privileged position which veiled women occupy because they are able to see and to look, but not be seen or recognised in return:

Under the arcades of the Avenue de France, the veiled women of the common people go into the shops. Beside these women wrapped up from head to toe, whose eyes cannot always be seen but are always seeing, I have the feeling of being naked.[7]

In his book, *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula examines postcards of Algerian women produced during the French occupation and compares the gaze of the veiled woman with that of the photographer's:

These veiled women are not only an embarrassing enigma to the photographer, but an outright attack on him. It must be believed that the feminine gaze that filters through the veil is a gaze of a particular kind: Concentrated by the tiny orifice for the eye, the womanly gaze is a little like the photographic lens that takes aim at everything. The photographer makes no mistake about it: He knows this gaze well; it resembles his own when it is extended by the dark chamber or the view-finder. Thrust in the presence of a veiled woman, the photographer feels photographed; having himself become an object-to-be-seen, he loses initiative: He is dispossessed of his own gaze.[8]

Much of this research has fed into a body of work dealing with this relationship between the photographer and the veiled woman, and the fantasy of uncovering or exposing the veiled woman. I produced a pair of photographs in which I took a group of five women and set them up for a portrait, rather like one might in a 19th century studio. What interests me, in particular, about the studio portraits is the constructed nature of the image, the painted backdrop, the props, the stiff, formal posing and the costumes. Also, early portrait photographers often allow

6 Fraser, John Foster, *The Land of Veiled Women: Some Wanderings in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco*, London: Cassell & Company, 1911, p. 75-6.

7 Margueritte, Lucie Paul, *Tunisiennes*, Paris: Les Edition Denoel, 1937, p.67.

8 Alloula, Malek, *The Colonial Harem*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987, p. 14.

us to see the mess of the studio beyond the edges of the backdrop and, in doing so, reveal the artifice of the photograph in the photograph itself. In my own work, I wanted to maintain this sense of formality, but also to reveal the fact that the photographs are a fiction.

One of the ways to achieve this impression was to divide the photographs into two – horizontally: What is occurring in the top half of the photographs, with the veils increasing and decreasing, is the formal, posed part of the image; and what is occurring in the bottom half: The fact that they are wearing casual Western dress, jeans and shorts etc., is revealing the 'behind the scenes' mess. The women stare out at the viewer in quite a confrontational way, and this represents, for me, the idea of the veiled gaze being a powerful gaze. I created a pair of photographs that work together, and are presented facing each other, so each of the women looks back at herself and, as the viewer enters the gallery, they disrupt the space between the two photographs.

There are two exceptional bodies of work which, despite being produced under what we might consider to be 'optimum' colonial conditions, are somehow able to transcend the circumstances of their production. For me, one of the most significant bodies of work on the veil is that of the French psychiatrist Gaetan de Clerambault. Clerambault was interested in mental automatism and passion-based psychoses. He produced two landmark texts on women's passion for fabrics. Clerambault enlisted as a medical officer during World War I and, after being wounded, was sent to Fez in

Morocco to recuperate. It was only after his death that an archive of some four hundred photographs, which he had taken of Moroccan women in the process of veiling were discovered.

Clerambault is a mysterious figure and little is known about the circumstances under which these images were made. What differentiates them from the Orientalist stereotyping, so dominant in the photography of his contemporaries, is the delicacy and sensitivity of the works. Many of the women are photographed in genuine interiors, unlike the stage sets of the commercial photographic studio. Others are photographed

outdoors, appearing active in the landscape. What interested Clerambault was the act of veiling itself and, in contrast to the dominant imagery of women becoming increasingly revealed to the extreme of nakedness, the women Clerambault photographs become increasingly hidden by the veil, while maintaining a strange and intimate relationship with the camera.

The veil, as a symbol, is not static but constantly shifting according to differing historical and political contexts. For example, the removal of the veil in public in Egypt in the early part of the 20th century was a sign of defiance and feminist resistance. By contrast, in Algeria in the 1950s and 60s, the veil came to be seen by many, including the black intellectual and political activist Frantz Fanon, as a symbol of Arab resistance to French colonial oppression. Working as a military photographer during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62), Marc Garanger was ordered to unveil Algerian women forcibly in order to photograph them so that identity cards could be made. Garanger has described the attitude of his superiors towards the photographs as an obscene physical attack. In his view, it was as if the women had been raped twice; the first time was being forced to unveil, and the second was having their photograph taken.

Resistance and confrontation are visible in the faces of the women Garanger photographed, and many of them stare back at him with utter contempt. However, in some of the photographs, the women look submissive or uncomfortable, ambivalent even. Surprisingly, in oth-

ers, they look relaxed and some even smile back at the camera. Although Garanger's portraits could be described as a perfect illustration of the relationship through photography between the coloniser and the colonised, the ambiguity that arises in a number of the portraits undermines this thesis. Is it possible for the compassion of the individual photographer to affect the outcome of an image in circumstances of such an extreme imbalance of power? Having been coerced himself into taking the photographs, is it possible that Garanger's sympathy for these women somehow affected the outcome? Or perhaps the relationship between the camera and the subject can exist outside these parameters. Whilst these photographs were being taken, were the women looking back at the colonialist, the photographer or indeed just the camera?

I will finish with a series of recent portraits, which I consider to be a continuation of the work I've been doing on the veil. This work focuses on the idea of concealment; each of the twenty portraits is of a woman who, in some way, is covering her face with her hands. This work addresses the image of the grieving woman which appears throughout the history of art and which is also a popular motif in reportage and photojournalism. The work is about the hierarchies of representation implicit in photography, particularly those relating to the 'other', non-European subject. The images are deliberately ambiguous; what are these women doing? Have they just witnessed some calamity or disaster, or have they been captured performing some mundane, everyday gesture, sneezing,

yawning or rubbing their eyes because they are tired, bored even?

I'd just like to say, before I end, that this forum is significant for me because this is the first time I have had the opportunity to show my work, and to discuss my concerns and other works I am interested in, outside a Western or European context. Despite coming from the Middle East – I was born and spent my childhood in Iraq – , I have had a British art education and all the work that I create and the methodologies I adopt are framed by the latter context. Much of the work I have shown here, at the forum, focuses on Western constructs of the 'other' and is produced primarily for a Western audience. I think it would be really interesting if we could have some discussion about whether this kind of approach to producing work is relevant in the Middle Eastern context, whatever that means; and, if any of the subjects I tackle in my work have any validity outside the context of Western art practice. Is there a clear division in the way artists work across the globe or has so-called globalisation removed any distinguishing characteristics? I hope not.

Born in Iraq, Jananne Al Ani currently lives and works in London. Al Ani studied Fine Art at the Byam Shaw School of Art and in 1997, completed an MA in photography at the Royal College of Art. She produces photographic installation, audio-visual, film, video and site specific works. Al Ani has works in a number of public collections, including the Arts Council of England and the Pompidou Centre, Paris. She has exhibited internationally and has had solo shows at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. and the Imperial War Museum in London.

Culture and Arts; Re: The Actual

Abbas Baydoun

Translated from Arabic by Karl Sharro

Once, while visiting an exhibition of the work of a well-known Lebanese artist, I saw an assortment of paintings some inspired by Pissarro and Monet, some which flirted with Cubism and abstraction, and others reminiscent of the Cobra. When I asked the artist about this, he answered by saying that, for him, different situations and various moments push him to Impressionism, while others push him towards Cubism and the Cobra.

The work of the past 150 years lies before him; and he has only to consult his whim to know what to choose and how to approach it. Of course, not all exhibitions are like this; and, this comic scene does not occur frequently. Nevertheless, we have heard artists saying that they have painted similarly to Matisse and Miro, without their knowledge, and without the knowledge of Matisse and Miro. Neither they nor their audience is naïve, but such an issue is like a secret bank account that cannot be revealed; there is a secret account between the world and us, and it had better stay like this.

Though this comic scene does not occur frequently, its logic is prevalent. There's a feeling that the world is our country, and that we are born and begin as internationalists. Our painters hold dialogues with Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard and Rauschenberg; our poets hold dialogues with Perse, Lorca, Eliot, Ritsos and Nietzsche; our novelists hold dialogues with Kundera, Suskind and Rushdie; and our critics are the brothers of Bakhtin, Genette and Barthes. We are born internationalists, by international standards and international conditions and with an international outlook. This internationalism of ours is instinctive, and is perhaps akin to the Lebanese ability for adaptation and movement. We are cultural nomads, never settling in a single place, ceaselessly wandering among the oases of modern art and culture. This is the instinct of our internationalism, as much as it is an extreme lightness and transience. We are unique among the Arabs in not possessing a constrictive local self; and we are nearly alone among those whose

local self is playful and uninhibited, marrying and adhering to whatever it encounters, and not finding difficulty in accepting the fragrances and colours of others. We can talk here with a certain measure of respect about a snobbish disposition. I say with a 'measure of respect' if we understand snobbism as the capacity of playing with many faces and adhering to different types and models, a capacity for being estranged from the self or considering it an outfit like any other outfit, a face like any other face, and in the end, a role like any other role. I neither reject nor rebut this snobbish disposition, which I might find healthier than an obsessive neurosis that grips the self and the world with endless reinstatements, repetitions and fixations.

I do not rebut because I am not dealing here with the duality of identity and alienation, although I may appear to be doing so. I am talking about a psychological, rather than an ideological, difference. I speak of the difference between happy wandering and obsession – a difference between two dispositions, the first for play, reincarnation and identification; and the second for repetition and fixation. Wandering is probably not alienation, for alienation is a more serious affair than this rapid movement that does not bear inquiry, scrutiny and comprehensiveness, and pursues instead disarrayed images and titles. It is satisfied with trademarks and labels, and is not concerned with structures and particularities, while repetition and fixation are involuntary urges that are incapable of

producing an identity, as long as they are negative to the extent that they do not produce anything, and as long as identity is a designation for the future and not just an invitation for the past, a work-in-progress more than a ready-made, a complex idea more than a self-repeating movement. For we often forget that identity, like nationalism, is a contemporary requirement and a modernist attitude.

For the moment, and only for purposes of classification, I speak of two dispositions, one of which crowds us with images, methodologies, styles and suggestions without necessarily making a place. For this crowdedness is a product of the touristic intellect and the distinct imagination, and a consequence of unstoppable movement and of ceaseless roaming. The second disposition leans more towards isolation, minimisation, confinement and solitude. What it singles out and insists upon becomes, through repetition, insistence and corroboration, an impassioned sentiment… and becomes elevated to gems, pillars, glorifying appellations, totems and taboos. Two dispositions: The first playful and roaming, fascinated by the world, by beauty and by appearances; the second inclined towards settlement, economy and dryness. The first is frequently connecting and disconnecting, getting attached to styles, methods and modes under the influence of a fleeting fascination that rapidly gets bored and fulfiled and moves to other places; and the second is loyal and persistent. For loyalty and persistence also entail heaviness, boredom and sluggishness. The first

does not find a medium between itself, the world and the other; the second is more firmly established, slower in its movement. The first is creative because of levity and instant improvisation; and the second makes more than it creates, and makes with capable hands and established custom, practice and skillfulness. The first, colourful, phosphorescent, embellished, elegant and stylised; the second, more materially substantial and less seductive. The first, promiscuous and playful – having the air as its horizon, the wind as its imagination; the second, earthly, with a fondness for mud and details.

For classification purposes only, there appear to be two; but, in reality, there are more than two dispositions. When simplified, they appear opposed to each other; but in fact, they are two temperaments that attract, intersect and compliment each other simultaneously. But if we go back to the 'internationalism of Lebanese art' that we call instinctive, we will find that the temperament and disposition of Lebanese art are closer to the first inclination; for this art is open almost unconditionally to the world and is a direct inheritor of a century and a half of Western art. It contains fluidity, a congestion of images and inspirations, continuous stylistic shifts, excessive stylisation, elegance, synthetic prudence and a symmetrical spirit. It is also a colourful, clean art averse to the literary subject – indeed to every subject – to every odd expression and to every distinct idea.

The pretense of internationalism in Lebanese art relieves us from having to think about art. We do not need to think about what others have thought about and have concluded upon, as we only need to rely on the result and the application and be satisfied with the resulting forms and not the driving questions, with styles, techniques and methods, without the theory and the philosophy. And so, this internationalism sets a link made of forms and techniques between the world and ourselves and allows the import of these forms and techniques regardless of their culture and their concomitant questions. We have become as skilled with these techniques and styles as if they were our own, even though we are unconcerned with their questions. Thus, we can say that our arts are mostly technical and that they are based on skills and practice rather than on experiments and positions. Craft is in one place and the question in another. Through this, we can understand how much stylistics, formalism, skill and technique there are in these arts. This willingness to reproduce the international trademark, without its questions and its requirements, is present not only in this art, but also in poetry, novels, theatre and music. We have often practiced forms and techniques in dismantling time, alienating narrations, composing in whites and re-producing display, without seeing in that more than free forms and formal suggestions that we practice as stylistic expressions only, unaware of their philosophy, culture and vision, and unaware of what they embody in terms of re-

questioning the conceptions and purpose of art and its connection to the transformations of the world and culture. If we acknowledge that the philosophy of art is an inseparable part of modern art itself, and that forms with their reasons-to-be and their cultural and theoretical justifications are in the end cultural responses – if we acknowledge that – then we would understand that we produce an art which is cut-off from its culture, thus transforming the international trademark into an art without a culture.

Silent, technical art is transformed into a stylistic contest, to an art that is less innovative and less daring than we think. The stylistic contest employs a measure of visual deception, using bedazzlement, elegance, symmetry and seduction as its tools. There is an elegance, fluidity and kindness in every work, even those that appear, at the first instance, to be simply improvising or negligent. Our art, which leans towards excessive colourfulness and synthetic balance, may find some justification in the Paris school. But, it conceals its own convictions through that scarcity of its requirements and its immersion in its formalism. Contrary to appearances, this art is not disposed towards actual innovation; the mark of innovation is stronger than innovation itself.

The generosity with which forms and colours are dispensed often conceal excessive stylicism, synthetic caution and formal balance; it conceals an obvious care in treating the eye kindly and a wariness of provoking it. To many people, innovation appears to be an art that is synonymous with fluidity and bedazzlement; and for that, we rely less on negligence, disorder and discolouration in our art. We did not celebrate Surrealism because it dealt with expression and ideas; and expression and thought disrupt the balance and fluidity of our paintings. We did not take interest in assemblage and pop-art; and we accepted them unwillingly and often sought in them a stylicism and an embellishment that do not fit with their initial principles and starting points, wasting the idea of finding an art that iconises the ordinary, the ready-made and the artificial, and that draws on sources outside art. Our response to pop-art and assemblage seems to indicate that we did not really accept them, and sought to trim the non-artistic materials of their usefulness and ordinariness, and incorporate them into a compositional game that distances them from their origin and thus, transforms them into purely artistic elements. Also, Lebanese art accepted installation art unwillingly and only in its margins, and is still experiencing a resident misunderstanding with conceptual art. Let us say that the innovation that we hold dear allows us to demonstrate our skills in conditioning, identification and re-producing more beautiful, more polite, more fluid and more visually seductive techniques and forms than when they were originally produced.

This may not be the case in literature, theatre and music, but, even there, there is a recurring characteristic, a calculated con-

temporariness. We deal less with innovation than with experimentation, because we always start from complete models and with studied forms, and because the trimming and softening of these forms are components of our art and literature. The 'international training' appears sometimes to bring in disorder, since the attempt to balance the imported elements and the desire to cram in a number of international accessories throw us – contrary to our intentions – into a kind of imbalance. Perhaps, this often appears to be the case in theatre and film; but, as poetry appears to be transformed into a secondary art, it has almost lost its adventurousness and now pursues a form of eloquent innovation or gets diverted into marginal positions.

Let us return to the story of the two dispositions or leanings. We may find Iraqi and Moroccan art closer to settlement, limitation, discipline, minimalism and skilled craft, but this does not relieve either of them from a burden of immutable elements that hinders them and prevents them from being launched properly. It does not remedy a recurring obsession that transforms it into stereotyping and inactive stylicism and, sometimes, into a purely ideological expression. We find, in plastic arts, the ultimate expression of this in the primeval art itself, that rapidly becomes a depressive and earthly material, which is stereotyped and melancholic. We may be in between two dispositions: At one end, a lightness and at the other, an obsession. Between the two, is an adventure that is, at one end,

without a particular question and at the other, without a particular motion. Or, let us say that we are in the presence of an art that is about motion and another art that is gripped by a calcified question, as if gripping a smouldering coal.

For classification purposes only, I talk about two dispositions and leanings; and I talk about them no matter how little evaluation I appear to be doing. Classification in general is general, in general; it does not apply fully to any single example and every example whose particularities we go into escapes it. There is, of course, As-Sayyab, who settles and takes hold without ponderosity; and there is Al-Azzawi, who joins the two dispositions; and there is Hussein Madi, from the other dimension, who leans more towards strength and deep-rootedness. There is Adonis, who is comprehensive and seems master of both dispositions, as well as many others. I am not concerned with listing or judging artists, I am just saying that what we think of as a conscious decision is, in fact, an internal disposition that we cannot frame or classify ideologically. It is mostly a temperament, or something akin to it. We can sometimes find the same temperament with significant differences in painting, poetry, novels, theatre and music. Its seduction in painting, for example, is less cautious. In spite of the fact that it is less durable, Lebanese painting may be the most beautiful – but remains the least established – art in the Arab world. In poetry, additional caution succeeds more at balancing lightness, swiftness, seduction and

discipline. In film, the international trademark changes into an imagination, controls the work, prevents it from breathing and moving, and transforms it into inconsistent parts, a strangled language, a withdrawal and a crippling eloquence. Maybe, theatre suffers from a contest that often ends with congestion, excessiveness and synthetic disarray – but we should not forget that instinctive internationalism is a characteristic, not a handicap; and that stylicism is a characteristic, not a handicap; and that excessiveness and lightness are characteristics, not handicaps. We should also not forget that internationalism is a style, a list of attributes, not a cultural depth, or civilisation or progress over others; for the hotelier knows this brand more than the man of letters, as does the restaurant owner and the man who sells souvenirs. And so, deep-rootedness and fixation are merely temperaments; and we cannot describe them as regressive or reactionary.

Let us see, for example, what the discussion of modernism has yielded – this discussion that established figures are still delving into. 'Modernism' and 'modernisers' are two recurring words, today, that young people use without knowing that this attire once belonged to the generation of their parents, whose age did not allow them any other words. Modernism has not changed in fifty years and, if anything has changed at all, modernism is today an accomplished model. If you find fault with the fathers for retiring early, then what do you think of

the sons who pick up the attire of fifty-year-old terminologies – as if half a century does not make any difference?

The poets, painters and dramatists often do not know where Western modernism or postmodernism has arrived at; but this is not the point, exactly. The point is that our modernism has not been affected by the last fifty years, and imports fragments of an artistic and literary modernism. It is without a philosophical reserve and without social and political transformations, without universities and cultural institutions and without a modern economy. It seems as if modernism, still suspended in art, did not pose a question, and still does not. We, here, still entrust art and poetry with what should be entrusted to culture and society, as a whole. We still think that literature and art alone can escape what applies to society, economics, politics and architecture. Why not? Modernism, like most of our possessions, is still beautiful and desirable in itself, and does not need more than discourse about it to be present and established. If the conception of modernism is temporal, and if modernism was, in the beginning, a distance in time, we then made it eternal and lasting; and we divorced it from time.

The strange fact is that we are stepping into postmodernism with little change in our discourse, and without questioning the substance of our artistic and literary modernism. Were abstraction and the connection to Brecht and Beckett, and reading T. S. Eliot and Saint John Perse enough to establish a modernism? Was not, in all of that,

the assumption of a renaissance, a second birth and a new age without any foundation except the strength of discourse and verbal recall? Was that not a kind of special myth or special magic? Things materialise just by being named; and modernism and the future become as strong as a name. Modernism was the anthem of the nationalist future for some; for others, it was a definition by negation: No to politics, no to the outside, no to traditions. It was a search for a self that escaped the world, reality and the outside. Isn't this closer to a special romanticism than to an actual contemporaneity? Isn't this completed with the claims of identity? The future gets completed with the past; for the future and the past, in claims like this, are not really different. They are two eternal times that do not move; yet, everything moves for and towards them. The future is nominal and so is the past; for how could it be otherwise – and with what relics, what traces, real or assumed? That is, we are in the presence of a timeless 'modernism' so, there is really no wonder that it was rapidly transformed into a verbal utopia and a nominal type, unaffected by time; and it remained mired in the same discourse, repeating the same arguments. The time of modernism itself was probably an apostasy, a discursive revelation of its fragility and utopianism; the more reality was allowed to appear and become present, the more its superficiality and its paradoxiality became visible. It appeared beautiful by itself and for itself; and it became

difficult to attach to any tangible outside. It became legitimate to question whether it fed on any present or any circumstance, if there was any substance or any reality in it. It revolves around itself, is born from itself and feeds on itself; and perhaps, our prevalent culture of discourse does only that.

Modernism is a culture in which conceptions are transformed into isolated, self-sustaining galaxies, and only immerses itself in its own myth and keeps repeating itself. Thus, we can talk about argumentative islands and examine the extent to which argumentation – through its language and vocabulary, at least – is a renewed generation of the intellectual and conceptual wreck itself.

Abdullah Al Arawi decided one day that we ought to start from a historicist Marxism, the 'Marxism of Alienation' and the German ideology. He was, thus, countering Althusser who called for starting again from the Marxism of Capital. Then, Al-Jabiri said that we should start from Ibn Roshd. In poetry, we did not start from Al-Nafri only, but also from Perse, Eliot, Ritsos and others. We started from Al-Wassiti, and shortly thereafter, from Ibn Moukla; whereas starting from Matisse, Picasso and Miro did not need any declaration: "Starting and re-starting", as Waddah Sharara says. I do not accuse beginnings, for they are legends that the artist cannot do without; but the ideology of beginnings always puts us before the start, waiting for it. We do not find an Arab library, museum, theatre or concert hall. This does not

mean that there is no accumulation or heritage, but that ours is a culture of suggestions.

Modernism is a cyclical affair without beginnings; it is fragments and shreds. We can only imagine our culture as fragments and pieces. There is no real possibility of connection, continuity and order in units and climates. Everything that culture does is ruined by reality, a reality that is without character, forms, clear institutions or fixed structures. This reality of "amnesia", if we use the Heideggerean concept of amnesia, is what transforms an aerial, paradoxical and self-supporting culture into a kind of a continuous repression, or into separate points and labels with no connections, frames or overriding themes. If we had started with a nominal modernism, then how do we move into what's after it? Is the 'daily' poetry, the dark cynical installations, so-called Oriental jazz, the scenic bodily theatre or quoting Derrida and Huntington enough to establish anything more than fragments and impotent beginnings? There isn't much behind us really, so how do we proceed from it into an empty future and continue, by that, a process that we can only imagine as separate leaps in the air? If we distance ourselves from the details, we can imagine that this procession is silent to a large extent. If Arab modernism began as a resonating call, what follows it begins as a crime or as a different, silent step.

Postmodernism begins without a theoretical accompaniment, without a discourse and without a call. It begins as a practical development or a technical adventure. If modernism was the anthem of a nominal future or a theoretical dream of a beginning, postmodernism is not concerned with settling any previous accounts; but, it supposes that it can establish itself without settling accounts and with only technical and partial interventions in special fields. There is no critique of modernism in Arab postmodernism, we come across attempts in installation art or conceptual art; but, we find declared or undeclared justifications for them. There is no doubt that there is a critical significance in some of these works – some of which is self-referential, of course – but we cannot easily find what might establish movements or currents in a collection of works like this. That is, we are witnessing artistic exercises in a field in which it is not enough for the work to be an artwork only, but is required to be a critique, a response and a protest in equal measure. These are artistic exercises in which the protest against art is transformed into pure art, the technique and the craft alone without a concept, without having a culture and philosophy.

Art without culture, this is what we are sinking into, or what we might sink into. Of course, there are exceptions but, I have noticed the prevalence of a technical course and explanation, whereas art is supposed to exceed technicality. This is probably one of the results of a complete cultural dislocation in which thought appears to be a private space, that is, a technical field also. Politics, too, become a

technical field; and, the public field becomes a foggy image. It is even possible for reality, itself, to be seen as a private field that has its own specialists and experts. Modern culture sometimes appears to be more fragmented than its precedent. Rather, it appears to have been born out of an immense fragmentation of reality, itself, and a quasi-pragmatic surrender to this fragmentation. The transformation of art, itself, to a technical subject means taking it partially out of culture and causing it to exist without justification other than its own rules. In brief, it means a great schism between art and the outside (for these purposes let us call it 'the outside'); and, this way of mixing between different fields – like what happens in theatre – becomes only a method and a technical performance. The importation of the ordinary and the popular becomes also merely a formal preference. We definitely find, then, in times, in styles, the artistic and the non-artistic, the artificial and the non-artificial, the personal and the impersonal – merely methods. This is what an art that does not renew its protest and does not connect to a movement of protest ends like; and, it lives in a time when culture becomes a secondary issue, and maybe, an additional credit for the politicians and the bureaucrats, and even the priests and the mullahs.

Abbas Baydoun was born in 1945 in the village of Ch'hour, in the region of Tyre, South Lebanon. For a period, he was preoccupied with left-wing political activities, which prevented him from publishing. He was incarcerated and tortured. He wrote and published successively: *Tyre, Time in Big Gulps, Visitors of First Rain*, followed by *Hunting Proverbs*, and preceded by *Glass Cemeteries*, then *Critique of Pain, Rooms, This Cup's Vacuity, Brothers of Our Remorse, To a Patient that is Hope, Uttered in the Cold* and *Blood Analysis*. Aside from poetry, he also writes literary and art criticism. He edits the cultural supplement of the daily *As-Safir* in Beirut. His poetry has been translated into English, German, Spanish, Italian, Greek and Catalan. His collection *Tyre* was published by Actes Sud in French.

Learning from Beirut: Contemporary Aesthetic Practices in Lebanon

Stakes and Conditions for Experimental, Cultural and Aesthetic Practices in Lebanon and Elsewhere

Catherine David

Translated from French by Rasha Salti

This paper, part of a larger work-in-progress, is an occasion for me to exchange a few thoughts on art and its practices within a Lebanese context, and perhaps others. I certainly do not speak from a position of authority, nor can I pretend to have come all this way to explain to you what contemporary art in Lebanon is. A few prefatory remarks will perhaps shed light on the interrogations and observations that animate this paper. Although the title, ''Contemporary Aesthetic Practices in Lebanon'', promises a review and discussion of a certain number of specific contemporary aesthetic practices in Lebanon, I have preferred to postpone such an endeavour. I would note, however, that this paper speaks from the perspective of a specific selection of such practices. As to the subtitle, ''Stakes and Conditions for Experimental, Cultural and Aesthetic Practices in Lebanon and Elsewhere'', it is important to state, at the outset, that I am not a sociologist, and therefore, am not interested in the whole of artistic practices, along with every image

and every object produced in the name of art. To be more precise, my interest lies chiefly in what I would like to denote as 'the interiors' of art production, identified in the vocabulary of sociology as an artistic or an aesthetic practice. These 'interiors' encompass objects and propositions that stem – at least, I hope they do – from an experimental and critical practice, the only sort of art practice that interests me, especially now.

I would also like to begin by thanking Christine Tohme for inviting a non-Lebanese and non-Arab interlocutor – a risky decision, I believe, in the present context. And I hope for my contribution to be positive and promote debate. This invitation follows a number of visits I have made to Beirut in the recent past. I did not come here as a tourist. All of my visits evolved within the framework of particular contexts, beginning with a visit occasioned by the Ayloul Festival. I had agreed to come then, because some people, in whom I have particular confidence, had assured me that the Ayloul Festival was indeed a realm for reflection. Dense with

deeply thought-out presentations, I was reassured to discover how little it resembled the myriad of other cultural festivals that the world, and not only Lebanon, endures today.

Through this and other visits, I became interested in what has been referred to as the 'privileged' context of Beirut. Obviously, we ought to all agree on the quotation marks that should bracket the attribute 'privileged'. The word refers to the very turbulent political and social situation in which certain configurations are very precarious and open for redefinition, in some ways desirable, while in others, less so. In such contexts, certain forms of cultural intervention acquire an urgency and a specificity distinct from those embedded in less 'privileged' contexts.

In trying to elaborate my thoughts on this context, it is important to note that those works that have solicited my interest have been produced by a constellation of artists and intellectuals joined in a common cultural project. I insist on specifying that they do not constitute a group. On the one hand, there is no actual group, and, on the other hand, none amongst them claims to belong to such a group. The artists that I have been working with share a cultural project, even if one is able to discern that this project is far from being homogeneous or uniform, and that some of its cracks and fractures might deepen in the future, maybe even in the near future.

The above-mentioned Ayloul Festival directed by Pascale Feghali and Elias Khoury, the projects

directed by Christine Tohme and produced by her institution Ashkal Alwan, and the work of the Arab Image Foundation, an institution that – although young – is nonetheless quite vital, are the spaces through which I approached these artistic and aesthetic practices. These three spaces are embedded in the context that this paper wants to analyse, and which for the moment have been institutionalised and instrumentalised only to a slight extent. The works embedded in this context resemble, in a slight measure, what is commonly understood as contemporary art production. And, as such, they run the risk, as in other contexts elsewhere in the world, of being normalised into the practices of the dominant international networks and circuits. They also run a second risk, the opposite of the first one, and that is to be increasingly marginalised and pushed to operate furtively in un-named margins. Neither of these directions is overtly endorsed by those artists and intellectuals I have worked with.

My involvement in this context is through a project entitled "Contemporary Arab Representations", of which I am a protagonist. It is a sort of mid-term and long-term project where the long-term prospect not only depends on my will, but also on the wills and interests of an ensemble of people. Its ambition is to introduce elsewhere than in the Arab world – in the hope that the most profound repercussions will nevertheless happen in the Arab world – these contemporary

aesthetic, cultural, critical and experimental practices that reside in the Arab world, despite whether or not the *beaux esprits* labour at proving quite the contrary.

Despite the fact that these practices are excessively marginal, a minority, threatened, almost censored and – in some extreme cases – silenced, there are critical and experimental works of prime importance that ought to be rendered visible and circulated in the Arab world and elsewhere. The order of urgency is, at times, tricky to determine and the stakes are not only about introducing works, ideas and projects from the Arab world into European and Western markets, but also about creating situations of confrontation to consolidate and protect the fragility of certain articulations. I belabour to search for the right words because I want to avoid using "emergent situations". That label, whose usage is familiar to Beirut, Sao Paolo and Bombay, is pre-eminently neo-colonial and reactionary. The notion of "emergence" carries a patronising tone, with shades of other dubious notions, such as spontaneity (namely, the unexplained, magical and thus, temporary upsurge of a phenomena) and is therefore, disagreeable, even dangerous. The stakes involved in a project such as "Contemporary Arab Representations" are modulated in a dual direction: On the one hand, to introduce a certain choice of contemporary, critical and experimental projects and propositions from the Arab world and, on the other hand, to ensure that these propositions are spared – through this project in common – the

pressures inherent to the contexts in which they are first articulated. Hence, the methodology of the approach to this project needs to be defined as something more than yet another massive importation of a handful of young stars-in-the-making into the open field of Western capitals. In this sense, operating in the scope of the long-term, this project is a layered approach, a work of infiltration that can be identified as the opposite of the tremulous techniques of spectacle, all too familiar to some orbits of the art world.

The title, "Contemporary Aesthetic Practices", which seems to irritate some observers, deserves a more thorough examination. The terminology is particularly useful for establishing distinctions between what stems from aesthetic critical work and what pertains to the realm of consumption in the dominant culture. In the past fifteen years – maybe less so in Beirut than in other capitals and other cultural locales – , contemporary art has become deeply instrumentalised and transformed into a banner and a space that is subsumed within the larger realm of cultural consumption. The framework of accelerated globalisation and its consequences on culture and cultures should impel us to be more attentive, more actively vested in keeping watch over the whole issue of heterogeneities. For, in themselves, namely when they are presented as an essential difference, heterogeneities become easily appropriated within the logic of global capital. Yet, when the proper attention is given

them, heterogeneities appear first-
ly as symptoms of a temporality,
of the variety of velocities that
need to be protected from
homogenisation and flattening
and, in some cases, from outright
destruction by a single, dominant
velocity or speed, namely, the
speed of capital. If understood as
such – that is, if revealed rather
than packaged – heterogeneities
can become a critical challenge, as
I hope they do when presented
through the framework of con-
temporary aesthetic practices and
not within contemporary art as a
massive category.

The context of Beirut can also
be characterised as one where the
circumstances are not yet those of
a practiced aesthetic practice, pro-
duced in a highly nationalised
context in which the market holds
a dominant position. And, although
it is important to understand the
situation as such, one should not
dwell upon its deficiencies and
merely lament – as some do. The
situation, as it is, presents a valu-
able context for contemplation.
Going back to my stated interest, I
find that those practices that I
identify as current, experimental
and critical in Lebanon and else-
where are necessary because the
historical relations and the natural
bonds between the realm of poli-
tics and the realm of aesthetics are
now again being redefined. I am
neither speaking in banal journalis-
tic terms, which in my opinion is
dangerous, nor in the terms of the
idiotic grassroots opposition of the
aesthetic and the political, wherein
the political role of the artistic is
understood, purely and simply, as
militant art, or *art engagé*. Rather,

and from the onset, the question
of the relationship between the
realm of the political and the
realm of the artistic or the aes-
thetic must be understood as far
more complex, where some of the
complexities have only begun to
unravel in the past ten years. To
that effect, I would like to cite a
passage from the work of a
philosopher who has greatly con-
tributed to rethinking these
questions, to their actualisation
and their revitalisation today. His
name is Jacques Rensière, and he
is mostly known as a political
philosopher and a specialist in
nineteenth century literature. He
has also worked extensively on
the relationship between the aes-
thetic and the political in literature.
Today, his wide knowledge of cine-
ma and his more recent, very
consequential and honest interest
in the work of some contempo-
rary artists, allows him to play a
major role in redefining these very
crucial questions. What follows is a
citation, a short text excerpted
from his notes, announcing a semi-
nar held in Barcelona:

*Aesthetic and Political: Rethinking a
bond. The relation between the artistic
and the political [or art and politics] has
often been approached like a rapport
between two separate and clearly defined
terms. The political was posited as the
sphere of matters pertaining to power
and the struggle for power. The artistic
was posited as the generic name for a
myriad of practices defined by their mate-
rials, their know-how [or craft] and their
specific final products. The question then
would become whether the artistic could
serve the political without renouncing
itself, or the reverse, whether its conceit at*

remaining autonomous [or at safeguarding its autonomy] does not mask its engagement [or participation] in the game of power. The positioning of these problems in terms of defined identities reveals today, more than ever, its limitations. These identities have become themselves problematic, not only with regard to the artistic or the aesthetic but also [with regard] to the political. The development of a consensus, in stride with globalisation, demonstrates this. It is not enough that there should be power, and a conflict over power, for there to be the political. The political is polemical in its configuration of the world as specificity, the objects that make up its parts and the subjects incapacitated to designate them and argue them. The political is about the sharing of the physical, tangible and sensible, the sharing of spaces, time and activities that define the common whole. The forms of art are themselves the forms of sharing the physical, tangible and sensible. They engage the political, reconfiguring the common world, modifying its forms of visibility and of its objects [parts], the distribution of its activities and the sharing of its spaces and times. There is, in this sense, an aesthetic dimension imminent to the political. Its suppression is called consensus.

It is absolutely fundamental today to reverse this question. An aesthetic work that is precise and demanding should summon a re-opening and a re-definition of the political realm, which is driven to extinction or sterilisation by certain practices within the dominant discourse. Contrary to some commonly and currently held notions, now is the time to interrogate contemporary aesthetic work and challenge it so as to move beyond its formalisms. Form is invariably laden with engagements,

with effects that transgress the pure effect. Often, I purposefully use the formulation 'contemporary aesthetic practices', particularly in as far as it is still very difficult for some observers and some audiences to conceive that a contemporary aesthetic practice is a contemporary project that can articulate the discursive and the visual, at times, in a complex manner. Some such practices are almost exclusively engaged in the discursive with extremely restrained visuals, or none at all. This poses problems both in terms of exhibition, display and circulation and in institutional and non-institutional presentation. The question of what becomes of an exhibition when its subject is strictly textual and/or purely discursive, when 'there is nothing there to see', is one question that some theorists and artists, as well as organisers and producers of exhibitions and contemporary projects, have asked themselves. It remains an open question, one that is rarely engaged with seriously.

At this point, I would like to start from Rensière's citation because it works at re-adjusting the pendulum to the hour and the day, helps steer clear from false debates on the artistic and the political and introduces, once again, the question with subtlety and subversion. Rethinking the political engagements of aesthetic practices in Beirut cannot acquire relief, nor can it rouse those already interested in the political dimension of aesthetic practices. Yet, the 'privileged' context of Beirut runs the risk of losing its privilege if either of the two

threats I mentioned earlier materialise: Namely, an accelerated normalisation of artistic practices into dominant genres or an accrued marginalisation. The stakes for aesthetic practices lie in their capacity to sustain higher expectations in their propositions, specificity in their research work, formal and textual elaborations, as well as in their capacity to defend all of these, at all costs. This situation is not entirely unique and specific to Beirut. The spaces I attempt to identify for demanding and uncompromising, contemporary, critical and experimental practices can be found in other circuits in the larger social realm, as well as in other spaces of inscription and encounters with other audiences. On this note, for instance, it seems to me that the limitations of Ayloul was in that it addressed itself to a public that is already privileged, one that is almost identifiable on a map of the city. By addressing an audience that is very neatly targeted and not heterogeneous enough, the effect of the festival could not be expediently diffused in the short or median run. It is certainly the responsibility of the actors of the cultural scene, intellectuals and artists, to find solutions to such problems and implement them. The case of Beirut is particularly interesting for two reasons: Firstly, because contemporary practices have not been fully instrumentalised and secondly, because the margin opened for maneuverability is wide enough, albeit extremely fragile, due to the absence of institutions. In some regards, the Arab Image Foundation, the institution

least recognisable as such, is fully operational as an institution. It has imagined, in the purview of the mid- and long-term, a plan and a series of actions so that its corpus of images would be the most complex as possible, the most rich and polemical. All the while, the Foundation has rendered this corpus accessible to the public, to a diversity of readings, to projects framed within a course of historicisation and of articulating serious relationships between documents and the corpus of images. It is, of course, totally legitimate to understand images today as the 'stuff' of dreams. Images belong to everyone and to no one at once. However, it is absolutely necessary, in my opinion, to produce, in parallel, a historical discourse on the production of images and their circulation and, eventually, on their confiscation in Beirut. This is an issue not only pertinent to the Foundation, but also to all those who are interested in the image and the document in Beirut and elsewhere. I insist on this point because, although there are specificities to the cultural practices of Beirut, it is also important not to remain smitten or lulled by these specificities to the point of becoming incapable of distanced and historically informed readings. This situation of 'privilege' in Beirut is, in some respects, exemplary if one does not misconstrue the attribute 'exemplary' within a sectarian or simplistic understanding. In a sense, what has been occurring here, for the past ten years, is an antidote against despair, a hope in the political and cultural potential of the aesthetic act.

I am quite aware that when seen from within this context, the issues I am raising may not carry the same purport. But, when one is from elsewhere, there is, at times, a return effect that makes linkages, among many contexts, in ways that are strong and engaging. Sometimes, these other places can be very close, as akin as an accomplice. Some of these contemporary aesthetic practices here, that have roused my interest, echo with aesthetic propositions formulated in places very different from Beirut. Some of the works that I was able to see in Sao Paolo, or closer to me, in Paris, works that are proposed by artists who have nothing to do with Beirut, could well be presented alongside the works of Lebanese artists, without lengthy explanations or theoretical contortions into national and regional identifications. This may be understood as an important point of validation for Beirut, but its significance goes beyond that. An attentive analysis of the contemporary aesthetic practices in Beirut could contribute meaningfully to the deconstruction of the discourse that belabours, with persistence, at telling us that modernity was unitary, homogeneous, and that it moved along one single temporality marked by innovative inventions and subsequent copies. But, the reality of things is all together different. If one makes the effort to open the folds and analyse them, in Beirut, as in other locales that fall outside the canonical realms or geography of modernity, one finds works and practices that demand a rethinking of formal invention, a rethinking of temporalities, which – although they cannot simply be superimposed – are nevertheless the temporalities of the modern in Beirut and elsewhere.

Catherine David studied literature, linguistics and art history at the Sorbonne and worked, from 1979 until 1992, as a curator in France. In 1992, she conducted the *Primitive History of Cubism* seminar for the Department of Aesthetic Anthropology at the University of Paris X Nanterre. She was the director of *Documenta X*, Kassel from 1994-1997, and organised, in collaboration with the Marseille Museum, *Jerusalem au Pluriel, Cultural and Artistic Encounters*, in 1998. In 1999 and 2000 respectively, her other projects include *Antropofagia*, a film and video program, *XXIV Biennial of Sao Paulo*; *City Editings/Reflexiones Sobres el Espacio Urbano Contemporaneo*, *Fundacion PROA*, Buenos Aires; and *The State of Things*, Kunst-Werke, Berlin; and, as Chargée de Mission at the Direction des Arts Plastiques, Paris. In 2002, she curated *Contemporary Arab Representations*, Beirut/Lebanon, at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and Witte de With, center for contemporary art.

Latency

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Translated from French by Tony Chakar

Latency is the state of what exists in a non-apparent manner, but which can manifest itself at any given moment. It is the time elapsed between the stimuli and the corresponding response.

The latent image is the invisible, yet-to-be-developed image on an impressed surface. The idea is that of the 'dormant' – slumber, slumbering – like something asleep, which might awake at any moment.

Latency has connotations with essence, but also with the idea of the repressed, the hidden, the un-testable, of an invisible element. It is an obscure form, troubling because it cannot be delineated; it is not a defined territory, but a diffused state, uncontrollable, underground, as if lurking, as if all could resurface anew.

Latency is the introduction to the possible, to the state of becoming.

Latency also evokes what is often felt in Beirut, in face of the dominant amnesia prevailing since the end of the war[1], in face of this strange paralysis that pervades the city, in face of this violent desire to place things between parentheses – to censure oneself.

This latency of memory coincides with an ambiguous relation to images, as they have been presented since the end of the war. These images oscillate between two temporal registers: The mythified and nostalgic past of Beirut – the pre-war period with its images and its sublimated postcards; and the future – as it is constituted in a supposedly collective fantasy that puts us back onto the track of the 'right road of progress and modernity', with its iconography projected in enormous billboards praising numerous real estate projects.

The image seems to navigate between a 'this has been' and 'this will be'. The present manifests itself, at times, in a hysterical fashion, in a denial of the historicised inscription. Most often, when one approaches the subject of the war, a certain 'cathartic' presupposition – so as not to say a therapeutic program – accompanies it to overcome 'this crisis'. The war is not simply a symptom, but it is also an ontology and process that cannot be reduced, a process that escapes, that

1 A law issued on August 26, 1991 (Law N° 84) stipulates a general amnesty for all crimes committed during the war, up until March 28, 1991. Crimes committed after this date would then be prosecuted.

represses itself and that denotes latency one more time. The war's near past becomes this latent figure shrouded in the shadow of the city, ready to gush out from the shade; this memory so quickly strangled, the ruins lying under the modernist's concrete, under the capitalist's dream of an efficient and proficient country.

In our approach to photography, we first began to inscribe the traces and memories of war in our work, insisting on the ruin, but also on the inscription of these modern ruins in the city, on the modes of perceiving the city and its evolution, on the urban tissues and their mutations. We were also re-oriented towards a re-reading of our contemporary history and its representations, which shape us.

This exploration led us to work on borrowed images.

This critical attempt often led us to impasses, to paralysis, to crises of representation. But the act of making images became obstinate, pushing us to seek different ways of 'saying' in an alternative way through photography.

Latency is well illustrated in the works that we will discuss in this paper: *Wonder Beirut* which refers to the work of a photographer, Abdallah Farah, a 'documentary' that we filmed on the Khiam detention centre and our research on an undeveloped 8mm film, which used to belong to Khalil's uncle, who disappeared during the war.

It is always an almost embarrassing bother to speak of one's own work. However, this is a recurrent approach for many of us in Lebanon. In the absence of a critical and theoretical structure, we often find ourselves in the process of theorising our work, saying it, writing it. It is also difficult to reduce our work to a precise perspective – such as latency – however, it seemed interesting to attempt to do so within this framework.

Abdallah Farah: *Wonder Beirut*, including various works: *The Novel of a Pyromaniac Photographer* and *Latent Image.*

Abdallah Farah is a photographer whose approach illustrates the difficulty of creating images during and after the war. Three periods can be distinguished through-out the course of his work. In 1964, Abdallah Farah was only sixteen years of age when he joined the photography studio of his father, a former assistant of Dalati and Nuhra. Studio Wahed was located in Bab Idriss in downtown Beirut. In 1968, Studio Wahed received an order from the Lebanese Tourism Agency for a series of twenty-four postcards on Beirut, as well as twelve illustrations to be used in the official calendar of 1969. The orders continue in the following years.

The photographs, shot over a period of six months for the postcards, attempt to reveal the most beautiful tourist sites in Beirut: The city centre, the bank district, the cinemas, the souks, the hotels, the beaches, the modern infrastructure, the urban monuments, the city's most important avenues and so on. Some aerial views were also taken with the assistance of the Ministry of Tourism and the army.
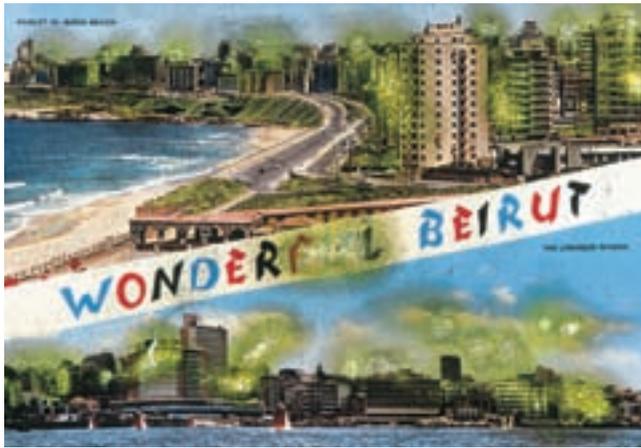
The idea behind the project, which was wholeheartedly supported by the prominent hotels, was to expose the city's modernity, its diversity and its richness. The quality of this work was such that it was regularly reprinted (and imitated). We still find reproductions of these postcards on sale today in Beirut's bookshops, even if some of the monuments they depict have disappeared. Abdallah Farah was certainly not the only one who produced postcards, but his work still remains among the most distinguished.
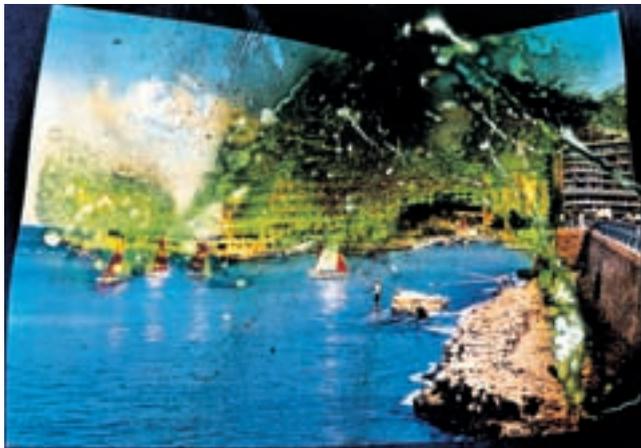
After the civil war broke out in the spring of 1975, besieged and invaded by militiamen from different factions, Studio Wahed was destroyed and subsequently burnt to the ground. Abdallah succeeded in rescuing some material – a fraction of his negatives, including those of the postcards and hundreds of rolls of virgin films, unshot and unexposed.

For an unexplained reason, Farah kept quiet about embarking on a new venture.

Three years after the start of the war, and a few months after his father's death, he began to damage his postcard negatives, burning them little by little – an intentional process of deterioration – as if seeking a way to have their states conform to his present. He imitated the destruction of buildings, which were progressively disappearing before his eyes, ravished by bombardment and street battles. In doing so, he inflicted yet another form of destruction. He spent his nights slowly burning his calendar and postcard clichés, making them correspond to his shattered reality.

Through a process, which integrates within it part hazard part accident, these 'damaged' images appear like new photographs. Through the traces of fire and light, an indexical rapport is recreated.

By the time Abdallah finished burning all these images, the official peace ending the war was proclaimed in Lebanon.

During the war, often confined to the house or to the bomb shelter, Abdallah Farah seldom went out (as he himself says, he has nothing of the adventurer or the war reporter). During these long years, he mostly photographed the people closest to him, his neighbours and neighbouring places. He used the un-shot rolls of film salvaged from his studio; but, short on products, fixatives and, most of all, paper, he was not able to develop his images. The photographed films began to pile up, waiting for a better day, for a moment when the shelling would stop and Abdallah would be able to go out. Since, – and despite the end of the war – he maintains this habit. He doesn't develop his images anymore. It suffices just to shoot them. The reels accumulate, without him feeling a need to reveal them. He nonetheless precisely documents each photograph he takes in a small notebook, describing it thoroughly. They are there to be read, leaving an immense space for the imagination. He entitles this work the 'invisible image' or the 'image in the text'.

For us, a little obsessed, we see it as a latent image.

One of our friends, Pierre Ménard, admires the work of Abdallah Farah. He talks of "a subterranean body of work, endlessly heroic, unequaled and, certainly, perpetually unaccomplished, a sublime attempt to capture each passing minute, fleeting time, running time".[2]

We imagine recovering Abdallah's photographic archives and deciphering his many notebooks, for the purpose of our making a *catalogue raisonné* of his invisible work.

2 Hadjithomas, Joana; Joreige, Khalil, *Ok, I'll Show You My Work*, Beirut: *Al Adaab*, Publication – January/February, 2001.
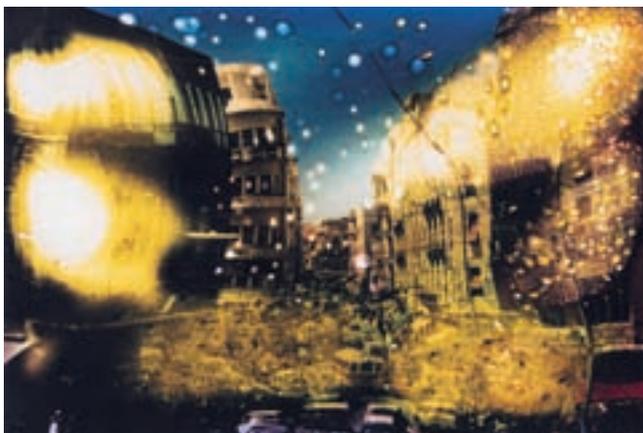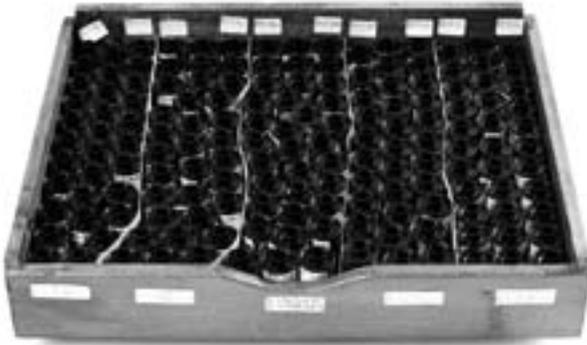
Film RE 145

1. 6/3/2000 at 11:20. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude just after a dispute
2. 7/3/2000 at 11:01. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of euphoria
3. 7/3/2000 at 13:52. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of hunger
4. 7/3/2000 at 14:30. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling "I've had too much to eat"
5. 7/3/2000 at 16:24. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude. Attempt at detachment but, rather, interiorized calm
6. 7/3/2000 at 17:06. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude. Attempt at detachment but, rather, interiorized feeling of boredom
7. 7/3/2000 at 18:08. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude. Attempt at detachment but, rather, interiorized feeling of expectancy
8. 7/3/2000 at 19:07. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude. Attempt at detachment but interiorized exasperation
9. 8/3/2000 at 12:42. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of excitement
10. 8/3/2000 at 13:08. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of expectancy
11. 8/3/2000 at 13:52. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of irritation
12. Ibid. (feeling of having been expressive, hence re-irritated)
13. 8/3/2000 at 15:25. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized undefinable feeling
14. 8/3/2000 at 16:44. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of "I'm too hot"
15. 9/3/2000 at 03:20. Autoportrait in the mirror, impassive attitude but interiorized feeling of fatigue

On the left, we see images of two of the many drawers he uses to store his films. The first contains films shot from Sunday, November 2nd, 1997, to Saturday, February 21st, 1998; the second from Wednesday, November 4th, 1998, to Sunday April 11th, 1999. Also depicted are the textual descriptions of films that Abdallah Farah continues to call 'contact sheets'. We have taken the liberty of translating the descriptions and simply typing them out on a computer (Abdallah's handwriting is very hard to read). Please note that, of course, this is not a facsimile (an image of the image), as resorting to the image of these latent images would be problematic.

A fundamental question remains that I will evoke only here: That of the conditions of apparition, or rather, the revelation of these images. At what moment, and to what purpose, would Abdallah Farah choose to develop his films – to subject his images to light? What would have had to change around him, in him, beyond him?

In his book, *Distracted*, Jalal Toufic writes that the fact that Abdallah Farah describes his photographs, in a notebook, "can be considered a contribution to the resurrection of what has been withdrawn by the surpassing disaster. The intended effect of the work of the one trying to resurrect tradition past a surpassing disaster is fundamentally not on the audience, except indirectly; it is on the work of art to resurrect it".[3] If we were to witness this change in Abdallah Farah's work, as well as in other artists whose work may evolve in a similar perspective,

it could signify that certain conditions – perhaps linked to the state that the country is in, or to the state of the art scene – have been made present for the 'revelation' of the image to occur. Of course, this would presuppose a transformation in our anticipation, in our rapport with images, in general, (The images would gain an 'aura', a different strength: They would be efficient, "terrible", in the sense used by Barthes).

3 Toufic, Jalal, *Distracted*, 2nd Ed., forthcoming from Tuumba Press, 2003.

Film PE 103

1. Zakiyeh, drunk, shouting and threatening the sky
2. Close-up, low shot on Zakiyeh, seemingly possessed
3. Mr. Srour, furious, on the stairs in front of his door
4. Zakiyeh dragging herself up the stairs
5. Mr. Srour in low shot looks at me inquiringly
6. Zakiyeh crawls to the landing
7. Zakiyeh asleep, collapsed on the doormat
8. The same (closer)
9. Close-up on Zakiyeh's open mouth
10. Half-closed eye-lid
11. The chain around Zakiyeh's neck and her pendant lying on the ground
12. The bottle of arak, on the last stair before the landing
13. Medium-low shot, Elham opens Zakiyeh's bedroom door
14. Medium shot, Elham tries to lift Zakiyeh (risk of moving, missed)
15. The same
16. Medium close-up on the faces of Zakiyeh and Elham, cheek to cheek
17. Mr. Srour in low shot, with his hands on his hips
18. Elham picks up the bottle of arak on the stairs
19. Elham puts down the bottle inside the room
20. Elham closes Zakiyeh's door while looking towards my direction
21. The sky seen through the window of my room
22. A cloud shaped like an elephant
23. Jnah. Painted film poster. Julia Roberts, completely deformed, is unrecognizable
24. Close-up on the face of Julia Roberts
25. New electric yellow pole, unused, stuck to an old wooden pole covered with electric wires
26. Front façade of a destroyed building being restored
27. A workman on a crane opposite the building
28. The workman, a tiny speck, atop the huge suspended crane
29. Mileage gauge of the car at 99,999 kilometres
30. Mileage gauge of the car between 99,999 and 100,000 kilometres
31. Mileage gauge of the car at 100,000 kilometres
32. Parked car, with mileage gauge at 100,000 kilometres
33. Medium long-shot of the car parked on Mar Elias street
34. Close-up on the horoscope in the paper "You have found the key to happiness among some old things, but you don't know what door the key opens"
35. Photo of one of my old photos (the postcard of burnt *Place des Canons*, published without my authorisation in the newspaper)
36. List of the managers of the newspaper for eventual proceedings

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Khiam: (Documentary,
52 minutes, April 2000)

Until the liberation of South
Lebanon in May of 2000, it was
impossible to go to the Khiam
detention camp, run by the South
Lebanon Army (SLA), a proxy militia
for Israel. We always heard 'talk'
about this camp, without having
seen any images of it. All our infor-
mation basically came from the
testimonies of liberated detainees
and the few Red Cross members
authorised to enter Khiam. Here
was what seemed to be an impossi-
bility of representation.

Through the testimonies of six
detainees, three men and three
women that we interviewed, we
were confronted with a raw, yet
partial, document – acts of 'speak-
ing', which lacked an image. In the
documentary, the only images that
are presented are those of the six
detainees who take turns speaking.

The images of the camp are
latent.

The setting used in the film is
strict, the camera fixed, the gaze of
the detainees calls out to the camera.
Through the editing, we wait for
something to occur. The experience
lived by the detainees, their act of
speaking, attempts a reconstruction,
as meticulous and as detailed as pos-
sible, of the camp – and of the daily
life in such a place: How the camp
and the rooms were precisely struc-
tured, how they used to live in a
1.8 × 0.8 metre space, what they ate,
what they did, how, with only a hand-
ful of material, they used to fabricate
craft-like objects, clandestine and utili-
tarian, such as needles, pencils, etc. By
being extremely meticulous, and by
giving the utmost attention to detail,
one attempts to make things exist.

The work is a form of experi-
mentation with the narrative, with
the way that the image, through
the discourse, can slowly construct
itself on the principle of evocation.
It is evocation that is supposed to
compensate for absence.

The missing image would then
be filled with the image created
through the detainees' act of
speech. This act of speech
becomes a screen on which each
spectator projects his own images.
The frame expands its limits, until it
provokes a breach through which
the missing image becomes an
open image, and the absence of
the image a possible image.

The frame itself becomes a
screen, a mask, a relay.

Today, after the liberation of
South Lebanon and the dismantling
of the camp, one can go to Khiam.
The image, at least the image of
the physical presence of the camp,
is in proximity.

The latent image of the camp
stumbles over reality and its con-
frontation. It has become a reference,
even if the testimony of the
detainees is not concentrated on the
reconstruction of the camp's space as
much as it is on the experience lived
in that space – an experience always
difficult to represent, the experience
of the camp being irreducible, an
'impossible experience'.

When visiting Khiam, everything
becomes significant. A new fictional
process enters the relay. The camp's
walls become yet another screen
where the repressed 'real' refuses to
reduce itself, where it overflows itself.

A frame, a mask, a relay.
The confrontation between latency
and the revealed image functions
ambiguously.

In *A State of Latency*[4], I describe the Ouzai road in the southern suburb of Beirut, where forty-two posts punctuate the road's axis. Forty-two electrical posts and streetlights, invested with frames of identical dimensions, recto-verso. Some of these frames contain images, portraits representing fighters who belong to one of the two principal Shiite political and religious movements in Lebanon, Amal and Hizbullah. Under each portrait, a sign with the words, 'the martyr fighter' or 'the martyr hero', precedes the name of the man. Other frames are still empty, waiting for the portraits of new martyrs. "It is strange to realise that the same post carries the tribute to the martyr and also the negation of the martyr by a criticism of the very status of the image, an empty frame".[5]

Research based on the archives and 8mm films, retrieved from among the belongings of Khalil's uncle

Latency is also risk of loss. From this perspective, it constitutes the hope of something that will be revealed; the confrontation with a real that can be potentially disappointing.

On the 19th of August, 1985, my uncle, Alfred Kettaneh Jr., was driving a Red Cross ambulance when he was kidnapped.[6]

My uncle was never found, and never returned. He is still reported as missing; and, the circumstances of his disappearance remain a mystery. There is very little evidence to explain what really happened.

17,000 people disappeared this way during the war, and have yet to be found. A law issued on June 23, 1995, defines the status of the

kidnapped[7]. The onus is on the families to demand that the law becomes effective: A missing person can be declared deceased four years after the date of his or her disappearance. The families who have been put in this situation are confronted with a difficult choice: To declare someone dead without a trace, without the physical presence of a body, a corpse.

A few months ago, I stumbled across the archives, photographs and films that once belonged to my uncle. He had a passion for pictures; he photographed and filmed regularly. I found 8mm films, family footage.

Among these, I found one 'latent' film still waiting to be sent to the lab for developing. My uncle probably didn't have the time to send it. It remained in its yellow bag for over fifteen years, surviving the ravages of the war and a fire that struck the house. The film could contain the last pictures my uncle took, and even some photograms representing himself. I pondered for a long time whether or not to send the film to be developed; whether to take the risk that this 'latent' image may reveal nothing, causing a disappointment, which would be impossible to compensate.

Finding the right lab, the best chemistry and taking great precautions didn't help. The film came out veiled, irreparable. A long series of white images unfold, and sometimes a shadow emerges; we recognise a hand, a rooftop, a vague image of a group of three joined by a fourth… The film thus reveals small variations of colour, of movements. We worked on this project about my uncle, even if developing the film didn't succeed in 'bringing him back'. Latency

4 Hadjithomas, Joana; Joreige, Khalil, *A State of Latency*, Germany: *Iconoclash*: ZKM/Centre for Art and Media, Cambridge, MA: Karlsruhe, and MIT Press, 2002.

5 Ibid.

6 The practice of kidnapping was common in Lebanon during the civil war. These kidnappings were carried out mostly on the basis of the holder's identity card, on which the holders' religious sect was printed. The kidnapped were then usually used for the purpose of exchange.

7 Text of the law of June 22, 1995 (see Appendix)

presupposes, in itself, the acceptance of being revealed and the risk of loss.

These latencies we have presented, as well as others, point out possible gestures, traces, some reminiscences, which become ghostly and haunt the photographs, the films, the documents, whether true or false.

This is a story about return, of the undead, the revenant, of something resembling the capacity of remembrance that makes us human. By remaining haunted, we do not succumb to cynicism in the acceptance of images and of realities in a continuous present.

Being haunted is refusing the mechanical state, the machine; it is time that refuses to efface itself. It is something that resists. Being here, today, is accepting to live with our ghosts, to long for them, to feed them. It is reminiscent of an image, of a knowledge that inhabits us, a knowledge difficult to pin down. This seizure, this gesture, we find important – whether in its failure or in its quest to incarnate as images.

This gesture forces us to think and to produce our images outside of a flux, to constantly interrogate their necessity, existence and implications in the world that we live in, in the video or photographic practice we use. Latency appears also as the possibility to exist outside hegemonic and monopolising networks (taking the form of censures and exclusions), which sanction alternatives, going so far as to annihilate them. This is also one of the conditions for the 'other' not to consider that it is possible to exhaust us with hazardous appreciation, a diagnosis of us, of our manifestations (especially in artistic work).

All our work is rooted on the frontier of a real; where the questions of the self, of the social body and of the individual body in a communitarian society pose themselves; where it is difficult to pose oneself as an individual, to say "I", to say "I am here, even more than an individual, I am a singular subject".

Latency is this 'being-there', although you don't see me; it is the necessity beyond the evidence.

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, both born in 1969 in Beirut, are two filmmakers and artists. In 1999, they directed their first feature film, *Al Bayt el Zahr* (*Around the Pink House*), a French-Canadian and Lebanese co-production. In 2000, they directed *Khiam*, a 52-minute documentary film; and in 2003, *The Lost Film*. They are the authors of various video and photo installation exhibitions. Among these are: *Beirut: Urban Fictions*, *Poste Restante*, *The Circle of Confusion*, *Don't Walk* and *Rondes*. Lately, they have been working on different facets of their project *Wonder Beirut*, which include: *The Novel of a Pyromaniac Photographer*, *Postcards of War* and *Latent Images*. They both worked on various articles and publications, including the book, *Beirut: Urban Fictions*.
Joana teaches scriptwriting, and Khalil teaches the aesthetics and philosophy of the image at the Institute for Scenic and Audiovisual Studies (IESAV), St. Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon.

PROVISIONS RELATING TO MISSING PERSONS

ARTICLE 33

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

ARTICLE 34 (as amended by law N° 434 of May 15, 1995)

The decease of the missing person shall be declared by judgment of his disappearance and the lack of news from him for the last four years, at least, since the date of his absence, at the request of any involved party.

The Civil Court of the First Instance of the place of residence, or the last residence, of the person for whom a judicial declaration of death is requested, shall hear the case. If the disappearance occurred outside Lebanon, the Civil Court of First Instance of Beirut shall hear the case.

ARTICLE 35 (as amended by law N° 434 of May 15, 1995)

The Court, mentioned in the preceding article, shall examine in court chambers the request for a judicial declaration of death and, to ascertain the facts, the court shall resort to the various legal elements of proof, including publication of inserts in local and foreign newspapers, if necessary, and the various means of advertising, which the court shall deem useful, as well as taking into account presumptions, especially in the cases and situations where the probability of death prevails without a body being found.

ARTICLE 36 (as amended by law N° 434 of May 15, 1995)

The heirs of the missing person, whose death has been declared by judgment, can enjoy his estate, but shall not be allowed to transfer ownership of the property or entail it before a period of six years as of the publication of the judgment, declaring the death in the local papers and in those of the country where he might be, has elapsed, and at the end of a period of six months as of the said publication.

ARTICLE 37

Should the missing person inherit from a third party or be the beneficiary of a bequest, his share shall be left in abeyance for five years as of the judgment declaring the death. At the end of that period, his share of the estate shall devolve to the heirs of the deceased, and his bequest shall devolve to the heirs of the testator.

ARTICLE 38

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

Should he reappear after the period of five years has elapsed, he shall recover whatever assets still remain with the heirs. However, that does not prevent him from retrieving the share of this estate acquired mala fide (in bad faith) by third parties.

Image in Crisis:
The Case of Hajj Metwalli's Family

Samia Mehrez

Translated from Arabic by Rasha Salti

Once again, as is the case every year, Egyptian television greeted us during the 2001 Ramadan season with an awesome mass of TV series, exclusively fashioned for Ramadan. The Arab viewer, who would have just broken his/her fast with the typically heavy Ramadan meal, *iftar*, could slip into a state of drowsiness and fall with abandonment in front of the small screen. Watching television – after decades of special programming, produced specifically for these post-iftar hours during the Holy month of Ramadan – is an activity that hinders the already arduous process of digestion, with an intensity that almost brings the process to a halt.

It has become safe to say that, in general, the typical Arab viewer has a special appetite for Ramadan serial television programming. These series dominate the small screen because they are aired at prime-time, in the time bracket when the entire family gathers around the television screen at the end of their meal, a captive audience that rarely has occasion to reunite in its entirety during the year, as the father may be out or the mother busy with the children,

etc. The shows summon the family to gather around them, in its smaller single unit or in the context of larger family gatherings. The unraveling of events govern the process of digestion, only to be interrupted by, or concluded with, heated discussions, accompanied by tea and Ramadan's traditional sweets. The debate spills over, onto the streets and overruns public spaces, hovering over that viewer who thought he/she could flee the family setting and rebel against its dominion. It travels across continents and the well-guarded national borders that the Arab viewer finds increasingly difficult to cross, particularly post September 11. There is no escaping Egyptian television series during Ramadan. Even those of my ilk, who do not watch television, are entrapped, after constantly scheming to avoid the lure of the small screen, and bound by a commitment to write a paper on Ramadan television series.

Since the keepers of the Egyptian media industry are fully aware of the power of this Ramadan siege and of its commercial and economic returns, they

have not spared any effort to invest in the most qualified, available talent in terms of scriptwriting, direction, performance and set design, to pleasantly surprise their restfully reclined spectator.

Ramadan series are created with the understanding that their target market is a family audience, one which crosses the class divide and encompasses both the poor and the wealthy. The producers, particularly at the level of scriptwriting, have thus directed their focus towards the social themes deemed best suited for the collective viewership – including the children of the nation – who is expected to engage with the shows despite differences in age, gender, class and creed.

From the moment of their inception in the 1960s, state television and other media institutions have been keenly aware of the national role of the small screen as a tool for awakening audiences and shaping their consciousness. They consider television to be a privileged tool, utilised for elaborating and disseminating a collective imaginary. They use it, more or less directly, to mould a representation of society in accordance with the outlook of state policies and national ideological transformations, continuously casting and recasting values onto the existing collective of values and thus, ensuring their safe-keeping.

Even when a television series ventures into lashing out a critique of the reality of economic and social disparity or changes in moral values, deemed to threaten the construction of the imagined and the real family – from the point of view of the institutions representing the state – , the critique, itself, stems from a constructive or corrective drive aimed, in its entirety, at coercing and disseminating values intended to protect the construction of the collective image.

Commercial production becomes a social text in the midst of debates, articles and dialogues whose broader lines are drawn from judgments and commentaries on the series, whether laudatory or negative. Every year, one of the series programmed for Ramadan succeeds in grabbing public attention, and in the rewriting of that collective social text – a ritualised confirmation to viewers and commentators alike of their belonging to the imagined nation and to the imagined community or collectivity, bound by the least common denominator of shared meanings and signs in the past and present, regardless of how conflicting the readings and commentaries of that one series appear to be.

In the past two decades, the official discourse, disseminated by the Egyptian state's media apparatus, appears as immature and precarious as the institutions from which it was spawned, weakened by its unrelenting effort to absorb the dichotomous prevailing liberal and Islamic discourses. This current status contrasts sharply with the 1960s, when state institutions effectively familiarised audiences with a unified, clearly organised discourse, cast in a nationalist, modernist, progressive and bourgeois vocabulary. The institution of the media has now become the staging area for the production of a discourse that aims at 'hitting two birds with one stone', so to speak – at pleasing, or alienating, for that matter, the right and the left, the Islamist

and the secular, the traditional and the modernist, – so as to impose a state-set sense of authority – on the concert of contradicting and competing discourses and values in the public sphere.

The position of Egypt as the primary exporter of television series in the Arab world, specifically in the market of the Ramadan season, has muddled the landscape even further. As Arab satellite stations have widened the scope of their broadcasts to include a worldwide audience, producers, and more specifically, the producers of specialised television programming for Ramadan, have had to take note of such transformations in the profiling of their viewership. They no longer fashion series exclusively with the Egyptian family in mind, but they have to make allowances for the wider Arab 'satellite broadcast' family audience, at the very least. Moreover, they have had to adjust their considerations of that family's values, expectations of storytelling and construction of drama. They have also had to contend with the limitations that such expectations have brought to the marketing and distribution of television series throughout the Arab region. In other words, the 'globalisation' of Ramadan serial television production has brought forth a new set of contentions and contradictions to their authors, who are subsumed in the drive to please all, while sailing safely through the multiple boundaries of censorship in their native country and fellow Arab countries.

Notably, the authority of the Egyptian state has been impacted in its attempts to produce an image consistent with its representation of the imagined nation, community and collectivity. On the other hand, worldwide satellite television broadcast has provided the producer of the television serial drama with a new realm, not necessarily positive or progressive, free from the standards of official representation.

Last Ramadan (November and December 2001), Egyptian television aired a series entitled *A'ai'lat Al-Hajj Metwalli* (*Hajj Metwalli's Family*), in the midst of all these transformations, flaring an uproar never witnessed before. In past years, series such as *Layali al-Hilmiyyah* (*The Dreamlike Nights*), *Al- A'ai'lah* (*The Family*), or *Awan al-Ward* (*Time of the Roses*) generated intense, albeit one-sided, debates during and after their broadcast. The Hajj Metwalli and his family invaded the lives of Egyptian families and their Arab 'satellite' kin, overshadowing any – and everything else broadcast on the small screen during this prime-time bracket, including the bombing of Afghanistan and daily Israeli invasions into Palestinian cities.

From the first instance of the series' broadcast, the principal preoccupation of Arab satellite television stations, in addition to other debate forums such as clubs, unions and radio stations, was to host the series' superstar Nour el-Sherif, and interrogate him unrelentingly on his opinion of polygamy, with the intention of extracting a definitive, crystal-clear, absolute rejection of that social phenomenon, all the while getting him to reiterate his tremendous love for his real wife, Pussy.

The story-controversy of *Hajj Metwalli* is, briefly, the story of the

social rise of Metwalli, a self-made man, beginning with his life as a 'boy', working for Mu'allem Salamah, the large textile merchant, and achieving the height of wealth and power after the death of his master. Metwalli's climb up the social ladder begins with his marriage to his late master's wealthy widow, who dies soon enough, leaving him with the opportunity to marry four other women. Parallels were being drawn between the story of Hajj Metwalli, unfolding on the small screen, and that of Hajj Medhat al-Suweyrki, which was unfolding concurrently on the pages of the press. The latter's story concludes with the Egyptian state indicting Hajj al-Suweyrki to a seven-year jail sentence for breaching the laws of polygamy by marrying more than four women at once.

Nevertheless, a notable difference separates Hajj Metwalli from Hajj el-Suweyrki, owner of the chain of *Tawheed and Noor* stores in Egypt. Hajj el-Suweyrki's accumulation of wives was driven by sexual urges. He married and took advantage of impoverished young women, who eventually turned on him and reported him to the authorities. The smart-talking Hajj Metwalli's accumulation, on the other hand, is driven by material calculations. He marries his four wives with designs to accrue his power and wealth, improve his social standing and his connections within the public administration. While the Hajj el-Suweyrki 'series' concludes with a jail sentence, the *Hajj Metwalli* series ends with his personage, a progenitor – the absolute ruler, sitting cross-legged atop a small empire comprised of women and money

where all are obedient, happy and extremely content, and 'all live happily ever after'. And, thus the story ends. That image sealed the representation of the Egyptian family and the Arab satellite family.

The series touched on a number of social issues widely identified as problematic in prevailing currents in contemporary Egyptian society, such as the growing number of unmarried women (or widely spreading spinsterhood), an increase in polygamy, the retreat of modernist or liberal values as symbolised in women's rights, women's education and family planning, the shattering of basic family and social values and the rise to prominence of a new class of parvenus and nouveaux riches. The tone with which the series shaped its approach mixed fantasy, satire and explicit exaggeration.

While a framework of light-hearted sarcasm overshadowed the complexity, reality and gravity of these issues, it nonetheless marked a contrast with the more familiar, long-established pattern in which television series approached such issues, namely with the absence of clear judgements or moral indictments of those social manifestations deemed nefarious. For instance, Mustafa Muharram, the author of the text, chose not to demean the framework in which Hajj Metwalli and his totally subordinate family evolved. Moreover, he decidedly depicted Hajj Metwalli's dominion as positive. The representation of the man as polygamous, opportunist, domineering and socially ambitious was presented in affectionate terms. Hajj Metwalli was surrounded by a cast of women he ordered 'to be or not to be'… this, at the cadence of

one episode after another, except for one, to which I shall return in due time.

Despite the complete absence of an analytic dimension, the series was undoubtedly held together by the stellar performance of its cast, with the great artist – popular far and wide across the Arab world – Nour el-Sherif, at its helm. The calibre of the actors' delivery explains the unprecedented success of the series, despite the conservative, reactionary discourse in which the daily install-ment, totalling thirty-four episodes, was laid out. Its success can be paired with the success reaped by the American series *Dallas*, which invaded the entire world a few decades ago and perhaps supersed-ed *Hajj Metwalli* in its conservative reactionary outlook, including its simultaneous treatment of progres-sive and regressive family structures.

The social text of *Hajj Metwalli's Family* seemed intricately and pro-foundly constructed. It interrogated, through the bias of the discourses that formed around it, on varying levels – whether in the written or audio-visual media – , a phenomenon

that certainly begs for further study of what it signified with regard to the representation of the crisis and the crisis of representation in current Egyptian society.

The range of social issues that the series approached was, in reality, nothing new for its audience. The question of polygamy has been exhausted by the media and has generated a tremendous amount of relentless debate, as has the question of the retreat of moral values in the face of materialism. Hajj Metwalli is, as a character, not far from that of Ahmad Abdel Jawad, the patriarchal dictator in Naguib Mahfouz's trilogy, which generations of Egyptians were raised on during the second half of the twentieth century.

Where is the novelty, then?

The novelty, from a personal per-spective, lies in the absence of a 'lesson-to-be-learned' moral structur-ing to the story. There is no one-sided or unilateral voice or reading, captioned with a negative judgement cast on those conserva-tive, reactionary values that present a real threat to the construct of the modern family, as perceived by the official collective image – 'official', in this context, representing a strictly discursive or rhetorical concern, and not that of the level of policy or gov-ernment action. Quite in contrast to Mahfouz's trilogy, which ends with the death of the domineering patri-arch and frees the path for his son, the *Hajj Metwalli* series ends with the patriarch squatting cross-legged on his throne, dominating his son, thwarting all of the son's attempts to escape or to reject the father-figure's authority and backward values.

The absence of the accustomed 'lesson-to-be-learned', or 'moral of

the story', flared an awesome amount of reaction from the recipients of the series; reactions that depict, in their intensity, an image of the comedic crisis and the crisis of comedy in Arab society, whether on the social, economic or political level. For instance, a large segment of women, including a group of young female students at the American University of Cairo (who later became the subject of an empirical research project), proclaimed that they would agree to being a second wife on condition that their marriage provide them with that with which Hajj Metwalli rewarded his second wife. Such postures were considered as mature remedies or logical alternatives to the dilemma of spinsterhood, and the tragedy spinsterhood engenders for Egyptian society. This position resonated with the outward approval of one of Egypt's better-known clerics.

Moreover, we were also reminded, through the penmanship of many, that, while polygamy was one of the traditional tenets of the Muslim community, Hajj Metwalli deserved chastising for falling short of undertaking the full proceedings according to the *Shari'a* (Islamic law) in his polygamous practice. Brethren from the Arab world, who had hastened to embrace modernist values and thus, forbade themselves from practicing their traditional entitlements within Islam, found in Hajj Metwalli the dream of a lost Eden, regarding him with the envious eyes of those deprived from God's paradise on earth.

Some of our Iraqi brethren, those Arabs who live in anticipation of an American assault at any moment, honoured Hajj Metwalli by lending his name and the name of his family members to a variety of traditional garb, as they perceived him as a genial entrepreneur who had succeeded in reviving the textile market from a slump. On another scale, many saw the image of 'Meeto' (the nickname awarded to Hajj Metwalli by his fourth wife, who is also an opportunist bourgeois), as a representation emerging from the absence of social justice, the breakdown of the middle class and the superlative accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few, abetted by the government. Yet others saw in Hajj Metwalli's control over his wives, progeny and the textile market, a representation of the New World Order – the embodiment of the decay of American hegemony that acts with power, control and injustice, all masked under a guise of spreading justice and prosperity.

This cursory exposé displays the diversity of interpretations of a single text, the scope of the reception this text received, fastened to the social location of its audience and its relationship to the message emanating from that text. The social location of the producers of that message is not necessarily in accordance with that of its recipient. These diverse and intersecting interpretations have allowed for the outlining of a new representation of the viewer. It is no longer possible to operate within the assumption of a single viewer with a unified, homogeneous or cogent perspective, deprived of will in the face of indoctrination by the media, whose aim is to sedate or awaken him or her. In this light, the receiver

appears as an active agent, a positive pole in reading representations. So, the issue then becomes what the viewer does to the media apparatus, not what this apparatus does to its audience.

State agencies refused to deal with the social text and the wealth of significance that the *Hajj Metwalli* series exposed so forcefully, but rather regarded it as a crime! In the logic of the official imaginary, the series was deemed as attacking the larger understanding, or virtues, of small families and belittling the importance of education. The accusations, carried in the official press release by the Higher Council for Women in Egypt, stated that the series stood against the national policy of the Ministry of Information as decreed by the state. The *Hajj Metwalli* serial was aired during the same time bracket as the Osama Bin Laden serial; and, it obviously antagonised the gruelling efforts being made to improve the image of Islam in the West. Concerned entities in the Egyptian government rushed to convene with the producers of *Hajj Metwalli* and their television executives, with the aim of inducing changes in the script and introducing the moral directive so blatantly absent from the narrative, as well as infusing the text with the ever familiar tone of the unilateral, unified reading.

Mustafa Muharram, the author of the serial, was forced to add a passage in the second-to-last episode, where the Hajj Metwalli presents a contrived confession explaining his polygamy, claiming it was the result of deprivation from contact with women in his early years because he was so poor! The dialogue with

his son Saïd, revealed the precariousness of the official discourse that forced its way into the text:

METWALLI: 'By the way my son, a single wife, good and loyal, who loves you, is a more blessed fortune than many wives.''
SAÏD: ''Do you mean to say that you regret your many marriages?''
METWALLI: ''Of course, Saïd! I wish everyone could hear me and understand that a single wife, good and loyal, is a more blessed fortune than many wives; and I don't want anyone to do as I have. Moreover, one is hardly able to cope with one… imagine having to cope with four!''

Mustafa Muharram said he made sure that Nour el-Sherif repeated the same sentence, ''that a single wife, good and loyal, is a more blessed fortune than many wives'', so the message would be passed on without any ambiguity to the intellectually limited, economically, socially and politically marginalised viewer, who was assumed to surely perceive the television series as an open invitation to engage in polygamy!

In reality, this intervention on behalf of the state and its agencies, mandated to enlighten the nation, confirms its persistent infantilisation of the audience – an audience that it perceives is in continuous need for protection from the multitude of readings and potentialities of interpretations, so that their world does not turn upside-down overnight. Despite the insertion of the contrived moral lesson into the dialogue, the contradiction between the rhetoric of state policy and the

construction of the family, in partic-
ular, and society, in general, in the
official collective image, as contrast-
ed with those representations
within the series, linger. The last
image of Hajj Metwalli depicts a
harmonious existence between him
and his three wives, after expelling
the fourth, bourgeois opportunist
wife – the one depicted as childish –,
from his paradise. The image of this
Eden he built survives until the last
frame of the series, the conclusion
of which confirms that social
change is not possible through
rhetoric and discourse, but through
effective change in the economic
and political reality of society.

Samia Mehrez is an Associate Professor of Arabic Literature at the American
University in Cairo. She is the author of *Egyptian Writers between History and
Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Soanallah Ibrahim and Gamal Al-Ghitani*
(1994). Her articles on Francophone and Modern Arabic Literature have
appeared in a number of Arab and international journals.

Early Photography in Palestine: Between Social and Imaginary Landscapes

Issam Nassar

The nineteenth century marked the beginning of a new era in human perception and memory. Technological and scientific developments reshaped human thinking and knowledge in ways that had never been possible before. Inventions in communications, both aural and visual, changed perceptions of time and space. It became possible to communicate instantly with someone at the other end of the world, and to view images of objects, people and events that were distant in space and time. Photography was at the centre of these developments.

The invention of the photographic process in 1839 had a far-reaching impact on how Palestine was presented to viewers in Europe. The introduction of photography in Palestine was an event that took place at a time when the country was divided among several small provincial districts distant from the economic, cultural and political centre of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled it since 1517. Indeed, despite its gradual growth in importance, largely due to its religious

significance to both the worlds of Islam and of Christianity, Palestine's weight in the life of the empire was rather limited. However, political events connected with the rise of colonial interests in the empire and with the Egyptian conquest of Syria – which included Palestine (1831-1840) – signaled the beginning of a new era in Ottoman openness. They also signaled the beginning of persistent European involvement in the affairs of Palestine that would have a significant political and social impact on the region.[1]

Palestine's religious significance was naturally crucial in shaping the nature of this European involvement. The prominent place that it occupied as the 'Holy Land' in Christian religious imagination was essential in forming the European worldview, which often placed Jerusalem at the centre of the world, not just in a metaphorical sense, but also geographically. The city and region where Jesus had lived and died seemed to provoke an ever-growing interest in Christian Europe. The large number of travelers and expeditions that set out from various places in Europe to explore the Holy Land, and the

1 For further information on Palestine in the 19th century, see Scholch, Alexander, *Palestine in Transformation (1856-1882): Studies in Social, Economic and Political Development*, translated by William C. Young and Michael C. Gerrity, Washington, D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993. Also see Tibawi, A. L., *British Interest in Palestine 1800-1901*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

more than two thousand books published on Palestine in Europe and its American colonies between 1800 and 1878, confirm this increased level of curiosity.[2] It is in this context of renewed European interest in the Holy Land that photography was introduced in Palestine.

Although more a European development than a modernising trend that emerged from within Palestine itself, the arrival of photography in Palestine was, like the advent of modernity in general, a process largely connected with political and social events whose centre originated in distant places. And, it was also, in itself, indicative of the arrival of a new era. Early photographic interest in Palestine was very much linked to a complex web of European connections to the Near East at large, and to Jerusalem in particular. Prominent among such connections were the colonial and scientific interests in the region, the romantic passion for imaginary and exotic sites and a revived Christian interest in biblical studies.[3]

As with the earlier experience in Europe, the inception of the modern age in the region was marked by a number of developments in knowledge and technology. Photography, one of the first in a series of inventions, also constituted the first sign of the arrival of the age of modernity in the region. It was followed by a number of other inventions such as the telegraph, the telephone, the bicycle, the automobile and the plane, all of which were powerful signs of the modern, industrial and rational age.

Ironically, by 1948, when Arab society in Palestine was on the verge of collapse, the process of modernisation that had begun in the nineteenth century in Palestine – and in many other centres in the Ottoman Empire – was already bearing fruit. The subsequent shift from Ottoman to British rule further fostered considerable growth and development in Jerusalem. Under the British, Palestine ceased to be the small region within a vast empire that it had been under Ottoman rule. It emerged, instead, as a country with its own economy and political life.

If the impact these inventions had on the region could, to a certain extent, be easily imagined or inferred, that is not the case with the advent of photography. True, like many of the other inventions, photography drastically changed the way people related to time and space. But only photography, with the revolution that it brought about in memory and knowledge, had the special power to reshape the past and, subsequently, the present. Indeed, the introduction of photography in the region by Europeans positioned them in a special vantage point to 'redefine' or 'reconstruct' the history of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land.

Early European Photography of Palestine

Photography arrived in Palestine in 1839, the same year in which Daguerre announced his invention to the world.[4] By the middle of the 19th century, pictures and images of Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem were already popular in Europe and its Western colonies. Depictions of these towns, particularly Jerusalem, were more readily

2 Rohricht, Reinhold, *Bibliotheca Geographica Palestinae,* London: John Trotter Reprints, 1989, pp. 338-587.

3 For Further elaboration on this see, Nassar, Issam, *Photographing Jerusalem: The Image of the City in Nineteenth-Century Photography*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1997, pp. 25-30.

4 Daguerre's announcement was made in August 1839. In December of the same year, Horace Vernet and Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet arrived in Palestine with the intention of photographing the country.

available in art galleries and photographic exhibits than those of many other Asian or African cities – perhaps with the exception of Cairo. One could find photographs of Jerusalem exhibited alongside those of Paris and London – as the following description of an architectural photographic exhibit, published in *The British Journal of Photography* on March 15, 1860, indicates:

> *The photographs in this exhibit are judiciously classed by countries, although the various nations are unequally represented. France and England are greatly in the majority, as might have been expected: Next follow Spain, Rome, Venice, Jerusalem and its neighbourhood.*[5]

Indeed, the photographs in question were the joint work of Robertson and Beato, two wet-plate photographers who visited Palestine in 1857.[6] Their work, together with that of many other European photographers at the time, made Jerusalem and with it, Palestine, a place familiar to the Europeans. In fact, in the same article in *The British Journal of Photography*, the reviewer described how he actually found that the buildings of Jerusalem were "as familiar as… the public buildings of London."[7]

In fact, we know that more than two hundred and fifty different photographers – most of them Europeans – worked in the Near East between the years 1839 and 1885. And, we also know that many of them photographed Palestine.[8] One can only assume that, by the turn of the 20th century, the number of photographers would have been significantly higher. The gelatin-plate negative and the transparent

nitrocellulose film – developed by George Eastman in 1888 and 1891, respectively – had made photography easily accessible to a wider public. The new negatives freed photographers from having to carry along the bulky glass-negatives that they had previously used, and enabled tourists to take their own cameras along with them to their various destinations. While it is impossible to make an estimate, the number of amateur photographers who took pictures of Palestine in the 19th century is likely to have been considerably large.[9]

Despite their diverse backgrounds and their large numbers, early photographers who worked in Palestine often performed similar functions and served a similar clientele. In most cases, they produced photographs that corresponded with the image of Palestine as the Holy Land, with the purpose of selling them abroad, or to visiting pilgrims.

Visiting photographers from Europe dominated the scene for quite a few years. However, little by little, a different group of photographers, who were either from the region or had resided in it for some time, began to emerge. As we see in their images, some of them continued the type of work undertaken by the first visiting photographers, while others began to employ photography in new ways. However, the diverging trends did not necessarily correspond to whether the photographer was a foreigner or a native of the area. The fact that photography in the Near East was first conducted solely by Christians means that photography conducted in Ottoman Palestine was more connected to a recognised millet

5 'Architectural Photographic Exhibition', *The British Journal of Photography*, March 15, 1860, p. 88.

6 An early photographic process developed in 1851 that used a combination of alcohol, ether and guncotton to produce a fluid known as 'collodion', which would be spread over the glass-plate prior to exposure in the camera.

7 Ibid., p. 88.

8 Perez, Nissan, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East 1839-1885*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1988, pp. 124-233.

9 The present study confined itself to photographs taken by professional photographers, as they were more widely accessible to the general public – both in the Near East and in Europe – and can be considered, in turn, the product of a market demand for Holy Land images. As such, they better illustrate the type of photographs that were sought by the public.

– a non-Muslim religious community – than to being native to the country. This makes the 'local versus foreign' dichotomy highly problematic.[10]

Still, the purpose of this study is to attempt to contrast the early images of Palestine produced before and after photography became a local career practiced by people from the region. For this reason, the religious division will not be highlighted.[11]

The Image of Palestine in Early European Photography

Although photographers travelled to the Near East for various reasons, it could be argued that their common aim was to define the Orient visually. In doing so, photographers often imitated each other's work and reproduced, conceptually, ideas and images that were already in existence. Therefore, it is of no surprise that in their photographs of Palestine, photographers followed certain patterns with regard to themes, styles, locations and techniques. The frequent recurrence of such patterns in commercially distributed photographs indicates that there was a tradition of uniformity in context, subject, aesthetics and textual commentary.

An overview of 19th century photographs of Palestine, taken by non-local early photographers, reveals the recurrence of the following patterns:

1. The predominance of religious sites;
2. The absence of local population;
3. The objectification of human figures as living proof of the biblical heritage;
4. The staging of biblical scenes;
5. The absence of nude models;
6. And, the photographing of similar locations from similar angles.[12]

The first, and most obvious, of these patterns points to the fact that the overwhelming majority of photographs were of sites connected with biblical history. The main churches, or holy sites, of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and others, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Nativity, the Ecce Homo Arch and the Church of the Virgin were among the most popular sites to be photographed.

Other locations – not necessarily marked by a church, but known to have biblical associations – also appeared frequently in these photographs. The village of El-A'zariyeh (referred to in photographs as Bethany), the Jordan River and the Mount of Olives are typical examples. It is particularly significant that the captions for such photographs – as in the case of El-A'zariyeh – almost always gave biblical names, rather than the names used by the residents of Jerusalem at the time. The most striking example of this is the continuous reference to the mosque of the Dome of the Rock – a marvellous architectonic Islamic shrine – as *The Site of Solomon's Temple*. The persistent disregard of the existence of the mosque went even further in some cases. On his 1854 photograph of the Dome of the Rock, the Scotsman James Graham printed Luke 21:37 on the negative.[13] The verse states that "in the daytime He was teaching in the Temple and at night in the mount called the Mount of Olives." It is rather ironic that the European photographers were able to see, on

10 Millet is a recognised non-Muslim religious community in the Ottoman Empire that granted the community a large measure of internal religious and legal autonomy.

11 For an elaborate discussion on how to best categorise early photographers of Palestine see our forthcoming study on the history of photography in Palestine, in Arabic, commissioned by the A.M. Qattan Foundation in Ramallah.

12 These patterns resulted from an extensive study of a very large number of nineteenth-century photographs of Palestine. These photographs include the photographic collection of Mohammed B. Alwan (Cambridge, MA), the Bonfils collection and the Diness collection housed at Harvard University's Semitic Museum, the photographic collection of the Palestine Exploration Fund, the collection of the Swedish Christian Study Centre in Jerusalem and my personal collection, which includes a few hundred photographs.

13 Graham's photograph belongs to the collection of the Palestine Exploration Fund in London (PEF p2159).

that site, what had existed two thousand years before and ignore what actually existed before their own eyes. Perhaps, in many cases, such 'blindness' simply resulted from a market demand in Europe for Holy Land photographs which were often used to illustrate Bibles, pilgrim narratives and other religious books, following a tradition already set by painters and engravers.

The second pattern, evident in these photographs, is the general absence of the local population. It is hard to find any human figures in the early photographic images of Palestine, particularly those which date from before 1867. The work of Maxime Du Camp, Auguste Salzmann, Robertson and Beato and Francis Frith, who all photographed Jerusalem during the 1850s, illustrate this point. It was not until the late 1860s that human figures started to appear more frequently in photographs. It is striking that only a few of Henry Phillips' photographs depicted people,[14] particularly in view of the fact that he had been sent to Palestine with the specific purpose of documenting the country. Even in the Holy Land photographs of Bonfils (late 1860s, 1870s and 1890s), famous for their staged studio portraits, human figures were absent from the pictures of biblical and historical sites. For example, we notice the complete absence of people from any of the photographs of the Dome of the Rock. In the photographs of the same location by M. J. Diness (1858), we occasionally see a handful of human figures, but always from a distance. Many other important locations, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the streets of Jerusalem and Bethlehem – the two towns that were photographed most frequently – , often appeared either empty or with a handful of people fully subordinated to the landscape. These images provoke in the viewer the feeling that Palestine was an empty place, as some of the most lively places in towns were reduced to sites of ancient, uninhabited ruins.

There are a few, typical occasions where this trend seems to have been broken. Many photographs of the front façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were taken during

14 Phillips accompanied the Palestine Exploration Fund's archeological mission that went to Palestine in 1867. He has often been mentioned as the first photographer to take ethnographic photographs in Palestine.

Right
American Colony
Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Jerusalem, Palestine early 20th century.
Collection Widad Kawar / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

Below
Félix Bonfils
The Dome of the Rock. Jerusalem, Palestine, circa 1875.
Collection Nabila Nashashibi / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

the busy Easter season, with large crowds in evidence. Despite their popularity, these photographs do little to undermine the image of the rest of Palestine as an empty place, due to the association of the large crowd in a special season and a special location. Furthermore, when captions were used, they seemed to have had the effect of downplaying the significance of the people present in the images. A good example is the photograph taken in 1901 by Dwight Elmendorf of the outside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Easter Sunday, in which we see the crowds attempting to enter through the doors of the Church. The caption to the photograph, *The Throng of Pilgrims and Others*,[15] might indicate the reason behind his photographing human figures. By describing most of the people in the photograph as pilgrims, the caption emphasised the authenticity of the location as a holy site, and reduced the local population in the region to mere 'others'.

No doubt, certain technical limitations (such as the long exposure time needed to capture an image photographically) had an important impact on the photographers' choice not to photograph moving objects. However, it is highly doubtful that these limitations fully explain why human figures did not appear in the early photographs of Palestine. Even though Maxime Du Camp used the calotype process,[16] he was able to capture some human figures in his photographs of Egypt. That he succeeded in photographing people in Egypt, perhaps through payments to the posing Egyptians, indicates a decision, on his part, not to do the same in Palestine. Similarly, McDonald and Philips, among others, often had a

human figure in their photographs of archeological sites, most likely with the mere intention of establishing a sense of scale.

The absence of the Palestinian population from most photographs was also derived partially from their own hostility towards the intruding European photographers and their intimidating cameras, which violated religious codes sacred to both Muslims and Jews. But this apprehension was probably not the only reason. Chances are, the Palestinian population's absence reflected the fact that they were also absent, at some level, from the mind and consciousness of the European or American photographer. In his mind, the city was reduced to a location that could attest to the truth of a biblical story, rather than be recognised as a real place in this world. The American photographer Edward L. Wilson, who photographed Palestine in the 1880s, corroborates this point in a striking way. In an article that appeared in *Century Magazine*, Wilson actually stated that the peasants he encountered near the Sea of Galilee were "repulsive," adding that, "they are entirely out of harmony with the character of the Land."[17] But, it is interesting to note that even the photographers who, unlike Wilson, were favourably impressed by the people of Palestine, avoided including them in their photographs. The Scottish photographer John Cramb wrote of his disappointment at not being able to photograph the women of Bethlehem – who he thought were beautiful – , adding that it was unfortunate that he was "not expected to spend my time [photographing] such subjects.[18]

15 Elmendorf, D., *A Camera Crusade Through The Holy Land*, plate LXXVIII.

16 An early photographic process developed by Talbot that required a long exposure time.

17 Wilson, Edward L., *In Scripture Lands*, p. 265, quoted in Davis, John, *The Landscape of Belief*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 87.

18 Cramb, John, 'Palestine in 1860; Or, A Photographer's Journal of a Visit to Jerusalem', *The British Journal of Photography*, No. X, November 1, 1861, p. 388.

19 Nir, Yeshayahu, *The Bible and the Image*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 135.

20 Doumani, Beshara, 'Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, Winter 1992, p. 7.

21 The slogan, "a land without a people for a people without a land," has been used by the Zionist movement to justify its claims to Palestine. David Ron attributes this slogan to Chaim Weizman, the long-time president of the World Zionist Organisation. See Ron, David, *Arabs and Israel for Beginners*, New York: Writers & Readers Pub., 1993, p. 94. For further discussion on how Zionism presented Palestine as an 'empty' land, see Schoenman, Ralph, *The Hidden History of Zionism*, Santa Barbra: Veritas Press, 1988, p. 16.

Right
Underwood and Underwood
Fishermen in the Sea of
Gallilee stereoscope.
Palestine, circa 1900.
Collection Issam Nassar

Below
Eric Matson
Shepards and flock near
Bethlehem
Palestine, circa 1920s.

It would appear that, like Cramb, other photographers thought that their buyers would resent having photographs of important sites being desecrated by the inclusion of Arabs, Turks and Jews.[19] This "amazing ability to discover the land without discovering the people,"[20] to use the words of Beshara Doumani, may very well have paved the way for the emergence of the popular mythical image of Palestine as a land without a people, which became a slogan of the Zionist

movement half a century later.[21]

The third pattern mentioned previously – the objectification of human figures as proof of biblical accounts – points to the fact that, when people were included in the commercially distributed photographs, their inclusion was often intended as an illustration of Palestine's biblical heritage. Images of shepherds in the vast, arid landscape of the mountains, or of a few fishermen at the Sea of Galilee were among the most popular photographs of this type. The choice to include human figures was often intended to invoke some particular biblical message. The image of the shepherds in the fields invokes the biblical story of the birth of Jesus; a woman getting water from a well invokes the scene of Jesus with the Samaritan woman; and women near the entrance of a cave recalls the scene of the resurrection. Some photographers, like Dwight Elmendorf, went even further, and listed the particular biblical verses relevant to the depicted image on the back of their photographs.

Another example of the objectification of Palestinians is the photograph taken by Bonfils, in the 1870s, of an old peasant man talking to an old peasant woman in a field of wheat. The caption described the scene as *The Field of Boaz*. Elmendorf – who copied the same setting in a photo of an old peasant couple in a wheat field – went even further, describing the couple in his caption as Ruth and Boaz.

This type of photograph was rather normative among the commercially distributed stereoscopic collections. In a stereoscope from

the Keystone View company, we see the plateau between al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock filled with people. The caption for this card describes the scene as *Mohammedan Pilgrims in Temple Area, Jerusalem*. However, if we examine the back of the card, we get a better idea of why Muslim pilgrims were photographed in the first place. Among other things, the text on the back states:

This is a Mohammedan festival; but it may illustrate many events in Bible history. When, a little less than a thousand years before Christ, on that plateau arose the walls and pinnacles of Solomon's newly built temple, walked up those steps with songs and trumpets and harps, King Solomon, in royal robes and crown, leading the procession. When two centuries after Solomon, King Hezekiah held a great Passover and people came from all parts of the land, there was a congregation like this before us…

Not only did the immediate reality serve to illustrate only certain past events, but the information was also historically inaccurate. For the text also states, in passing, that the Dome of the Rock that appears in the photograph was built in the 10th century after Christ, when, in fact, it dates back to the end of the 7th century.

The process of turning Palestinian peasants into biblical icons had its counterpart in the genre of staged studio portraits, which became fashionable in the last two decades of the 19th century. The work of Tancrède R. Dumas – employed in the late 1870s by the American Palestine Exploration Society – exemplifies this photo-graphic genre. He photographed people, especially women, dressed in the different Palestinian traditional costumes. In his written identifica-tions, his subjects were associated with towns and villages that had biblical connotations. An example of Dumas' captions is the two photo-graphs, *A Woman From Bethlehem*, and *A Man From Bethany*.

However, it is rather hard to accept fully the authenticity of some of the featured characters because, in a number of cases, the subjects of the photographs appear to have been posing models. A good example of this can be found in the Bonfils' collection, where the same person appears in two differ-ent photographs, identified in one as a cotton carder and in the other, as the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem.[22] Similarly, in one of Dumas' photographs, the posing subject is identified as the Maronite Patriarch of Jerusalem – an office that never existed. Moreover, such models were not representative of the country's population because they

22 In the Bonfils photographic col-lection, at the Harvard Semitic Museum (HSM), these two photographs were classified as 4E1 and 4E2. See Gavin, Carney E. S., *The Image of the East*, p. 78.

Below
Félix Bonfils
Market place in Bethlehem.
Bethlehem, Palestine, circa 1875.
Collection Nabila Nashashibi / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

represented, in most of these photographs, members of the smallest minorities in Palestine, such as the Samaritans, Armenians and Bedouins.

The objectification of Palestinian figures often occurred in conjunction with the fourth pattern listed previously, namely, the staging of biblical scenes. It is sometimes difficult to determine whether some of the photographs were staged or were simply realistic scenes, which the photographers' manipulations transformed into some sort of biblical allegorical image. This type of photography was particularly popular among producers of stereoscopic images. In a stereoscopic card from the collection entitled *The Travel Lessons of Jesus*,[23] for instance, we see a man dressed as an Armenian monk, walking away from another man lying on the ground, while a third person, dressed in a Palestinian peasant dress, having stepped down from his horse, assists the man on the ground. The caption reads *On the Road to Jericho: The Parable of the Good Samaritan.*

This photograph is representative of a large number of similar situations that were staged to reflect biblical scenes. Among these, a large number of photographs show people with deformities – most notably, lepers – who invoke the biblical story of Jesus healing the lepers. However, the biblical image is not the only message in the photographs of lepers that can be found in all the stereoscopic collections published on Palestine. The caption, *Unclean Wretched Lepers Outside Jerusalem*, appeared on the back of all such stereoscopes from Underwood and Underwood. The accompanying guide to the collection, *Jerusalem through the Stereoscope*, notes that, "there are generally forty to fifty of them outside the city," adding that such a deadly "disease of sin" is hereditary, for "every man inherits [it] from a line of sinning ancestors... which no human power can cure".[24] The text also suggests a certain European chauvinism toward these "deformed, unclean and underdeveloped" inhabitants of the Holy Land.

Incidentally, the staging of biblical scenes was not limited to 19th century photographic images, but continued throughout the British Mandate period (1917-1948). In a photograph by Swedish Eric

23 This collection was designed and its text authored by Rev. William Byron Forbush and distributed by Underwood and Underwood publishers in the 1890s.

24 Hurlbut, Jesse Lyman, *Jerusalem through the Stereoscope*, New York: Underwood and Underwood, 1908, p. 91.

Right
Underwood and Underwood
On the Road to Jericho, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Stereoscope from *The Travel Lessons on the Life of Jesus.* Palestine, 1899
Collection Issam Nassar

Right
Underwood and Underwood
"Unclean! Unclean!" Wretched lepers outside Jerusalem. Stereoscope from *The Travel Lessons on the Life of Jesus.* Jerusalem, Palestine, 1897
Collection Issam Nassar

Matson,[25] taken either in the 1920s or the 1930s, and entitled the *Judean Home*,[26] the exterior of a very old construction, resembling a grotto, can be seen. A father figure stands before the structure, while a mother figure, holding a baby in her arms, sits on the ground. Another man and two camels can also be seen in the photograph. The resemblance between this tableau and the Nativity scene can hardly be assumed as coincidental.

The fifth pattern acquires its significance from its absence. It is almost impossible to find any 19th century photographs of Palestine that correspond to the image of the exotic Orient. It was rather fashionable among European photographers of the East, including some of the same photographers who visited Palestine, to take photographs of nude women in other places (often identified as Algerian, Nubian, Moorish or Bedouin).

While the absence of such images from the photographs of Palestine might suggest a desire on the part of the photographers to respect the sanctity of the land of Jesus, its religious ceremonies and clergy, it may also indicate that European photographers did not view Palestine as a location that was part of the Orient. Rather, it was a familiar site, very well known to the Europeans and often claimed by them.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, that photographs of nude women were not totally absent from photographs of the rest of Palestine. In the Bonfils collection, for example, there are at least two different photographs that show a woman carrying a bundle of wood on her head with one of her breasts exposed.[27] In the catalogue of Bonfils photographs, one of these women is described as a Bedouin from Jericho. It is also interesting to note the resemblance between this and another, almost identical, photograph taken by Tancrède Dumas around the same time. In this photograph, we see a woman standing, holding a bundle of wood, with her breast exposed. Dumas entitled this photograph *A Bedouin*

Left
Eric Matson
The Judean Home.
Circa 1920s.

Left
Bonfils
A Beduin from Jericho in Jerusalem.
Jerusalem, Palestine 1880s.
Collection Mohammad B. Alwan

25 This photograph does not represent the core of the photographic work of Eric Matson. He was the photographer of the American Colony in Jerusalem; and his large collection, housed at the Library of Congress, fully documented the Near East, its geography and its people.

26 Graham-Brown, Sarah, *Palestinians and their Society 1880-1946*, New York: Quartet Books, 1980, p. 1.

27 Photographs 4F4 and 4F9 in the HSM collection. See Gavin, Carney E. S., *The Image of the East*, p. 79.

from Beirut. The similarity between the two images can easily be seen in the context of the next pattern.

Numerous photographs of the same locations, taken from the same angle, even when the sites had no apparent special significance, represent the last pattern I would like to discuss. Several photographs taken by Bonfils and by the photographers of the American Colony, among others, show the same scene that they labelled *First View of Jerusalem.* These photographs even show a similar number of animals and people in the same locations.[28] This replication indicates that what we have is more than a simple case of new photographers following the lead of earlier ones. Such frequent duplications reveal that a photographic tradition had been established in the minds of the photographers, which they felt obliged to follow. It was as if any site, previously photographed in the Holy Land, had acquired some meaning that every new photographer felt a need to document.

A point, which needs to be reiterated is that there is "no such thing as one, definitive meaning of a text or image."[29] Rather, different possible meanings originate from different readings of the same text or image. These readings depend very much upon the particular experiences of the readers/viewers and the historical and cultural contexts in which they are being constructed. However, it is important to emphasise that photographers are not always fully aware of all the possible meanings for the images they produce, as they are subject to various kinds of unconscious processes through which connections with previously existing concepts and ideas

are formulated.[30] The market demand for Holy Land images, coupled with their dissemination through publications and exhibitions, only confirms that an authoritative, popular view of Palestine was in existence in both Europe and America. In this sense, 19th century photographs of Palestine were not only about representing the country's landscape, but they also revealed something very significant about the way in which Europeans thought of themselves and of the world around them, at that particular juncture in history. The images, presented in the photographs, corresponded to the popular image of Palestine as the Holy Land, at least in the same sense that contemporary travel literature represented it. They also paralleled the general attitude of the colonial European powers towards Palestine. It is in this context that studying how Palestine was represented by local photography becomes even more significant. Questions relating to how native photographers employed photography, and how they represented their land and lives become central in light of the image of Palestine in early European photography.

Local Photographers or Photography: The Problem of Definition

As implied above, the overwhelming majority of the 19th century photographers of Palestine were, in fact, Europeans. The few exceptions to this rule were Ottoman subjects from regions quite distant from Palestine. It was not until the end of the 19th century that a photographic tradition, which can arguably be called local, began to emerge. Three photographic studios had been established in Jerusalem and, at least

28 These photographs are representatives of many others. Commercial photographers were regularly copying each others work and depicting the same sites. A general comparison between the works of Bonfils, Dumas and Zangaki clearly illustrates this point.

29 Felicity Edhom, '*Beyond The Mirror: Women's Self Portraits,*' in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender,* edited by Bonner, F., Goodman, L., Allen, R., Jones, L. and King, C., Cambridge MA: Polity Press in association with The Open University, 1992, p. 158.

30 Ibid., p. 158.

one in Jaffa, by the turn of the century. By the early 20th century, photography was a local career and a number of photographic establishments in the country began to serve the growing demand for photographs in local society.[31]

However, before venturing to narrate a history of local photography in Palestine, it is necessary to attempt to clarify what 'local' photography signifies. The traditional definition of 'local' as exclusively determined by the photographer's birthplace, family ties, residency or ethnicity can be problematic in the context of Palestine, in light of both the Jewish immigration and the unusually large number of foreign residents in the country. In addition, 'native' photographers regularly worked for, and with, their foreign counterparts – often producing images that served the growing tourist market in a fashion not very different from that which was produced by European photographers. Part of the difficulty in the definition is instigated by the way in which the history of Palestine itself serves as an arena for contestation. Illustrating the complexity of this characterisation of who is 'local' and who is 'not local' is the case of the photographer Mendel Diness, a Russian immigrant and an early photographer, who worked in Jerusalem in the 1850s. Some Israeli photography historians recently argued that, in fact, Diness was "Jerusalem's first professional photographer."[32] His Jewish origin, and the fact that he had been introduced to photography in Jerusalem, were used as the basis for the claim that Diness was the first 'local' photographer in Palestine.

However, if localism were to be defined in ethnic or linguistic terms, Diness certainly would not qualify as 'local'. The same could be said were we to adopt, for the sake of argument, the far-fetched Zionist paradigm that makes every Jew a native of Palestine, especially in light of the fact that Diness had converted to Protestantism. Similarly, if 'local' denoted Ottoman citizenship, Diness would also fail to fit the description as he was a Russian, who remained in Palestine under the protection of the British consulate in Jerusalem.[33]

Defining 'local' is, essentially, a theoretical problem. According to the Oxford dictionary, it refers to a state characterised by an attachment to a certain locality and by "interests arising out of such attachments."[34] The production of locality, in my view, is a process that evolves through history, and is based on the idea of the negation of what is 'not local'. In this process, several elements are at play, which cannot be reduced merely to the spatial element. Locality, as Appadurai has argued, is connected more with relations and contexts than with places and location. Locality is essentially a quality that is "constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts."[35] In other words, locality becomes an issue connected more with social context than with the physical location: It is the context in which images are produced, exchanged, viewed and assigned meanings that must be placed at the core of our attempt to differentiate between what is local from what is not. In this

31 It is important to note that the forefather of local photography, Yessayi Garabedian, described his fascination with photography in his memoirs using the Armenian word *arhest* [meaning craft] instead of the word *arvest* [which means art]. See Victor-Hummel, Ruth, *Culture and Image: Christians and the Beginnings of Local Photography in 19th Century Ottoman Palestine*, in O'Mahony, A.; Gunner, G. and Hitlian, K., *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, Jerusalem: Swedish Christian Study Centre, 1995, p. 186.

32 See Wahrman, Dror, *Mendel Diness: Jerusalem's First Professional Photographer?, see* Cathedra for the *History of Eretz Israel and its Yishuv*, Vol. 38, 1985, pp. 115-120 (Hebrew).

33 Because Diness converted to Christianity, he was shunned by the Jewish community in Palestine, which tried to physically harm him, and, in fact, managed to take his wife and children away from him. As a result, Diness sought refuge at the house of the British Consul in Jerusalem. It was in that house, with the help of the consul's wife, Mrs. Finn, that Diness first learned of photography. He worked in Jerusalem capturing images of both the place and of Ottoman rule before he left in 1860 to the United States, never to return. For more information on M.J. Diness, see *Capturing the Holy Land: M.J. Diness and the Beginnings of Photography in Jerusalem*, Cambridge: Harvard Semitic Museum, 1993.

34 *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Thumb Index Edition, 1993, s.v. "Localism."

35 Appaudrai, Arjun, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dynamics of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960, p. 178.

context, the subject of the photograph becomes crucial, since it is obvious that the different markets of exchange were interested in the image because of what it depicted, and also by its subject's relation to the community in question. Christian Europe, for instance, was interested in Holy Land images much more than it was interested in the people of Palestine.

In light of the above discussion, it may be safe to claim that, in Palestine, it was the image – and not the photographer – that mattered the most. If the picture depicted the desired image, then it was in demand – regardless of who had produced it. Therefore, in examining the emergence of local photography, it becomes fruitless to focus exclusively on the national, ethnic or religious identity of the photographers at the expense of the work they produced, and the relation of the latter to local society. Whether the photographers were Armenians, Arabs or European residents; Muslims, Christians or Jews, the work that they produced, relative to the fabric of Palestinian society at that time, confers the quality 'local' upon them, in contrast with the photography that we have already defined as 'non-local' (photography that produced images in response to European market demands, as well as Zionist photography that was connected exclusively with the Jewish settlement project in Palestine). In this sense, photographs of Ramallah taken by the American Elihu Grant, from 1901 to 1904, can be called local photography. Not only do they capture life in the town, but they were also produced for the benefit of the town, despite the fact that Grant himself was an outsider.[36] The same could be said of some of the work of the photographers of the American Colony in Jerusalem.

Early Local Photography and the Question of Representation

Photography, as a new craft practiced by the local population of Palestine, began as early as the 1860s, when the Armenian Patriarch, Yassayi Garabedian, established a workshop in Jerusalem for the purposes of training young Armenians in photography. It was a while before the first Palestinian actually opened a studio in Palestine. In 1885, the Armenian Garabed Krikorian, a student of Garabedian, established the first photographic studio in Jerusalem. From this studio, two more important, local photographers of Palestine began their careers. The first was Khalil Raad, who subsequently opened his own shop in Jerusalem, in 1890; the second was Johhanes, the son of Krikorian, who took over his father's work and studio around 1913. Two years after Raad, Issa Sawabini opened a studio in Jaffa.

As the 20th century began to unfold, more and more people in Palestine took up photography as their career of choice. Among the many who worked in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jaffa and Nazareth, among other places, were Hanna Safieh (1910-1969), Ali Za'rour (1901-1972), Anton and Joseph Mikhail Carmi, Sama'an al-Sah'har, the Elia studios in the Old City, Diana (location unknown) and the photo dealers, Hanania Brothers

36 Photographs taken by Grant were printed in *The Ramallah Messenger*, the newsletter of the Society of Friends in New England. See Shaheen, Nasseb, *A Pictorial History of Ramallah*, Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1992, p. 31.

(location also unknown). Za'rour, who worked in Jerusalem from 1936 on, was one of the first Muslim photographers in Palestine. The Carmi brothers, on the other hand, were appointed as the official photographers of the Russian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem at the turn of the 20th century. As for Sah'har, he owned a photographic studio that was located on the outskirts of the New Gate of the Old City, in the mid-1940s. Following the division of Jerusalem, his studio remained in what was known as 'No-Man's Land', until he moved his practice to Bethlehem.

There is no doubt that the presence of a number of professional local photographers, who worked in Palestine in the early part of the 20th century, points to the birth of a new photographic tradition, at least with respect to the way in which Palestine and its people were depicted. A quick examination of a number of works by early local, professional photographers indicates that, in many ways, the commercial photographs of Palestine, produced for the tourist market by the local photographers, were not different from those produced earlier by their European counterparts. However, images of holy sites, religious ceremonies, statesmen's visits and general views of major cities were not the only images produced by local photographers. Much of the bulk of their photographic production was, rather, connected to the life of their community: Personal, family and other social occasions, as well as the photographic documentation of political changes occurring in

Palestine. Furthermore, a large volume of their work belonged to the genre of portrait photography. This point does not negate that early European photographers – particularly residents with studios in the region – were not engaged in the production of portraits. The significant difference lies in the manner in which the two groups – local or resident photographers – approached, related to and produced portrait photography.

A typical trend in early-European portrait photography in Palestine showed human figures whose identity as individuals was consistently ignored, to the point that it can be argued that their identity was obliterated. As previously mentioned, the people who appeared in the images taken by Dumas, Bonfils and others were representatives of 'types' of people living in the Holy Land (refer to Dumas's image of *A Woman from Bethlehem*). In a way, the choice of pose, setting, object and subject was cast by the photographer;

Left
Khalil Raad
Tourists photographed in Arab traditional clothing. Jerusalem, Palestine 1925.
Collection MK / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

whereas in local photography, the object of the picture was the subject him- or herself. In local photography, it was the subject who opted to be photographed, and who chose the type of pose or image in which they wanted to appear. Interestingly enough, however, they often imitated images they had seen in early European photography. For example, it was not uncommon for urban women to be photographed dressed as Bedouins or Bethlehemites. The studios of Krikorian and Raad, among others, had various attires from which their customers could choose to be photographed in, disguised as other, 'more exotic' locals. That they often chose to do so may be explained by the fact that many of the customers of the early local studios were from the wealthier and more urban segments of Palestinian society. It appears that the new emerging class of urban aristocracy, which had fully adopted a European attire and style of life, also adopted the European perception of peasants and Bedouins as 'exotic Orientals'. Despite the result of the image being very similar to those commonly produced by European photographers, the role of the individual being photographed – as a passive object or as an active participant in the choice of subject – remains an important distinction in the context of the present discussion.

The practice of early photography reveals several important trends that dominated the work of the Jerusalem photographers at that time. The first, and perhaps most common, was production of family portraits. Many rich or middle class urban families wanted studio portraits of the entire family. This trend was rather common among Christian Arab families at first, but rich urban Muslim families quickly adopted it, as early as the 1920s. The work of Johhanes Krikorian presents us with numerous

Right
T. Dumas
A Woman From Bethlehem.
Palestine 1889.
Collection Mohammad B. Alwan

Right
Johannes Krikorian
Najla Krikorian.
Jerusalem, Palestine 1921.
Collection Aida Kawar Krikorian / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

examples of this genre. The most typical of such photographs would have the head of the household, the man, standing in the middle of the photograph, while the rest of the family was seated at his side, in a lower position surrounding his wife. The patriarchal nature of Arab society in Palestine at the time is evident in these images. A studio portrait by the Jaffa-based photographer Issa Sawabini, taken in 1911, shows the father (Alfred Roch) standing with a finger pointed towards his baby daughter (Ortineh), held by her mother (Olinda). The mother is dressed in attire that seems to suggest that she belonged to Victorian America. The photograph thus presents us with a mélange of ideas and attitudes belonging to various cultural trends at the time. The contrast between the postures of Mr. and Mrs. Roch in the photograph is reminiscent of John Berger's observation on the existence of a convention in modern European art where "men act and women appear".[37] The set-up, and the father's gesture, affirm values of patriarchy which were strictly upheld within Arab society at the time, whereas the posture of the mother suggests that she was attentive to the way she would appear to the viewers. Finally, the attire of all three reveals the emergent trend towards westernisation among the local aristocracy.

As time passed, photographs of the family without the patriarch started to become more common in certain regions and social classes. Immigration to the Americas or war drafts, may explain the absence of the father figure. In fact, it is likely that such photographs were taken for the benefit of the absent father.

The second trend that developed was associated with photographers from missionary groups that worked in Palestine. It was rather common for missionary schools to hire photographers in order to produce images showing

[37] Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin, 1972, pp. 45 and 47.

Left
Anonymous
The Lorenzo family.
Jerusalem, Palestine 1900.
Collection Leila Kardus / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

Left
Garabed Krikorian
Alfred and Olinda Roch with their daughter Ortineh.
Jaffa, Palestine 1911.
Collection Samia Salfiti / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

their charitable activities for the benefit of their funders abroad. The work of the missionary E. Grant in Ramallah, in the 1910s, is a good example. Grant photographed the people of Ramallah often, especially those who were associated with the Quaker school (*The Friends School*). His photographs often appeared in Quaker publications, published at the Quaker headquarters in Philadelphia in the United States. Photographing the graduating classes in the missionary schools was another area in which photography was regularly employed. This is one type of work in which many local photographers, particularly Khalil Raad and Issa Sawabini, were active.[38]

The third trend that was common in certain areas, primarily areas with a significant Christian population, was post-mortem photography (photographing the deceased before or during the funeral). Photographs of deceased clergymen, especially patriarchs and bishops, can be found in the photographic archives of many churches in Palestine, dating back to the late 19th century. This tradition, which appears to have been limited to

clergy at first, became popular among the Christian population in the early part of the 20th century. It was not uncommon for local photographic studios to occasionally advertise that they specialised in photographing funerals. In many cases, the deceased would be photographed in an almost standing position, with the coffin pushed up a little, surrounded by his/her family. The origins of the emergence of this tradition in the early photography of the Near East are unknown. Nonetheless, post-mortem photography was not uncommon in other parts of the world during that same period. This practice can be found in early American photography, as well as early Indian photography. Resorting to post-mortem photographs, in the case of Palestine, may well have to do with the fact that the subject was not photographed during his/her lifetime. It is quite possible that the subject's last picture was his/her first. Taking a picture with the deceased, surrounded by family members, was, perhaps, as Christopher Pinney pointed out in his discussion of this phenomenon in the case of India, "an expression of a combination of love […] and the need for grief-stricken relatives to cling to memories of the deceased."[39] This last point may explain why post-mortem photography did not fully disappear from the photographic scene, as, on occasion, pictures of the deceased can still be found today.

The fourth trend in local photography is what I dub as 'war photography'. This genre includes both studio portraits of men in army uniform, as well as pictures of

[38] It is important to keep in mind that the shortage of photographers in Palestine, at that time, often meant that people from the surrounding villages and towns regularly employed the Jaffa and the Jerusalem photographers who were ready to travel from town to town.

[39] Pinney, Christopher, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs,* London: Reaktion Books, 1997, p. 139.

Below
Anonymous
Saint Joseph de l'Apparition school.
Jaffa, Palestine 1946.
Collection Aida Shehadeh / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

combat or events related to the various wars and rebellions that affected Palestine. One can find pictures of Palestinian men in Ottoman army uniform or in British police uniform. With the passage of time, photographs of resistance fighters began to emerge. While the studios of Krikorian, Raad and Sawabini produced this type of image in portrait format, Hanna Safieh, Eric Matson and Ali Za'rour produced similar photographs on the field and outside the confines of the studio. As an example, several photographs by Hanna Safieh, taken in the 1940s, show leaders such as Abdel Qader al-Hussieni posing for the camera, surrounded by armed men from the al-Jihad al-Muqadas forces, which he led. Other pictures by Safieh include photographs of the Arab attack on the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, in May 1948, as well as the battle of the Gush Etzion Jewish settlement (between Bethlehem and Hebron), in May 1948. According to an eyewitness account, Safieh travelled in the tank of Abdullah al-Tal, the commanding officer of the Jordanian Army, who captured the site from the Zionist forces in 1948. Other photographs documenting the Arab Revolt of 1936 and the 1948 War can often be found in family collections and in other archives. Another photographer, whose work documented the 1948 War, was Gaza-based Abdel Razak Badran.[40]

The afore-mentioned trends attest to the existence of a local photographic tradition in Palestine, which employed the medium in ways that were significantly different from the European tradition with regard to this subject. Clearly, photography found its own place within Palestinian society, in general, and within Jerusalem, in particular, as a way of documenting social life; it is interesting to note that photography was, indeed, not perceived as an art as much as it was viewed as a means for documenting social and private lives. Photographs which suggest that the medium was used

Left
Antranig Bakerdjian
British police, Palestine.
Collection Antranig Bakerdjian / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

Left
Garabed Krikorian
Doctor Jamil Tuck-Tuck,
Jerusalem, Palestine 1915.
Collection Sami Khoury / FAI
© Fondation Arabe pour l'Image

40 Abdel Razak Badran was born in 1919, in Haifa. He lived between Safad and Nablus before he moved to Cairo, where he studied photography at the School for Applied Arts at Cairo. In 1941, he founded the *Studio for Art and Photography* in Gaza.

as an art form are rather rare. One of these exceptions can be found from a few photographs dating back to 1922, which reveal a man named Mr. Skaff, posing in four different positions. In an almost surreal setting, one of these photographs show three versions of Mr. Skaff around a dining room table, eating potatoes, with a head – also of Mr. Skaff – placed on a plate before them.

In Conclusion

One can argue that photography in Palestine had several beginnings and multiple histories. First, was the arrival of photography, in 1839, as a European invention, which has been briefly outlined in this paper, in an attempt to establish an initial frame of reference. With the intervention of European photographers, certain ideas and traditions in photography and captions were gradually established. Subsequently, there were the 'beginnings' of photography as a local career with several Armenian and Arab photographers. This initiation was largely connected to the advent of modernity in the Ottoman Empire; and in particular, into Jerusalem. The third 'beginning' arose with the commencement of the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, which brought a number of photographers to the country, who documented the birth and the growth of the Jewish Yishuv. Studies on both the Zionist and the European traditions of photography with regard to Palestine are numerous. However, only a handful of articles have been written, thus far, about the tradition of local photography in Palestine. This study is an attempt to simultaneously introduce a number of 'local' photographers who have, until now, been largely ignored and, more importantly, to carve a place into the history of photography in Jerusalem for what one may call a 'local' photographic tradition. Needless to say, much work remains to be done in reviewing this field. Not only is the study of the development of local photography important for understanding the advent of modernity in Jerusalem, but it also offers the social historian important material, relevant to the social changes that were taking place at that time. Early local photography left us a large number of records of political and daily life in Jerusalem. At the same time, it provides us, today, with a glance at how people then 'viewed' and 'framed' themselves. After all, it is important to remind ourselves of the significant role that photography plays in shaping what we know, and how we know it. As it has been wisely declared, photographers ''alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe.''[41]

41 Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977, p. 3.

Below
Anonymous
Mr. Skaff in four different positions.
Bethlehem, Palestine 1922.
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Issam Nassar is a photography historian and the associate editor of the *Jerusalem Quarterly File*. He is also the associate director at the Institute of Jerusalem Studies and an assistant professor at Al-Quds University. He is the author of: *Photographing Jerusalem: A Study in Nineteenth-Century European Representation* (Boulder: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1997); *Hanna Safieh: A Man and His Camera, Photographs of Palestine, 1927-1967* (Ramallah: Turbo, 1999); *The History of Jerusalem: New Trends in Research,* co-edited with Salim Tamari, (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2002); *The Memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948* (a prominent Jerusalemite Musician), co-edited with Salim Tamari, (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, in Arabic, 2002); *Early Local Photography in Palestine: A Social and Visual History* (London: A. M. Qattan Foundation, forthcoming, in Arabic, in 2003).

Framing the Subversive in Post-War Beirut: Critical Considerations for a Social History of the Present

Rasha Salti

In the past year, the debate over 'the social history of art', or the writing of the history of art within the practice of social history, has once again been rekindled in the pages of art and culture periodicals in the United States.[1] The latest instance was partly sparked by the appointment of Thomas Crow to the helm of the Getty Research Institute, and the consequent rise to prominence and reach of the brand of scholarship he embodies at institutions, in parallel with academic ones, that patron historians and critics of art. The same debate flared in 1999 with the publication of Crow's *The Intelligence of Art*[2] and T. J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*[3].

Both Crow and Clark are stellar scholars in the field of the social history of art. T.J. Clark is now a professor at Berkeley, while Crow taught most recently at Yale University, prior to holding the directorship of the Getty Research Institute. Despite the fact that these two operate from the safe haven of tenure in prestigious institutions, their venture, which they share with a host of other scholars, is far from

being the prevailing trend in art historical writing. Their marginalisation is not only the result of the conservative ideological sweep in Western academia, but also the result of the emergence of the 'New Left', post-structuralism, identity politics and postmodernism. At heart, the social history of art is founded on the interpretation of artistic and cultural production as an expression, meaning or sign, fundamentally − if not totally − embedded in social structures or the forces born from the relations of production that structure the society in which they emerge. In other words, class and class relations are the key elements in which the analysis is anchored and where meaning is understood to take shape.

This paper purports to sketch the diagram that allows for thinking or grounding a social history of artistic production in post-war Lebanon. Briefly. This has, by no means, been conceived as an academic paper, nor is it the result of serious, concerted research. Rather, it is more a conversation piece, an invitation to venture into a territory not quite familiar in the realm of art

1 Most notably *Art Press*, No. 74, December 2001, and *Documents 21*, Spring 2002

2 Crow, Thomas, *The Intelligence of Art*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

3 Clark, T.J., *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism,* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999.

history and art criticism in these confines. Although the syntax is entirely in the affirmative, at heart – as I present it to you – it is meant to be tuned to the interrogative. In this instance, the paper will only address artistic and cultural production that either has been identified, or has identified itself, as 'alternative', 'critical', 'subversive' and/or 'counter-current'. I realise that these attributes are loaded terms, and beg for deeper investigation and clarification. However, at this point in the introduction, and for the purposes of framing the subject of the paper, they refer to artistic and cultural expression that has come to life outside – and to some extent in spite – of official venues and institutions of culture, outside the social realm and the 'establishment' of cultural production and outside the conventional social practices of cultural consumption.

The paper is structured into three sections. The first section proposes to lay out relations of production and examine the reconfiguration of social classes in post-war Lebanon. The second section maps the discursive matrix of hegemonic ideology. The third section hones in on the social and political realm in which this counter-hegemonic, or alternative, current of artistic production, as well as its authors and its patrons, lie. The final section proposes to read a selection of these art works in light of the interpretive scheme unveiled by the two previous sections. It also seeks to examine how the attributes 'modern', 'kitsch' and 'subversive' relate to these art works. Finally, in lieu of a conclusion, the paper will interrogate the 'subversive' (or

counter-hegemonic) in this 'counter-current' of artistic production.

I would like to start with a few prefatory remarks. I feel I ought to 'come clean' before I venture into investigating artistic works and their authors in the framework I propose. Not so much a pre-emptive move to curtail critical reactions, this admission is more of an acknowledgement of the shortfalls of the venture at the centre of this paper.

Prima facie, the bonds I carry – with pride – to the realm of the faces and projects I seek to analyse can be thought to undermine the 'objectivity' of my venture. One of the virtues – and charms – of the social history or social critique of art lies in that it evolves within a structuralist diagram that gives considerable space to objectivity without undermining the presence, and power, of subjectivity. Unlike Clark and, to a lesser degree, Crow, who have written about the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th centuries, dealing largely with artists who are deceased, the artists whose work I deal with are very much alive and kicking. To complicate matters further, I am personally acquainted with almost all the members of the group, and some are extremely dear to my heart. The larger social realm in which they socialise, reap success and failure, band and fall in dispute, gossip, seek solace and experience moments of recognition, is a world that was my home. At the risk of digression, I will confess with a heavy heart, that I have been homesick. In that respect, the extent to which my emotions may have tainted my narrative is only so far as to perfume it with tenderness. More to the point, I am a subjective narrator wherein

intimate, first hand and unconventional knowledge informs the claims of this paper. I am 'privileged' in access, since the group of artists and their works are so deeply shaped by being 'outside', their archival traces are uncollected, dispersed among the artists themselves, curators and patron organisations.

The second shortfall of this paper is the result of my geographical displacement. For the past three years, I have been migrating between Beirut and New York City. Thus, my acquaintance with the quotidian of Beirut and the familiar access to the social realm of this cultural production have been punctuated by sharp interruptions. I have tried to keep up, to the best of my capacity, but I acknowledge the negative impact that my absence has had on sharpening and updating the data bank of intimate, informal knowledge. However, this paper is partly a reflection born from displacement. More precisely, it is the coupling of my recent acquaintance with fields in social science, such as cultural studies, social history, sociology of culture and anthropology, with my looking back at this counter-current in Beirut. That is why I prefer to converse, rather than proclaim, and propose to sketch a framework for a historiography, rather than narrate a history.

And, as a final reflection in this preface, I am aware that the venture of this paper can be regarded as preposterous, considering that a decade of interspersed, shy, experimental attempts at building a niche and practice of counter-hegemonic, alternative artistic expression is too embryonic, too fragile and too young to be considered eligible for a historiography. However, my venture is the stratagem I felt I commanded, with the least ambivalence, to break the silence of critical evaluation and start a conversation. From an ideological standpoint, I wanted to be the dry, stern, old-fashioned structuralist, not to say leftist, to stand behind a podium and bring class, as an economic, political and social category back into a conversation on culture and hegemony.

Diagram of Class Relations

There is wide disagreement in Lebanon, and the rest of the world, as to the changing significance of class distinctions, whether social classes exist at all, and whether it is still useful to read society in terms of classes and class conflict. Both the 'New Left' and the 'New Right' present us with a myriad of options. At the risk of sounding like a crude, dogmatic, old-fashioned Marxist, I defend the view that the analytical perspective, provided by a class-based perspective, is still the most pertinent. Indeed, the era of global 'post-capitalism' carries its own peculiar categories of meaning and engenders its own social and political phenomena; but, I find they are all better understood when the undergirding scheme is class-based. In the case of Lebanon, and for the purposes of this paper, I propose a truly rough scheme of three classes. The neo-liberal turn of the post-war era has sharpened polarisation between classes in ways that underscore the crude diagram I propose, but it has also proletarianised social groups within classes to the point of undermining the scheme at the same time.

I laboured, painstakingly, at finding the right balance between those readers to whom the Lebanese context is the daily grind, and others to whom Lebanon is something else – whether a fellow Arab country or the vernacular version of Hong Kong or Saigon.

Historically, unlike some of its Arab kin, Lebanon had prided itself – with boisterous arrogance – on being a bastion of market-centred and market-driven liberal economic policies. However, the neo-liberal outlook endorsed by successive post-war governments, marked a decisive turn in the country's fate. While in Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, national governments of the mid-1950s and the 1960s embarked on state-led industrialisation and development with import-substitution, Lebanon's successive national governments entrusted, principally, the private sector with economic development and production. To this day, the Lebanese state has been, unwaveringly, the loyal, fierce and proud defender of the well-being and prosperity of the ruling economic elite, its corporations and wealth, and its capacity at reproducing capital. The 'social contract' in Lebanon was, and still is, tipped substantially to the favour of employers and private entrepreneurship. In exchange for sharing the burden of social wages with the state, tax burdens were rendered significantly insignificant, and laws of banking secrecy veiled accumulation of surplus from taxation. The boundaries between the economic elite and the political class have been, and remain, almost non-existent.

The first stirrings of the civil conflict erupted in Lebanon in 1973. It was brought to an end in 1991, as warring factions signed the Taef Agreement, and as, at the same time, George Bush père set his New World Order well afoot to re-map the United States' emperium. Lebanon figured in the more radical geo-political restaging in the mapping of the New World Order. It would no longer be the untamed passage between Syria and Palestine, or the stage to petty warlord and militias bickering over parceling fiefdoms. More importantly, it would no longer be the site of money-laundering, narcotics production, trafficking and arms dealing. It was not clear what shape and what direction the revival of Lebanon was to take; however, it was premised on an irrevocable condition and circumscribed by an insurmountable obstacle. The diktat by the New World Order stipulated that Lebanon's post-war security and stability would be directly policed by Syria. The Syrian regime was officiously vested with the mandate and powers to oversee the transition of Lebanon into a stable post-war condition, and to ward off the spectre of rekindling the civil conflict. On the other hand, the Lebanese revival was circumscribed by having its southern tip remain the grounds for Israeli occupation, or what the Israeli state described as its 'military security buffer zone'. This zone was also the platform from which the only remaining active armed resistance was being waged against the Israeli state, outside the borders of the Occupied Territories and Gaza.

The first post-war government was short-lived and dissolved in the clamour and rubble of massive, countrywide, popular demonstrations. Prevailing convention dates the

first significant post-war government to 1992, when the subsequent (or second) cabinet, headed by the current Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, who held, then, the post for the first time, took office. His persona, more so than the socio-political species he emblematised, emerged as a phenomenon and a force that spilled into the fissured, hollowed war-ravaged landscape of political forces and their discourses. Rafiq al-Hariri, along with his revolving cast of cronies, experts, pundits and jingoists, has intermittently branded himself as various incantations, reincarnations and symbols of local political trends. However, fundamentally, in terms of ideology and public policy, he was, and remains, the business magnet whose political charisma and ideology champion neo-liberalism.

Both the Taef Agreement and the endorsement of the global sweep of the neo-liberal trend reshaped Lebanon's post-war class structure. The wager of revival, or 'reconstruction', by Hariri-led post-war governments was an alchemy of tight financial acrobatics to stabilise the currency and a resounding global advertising campaign proclaiming Lebanon's rise from the ashes, in an effort to attract investment and bid away economic revitalisation to private entrepreneurship. The government has been successful at stabilising the currency – albeit at a backbreaking cost – yet less so at curbing inflation and ensuring equitable standards of living.

The Ruling Class

The reconfiguration of the ruling class was more the result of post-war political reshuffling than of economic or social policies. New protagonists were grafted onto the body of what is described as the 'traditional' economic and political leadership. These new protagonists were a collection of top cadres from political parties and movements transformed into militias in the last phase of the civil war. They were political powerbrokers and warlords, who were included in the round of negotiations that ended the war, and were endowed with enough political clout to claim a stake in financial and business ventures in post-war Lebanon. In contrast, a fraction of the traditional component of the ruling class was, to some extent, marginalised. 'Traditional', in post-war Lebanon, came to mean many things. In this instance, it refers to the ruling 'establishment' in the pre-war era. More precisely, it refers to a social group that has maintained its political and economic hold on hegemonic standing over time, through patrilineal legacy. In other words, the families/corporations whose dominion or capital is either political or financial, and to whom the discourse of 'tradition' provides an uncontested legitimacy and anchor in the timeline of the nation. There is a third component to the hegemonic class that straddles between Lebanon's 'traditional' and parvenu groups; namely, the social group of immigrant returnees, of whom the Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri is the most recent and stellar scion. Some of the returning emigrants, who were able to amass considerable wealth, have repatriated as powerful protagonists in the post-war period, and have become heavyweight financiers and/or new political brokers.

The Middle Class

The reconfiguration of the Lebanese middle class has been more the result of government policy. In contrast to the hegemonic elite and the subaltern 'working class', or the 'class of the poor', the middle class is the most widely-cited class, both in the government's rhetoric and in public policy, as the central pillar of the well-being, prosperity and advancement of the nation. If the ruling class comprises large and secure holders of capital (political and economic – and, in Lebanon, the conversion value between both is quite straightforward), the middle class comprises the salaried, white collar labour force (both in the private and public realms) that has a nominally secure access to social securities such as healthcare, education and retirement pensions. They also include small-scale entrepreneurs and business owners, but not their employees.

The state's failure at curbing inflation and the rampant cost of living have taken their toll on the stability of the economic status of the middle class. The neo-liberal doxa's sustained reductions of the state's role of safeguarding social benefits has further intensified the precarity that threatens their status. Salaried professionals, like physicians, lawyers, architects, engineers, teachers and such, have become proletarianised; their professional associations, syndicates and unions have had little success in protecting their members from continued assaults by the private sector and by public policy. In conclusion, the Lebanese middle class of the post-war era shares far more

characteristics with a working class – in its fledgling economic standing, in the dwindling package of social securities it has access to and in its inability to bargain collectively with the private sector and the state – than it does with a middle class.

The Working Class

As for the working class, or the 'poor classes', as they are often dubbed in the local vernacular, they remain the most mysterious and elusive entity in the government's discourse. While at the outset of the war, it stood as a significant organised political force engaged in a protracted struggle to reverse the ideological foundations of the Republic, the Lebanese working class has endured the most radical and painful reconfiguration in the post-war era. It still bears the wounds of the civil war, some of which have barely healed. The class of 'working poor' is a composite of a variety of socio-economic groups that are lumped into a single class because, in the final analysis, they share an identical status of disenfranchisement, marginalisation, little or no access to social benefits such as healthcare, education and retirement security. These socio-economic groups include unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers in the industrial and service sectors, agricultural workers, small-scale farmers and construction workers, to name a few.

The post-war peace agreement laid the terrain for the massive import of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour from Syria that provided holders of capital, entrepreneurs and business owners with the sort of labour force they had only dreamed of. Historically, Lebanon's prosperity

and fragile status quo, in terms of class conflict, have been predicated on the existence of a large pool of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, outside the realm of citizenship, bound in extremely abusive relations of power. This lowest-ranking group in the social construct provides capital holders with a larger margin of the surplus, but it is also used to police the class of workers ranking just above them. Their complete political and social marginalisation, and their exclusion from the 'civil' sphere, serve to maintain standards of wage and work conditions at inhuman levels, and to scale down standards for Lebanese workers. Moreover, Syrian workers, although seemingly unorganised, are, in reality, bound by a variety of social networks of kin, village provenance and, ultimately, the hierarchy of military and intelligence officers that make up the Syrian task force in Lebanon. It is important to note that Lebanese private entrepreneurs have been more eager to employ migrant, day-to-day workers at extremely low wages and no social costs, and to turn a deaf ear to the plight of Lebanese workers. In effect, and on a final note on the subject, the working class, as such, has been completely absented and silenced in the post-war period. The sectarian/communitarian discourse has reconfigured the Lebanese working poor to fill the empty lower bulges of the social constructions that make up their respective sectarian communities. They are the nameless, faceless soldiers and cannon fodder to whom undemocratic sectarian leaders pledge allegiance.

Where do my artists stand in this diagram? They hail almost entirely from the flanks of the middle class, albeit at different sublevels within it, and some from the ruling class. None are formally employed as artists, and I could not answer how many, if any, belong to artists' unions. These unions have done very little to secure social benefits for their membership. Their struggles have been more political, particularly in the sense of marking symbolic stances with regard to local political issues. The artists in question here are employed as teachers, professors or journalists. As professionals, they are members of their respective syndicates and organisations. If they are able to sustain a standard of living, they barely make ends meet to ensure a secure living, and a single misfortune or accident could threaten to seriously disrupt their livelihood. Their artistic contributions take place outside their working hours, and are, to a great extent, self-financed. Their 'social safety nets' are mainly due to their personal ties, restricted to the precarious securities that their immediate families provide.

Discursive Matrix of Hegemonic Discourse

The case for Lebanon was different from that of its Arab kin because the prevailing liberal ideology posited the middle class as the 'national' class. The period of the mid-1970s and early 1980s signaled a shift in economic and social political outlook. Since then, Arab states have marched steadily towards embracing the global neo-liberal tidal wave, or what analysts define as the 'Washington Consensus', propelling the market as the unbridled central regulator of surplus value and social inequities. To quote Joel Beinin,

"The neo-liberal conception of an economy eliminates questions about whose interests it serves. […] Few advocates of the Washington Consensus argue that an economy should privilege the interests of local and multinational capital and international financial institutions"[4]. Throughout the Arab world, the working poor have been dissected in narrow and dry models of quantitative representations, between a less belligerent 'lower middle class' and 'the poor'. The plethora of studies and policy papers on poverty have shifted the paradigms of the debate from the vocabulary of a class-based analysis in conjunction with aggressive marginalisation of political parties that promote a class-based outlook and unrelenting isolation of the base of the working poor from the higher ranks of its union cadres and political leadership. Class-based ideologies have been rendered obsolete, deemed as anachronistic tools for building nation- and region-wide solidarities and platforms for political actions.

The Sectarian Discourse

The particularity of Lebanon has more to do with the forms in which the hegemonic political and economic class has attempted to steer clear from confronting class-based ideologies and movements. It is a strange hybrid of what the rest of the world has come to experience as identity-politics, cast in a clientelist, patriarchal, communitarian, discursive representation of society. Contrary to the US and Western Europe, identity-politics in Lebanon take root in firm constitutional, thus institutional, ground, while the ethnographic cultural manifestations and social practices of identities follow suit. Our covenant shapes our society into sectarian communities, where the interests of sectarian communities are believed to supersede those of social classes. The impact of the neo-liberal cast on the post-war cessation of violence, policed by the Syrian regime, has resulted in the almost complete hegemony of the sectarian/communitarian discourse. All political struggles that the Arab world and the country find themselves at grips with, come to life within the hegemonic framework of sectarianism. In consequence, questions of social justice are ascribed sectarian attributes, while the Arab-Israeli conflict translates into conflict amongst sects, and competing regional identities become subsumed by overarching sectarian identities. The most successful project of the hegemonic class in the post-war period has been to essentialise and institutionalise ethnographic constructions of sectarian difference and competing – almost irresolvable – sectarian economic interests. While the middle class and class of working poor are fractured into sectarian components, pitted against each other in contest for a more equitable share of 'entitlement', in practice, the ruling class has been a stellar example of collaboration and solidarity, overriding sectarian prejudice for the accumulation of surplus and the safeguarding of the reproduction of wealth.

Political and Cultural Resistance

A number of issues have prevailed over the terrains of critical contestation amongst the circles of post-war Lebanese intellectuals. These include the questions of

4 Beinin, Joel, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 147.

Lebanon's national identity, in light of the stipulations of the Taef Agreement versus the concrete practices of the post-war ruling hegemony and the revitalisation, or renewal, of the political class; the question of Lebanon's sovereignty under the weight of the Syrian mandate over-policing the transition to a stable post-war state; the question of the Israeli occupation of the security zone and the resistance to liberate this territory; the question of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, their civil status and political struggle; the question of the neo-liberal assault on public spending and on the state's provision of social safety nets and its bidding away of rehabilitation and revitalisation to the private sector; the question of the legacy of the civil war, reconciliation and restoring the demographic balance of pre-war multi-sectarian regions and tending to the open wound of the families of those kidnapped and missing during the war.

Almost all of the questions I have just listed intersect and spill onto one another. The question of Lebanon's identity and mosaic of identities, overlaps the questions of its sovereignty, the Syrian mandate, the country's imbrications in the struggle for Palestine, the Israeli military occupation, its withdrawal and the negotiations for peace. The debates over identity are under-girded by debates on the new forms of American imperialism or the globalisation of an ideology, a mode of maximising exploitation and streamlining extraction of surplus, restructuring societies and commodifying civil and cultural practices. The more intellectual and critical debates over identity are moored in the discursive frameworks initiated by Edward Said's magisterial work on Orientalism and the ensuing academic analyses proposed by the Subaltern School and Postcolonial Studies. From there, debates over identity flow into the realm of stark polarisation and blithing disempowerment that corsets constructions of the 'West' as opposed to constructions of the 'East' and/or the 'Third World' and/or developing nations. These debates reach the turbulent terrain of westernisation and modernity versus alternity and postmodernity, the rights of nations to self-determination, to shape their own history and to reclaim their place in history. To many critical intellectuals, Lebanon and the Arab world remain 'outside history', to cite the famous Hegelian expression.

The poles of these debates oppose the hegemonic, sectarian pole with a centre-right, secular pole aligned with the surviving vestiges of the left. Obviously, the balance of forces was, and remains, severely biased, as is the access to resources, venues and exposure. When irked or threatened, the ruling elite and its Syrian junta does not hesitate to censure, coerce, intimidate and use force to silence criticism and break a front of opposition. The cast of protagonists are the usual suspects of cultural circles and civil society: Intellectuals, writers, journalists, educators, academics, artists, as well as prominent cadres and leadership of political parties at the margins or outside the corridors of power. These debates have found niches in their natural habitats: The press, cultural clubs and associations, some of whom are independent and others with partisan affiliations, and last but

not least, in cultural centres, performance spaces and art galleries.

Since the second post-war government in 1992, a loosely-gelled opposition front began to take form. It would grow and shrink intermittently, depending on the particular campaign or struggle it had risen to wage and the circumstances surrounding it. This front represented less the fertile soil for a cogent political front, or for the renewal of political life, and more the backdrop to significant moments of confrontation and contestation on issues ranging from the preservation of historical buildings to election fraud, curtailing political freedoms, arbitrary abuse of force, etc… Its most stable and steadfast core comprised those surviving vestiges of the left. However, a decade has lapsed; and, unfortunately, the accumulation of campaigns and short-lived struggles have not fuelled a true revival of political parties on the left.

In my introduction, I described the counter-hegemonic cultural and artistic realm as lying in all its aspects outside the mainstream. More specifically, this critical, oppositional, contestatory front I have just outlined is the social and political realm in which it lies. It is where its artists work and produce, where their curators showcase events and where the audience for these cultural practices is anchored.

Alternative, Counter-hegemonic Cultural and Artistic Practices

In a short and delightful piece published in *Mulhaq an-Nahar*, or the cultural supplement to the daily *An-Nahar* last year, Walid Sadek proposed a rudimentary path to a chronology of this family of artistic practice. He dates the first manifestation to Ziad Abillama's installation on the Dbayeh – then public – beach in the summer of 1992, entitled *Systeme Fulfill*. Sadek did not intend to sketch a chronology, and neither do I. Moreover, I am sure that this first marker will be subject to debate. My intention is to track the evolution of the organised effort to curate and showcase these artistic practices. Abillama acted entirely on his own; he conceived, produced, showcased and promoted his piece alone (although not without the help and support of friends, I understand). Over the next few years, there were scattered instances where galleries and the cultural centres of foreign missions became less apprehensive to the idea of hosting installations, conceptual artworks and video art. Most notable among these were the cultural arm of the French Embassy (which likes to describe itself as a 'cultural mission') and the cultural arm of the German Embassy, the Goethe Institute. By 1994, Ashkal Alwan was formed and began to showcase venues where conceptual, installation, unconventional and subversive artists produced pieces in public places throughout the city. Curated by Christine Tohme, Ashkal Alwan's first event was staged in the Sanayeh public garden in 1995. Shortly thereafter, the Ayloul Festival became a venue marking the first few days of September in Beirut. If more venues, galleries and exhibition spaces have since then sprouted, these two protagonists remain the only ones that curate events. To the limit of their capacities, they offer the framework of an institutional practice and not just haphazard occurrence. Christine Tohme attests

to the fact that one of her long standing ambitions is to endow Ashkal Alwan with a resource archive and lay the solid foundations for the organisation's longevity.

Both Ayloul and Ashkal Alwan's projects have been financed by grants from international foundations, local corporate sponsorship and occasional grants from the Ministry of Culture in Lebanon. Their livelihood rests solely on such grants that, in themselves, represent one of the greater dangers to their survival. The extent to which such grants are dispensed with limitations or directives is pivotal to uncovering more of the under-girding politics in which artistic production is framed or circumscribed. At this instance, in this paper, it remains an open question.

Locating the Subversive and the Counter-Hegemonic
The Modernity/Postmodernity Debacle

The number of prevailing issues and debates I listed earlier has also unraveled in the realms of counter-hegemonic and alternative, artistic expression and representation. They have done so in the vocabulary of conceptual, installation, video and performance art. To some extent, the use of this contemporary, yet alien, language has engendered more debate and controversy than the artists intended, expected or wished to grapple with. On the one hand, this language begs an entirely different experience of deciphering and understanding from established convention, from an audience with few resources for an unencumbered experience with artistic expression and practice.

Unfortunately, this audience has, for most of the time, remained frozen in its misapprehension of the unfamiliar and the obscure. On the other hand, the technicity and the craftsmanship invested in creating such works, the cold estrangement from conventional language, its defiant contemporaneity and seemingly unprejudiced borrowing of form and vocabulary from post-industrial cultures, has rendered the perception and judgment of conceptual art and its kin forms as imported 'postmodern' forms, unfit for expression within Lebanese society. In this vein, the very shape a conceptual or installation piece takes becomes laden with pointless interrogations on the authenticity of expression and representation and, ultimately, on identity. Besides hollow questioning of 'authenticity', the problem of legibility lingers nonetheless, and illicits the question, with whom do these artists communicate? To what extent do they wish to mediate to an audience and, is there significance to their incommunicability?

On the question of authenticity, representation and identity, I would like to propose shifting the terms of the debate to the following context. If we were to take T.J. Clark's claim of money being "the root form of representation in bourgeois society" to be valid, what happens to our questions when resituated in the framework of the dual currency that shapes our economy and our society? Moreover, how does it impact the notion of sovereignty, the boundaries of the 'national' and those elements widely perceived as threatening both sovereignty and

the nation? I leave this point in interrogation form.

Incommunicability is partly the predicament of modernist artistic expression, or of artistic expression inscribed in modernism. T.J. Clark's work on modernism has been particularly inspiring. In the introduction to *Farewell to an Idea*, he writes:

> Modernism had two great wishes. It wanted its audience to be led towards a recognition of the social reality of the sign (away from the comforts of narrative and illusionism, was the claim); but equally it dreamed of turning the sign back to a bedrock of World/Nature/Sensation/Subjectivity, which the to and fro of capitalism had all but destroyed.[5]

The incommunicability is, at once, the proposal for new forms of expression and production of symbol, with its open-ended interrogations of itself laid bare, all the while bound within the hegemonic production of meaning and symbol. Frederic Jameson proposed that, since modernism was the cultural expression of capitalism, then postmodernism would be the cultural expression of post-capitalism. Perry Anderson proposed a variant to this formulation. In *The Origins of Postmodernism*, he contends that modernism is "the product of a bourgeois society in which the bourgeoisie still struggled for cultural self-definition in the face of its feudal, aristocratic other; one in which the sheer extremity of that struggle for self-definition forced the bourgeoisie to declare itself as a specific locus of that cultural authority". "Postmodernism comes", he writes further, "when

that self-positing comes to an end". T.J. Clark describes that moment as such:

> Once democratisation of manners and disinhibition of mores have really done their work of symbolic pseudo-levelling, once a general encanaillement of the possessing classes has overtaken the older, embarrassing, Bourdieu-type signs of distinction, the game for modernism is up. It has no adversary. Its endless rifts and deformations of the aristocratic legacy — the very legacy the bourgeoisie was struggling at the same time to turn to its own purposes — came to mean nothing, to have less and less critical force, because the bourgeoisie had abandoned the struggle, and finally settled (as it always wanted to) for purely instrumental reason.[6]

Both T.J. Clark and Anderson agree that a crucial marker of difference between modernism and postmodernism is that, while the former is shaped by "an open political horizon, in which revolutionary upheavals of one kind or another against the prevailing order were widely expected or feared", the latter is shaped by "the cancellation of political alternatives". In other words, it is "the end of a long epoch of revolutionary myths and challenges to bourgeois society on which modernism had fed".

To what extent are the artists in question imbricated in the modernist and postmodernist predicament? To what extent does the matrix of the social class conflict that describes the European 19th and 20th centuries resemble our own; and, are comparisons at all useful? There are tremendous divergences between the class structures and manifestations of capitalism both in the 19th and 20th centuries of

5 Clark, T. J., *Farewell to an Idea*, p. 10.

6 Clark, T. J., *Origins of the Present Crisis*, New Left Review, March-April, 2000.

Europe and our present and past conjectures. However, the matrix of conflict between classes over power or hegemony unveils a scheme which can be useful to understand our own.

Bringing Back Class

Prima facie, the most delightful feature of these artistic practices lies in that they can rarely be 'wrapped to go' for the purpose of matching a sofa and brightening a wall. In fact, these artworks, except for video art, behave more like apparitions. They come to life in the most familiar of public sites for short brackets of time and disappear forever. Moreover, they leave scant traces – a picture or a diagram and a text in a brochure; occasionally, traces in the press. By virtue of all these virtues, they are unburdened by accusations with regard to the commodification of the consumption of art as a social practice to celebrate class status; or, the reification of 'habitus'. Most, if not all, of Ashkal Alwan projects have taken place in open public spaces, where tangible obstacles barring access to the site are nominally eliminated. Furthermore, brochures distributed, free of charge, as informational support to events, facilitate mediation between the viewer and the artwork. The audience of these artistic practices comprises, in the first place, its practitioners and a nebula of kin audience, to whom the industry of artistic and cultural production has become an essential component of social and political identity – an identity that defines itself also in contrast to hegemonic construction, but is unclear about the standing and significance of the counter-hegemonic.

In terms of themes and subject matter, artists like Walid Sadek, Akram Zaatari, Walid Raad, Salah Saouli, Marwan Rechmaoui, Nadine Touma, Lamia Joreige, Jalal Toufic, Tony Chakar, Rabih Mroué, Lina Saneh and others, have often gravitated towards problematic, conflictual and contested nodal points in the hegemonic discourse. To cite a few, they have interrogated representations and constructions of moral taboos at the heart of the bourgeois understanding of decency and morality like sexuality, homosexuality and constructions of gender, objectification of the body and of prostitution; they have interrogated representations and reconstructions of the prevailing script on the civil war (in as far as there is one), the historiography of the civil war and the intimate vocabulary of sectarian identities; they have interrogated intellectual censorship (and also confronted it); they have interrogated constructions of the Israeli occupation, the boundaries of resistance, violence, and construction of heroism and treason and the criteria for inclusion/exclusion from the nation… And I am only scratching at the surface…

The contention that I wish to defend, in this last instance, and that probably explains why I had my readers endure the long socio-economic exposé, lies in rethinking the cultural expression of social classes, as I laid them out in the first section, in light of the brief quotes from T.J. Clark and Perry Anderson. Namely, I started from the proposition that our bourgeoisie, or middle class, is by all means a working class. Meanwhile, our ruling class behaves very much like a bourgeoisie that

has won access to higher standing; and yet, it is a class whose political and cultural sovereignty are deeply compromised, beholden to actors, entities and institutions outside of its command. If it is able to assert a hegemonic dominion over the social classes below it, it is deeply compromised by waging continuous struggles to maintain that dominion and the discourse to legitimise it. In this respect, it labours at asserting cultural and political authority as if it were the bourgeoisie. While the group of counter-hegemonic artists who hail from the margins of the nominal bourgeoisie, and operate from within it, may have a vested interest in deconstructing the hegemonic dominion and discourse of the ruling class, their identification with modernity and/or postmodernity inscribes them to a silent struggle of asserting the cultural authority of their class. Moreover, their practical, quotidian experience stands in deep contradiction to this venture. Every day, at every instance and with every transaction, they are reminded of their subalternity and of the precarity of their status. Their social standing may carry the varnish of the comforts of the bourgeoisie, but their practical experience informs them otherwise. In other words, these artists' gazes have been stubbornly turned upwards more often than downwards. Their stark spurning of a class-based sensibility, of a class-based overall understanding of the nodal points on which the hegemonic discourse is built, muddles the counter-hegemonic terrain on which they stand. I do not mean to say that representation of subaltern classes, the working poor, peddlers, prostitutes, servants, etc., is absent; however, when it occurs, it stops at representation. It does not bring with it an interrogation of the fabric of class conflict that shapes that reality. My argument is that subversion, in the Lebanese context, lies principally in interrogating the fractures, nodes, meanings and signs of the hegemonic discourse from a class-based perspective.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude with a brief illustration. For this purpose, I will use Akram Zaatari's video piece, *Red Chewing Gum*, because I know that I can abuse his friendship. The piece was presented in the *Hamra Street Project*, also an endeavour by Ashkal Alwan. The video narrates the remembrance of a love story, or more precisely, the end of a love story. The narrative is built on three protagonists, two men and a chewing gum peddler. The dialogue, or story, shifts intermittently between the two men as they recall an instance of their love affair, while walking down Hamra Street and encountering a young chewing gum peddler. The love affair is, in fact, mediated between them through the chewing gum peddler. He is representative of that subaltern population of Hamra Street; of invisible, faceless, nameless, peddlers, beggars and toilers who anchor the experience of urban consumption with an incremental value. The army of street fauna, interpellating benevolence, selling shoe-shines or amusing knick-knacks, coupled with the codes of dress, self-presentation and behaviour of salespeople in the shops represent the subaltern, the organised world of the 'domestic stable',

whose labour is to cater to the well-being of the discriminating consumers of Hamra street. I thought it both powerful and interesting that a chewing gum peddler be the principal mediator of a story of an insouciant romance on Hamra Street. Zaatari used him as a symbol to represent the polarity in power relations between two people caught in a love affair. In other words, the class status of the chewing gum peddler was what mattered to Zaatari, not the reference to the brutality on which representations of urban *joie de vivre* rests, or the significance of his status in the larger landscape of class relations. I am not making a judgment on what ought and what ought not to be, what is right and what is wrong. My intention is to demonstrate via this example, albeit in a cursory manner, how the counter-hegemonic posturing of this artistic expression falls short of engaging in subversion because it disregards a class-based perspective. This said, the video piece has a life of its own outside the intentions of its author. And to some extent, I read into the use of the chewing gum peddler a sign that revealed relations of production and class relations that Zaatari may have not intended. The overall piece does not, however, pick up on that sign enough to inform my reading further. *Red Chewing Gum* is one example where the subaltern is represented. There are other instances, which I will not discuss now, where symbols, elements of practices or referents to the quotidian of the subaltern classes are completely appropriated and reproduced for the purposes of

shock or provocation to hegemonic ('bourgeois') notions of decency, order and well-being. In the absence of a class-based critique, such instances become pure kitsch. They serve the opposite purpose of subversion, and reinforce the hegemonic class' self-righteous dominion over its capacity at renewal and co-optation. This very capacity is that which lies at the heart of capitalism's cultural immunity against attacks and critiques, grounded exclusively in 'morality' and 'decency'.

The fantastic, and perhaps tragic, contradiction in which these artists and their works are caught, is that, by engaging in the illusory promise of a power struggle to claim cultural authority for the class they presume is their own, they become engaged in silencing the class they effectively belong to.

Rasha Salti was born in Toronto, Canada in 1969, and currently resides between Beirut and New York. She obtained a BA in Fine Arts from Georgetown University in 1992, and an MA in Liberal Studies from the New School for Social Research in 2000. Her work experience includes working as an intern at Alif Gallery, Washington D.C., from 1991-1992, and also as part of the administrative team at Theatre de Beyrouth, from 1992-1994. Since 1995, she has worked as a graphic designer, as well as an independent cultural events organiser. Among her significant projects was *Image Quest*, co-curated and organised along with Moukhtar Kocache in 1995. She worked at *L'Orient-Express* and *L'Agenda Culturel* as art director and designer. She also assisted in the 50th Commemoration of the Nakba of Palestine, held at Theatre de Beyrouth.

'Āshūrā', or Torturous Memory as a Condition of Possibility of an Unconditional Promise

Jalal Toufic

Can one still give and maintain millenarian promises in the twenty first century? But first, a more basic question: can one still promise at all?

Al-Ḥusayn, the grandson of the prophet Muḥammad and the son of the first Shi'ite imam, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, was slaughtered alongside many members of his family in the desert in 680. This memory is torture to me. But, basically, one can say *this memory is torture to me* of every memory, since each reminiscence envelops at some level the memory of the origin of memory, the torture that had to be inflicted on humans in order for them to be able to remember. If we feel a tinge of pain, a pang, when we remember it is not necessarily because the past vanishes, is no more (Einstein's relativity and Dōgen's Zen tell us otherwise in two different ways), but because each memory reactivates in us however faintly the genealogy of the establishment of memory. In Duodeciman Shi'ites' yearly ten-day commemoration 'Āshūrā', we witness a condition of possibility of memory, in a Nietzschian sense:

To breed an animal with the right to make promises—*is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? is it not the real problem regarding man?*

That this problem has been solved to a large extent must seem all the more remarkable to anyone who appreciates the strength of the opposing force, that of forgetfulness. *Forgetting is no mere vis inertiae as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression…*[1]

Now this animal which needs to be forgetful, in which forgetting represents a force, a form of robust *health, has bred in itself an opposing faculty, a memory, with the aid of which forgetfulness is abrogated in certain cases—namely in those cases where promises are made…*

"How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?"

One can well believe that the answers and methods for solving this primeval problem were not precisely gentle; perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his mnemotechnics. "If something is to stay in memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt *stays in the memory"*[2]—

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1 Cf. "Freud does not consider this amnesia [infantile amnesia] to be the result of any functional inability of the young child to record his impressions; instead, he attributes it to the repression which falls upon infantile sexuality (…). Just like hysterical amnesia, infantile amnesia can in principle be dispelled; it does not imply any destruction or absence of registrations of memories…" (J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, with an introduction by Daniel Lagache [New York: Norton, 1973], pp. 212-213).

this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth.[3] *One might even say that wherever on earth solemnity, seriousness, mystery, and gloomy colouring still distinguish the life of man and a people, something of the terror that formerly attended all promises, pledges and vows on earth is still effective… Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them),*[4] *the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example),*[5] *the cruelest rites of all the religious cults (and all religions are at the deepest level systems of cruelties)—all this has its origin in the instinct that realised that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.*

If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal what *they have simply been the means to, then we discover that the ripest fruit is the* sovereign individual, *like only to himself, liberated again from morality of customs, autonomous and supramoral (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the* right to make promises… *And just as he is bound to honour his peers, the strong and reliable (those with the* right *to make promises)—that is, all those who promise like sovereigns, reluctantly, rarely, slowly, who are chary of trusting, whose trust is a mark of* distinction, *who give their word as something that can be relied on because they know themselves strong enough to maintain it in the face of accidents, even "in the face of fate"—he is bound to reserve… a rod for the liar who breaks his word even at the moment he utters it.*

… Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole sombre thing called reflection, all these prerogatives and show-pieces of man: how dearly they have been bought! How much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all "good things"![6]

2 Among other factors, we can call the long primeval period the "prehistory of man" for the following two complementary reasons. The first is that he had a flighty mind and was attuned only to the passing moment, and so was unable to produce the deep temporality of past/present/future required to construct a history. The second reason is that most of the torture to inculcate in him a memory, i.e. the most atrocious and frequent torture, was happening then, with the result that that period, the most traumatic of all, was and still is repressed, and consequently is not included in our history—it is as it were humanity's infantile amnesia.

3 Nietzsche's words apply far better to the distant past, for man could then withstand much more pain because he was much more superficial, whereas now, having to a large extent succeeded in creating a memory for himself and therefore being (temporally) far deeper, with few exceptions intense pain easily and quickly traumatises him, ushering repression and consequently post-traumatic amnesia.

4 A long-term memory of the addressee of the promise is a precondition even for the promiser. Thus one of the conditions for God's promise to Abraham is that the latter create a memory for himself: "Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.' (…) The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 'I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed…'" (Genesis 22: 2-18).

5 Clearly castration is here theorised from a different perspective than the one encountered in most feminist film criticism drawing on psychoanalysis (see Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema").

6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale/*Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann; edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 57-62. I rearranged the order of one of the quote's paragraphs.

'**Āshūrā**'
This Blood Spilled in My Veins

هذا الدم الذي في عروقي

7 More specifically in *al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*. Ibn al-'Arabī "calls the intermediate world of imagination 'discontiguous imagination' (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*), since it exists independently of the viewer. And he names the soul along with the faculty of imagination 'contiguous imagination' (*al-khayāl al-muttaṣil*), since these are connected to the viewing subject." (William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* [Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989], p. 117). The notion of *khayāl munfaṣil*, of an imagination independent of the viewer, which we find not only in the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabī but also in Shi'ite theosophy, will regain currency with the advances in and spread of virtual reality; in Andy and Larry Wachowski's Gnostic film *The Matrix*, 1999, the vast simulation called the Matrix is an example of *khayāl munfaṣil*, while what each of those within the Matrix, i.e. within the *khayāl munfaṣil*, subjectively imagines is a *khayāl muttaṣil*.

8 Many of those present at the assemblies of 'Āshūrā' cover their faces with their hands. When they remove their hands one often can see that they were crying. But sometimes, one suddenly espies through a gap between their fingers that they are yawning! In part these yawns are not the effect of boredom at hearing yet again the same stories of the tragedy, but of sleepiness, as these assemblies take place from around 9 p.m. till around midnight. This yawn has the same unsettling effect as the small spot of corruption in the otherwise uncorrupted corpse of a saint: "Ruysbroeck has been buried for five years; he is exhumed; his body is intact and pure (of course—otherwise, there would be no story); *but* 'there was only the tip of the nose which bore a faint but certain trace of corruption.' In the other's perfect and embalmed figure (for that is the degree to which it fascinates me) I perceive suddenly a speck of corruption. This speck is a tiny one: a gesture, a word, an object, a garment, something unexpected which appears (which dawns) from a region I had never even suspected, and suddenly attaches the loved object to a *commonplace* world…. I am *flabbergasted*: I hear a counter-rhythm: something like a syncope in the lovely phrase of the loved being, the noise of a rip in the smooth envelope of the Image" ("The Tip of the Nose," in Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Hill and Wang, 1978], p. 25). The sleepiness affecting these yawning participants is of the kind that affected the three disciples Jesus Christ selected to accompany him for prayer: He asked them: "Stay here and watch with Me" (Matthew 26: 38). He moved *a stone's throw* (Luke 22: 41—how incisive is the laconism of this *a stone's throw*) and prayed. Returning to them, he found the three sleeping: "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Matthew 26: 40). Three times does he leave them to pray, each time, upon returning, finding them sleeping. "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed…" (Matthew 26: 45).

9 "Respecting the derivation of *insān* [a human being], authors differ (…): the Baṣrees say that it is from *al-ins* [sociability], and its measure is *fiʿlān*; (…) some say that it is from *īnās*, signifiying 'perception,' or 'sight,' and 'knowledge,' and 'sensation' (…) and Mohammad Ibn-'Arafeh El-Wāsiṭee says that men are called *insiyyūn* because they are seen (*yuʿnasūn*, i.e. *yurawn*) and that the jinn are called jinn because they are [ordinarily] concealed (*mujtannūn*, i.e. *mutawārūn*), from the sight of men (…) some (namely, the Koofees, Mṣb) say that it is originally *insiyān* (S, Mṣb, TA,) of the measure *ifʿilān*, from *an-nisyān* ["forgetfulness"], (Mṣb), and contracted to make it more easy of pronunciation, because of its being so often used." The entry *alif nūn sīn* in Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vol. (Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 1980).

The preservation of the events of 'Āshūrā' takes place at two levels: in *ālam al-mithāl* (The World of Images), aka *ālam al-khayāl* (The World of the Imagination),[7] where they are, in a transfigured version, eternal, outside both the corrosive, dimming sway of chronological time, and the labyrinthine temporality of the realm of undeath, where al-Ḥusayn would run the risk of forgetting who he is, of forgetting himself; and in historical time, through the bodily and emotional tortures endured during the yearly ten-day commemorative ceremony,[8] which are the means to breed in the human being,[9] a forgetful creature ("And verily We made a covenant of old with Adam, but he forgot, and We found no constancy in him" [Qur'ān 20: 115]), a historical memory. But the memory that the ceremony of 'Āshūrā' is trying to maintain is not only or mainly that of the past, but the memory of the future, that of the promise of the coming of the Mahdī, the Shi'ite messiah, as well as the corresponding promise of Duodeciman Shi'ites to wait for him. The exemplary promise has until now been the messianic one, for at least three reasons. It has been the longest lasting, spanning centuries, even millennia. It has been maintained "in the face of accidents, even 'in the face of fate'": Duodeciman Shi'ites have maintained the promise to wait for the successor of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, the eleventh imam, who died in 260 AH / 873-74 AD, even though the latter apparently left no son, and even though the occultation of the presumed twelfth imam has by now persisted for over a millennium; and they have maintained their expectation that the twelfth

imam will fulfil his promise to appear again. And, third, it implicates a supramoral, antinomian attitude, hence Sabbatai Ṣevi's "strange actions," which included causing ten Israelites to eat "fat of the kidney" in 1658, an act which is strictly prohibited by the Torah, and punishable by "excision" (getting cut off from among one's people); reciting the following benediction over the ritually forbidden fat: "Blessed are Thou, O Lord, who permittest that which is forbidden"; and abolishing the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz in 1665; hence also the Qarmaṭīs' sacking and desecration of the Ka'ba in 930 and then their abolishing of the Sharī'a during the Zakariyya al-Iṣfahānī episode in Aḥsā'; and hence the Nizārīs' abolishing of the Sharī'a starting with the proclamation by Ḥasan 'ala dhikrihi'l-salām (on his mention be peace) of the Great Resurrection in Alamūt in 8 August 1164 from a pulpit facing west, a direction opposite to the Ka'ba in Mecca, the direction toward which all Moslems have to turn during their prayer.[10] The basic and ultimate promise is to wait for the messiah, who, truly sovereign, supramoral, will initially break the Law, including the "laws" of nature[11] (indeed his miraculous coming notwithstanding his death or millennial occultation is often announced by supernatural events "such as the rise of the sun from the west, and the occurrence of the solar and lunar eclipses in the middle and the end of the month of Ramadan, respectively, against the natural order of such phenomena"[12]), then altogether abolish the Law, which applies only to the unredeemed world, establishing redemption, thus allowing

me, his initiate, to be resurrected into a lawless world.[13] The ceremony of 'Āshūrā' is the flip side of the belief in the promise of the hidden imam. I would thus wager that the introduction of the ceremonies of 'Āshūrā' and of Ta'ziya coincided with a period when Duodeciman Shi'ism was not on the rise but, on the contrary, when the continued belief in the coming of a Mahdī was in danger of extinction. From this perspective, the condemnation of these ceremonies by many Duodeciman Shi'ite 'ulamā'[14] is short-sighted. Were 'Āshūrā' to be discontinued across the Duodeciman Shi'ite community, then sooner or later the memory of the promise of the occulted imam would fade away. The basic reason the ceremony's participants hit themselves and self-flagellate[15] is not some unreasonable feeling of guilt for not succoring imam Ḥusayn and his family around 1300 years ago, but that such cruelty is a most efficient mnemonic. Some may object that the morality of mores, etc., has already born fruit, namely the one who can promise on the basis of his ability to remember, and that therefore there is no longer any need for such a cruel mnemonic. This would be the case for promises of normal spans (but not for one that spans millennia),[16] and were we not reaching a point where the immemorial process, described by Nietzsche, by which man succeeded to a large extent to create a memory for himself is beginning to be reversed. Paul Virilio, the thinker of dromology, writes: "*The acceleration of real time*, the limit-acceleration of the speed of light, not only dispels geophysical extension… but, first and foremost, it dispels the

10 The Great Resurrection of Alamût lasted till 1210.

11 Friedrich Nietzsche: "I beware of speaking of chemical 'laws': that savours of morality." *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 630.

12 Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: the Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 158.

13 I find this period so unjust that it seems to me there are, beside the revolutionary one, two exemplary responses to it: a messianic one and a Gnostic one. The first demands waiting for the messiah ("which is the best of actions during his occultation"), who will in the end fill with justice a world only transiently filled with injustice since it is essentially and ultimately good, being created by God, the good God. The second demands the disinvestment from this demonic world, which has nothing to do with the good God, but was created by a demiurge.

14 For example Muḥsin al-Amīn: see *Thawrat al-tanzīh: Risālat al-tanzīh, talīha mawāqif minhā wa-arā' fī al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Ḥusaynī al-Najafī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jadīd, 1996).

15 Many a flagellant's slap against his chest is as sober as the flapping of a bird's wing during flight.

16 While we should be willing to pay the price for the ability to give promises, and therefore for the memory that is a precondition for promises, should we make sure that promises do not span centuries or millennia, given that the price of such promises is exorbitant?

17 Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 118-119.

18 1992 figures; they were 28 hours per week and 23.5 hours per week, respectively, in 1986 (1986 Nielsen Report on Television). According to the Centre for Media Education in Washington, DC, watching TV is the n° 1 after-school activity for 6 to 17 year olds; each year most children spend about 1500 hours in front of the TV and 900 hours in the classroom; and by age 70, most people will have spent about 10 years watching TV.

19 Indeed live prematurely in the future through virtual reality using the simulations of extremely powerful computers.

importance of the *longues durées* of the local time of regions, countries and the old, deeply territorialised nations… Past, present and future—that tripartite division of the time continuum—then cedes primacy to the immediacy of a tele-presence… This is… the time of light and its speed—a *cosmological constant* capable of conditioning human history."[17] We started with a flighty mind attuned only to the passing moment; then we had a torturous process of thousands of years of pain and sacrifices to inculcate in humans a memory, and consequently a deep time; but we have now reached someone who is being conditioned and programmed by telecommunications at the speed of light, for example TV (on average in the USA, children aged 2 to 11 watch about 23 hours of TV per week, and teenagers watch about 22 hours per week),[18] to hear and see a live "event" anywhere in the world of globalisation only to instantly forget about it: Rwanda, then a commercial for a soap brand, then sports… In order to describe the human being at the beginning of the twenty first century in front of his TV, we can instead of resorting to Virilio's contemporary terms revert to the terms Nietzsche was using to describe man in prehistory: "partly obtuse, partly flighty-mind, attuned only to the passing moment." We (or more precisely the West) will more and more be able to accurately predict through computer simulation,[19] but we (or more precisely the West) will less and less be able to give promises.

Jalal Toufic is a writer, film theorist, and video artist. He is the author of *Distracted* (1991; 2nd ed. forthcoming, 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed. forthcoming, 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), *Forthcoming* (2000), and *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002). His video and installation works, which include *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green* (1995), *Radical Closure Artist with Bandaged Sense Organ* (1997), *Overlooking the Unsightly to See* (2000), *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002), and *'Āshūrā': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002), and *Sacing Face* (2003) have been presented in New York (Artists Space); San Francisco (the San Francisco Cinematheque, the Lab and Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts); Berkeley (Pacific Film Archive); Los Angeles (UCLA Film and TV Archive); Barcelona (Fundació Antoni Tàpies); Rotterdam (Witte de With); Brussels (Palais des Beaux-Arts); Berlin (BüroFriedrich); Toronto (YYZ Artists' Outlet); Marseille (centre international de poésie); Athens (the National Museum of Contemporary Art); Cairo (Townhouse Gallery); and Beirut. He is a member of the Arab Image Foundation. He co-edited the special *Discourse* issue *Gilles Deleuze: A Reason to Believe in this World*, and edited the special *Discourse* issues *Middle Eastern Films Before Thy Gaze Returns to Thee* and the forthcoming *Mortals to Death*. Toufic has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, USC, and DasArts (Amsterdam), and is currently the Head of the MA program in Film/Video Studies at Holy Spirit University, Lebanon.

23 March 2002
Jalal Toufic, Beirut
jtoufic@cyberia.net.lb

Betty, Paris:

As for the book you volunteered to give me as a gift and promised to send to me, Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, one of the lines in the first edition of my first book, *Distracted*, says: "My apology turned out to be unnecessary, for he had already forgiven my age": isn't youth the age when one gives so many promises—including to oneself—that remain unfulfilled—at least for a long time. Promising is one of those actions that seem to be the easiest—after all, it is a performative (see J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*)—when actually it is the most difficult since unnatural: "To breed an animal *with the right to make promises*—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man?" (Nietzsche).

Best
Jalal

The Singular of Seeing
[Al Marra min Nazar]

Akram Zaatari

My friends are aware of my close relationship with the popular Egyptian films of the 1940s and 1950s. I perceive them as a rich archive, rarely 'read', despite their being regularly broadcast on most Arab television channels. They have been so over-watched that they have become a mere background to our domestic life. We sing songs from musicals and memorise lines from films, using them in our daily language. However, we rarely go beyond the storyline to question or study their narrative content or structure. While researching the history of photography in the region[1], I have become increasingly attentive to the fact that these popular films are inseparable from a larger visual culture, which includes photography, print and fashion. The photographic work of Armenian-Egyptian photographer Van Leo (1922-2002), for example, had a fundamental connection to fashion, acting, the local film industry of the times and even Hollywood, through the American film journals that he used to buy. Any attempts to read Van Leo's photographic work without situating it in the context of the visual production of the period, or the craft and technicity then, may fail to grasp some of the cultural links that strengthen the reading of his work, in harmony with his original intentions and within his mode of production[2]. The study of this context often helps to identify narrative patterns and possible deviations from those patterns, which sheds light on the practice itself in relation to given socio-economic and political contexts.

One usually finds photographs separated from their corresponding narratives, whereas films – whether to an advantage or disadvantage – carry their narratives within them, often in packaged, edited formats such as feature or short films, documentaries or reports. When separation between image and narrative occurs, the narrative, or illustrative information, in a certain fragment is reduced to the strictest minimum observed in that fragment. What is of interest, at this instant, is the state of initial cognition before any meaning is generated, or synthesised by the audience and before any links with other fragments get drawn. I am

1 Referring to my ongoing research for the Arab Image Foundation conducted in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, exhibited and published on several occasions. (Please visit: www.fai.org.lb)

2 I am not dismissing here any possible reading of a visual fragment or of an entire work outside given socio-political or cultural contexts.

attracted by the fact that the Arabic word *nazra*, which means a 'view' or a 'glance', also means 'point of view'. *Nazra* is explained linguistically as the singular of the act of seeing, *al nazar*[3]. The term for this act is constantly meant, even defined, in a plural sense – as if the one fragment of an act of seeing signifies a piercing, sharp and focused point of view[4].

Evidence is a narrative element and is rooted in belief, i.e. that which lies in the audience's minds. It is fascinating to observe, for example, how popular films invite the viewer to – willingly – suspend and re-establish belief several times in the course of one film. For example, in the Egyptian film entitled *Ghazal el-Banat* (Anouar Wagdi, Egypt, 1949), one observes this complex system of encoding within a film's narrative in order to make a work 'believable', even when it is not. If the elements of evidence are used in order to make one believe what is hard to believe, then one wonders: What is the value of this evidence? And once those elements are stripped from the faith in them – when used in a different context – , what possibly remains? In my opinion, what remains is simply the document value of the fragment. In this context, value is defined as the precise and strictest minimum used to describe what is referred to in this photograph, film or video. It is information that is so basic, so clear, that the existence of which – undeniably facing a camera – cannot be, at all, questioned.

Studying the work in isolated fragments allows for the possibility of looking at a set of visual traits before they get appropriated within a narrative, whether in a fiction film, in a documentary, on the news or even in a descriptive caption at the bottom of a photograph. If the initial role of photographs, films or videos is to invite their audience to 'look' before they are entertained, seduced, refreshed, provoked or impressed, then the value in question, is simply: That which is looked at. What I'm referring to is as straightforward as a photograph of a colour scale. Imagine the spectrum of colours in a photograph relative to its reference on the visual scale. If the film development is done according to recommended standards, colours should be exactly the same in both the visual scale and in its photographic representation.

In the film *Ghazal el Banat*, Layla (Layla Murad) and her Arabic teacher, Hamam (Naguib El Rihani), seek refuge in a villa late at night in order to avoid an insolent intruder. After knocking on the villa door, they discover the house is that of the famous actor Yussef Wahbi, who plays himself as a guest star in the film. Layla is surprised to see him face-to-face and is ecstatic to find out that Wahbi is hosting singer Mohamad Abdel Wahab. Abdel Wahab is getting ready to rehearse *Aashik el Ruh* before a large orchestra. In this late night cinematic fantasy, which regroups together four major film celebrities, Yussef Wahbi and Abdel Wahab's characters are treated differently from the other two.

Unlike Layla Murad and Naguib el Rihani, Yussef Wahbi and Abdel Wahab preserve their 'real characters', as they contribute to the narrative of the film. In other words, Yussef Wahbi plays the

3 Baalbaki, Munir & Rohi, *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, Beirut: Dar el-Ilm Lilmalayin Publishers, 2001.

4 Similarly, isolating one frame of a film and video that captures live action allows one to perceive this action differently, providing an opportunity for a different reading of that fragment. In my video installation entitled *Another Resolution,* Beirut: Ayloul Festival, 1998, I asked people to stand in poses that were inspired by photographs of children, while my video camera was running. The result was a combination of frozen action with a moving background, which was intended to attract the viewer to the eroticism existing in the original photographs. Please refer to: Zaatari, Akram, *Another Resolution*, Beirut: Mind the gap, 1998.

character of Yussef Wahbi, and Abdel Wahab sings as Abdel Wahab[5]. It is possible for one to argue that these characters are simply cultural landmarks, icons or textual references introduced within this context exactly as a possible visit to the Cairo tower or the Pyramids in an Egyptian film would be. However, as it is unusual for an actor to be as passive as a monument with respect to a film's narrative – in the sense that actors are expected to interact with one another – , such blocking of interaction introduces an ambiguous situation that can be believable only through the faith of the spectators, whether this blocking happens on the level of 'seeing' – as is the case with Abdel Wahab, who doesn't even notice the presence of the girl and her teacher[6] – or on the level of 'recognition' – as is the case with Yussef Wahbi.

Layla and Hamam recognise Yussef Wahbi as the writer and comedian Yussef Wahbi, who – and contrary to what one would normally expect – doesn't recognise them, as if he is seeing them for the first time, although the pair – if one considers the level of the two actors' stardom – are equally famous. Ironically, Layla Murad's character's name in the film is also Layla Murad. But her character is not representing the star 'Layla Murad', who everyone is familiar with and that the audience knows. If one were to apply the idea of the visual scale, such a plot would fail and thus, threaten the unity and credibility of the film. Only faith, this predetermined submission from the part of the audience, makes it believable.

Since the icon, within this film's context, refers to a famous personality in film history, and belief depends on the audience's knowledge of Wahbi's previous films and plays, it is valid to claim that this is a cinema of historical and popular notoriety, to the extent to which it can be considered self-referential. One might, also, rightly see this scene as an attempt to penetrate a star's intimate life, even if this life has been staged for the sake of the film. This tactic, or 'artistic license', takes advantage of the audience's voyeuristic tendency and their curiosity about what Wahbi's house might look like, how he might behave at home, who might be in his company, etc. But, when faced with the historical reality of the film industry in Egypt, Wahbi's role – like Abdel Wahab's – is perceived and recognised as a character in a bubble. It is a one-way recognition that can be identified as iconic recognition, where the two characters are transformed into screen-figures. What appears to be a window into an icon's daily life is more of a showcase display.

What we are watching is a pre-staged intrusion that is at the service of the star system, which aims to seduce more audience; the plot is pre-scripted and, contrary to its obvious claim of penetrating the star's daily life, it reinforces a 'halo' around the star. In simple terms, it communicates the following: That even if you – as an audience – succeed in breaking into this actor's life, you will experience what looks like a film; and furthermore, it is a film with which you are familiar.

Abdel Wahab's stardom is reinforced when Wahbi invites Layla

5 This is not the only example where Egyptian film stars play their own characters in a film. Hind Rostom played a memorable role in Fatin Abdel Wahab's *Isha'et Hobb* (*A Love Rumour*, Egypt, 1960), as did Ismail Yassine in several of his films.

6 Layla Murad played the leading female role with Mohamad Abdel Wahab in Mohamad Karim's *Yahya el Hob* (*Long Live Love*, Egypt, 1937), and even sang with him the duet, *Yadi Naim*.

and Hamam to listen to Abdel Wahab give a spectacular performance, while he is unaware of their presence. Two points are interesting here. The first is the assumption that the audience is to believe this plot; and, the second is how the role played by Abdel Wahab is reduced to strictly singing, to the extent that it becomes legitimate to pose the question, is he 'performing' for the film, or is it true that he is 'really' singing?[7] He simply sings which, in my opinion, adds to his aura, and reinforces the existing image of himself. If I were to describe Wahbi as a screen figure in this film, then Abdel Wahab can be described as an icon on the wall behind Wahbi. He is set in a deeper level within the film, and does not interact with any of the actors. His act is so simple that one can no longer consider it acting. It is such a simple act, an act as simple as chewing gum, which leads me to why and how *Red Chewing Gum* was born.

7 In the second part of his autobiographical trilogy, *Haddutah Masriyah*, (*An Egyptian Story*, 1982), Yousef Chahine includes a scene that he filmed in the early 1970s revealing Oum Koulthoum singing on stage. In the film, this scene is intercut with another scene which zooms-in on the actor Nour el Sherif, playing Chahine, while sitting in the audience. The spectator is led to believe that Chahine is watching Oum Koulthoum sing. However, the spectator is also aware that, at the time the film was shot, and at the age in which Nour el Sherif appears in this film, Oum Koulthoum had been deceased for years. Oum Koulthoum's role is restricted to singing here, as if documentary material, shot previously, was used to give credibility to the narrative of the film.

Red Chewing Gum was my contribution to the Hamra Street Project, curated by Ashkal Alwan in 2000, to reflect on the rise and fall of this famed Beirut street. The project allowed for debate to take place around the street's pivotal history in the city and its present condition. I wanted to stage a scene of a boy chewing gum; videotaping this scene over and over, adding new information in each take, removing the viewer one step further away from the plot. The image of the boy chewing red gum becomes like a recurring icon that acquires more meaning as the video unfolds. The work was conducted on two levels, adapting my personal interest in pursuit, as a structure, to my commitment to the nature of the street. The work plays on the theme of consumption, which I found relevant to a commercial street such as Hamra.
(VIDEO, 10 MINUTES, 2000)
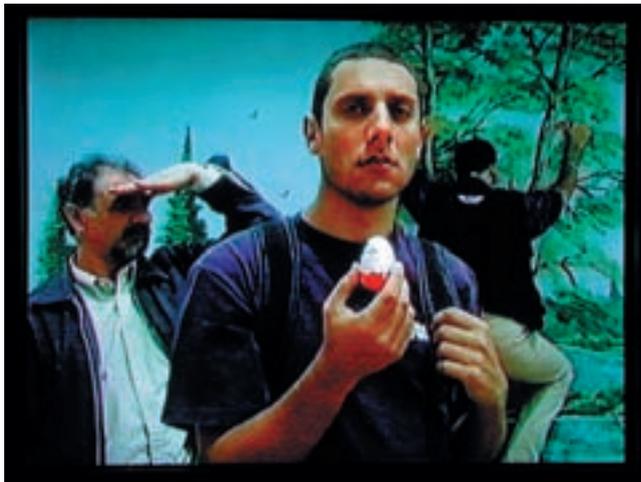
Baalbeck (a collaboration with Ghassan Salhab and Mohammad Soueid) is a three-part road film, set between Beirut and Baalbeck, where two men – a journalist and a photographer – cross the country from west to east, from the coast up to the Syrian borders, in order to cover a story about the Syrian singer Sabah Fakhry. Their journey is repeated three times, according to three interpretations, conceived and realised by the three of us. As in *Red Chewing Gum*, I work on the idea of pursuit as the two journalists get attracted to a young man, and decide to deviate from their original itinerary in order to follow him. Their attraction – as it is presented in the video – is blurred, something between potential investigation and physical desire. I find the two very related. The two characters desire this man, but they do not admit it to themselves, let alone to society. They justify their pursuit of him with the pretext of the investigation, where their desire of him is camouflaged with suspicion. Pursuit is a form which can be interpreted as both desire and/or investigation. I take their interest in the man as a pretext to penetrate a person's life and explore his cultural identity. Take, for example, the idea of collecting what the young man uses, then throws on the road; a chocolate wrapping, an empty soft drink can or lip balm. They even go so far as to look into his clothes and make a detailed inventory of his possessions. For me, this description provides the work with an opening into the intimate world of this person, just as an X-ray would. I asked the young man (Nabil Kojok) to take his handbag with him to the set, and asked the two journalists to start describing and to take notes on its contents. (VIDEO, 60 MINUTES, 2001)

The concept behind **How I Love You** was born after *Majnounak* (*Crazy for You*, VIDEO, 26 MINUTES, Ayloul Festival, 1997), which provided a platform for three men to speak 'proudly' about their conquests of the other gender, describing their sexual encounters in detail. *Majnounak* was meant to be a critique of the definition of masculinity, as it is conceived and propagated by men – in general – in contemporary Lebanon. *How I Love You* extends the exploration of male sexuality to homosexuality. I wanted the images to portray traces of the time and location in which they were being produced, which led to a blurring and the overexposure of the image, as homosexuality is still considered illegal in Lebanon.

(VIDEO, 29 MINUTES, 2001)

All is Well on the Border explores the Lebanese-Israeli conflict in South Lebanon through its mediated/televised images. The manipulation of television images is emphasised, sometimes by playing with speed and other times, by separating sound from its corresponding image. The video shows staged interviews with former Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons as a comment, a self-mediation. *All is Well on the Border* aims to deconstruct the conventional narratives of resistance by breaking myths of the hero/traitor, the victor/victim and illustrating the impossibility of representing a conflict without further constructing oppositions.

(VIDEO, 43 MINUTES, 1997)

For me, **Image + Sound** was based on de-contextualising televised images. It is not only a fieldwork of interpretation, but also a critique of the entertainment value of broadcast television. The technique used was to choose one location, shoot totally improvised scenes – inspired from that location in one afternoon – and attempt to complement them with a selection chosen from television archives, in a quest to generate a third interpretation.

(VIDEO, 5-7 MINUTES, 1995-96)

Born in Lebanon, in 1966, Akram Zaatari is a video artist and curator who lives and works in Beirut. He is author of more than thirty videos, among which are: *How I Love You* (29 min, 2001), *Her + Him Van Leo* (32 min, 2001), *Crazy for You* (27 min, 1997), *All is Well on the Border* (43 min, 1997), *The Candidate* (10 MIN, 1996); and two video installations: *Another Resolution* and *Monument # 5: The Scandal*. He is co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation (Beirut), through which he developed his recent research-based work on the photographic history of the Middle East. This work became the basis for a series of exhibitions: *The Vehicle: Picturing Moments of Transition in a Modernizing Society*, *Portraits du Caire: Van Leo, Arman, Alban* and *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography* (in collaboration with Walid Raad). He has edited or co-edited three publications of the same titles. He has been published in critical and scholarly journals such as: *Parachute*, *Camera Austria*, *Framework*, *Transition*, *Bomb magazine*, *Al-Adaab*, *al-Nahar* and *Zawaya*.

APPENDIX

Ghazal el Banat (Anouar Wagdi, 1949)

EXCERPTS FROM FILM DIALOGUE:

SLEIMAN: Yes? Wait a bit. Pardon me, but what do you want?

HAMAM: A glass of water.

SLEIMAN: A glass of water? Why, what do you think this is… a café?

HAMAM: We are thirsty. Is water that expensive?

SLEIMAN: It is not a matter of being expensive, but you are knocking on people's houses at this hour asking for water?

HAMAM: Isn't this Ismail Bey's house?

SLEIMAN: Who's Ismail Bey?

HAMAM: Ismail Bey Abu Manakhir.

SLEIMAN: There is no one by that name here.

HAMAM: Maybe it is the house before or after this one?

SLEIMAN: It is neither.

HAMAM: Then maybe we went to the wrong street? Good-bye.

SLEIMAN: You are not going anywhere but to the police station. You are burglars. Mohamad, Osman, tie them up. These are new tricks that you have invented to rob people's houses, you burglars!

YUSSEF WAHBI: What's the story Sleiman? Who are these people?

SLEIMAN: Sir?

LAYLA: Yussef Wahbi? Oh my God!

HAMAM: Mr. Yussef Wahbi, the movie star? Oh shit!

LAYLA: Bonsoir Monsieur.

YUSSEF WAHBI: Bonsoir? You mean bonjour. It's almost dawn. Anything I can help you with?

LAYLA: Yes. Ehh… Please tell him why we're here.

HAMAM: Because… because we love trouble.

YUSSEF WAHBI: But I don't get it. Who is he?

Layla: He is my teacher and his name is Hamam.

YUSSEF WAHBI: Your name is Hamam (pigeon)?

HAMAM: Yes my name is Hamam. They gave me this name so people would make fun of me.

YUSSEF WAHBI: And you?

HAMAM: She is Layla, the daughter of Murad Basha who lives at the end of the street.

YUSSEF WAHBI: Welcome. Please have a seat. What honour grants me this nice visit?

LAYLA: In reality…

HAMAM: In reality, we… we…

LAYLA: We were having a walk, out to get some fresh air.

HAMAM: We have to leave.

YUSSEF WAHBI: But isn't it early?

SLEIMAN: Sir, Mr. Mohamad Abdel Wahab says he's ready.

YUSSEF WAHBI: OK. I'm coming.

LAYLA: Mohamad Abdel Wahab? The singer?

YUSSEF WAHBI: Yes he is here, inside.

LAYLA: It's not possible!

YUSSEF WAHBI: Don't you believe me?

HAMAM: Let's go.

LAYLA: Wait. He is going to sing now.

HAMAM: Sing? Oh my God! Save us from this hell. Abdel Wahab and Yussef Wahbi in the same house. We escape one guy and fall in the hands of others!

LAYLA: Is it true that Abdel Wahab will sing now?

YUSSEF WAHBI: Yes. He will sing an excerpt from my last novel, which I am writing for him.

LAYLA: What is this novel about?

YUSSEF WAHBI: It is about a man who loves a woman so much that he cannot but see her happy, even if her happiness is with another man.

LAYLA: This is a great story. I am sure it will be very successful.

YUSSEF WAHBI: Hush! Listen! Abdel Wahab is about to start.

Layla: Mr. Hamam?
What's the matter with him?

Yussef Wahbi: Ms. Layla, this man loves you.

Layla: Don't say that. He loves me?

Yussef Wahbi: To the point of craziness

Layla: That's not possible!

Yussef Wahbi: Why not? Many novelists have addressed this subject, including me.

Layla: Thank you.

Yussef Wahbi: Hey… What is life, if not a great theatre?

Home Works: A Forum on Cultural Practices in the Region

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Shahrzad:
Political Art Brochure

Tirdad Zolghadr

One of the many reasons I didn't pursue an academic career, was that I not only have considerable difficulty concentrating on painfully systematic, conscientious analyses of a single topic for a longer period of time, but I also realised that it just wasn't necessary. In order to make a relevant point about contemporary cultural practices, there is no reason a text or discourse should have to declare its function and intention and then politely do all it can to avoid disappointing anyone. Actually, it presumably stands to gain from expectations being hopelessly overheated.

I would compare *Shahrzad*, the project I'm here to present, to an exotic pack of foreign cigarettes that you place on a bar counter and which allows you to get into conversations with people you would otherwise never have met. Obviously, the conversation need not revolve around the cigarette pack itself. The cigarettes actually only offer a pretext, they're interesting only in that they create a situation in which a conversation can unfold.

Indeed, there's little point in going on about *Shahrzad* for thirty minutes, because:

a) It would remove the ambiguity and the potential misunderstandings that are the most interesting aspects of a project such as this; and,

b) It's more fun, or more engaging, if you will, to see *Shahrzad* as a cross-point between different issues – issues which, according to where you are and when you happen to be there, are very different in relevance.

So, I've decided to make a brief tour of what might be most interesting to a Beirut audience of international illuminati as you are.

Shahrzad is a project realised by Shirana Shahbazi, Manuel Krebs (also known as Rashid Tehrani) and myself. All three of us currently live in Zurich. Shirana is an Iranian photographer who grew up in Tehran and Stuttgart. She is currently enjoying an impressive amount of international attention thanks to a photo series, *Goftare Nik*, which shows urban panoramas and staged everyday situations in the life of an

upper middle class family in Tehran. Manuel Krebs co-founded a graphic design bureau, 'Norm', which produces very heady, minimalist, Swiss-German design. Norm are, at present, working on their second book, a critical and theoretical inquiry into the history of the Latin alphabet.

Shahrzad is a project that is intended, in time, to grow into something bigger. We hope to be publishing two issues a year, including new collaborators incrementally. One of the basic precepts, or parameters, behind *Shahrzad* is the idea of combining political content with cheap, but good, design. We think it's a shame that politicised publications have such an arrière-garde attitude to form and self-marketing; and, that magazines with high aesthetic standards are so busy being post-feminist, or antipolitically-correct or whatever.

Although the format, the volume and the topics will change, the stance will remain the same, i.e. that of picking up heavy-handed topics and utilising them to do something new. The topic addressed most directly in this issue of *Shahrzad* is censorship. Censorship is a good example of a very rich subject – with deep and complex links to issues of class, property and representation – that is dealt with in a very hackneyed way.

We planned the project in Switzerland, but collected the material, designed and printed it in Iran; and, are now distributing it back in Switzerland. So, this first issue of *Shahrzad* touches on Western Europe and the Middle East, which offers a good pretext to subdivide my talk.

Let me begin with Zurich.

Zurich

Censorship isn't an issue in Switzerland. At the moment, the public debate that might come closest to the problematics of censorship is the strong and increasingly obvious link between culture and commerce. This debate is, actually, very valuable and instructive to anyone from the Middle East who is confronted with issues of, what I like to refer to as, 'ethnic marketing' in the West. One could equally speak of showcasing, presenting, representing or exhibiting the Middle East, rather than 'marketing' it. But, I'd say 'marketing' is a more honest term; referring, as it does, to matters pertaining to global economics, to fluctuating supply and demand and to strategy and self-packaging.

At this point, allow me to make a brief aside. Arriving at the *Home Works* forum, I couldn't help but notice an implicit sense of embarrassment in the air. The idea or impression was that, with a semi-war going on next door, this was not the place or time to be thinking about art, culture and other frivolous, abstract matters. In the face of the ongoing invasion of Palestine, what is the point of talking about Zurich bankers sponsoring art exhibitions?

I'd simply like to insist that none of what we're doing here is abstract. There's absolutely nothing abstract in standing here at the microphone talking to you. It's no more abstract than digging ditches or, incidentally, handing out Hizbullah flyers at a sit-in. The difference between digging ditches and what we're doing here lies not in the degree of abstraction, but in the degree of privilege, authority and influence; the privilege

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of leaving traces within those institutions which, in turn – albeit in the very long run – , play a crucial role in shaping ideologies of representation. It's striking how, especially in Europe, people, who can be so critical and articulate when it comes to anything from TV advertising to video art, become blubbering illiterates, helpless in the face of political fashions and tacit censorship, as soon as we're dealing with the Islamic world. At the risk of sounding like I were preaching, if there were a more intelligent approach to the complexities of representation, aesthetics and geopolitics and to what I referred to as 'ethnic marketing', we wouldn't quite be where we are now.

Back to Zurich.
I'd last lived in Switzerland as a teenager. Now, having just moved back to Zurich from Tehran, I'd say

the new links between culture and commerce are actually one of the few, clear and unmistakable recent developments. You have the gala dinners for the United Bank of Switzerland at the City Theatre, you have receptions for petrochemical corporations in trendy, underground discotheques and you obviously have the many galleries and cultural centres funded entirely by private corporations. What is eerie about the situation is that, in many ways, there really isn't anything wrong with it. Hardly anyone would dispute the fact that, ever since its wholesale artistic privatisation, the genius loci hasn't lost anything in critical spirit. Some even say it is far more lively and provocative than before.

Yet, there are things that make you wonder. In 1991, there was a nationwide initiative to commemorate the mythical founding of

Switzerland in 1291. Then, the intelligentsia made a laughing stock of the organisers by boycotting the celebrations, preferring to deconstruct the 700-year myth in the press, and to happily mock the very idea of patriotism and nationhood. Now, only eleven years later, there is to be another nationwide, cultural celebration of vaguely patriotic temperament, the expo nationale 02. This year, however, the entire intelligentsia is desperate to join, everyone jostling for a place in the sun. Once it was clear-cut political positioning. Now, it's Rem Koolhaas surfing the wave, Chairman Mao's fish in the water and whatnot, everyone happily reworking the system from within.

A word on this notion of outwitting the mainstream: Of course, one can merge with one's institutional setting and then avoid, as much as possible, the blunt content and formal polish the latter is accustomed to. Unfortunately, this tactic usually amounts to little more than congratulating select readers, viewers and listeners for recognising one's nifty nuances for what they are. In other words, very ironically, one runs the risk of becoming even more exclusive and elitist than ever before. Moreover, to assume that an institution's rules and codes of conduct are obvious enough to be penetrated and reworked from within, is to pay them an unearned compliment, and to help occlude the ways through which they become transparent to themselves. Codes, laws and canons don't just drop from the sky into a cultural vacuum. Laws have a circular, mutually dependent relationship to the field of action in which they're read

and interpreted. As law professor Stanley Fish likes to put it, rules make sense only ''in reference to the regularities they are thought to bring about''. In short, even rules and institutions change over time. Orientalism itself has changed.

I'm not wagging my finger at anyone. I, myself, have accepted a mandate for the expo. As for the *Shahrzad* collective, we're open to collaborating with almost anyone. But, the project is indeed intended to remain independent. And, since the brochure isn't sponsored, it's admittedly a little expensive.

So, what might I expect you to know about Switzerland? I'm sure you've heard of Heidi.

Last summer, we commemorated 100 years since the death of Johanna Spyri, whose *Heidis Lehr-und Wanderjahre* is one of the most popular novels ever published. Yet, despite the book's extraordinary international success in the 1880s, the book was only published in Switzerland in 1918, years after Spyri's death. This differentiation between cultural export products and what is consumed within the country is rather widespread through the contemporary Third World; and, it must sound familiar to you.

A century after Spyri's death, another Swiss author, with a similar knack for landscape exotica, gained international attention. Novelist Tom Kummer lives and works in Los Angeles, from where he peddles standard, folkloric Americana: The Nevada desert, amphetamines, freeways, the LAPD. Occasionally, Kummer would sell interviews with Hollywood celebrities to the European press. These he made up himself. His interview with Ivana

Trump consisted of Andy Warhol quotations. One day, it all 'came out', and Kummer was attacked by a scandalised public, including his own one-time friends and associates.

The tragic tale of Tom Kummer goes beyond the tired dilemma between the reality of fiction and vice-versa. It draws our attention to the middleman, the representative himself. The latter is caught between what German-speakers call *vertreten* (substituting someone or some-thing; 'rhetoric as persuasion') and *darstellen* (description; 'rhetoric as trope'). As Ms. Gayatri Spivak has pointed out: In English, the term 'representation' is used for both. The interest, with respect to Tom Kummer, is that Kummer was tried and convicted on the grounds of being a dishonest journalist; i.e., by resorting to some press ethos that has more to do with a 19th century gentlemen's agreement than with the world of ethnic marketing and cultural commodification that has grown around us. And, what I'm saying is that, compared to the reali-ty-fiction problematic, the tension between 'metaphoric' *vertretung* and 'metonymic' *darstellung* offers ethical and epistemological stakes that are decidedly more challenging. To us, here, these stakes are valuable and instructive – we, who at this forum, are trying to forge international links throughout the Middle East, and who, on the other hand, are jostling for our places in the postcolonial, Western art market, where, indeed, the recent interest in non-Western art and cinema has brought a great demand for spokespersons and eth-nic exiles to pat on the back.

What is worth noting here is that, when it comes to Third World art and ethnic marketing, Western institutions that never question the apolitical nonchalance of the local *Kunstbetrie*, suddenly demand the 'Political' and the 'Uncompromising', preferably with a pinch of women's rights. Please find a clever, sexy way to condemn your regime.

So, to come back to our art brochure on how to represent and talk about censorship in Iran in the present context – as I've just described it. Censorship, of all things. Each time you start victimising the 'Middle East' or the 'Third World', you inevitably strengthen the wide-spread idea of the impossibility of intellectual work occurring outside the Western teaching machine. And, you make yourself – the ethnic exile – look fabulous by comparison. Indeed, insisting on the role of a crushed Third World race, rather than on considerations of class or gender, is exactly what a Zurich-based male academic with a racy, Third World complexion could use.

So much for Zurich.

Iran

Regarding the Middle East, rather than speaking of contempo-rary Iran per se, I have decided to speak of an historical era that has fascinated me for some time now. The era brings to a point the issues of representation and ideology in relation to property and exile, and simultaneously addresses the rela-tion of Iran to Israel and, in a way, to the Arab countries.

I'd like to tell you a bible story.

I suppose you'll agree that, when it comes to the Bible, the Old Testament stories that one is most familiar with are the first myths (Paradise, Babel, Noah's Ark),

the first nomads (Sarah and Abraham), and, of course, Moses and the return to the Promised Land. You will agree that that is pretty much it, as far as the common imaginary goes, before getting to Joseph and the Virgin Mary. What is most striking about this chasm is that the gap between the mythical events marked by 'Moses' and 'Mary' amounts to a period of six centuries. It was in the course of this epoch – which constitutes one of the most neglected areas in what they call Syro-Palestinian archaeology – that Israel was colonised by Persia for approximately two centuries. Although two hundred years of colonisation may sound like a long time, nothing spectacular or historically decisive is known to have happened during that period. On the contrary, as many have been quick to point out, the Persians were different from other imperialists: They invited the Jews back home from exile under the Babylonians to live in peace, do their thing and practice their religion, exactly the way they liked it. Many biblical scholars even hesitate to call Israel a colony; and some even hold that, under the domination of the Achaemenids, Hebraism knew its 'Golden Age'.

The Pax Iranica, one assumes, allowed Hebrew culture the leisure to manifest itself according to the most authentic tendencies. And since, as some like to say, peace is boring, it's no surprise that neither Ezra, Nehemia nor any other hero from the 'Golden Age' are the main characters in kindergarten colouring books.

Generally, Persians were well known for their unflinching policies of forced resettlement and de-

urbanisation and for ghettoising entire populations. These ethnically distinct units were encouraged to hold their proper, popular cults and emblems – which allowed for an appeasement of anti-Persian sentiment – and were also assigned specific economic functions, which permitted a more efficient and profitable administration of the imperial body.

In recent years, scholars such as Ronald Carrol, Philip Davies, Tamara Eskenazi, Harold Washington, Joseph Blenkinsopp and Charles Carter have been insisting that the Jewish return from Babylonian exile under the Achaemenid Empire, as narrated in the Old Testament, is not to be taken at face value. Why should this particular version of events be representative for the population as a whole? The sources from both within and without the biblical corpus are ambiguous as to just how harsh the Babylonian exile really was, and as to the exact reason the exiles were willing to come back. They do suggest, rather less ambiguously, that, at best, the returnees formed a fraction of the local population, and that they were granted exclusive privileges by the Persian authorities, e.g. land rights and control over the official cult.

This newly-formed gathering found itself under the aegis of a sizable empire, which declared its members the colony's official spokesmen. Although they could not control the locals, with their paganisms, intermarriages and muddled oral histories, they had the texts; they wrote the official histories as they wrote the land grants, along with the marriage certificates, for that matter. A new cult of the

forefathers emerged in Israel during this era, a shift in discursive emphasis towards kinship rather than territory; one that is unmistakably reflected in most biblical stories of the period (e.g. Naboth, Joseph, Esther and Ruth). Lineage was an obvious way to define who was clearly Jewish, and the only method available to authorising newcomers to reclaim lands long appropriated by those who had stayed behind under the Babylonians.

A big question here, in light of these one-time political interests, is the issue of whether, at the end of the day, it is Moses or Persia's Ahura Mazda who is the actual key to Judeo-Christian monotheism. The two are uneasy bedfellows; but, Moses and Mazda do have things in common. Like Judaism, Zoroastrian philosophy isn't a contemplative understanding of the impersonal concepts and processes of the universe (as in, say, Hellenism or Buddhism), but is directed towards active participation in a personal and cosmic struggle with the forces of good and evil. Second, out of an initial, complex cosmolo-

gy, Zoroastrianism, like Judaism, forged a single and personal God. Thirdly, much as the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda is not a universal God, but God of the Persian Aryans, Jehovah is the God of the children of Israel; both are deities with a racial and national character, and not gods of all mankind. Fourthly, neither doctrine encourages proselytism across racial boundaries, preferring to proselytise within the ethnic body and to systematically uphold the faith in the nation.

In Europe, after having gone out of style during the Middle Ages, but still well before Nietzsche's famous 'Zarathustra', the prophet Zoroaster was rehabilitated by a host of cultured celebrities from the European Enlightenment, ranging from Rousseau to Voltaire to Goethe and also Mozart and Delacroix, who all considered, in their respective ways, that the wisdom, dignity and purity of Zoroaster indeed made him the earliest pillar of civilisation. G.W. Friedrich Hegel, always one for little timetables and marching orders, declared the Persians "the first historical people".

As many, including Edward Said, have pointed out, this was the precise time when the theory of the *Aryan Urheimat* began to emerge in the West, and the Aryan myth began to dominate historical and cultural anthropology.

I'd like to conclude by reading a few excerpts from the brochure:

In Farsi: 'SANSUR', from the Latin 'CENSURA', meaning 'to test or evaluate'. 'CENSIO' – 'in my opinion'.

"Next time, don't tell the foreigners. Tell us first, and we'll take care of it", said the secret police to the BBC correspondent. *"I don't tell foreigners about [censored]'s little obsessions. It's too embarrassing. [censored] is the founder of the [censored]. Even in Iran, the use of his writings and speeches are subject to severe restrictions. This is why the use of his writings and speeches are subject to severe restrictions. Nonetheless, the use of his writings and speeches are subject to severe restrictions"*.

The Roman 'CENSOR': a magistrate whose original functions were registering citizens and their property. Gradually, however, the censor was charged with supervising the moral conduct of senators. Senators were voted into office by citizens with property previously registered by the censor.

Mingle with the Tehran intelligentsia. Have a Winston Red at Café Shukaa.

Censorship is a red herring.
The real problems:
Bad taste, provincialism, money.

WHAT DO WE WANT? SOMETHING.
WHEN DO WE WANT IT?
WHENEVER YOU GET ROUND TO GIVING IT TO US.
IN FARSI: SANSUR, FROM THE LATIN CENSURA, MEANING
TO TEST, OR EVALUATE. CENSIO - 'IN MY OPINION'.
████████████ WROTE A BOOK CALLED
████████████ WHERE HE SAYS THAT ████████ LITTLE
CHILDREN ██████ ███ IS OK.
THE BIT ABOUT ████████ LITTLE CHILDREN ██ ██. ████ IS
IN VOLUME 4, ██████ ███ EDITION, PUBLISHED 1990 IN ███.
THIS IS WHERE ████████ ████████ WRITES 'A MAN CAN
HAVE ████ ████████ WITH ████████ A ████'.
NEXT TIME, DON'T TELL THE FOREIGNERS. TELL US FIRST,
AND WE'LL TAKE CARE OF IT. SAID THE SECRET POLICE TO
THE BBC CORRESPONDENT.

Tirdad Zolghadr is an independent journalist and translator who lives and works in Tehran and Zurich. In Tehran, he co-founded the online magazine *badjens.com*, curated the multimedia art exhibition *group-project* and co-directed the documentary film, *Tehran 1380*.

PERFORMANCES

Tabla Dubb: An Audio-Visual Performance, Hassan Khan
Biokhraphia, Lina Saneh and Rabih Mroué
Ode to Rhinos, Nadine R. L. Touma

Tabla Dubb:
An Audio-Visual Performance

Hassan Khan

Hassan Khan works in the audio-visual medium, producing videos and video installations, as well as composing soundtracks for theatre and contemporary dance. His work has been installed, exhibited and screened in festivals, art galleries and public spaces in Europe, Asia, the United States and, of course, Egypt and the region. Hassan Khan lives and works in Cairo, Egypt.

tabla dubb attempted to fashion a public media that uses the basic element of popular musical culture without engaging in the reductionist discussions around the 'traditional and contemporary' imposed by the orientalising discourses of dominant institutions. This performance was an attempt at creating a new cultural practice where music, video and the direct statement were used to investigate, in a concise and concentrated form, the politic of shared co-habitation, in a city where power is contested on a daily basis. It is a moment of cultural production where the insecurities of having to constantly define one's identity are hopefully sidestepped. Connecting the music to a library of video images that arise out of an imagistic engagement with the city, mixed with directed and repeated statements, the performance was an invitation to ponder upon the relation that the body politic holds with itself. Moving to the music, while consuming the 'direct statement', is an alternative to mass media that is neither parodic nor ironic. *tabla dubb* is to be performed in Cairo and Alexandria, in public spaces and under tents on streets.
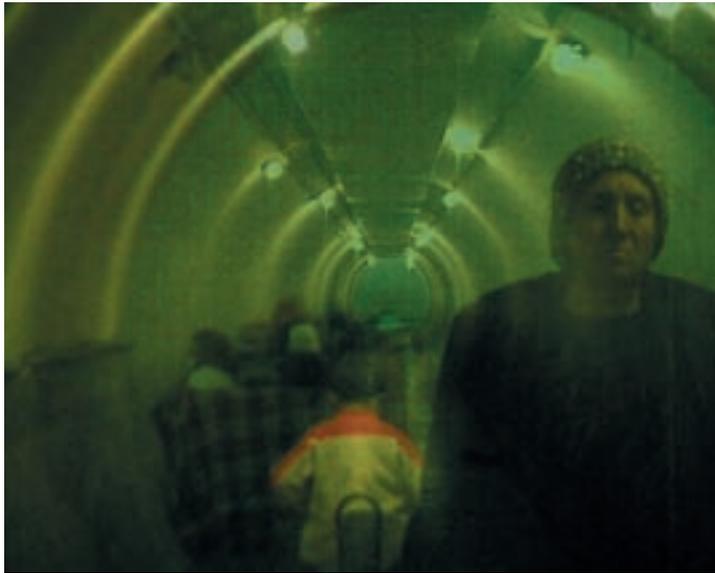
Biokhraphia

Lina Saneh and Rabih Mroué

Translated from Arabic by Mona Abu Rayyan

Lina Saneh, born in Beirut, has been working in the field of theatre since 1990. Rabih Mroué, born in Beirut, has been working in the field of visual arts since 1990.

AUDIO: She studied theatre at the Institut des Beaux Arts, part of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University. She received her doctorate in theatre from the Sorbonne III in Paris. She is an artist of a special calibre. She adores culture, knowledge and theatre. She's a homebody. She spends her time reading and seeking knowledge on all matters related to theatre. She has participated in many festivals in the Arab world and internationally. She presented her last theatrical pieces in Beirut, Amman, Paris, Tunis, Brussels, among others. She is currently in the process of presenting a new theatrical work, entitled *Biokhraphia*, in collaboration with the theatre director Rabih Mroué.

We would like to take advantage of her presence with us here today, in this auditorium, to interview her and get to know her better. Welcome, Lina Saneh.

ARTIST: Thank you.

AUDIO: Please speak into the microphone.

ARTIST: Thank you. Thank you very much.

AUDIO: As we all know, you are an accomplished artist… creative as well.

ARTIST: …

AUDIO: And you were raised in a family of artists…

ARTIST: …

AUDIO: Let's not forget your Aunt Madonna Ghazi. For those who don't know Madonna Ghazi, Madonna Ghazi is one of the most important actresses in cinema…

ARTIST: in theatre…

AUDIO: That's right, in theatre. She worked with the most influential directors of the sixties and seventies: The Rahbani Brothers, Samir Nasri, and Tele Liban.

ARTIST: and Raymond Jbara…

AUDIO: Of course, we mustn't forget Mr. Raymond Jbara.

Our interview, today, will focus on your new work. Why did you call it '*Biokhraphia*'?

ARTIST: *Biokhraphia* is composed of two words: Bio, stemming from the Ancient Greek term 'Bios', i.e. Life; and life is the antonym of death…

AUDIO: Ok. *Biokhraphia* is clear… biography.

But, why did you record this cassette using your own voice to interview yourself?

ARTIST: It's natural to record it in my voice.

AUDIO: Why?

ARTIST: I read it in a book somewhere.

AUDIO: What book?

ARTIST: A book that says that after death, everyone interviews one's self. One asks oneself questions and one answers one's questions. So I said to myself, why not record all the questions I've always wanted to ask myself, but haven't been able to answer?

AUDIO: Like what, for example?

ARTIST: Like a lot of things. For example: Why theatre? What is theatre? What's the significance of theatre? What's the role of theatre?

AUDIO: Really? You'd like me to ask you these types of questions?

ARTIST: I don't know. No, I wouldn't like that. Of course not.

AUDIO: Then what?

ARTIST: I don't know. You start. I like surprises.

AUDIO: What is the significance of theatre, in your opinion?

ARTIST: The significance of theatre?

AUDIO: Surprised?

ARTIST: Yes. I'm surprised. I don't know.

AUDIO: Really?

ARTIST: Maybe it's important. Maybe it's not. I don't know anymore. What is the significance of theatre? If I think about all the plays I've seen in my life, I think: So what? What did they do for me? Maybe, if anything, theatre benefited me as a profession, as a hobby. But now, if I think about performing, I get all stressed out

and I don't want to deal with it. If I'm going to see a play, I get all stressed out and I don't want to deal with that, either.

AUDIO: So why did you choose theatre?

ARTIST: I can't remember now. Maybe to piss my parents off. It was wartime, and I didn't know what I wanted to do with myself. So, I did theatre.

AUDIO: Any regrets?

ARTIST: No.

AUDIO: Did you get involved in politics?

ARTIST: Yes. Of course. We all got involved in politics.

AUDIO: Right or Left?

ARTIST: Left.

AUDIO: Speak into the microphone.

ARTIST: Left.

AUDIO: Did you fight?

ARTIST: I wanted to fight.

AUDIO: Did you fight?

ARTIST: I wanted to fight. But I was scared. You know, combat zones, trenches, barricades… there's a lot of cockroaches and rats. And I really got scared. For example, I really wanted to be part of the resistance and carry out military operations. I believed in it. A lot of my friends were martyred; others were detained. That also scared me. I used to think maybe I would get detained. I'm sure there are lots of insects in detention centres. There's another thing…

AUDIO: What?

ARTIST: Menstruation.

AUDIO: Yes?

ARTIST: Until now, I've never been sure whether or not they provide sanitary napkins in detention centres. And this really bugs me.

AUDIO: So, you didn't fight?

ARTIST: No.

AUDIO: And the bullet in your leg?

ARTIST: It's a wound.

AUDIO: From what?

ARTIST: In the war, once, I saw a guy from a militia… I don't know which militia… I went to him and I started to heckle him… If you're a man, you'll shoot me. If you're a man, you'll shoot. Shoot, you dog. You loser. You lowlife. You coward. You chicken shit. Shoot, you bastard, shoot. If you had balls, you'd shoot.

AUDIO: And what happened?

ARTIST: He shot me in the leg.

AUDIO: And then what?

ARTIST: Honestly? I regretted it. Because now that I think about it, if I had brought a cameraman, and we had actually shot what happened, it would have been a great performance. They would have written about us in the newspapers or something.

AUDIO: Ok. Let's talk a little bit more about you.

ARTIST: What do you mean?

AUDIO: Tell us about your childhood. How was it?

ARTIST: Average. It's not worth talking about.

AUDIO: You didn't suffer? You didn't

have troubles?

ARTIST: No, no. A regular childhood.

AUDIO: And, how did your parents treat you?

ARTIST: Normal. Like parents.

AUDIO: So how come you have this profound sensitivity?

ARTIST: Maybe my mom? No. Everyone in my family is sensitive and we are all easily touched.

AUDIO: By the way, how many times did the artist Lina Saneh try to commit suicide?

ARTIST: Five times? Six times.

AUDIO: The family?

ARTIST: No. No. It had nothing to do with the family.

AUDIO: But in all your performances you have 'the family', your family. And your family's hysteria: The harsh, tyrannical father and the sweet, loving mother.

ARTIST: This is a simplistic view, in all senses of the word.

AUDIO: Aristotle states that the family is the birthplace of tragedy, par excellence.

ARTIST: Aristotle wasn't talking about psychology.

AUDIO: But there are always these intense relationships in your work. Destructive conflicts, unbalanced personas, verbal and physical aggression, women versus men, men versus women… and what's strange is that we always have the same amount of men versus the same amount of women. And there's always the number three. Or the multiple of three. Does this symbolise destiny? Death? The Trinity?

ARTIST: This is a metaphysical interpretation. It's irrational. And I reject it.

AUDIO: Ok. Maybe we need to read your work within a more com-

prehensive framework and not to consider it as a singular answer to a family issue.

ARTIST: By the way, my husband always said that the nicest gift a mother can give her son is to vanish as early as possible. I'm sorry… continue…

AUDIO: *Biokhraphia…* Let's stay with *Biokhraphia*

ARTIST: Yes. That would be better.

AUDIO: *Biokhraphia*, in my opinion, is the least successful of your works. And you exploited its failure to create a legend.

ARTIST: Me? That's not true. All my life I've rejected and fought the idea of the legend. First of all, because the legend – with all its talk – eliminates politics. Secondly, the legend creates worlds without histories. It obliterates contradictions. It converts meanings into forms. Please refer to the lecture I gave at the American University.

AUDIO: When was that? I had no idea.

ARTIST: 1998.

AUDIO: I wasn't there. I didn't attend it.

ARTIST: That's not my problem.

AUDIO: What did you say?

ARTIST: It's not important… go on.

AUDIO: All right. Can we consider *Biokhraphia* a political work that attempts to showcase your problems as a part of a younger generation, and your critical stance against authority?

ARTIST: Maybe… That's possible. If you'd like. Why not? But, no… Definitely, no… *Biokhraphia* doesn't, at all, have anything to do with the stance and views of my generation. Actually, yes. Maybe. It depends on which

generation and which age. For example, if we take all those born between the sixties and seventies, it would work. Yes. But, no. Because in the eighties, you have a generation who were born in 1975, 1976…. These people might be included within our generation – especially the ones born in April, May, as well as some of whom did their military service. In any case, we need to reevaluate those from 1966 and 1967 – maybe they shouldn't be included in our generation. Actually, they most likely shouldn't be included.

AUDIO: But you're all the war generation. You lived the civil war. You were affected by it. It's imprinted on you.

ARTIST: No. Me, for example… I have nothing to do with the war generation. I always felt different. Not like anyone else. I'm special. A person like me could have committed a personal revolution with or without a civil war, or any other historical circumstance, for that matter.

AUDIO: Why?… How?… Why?…

ARTIST: You're asking me to get into personal matters.

AUDIO: But it's important for us to know.

ARTIST: Ok. For a long time, I refused to change my underwear. I think I stayed in the same underwear for about six or seven months. Of course, I used to hide this fact from everyone. Even my family, my mom, my sister… none of them noticed anything. At some point, the smell became overwhelming. Wherever I went, I was followed by a stench.

In class. At home. In the elevator. In my room. Wherever I went, people avoided me. My friends at school were the ones who discovered that the smell was from me. When they found out at home, I expected to be punished. But instead, they indulged me; they gave me gifts. And since then, every time I get a whiff of a bad smell, I think that they're going to suspect it's me. This left a profound mark, deep within my being. So what is this? This is something that's a hundred percent psychological. Private. Personal. This Kafkaesque relationship with smell is a million times more exciting for the artist than any other historical incident such as the war, or the like.

Audio: Honestly, I'm not getting you… you lost me.

Artist: That's strange. Why?

Audio: I'm just not getting it… let's start all over again.

Artist: Ok. No problem.

Artist stops the tape recorder and rewinds the cassette to the beginning.

Audio: She studied theatre at the Institut des Beaux Arts, part of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University. She received her doctorate in theatre from…

Artist stops the tape recorder again, and now fast-forwards the cassette.

Audio: Our interview today will focus on your new work. Why did you call it '*Biokhraphia*'?

Artist: *Biokhraphia* is a word which signifies nothing. We chose it because it has a nice ring to it.

Audio: Ok. *Biokhraphia* is clear… biography. But, why did you record this cassette using your own voice to interview yourself?

Artist: Ummm… How would I know? Do I have to answer this question?

Audio: Why?

Artist: Because it's not important.

Audio: All right then. What's your definition of theatre?

Artist: I reject all things theatre.

Audio: Speak into the microphone… What's your definition of theatre?

Artist: I reject theatre and all that's related to theatre.

AUDIO: How can you articulate this rejection?

ARTIST: I don't go. I don't attend. I refuse to. Or, I sit in the front row, bring my snacks, crunch on nuts and slurp on a soda.

AUDIO: Have you done this before?

ARTIST: Nope. Never.

AUDIO: Speak into the microphone.

ARTIST: No. Never.

AUDIO: What do you think of Rabih Mroué as a director?

ARTIST: Good. Good. But he doesn't know how to cast his actors.

AUDIO: But you still haven't explained to me: What is theatre?

ARTIST: Oooff… theatre. It's difficult. Where do I start? It's such a broad term.

AUDIO: No – I mean theatre in Lebanon. You've been following Lebanese theatre from its inception until today. You've watched many plays. And, you've read a lot about them…

ARTIST: Listen… I'm going to tell you about this dream that I had… I dreamt that I was wandering in the streets, going from office to office… to get a license to exhume my tomb.

AUDIO: Sorry?

ARTIST: My tomb, my grave… I went to over a hundred offices. They all refused. So, I decided to exhume it myself. After a lot of effort, I was able to reach my coffin. But when I opened the lid, I didn't find my corpse. Instead, I found my father's. It took a lot for me to interpret this dream.

AUDIO: What are you trying to imply… that Lebanese theatre is a beast?

ARTIST: No! What does Lebanese theatre have to do with this? I was really trying to tell you about a dream, and I meant nothing else by it… And I don't know why it came to mind – free association?

AUDIO: Ok… But what are you guys trying to do with theatre?

ARTIST: We're doing theatre.

AUDIO: You mean that you consider these performances you've been presenting this past while theatre?

ARTIST: I would prefer to delay my answer for the simple reason that I don't want to be accused of pre-empting criticism and then blocking it.

AUDIO: We all know that Lina Saneh, after she completed her studies at the Lebanese University, went to Europe to continue her acting career. You went to workshops: Far East, Commedia dell'Arte, Jacques Le Coq, Arianne Mnouchkine… but, we're not seeing you. You're nowhere to be seen. You're not taking on any roles. Why?

ARTIST: But I'm here now. I'm acting now.

AUDIO: No. I mean acting a role – a role – not like this.

ARTIST: But, I am playing a role.

AUDIO: No. No. Sorry. What I mean… what you're doing, anyone can do. It doesn't need four years of studying.

ARTIST: You're right.

AUDIO: So, why aren't you acting… really acting?

ARTIST: Honestly, I'm getting offered a lot of roles… but I'm not interested in any of them.

AUDIO: What are you trying to tell me? There aren't any good directors in town?

ARTIST: Maybe there are a lot of good ones, but none of them

satisfies me… I mean… I don't feel any of them can direct actors the way I like… the way I want to act…

Audio: So what you're trying to say is that right now you're not acting?

Artist: Yes, but…

Audio: So then, any director can direct you.

Artist: If I'm playing a character…

Audio: Then, you're not playing a character now?

Artist: Are you trying to trip me up?

Audio: No, I'm not trying to trip you up, but… we just want to know why you aren't acting.

Artist: I'm acting. I'm acting.

Audio: But what you're doing now, anyone can do.

Artist: You're right.

Audio: Ok. Ok. If there aren't any directors to your liking… Your husband… why doesn't he produce anything for you?

Artist: He doesn't feel like it.

Audio: Speak into the microphone.

Artist: He doesn't feel like it.

Audio: What?

Artist: Once, by chance, I read a line to him… I can't remember by whom… something to the effect of: 'It's enough that someone does something… anything'. For example, someone passing by – crossing the street, while another person is watching. This act, in itself, is enough to be theatre. He found this pleasing. He was convinced. Since then, he has decided that we shouldn't bother putting in all this effort, all this energy, sweat and guts into theatre when it's actually so simple.

Audio: But there's an audience as well. I mean… they're paying the price of a ticket… not to see an actor playing a part anyone can do… I think they deserve to see talent, skill, creativity, ingenuity…

Artist: But, in reality, they aren't paying enough. Let them pay, and we'll show them whatever they want to see. We'll sing, we'll dance, we'll emote, we'll express, we'll cry, we'll jump around like chimpanzees, we'll go ape-shit for them.

Audio: Really?? If they pay enough, you would do anything they ask for?

Artist: What do you think I am, a slut?

Audio: You're confrontational… you're a confrontational person…

Artist: Me?!

Audio: Yes… all your talk is provocative. Actually, when I think about your work, it resembles your talk… provocative… confrontational…

Artist: How… How did you get all of that?

Audio: You're like a commando. You do these small works. You present them once or twice… an instant. Then, for six months, a year… or two… you just talk about them.

Artist: What's wrong with that?

Audio: Nothing. But it reminds me of the tactics used by the Islamic Resistance and the military operations they carry out against enemy positions.

Artist: Whoa, whoa… where did that connection come from?!

Audio: It's the same logic: Conquer, raise the flag, film the event, withdraw.

Artist: Wait a minute… just a minute, this is the enemy's point of view.

AUDIO: No, this is the point of view of the audience.

ARTIST: Anyway, I have no presence without an audience. In my particular case, things don't happen this way. The difference between my work and the Islamic Resistance is that when the Resistance films its operations, it's to prove their existence. Because, in their opinion, one can't be real unless one's captured on film. Otherwise, why would they film their operations? When I use my image, it isn't to prove my existence... on the contrary, it's to confirm my death or, maybe, to say that the performance taking place before you is not actually happening.

Long pause

ARTIST: Do you think I'm being irrational?

AUDIO: No. No. Not at all. What you're saying is very profound and interesting. And it confirms my opinion about you and your work.

ARTIST: What opinion?

AUDIO: That you're confrontational... a provocative woman.

ARTIST: You're still thinking with the logic of the enemy. The enemy thinks that our work is provocative. They accuse us of being influenced by the West. Of being cerebral. Formalist. There's no story there... no actors... we have suffered and are still suffering from the hegemonisation of the Arab and Islamic identity. But, in reality, people are not at all proud of this identity. This is our reality; and, what I did was to attempt to tell this truth. We don't remember that we're Arabs until the Americans and the Israelis bomb Beirut, the West Bank or Iraq... in times of crises... It's only when things like this happen that this instinct in us is stirred. Our loyalty is instinctive; therefore, it's not positive. In this context, the Arab identity can be considered an issue or matter, which in itself, imposes upon us the inevitability of fate and destiny.

Pause

AUDIO: So, what are you reading these days?

ARTIST: Newspapers.

AUDIO: What newspapers?

ARTIST: By virtue of my work, I get all the newspapers.

AUDIO: What work?

ARTIST: I teach at the university.

AUDIO: Move closer to the microphone, then speak into it.

ARTIST: I teach at the university.

AUDIO: Which pages of the newspaper do you read?

ARTIST: The first and the second.

AUDIO: You mean you're interested in politics?

ARTIST: Yes.

AUDIO: Do you have political ambitions?

ARTIST: I have no political ambitions.

AUDIO: Speak into the microphone.

ARTIST: I have no political ambitions. I'm only interested in theatre.

AUDIO: Does political theatre concern you?

ARTIST: I support the arts. I don't know when it's the arts… when it's politics…

AUDIO: The title of your play – *Biokhraphia*?

ARTIST: Yes. Yes.

AUDIO: What's the play about? What does it talk about?

ARTIST: About…

AUDIO: Wait… what about the title?

ARTIST: *Biokhraphia* is made up of three words: Bio from bios, which means life. Khara, which in Arabic means 'shit'. And, Phia… in Arabic means 'in it'. So; it's a shitty biography.

AUDIO: Indeed. So what's the play about?

ARTIST: The play… I enter. I have a tape recorder with me. I press 'PLAY'. My voice comes out. It starts asking me….

AUDIO: Yeah, Yeah… we've been through this… what are you doing?… telling me what I already know? In the play, you say you like homosexuals because they are incapable of being soldiers.

ARTIST: This is discriminatory language and I would never speak this way.

AUDIO: Are you denying your sympathetic language with regard to homosexuality in the play?

ARTIST: No.

AUDIO: Speak into the microphone.

ARTIST: No.

AUDIO: Are you denying your opposition to the military in your play?

ARTIST: No.

AUDIO: Was this statement censored out of your play? Yes or no?

ARTIST: Yes.

AUDIO: Speak into the microphone.

ARTIST: Yes. It was censored.

AUDIO: And despite all this, you did not comply with that order.

ARTIST: Yes, I did.

Audio. No, you didn't.

ARTIST: You said it, not me.

AUDIO: Me?

ARTIST: Yes, you.

AUDIO: Are you trying to get the better of me? Stop beating around the bush… confess your failure.

ARTIST: What failure?

AUDIO: Confess to us that you no longer know how to do theatre.

ARTIST: That's the least of my concerns.

AUDIO: … that you don't know how to act.

ARTIST: Who gives a shit?

AUDIO: … that you don't know how, or where, to even begin with theatre. You don't know where you're going. What you want to say. What…

Artist stops the tape recorder. Exits. Returns after a long pause.

Artist presses 'PLAY'.

Audio: Look. Don't do that again. Understood?
Artist: I apologise.
Audio: Let's go back to the last part.
Artist: Ok.
Audio: Press 'REWIND'.

Artist rewinds tape… Presses 'STOP'… Presses the 'PLAY' button.

Audio: So, what are you reading these days?
Artist: Newspapers.
Audio: What newspapers?
Artist: By virtue of my work, I get all the newspapers.
Audio: What work?
Artist: I teach at the university.
Audio: Move closer to the micro-phone, then speak.
Artist: I teach at the university.
Audio: Which pages of the news-paper do you read?
Artist: The first and the second.
Audio: You mean you're interested in politics?
Artist: Yes.
Audio: Do you have political ambi-tions?
Artist: I have no political ambitions.
Audio: Speak into the microphone.
Artist: I have no political ambitions. I'm only interested in theatre.
Audio: Does political theatre concern you?
Artist: I support the arts. I don't know when it's the arts… when it's politics…
Audio: The title of your play – *Biokhraphia*?
Artist: Yes. Yes.
Audio: What's the play about? What does it talk about?
Artist: About…
Audio: Wait… what about the title?

Artist: *Biokhraphia* is made up of three words: Bio from bios, which means life. Khara, which in Arabic means 'shit'. And, Phia… in Arabic means 'in it'. So, it's a shitty biography.

Artist moves to a chair stage left. Her image appears in the screen that the artist was physically standing behind before (video projection of the artist takes the place of the artist).

Audio: Indeed. So what's the play about?
Artist: The play… I enter. I have a tape recorder with me. I press 'PLAY'. My voice comes out. It starts asking me….
Audio: Yeah, Yeah… we've been through this… what are you doing?… telling me what I already know? In the play, you say you like homosexuals because they are incapable of being soldiers.
Artist: This is discriminatory lan-guage and I would never speak this way.
Audio: Are you denying your sym-pathetic language with regard to homosexuality in the play?
Artist: No.
Audio: Speak into the microphone.
Artist: No.
Audio: Are you denying your oppo-sition to the military in your play?
Artist: No.
Audio: Was this statement censored out of your play? Yes or no?
Artist: Yes.
Audio: Speak into the microphone.
Artist: Yes. It was censored.
Audio: And despite all this, you did not comply with that order.
Artist: Yes, I did.
Audio: No, you didn't.

ARTIST: You said it, not me.

AUDIO: Me?

ARTIST: Yes, you.

AUDIO: Are you trying to get the better of me?

VIDEO: But there's a scene I didn't present in compliance with the censorship order.

AUDIO: Which scene?

VIDEO: The one at the beginning. The actress enters… she squats… she shits a tape… she shoves it into the tape recorder… and plays it.

AUDIO: Ooff… so vulgar… you're incredible… you think this is daring? That you're provoking the audience? We should thank the censors for stopping you from doing these things… You… you don't think about what your father would say if he saw you doing these things? Your mother?? Your in-laws??? Your students?

VIDEO: If we can't talk about sex… or about the military… or about religion… or the presidency, what are we supposed to talk about in theatre?

AUDIO: There are many other subjects you can talk about.

VIDEO: Like what?

AUDIO: You can talk about inheritance… love… about war, and how ugly it is… A lot of things.

VIDEO: Can we talk about Syria?

AUDIO: What do you mean by that? Of course not. But you can talk about Israel.

VIDEO: Yeah, and what do we say… that Israel is our enemy? Tell me something we don't know.

AUDIO: This country is full of conflict and the censors are here to protect you. At the same time, they are giving you a margin of freedom within which to work. But, it's limited by some broad red lines. And, as the Americans would say, "the devil lies in the details". Therefore, take my advice and don't get into details. Keep busy with the generalities.

The video projection of the artist shoots herself in the head with a pistol. The actress gets up quickly from the chair and returns to the set. She runs to both the tape and video recorders.
She presses 'REWIND'… 'STOP'… then, 'PLAY'.

AUDIO: This country is full of conflict and the censors are here to protect you. At the same time, they are giving you a margin of freedom within which to work. But, it's limited by some broad red lines. And as the Americans would say, "the devil lies in the details". Therefore, take my advice and don't get into details. Keep busy with the generalities.

VIDEO: Ok.

AUDIO: How often do you sleep

with your husband?

VIDEO: Do you want the details or do you want me to keep busy with the generalities?

AUDIO: Don't be impertinent. I'm asking you a very clear question.

VIDEO: Sorry, go ahead.

AUDIO: How often do you sleep with your husband?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: When was the last time you slept with him?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: Do you enjoy it?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: Was he your first?

VIDEO: That's personal.

AUDIO: Did you have other sexual experiences?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: Do you masturbate?

VIDEO: You don't have the right to ask these kind of questions.

AUDIO: Do you use condoms?

VIDEO: I said that's none of your business.

AUDIO: Do you keep your eyes open or closed?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: Do you guys make noises?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: Do you guys talk?

VIDEO: That's none of your business…

AUDIO: Do you watch porn?

VIDEO: That's none of your business… none of your business!!… none of your business!!!…

AUDIO: Ok, Ok, Ok… All right. How many times a week?

VIDEO: Honestly, ever since I got married…

AUDIO: Speak to the microphone.

VIDEO: Ever since I got married, I've been recording in a little notebook how many times we sleep together, my husband and I: The date, the time, the number of times, the positions, whether I enjoyed it or not. On our tenth wedding anniversary, I did an inventory and put it on paper. Would you like me to read it to you?

ARTIST: That's not necessary…

AUDIO: Of course it is.

VIDEO: In the last ten years, we slept together 1,143 times. 231 times during the day. 912 at night. On the bed, 822. In the living room, 285. 11 times in the bathroom. In the stairwell, 8 times. 3 failed attempts in the elevator. 41 times during trips outside of Lebanon. As for positions: There are 3 fundamental positions…

AUDIO: That's ok… that's ok… what concerns me is whether or not you enjoyed it.

VIDEO: Oh. This is a subject I have calculated in detail. I found that in the first year and in the last year, we slept together the same amount of times… 92 times. 92 means 23 times each season. But, this can't be right… because according to my note-book, in the first three months, we only slept together three times. I think maybe because it was cold? In the next three months, 15 times. The next season, 52. So it was mounting. In the last three months, 22 times. That means that, if we wanted to take the median average, we have to take the second and last season, because the difference isn't so big. So, if we take the median average for three months, it comes out to 18.5 times. That means that during the week, we used to sleep with each other 1.42 times. That means 0.20 times per day.

Which is also not correct, because, according to my notebook, we only slept with each other on weekends. That means we have to divide the number by two to get what the average is per day. Which is 0.71. 0.71 is 0.29 less than what is required for me to orgasm. So, it's safe for us to say that in the first year and in the tenth year, my sexlife was a failure. On the other hand, the fourth year has the best ratios, 1.16, which, in practical terms, means we were enjoying it by 0.16 more than required. And this number was the cause of my ailments. Because, it's true that we were enjoying one full time, but there was 0.16 that was never completed. Which was the main source of my frustration.

ARTIST: This isn't true… what are you talking about??

AUDIO: Frustration! That's exactly what I wanted to get at! Do you think that this is your generation's problem?

VIDEO: I think so. Yes… I think so.

AUDIO: Then, this is what you think caused your generation to reach a dead-end?

VIDEO: Not at all. My generation hasn't reached a dead-end.

AUDIO: But there's a feeling out there that your generation is bankrupt. They have nothing to say.

VIDEO: I'm going to tell you something. If you heard about an institution on the brink of bankruptcy, would you put your money in it or would you take it out? There are huge institutions that are supporting us. They're giving us funds to do theatre. Why do you think that is?

Because we're at a dead-end?? That's nonsense and it's ridiculous. I've heard a lot of talk about our generation falling apart. I even heard that our generation would fall apart in January, to be exact. What happened?? We're already into April and our generation still hasn't fallen apart. There are people who are putting up money… is it reasonable to say that people are putting money into a place where they have no faith? I'm going to be even more honest. We, last month, asked for $400,000 from international associations that I'm not going to name. They gave us $840,000. In reality, we took $750,000. So that we don't beat around the bush, let's put it this way: We asked for $400,000 and they gave us $750,000. We, as a generation, find it imperative to confirm…

The artist pauses both tape and video players.
She opens the faucets, attached to the bottom of the screen, and drains her liquid image from the screen into small bottles. Each bottle has the same image of the artist that was on the screen. She puts these small bottles on a tray. Walks up the theatre aisle towards the exist. Sits at a table.
She places a sign on the table and waits for the audience to get up. The sign says 'For Sale: $20/Bottle'.

THE END

Ode to Rhinos

Nadine R. L. Touma

Nadine Touma, born in 1972, received a BA in Women Studies and Studio Art at Wellesley College. Projects she worked on include: Exhibiting in the *Hamra Street Project,* Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, 2000, *Missing Links*, Ashkal Alwan, Cairo, 2001 at Townhouse gallery. She co-directed with Elie Karam and scenographed *Ta'a Kul Mjaddara Ya Sabi*, Ayloul Festival, 1999; and directed, wrote and scenographed *Hawa Ab*, Ayloul Festival, 1998. In collaboration with Elie Karam, Touma presented an installation, *Revisiting the Human Rights Charter*, Espace SD, Beirut, 1998.

An Introduction To What Comes After

Sandouq El Ferjeh is a street performance based on a year of field research on rhinoplasty practices in Lebanon, interviews with seven plastic surgeons and fifty-five female patients, investigating the 'how' and the 'why' the region has been witnessing, in the last four years, this extensive widespread phenomenon.

Elements of the performance:

- 1001 handmade Marzipan noses made from almond paste, sugar and orange blossom water, representing four stereotypical nose shapes: African, Native American, Semitic, and Marilyn Monroe.
- A vegetable seller's pickup truck, *Sousou the Coquette*, equipped with a megaphone.
- A Sandouq El Ferjeh (inspired by the old-fashioned peeping boxes), containing a series of images consisting of pictures which documents the nose-making process, aged pictures of Egyptian female film stars stitched with needle and thread, illustrations of *sindibad* from old European children's books, handmade replicas of famous oil paintings and images from an old sandouq (box) from Aleppo, Syria.
- A bumper sticker saying: *Handle With Care* NOSE *Thank You.*
- The artist and three female performers peddling noses.

The noses were hung in plexiglass, fluorescent boxes installed in the back of the pick-up, *Sousou the Coquette*, which toured Beirut while the artist announced on a megaphone, in humourous rhymes, the great wonders of the noses, their tastes and shapes, inciting people to fight the monolithic Lebanese nose – with all its political and social implications – and much more. *Sousou the Coquette* made several stops at various locations in the city of Beirut: Noses were sold and stories of lost noses told, people in the streets peeped at the images showed and ate noses with mouths opened and closed.

The following texts were created a few months after the street performance. They are reflections on rhinoplasty practices and on-going adventures through nose stories.

Adolescent Voluminous Pencil Drawings

I turned off my bedroom lights touching myself with eyes closed feeling every curve every inch the holes the bone the arch the fleshy parts the wetness inside the width the length. Ten of age, my adolescent nose growing at a rate of a kilometre a minute, crossing a mirror happened at a disproportionate ratio of time/reflection. I drew the shadow of my profile day after day, erased black pencil marks on the same white wall marking my rate, (3+6=9+3=12+3=15+…) measuring the difference, no it was not a nose drawing distorted by light but a shadow that said it all: The kids staring at me at school, the teacher not looking in my eyes but at my nose, my parents asking me if I was ok, my dog fixated on licking my new additive volume and my compulsive panic reaction of, "Oh my god I cannot read or write anymore because my nose is blocking my vision."

I turned the lights on rushed to my parents' room screaming and crying, "I don't want my nose."

A family joke arose from the adolescent nose drama that my dad used on me to try and exorcise my agony, he would call me from across the room and when I would answer or turn to face him he would say, "Ouch! You just hit me with your nose!"

And so began my nose phantasmagoric obsessions observations obliterations.

Mouwahhidat

Years later, many love-hate stories apart, millions of nose files rushing through my mind, a fetish of sucking my lovers' noses, wars and colonial mandates beginning and ending, a post-Picot era of unrest, many travels between East and West and very few between North and South, a post-, then pre-Shaarawi Ottoman unveiling in Egypt, and an endless non-ending end of Arab Nationalism, emerged in the Levantine area a new social party with political implications called *MOUWAHHIDAT: Women Oneness With Rhinos.* Noses of all shapes and colours were being sacrificed to the goddesses above, eliminating difference, celebrating oneness… finally the East and the West were bridged where the Western nose sat on the Eastern face all boundaries erased and Saids' Orientalism thrown into a cleansing ritualistic bonfire. Rich and poor, Christians Muslims Jews and atheists, leftists centrists and rightists, all seeking to be different from one another yet one with the Rhinos.

The Mouwahhidat grew larger and larger, attracting more and more people, organising charity balls for women who did not have the money but wanted to join, with slogans like: "Your Life or Your Nose" "Free from Nose Testing", "Pacifist Rhinoplasty", "Love Yourself, Get Rid of Your Nose", "Nose on Credit, 5% Interest"

Etcetera… Etcetera… Etcetera…

A male plastic surgeon was chosen every year as the new pop idol of the Mouwahhidat. Posters and T-shirts donning his pictures were printed, interviews on all televisions, videotapes of his Mouwahhidat success stories and Rhinoplasty's life-
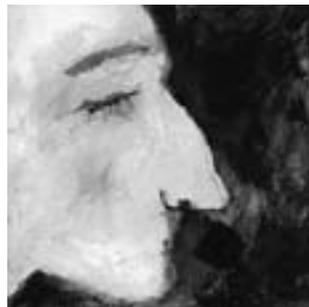
Drawings by Hayla

changing experiences, autographed photographs of new noses, audio tapes with his favourite Rhinoplasty recipes (one of my personal favourites was one doctor who would not only change your nose but also your facial expression by adding an eternal smile, or frown, depending on what the Mouwahhidat needed to look more beautiful than ever and more like each other.)

As a gift (and we thank them for it), the generous Mouwahhidat have offered us a *Stitch Your Own Nose* card with a needle and blue thread. Enjoy drawing your own blue-line Rhino boundaries.
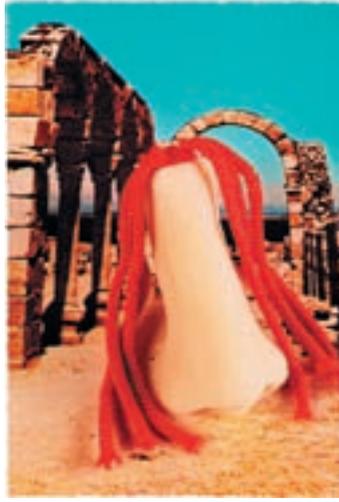
Rhinoanarchy

At dusk in a remote village on a faraway mountain in a tiny stone house under an unknown Roman bridge in a dark room smelling of wet spring grass, met for the first time a group of Rhinoanarchists, rebelling against the Mouwahhidat, fighting the Rhino-globalisation movement and the fast-Rhino-clinic-chains springing out everywhere, discussing Rhinos at large, Derridas' epistemology and extensive work on the source of the word 'nose', Foucaults' nose in criminology essays and the usage of nose torture in prisons, the loss of many Southern and Eastern archetypal noses and Naccaches' work on the Babylonians' adoration of the 'long nose'.

One of their first activities was to invite a group of multicultural politically-correct Rhinos to the Levant, to reintroduce them slowly into their communities of origin without wreaking culture shock on the indigenous masses and take them sightseeing. The Rhinoanarchists were kind enough to provide us with some photographs documenting the journey of the Rhinos.
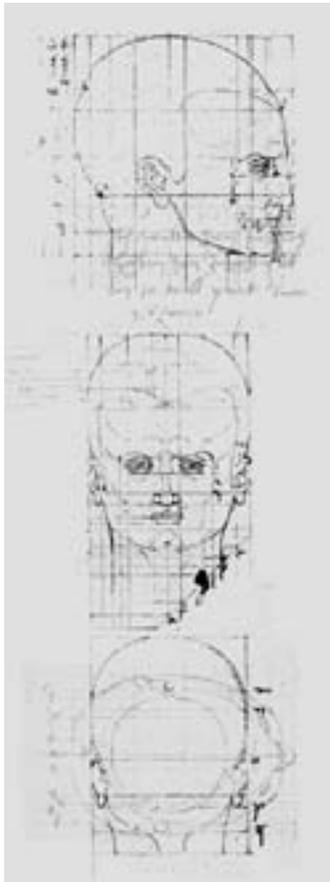
Rhinophobia

Rhinophobia, – as found in the American Medical Encyclopedia – is defined as a sickness that appeared in the Western Hemisphere and the North American Continent during September 2001 after Christ and post 9/11. Its manifestations include the following reactions at the sight of a Levantine nose: Hyperventilation, severe chronic malfunction of the bladder, a twitching of the upper lip accompanied by a deep unquenchable desire for sex.

A cure has yet to be found – but the American Congress has just passed a bill allocating millions of dollars for medical research.

A Conclusion To What Will Come Later

After what we hope has been an extensive overview of the current Rhino situation worldwide, we hope to see your comments and hear your nose stories on **rhinoleb@hotmail**, the official address for Rhinos.

EXHIBITS

The Crows, Bita Fayyazi
Copyright, Khalil Rabah
Being there…, Randa Shaath

الغربان

بيتا فايازي

بيتا فايازٍي فنانة لها ١٣ سنة من الخبرة في فنّ الخزف والنحت. شاركت في أكثر من عشرين معرضاً ومحترفاً فنياً، في إيران، كوبنهاغن، لندن، السويد، نيودلهي.

«لو كان للناس أجنحة واكتسوا بريش أسـود، لكانت قلـة منـهم تتمتع بذكاء الغربان» هنري وورد بيتشر.

أول ظهور للغربان في أعمالي كان في «تجربة ٩٨»، وهو عرض ينتمي إلى الفنون الفانية، حيث قدّم أربعة فنانين، من خلفيات وثقافات مختلفة، أعمالهم في بيت مهجور ومعدّ للهدم، من دون أن يتجاهلوا طبيعة المكان، وما تطرحه عليهم من احتمالات.

وكان عمـلـي عبـارة عـن عـدد مـن الغربان الموضوعة على صناديق الفاكهة. وهـذه الأعمـال دمرت مـع البيت، ولاقت مصيره. في هذا المعرض شكّل فضاء البيت المهجور محترفاً للفنانين ومكاناً للعرض في الوقت نفسه.

كثيرة هي لقـاءاتي غير المتوقعـة مـع الغربان. قد يقول البعض إنها مصادفات مشؤومة، والبعض الآخر: فأل سيء. إنما أنا أقول: ربما هي ضرب من الطرافة أو العبث أو السخرية، لكنها مصادفات فاتنة على الدوام. وأحسب أني أعيش نوعاً من التماهي مع هذه المصادفات.

«الـغراب الـعادي هو في الواقع طائر غير عـادي» راسـبيران كـريسـناسـوامـي لاكسمان، رسام كاريكاتور.

The Crows

Bita Fayyazi

Bita Fayyazi is an Iranian artist with a 13-year work experience in ceramics and sculpture. She has exhibited in Iran and internationally, in Copenhagen, London, Sweden and New Delhi.

If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would be clever enough to be crows,
Henry Ward Beecher

Fayyazi first began working with the figure of the crow in *Experiment 98*, an exhibition of ephemeral art in an old and abandoned house marked for demolition. With three other artists, she ventured into reconfiguring that space and its history. Bita's contribution was a large number of sculpted crows placed on top of used fruit crates. All the work was subsequently destroyed along with the house.

Encounters with crows have been a common occurrence for Fayyazi. Although she feels many would consider this situation as sinister or as a bad omen; for her, this occurrence is filled with humour, folly and even irony. The crow, for Bita, is a fascinating presence and deeply resonating.

The common crow is really an uncommon bird,
Raispuram Krishnaswami Laxman,
Cartoonist

حقوق النشر

خليل رباح

عرض خليل رباح في ألمانيا والقاهرة وسيينا وباريس وبلجيكا. وهو مرتبط مع «غاليري قناديل» في القدس. كما اشترك في البينالي الحادي عشر في سيدني، البينالي الرابع والعشرين في ساو باولو، بينالي كوريا الجنوبية.

عرفت الـهـويـة الفلسطينية المعاصرة امتزاجاً بين الـهـويـة الأصـلـية والهويات والثقافات التي اكتسبها الفلسطينيون، طوعاً أو قسراً، بتأثير الأحداث التي لم يمر عليها زمن طويل. والأرجح أن هوية ثقافية فلسطينية جديدة تولد، مستندة إلى مسارات مـعـقـدة مـن هـذه الثقافة أو تلك، تتضمـن الخسارات والألم والعنف، إنما أيضاً إمكان التـغـيـيـر. نستطيـع أن نـرى في أعمال خليل رباح أثر كل هذه القوى، كما في عمله «وشم»، حيث ينسل خيوط الكوفية، ويرسم الذاكرة المـوشـومـة بـالـعـلاقـة بين الخيط والنسيـج. كذلك في «نصف صورة ذاتية»، حيث يبدو الشاش الذي يلف الوجه شرنقة أو طبقة جلدية لم تكتمل، وأخيراً في العمل الذي قدّمه في بيروت، بعنوان «حقوق النشر».

Copyright

Khalil Rabah

Khalil Rabah has exhibited in Germany, Cairo, Paris and Belgium; in addition to an ongoing engagement with Gallery Anadiel, in Jerusalem. He has also participated in several Biennales, including the 11th Biennale of Sydney, the XXIV Biennale of Sao Paulo and the Kwangju Biennale in South Korea.

As a result of recent historical events, contemporary Palestinian identity has become an amalgam of numerous cultures to which Palestinians have been voluntarily and/or forcibly, exposed. A new Palestinian cultural identity is being forged, based on the complex processes of one culture feeding off another, an experience which involves loss, pain and violation, but also the possibility for a transformation. It is these processes and dynamics, which can be seen in the work of Rabah, such as in *Tattoo* (1997), where the unweaving of the pattern of the 'kaffiyeh' delineates an absent screen that traces the memory marking the relationship between the thread and the fabric. In his *Half Self-Portrait* (1997), the medical plaster covering parts of the artist's face forms a cocoon, or an epidermal layer, that does not harden into a crust.

Khalil Rabah's intervention at the *Home Works* Forum, in Beirut, was entitled *Copyright*.

أن تكون هناك...

رندا شعث

رندا شعث مصوّرة فلسطينية، ولدت في الولايات المتحدة الاميركية، ١٩٦٣. مجازة من الجامعة الأميركية في القاهرة – الدراسات الشرق أوسطية. ماجيستير في علوم الاتصالات البشرية، من جامعة مينيسوتا. عاشت في بيروت، ١٩٦٩–١٩٧٧، وتعيش حالياً في القاهرة. عملت في قسم التصوير في وكالة الصحافة الفرنسية في مصر وغزة، في العام ١٩٩٤. مصورة في جريدة الأهرام الأسبوعية منذ عام ١٩٩٣.

معرض صور فوتوغرافية مستقاة من مشاريع عدة في فلسطين وبلاد النوبة، ومن الحياة اليومية في القاهرة وجزرها المنسية. تعود جذور مشروعها التوثيقي الأول إلى العام ١٩٨٨. بدأت في مخيم كندا، وهو المخيم الوحيد للاجئين الفلسطينيين في مصر، ويقع على الحدود مع غزة. أمضت فيه سنة، تاركةً للاجئين أن يقودوها إلى الأمكنة التي لم تكن قد صورتها من قبل وأن يطلعوها على جوانب أساسية ومهمة في حياتهم.

تتحدّث رندا شعث عن تجربتها، قائلة: «أصور الذين أحبهم وأقدرهم. وأركز على عناصر الحياة اليومية التي يشترك فيها البشر جميعاً. أبحث عن تلك الأشياء التي تجمعنا وأستكشف طرقهم في البقاء واستراتيجيات المحافظة على إنسانيتهم التي تتم، غالباً، في ظروف بالغة الصعوبة.

Being there…

Randa Shaath

Randa Shaath is a Palestinian, born in the United States in 1963. She received a BA in Middle Eastern Studies from the American University in Cairo, and an MA in Visual Mass Communication from the University of Minnesota. She lived in Beirut from 1969 until 1977. Currently, she resides in Cairo, Egypt. She worked as a photo stringer for AFP in Egypt and Gaza, in 1994, and has worked as a photographer for the *Al Ahram* Weekly Newspaper since 1993.

Shaath's exhibit portrayed photographs from various projects she had worked on in Palestine, Nubian villages and the forgotten islands of Cairo's daily life. Her first documentary project dates back to 1988 in Canada Camp, the only Palestinian refugee camp in Egypt, bordering Gaza. She spent a year living in the camp, allowing refugees to guide her to places that she had not photographed, and where they pointed out the more important aspects of their lives.

Photographing those she admired, she focused on elements of everyday life, elements that everyone finds in common. Through her photographs, she explored the ways in which people survive and the strategies they adopt to preserve their humanity, often under extreme circumstances.

FILMS

Al Mumiaa - The Days of Counting the Years, Shadi Abdel Salam
Tahadi, Nizar Hassan
Zinat: A Special Day, Ibrahim Mokhtari
Baalbeck, Ghassan Salhab, Mohammad Soueid, Akram Zaatari
The Arab Dream - Homage by Assassination - Cyber Palestine, Elia Suleiman
The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins, Jalal Toufic

المومياء
يوم أن تحصى السنين

Al Mumiaa
The Days of Counting the Years

شادي عبد السلام

Shadi Abdel Salam

يكتشف ونيس وأخوه البكر، بعد موت أبيه زعيم قبيلة الحربات، أن أهل قبيلته كانوا يعيشون على نبش كهوف الجبل، واستخراج المومياءات المدفونة فيها وبيعها. يتم اغتيال الأخ البكر، ويتزعم ونيس القبيلة ليكتشف، أثناء عمله، أن هذه المومياءات التي يسرقونها ويبيعونها، ليست مجرد جثث موتى مجهولين أو نقوش بائدة، بل هي بقايا رفات أجداده.

فيلم ٣٥ ملم، ٩٠ دقيقة، ١٩٦٩

After the death of his father, the chief of the Horabat Tribe, Wanis, and his elder brother discover that the tribe has been living off stealing mummies and their belongings from inside the mountain. Following the assassination of his brother, Wanis, now the chief of the tribe, comes to realise through his interactions with an archeological mission to Thebes that what surrounded him were, in fact, the remains of his ancestors and not mere dead objects or inscriptions. It is a film about memory and consciousness.

Film 35mm, 90 minutes, 1969

تحدّي Tahadi

نزار حسن Nizar Hassan

يُكلَّف مخرج بصناعة فيلم عن الإنتفاضة، عن الطفل محمد الدرة تحديداً. وفجأة يجد فريق العمل نفسه وسط ظروف بالغة الصعوبة: طرقات مقفلة، منع تجوّل ومعارك هائلة. وسرعان ما يجد فريق العمل نفسه عاجزاً عن الانتقال من مكان إلى آخر، وتصبح أوروبا أقرب إلى رام الله من غزة.
فيلم ٣٥ ملم، ٢٠ دقيقة، ٢٠٠١

In *Tahadi*, a filmmaker is commissioned to do a film about the Intifada, based on the footage of the lethal shooting of young Mohammed El Durra. He quickly finds himself in the midst of a mad attempt at making a film in impossible conditions: Road closures, curfews and terrible combat. It soon becomes quite impossible for the film crew to move from one place to another, and Europe seems to be closer to Ramallah than Gaza.
Film 35mm, 20 minutes, 2001

يوم غير عادي
في حياة زينات

Zinat: A Special Day

ابراهيم مختاري

Ibrahim Mokhtari

زينات شخصية مميزة. شاعرة وناشطة في مجال الصحة العامة، فضلاً عن كونها أماً وعضواً في مجلس العموم. أصلها من كِشمْ، جزيرة في الخليج الفارسي. وكانت أول امرأة أسفرت عن وجهها، عندما بدأت في مجال العمل العام ١٩٨٥ في قريتها. ساهمت، من خلال عملها، في تأسيس أكثر من دزينة من المراكز الصحية في مناطق نائية. وهي اليوم إحدى الشخصيات الأكثر شعبية في كشم، حيث فازت في انتخابات ١٩٩٩، لتصبح، بذلك، أول امرأة تدخل مجلس العموم.

فيلم وثائقي، ٥٦ دقيقة، ٢٠٠٠

Zinat, an outstanding figure – poet, health worker, mother and council member – from Qeshm, an island in the Persian Gulf, was the first woman to unveil her face upon starting her activities in 1985. Her work helped establish more than a dozen health centres in remote areas. She is, today, one of the most popular public figures in Qeshm, where she won the 1999 elections and became the first female council-member.

Video Documentary, 56 minutes, 2000

بعلبك Baalbeck

غسان سلهب Ghassan Salhab

محمد سويد Mohammad Soueid

أكرم الزعتري Akram Zaatari

يخرج صحافي ومصور لتغطية حفلة لصباح فخري،
لكنهما يضلان طريقهما بين بيروت وبعلبك، وتتكرر رحلتهما
ثلاث مرات، لتعكس أحلام الوطن وهواجسه.

فيديو، ٦٠ دقيقة، ٢٠٠١

A journalist and a photographer drift between
Beirut and Baalbeck. This journey is repeated three
times, in three different ways, evoking parallels to
current issues and the confusion in Lebanon's
present state.

Video, 60 minutes, 2001

The Arab Dream   الحلم العربي

Elia Suleiman   إيليا سليمان

صوّر هذا الشريط في القدس والناصرة ورام الله ويندرج في سلسلة «نهاية الألفية» من إنتاج قناة آرتي الثقافية. يقدم المخرج في شريطه هذا تأملاته حول صراعه الشخصي للحفاظ على فسحة جمالية، والدفاع عنها في حقل يتضاءل فيه الأمل، وتسكن النزعة الفاشية طيات يومياته.

فيديو، ٢٦ دقيقة، ١٩٩٨

Filmed on location in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Ramallah, *The Arab Dream* was commissioned by Arté TV as part of the *End of the Millennium* series. In this film, Elia Suleiman meditates on his own struggle to safeguard an aesthetic territory in a site where hope is diminishing and a fascistic spirit is haunting the everyday.

Video, 26 minutes, 1998

Homage by Assassination

تكريم بالقتل

Elia Suleiman

إيليا سليمان

يقدم الفيلم شخصية إ. س وهو فلسطيني مقيم في نيويورك يحاول كتابة نص سينمائي خلال حرب الخليج. في انقطاعه المتزايد، وانعزاله عن العالم الخارجي، وفي ضيق محيطه، يحاول إ. س أن يمسك ويعيّن واقعاً مكسّراً ومتناقضاً عن حرب تدور في مكان بعيد هو موطنه.

فيلم ٣٥ ملم، ٢٨ دقيقة، ١٩٩٢

Homage by Assassination depicts E.S., a Palestinian who is writing a film script in New York during the Gulf war, and his growing disconnectedness as he shuts himself off from the exterior world. In a claustrophobic environment, he attempts to capture, define and take control of his fractured reality, a paradoxical reality of a war taking place, far away, at home.

Film 35mm, 28 minutes, 1992

Cyber Palestine سايبر فلسطين

Elia Suleiman إيليا سليمان
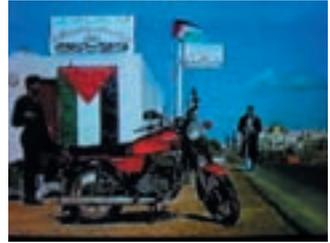
يروي هذا الشريط قصة الفلسطينيين مريم ويوسف العائدين للعيش في غزة، ومصاعب العيش فيها تحت الاحتلال الإسرائيلي. من أرض التوراة وفي بلاد الصراع اليومي تحفل هذه المأساة – الملهاة (التراجيكوميديا) بمفارقات مذهلة. إنتاج «مشروع بيت لحم ٢٠٠٠»، وهو جزء من احتفالات الألفية الثالثة التي دَعت إليها السلطة الفلسطينية.

فيديو، ١٦ دقيقة، ٢٠٠٠

Cyber Palestine is the tale of a modern-day Mary and Joseph, two Palestinian returnees living in Gaza, and the hardships they face under the Israeli occupation. Coming from the land of the Bible, this tragi-comic tale has surprising revelations.

Cyber Palestine was commissioned by the *Bethlehem 2000 Project* of the Palestinian National Authority as part of the millennium commemorations.
Video, 16 minutes, 2000

The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins

نوم العقل: هذا الدم المراق في عروقي

Jalal Toufic

جلال توفيق

إن الموت العضوي لإنسان ليس شيئاً مقارنةً بالموت العضوي لحيوان، ممثلاً بموت ثور في حلبة مصارعة. الظاهرة الوحيدة التي تضارع في حِدّتها موت ثور في حلبة مصارعة أو موت بقرة في مسلخ هي قيامة إنسان: لَعازِر خارجاً من القبر. نلقى المرأة الحيّة في قصيدة ت. أس. اليوت «أغنية حب من ج. ألفرد بروفروك» وهي تسوّي وسادتها لتنام حين تصادف اللاميت. لماذا تسوّي الوسادة أيّها المشاهد أو القارئ، لماذا أنت نعسانٌ الى هذه الدرجة؟ من أي كشفٍ تحاول أن تتملّص؟ «أُخبر الجميع كلَّ شيء»، يقول لَعازر في قصيدة أليوت. أوَلا يشمل هذا «الجميعُ» لَعازر نفْسه؟ هل عاد لَعازر ليخبر نفسه عن الموت؟ أوَجَدَ نفْسَه نائماً إذّاك.

فيديو، ٣٢ دقيقة، ٢٠٠٢

The organic dying of a human is as nothing compared to that of an animal, exemplarily of a bull in a corrida; the only phenomenon that equals in intensity the death of a bull in a corrida or of a cow in a slaughterhouse is the resurrection of a human, Lazarus coming out from the grave. The living woman in T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is found settling her pillow to sleep when she encounters the undead. Why are you settling the pillow, why are you so sleepy? What disclosure are you thus trying to elude? "Tell you all," Lazarus says in Eliot's poem, and would that "all" not also include himself? Did Lazarus come back to tell himself about death? And did he find himself sleeping then?
Video, 32 minutes, 2002