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1. 2nd edition.

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By the Same Author

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To the forgetful grateful, and to my untimely collaborators

Author's Note to the Second Edition

Why do a second edition of *Distracted*? Because it is now starkly clear to me that there is a limited number of concepts, figures and postures that a writer is here to create and possibly elaborate (in my case: freezing, diegetic silence-over, over-turn, radical closure with irruption of unworldly ahistorical fully-formed entities, the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster, etc.). The extra material that was in my first book still awaits its writers—paradoxically getting rid of it is indirectly a way of avoiding future imitators.

This version of *Distracted* is a second edition, in relation not to the one published by Station Hill Press in 1991, but to the shorter version that was sent in March 1988 to the Register of Copyrights at the Library of Congress as well as to a dozen publishers, and that was rejected by the latter and never published as such. Therefore, were a future academic to decide to indulge in comparative studies of the various editions of *Distracted*, he should consult the first version (registration number TXU 310-041) or else, equivalently, only the first seventy one pages of the book published by Station Hill. That book is too long consequently of the then excessive solitude of its author (see the aphorism on pages 79-80 of the present edition). Now that I teach, I am no longer excessively solitary.

Distracted and (*Vampires*) form the two volumes of one book. I wish to thank George Quasha, the publisher of the first editions of both volumes, for gracefully agreeing to the publication of their second editions by other publishers.

Thanks to Ralph Gibson for permission to use the photograph that appears on page 107.

The letter to Réda Bensmaïa was first published in *Gilles Deleuze: A Reason to Believe in this World*, *Discourse* 20.3, Fall 1998, pp. 4-10.

— *Are you saying this to me?*

— *Also to myself. One should speak solely when also speaking to oneself. Only then is there a dialogue.*

J.T.

Twenty-four years old, and still not one book written, not one feature film made, not one suicide attempted!

I wrote a page. Feeling dissatisfied with it, I began crossing out. I crossed out an infinite number of pages.

On the subway train, a father is teaching his child: “Parallel lines meet at infinity.” Two parallel tracks converge. The child: “Is this infinity?”

The tourist is not someone who does not find the places he is searching for. He is someone who on asking, “Where is the place — —?” always gets for answer: “But you’re in it!”

The foreigner’s exile: spelling one’s name. “*J* as in *Jalal*, *a* as in *aphoristic*, *l* as in *laconic*, *a* as in *abroad*, *l* as in *unlike*.”

Never buy a city map, for without it there is no city, just streets that intersect, and others, obstinate, that don’t—becoming dead ends.

I’ve been in Paris now for three weeks. Both hotels and universities are full. All the better. Are some of these hotel rooms occupied by the likes of the Kaplan of Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest*, an in-existent person constructed by the CIA as a decoy to fool spies? Thornhill, the protagonist of Hitchcock’s film, works in advertisement. How appropriate that he gets

mistaken for Kaplan: “We construct a self from the data given (the paper, the cards, the ticket, the hat, the location), the correlatives for a particular character... These ‘clues’ signify a person—but he is absent; and so are we. In this shared absence we can easily merge: we can become the absent traveler” (Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*). By taking the place of an inexistent person, he has himself now to become absent so as not to be killed by the spies, or imprisoned by the police who mistakenly believe he murdered someone. We do not take the place of the absent person, only his absence. In this “shared absence,” the differences between the two men (Kaplan’s trousers don’t fit Thornhill; Kaplan has dandruff, Thornhill doesn’t...) are irrelevant.

It is to protect the “guest” from losing his identity in the anonymous hotel room that he’s made to sign his name in the register. In Jim Jarmush’s *Stranger Than Paradise*, the three protagonists, two men and a woman, park at a motel. The two men go inside and register for a two-bed room. As planned she sneaks into the room a little later. But, not having signed the register, she becomes absent: the two men go on several outings without taking her along.

The hotel manager shows him around his room. A few days later, he moves to a different floor. The manager shows him around his new room: a replica of the other one. The manager drops a piece of information about the presence of an item that was also in the first room but wasn’t mentioned during the earlier presentation. A hotel room cannot be known by scrutiny, but by a lateral movement from one room to another, from one account to another.

Don’t get lost in the myriad paths my sauntering produced in

my small room.

Suddenly he felt he could no longer endure loneliness. He spoke to the first woman he met in the street. No response. “But what do I lack?” “Nothing. You lack nothing.” And then, with a certain tenderness: “Not even a woman.”

A woman enters the café where I am sitting and smiles. Someone must be waiting for her. Yes. Did the solitary person I am ever smile on entering a café? Did I ever come running into any place—that is, when not racing against a heavy rain? Harsh rain is nowadays my only way to get somewhere on time. It is my alarm clock, the one with the most beautiful sound. The cafe in which I am sitting drenched has glass doors. It is raining outside soundlessly as if in a silent film. When rain falls harshly, even on streets, it feels it is falling on roofs. Except for a few films, I now go to the cinema only to rediscover that most social of feelings: *being late*—late in going out of the cinema: a few fade-outs in the film, but a myriad of them during projection, for the eyes keep closing from time to time.

Whitman knew how to stay just long enough to leave too early—that is, not too late.

Five minutes before the train moves. To the left, to the right: more trains. No horizon. Inside the compartment, no faces, just newspapers. The train moves. The world!

Through the moving train’s windows he can see the many stopped trains at Howard station, Chicago. He writes: “I love the roofs of trains: they are like the backs of whales, conjuring a *Moby Dick* Whitman could have written.”

After writing about film slug, he looks from the window of

the moving train: “Was what passed by while I was writing a slug to maintain sync?”

A car cemetery and, much farther, human cemeteries. It is right the two should be separated. None of those lengthy phrases that join a crushed car and a killed human being. One thing following the other not causally, but because the tracks happened to pass here and not there.

Even the ghosts of the cemeteries have left the small towns for cities.

I’m amazed to hear of people committing suicide by drowning in the Seine: but for the Seine, I may have attempted suicide.

A lake’s water after the rower has passed, the reflections closing again not merely because he has moved on, but because he did not fully exist as he passed through the lake.

A caw. Through me flew a bird. My apprehension that it would perch inside me, that I might become rooted in its tired wings.

Lightness: wings themselves have become heavy, cumbersome, something to be discarded.

The localization, the in-focus of what should remain vibrational is an itch. Hence this eccentric body that instead of scratching the itch reacts to it by becoming in its entirety a vibrating body.

To the blind all that is not an edge is an abyss.

5:30 in the morning. The sound of a passing car. Yet, outside, in

the darkness, no car to be seen. One hears sounds best at night, for then they are not mixed—with their sources.

Not too much yet overflowing, as in superfluidity.

Rather than the exhibitionistic extremism of those at the lower or higher end of the spectrum, the unobtrusive excess of those outside it.

Is it too early or too late? for I presently feel that it is too something.

Not yet time to write. At last, time to write no more! Not yet time to write. At last, time to write no more! There is no such thing as the right time to write: a period that would take place between the “not yet time to write” and the “time to write no more,” between writing as promise and writing as compromise.

A bookstore. The board has the inscription, “Old and New Books.” Yet how old is the board itself.

David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel found in their experiments on cats that up to four months after birth “the visual cortex is plastic enough to change its organization in response to the input from the retina... it is possible to delay the onset of the critical period by rearing kittens in total darkness, thereby allowing all other developmentally related changes to occur... This strategy, called dark-rearing, was first explored by Max S. Cynader... it enabled Cynader to initiate shifts in ocular dominance in cats that were as much as two years old” (Chiye Aoki and Philip Siekevitz, “Plasticity in Brain Development,” *Scientific American*, December 1988, p. 59). One can be the

contemporary of one's earliest childhood also in this sense and manner, thus averting the nostalgic, metaphorical relation to it (memory as metaphor: "*as a child*, I used to..."). Whether we come from Developing countries or not, we have to create our non-developed areas.

The difficulty of becoming part of the composition of remembered things is not the ostensible immateriality of the past. It rather consists in that the time needed for remembered things to compose the past is simultaneously the span it takes the one remembering to decompose. Nostalgia is this missed meeting.

If time is our mismatching with ourselves, then one's palm is a *joiner*: its time is, and its lines are the mismatching of many photographs of an absolutely smooth palm with not one line. Some interviewer should ask David Hockney if he believes in palmists, indeed if he himself is one.

The director was such a perfectionist that having a close-up of a person's palm, he redistributed its lines with make-up so that a palmist watching the film would be able to predict what will happen to that character.

We have to become (both come to be and befit) even what we are, passing along the way through the risk change entails. Only what does not change has control: it is appropriately called *the control sample*.

Reverence for oneself, never self-satisfaction.

Where are we to detect inexactitude if everything in the outside world is incorrigible? In the interior monologue.

There is no sloppiness in a universe of eternal recurrence, or rather the only sloppiness in a universe of eternal recurrence is one's unawareness of this recurrence, and hence one's attempt to approximate what one cannot miss.

A stranger arrives at the party where I am or the hotel where I am holidaying and tells me with an almost disarming certitude that we've met before: "Don't you remember?!" Notwithstanding that I am usually considered by my acquaintances to have a reliable memory, I do not have any recollection of having met him or her. This is one of the exemplary situations of the intimation of eternal recurrence. With eternal recurrence, the distinction between the recurrences becomes indeterminate so that each of the instances of the event can be not only subjectively but also objectively its first occurrence. This is what possibly happens to the woman of *Last Year at Marienbad*. The good and the bad memories that the woman and the man have or are suffering from in no way characterize the respective persons prior to the establishment of eternal recurrence, but belong to the latter: he can remember—somewhat inaccurately (there is a frequent discrepancy between the description he gives of what she was doing or wearing and what the images show)—because he is starting to evade eternal recurrence; she has a bad memory because she is at the first occurrence of the indistinguishable recurrences. Memory is staked out against not only forgetfulness (*Hiroshima mon amour*) but also the amnesia of eternal recurrence (*Last Year at Marienbad*).

The fact that something happened at a specific historical date does not as such make it unrepeatable and therefore an event. For if there is eternal recurrence, then that event will recur an infinity of times, each time at the same historical date. One way of considering eternal recurrence is to view it as a logical

consequence of postulating an infinite, open time and a finite set of energy configurations;² but if we view time as finite, and the Many-World interpretation of quantum physics as false, then countless recurrence is not a facet of the physical world, but will be introduced by man, through computer simulation. Therefore at least from this perspective, there is no contradiction between eternal recurrence and the production of the new. Indeed, the two main events, the two main paradigms of the new are: eternal recurrence and the will that the ordeal of the experience of countless recurrence is going to make possible (in *Last Year at Marienbad* the woman has to go through countless recurrence in order to be able to finally achieve the will to leave).³ Once these two main events are achieved, then anything that happens is an event since only that which is willed to recur eternally is then actualized.⁴

I like most, I'm best at, play. I hate games.

— Since...

— Bad: since an argument. Never indulge in the restless rest

2. In which case, eternal recurrence is not a form of temporal radical closure.

3. If we subscribe to Schopenhauer's view, are we going to have two sorts of will: the general will, the groundless thing-in-itself, not subject to time (and space) and causality; and then the will resulting from the experience of countless recurrence, which is going to force the first to objectify itself only according to certain criteria?

4. If our world is one that is repeatedly created anew, then everything is an event irrespective of eternal recurrence and the production of the will: "God's perpetual self-disclosures to the creatures mean that creation is renewed at each instant. Hence, no one with any understanding of the nature of the things can suffer boredom (*malal*), whether in this world or the next: '... no one in the cosmos becomes bored except him who has no unveiling and does not witness the renewal of creation constantly at each instant and does not witness God as Ever-creating perpetually.'" (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. 105).

of explanation. All explanations are excuses—unless, after a sober, awkward preparation of oneself (nothing comes quickly, certainly not quickness—everything happens suddenly), and by an unexplainable metamorphosis, "to explain" becomes to make something explain. Continue the interruption.

— Prove that you dislike explanations.

— I accept misunderstandings.

A story is always too long—which means its summary as well is always too long.

Words?! Yes, I will leave some behind only if they take as little space as the ashes of that half of my body that will be burnt, and as little time to read as the duration needed to bury the other half.

Practice makes practical, not perfect.

Patience is the subtlest obstacle to the attainment of serenity.

I do not apprehend recurrent behavior in terms of character traits but in terms of insistence on declaring oneself a certain type of person. This student keeps acting in a stupid manner, that is, he keeps repeating to himself and to me, his professor: "I am stupid." My response: "But I am intelligent enough to get this from the first time. You should therefore stop acting demonstratively in this manner."

With obsession, one is dealing with a countdown.

In this sedentary film, the train serves only to stop the cars.

Il promenait les mains dans les poches.

It is necessary to be a cinematographer at least once in one's life so as to experience how difficult it is to accompany anything, whether in a pan, dolly, or even a static shot.

Long journey
Looking at lake's surface
Drops of sweat

A worker is tilling the ground. The drop of sweat at the tip of his nose annoys me more than the noisy dripping from a leaky faucet for hours on end.

Out of reach. I've left "No Trespassing" to others.

The resting place of nomads is the edge.

Trying to join two cliffs with a phrase. But the phrase itself has a chasm, stops in the middle.

All changes happen in the ellipsis mark. To know how to detect in every phrase, in everything, its three ellipsis points—that place where it becomes so slow it can proceed only by leaping. One must remain in these three points as long as they persist, and precisely because one is a nomad: continuing toward the one point that seemingly brings the matter to an end is nothing but a drifting along a circle whose center is this point.

All courage resides in walking to the very edge. Beyond is dizziness. Has anybody gone over the edge except by slipping? But there, beyond the edge, the world itself slips. Thus one remains steady.

When resting, one is more exposed to danger, but there is no risk, and therefore no possibility of courage.

He parodied it to bring it to its end—he should remember though that a thing is not completely dead so long as its parodies are alive.

The beginning and end of a line are not points, merely extremes. Hence their sterility. Still, every point on the line can create its own extreme. If this happens with even one point, the line is undone. Hence a real beginning.

Since where one begins is the beginning, one should begin at the end.

— I am in an upside down relation to society, like the fetus in the mother's womb. I must be on the point of birth to myself and to the world.

— I loathe bastards, glued as they are to anyone who agrees to be their dad. Each has an indefinite number of fathers. One who believes in fathers will reduce even a prostitute to a mother, when every mother is a whore who has been penetrated by millions—of sperm. A sterile whore: let the sperm penetrate the ovule, and let this result in a stupendous number of healthy sperm or ovules—what have I to do with the reproductive life of another kingdom? One is not born. Hence, one should stop talking about being reborn. Behind their masquerade of loathing it, most women love nothing more than talk of rebirth. Many a woman's dream: giving birth to a child and rebirth to a father.

Cloning would not usher a period of pervasive visual similarity. On the contrary, as similarity is displaced to the level of the

genetic code, on the long run we are going to gradually lose much, if not all of our ability to differentiate between people at the level of visual form.

How cruel of you to describe him, for he's no more than a description of himself.

A sculpture of a girl putting on one of her stockings: is she sculpting herself? A Renoir painting of a vase full of flowers: how pale are the flowers compared to the vase!

"I like the way you sound." That was his reply to my letter. Now, it's the envelope as it's torn that makes a sound. Could it be, then, that he mistook the envelope for the letter? Or is it, which is even worse, that being too heavy himself, he searched for a letter inside the letter, that is, mistook the letter itself for an envelope. "I like the way you sound"—what about the five other senses?

The price of one of Christo's wrapped objects at Gallery Zabriski is \$330,000. The artist may have subverted such a price by putting something worth more than \$330,000 in the wrap; the buyer can subvert it by giving the latter as a gift to someone and watching her unwrap it to see her present.

— Thank you for your present.
— Thank you for your birthday.

Three quarters of an hour into 1986. The train has been frozen in the station for the last fifteen minutes. Someone yells: "What are you waiting for, 1987?"

Sunday, March 2, 1986. I touched a branch.

The surface of a table, a shoe, hair on my arm: is it because I am becoming colder and more detached that I am now able to get in touch with them? Now that I am closest to them, I feel most sterile. Presently actualization lies, as with the sterile mist I love, in dispersion, so that a lost traveler may exclaim: "The world!"

Boat, cloud, lake.

A sound.

Fish? Gull?—The moon! The moon!

"Clouds now and then / giving men relief / from moon viewing" (Bashō). But what if I like clouds even more than the moon? Moon giving men and women relief from cloud-viewing.

Forty hours without sleep. Every moment, now, feels as an early wake-up ordeal.

A jarring anachronism: people who are still talking sense on the radio at 4:18 a.m. Whoever wants to speak or perform late at night should not sleep during the day. "Dreams are the clichés of the sleep world." She looked in my direction as I spoke, her eyes becoming bigger and bigger. They did not do so suddenly out of anger, joy, or surprise. It was a slow expansion at a constant rate no matter what I said or did. Was she masturbating in front of me? No use fleeing, for her eyes would go on expanding until the universe is swallowed in them. No use speaking about love either, for I have become merely another item among the infinity of others that have disappeared in her. I was suffocating, for her expanding eyes were making the rest of the world smaller and smaller. As I froze into silence, everything went back to how it was earlier. Again, to my left, someone laughing, adjusting his watch, eating with a fork: making sounds. Next

to him, an inebriated person: he spoke only to slow down the rate at which he was drinking. The others: *mi-riant mi-pleurant*, halfhearted, at times half-witted. I know that's already four halves, but at 5 a.m.... I go outside; as long as one has not seen the sun rise in a city, one has not visited it, let alone lived in it.

Sunrise: a red sun; a yellow sun; a white sun.

Notwithstanding Godard's proposition in his *Scénario du film "Passion"* (1982), a filmmaker does not start with the white screen but has to achieve it, for example by recourse to the white of a blizzard. Colors can be used on credit, but sooner or later, in a third, tenth, fifteenth or last film, the filmmaker must reach their condition of possibility. Two of the greatest colorists in cinema, Kurosawa and Antonioni, respectively resorted to a blizzard (*Dreams*) and to fog (*Identification of a Woman*) as a condition of possibility of the birth of colors, first monochromatic, in the form of the red or blue of the headbands and the yellow of the jackets of "The Blizzard" section of *Dreams*; then full-blown with the filmic recreation of many of Van Gogh's colorful paintings in the "Crows" section of *Dreams*. When after the blizzard, we have black and white, these are now colors.

Quicker than the possible.

Always arriving too early, that is, too late to act.

"To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction." Certainly Newton was not an angry person. A reaction, even a deferred one, is always on time: it always occurs either simultaneously with the action, as in physics, or after it. Anger is untimely.

The clapping of two hands is mere noise. Applause is the clapping of the hand against one's forehead (aha).

On the beat: one hand stopping the other one midway in its movement to slap the body. Do we have two hands so that one hand can prevent the other from often slapping the rest of the body?

Slap yourself in the face to discover the hand that is ever in it.

I'm drunk. Something is separating me from this man I feel strongly like punching—probably my hand.

— Who do you think will win?

— I don't know.

— Who do you think will lose?

Fighting for a cause?! A cause has an infinity of effects, and one usually wants only one or two of these—all the others one calls by-products. One fights for an effect. Someone who accepts a cause and consequently its countless effects is no fighter.

Hero: one who does not adapt to his victory.

A powerful person would never do *this*, only a mere powerful situation.

It was not the perfect sync of the movements of the army units that scared me at a screening of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, but the absolute sync in the reactions of the film spectators.

The herd: not many, but too many, or rather too one. To detach oneself from the herd, one must become many and do so by

making summation impossible through becoming heterogeneous elements that cannot be added to give one number (or one yawn, the yawn of the *etc.*), irrespective of whether this number is one million or one.

One has become indistinguishable, snow buried in snow, snow exposing snow.

Indistinguishable: not like everyone else, like nothing.

Don't take away from them what they reflect, for then they become a mere reflection.

I just learned that her sister is suicidal, unlike her who is pocourante and cowardly. Often when one thinks one is drawn to a person, one is really attracted to one or more persons the latter knows or knew (or will know?) and whom one may oneself never meet: her sister or mother or friend or teacher or enemy.

Joan of Arc in the presence of the king dissimulating his identity: a test for both of them, and the king knew this. There is never an acknowledgement, a meeting except between those without proofs.

It does not matter to me that she's speaking to him. Her voice reaches me. It gets lost in me. Now, I meet her: only the lost can meet the lost. She smiles when I say *lost*, for I walk with no hesitation whatsoever through the myriad paths of this library and sit in front of her who is ever lost in it. How easy it is to reduce someone to muteness: her red earphones. Her eyes make me forget everything else, so what is it, then, that each time makes me forget to see their color?

Her lips and my distraction often interrupted by her tongue.

She attracts me fully, for she attracts both my writing and me.

Her young age always comes along when the two of us go out. Youth is often the devil's advocate. She retorts: "Your writing too always comes along when you and I go out."

She sat on my knee like a notebook.

I wrote several lines. A blank page replaced by a blank mind.

As soon as I become silent, which happens so often and for such long periods, she goes into a reverie that does not exclude me but, infinitely worse, goes back to when I talked.

The car is moving to another lane, and I, seated in the back, am staring at the yellow line receding into the dwarf distance. I feel like saying goodbye (to it?). Above, in a sky the color of two veins, a bird, its wings making farewell signs to nobody and nothing. Behind, in the visible past: other cars. One of them gains speed, enters the present, then passes into the visible future, then into the trans-horizon future.

Le propre des choses est d'arriver ("quelque chose m'est arrivée"). Le propre de l'homme est de quitter?

The nomad, unlike the sedentary, refuses to learn how to fix things, how to intervene to halt or slow down the natural process of disintegration. He accepts nothing more than dissolution. Yet, it seems, always comes the moment of the dissolution of dissolution, the moment when dis-solution begins to ask for a solution. Then he goes away.

Tomber sur une solution: heaviness.

Puzzles demand, to be (dis)solved, that pieces be removed rather than added. Remove so many pieces that empty road-like spaces form. Go from house to universe by extraction.

Even holes have to be perforated.

How do you open up to someone knocking at the wall?

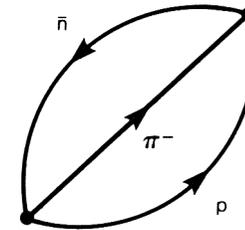
Once the house that one built and/or occupied, if one is a sedentary, or that one met, if one is a nomad, has crumbled, neither to restore it, nor to dig the earth to lay the foundation of a new house: by doing the latter, one will find and found only graves. To let the house crumble until there remains a wall. A wall cannot be demolished. The one who tries to demolish it turns into a normal person, becomes himself a wall. To *perforate* the wall. The dangerous necessity of becoming a rat (the thing I like most about New York is the subway. It perforates both city and difference of day and night. One sees sometimes a rat amid its tracks). They heard: "Art." Didn't each with his two eyes see the large number of walls he had perforated, of holes he had created (holes in which not oneself, but the walls fall), and hence the myriad eyes that he had acquired? Perforation should go on until one reaches the most terrible, best hidden of all walls: one's teeth. The teeth themselves must get perforated, become ones through which the universe circulates. Only then does respiration occur away from the countless beginnings-ends of the heart's diastole-systole.

Still, almost everyone will go on telling one: "You want to get her? Make her laugh. And don't, yourself, forget to laugh." Only a woman and a man showing each other they have teeth, and strong and healthy ones at that, will assure all concerned, above all the baby to be born, that they can bite into, chew and

digest the world. Maybe they will be the ones to perform the miracle: a baby who upon coming out of his mother's vagina laughs rather than cries.

They mistake perforating with biting-chewing-digesting. The wall is that which is still undigested after "everything" has been chewed and digested. The wall is that which remains, the indigestible. It is the real shit. Hence it has to be perforated. But if we ourselves go on shitting, isn't it because so much of us digests yet is not digested? So much of us is shit, walls that have to be perforated.

Perforated teeth and universe have withered each other, releasing all kinds of particles, from nothingness ones



to photons (which cannot be felt), to the particles one feels when one slaps oneself in the face. Everything digests and is digested now in the same movement. No more shit, not even the shit of *no shit!* One can now intuit, and by this intuition constitute the, only then, already present absent-minded body. Have you stared at people having a discussion? Have you noticed not only the movements of their hands and in their faces, but also the simultaneous motionlessness of their legs, knees, buttocks, or other parts. Look at people in subway trains. Try to reach a state where you don't merely deduce that parts of the body are distracted from the plot, or plotting against it; but where you intuit that the body is always absent-minded: it is always in the

most relaxed position however awkward one's pose, however strenuous the thing one is doing. It absents itself from nothing except rest, that is, from absence. Hence it has no parts made of shit, never shits, does not need rest rooms (*rest room* is not a euphemism: it is the right term to designate the place where one shits, for rest is shit). It is in the same movement that one intuitively this absent-minded body and that one knows that one is *always* tired, with a weariness that admits of no rest. Only the weariness of workers, that is, of almost everyone, can be alleviated by rest.

One perforates the blindness of the wall with nothing to sustain one except one's trust in untimely collaborators and the feeling one's teeth are being perforated. That this should repeatedly end in the production of an opening in the wall may lead one no longer just to have faith in oneself, but, unfortunately, to become one of the faithfuls of oneself. Editing is almost a necessity here, for during it the aphorist senses how indefinite writing remains. But, editing, unlike the reception of an aphorism at the end of a perforation of the wall, is a kind of rest. Hence, it exposes one to the danger of trying to join: the one who rests less becoming the restless. Yet one must not cry wolf too quickly—one may be the wolf oneself. One knows that finding many a *therefore* in aphorisms does not necessarily mean that the writer became restless, needed to explain—and not only to the readers. What gives the *therefore*, *hence*, *because* the exceptional grace they acquire when used by aphoristic writers is the intermingling of tenses in the aphorisms. For although an aphoristic writer edits, joining what was received piecemeal, he does not change the tense in which each thing was received, does not hide that some things were received in the form of the past, others in the form of the present, others still in the form of the future. This is what makes it possible for the effect to precede the cause although the *because* joining

them is still an arrow from the latter to the former. As writers, aphoristic authors rarely learn from experience partly because what they receive at the end of a sequence of experiences is frequently given to them in the form of the past.

It is part of resistance to eschew projection to a better historical period. One's imagination of a change is not a mere projection, but real whether or not it gets actualized, only if one received it at the end of a perforation of the wall. What gets actualized may be different from what was imagined, but if it was not received in the above manner, it is not real (similarly, a line written with the possibility of evading receiving it, but read in the absence of such a possibility only became real when it was thus read; if a copyright is to be attributed to anyone at all, it should be to the one who read it in such a manner). Much of what is actual is not real. To replace Berkeley's proposition "that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known" with the aphoristic "To be is to be received at the end of a perforation of the wall."

In some interviews, one is asked to repeat part of the question so that the answer would look self-sufficient rather than a reaction. Aphoristic writers find this felicitous, since it eliminates the external occasion, forcing the interviewee to *take irresponsibility* for what he says. We are irresponsible only for what we receive at the end of a perforation of a wall. One can—no, one must try to work on what one considers unjustified biases one holds. One must do this before putting oneself in a corner/against a wall, since whatever is received at the end of a perforation of a wall should be accepted, even if it is impossible (a miracle) or a bias. A bias received at the end of a perforation of a wall

is a justified one: one's refusal to accept it on any grounds is censorship. One can subsequently repeat the process of putting oneself against a wall, hoping that what will be received during a subsequent perforation will be different.

The blank between consecutive aphorisms functions in the manner of the insulator between the superconducting parts of a Josephson Junction. An aphoristic book required from its author the perforation of walls for the reception of aphorisms, and demands from its reader quantum tunneling between the consecutive aphorisms.

The speeding car, the world slipping by in the opposite direction. This won't do: it is not a back-and-forth movement. One has to perforate holes (film's sprocket holes, video's control track) in the world, so that it would flow through the projector of the mind (after Griffith, Toufic reinvents the iris). Then, one can accept everything in the (video) insert mode.

During the editing stage, a writer may read his or her manuscript five times, discarding parts of it. Does this indicate that these parts are bad, or does it just mean they are not good enough to be read five times? The former, for necessary writing precludes one from perusing it enough times to become familiar with it. It is not only we who resist the text: once it has changed us, it resists us.

For the over-writer that I am, *well done* is overly cooked.

Aphoristic writers consider the editing process outlandish. While before, they received, at the editing stage they find. Receiving has nothing to do with finding. It does not permit one to locate oneself in the world.

We lose the world every time we lose something important. If we lose another important thing, we lose the world we've already lost, again. Losing the world twice without having found it in between!

The sheep were gone. The shepherd's voice searched for them until it, in turn, was lost. Now the shepherd was really alone.

The irreplaceable is so early and so easily replaced in the replaceable.

William Blake's "To see a world in a grain of sand / And a heaven in a wild flower / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / and eternity in an hour" (*Auguries of Innocence*, 1803) implies we need an eternity to explore and exhaust what is in one hour: "I have no time to remember the event as I have yet to explore and exhaust it."

The one thinking, the one creating gives the impression, assumes the posture of someone remembering—though nothing that belongs to the past.

An old man who saw me unable to write told me that his trick to counter a writer's block is to put down the two words "I remember..." and link to them. My first, polemical thought was that what might do the trick in my case is rather to write: "I forget..." But actually, writing and thinking are a resistance to forgetfulness unrelated to any attempt to remember.

"It is useful to give a different description of the Cantor set, by means of 'virtual cutouts.' Again, one starts from $[0,1]$ and cuts out its middle third $]1/3, 2/3[$. The second stage cuts out the middle thirds of each third of $[0,1]$. Since the middle third

of $[0,1]$ has already been cut out, cutting out the middle third of the middle third has no perceivable effect... In the same way, one cuts out the middle third of *each* ninth of $[0,1]$, of each 27th, and so on. Note that the distribution of the number of cutouts of length exceeding u is no longer of the form u^{-D} . One finds instead that this distribution is roughly proportional to $1/u$ " (Benoit B. Mandelbrot, *Fractals: Form, Chance, and Dimension*). It is along these lines that *absent-minded* is to be understood: thinking is always taking place in the case of the distracted, including when they are absent. They therefore find the specifying expression "I have been doing some thinking lately" incomprehensible.

Though every immeasurable outstrips every measure, not every measure is adequate to unsuccessfully try to measure every immeasurable.

It is aristocratic to accept generosity. Generosity is a beginning, it cannot be a response, it cannot be responded to: it is the gratitude of the forgetful. Generosity is always towards strangers; it turns even people we know into strangers. Only thrifty people take full advantage of a situation, but to the munificent the world itself is frequently generous.

It is out of thriftiness that the majority of people want to be able to count what is given to them or that the giver be able to do so.

One can never be sure how much an idea or an ability requires in order to occur and hence how much is given generously to one.

Maxwell's wave equation for light has a *retarded solution* and an

advanced solution. Retarded light waves travel forward in time, while advanced waves travel backward in time. In conventional radiation theory, an atom can emit a wave of light even if the latter does not get absorbed in the future; but in the Wheeler-Feynman *absorber theory of radiation*, in order for light to be emitted, a back-and-forth movement has to happen: a half-sized retarded wave must travel from the atom to the future absorber, and a half-sized advanced wave must travel from the absorber back to the atom. If there are no absorbers in a particular region, light will not shine in that direction.

Every time I create something, I know that there is a stranger somewhere who has received it. Many a time I stopped writing, and went out with boring people who have money and time to waste: I did this most probably because there was no stranger to receive the new I might have created if he or she existed. An ethical imperative: to be available so that what has the possibility of being created can be forwarded to us rather than blocked.

The periods in his life when he failed to write were those when he lost his belief in the generosity of the world, or rather in the generosity of what in the world resists the world.

Jalal Toufic, Los Angeles

10/23/1997

Dear Réda Bensmaïa, Pawtucket, RI:

While at California Institute of the Arts, I went into the reference section of its small library to check the English release title of a French film mentioned in one of this issue's [*Gilles Deleuze: A Reason to Believe in this World*, ed. Réda Bensmaïa and Jalal Toufic, *Discourse* 20.3, Fall 1998] articles. Noticing *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, 1996, I opened its index: the film's title was the same in English. Then it occurred

to me to check for Deleuze: no mention. I then looked through the long bibliography: no mention. Two salient characteristics of mediocrity. It is self-congratulatory: it has become customary these days for those applying for a teaching position in the field of cinema studies to get in response something along the lines of “We received hundreds of applications. We are quite pleased with the very high level of many of the applicants. Such excellence portends very well for the field.” It seems one has to brace oneself for a mild dose of displeasure and a large dose of indifference as this throng of academics begin to temporarily—for a decade or two—taint with pettiness and vulgarize through countless rehash in badly written papers expressions like *becoming-animal* and *line of flight*, as they have transiently vulgarized and made ugly such beautiful words as: *other*, *nomad*, *margin*. Second, it evinces a flagrant lack of embarrassment: how otherwise to explain that thirteen years after the publication of *Cinéma 1: L’image-mouvement* and ten years after its English translation; eleven years after the publication of *Cinéma 2: L’image-temps* and seven years after its translation into English, there is no mention of Deleuze, the author of these two volumes that compose the greatest work ever written in relation to cinema, either in the bibliography or in the index of *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (henceforth referred to as *Another Thoughtless Oxford Cinema Book*). Should one attribute this absence of Deleuze to Deleuze himself: as an effect of his becoming-imperceptible? While such a becoming may have been a contributing factor to this meager circulation and acknowledgment of his work, it is disingenuous to attribute the latter either fully or even largely to it. For Deleuze has a becoming-imperceptible not only for those who have opted to disregard his work, but also for those who love it. The imperceptibility of Deleuze will become both clearer and more outlandish when his work is better known. Yes, we have as yet

sensed only a minimal part of his becoming-imperceptible.

Is Deleuze part of world cinema? Deleuze has made it quite clear that philosophy does not reflect on cinema, artworks, and literature, but that it creates its own entities: concepts. I would add that, not being wedged in linear time, philosophical and literary creation is sometimes additionally a collaboration with past cinematic or literary or artistic works.⁵ Complementarily, any artistic or literary work is related to the future. Not so much because its quality and validity supposedly can be judged only by whether it successfully passes the test of time—if, taking into consideration Dōgen’s time-being, we view as time a Bosnian Serb aiming his artillery at the National and University Library in Sarajevo, or a *mujahidin* fighter not making any effort to spare The National Museum of Afghanistan, then during the last decade much great Moslem art and much great Bosnian and Ottoman literary and mystical works failed to pass the test of time. Nor so much because the majority of those living in the same period in which it was created need a surplus time to catch up with and become the contemporaries of the time in which they lived. But fundamentally because it collaborates in an untimely manner with future philosophers, writers, artists, etc. Since art, literature, and film are fundamentally related to the future, what is truly amazing about an artist, filmmaker, or writer, is not the future component of his or her work, one that maintains its relevance far into the future—for that comes to him or her from his future collaborators; but that he or she is exactly of his or her time, rather than being, like the vast majority of the living, behind his/her time—how little fashionable it is to be the contemporary of one’s time: Deleuze. I feel closer to Gertrude Stein’s view in her book on Picasso: “Wars are only a means of publicizing the things already accomplished, a change,

a complete change, has come about, people no longer think as they were thinking but no one knows it, no one recognizes it, no one really knows it except the creators”;⁶ than to Kafka’s, as reported by Gustav Janouch: “There were some pictures by Picasso... ‘He is a willful distortionist,’ I said. ‘I do not think so,’ said Kafka. ‘He only registers the deformities which have not yet penetrated our consciousness. Art is a mirror, which goes “fast,” like a watch—sometimes”’(Gustave Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* [London: Andre Deutsch, 1971], p. 143).

I find Kafka’s expression less felicitous than Stein’s although it overlaps with it, since it mixes two positions: the artist or writer as that rarity, someone who is the contemporary of his or her time, and thus who is in advance in the present over those who are living in the same period; and the artist or writer as ahead of his time.

Deleuze was not starting to collaborate when he began working with Guattari in what ended up being one of this century’s great such endeavors. He was switching modes of collaboration. For he had already collaborated with Lewis Carroll, and with Nietzsche—how much has the latter, who was “6000 thousand feet beyond man and time,” collaborated with future writers and thinkers! Nietzsche’s untimeliness will not cease in a hundred years from now, around two centuries from when he wrote in one of the notes of the preface (dated

6. Gertrude Stein, *Picasso: The Complete Writings*, ed. Edward Burns (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 62. Lyotard is critical of the notion of creation as applied to art. Such a dismissal is too general and thus abstract. Reception from the other side of the *event horizon* that forms around a trauma, or from the other side of the threshold of death, does not always prove impossible. This successful reception could only have happened by a creation this side of these thresholds: the voice-over-witness, etc. Moreover, whenever an artist (Francis Bacon), writer (Alain Robbe-Grillet), or filmmaker (David Lynch) produces a structure of radical closure, some or all the entities that appear in the latter are possibly a-historical irruptions: creations. These can be attributed to the writer, artist or filmmaker not in the sense that they were willfully and directly created by him or her, but in the sense that he or she set the structure that made their appearance out of nothing possible.

sometime between November 1887 and March 1888) of his projected *The Will to Power*: “What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming.” I don’t consider *Dialogues* a collaboration between Deleuze and Claire Parner; on the other hand, I am sure that Deleuze collaborated with Francis Bacon. It is true that Deleuze’s forceful book on Bacon inflects its readers’ interpretations and viewing of that painter’s oeuvre; but it primarily affected that work in the past: it is a collaboration with Bacon, accessed by the latter through his intuition. Bacon’s work would physically not be the same without *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*, 1981. Since I too have collaborated with Bacon through the section on radical closure in *Over-Sensitivity*, 1996, his work would be physically different without my book. Cinema tends to be a collaborative medium not just because most filmmakers have to work with musicians, set designers, cinematographers, actors, etc.; but additionally because being also an art form, even filmmakers or videomakers who themselves shoot their films or videos, perform in them, edit them, compose their music, and distribute them, collaborate in an untimely manner with future philosophers, writers, filmmakers, and/or artists. Deleuze has already collaborated with some of the filmmakers mentioned in his cinema book. Thus he belongs less in the bibliography of books on world cinema than in any chapter they contain that covers collaborators (cinematographer, screenwriter, etc.) and influences, therefore in their indexes. Does this sort of collaboration make it illegitimate to consider the affected filmmaker as an *auteur*?⁹ It does so as little as would Hitchcock’s collaboration with composer Bernard Herrmann and title designer Saul Bass, and his use of a Boileau and Narcejac novel, make it illegitimate to call *Vertigo* a Hitchcock film. This century of cinema has been considerably influenced by Deleuze even if not many filmmakers have read his work between 1983 (the

date of publication of the first volume of his cinema book) and 1996, and even if not many end up reading it between now and the end of this century. To have affected, through this untimely collaboration, past artists more than future ones is another manner of being imperceptible. Since they have already heeded it, it is certainly legitimate for great filmmakers to declare that they don't read what is written on their work even by philosophers and writers—while legitimate, this attitude is unfortunate, for they are missing much; in the case of Deleuze, the utter beauty of his two volumes on cinema. Deleuze's work itself is a collaboration: with Guattari, and others, in the books the two co-authored; and with others—including possibly with Guattari—in Deleuze's own books. "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.... We have been aided, inspired, multiplied" (*A Thousand Plateaus*)—including by future philosophers, writers, artists, scientists, etc. One knows that a collaboration with a specific contemporary writer, philosopher or artist is simply not working when our usual future collaborators no longer influence us and no new untimely collaborators take their place. Do artists and writers suffer unduly from an "anxiety of influence"? An artist cannot afford this reported anxiety of influence: he or she could not have created while having it, creation being an untimely collaboration. In *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, 1947, his canceled radio program, Artaud found himself forced to torturously collaborate with his voices; but he also collaborated in an untimely manner with Deleuze and with Deleuze-Guattari (and also with Jacques Derrida, the author of "La parole soufflée," an article in which Derrida is sometimes an untimely collaborator, sometimes a critic). It is mostly critics who, unaffected by and unaware of such an untimely collaboration, make a fuss about an anxiety of influence. A

critic, especially a journalistic one, comes after; the artwork or literary work is truly finished for him or her by the time he or she arrives on the scene. Critics and journalists, who function well under deadlines, always arrive late for such untimely collaborations. Being late for a genuine collaboration, they are left with contributing to one more fashionable, for constitutionally-late, anthology. Since they don't collaborate in an untimely manner with the artistic and literary works on which they reflect, it is understandable that they find it easy to write on commercial culture, which in the vast majority of cases is linear not only narratively but also in its mode of collaboration and influence: in it there is no need for this collaboration with the future which constitutes much of intuition. In academia and criticism, so many anthologies on a popular culture that has been reduced to and equated with commercial culture, and so little collaboration. Despite its eighty-two contributors, there is no collaboration whatsoever in *Another Thoughtless Oxford Cinema Book*. If philosophers and writers find it extremely difficult to write on commercial films and novels, it is not simply or mainly as a consequence of their negative value judgment of these works; it is fundamentally because their writings are not a reflection on films, paintings, dance and works of literature, but a collaboration with these, so that the fact that the vast majority of commercial works are linear not only narratively but also in their mode of collaboration and influence renders any untimely collaboration in them unfeasible. It is much easier for a philosopher or thinker to write in relation to Robbe-Grillet, for his work is triply non-linear: from the least unsettling and least important level, that of narration (the tedious *Pulp Fiction* remains at this level); to that of the story, i.e. of the diegetic space-time; to that of an untimely collaboration with future thinkers and writers. Robbe-Grillet, one of the most articulate

writers and filmmakers about his novels and films,⁷ is a much more intuitive filmmaker than the majority of contemporary Hollywood filmmakers, who don't tire of repeating to us how crucial intuition is in their "creative process." If I already belong to world cinema, it is certainly far less as a result of my few videos than as a consequence of the untimely collaborations with filmmakers such as Robbe-Grillet, Lynch and Tarkovsky through (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* and *Over-Sensitivity*, as well as with Paradjanov through my coming book [*Forthcoming*]. I am sure I have collaborated with the latter two filmmakers although I never met them and although they died before any of my books was published. I had become so imbued with this form of collaboration by the time I was writing my third book that I had grown totally oblivious of the more obvious and discussed mode of influence, getting reminded of it with a sense of surprise on receiving a letter from performance and installation artist Carolee Schneemann in which she wrote in response to reading (*Vampires*): "I wish you could see the piece; the influence of your 'space-time continuum' sweeps through each element of *Mortal Coils* [1994]." The consolidation of corporate monopoly over the distribution of films and books can mitigate this untimely collaboration, but it cannot stop it. The latter can be stopped by surpassing disasters, which produce a withdrawal of tradition; or by developments that lead to the destruction of the future, thus impoverishing our intuition; or by certain epochal events that create discontinuities in time. I would define epochs by whether this untimely collaboration is possible: what belongs to different epochs is what essentially

7. If it is infelicitous to ask an artist or a writer about his or her work, and if writers' and artists' answers to such questions are never fully satisfactory, it is partly that these works are untimely collaborations with another or others unknown to the artist or writer, one or ones in whose place he or she is ill-equipped to speak.

cannot collaborate in an untimely manner. Despite the deep affinity an Iraqi poet or thinker may feel toward *Gilgamesh*, he will not have when writing on it the impression that he collaborated on its production. Despite being deeply impressed by the similarity between ancient Egyptian peasants and contemporary villagers in the vicinity of Edfu with regards to their physiognomy and the style and building materials of their dwellings, I am sure that, while making use of ancient Egyptian monuments and hieroglyphic writings in *The Night of Counting the Years*, 1968, at no point did Shādī 'Abd al-Salām feel that he was collaborating through his film with the ancient Egyptians across chronological time. While one cannot become an untimely collaborator in relation to artistic works belonging to a different epoch, one can still possibly understand and appreciate them; use them in one's work, as Armand Schwerner does with *Gilgamesh* and other Sumero-Akkadian work in his *The Tablets*; or affect their reception and interpretation as a critic. Deleuze is still a philosopher rather than a critic even in relation to other epochs, for though he cannot collaborate with them in an untimely manner, he still creates concepts in relation to them. Even when we are quite conscious of our changing views of them, we are also aware that there is something definitive about works belonging to another epoch: they are thus classics.

I presently admire the following people:

- The artist, writer, filmmaker or philosopher, by constitution intuitive.
- Their future untimely collaborators.
- And the one, seemingly modest, whose aim isn't to become a writer, a filmmaker, or an artist, but rather, with a wonderful extravagance, to incarnate *the audience implied by the artwork*. The dancer having lost the mirror-reflection on crossing the threshold to the altered realm in Agnes de Mille's "dream ballet"

for Fred Zinnemann's *Oklahoma!*, he, an audience member, could not tell, not only theoretically but also physically, not only *de jure*, but also *de facto*, that Laurey (played by Shirley Jones) was physically different from her double (performed by the ballet dancer Bambi Linn), that Curly (played by Gordon MacRae) also looked different from his double (performed by the ballet dancer James Mitchell), and that Jud and his double, both played by Rod Steiger, were physically identical. "His thing" was not to identify with and embark on the quixotic path of modeling himself on the protagonist (nothing has been as cheapened, programmed and manipulated in twentieth century culture); but to incarnate, to coincide with the audience implied by the artwork—a much more demanding endeavor. He had distantiation toward the actors and characters, but not toward the implied audience. While I despise those who remain solely empirical audience members, I admired him. He decried a widespread misrecognition that a painting, dance or literary work implies and therefore has a specific, intrinsic audience. He felt there weren't enough people who tried or are trying to make the audience "part" of the artwork not by blurring the boundary between the performers and the audience—this resulting most often in sloppy, weak pieces; but rather by filling the position of the audience implied by the artwork.

By the way, is Duras' *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (Gallimard, 1991), with its "This is a book. / This is a film," part of world cinema?

There is something theatrical about Nietzsche, in that one often has the sense that he is speaking in asides: "—Ultimately, no one can extract from things, books included, more than he already knows.... Now let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events which lie outside the possibility of general or even of rare experience... In this case simply

nothing will be heard, with the acoustical illusion that where nothing is heard there *is* nothing" ("Why I Write Such Excellent Books," *Ecce Homo*).

It is part of the miracle one's hearing about it although it is what excludes witnesses—even in the guise of the one who performed it.

Divest possibility from curiosity. The vigil over possibilities has nothing to do with curiosity, as is clear in quantum physics, where an act of observation collapses the wave equation into one actuality. Quantum physics has been the branch of science that has gone furthest in acknowledging possibilities precisely because it relinquished curiosity: it can say nothing about what goes on between the source and the detection device in a measuring apparatus.

The jealousy-inducing woman includes a third in the relationship. The jealous person achieves a reactive equivalent by looking at the bystander or passerby to see in the expression on his or her face signs about what is going on *behind his back* (Munch's *Jealousy*)—not being the curious type myself, I looked at him, and not at what was eliciting his curiosity.

There is need not only for the witness position but also for the detached disposition, embodied in one who is at the site of the events but continues what he is doing without being affected by whatever is happening, poised, thus aborting the audience's identification with the characters. A play with such a character would end not with a resolution of the conflict between the hysterical antagonists in the foreground, but when either they desist from their conflictual actions and join the detached one in the background or the latter joins them.

Real spectator: the detached one who looks as a third party at the exchange between his emotions and a film or painting.

No one is a worse actor than the spectator identifying with a fictional character.

Not hard, but detached, for hardness is still sensitivity.

In person, the saint was no longer expressive: his elocution was dull, arrhythmic; his language placid; his demeanor unobtrusive and unremarkable; and his facial expression deadpan. And yet, increasingly, when he appeared in the visionary dreams of people, he was most expressive, even hysterical.

The unbearable to see are not only the obscene gestures and gesticulations of the possessed, but also the exorcism by which Jesus Christ does away with the demons provoking them.

Cleanliness is the reduction in the parasitical of a lower order.

In most books, one must look for the digressions, for in the digression from the digression, one may still find something necessary.

Notwithstanding my instructions, the blabbering barber blithely continued to shear my hair even after it had become clearly too short. I interjected several times: "Cut it short!" Without stopping his palaver, he continued clipping my hair, until I became bald. Again, I repeated: "Cut it short." Still chattering, he began trimming the moustache.

The first limit to disappear: the borders of the lips.

It is one of the merits of Burhān 'Alawiyya's film *Kafr Qāsim*, 1974, to have shown that if there is an Arab community of which the Palestinians are a part, the implication is not, as many Israelis would like the world to believe, that Palestinian refugees ought to be settled in the Arab countries to which they had been expelled; but on the contrary, that the other Arabs have themselves been exiled by the Israeli occupation—and this not because between 1948 and 1967 the West Bank was ruled by Jordan and the Gaza Strip was administered by Egypt. Iraqis, Algerians, Yemenis, etc., have been exiled by the Israeli occupation. 'Alawiyya appears to be concerned with giving back to the voice-over as an exiled voice—for example the voice of the Egyptian president Nāṣir during his 1956 nationalization of the Suez canal speech broadcast on radio and reaching the Israeli-occupied territories in Palestine—not so much the body, its source, as a land, a country, without which even when incarnated in a body it remains a voice-over.

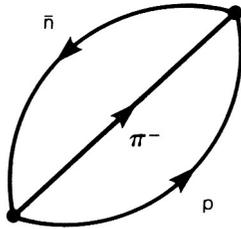
It is not a matter of reading a fictional text aloud in such a way as to re-create the character, who has already been created by the text. It is a matter of getting to the voice. The voice existed as such, disembodied from her, not her property, only when she read aloud certain sections of the text (some paragraphs are a magic formula for the voice to appear), whereas reading others did not make it materialize, the voice reverting to being merely hers, something one did not then even feel imprisoned within her, so much had it lost that possibility of disembodiment.

How to hug her voice? How to hug what hugs? Is it by turning, like a Möbius strip, inside out?

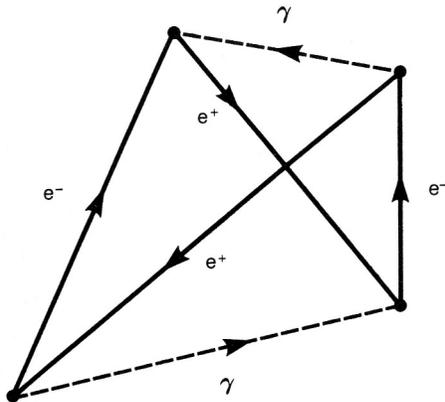
His voice one more instrument the musician and singer left on the platform among the other instruments, to mingle, mute,

with people during the break.

Emptiness has sometimes to shout



in order to counter the intolerable noisy effervescence outside it. When noise becomes stentorian, emptiness' shout becomes even louder:



The law of conservation of energy, notwithstanding the uncertainty principle, can almost hear it now (fluctuations can be detected by man's theories, but not automatically by the law of conservation of energy!).

Art has an affinity with prayer: both produce an absence of the interior monologue.

Simultaneously hearing the talker and overhearing his interior monologue: noise. There are separate sections in restaurants, different compartments in trains for smokers and nonsmokers. I am a nonsmoker who does not care in which of these he ends up sitting. There should be different compartments and sections for talkative and silent people.

Film teachers tell their students to turn off the sound of films to be able to concentrate on the lighting and composition of the image and on camera movements. One should occasionally turn off the sound track of life, so as to see better.

It is no longer only or mainly sound and image that can be out-of-sync with each other: the extremely quick cuts in many contemporary videos have nothing to do any longer with jump cuts, but with images that are out-of-sync with each other.

An image should remain for much longer than its function requires, or disappear so fast that the *persistence of vision* makes one feel it is the eye itself that subsists for too long.

The dead's eyes don't see. When not speaking, the ghost has, like a Stanislavsky actor on the empty stage during the first rehearsals, to invent what and who is around him, as props, so as to haunt.

Already in Fritz Lang's first talking film, *M*, 1931, one encounters voices that see. Worried by the absence of her daughter, Elsie's mother calls her name. The screen time of each of the five subsequent shots depends on the duration

the searching voice needs to ascertain that Elsie is not in the different spaces shown in long shots: the staircase, the courtyard, the bush from which Elsie's ball rolls, and the electricity poll in which her balloon gets trapped. When it is reported in the evening newspaper that Elsie has been murdered, there is no shot of someone informing the mother of that or of the mother reading the news: there is no need for such a shot as her voice already witnessed sufficient indices of her daughter's death.

Godard's proposition that framing in cinema is a matter not only of space but also of time becomes manifest when the image sporadically freezes, as in Lynn Marie Kirby's *Paris and Athens, June*, 1994; as well as in some films where the shots are maintained for a long while. Only with filmmakers who are excellent temporal framers does the latter approach make one feel not only that time is building up in the frame, but also, past a certain point, and in a Dōgen manner, that objects are time, that various objects are different sorts of time. The duration of the shot in this kind of cinema is determined less by the dramatic action than by the kind of temporality that the presented objects are. It takes time for sugar to dissolve in water, a Bergsonian duration, but both sugar and water and sweet water are time. Even objects in atomic temporality, which appear and disappear from instant to instant without duration, are themselves time, particular kinds of time. Thus objects are mandatory for there to be time in the shot not because time would be a displacement of objects, a figure of change, but because objects are time. Such films do not present to us the past or future of the character, but the kind of time he is. The character is a certain kind of time experiencing another kind of time in the form of a house, a beach. In these films, one witnesses no affects in the characters, hence the almost total

absence of close-ups. Or rather, one apprehends one affect: time. The only adequate aural accompaniment to such an affect is not the interior monologue, but music.

No balance can be reached in chronological time, since chronological time cannot exist without a sense of imbalance.

The bad critical: the one that has nothing to do with a phase transition.

Occidental surprise, oriental freshness.

Equality (=) is made up of two minuses.

One is just only when one *has had it*.

Nothing is missing even though everything is in excess.

What does it mean to have a fade-out in Wenders' *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, where everything and more is shown, where nothing is overlooked and discarded except overlooking and discarding—if not to add, rather than subtract, one more thing, the fade-out itself.

Someone awakens from a nightmare with a scream only to feel the knife of a murderer plunge through his open mouth.

Time-lapse cinematography accelerates incredibly the decomposition of a corpse compared to how the human eye sees it. Yet, even then, the decomposition is rendered much slower than it is experienced in reality. For in a corpse all filtering devices that ensure most stimuli remain below the level of sensation have dissolved: everything is felt. The Flood. And there is no way to flee the decomposition of a corpse, this

horrifying *life after death*: suicide, heart attack, death of any kind are not possible. I write from experience. Why aren't corpses anesthetized?

Was sparing the Ka from at times experiencing the decay of the corpse one of the reasons the ancient Egyptians preserved the body?

The mirror on which he painted his portrait was shattered. In his eyes, like snow floating on the surface of a lake, were pieces of glass dazzled by his blood strange as a new color. In his skin and fingers lingered, moved like a snake, the dangerous freshness of the edge. In his ears, shells, was the sound of a waterfall, rain falling from earth to earth.

At home only in places that are in exile. The subway, most of the time under New York, is such a place—except in rush hours, when it regresses to become New York's subway.

A branch entered my room through the window. If, when it rains, rain does not also fall in my room, and not through the window, I'll burn the whole tree.

The sentimental hug of the horizon.

It is not by running that one goes outside, since one has then to sooner or later stop to catch one's breath, this giving the dialectical movement enough time to catch up with one. The dialectical movement is this catching of the breath.

One collides against something whenever one moves, whenever one remains still, be it nothing other than the air one is breathing.

Is the scream a clearing of the throat, the only real, necessary one before speaking can happen?

To become a rumor on nobody's lips, in nobody's mind.

People: mirror images that linger obstinately even though there is no one in front of the mirror, even though there is no mirror.

Derivatives are not forgotten not because they are remembered, but because people and time *forget to forget* them.

Revulsion: distance lacking distance.

I need peopleglasses.

They used to give one a feeling of *déjà vu*. That was still bearable. Unbearable solitude: this feeling, nowadays, even as one stares at them, of *déjà-overlooked*.

They keep repeating the same infinity of things.

Why don't they brush their teeth after uttering so many unnecessary words? Solitude: all voices have become ambient sound.

He brushed his teeth, rinsed, spat. In the creamy saliva on the point of disappearing in the sink, he saw four words.

The ear should often get clogged like a sink, words and sounds flooding out of it.

I spat out the words that were in my mouth. I vomited my

throat. If only words, like migratory birds, had their seasons for leaving us, for going away. Migratory words.

Many people think writers acquire a facility with written language. On the contrary. And the difficulty now extends even to writing a letter to someone to ask permission to film in his café. Is this gradual reduction of what one feels should be written an unavoidable facet of writing? The process is contagious, one saying little; walking to the other end of the dining table to get the salt instead of merely saying *salt*; then doing away with salt and with... (how much does this ellipsis mark still contain!).

The strangest: the familiarity with which language met me halfway in my attempt to meet a new thought dawning on me.

If among alternative translations of a foreign word, a people chooses, through giving it currency, one that later helps thought, leads thinkers in certain fruitful directions, that people thinks, at least potentially-virtually. With every word that is taken straight from a foreign language, no Arab word coined for it, Arabs resign themselves to think without the collaboration and inspiration of language (for an example of the opposite situation of thinking with the collaboration and inspiration of language: my work with *cadaver*).

The self-reflexivity in Bill Viola's *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* resides not only in the shots in which he is taking notes while looking at his footage on a monitor, and those in which one can see his reflection in birds' pupils as he stands behind his video camera; but also in the close-ups of birds' and fishes' heads and of a bull's eye. *Bull's eye*: a simple lens with a large numerical aperture; *fish-eye lens*: a 180° field of view wide-angle

lens giving prominence to central objects, therefore to the *bull's eye*, the target's center; *bird's-eye view*: a far away overhead shot, as from a helicopter. The shot of the fish attached to the side of a helicopter was videotaped with a very wide angle lens, giving one a bird's-eye view with a fisheye lens. Since the fish is part of the bird's-eye view, it is not surprising that in the final shots birds eat it.

— The mirror does not break, it is only the glass that does.
— The mirror breaks if in front of it one is totally blind. For that the eyes, the hand, and the cane must become blind simultaneously.

The truly shy feels bashful even in front of himself or herself in the mirror.

To most women, the mirror is something to be seduced. They begin to believe in "the mirror's objective view" only when their seductiveness vanishes.

An attractive woman is the hysteria of the world: a *conversion* in terms of lighting and sound levels takes place to make her look her best.

A substantial part of the actor's and actress' day during the filming is passed waiting for the lighting to be ready, the dolly tracks to be laid, etc. How can I be a film director when this entails asking others to wait, or rather (for they usually don't mind the waiting that much) withstanding the waiting of others?

Workers make one wait for at least the minimum division of their work schedule: an additional *absolute refractory period*.

Those who postpone are not able to oblige them, since they fail to properly wait. I arrived five minutes late at this remote cinema. I decided to wait for the following screening. I went to several bookstores. I arrived five minutes late for the next screening.

I arrived late for our date at a gallery. I inquired of the receptionist, whose phone rang less to signal a person on the other side of the line than to show her impatience, whether she saw a beautiful woman with black hair and out-of-sync silence.

She, a dancer, is attuned to my in-sync silence: the concordance between the motionlessness of my lips and the absence of an interior monologue in my head; I, an aphoristic writer, find her occasional out-of-sync silence in the altered realm into which dance projects her, as her lips continue briefly to move before the falling diegetic silence—over freezes her, arresting.

She's using hand gestures to better explain to me what she's saying. I understand what she's saying. What I don't get is why she doesn't give me her hands.

— Your hand is the in-focus plane of my hand.
— Which one of my two hands?

Each of her winter socks is large enough to hold her foot and my hand.

To kiss the laughing mouth without interrupting the laugh.

White balancing my eyes with her teeth.

I don't care about love bites, but about the vampiric kiss of teeth with teeth.

The taste of her body. My lips at last are nude.

It is not by adding one more habit, that of being with him or her, that one has an intense relationship with a person; it is by doing away, at least temporarily, with some of one's other habits. Her saliva is in my mouth. All the liquid of the universe can't fill the infinity of holes in the saliva of one mouth; thirst. I park at a restaurant, then quickly drive away, without drinking or eating, still thirsty and hungry. Her saliva must remain in my mouth. How long will the fasting last (the food is better in Beirut than in New York. Yet once one fasts or goes on some kind of diet, once, that is, one begins feeding on oneself, then one discovers that one tastes better in New York than in Beirut)?

One should maintain the other person's inaccessibility present by not absencing oneself from his or her absence through TV, films or friends. Not to dilute the other person is to draw an equivalency between him or her and time: a sure sign that that person will change us. Regrettably, I diluted her absence at least once. We had a tentative appointment the next day. I divested her from a direct equivalency with time by driving to Detroit and then immediately back to Chicago, thus reestablishing the mundane equivalence of time and space: 75 miles/hour.

I arrived at the café five minutes too early. The moment one begins waiting—but does waiting begin at a precise moment?—people, electrons, events begin to jostle on their way towards where they are awaiting themselves. How can one not be distracted by, and how can the awaited one ever reach one

through this commotion? Waiting turns any appointment into a chance meeting. She arrived! Then the city receded inside the shell of her open lids.

Her smile makes her eyes close a little in a gesture of yielding—to her smile.

Looking at her, my eye's iris becomes that of a slow lens that can't close all the way down to have a total fade-out.

Some shots should be extended till it becomes as difficult to know when to cut them as when to disengage from a hug.

Detached strands of her long hair sometimes on my jacket, at other times on my trousers. Are all clothes of all colors made of this one color-material?

I cannot sleep when I am next to her since sleep contains non-REM periods: how can I be in proximity to her and be without affects and images, without commotion?

Being a distracted person, I can write only when in that state. She makes me concentrate on her in her presence—and absence. She makes me sterile.

Generous: Parting, she gave him a melancholy smile. In the melancholy itself, he saw her eyes.

He got drunk not to forget but so that it would become clear to him that nothing passes.

When they tried to return together, it was too late: her aura, that of her absence, was so established that she was eclipsed by it.

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Please read the operating instructions on the reverse side./Prière de lire les instructions au verso.

The *I* that fell in love with her must vanish. To go back to solitude now is to go back to a solitude where I can't keep myself company, a solitude that is no longer *my* solitude but the solitude of no one (hence contagious, but to no one). Solitude to the power two (back to this accursed number).

At times a modicum of help is necessary! Without it, that which, in us, we were trying to let wither away would be all too happy, in order to save itself, to offer us its help; and we, grateful as we are, would then offer it in return ourselves.

Helpful: the assurance help has been sent and will arrive too late.

Dilution is not help. It is a weakening that makes one need others' help.

Wenders' *Nick's Movie*. A sad, nihilistic film for a cowardly film. Wenders shows up to assist the cancer-ridden Nicholas Ray. Ray: "I started out as strong as I could and then there was a great relief when I surrendered more and more to you." All one can hear in the changing rhythm of one's breathing is from time to time Ray's piercing—for constrained between the "Action" and the "Cut"—soundless invocation: Help me, anybody, get rid of Wenders' help. For that's when others need help, and that's when one should help them: when they are being helped. They need this further help precisely and for no other reason than to get rid of the former help. Ray knows that he let Wenders steal from him what he himself did not possess but had the possibility of experimenting: his dying (if, like a cat, one has nine lives, one may be forgiven wasting one dying; already with eight, no). But really nothing has been stolen except counterfeit dying since one can steal only the forged.

During a commemorative minute of silence, one should not abstain from talking, but rather move one's lips without uttering any sound, thus accompanying momentarily the dead, who suffer from diegetic silence-over.

Howard Barker's Judith does not enter the first time general Holoferns says "Come in" during his monologue. His preceding words were: "... and made battle precious." Nor does she enter on his second "Come in," which was preceded by: "... a profound love." It is only on his third "Come in" that she enters. This time his preceding words were: "... trembling with a terrible infatuation." That is what Holoferns feels for her (already the third enjoining to enter, "Come in, I said!", with the emphasis of the "I said!", is indicative of an infatuation), but, more importantly, that is what she feels, what she embodies. And it is this terrible infatuation of Judith—less so of Holoferns—that one witnesses during the play. That is how the last section where Judith is transfigured should be played by the actress: she should be trembling with infatuation. As for the servant's entry: between the recurrence of the word "infatuation" and her coming in, there is Holoferns' interpolation: "I hate to be bothered when I am thinking about death." Judith's subsequent delays to kill him are a consequence of that original delay that made her come in not when he first ordered her to do so after saying "... precious battle," but on the words "terrible infatuation." They keep telling each other that they are in love but simultaneously that they are lying, because the issue is not love, not even profound love (the words that preceded the second unanswered "Come in"), but terrible infatuation. Thus that sublime line of Judith: "Love will do — (*Pause*)." Howard Barker, or aposioposes that interrupt nothing (in another sense, now unfortunate, such suspensions will prove ineffectual in interrupting the vast majority of actors and actresses, as well as

the majority of directors, who will take these arresting dashes as simple ellipses. How many lines I wish actors and actresses [and the prompter] would forget if not in full, then at least in part! I like to envision the actress playing Judith forgetting the rest of her line, saying only: “Love will...”, and the prompter whispering to her: “... do.”). Judith is “renowned for being subtle.” I concur with this characterization simply from witnessing how she suspends many sentences before they turn into one more platitude—suspensions that thus interrupt nothing. While in the play, Judith quantitatively speaks more than the servant, she is far less talkative. The servant’s talkativeness resides in her inability to suspend the sentences before they start repeating the endless discourse of ideology. She does not know how to suspend sentences in the sense that when she does, the suspension clearly seems to be a pause, and thus invites the listener, including the servant herself, to continue and finish an actually already complete sentence. Anyone can finish such interrupted sentences because they are the sentences of common sense. The servant’s whole discourse could in the end be reduced to one long stretch of ellipsis points: it would then be the most talkative.

The talkative silence of the *etc.*

Never summarize. Be brief.

Aphoristic writers don’t *fill in the blank*.

A one-thousand-page volume might contain more necessary lines than a sixty-page book of aphorisms, of what is interrupted by its own conciseness. It won’t contain more silence, nor more blank space and time.

One understands nothing about aphoristic writers if one finds distance, silence, blankness, and suicide only between the aphorisms, and not also in the aphorisms themselves.

That solitary person, Nietzsche, knew that one either uses the dash to introduce merely an interlocutor’s words, or uses it instead in the sentence itself to introduce a subtlety in the monologue.

What connects thoughts seamlessly is not only the logical and causal links. Such specific links would strike us as forced and artificial, the thoughts seeming to be rigidly placed next to each other across gaps, were it not for the background of generalized linkages that is the interior monologue. The latter, rather than distracting from the link, makes it feel natural. The disjunction between the aphorisms, and between the sentences of an aphorism, is accentuated by aphoristic writers’ absence or substantial reduction of the interior monologue. Indeed, in the absence of the interior monologue, one gets the aphoristic mode of thought—thoughts that are divested from development, come out of the blue—irrespective of whether on the page the thoughts are juxtaposed or separated by blanks. While teaching, I, an aphoristic writer, have to relax my vigilance against the interior monologue, so that my speech would flow. This applies to listening too: the internal monologue of the listener facilitates the talk of the speaker. If a thought restrains the interior monologue, people cannot concentrate on it, i.e. they become distracted, to reactivate an internal monologue (the distraction I write about elsewhere in this aphoristic book is obviously of a different kind). He talked to himself no longer in the mode of an internal monologue, but in the manner of Richard Foreman’s characters: when he uttered a question, he was among the ones who answered it.

Two quite different conceptions of the aphorism:

— One that presupposes the continuous, and where the aphorism is constituted through a folding. Interpretation is then a monadic unfolding.

— One that presupposes atomism and the corollary discreteness and separation of accidents. Although in most matters I find myself clearly on the side of the *Ismāʿīlīs* and other *bāʿinīs* (Moslem esoterics) against their Ashʿarite enemies, orthodox Moslem theologians, nonetheless, as a Semite and an aphoristic writer, I feel a strong affinity with the latter's atomism, and their occasionalist denial of nature (for a custom of God) and separation of accidents (life, knowledge, etc.)—not without sensing that this affinity and the accidents with which it resonates are repeatedly re-created.

The aphorism is mistakenly viewed sometimes as enunciating an opinion, sometimes as setting forth a truth. In the former case it is confounded with the saying, in the latter case it is mixed up with the maxim. But the aphorism is neither opinion nor truth. The great aphoristic writers, Nietzsche paradigmatically, are conjointly some of the keenest problematizers of the notion of truth, as well as some of those who fought most intensely against opinions. The apparent closeness of the format of the aphorism to those in which opinions or truths are coined or proffered (the proverb, the saw, the saying, the maxim) makes opinion and truth insidious risks and temptations of the aphoristic form, heightening aphoristic writers' vigilance against them. One of the main indications of this fight against opinion is the widespread presence of the dash in aphorisms. The aphoristic dash is either a symptom of a sudden switch in relation to an opinion that managed to insinuate itself in one's writing, or else stops what is advanced from turning into

an opinion. Nietzsche writes:

“To say in ten sentences what everyone does not say in a book—what everyone does not say in a book.”⁸ The first part of this aphorism is that of opinion, thus shows a common, verbose conciseness, and therefore presents little obstacle for commentators wishing to proceed to explicate such ten sentences in a book. Then, across the abruptness of the dash—the aphoristic modality proper, and consequently a different *everyone*, no longer the mundane herd, but possibly

the psychotic “every name in history is I” (this expression appears in Nietzsche's letter of 5 January 1889 to Jakob Burckhardt), and thus *the absence of the work* (Foucault). In some aphorisms in Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Gay Science* the dash is not in the middle of the sentence, but in its beginning—and this not simply in order to introduce a different interlocutor. Aphoristic writers dislike the dialogue format partly because it wastes the dash by neutralizing it into a conventional device. I can very well imagine a dialogue by an aphoristic writer that would have either two dashes at its beginning: one conventional, to indicate a change of the interlocutor, the other as an interruption of what is already developing into an opinion; or else would use the conventional device of placing each interlocutor's replies in quotes, and yet have such responses each start with a dash.

8. Borges certainly managed a number of times to say in “ten” sentences what everyone does not say in a book, since these ten sentences refer to a book that was not actually written: “It is a laborious madness and an impoverishing one, the madness of composing vast books—setting out in five hundred pages an idea that can be perfectly related orally in five minutes. The better way to go about it is to pretend that those books already exist, and offer a summary, a commentary on them. That was Carlyle's procedure in *Sartor Resartus*, Butler's in *The Fair Haven*—though those works suffer under the imperfection that they themselves are books.... A more reasonable, more inept, and more lazy man, I have chosen to write notes on *imaginary* books. These notes are ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ and ‘A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain.’” (Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley [New York: Viking, 1998], p. 67).

The aphoristic form is characterized as much by the blanks between the different aphorisms as by the dashes in the aphorisms. While it is true that aphoristic writers can be distinguished by their varying conceptions and practices of the blanks between the aphorisms, with all of them the blanks, with the forgetfulness and *pathos of distance* they implement, preclude any consideration of the aphorisms as possibly contradicting each other. Contradictions do not happen between aphorisms, but in the aphorism, when its latter part does an about face, usually across a dash, to undermine an opinion that managed to insinuate itself in the first part: it is this that gives at least some aphorisms their paradoxical quality. When the aphoristic writer begins to slide into opinions, which are open to considerations of contradiction, the spaces between the different units change in character.

The writing that strikes me is one that became leaner and leaner until it became leanest: an exclamation point. This lightning separating every sunset from night.

Malcolm Cowley criticizes “Whitman’s old-age habit of never saying in three words what might be said in six.” One who accepts the two sides of the coin on one face needs more words than one who chooses either the head or the tail, or, worse, chooses both, one in a first bet, the other in a second, and only knows how to bet on two out of three, that is, on three out of four, on three out of five, on four out of six, on four out of seven, on five out of eight, on five out of nine, on six out of ten, on six out of eleven, on seven out of twelve, on eight out of fourteen—he thinks laconism lies in using the *etc!* No, laconism lies in using the *etc.*—on eight out of fifteen, on nine out of sixteen, on nine out of seventeen, on ten out of eighteen, on ten out of nineteen, on eleven out of twenty. He fell asleep,

sound asleep. No sound could wake him. Indeed, some count to sleep—as if counting were not already a variety of sleeping! Rather, to be open to sounds, voices, thoughts, snow, nothing: to anything that can cause you to make a mistake or forget the number you arrived at in your counting; to all that would interrupt your etc. To become an insomniac even during one’s sleep.

Due to prolonged insomnia and weariness, I have the feeling I am vomiting all the external things surrounding me. “It is midnight, time to...” That’s how both vampires and most people reason, the former coming out of their freezing, the latter going to sleep. As for me, it’s never “time to...”

The only freshness is the untimely.

The new, which is occasionally in the form of lies (most lies are repetitions) or of errors (most errors are repetitions), is simultaneous with every other new.

One cannot react to an action, since an action is always simultaneous with other actions, hence its newness; one reacts only to a reaction.

Action: X slapped Y on the left cheek. Re-action: and in the same movement on the right cheek. The first slap can be an action only if contaminated neither by the thought of a reaction to it, nor by that of the impossibility of a reaction to it. The second slap is a bad repetition since inertial—inertia: the extension of a phenomenon until it is no longer an interruption, its reduction to a re-action.

There is no choice where all the alternatives are given, for

choice is the creation of the alternative.

Most people eschew choice for decision since however much time one may take to reach the latter, it is a restatement of the instantaneous determination of the resultant of the forces present then. Since it restates the outcome, a decision is redundant. Contrariwise, for choice to be possible, a resultant of the forces must be impossible: choice requires the postponement of the instantaneous production of a resultant force. The impossibility of a resultant force has for effect the dissolution of vectors into lines (recommendation: not to force the forcing, not to reduce the line to so many points, each the center of a vicious circle; and not to let all forces dissolve, but to maintain a minimum of force so as to preserve the possibility of being forced to perforate walls or corners, in order for a creative meeting with what might then be received to occur. But can't one meet a wall or a corner? Yes, when all one's forces have been dissolved into speeds. Then, while one can no longer create, everything is a miracle). With this dissolution, there is no longer any *to*, but a labyrinth in which all palm readers get lost. This condition of loss initially affects words, for example *losing one's shirt*, *losing one's tongue*. While worrisome, such a loss is not scary, since words can be found again—in dictionaries. But shortly a more humorous, dangerous and terrifying process occurs. June 23, 1987: Loss of my phone book. July 1: Loss of a video editing room's key, entailing a \$40 fine. July 4: Loss of my cash card. July 10: Loss of my international driving license. July 14: while moving to another small room, loss of a bag containing my passport and a notebook. Today I had the unsettling feeling that I may have lost one of the distracted parts of my body. If this process does not stop soon, I am afraid I may *lose* my mind. With the dissolution of the vectors, the arrow of time is undone. There is no longer any *time to*. Those

who no longer feel it is *time to* find out that time is never on time. Time should logically occur during, before and after two simultaneous actions. If it always occurs between the two, it is because time is always late. One cannot even wait for this late time, since one can wait for time only in time.

Going through an action at all the different speeds has nothing to do with repetition, but is a way, maybe the only way, to undo repetition—at all the different speeds except the slowest one, this latter being the black hole that swallows all the others, that therefore is not a separate speed, but the blockage of all the others. One can still experience the slowest speed if one gets to the absolute one, since the latter is the same as the slowest one except that it is a separate speed.

Speeds meet for a longer or shorter period forming speeds of speeds. One is a triad of speeds, speeds of speeds, and “a” noumenon. The latter is the same in everything. All of it is “in” any one thing, whether the latter be telescopic, microscopic or a naked-eye thing.

Quickness and slowness are not a matter of how much one does in a given period, but, respectively, of whether one is quicker/slower than or in sync with oneself (photons are quicker than themselves in non-local interactions).

Time tries to make us blank, for every creation is a hurrying of time.

Only time that is on time is money. Time is not always on time, money is always on time.

“Time is money.” In cinema, only the abstract time fabricated by

the insert is money. That's why commercial filmmakers don't let time pass in the shot, but go to inserts. They have more than one character in almost all scenes to be able to cut from one to the other, i.e. to use the various characters alternately as inserts and to have them use each other as inserts. If such filmmakers sometimes accept shooting single-character scenes, it is because they can resort to point of view shots as inserts—how many of the point of view shots in cinema are not merely inserts? Once you don't let time pass in the film, the film becomes a pastime.

Never hurry anyone or anything (generosity demands nothing), let each take his or her or its time (to wait for something is to hurry it), that way if he or she or it is generous, starting before you arrive, he or she or it will not make you wait (since the flower's smell started its dissemination before I arrived, I did not have to wait for it. Only the generous are available. But I also started toward it even before it had existence for me, even though it may never have existence for me: distraction. Only the generous are available)(any kind of waiting other than the messianic one is servile). But hurry or slow down time itself (generosity is demanding), getting an out-of-sync time into which you collide or that hits you from behind, corners/walls forming that have to be perforated. Two completely different kinds of pressure: the hurrying of a journalist by a deadline, which leaves him or her in sync (talent, even the one misunderstood and neglected by society, is in sync); and the hurrying of time, which produces out-of-sync (the necessity when one is not in sync with oneself of trusting oneself), putting the writer under an inhuman pressure irrespective of any deadline. Creation presupposes putting oneself in a corner/against a wall that has to be perforated, thus being slower than oneself. And it issues in a reception without any

waiting: to receive without having to wait is to be quicker than oneself. And it requires the postponement of what has been received, of again being slower than oneself (not to mistake being slower than oneself for laziness), so that a supersaturated solution may become possible. Those who postpone as a condition of choice and of a supersaturated solution are against both impatience, since it precludes things from meeting; and waiting, which gives at best a saturated solution. Since being slower than oneself is an out-of-sync state, it does not permit others to catch up with one, for the out-of-sync belongs to simultaneity, while catching-up-with belongs to succession.

While clumsiness is an imbalance of forces—like an incompetent physics student, the body overlooks a number of forces when making a summation to get the resultant force—awkwardness is a matter of speeds, of being quicker and slower than oneself. It is the offbeat elegance of aphoristic writers.

I was in a hurry to meet her. She was not in a hurry to meet me. How could we not miss each other?

Tiredness implies an insufficiency of time, since it implicates rest.

Laziness is related to rest and not to how low the energy level is: superconductivity, the resistless uninterrupted flow of electrons, is a lower energy level than the normal state.

One should be not just modest, but humble if and when one rests.

Cioran says: "The aphorism is a conclusion. I write two or three pages and publish only the end result. I spare the reader the progress of my thought." He writes: "One must censure the

later Nietzsche for a panting excess in the writing, the absence of rests.” The aphorism is not a conclusion. Anyway, one must spare oneself “the progress” of one’s thought (thought too occurs in a “black bag”). In which case, what need would one have to rest?

The mask does not change: this beautiful young woman who is smiling will continue to smile, this terrifying old man maintains the same expression on and on. Therefore whenever I have a discontinuous temporality, more precisely an atomistic one, where there is no gradual change by transitions, but appearance, then disappearance then appearance again of a more or less different face, I have as a result masks irrespective of whether material masks or make-up—a stand in for a physical mask—are placed over the faces. The absence of transition as such changes faces into masks (when there is an actual physical mask, it is just an implementation of the absence of transition). The faces that would result from the discontinuous, atomistic temporality of the Ash’arite theologians are masks. Indeed in Moslem miniatures, we have not so much an absence or ignorance of individuation (even in those Ottoman miniatures with rows upon rows of soldiers all having the same face) as an absence of emotional transition, and thus masks. The mask implies that I am missing something, but not behind it: rather at its location, when it indicates my gaze’s swish pan in fear; or between it and another mask, when it implies a discontinuous world, especially one with an atomistic temporality. The mask is either the transition *par excellence*, being the result of the swish pan of one’s gaze as a result of fear (as in the “Foxes’ Wedding” section in Kurosawa’s *Dreams*, where the masks the child sees over the anthropomorphic foxes are the embodiment of his fearful swish pan of his look away from them); or else the absence of transition, a result of temporal atomism. Eisenstein, one

of the major proponents of montage writes: “The first and most striking example [of methods of montage in the Japanese theater, particularly in acting], of course, is the purely cinematographic method of ‘acting without transitions.’ ...

At a certain moment of his performance he [the Kabuki actor] halts; the black shrouded *kurogo* obligingly conceals him from the spectators. And lo!—he is resurrected in a new make-up. And in a new wig. Now characterizing another stage (degree) of his emotional state.”⁹ We have such “acting without transitions” in Kurosawa’s *Dreams*. In “The Blizzard” section, we first see the Siren-like smiling face of a beautiful young woman; then her face is obscured by her hair flapped by the wind; then again we see her face but now it is an angry one; then again it is hidden by her hair; then again we see the face as the hair is removed from it by the wind: it is now that of a terrifying old man. We thus get different stages of the action without any transition between them. This absence of the transition changes the face into a mask. We thus have masks in Kurosawa’s *Dreams* not only in the first section, “Rainbow,” where (the spirits of) the foxes are physically masked; and in the section “The Tunnel,” where the revenants’ faces are made up into black zones around the eyes and white ones elsewhere so that they form masks; but also in “The Blizzard” section.

9. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 42. This acting without transitions is actually better viewed within the context of Dōgen’s Zen rather than of dialectical montage: “It is a mistake to suppose that birth turns into death. Birth is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future... Death is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future.... In birth there is nothing but birth and in death there is nothing but death” (“Birth and Death” [*Shōji*]).

When he, a physicist, first encountered Minkowski’s formulation of relativity in terms of space-time, he was not perplexed and felt no resistance to it, since it confirmed his experience: he was

unaware of any flow of time. He was aware of movement only. “But if you are aware of movement, then you are aware of time, since time, according to Aristotle, is the number of movement.” He was untouched by that Aristotelian definition of time. Nothing could make him feel that there is time. Not even music? No, for he subscribed to Schopenhauer’s view that “music is... a copy of the will itself,” which is beyond the principle of sufficient reason, that is, beyond time, space, and causality. Fundamentally, music is not a temporal medium. One day, he was dumbfounded while watching a film. In his diary, he wrote: “Today for the first time, I have experientially witnessed time, in a film. I will go back tomorrow and watch the film again, to make sure that I was not the victim of some hallucination.” When he returned the next day, he got his confirmation. The first time a filmmaker produced time in the medium of film, it became a potentiality of that medium. Only cinema is a temporal medium, occasionally. Film records and thus preserves time only secondarily, for it has first to produce it. From then on, he felt neither that time does not exist nor that it is pervasive, but that it is rare. He watched films less to see images than to occasionally feel time.

When I look at the object with my interior monologue stopped, I am convinced of what Einstein’s relativity tells me: the object is not subject to some passage of time. But while the passage of time may be an illusion in the world, it is not so in fiction. Thus fiction is our way, we mortals, to make the world, otherwise preserved in relativity’s block universe of four-dimensional space-time, transient. Great fiction preserves a world it has first made transient.

If the past were not preserved in itself, if the past vanished, the photographic image would disappear as soon as it was

“recorded,” filmed, taped. The film or video shot is a window on a small section of the Minkowski block universe, where there is no passage of time, no transience, where things and events are preserved as such. If film can have a function of preservation, it is not of the world, given that in the block universe of relativity, where time does not pass, the world is preserved as such; but rather of fiction worlds, of worlds it has created.

If an essential function of the cinematic image is to preserve, then anything that is auto-preserved does not appear in cinematic recordings. The Bergsonian past and God cannot appear in cinema. If “cinema films death at work” (Cocteau) it is also because to film something is to imply that it does not preserve itself, that it is subject to some variant of death, and consequently that it requires cinema in order to be preserved.

Preservation through TV images produces a *memory for forgetfulness* (Maḥmūd Darwīsh).

All forms of indexical preservation are becoming secondary. Digital emulation (perfect simulation) will become the major form of preservation—of even what never existed actually.

‘Āshūrā’, Duodeciman Shi‘ites’ yearly commemoration of imam Ḥusayn’s slaughter alongside many members of his family in Karbalā’ in 680, is less to remember that historical event than to slowly, along the years, decades and centuries, imbue in Shi‘ites the feeling that that event cannot be reduced to the linear and historical, but belongs also in part to ‘*ālam al mithāl* (the Imaginal World)—the visionary realm where bodies are made incorporeal and spirits and Intelligences are materialized—where it is in no need of preservation, but preserves itself. That event insists at the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) level, through the yearly

commeration of ‘Āshūrā’; but it also subsists at another level, esoteric (*bāṭin*), in ‘*ālam al mithāl*. We have the urge to repeat such an event not to historically preserve it, but so that on the long run we would come to feel that that event is already preserved. What we are apprehensive about is not forgetting such an event as forgetting that it is preserved, that it preserves itself. And the repetitions, with the inevitable distortions, signal to us that it is not preserved as it happened historically. We repeat so that gradually, along the repetitions, as the event gets more and more distorted, it would come to approximate how it is preserved (we still have to discriminate in the hagiographic popular fabulation from what belongs to the Imaginal World).

Imām Ḥusayn said to Umm Salama: “I know the day and hour, and the spot wherein I shall be killed. I know the place whereon I shall fall, and the spot in which I shall be buried, as I know you.” Weakening and failing one’s destiny do not necessarily reside in trying to avoid or flee the scene where the fatidic event is projected to occur or in attempting to repress such a knowledge, but in totally reducing the event to the linear time in which it also occurs. The temptation here lies in reducing destiny to, and living it as, (only) a future event. The test of Ḥusayn and his followers is to maintain a subtle unbridgeable difference between the actualization in the world of his slaughter at Karbalā’ on the tenth of Muḥarram 61 A.H., and that event as part of ‘*ālam al mithāl*, the Imaginal World where bodies are made incorporeal and spirits and Intelligences are materialized. Ḥusayn’s words are not a simple prediction since at the level of the visionary ‘*ālam al mithāl* the event is not only yet to happen but has already happened even as he speaks to Umm Salama. It is thus that in the hagiographic literature, for example in Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-Anwār*, when passing on the spot of Karbalā’, the previous prophets Adam, Noah,

Abraham, Moses, and Jesus feel, often as a physical pain, the aura of the slaughter that is yet to happen in linear time.

Who better than Shi’ites, this people of the surpassing disaster, have thought occultation and withdrawal: the Ismā’īlīs’ cycles of occultation, during which the esoteric sense should not be divulged; and the occultation of the twelfth imam of Duodeciman Shi’ites—whether it be the Lesser Occultation (when the imam was part of the world but hidden, communicating with his party by means of his deputies), or the Greater Occultation that followed it (when he is no longer in the world)? Who has as much as they tried to resurrect what has been withdrawn: the Great Resurrection of Alamūt under the Nizārī Ḥasan ‘*ala dhikrihi*’l-*salām* (on his mention be peace)?

The one who is *absolutely modern* (Rimbaud) and the resurrector of tradition are both reacting to the surpassing disaster, which produces a withdrawal of tradition;¹⁰ while the modernist or postmodernist and the traditionalist are not. Thus the one who is absolutely modern has more affinity with the resurrector of tradition than with the modernist or the postmodernist; and the resurrector of tradition has infinitely more affinity with the absolutely modern than with the traditionalist oblivious of the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster.

Godard’s *Bande à part* mentions a certain Jimmy Johnson of San Francisco who set a record for touring the Louvre in 9 minutes and 45 seconds. He must have had a busy schedule of site-seeing

that day. Taking this American philistine as a symptom of an accelerated temporality that is replacing slower ones, one is faced with the threat of the precipitated mortality of many of the artworks in the Louvre. While museums can physically preserve artworks, they cannot shield them from mutating temporalities. This hurried American is the figure of death to these artworks. Is he and his type one of the forms of a surpassing disaster that is resulting in the withdrawal of paintings, with the consequence that one has to resurrect them, as Godard does in *Passion*, 1982, if one wants to maintain them available?

Even if all at first arrive in Paradise, only a few linger there. To ascertain that, go to a great performance of santur music: soon enough, you will witness people leaving the auditorium!

A woman dancing alone is the figure of fidelity—of the music to her.

The dancer practices assiduously each movement. These rehearsals to the music are to release a subtle body that knows the perfect moves in no time. This subtle body cannot make mistakes all the more because it is not dancing to the music but the music is accompanying it. It is thus only in dances that do not project the dancer into an altered realm that it is an ideological mystification to eschew showing the dancers practicing to accomplish their felicitous dance.

She's asked to dance not by you but by the music.

"I am flattered": How unflattering is this response. Did Mary answer the annunciation angel: "I am flattered"?

Air and water are different media in which dissimilar kinds

of beings live and move. One has only to look at dancers to perceive that music too is such a medium.

The choreographer Laurie Macklin incarnated music in the guise of the body of the composer, who walked on the stage playing his wind instrument. One of her piece's shortcomings was that when the music stopped for a while and the dancer froze, there was no incarnation of silence.

The music suddenly went wild, dancers no longer able to be simultaneous with it, and began to rid itself of even the best of them. I have seen a striptease of music.

Dance is not erotic. The supposed eroticism of dance is the result of the common urge to penetrate the aura of the dancer.

Dancers' feet movements are an acupuncture of the floor.

If god is the *unmoved mover* (Aristotle), the dancer is the unmoved moving. The freezing in the realm into which dance as an altered state of the body projects the dancer allows the animation of the inanimate, with the result that the dancer can move without moving. While standing still, the ground below him or her was moving. Dance is the nomadism of the sedentary. *Dance Road* in Indiana is a misnomer since the designated road does not itself move.

Only dancers, meditators, and ancient Egyptian statues can be seated without giving the sensation of stagnation.

The somnambulism of a dancer continuing his or her dance after the music has stopped or walking backward without bumping against anything, not even himself or herself in the form of hesitation.

Walking back and forth on one-way pavements, in empty subway compartments at $2 < x < 5$ a.m., on escalators going up, in front of cars stopped by WALK signs. In his essay "Walking," Thoreau deploras the state into which sauntering has degenerated: "Half the walk is but retracing our steps." Such is not the walk he practiced; such also is not the back-and-forth movement, for the latter kind of motion is a basic unit and hence cannot validly be viewed as made up of two stages and movements.

I walked for so long my shoes, in mint condition when I left, were in tatters. I bought new ones. Only then did the trip begin.

"He's of normal height." They overlook that he's standing on quicksand, and hence that his height should be measured from the quicksand's bottom up and not from its surface up. What height is one whose head is quicksand?

In Woody Allen's *Side Effects*, Abraham Lincoln is asked how long a man's legs should be: "Long enough to reach the ground." Almost a Zen answer? Asked how it feels after attaining satori, Daisetz T. Suzuki answered: "Just like ordinary everyday experience, except about two inches off the ground!"

She goes down slowly and reaches the ground. One feels she has to descend even lower. And indeed, the male ballet dancer soon stands on the tips of his feet, raising the surface with him.

The surface is the most difficult place, for one must, in the same movement, balance oneself on it and keep it in balance by maintaining its constituent imbalance.

That other puppet: the tightrope walker.

They regard themselves as different because of their failure to imitate. Unfortunately, they all fail to imitate in the same way.

"One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil," writes Nietzsche (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)—also if one remains later only a teacher.

All they do is comment on their quotes from one author by paraphrasing what another author wrote.

When I am quoting something to *most people*, I feel I am paraphrasing it.

Style as the only legitimate quotation marks: the one without style is ever paraphrasing himself. Hence the redundancy of enclosing within quotation marks the words of someone who has style. The academician's quotation marks: fingernails that reduce everything that comes their way to dirt.

His graceful superciliousness manifested itself in his refusal to persuade.

They felt sometimes annoyed with him for what they considered an attempt to impress them with his ideas, when in fact he was getting rid of those thoughts of his he considered merely smart but without any necessity by drowning them into the anonymous noise of simultaneous conversations where it is no longer clear who said what, who heard what, who did not hear what. The advantage of being solitary is that one does not waste too much time with and on people, but the disadvantage is that one is less able to exclude from the book what should

be merely said and wasted in a conversation. Had they not forced him to despise them so much, thus precluding his having conversations with them, his book would have been more laconic.

Their last weapon against me is to make me terribly despise them: too much contempt is sterilizing.

Alone at night
The mind blank like a white paper
And the white paper

How dark must be a book on which nothing is written.

The fade-in in many a film functions as the nicest alarm.

One used to come to school late every morning not because one was too sleepy, but because the class made one so.

“Don’t you ever stop reading?” The one posing the question must not have noticed that the subway’s light is intermittently off.

A book had to be of a critical size so that the look would remain focused inside it and not slip away to the world. It had to form a horizon and it did. But soon wrist-sized computer terminals will be widespread. Words will then become subtitles to the world: the world as foreign.

It is not on the day of arrival from abroad but only on the second day that one feels very tired, as if one’s tiredness were a suitcase that got lost in some airport or other on those flights with two transit cities, and that arrives a day or so after one’s

own arrival. Direct flights from the U.S. to Lebanon are illegal. One buys a Chicago-London-Amman ticket. Once one gets to the airport in London, the ticket is changed automatically to a London-Beirut one. One soon discovers however that one’s tiredness is not proportional to a Chicago-London-Beirut trip, but to a Chicago-London-Amman-Beirut trip.

Lebanon is so small there are no internal flights between its cities: a country without sky.

In Lebanon, 100,000 people were killed in ten years of civil war compounded by war. Peacetime death rate per 1,000 pop.: 8. Lebanese population: 2,852,000. Number of natural deaths per year: 22,816. Excess period: the number of years it would take for 100,000 peacetime deaths to occur in Lebanon: 4.383. Callous optimists would say the war has done Lebanon a favor, raising life expectancy in it from 65 years for males and 68.9 years for females to 69.383 years for males and 73.283 years for females: a country of survivors in the cheap and shallow sense that its people on the whole live beyond the life expectancy. Callous pessimists would say that because of the carnage the real life expectancy is 60.617 years for males, 64.517 years for females: a country of suicidal persons in the cheap and shallow sense of having its population on the whole die below the life expectancy.

To forgive is to forget. A pessimist would add: to forget is to forgive.

The moment is eternal, hence eternity should end in one moment: the logic of pain.

In all the shots in which he appears, he is a reflection in mirrors

or water or is framed by a painting on the wall behind him, becoming his own image, something that does not feel pain. A high ratio of such shots in a film or video (Bill Viola's *Migration*) is frequently symptomatic of a director hypersensitive to pain.

The out-of-focus of weeping eyes. Suddenly feeling that, like a shot lit by a spotlight is visually harsh, an in-focus shot is harshly focused.

Sometimes tears that do not condense around any incident.

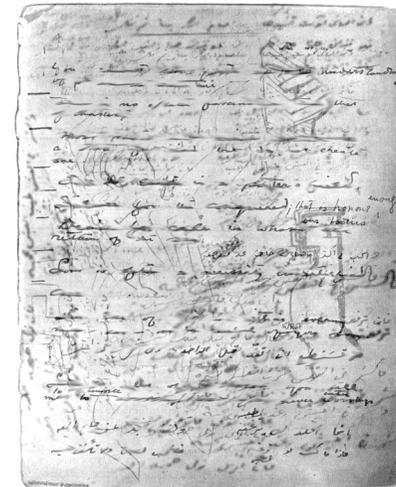
The bum seen in the street with *one* sock on, and the latter has changed into a bandage.

Lebanon. Nothing left, not even leaving.

The title of a May 2001 workshop organized by Lebanese videomakers Maḥmūd Ḥujayj and Akram Za'tarī, for which they invited seven persons from four Middle Eastern countries and from various fields (cinema, video, graphic design, etc.) to come to Lebanon, join two Lebanese, and make, along with these latter, each a one-minute video by the end of the workshop, was *Transit Visa*. Can one have a transit visa to a radical closure? Doesn't the very notion of having a transit visa to Lebanon imply that notwithstanding the siege of West Beirut by Israel during the latter's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, it is not a radical closure?

In addition to so much Lebanese photography that remained at the level of artistic documentation, for instance the work of Sāmīr Mu'ḥaḍ (*Les Enfants de la Guerre: Liban 1985-1992*; and *Mes Arabies* [Éditions Dār an-Nahār, 1999]) and Fu'ād al-Khūrī, who were treating and continued to treat the civil-war and war as a disaster and the closure that affected Lebanon as

relative albeit extreme, we encounter two kinds of works that are symptomatic and emblematic of a Lebanon that was during part of the war years a radical closure and/or a surpassing disaster.



Atlas Group, document TR680.5 W 23, anonymous donor.

Where is the rest of the world? What is the world doing? How is the world allowing such atrocities not only to happen but also to go on being perpetuated for months and years? The incredible desertion of the world is the leitmotiv of the indignant exclamations one hears in zones under siege: the Palestinians and the Lebanese in West Beirut during the Israeli siege of that city in 1982; the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the start of their closures then sieges by the Israelis; the inhabitants of Sarajevo during its siege by Bosnian Serbs; the Tutsi minority during the Rwandan genocide of 1994; the Iraqis since the start in 1990 of the on-going sanctions. Is it strange that some feel, or make artworks that

imply that these places became radical closures? Can we detect in such places one of the consequences of radical closures: unworldly, fully-formed a-historical irruptions? As usual, it is most appropriate to look for that in artworks. The “document” attributed by Walīd Ra’d to Kahlil Gibran and projected as a slide for the duration of Ra’d’s talk “Miraculous Beginnings” at Musée Sursock in Beirut (see image on page 83);¹¹ and the eight small black and white photographs of group portraits of men and women that were published in Ra’d’s photo-essay “Miraculous Beginnings,” and that—the reader is told—are part of twenty-nine large photographic prints and fifty-two documents (handwritten notebook entries, letters, typed memoranda and minutes) unearthed in 1991 during the demolition of Beirut’s civil war-devastated Central District, processed by laboratories in France and the USA,¹² and handed to the Arab Research Institute,¹³ can be legitimately viewed as unworldly a-historical irruptions in the radical closure that Beirut may have become at one point.¹⁴

We live in a block universe

11. Walīd Ra’d, “*Bidāyāt ‘ajā’ibiyya—mīswadda* (Miraculous Beginnings—A Draft),” trans. Ṭūnī Shakar, *Al-Ādāb*, January-February 2001, Beirut, Lebanon, pp. 64-67. The document in question appears on page 65.

12. Walid Raad, “Miraculous Beginnings,” *Public 16* (Toronto, Canada, 1998), pp. 44-53.

13. Is the role of art to reestablish the search for truth in the aftermath of wars, with their many falsifications and distortions? Is it on the contrary to insinuate and extend the suspicion to reality itself? Would the aforementioned Ra’d works be ones that extend the problematization and suspicion not only to the discourses and behavior of politicians but also to reality?

14. So can the video *Hostage: the Bachar Tapes (English Version)*, 2000, produced by Walīd Ra’d and whose purported director is the hostage Bachar Souheil notwithstanding that historically there was no hostage by that name.

Is it at all strange that the director of the radical closure film *The Birds* (1963) should conceive the following scene for *North by Northwest* (1959)? “Hitchcock: ‘Have you ever seen an assembly line?’ Truffaut: ‘No, I never have.’ ‘They’re absolutely fantastic. Anyway, I wanted to have a long dialogue scene between Cary Grant and one of the factory workers as they walk along the assembly line. They might, for instance, be talking about

of space-time, where nothing physically passes and vanishes, but where occasionally things withdraw due to surpassing disasters. Palestinians, Kurds, and Bosnians have to deal with not only the concerted erasure by their enemies of much of their tradition: the erasure by the Israelis of hundreds of Palestinian villages in 1948 and their renaming with Jewish names,¹⁵ and the erasure of hundreds of Kurdish villages during the *Anfāl* operation in Iraq, etc.; but also the additional, more insidious withdrawal of what survived the physical destruction. The exhibition *Wonder Beirut* by Juwānnā Ḥājjī Tūmā and Khalīl Jurayj (Janīne Rbayz Gallery, Beirut, July 1998) revolves around a photographer who, along with his father, was commissioned by the Lebanese State in 1969 to do postcards, and who four years into the civil war and while shut up in his studio takes down all these postcards, “which no longer referred to anything” since what they showed—Martyrs’

one of the foremen. Behind them a car is being assembled, piece by piece. Finally, the car they’ve seen being put together from a simple nut and bolt is complete, with gas and oil, and all ready to drive off the assembly line. The two men look at it and say, “Isn’t it wonderful!” Then they open the door to the car and out drops a corpse! ‘That’s a great idea!’ ‘Where has the body come from? Not from the car, obviously, since they’ve seen it start at zero! The corpse falls out of nowhere, you see!...’ ‘That’s a perfect example of absolute nothingness! Why did you drop the idea? ...’... We couldn’t integrate the idea into the story.” (François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott, rev. ed. [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984], pp. 256-257). In radical closure films such as *The Birds*, the Hitchcockian suspense is abrogated—the first, abrupt attack of a bird breaks with the principle of alerting the spectator to the dangerous element—and we switch to surprise (and then, past the first irruption, to free-floating anxiety). The haunting quality of Toba Khedoori’s *Untitled (Doors)*, 1995, and *Untitled (Apartment Building)* does not emanate from some possible presence of lurking people behind the rows of closed windows and doors, but from the eventuality of untimely irruptions. Consequently, despite the resemblance between her *Untitled (Apartment Building)*, 1997, and Hopper’s *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, there is a fundamental difference between these two paintings, since Hopper’s space is not a radical closure. Sooner or later (better later, when he or she has become adept at impressing on us the difference between a relative closure and a radical one), a radical closure artist paints or produces prisons or prison-like structures (the prison of Robbe-Grillet’s *Topology of a Phantom City*, of Magritte’s *Universal Gravitation*, of Khedoori’s *Untitled [Chain*

Square, the souks, policemen on camels, etc.—either was destroyed or no longer existed, and “burns them patiently, aiming at them his proper bombs and his own shells... thus making them conform better to his reality. When all was burned, it was peace.” Thus the following model sequence: photographs of burned buildings and scorched walls taken by him from the window of his studio a couple of years into the conflict; then, four years into the war, burned photographs that are later exhibited (this indicating that the war was then not yet a surpassing disaster, but just a localizable catastrophe); then in 1999, undeveloped photographs, a symptom of the withdrawal past the surpassing disaster that Beirut must have become: “Today, this photographer no longer develops his photographs. It is enough for him to take them. At the end of the exhibition [*Wonder Beirut*], 6452 rolls of film were laid on the floor: rolls containing photos taken

Link Fence)), but the radical closure is elsewhere: the blank of Khedoori’s *Untitled (Auditorium)*. It is unsettling to see the museum guard walking in front of a radical closure painting such as Khedoori’s *Untitled (Park Benches)*, 1997, with its life-size benches, for such a painting gives the impression that the guard himself, supposed to prevent people from touching the painting, could irrupt in the latter (as happens to the museum spectator in the “Crows” section of Kurosawa’s *Dreams*). Because dogs guard against strangers, they are irrelevant in situations of radical closure: they cannot shield from the irruption of what does not come from the surrounding space and does not enter a house or other enclosure through an opening. If in works by radical closure filmmakers, dogs still appear, they fittingly do so in the manner of irruptions of unworldly barking sounds (Lynch’s *Lost Highway*). At one point in Duras’ *The Man Sitting in the Corridor*, the till then extra-diegetic narrator tells the female protagonist, whose eyes are shut, that the man who was standing in the corridor is coming towards her: “We—she and I—hear footsteps... I see and tell her, tell her he is coming” (Marguerite Duras, *The Man Sitting in the Corridor*, trans. Barbara Bray [New York: North Star Line, 1991], p. 19). Notwithstanding André Bazin’s proposition in 1951 that unlike in theater, with its flesh-and-blood actors, there is no presence in cinema, these irruptions introduce a presence in that medium: the women who irrupt in the final few minutes of Duras’ *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta* can be viewed as the fictional characters Anne Marie-Stretter and one of her party guests, but also as the actresses themselves. In Kubrick’s *The Shining*, before leaving the hotel on his yearly winter-leave sometime in the 1970s, the psychic cook told the psychic

by the photographer but left undeveloped” (from Ḥājī Tūmā and Jurayj’s text “*Tayyib rah farjī k shighlī*” [“OK, I’ll Show You My Work”], *Al-Ādāb*, January-February 2001, Beirut, Lebanon). Ḥājī Tūmā and Jurayj are currently preparing a show titled *Latent Image* in which they will frame and mount on the gallery’s walls textual descriptions of photographs taken but left unprocessed. Here are six examples from film roll no. PE 136 GPH 160:

- Master shot of the dead end from the window of the room. It is raining.
- Close shot of the seepage under the living room’s windows.
- The water enters into the kitchen.
- Close shot of the floorcloth in front of the living room’s windows.
- The rain on the room’s pane, with the camera focus being on the drops.
- Close shot of the spots of humidity on the wall and the ceiling.

While their work in *Wonder Beirut* and their forthcoming *Latent Image* bring to my mind two parts of Hollis Frampton’s *Hapax Legomena*, *Nostalgia* (1971) and *Poetic Justice* (1972), in the first of which Frampton placed one at a time photographs on a hotplate, the latter’s coil shortly tracing its shape on the photograph before the latter’s full burning; and in the second of

child of the middle aged Jack Torrance that he should not worry about the visions he might see in the Overlook Hotel, for they are like pictures in a book: they cannot hurt him. But precisely with radical closures, there is intermixing of world and media, and therefore what is inside a picture can intermingle with what is outside it, and vice versa. Did the child’s father end up becoming one of these, a picture in a book: the photograph with the inscription “Overlook Hotel, July 4th Ball, 1921” in which he appears as a middle-aged man?

15. See Walīd al-Khālīdī, *Kay lā nansa: qurā Filasṭīn al-latī dammarathā Isrā’īl sanat 1948 wa-asmā’ shuhadā’ihā (All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948)*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1998).

which he placed on a table, in between a small cactus and a cup of coffee, a stack of papers with descriptions of two hundred and forty different shots, which descriptions we read one at a time for the span of the film (for instance “#4. [close-up] A small table below a window. A potted cactus, a coffee cup”), I am aware that the burning of the photographs in *Wonder Beirut* has to do not only with matters relating to the medium as such, as in Frampton’s *Nostalgia* (Ḥājjī Tūmā and Jurayj: “We wanted to return to an ontological definition of these images: the inscription of light by burning” [Al-Ādāb, January-February 2001, p. 37]) but is also a reaction to the incendiary wars that were going on in Lebanon; and that the substitution of textual descriptions for the photographs is related not only to the problematic relation of words to images in audio-visual works, but also to the withdrawal of many images past a surpassing disaster. I had not expected the intermediary step of *Latent Image* between exhibiting rolls of undeveloped films in *Wonder Beirut* and a possible future exhibition of developed photographs. This intermediary step 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. Such resurrecting works are thus referential. It is interesting to see when—if at all—Ḥājjī Tūmā and Jurayj will feel the impulse to develop those photographs, this signaling the resurrection of tradition.

Felicitous photographs of Lebanon many years into the war and then many years following it: photographs taken by nobody—irruptions in a radical closure—but developed (*Miraculous Beginnings*); and photographs taken by someone but left undeveloped because of the withdrawal due to the

surpassing disaster that was Beirut (*Wonder Beirut*, 1999).¹⁶

It is one thing for an academic scholar like the Palestinian Walīd al-Khālīdī to do archival work (he is the editor of *Kay lā nansa: qurā Filasṭīn al-laṭī dammarathā Isrā’īl sanat 1948 wa-asmā’ shuhadā’ihā* [All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948]); it is, or at least it should be, another matter were Walīd Ra’d and Juwānnā Ḥājjī Tūmā and Khalīl Jurayj to do so. Walīd Ra’d is already a member of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), and Juwānnā Ḥājjī Tūmā and Khalīl Jurayj would, in my opinion, be fine candidates for membership in the same foundation, which was established in Lebanon in 1996, and whose aim is “to promote photography in the Middle East and North Africa by locating, collecting, and preserving the region’s photographic heritage.... Material in the collections will date from the early-nineteenth century to the present.” Ra’d is also implicated through his

16. Alongside the irruption of ahistorical fully-formed unworlly entities in the radical closure that the 1982 besieged West Beirut may have become (Walīd Ra’d’s *Miraculous Beginnings*, 1998 and 2001, *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs*, 1996-1999, and *Hostage: the Bachar Tapes [English Version]*, 2000); the withdrawal of tradition past the surpassing disaster that Lebanon may have become during and even after the 1975-1990 war (my *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*, 1995; Juwānnā Ḥājjī Tūmā and Khalīl Jurayj’s *Wonder Beirut*, 1999); tracking shots from a moving car that are not followed by reverse subjective shots and therefore do not indicate vision but the condition of possibility of recollection in Beirut (Ghassān Salhab’s *Phantom Beirut*, 1998); the fourth most important aesthetic issue and strategy in relation to Lebanon is that of the archeological image, a subject already addressed by Gilles Deleuze regarding Straub-Huillet’s work (with the break in the sensory-motor link “the visual image becomes *archaeological, stratigraphic, tectonic*. Not that we are taken back to prehistory [there is an archaeology of the present], but to the deserted layers of our time which bury our own phantoms... they are again essentially the empty and lacunary stratigraphic landscapes of Straub, where the... earth stands for what is buried in it: the cave in *Othon* where the resistance fighters had their weapons, the marble quarries and the Italian countryside where civil populations were massacred in *Fortini Cani*...” [Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 244]); Serge Daney in relation to Palestine (“As for the missing image, it is, still in *L’Olivier*, when Marius Schattner explains in a very soft voice that beneath the Israeli colony [which we

artistic practice in both the Arab Research Institute's archival collection *Miraculous Beginnings: the Complete Archive*, which as of 1994 comprised, we are told, forty-six hundred documents; and the Atlas Group's growing collection. While for now the artistic practices and issues at stake in these latter two archives have not affected or interfered with the collection of the AIF, it is quite conceivable that they will, through Ra'd, do so, problematizing the historical authenticity of its photographs, with the probable consequence that we will learn about new Muḥammad 'Abdallāh, Kamīl al-Qāriḥ, or Alban photographs. I envision, as a first stage, the archival collections of both the Arab Research Institute and the Atlas Group ending up equaling the collection of the AIF, presently around 30000 photographs; then at a later stage, the AIF archive becoming just an appendage of Ra'd's (largely virtual) archive, the latter occasionally referring to

see] there is, buried, covered over, a Palestinian village [which we don't see]. I also remember this because we are among the few, at *Cahiers du cinéma*, to have always known that the love of cinema is also to know what to do with images that *are really missing*" [Serge Daney, "Before and After the Image," trans. Melissa McMuhan, *Discourse* no. 21.1, Winter 1999, p. 190]); and myself, mainly in *Over-Sensitivity's* section "Voice-over-witness" in relation to the Shoah. Clearly, the issue and aesthetic of the archeological image belongs to any of the zones that have suffered massacres and mass graves: Lebanon, Rwanda, Cambodia, Srebrenica, etc. Do we witness an archeology of the image in those sections of Danielle 'Arbid's *Alone with War* (2000) where she goes to the Šabrā and Shātīlā Palestinian refugee camps and to the Christian town ad-Dāmūr, the sites of massacres and mass graves in 1982 and 1976 respectively, asking playing Palestinian children whether they have come across anything arresting while digging in their makeshift playground? Regrettably, the possibility of an archeological image is somewhat botched because what we hear in relation to these images is not a voice-over-witness, but journalist 'Arbid's commenting voice-over. It is therefore better to look for this archaeology of the image in Paola Ya'qūb and Michel Lasserre's *Al-Manāẓer (The Landscapes)*, 2001, where at the corner of some of the photographs of the green landscapes of south Lebanon one can read the inconspicuous terse factual information about Israel's invasion; and where one can hear the disincarnated voice of the stretcher-bearers ascend from this archeological earth to relate work anecdotes and describe life during the long Israeli occupation. While in this post-war period in Lebanon, those of us who have not become zombies are

the former as holding a small number of photographs that it does not have: "For an additional 23 photographs of the work of Kamīl al-Qāriḥ, as well as for an additional 20 photographs by Muḥammad 'Abdallāh, we refer you to the Arab Image Foundation's collection." What would happen to the AIF's "long-term goal of... the creation of a center in Beirut for the preservation and exhibition of its photographic collections..." were Juwānnā Ḥājī Tūmā and Khalīl Jurayj to end up becoming members of the foundation? How would the AIF's goal of preservation be affected by the presence of two artists who have burnt some of their photographs then exhibited them? How would the Foundation's goal of exhibition be affected by the presence of two artists who have included in one of their exhibitions myriad rolls of unprocessed photographs, therefore of unexhibited photographs? How would the Foundation's goal of archiving and therefore also dating be affected by the presence of two artists who assigned two different dates to what seems to be the same postcard of pre-

suspicious of classical cinema's depth (Deleuze: "You [Serge Daney], in the *periodization* you propose, define an initial function [of the image] expressed by the question: What is there to see behind the image?... This first period of cinema is characterized... by a depth ascribed to the image... Now, you've pointed out that this form of cinema didn't die a natural death but was killed in the war.... You yourself remark that 'the great political *mises en scenes*, state propaganda turning into tableaux vivants, the first mass human detentions' realized cinema's dream, in circumstances where... 'behind' the image there was nothing to be seen but concentration camps... After the [Second World] war, then, a second function of the image was expressed by an altogether new question: What is there to see on the surface of the image? 'No longer what there is to see behind it, but whether I can bring myself to look at what I can't help seeing—which unfolds on a single plane.' ... Depth was condemned as 'deceptive,' and the image took on the flatness of a 'surface without depth,' or a *slight depth* rather like the oceanographer's shallows..." [*Negotiations*])— which may explain, no doubt along with financial reasons, why a substantial number of the most interesting Lebanese makers of audiovisual productions work in video, with its flat images, rather than cinema—we believe in the depth of the earth where massacres have taken place, and where so many have been inhumed without proper burial and still await their unearthing, and then proper burial and mourning.

civil-war Beirut's central district, and wrote through the mouth of their fictional interviewer, the Twentieth Century Pierre Menard of Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*": "I have here two images, one taken by the photographer in 1969, the other a 1998 photograph of this same preexisting postcard.... By simply photographing these images you invent a new path, that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution"?

As a result of the damage to the power stations in Lebanon, only twelve hours of electricity are available daily. Like the sun, electricity rises and sets in Lebanon.



Seated (!) in my study, Naqqāsh, Lebanon, 10:30 PM, 8 February 2000.

They were discussing which theme to do for the next episode of a cultural program to be aired on a Lebanese TV channel. One of them suggested that they do it on Night: "Then we can work on *day for night*, etc." "For my part, I prefer to do it on *la nuit*, this way we can work on *nuit américaine*, *nuit blanche*, etc." I wonder whether unlike a camera on automatic, our eyes open ever so minimally when we hear or say or read the word *Night*, as if to compensate for the darkness that is projected by that term. He was starting to unbutton her shirt on the night of 7-8 February, 2000, when the room became suddenly dark: "What happened?" "Most likely, Israel has once more attacked the power stations." The next day they heard that there was indeed a devastating Israeli attack on power stations in which 10 people died and fifty four were wounded, and that power rationing would resume with only 6-7 hours of electricity a day, to be progressively increased over the next six to seven months. The nocturnal is not reserved for the night in Lebanon: even during daylight, doesn't a shade of the night appear every time the electricity is off due to electricity-rationing? Yes. The vampire sensed this, told his agent: "I stir in my coffin in Lebanon for the interval between the cutting off of electricity due to rationing and the turning on of private generators." The insomniac asked the person he just met and who unbeknown to him was a vampire: "Are you an insomniac?" Indeed he was, since he neither slept during the night, when he woke up, nor during the day, when he was frozen. The vampire's pursuers arrived during daylight at his lair, waited for him to stir out of his freezing when the electricity was suddenly off due to rationing, and fatally stabbed him. Through this additional period of darkness during which they do not sleep, the Lebanese have turned into quasi insomniacs. The spells of periodic cut off of electricity have allowed me, who is otherwise not an insomniac,

to better appreciate the two insomniacs E.M. Cioran and my friend the filmmaker and writer Ghassān Salhab. The night following the attack on the power stations, he went with two friends for dinner at Ban Thai, a small restaurant in Ashrafiyya. After taking their orders, the waitress returned to kindle the candles. He was on the verge of commenting that he's had it with this mawkishness, when the lights were off. The significance of the candles altered. The following day each of the three friends present at the dinner lectured in his academic setting on a subject having to do with night: one, critically, on the ersatz cinematic reflexivity in Truffaut's *Night for Day*; a second on the night that suspends *the night of the world* ("Yesterday, in *the night of the world*, ten people died in the Israeli air raids on power stations. One could see bloody heads, severed hands with crossed fingers, etc. These same people, now dead, must be experiencing 'the human being [each of them is as]... this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of presentations, images, none of which occurs to him or is present. This night, the inner one of nature that exists here—this pure self—in phantasmagorical presentations... here shoots out a bloody head, there a white shape... One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye—this night that becomes awful suspends the night of the world in an opposition" [from Hegel's manuscripts for the *Realphilosophie* of 1805/1806]);¹⁷ and the third on how in eternity, it is not light that is in the world, but the inverse, the world is in light, and on how when entities exist not in the world but in light, there is no alternation of day and night, for night, the absence of light, would then be the absence of entities: "In eternity, even 'the night is a sun' (Zarathustra)."

Many of the problems that led to the Lebanese civil war or perpetuated it have either remained unsolved, or even become exacerbated: the sectarianism, the unsightly architecture, etc. It is particularly the latter that makes me apprehensive about a resumption of the war: many wars are partly assaults on bad architecture (it is more understandable that in the West, with its more acceptable architecture, the military would think of weapons that can kill people without attacking buildings. With many present developing countries, this is not a good idea, since wars are in a way waged against unsightly architecture), either to destroy it wholesale or to remedy it by introducing the aleatory in it. The "civil"-war added to numerous buildings the element of the aleatory that so many Lebanese architects failed to include in their buildings in the years preceding the carnage. This addition of the aleatory is in part why drab cities appear beautiful, or at least more beautiful during wars, and why they appear again ugly once the reconstruction has been completed during the subsequent peace. I expected the war to have had at least one positive effect: to have revealed to young Lebanese architects how crucial it is to inject aleatory processes in architecture. One instead ended up with the worst combination: an architecture without the aleatory and a random urbanism.

Was it because no adequate monument to Beirut was produced in the aftermath of the war, whether in literature, cinema, video, or the other arts, that there occurred the strange, excessive post-war unconscious expectation that the whole of this city or at least its destroyed Central District would be preserved as a monument to itself and to the war? People could repress the traumatic past with a relatively good conscience as long as the memory embodied in the war-damaged buildings subsisted. It seems people could not tolerate that this collective, physical memory, the memory of "everyone and *no one*" (Nietzsche),

was being erased, that each had now to assume and access the traumatic memory through his or her anamnesis. At a certain level the frustration and anger at what Solidere, the company in charge of the reconstruction and development of Beirut's central district, is doing finds one of its source here.

Artists and writers are usually among the first to get to some out of the way place and explore it, so what are Lebanese novelists waiting for with respect to Beirut's aseptic reconstructed Central District? Why are they not being the first to "inhabit" it through their fiction?

Coming back to Lebanon from the USA, the absence of a proper dance scene adds to the constriction one feels in this very small country, since the country's superficiality is not virtually augmented by the space into which dance projects. Near the beginning of Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris*, the Gene Kelly character awakens from sleep in the small room where he lives, and then effortlessly raises his bed to the ceiling by a pulley, and moves with stylized gestures a chair and a table with retractable sides out of the closet. The space that seemed barely large enough at first to be a bedroom becomes wide enough to be also a living room. This scene foreshadows in a form easy to accept the subsequent actual creation of space by the dancer, who is projected by dance into a drawing then into various paintings and who creates depth in these surfaces at the pace of his movement. The originality of Minnelli's cinematic adaptation of these drawings and paintings is that he does it through the diegetic agency of a dancer, for this has as a consequence that the sections where the dancer has not yet moved and created space continue to be two-dimensional, painted or drawn backdrops, acting as traces of where the cinematic adaptation started from.

"Dancers in Lebanon are not thin enough!" "You are making an inaccurate generalization!" "I am not. The legendary thinness of the dancer, specifically of the ballet one, is not just, if at all, a matter of reduced weight, but is linked to the circumstance that dance allows him or her to cross into the mirror or into a screen or a monitor or a painting or a wall (while theater has a fourth wall, dance doesn't, since the dancer crosses one of the walls, revealing it not to be really one), and thus to somewhat assume the latter's flatness, however momentarily. Therefore a dancer who never projects a subtle body into the altered space-time of dance, or who does not reach a doubling with other dancers, implicitly crossing the mirror, never fully gives the recognizable strange leanness of the dancer."

— You're mad.

— No, I am a *nomad*—to flee the flight of the world.

"What is this video about?" This question was put to me despite the *No questions asked* included in the ad for actors and crew. Lebanese filmmakers and more so videomakers should not make films or videos to try to understand and make understandable what happened during the war years. While social scientists, whether sociologists, economists, etc., can provide us with more or less convincing reasons, and mystifiers can grossly nonplus us, valid literature and art provide us with intelligent and subtle incomprehension. One of the main troubles with the world is that, unlike art and literature, it allows only for the gross alternative: understanding/incomprehension. Contrariwise, art and literature do not provide us with the illusion of comprehending, of grasping, but allow us to keenly not understand, intimating to us that the alternative is not between comprehension and incomprehension but between incomprehension in a gross manner and while expecting comprehension; and incomprehension in

an intelligent and subtle manner. Great films and works of literature make even those who have researched the economic, sociological, and geopolitical reasons for the famine in Ethiopia, Sudan, and North Korea; the continuing sanctions against Iraq; the massacres in Rwanda; the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo not understand these catastrophes but intelligently and subtly. Art extracts the event from the reasons for its occurrence, even when it recreates these in a fiction. Valid films make us perceive the difference between understanding the reasons for an event and understanding the event. We who already see clearly in Lebanon the metastatic growth of buildings on shorelines and hills; the condoned emission of car pollutants such as diesel; the legalized wiretapping of phones, etc., and consequently desperately warn against ensuing disasters while so many others are oblivious of them, will nonetheless when these disasters actually happen make films and videos that show our subtle and intelligent incomprehension of them. If I found it difficult to teach, certainly when I started doing it, it was that students wanted, expected, demanded to understand. While I could somewhat tolerate this attitude in universities in the USA, I cannot stand it in Lebanon: what is there for current Lebanese university students, who are between eighteen and twenty-five years-old, to understand, they who have first been thrown in the world (Heidegger), and survived fifteen years of civil war and of the war with Israel, only to be submerged by the amnesia of the post-war era? While films, especially Lebanese ones, produced by people who suffered fifteen years of war, should allow us not to understand in an intelligent and subtle manner; theory should make us see (the Arabic *an-naẓarī* means both *the theoretical*, and *al-mansūb ilā an-naẓar*, what is attributed to vision): “At the end of the calculations and observations it was noticed that Jupiter and Saturn went according to the calculations, but that Uranus was doing something funny. Another opportunity for Newton’s

Laws to be found wanting; but take courage! Two men, [John Couch] Adams and [Urbain] Leverrier, who made these calculations independently and at almost the same time, proposed that the motions of Uranus were due to an unseen planet, and they wrote letters to their respective observatories telling them—“Turn your telescope and look there and you will find a planet.” ...

and they found Neptune!”¹⁸ I would advance (polemically?):

18. Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), pp. 23-24.

a cinema, especially a national one, can exist without cameras (as was made manifest by such films as Len Lye’s *Colour Box*, 1935, and *Free Radicals*, 1958, with their painted or scratched film stock; and Stan Brakhage’s *Mothlight*, 1963); without editing (Warhol’s *Sleep*); without projection, in an art for the dead à la that of ancient Egypt; but it cannot exist for long, thrive, without theoretical discourse around it. Arab filmmakers and videomakers seem to have left this task to Western critics, for instance to journals such as *Cahiers du cinéma*. This is only a stopgap.

The title of LA Weekly’s general review of the retrospective *CineArabic* was: “Arab Chic.” Setting aside the political problem of plays on association that draw on stereotypes, here in the form of the similarity of pronunciation of “Chic” and “Sheik,” it is instructive to contrast such a lazy and parochial journalistic link with two artistic practices.

Pierre Reverdy writes of the image: “It cannot be born from a comparison, but rather from the bringing together of two realities that are more or less distant from each other. The more distant and correct the relationships between these realities, the more emotive power and poetic reality the image will have” (*Nord-Sud*, no. 13, March 1918). Thus “the encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table”

(Lautréamont). When one does not avail oneself of the facile association provided by comparison, one is highly aware of how difficult and rare it is for an image to be created. If the artist is honest, the spectator is going to witness occasional failures to establish a correct relationship between the two distant realities and therefore the abortion of image-creation: this is one of the ways of viewing the appearance of the intertitle “The End” at two points in Godard’s *King Lear*, 1990, a film in which Reverdy’s words are referenced. Another manner of viewing the intertitle is as one of the two distant realities, which may have formed a correct relationship with the preceding shot, resulting in an image. It could be that the two times the intertitle appears function differently, one signaling the failure of the link of the two realities, the other the creation of an image of which it is a component.

The events of some Raymond Roussel novels go from one phrase to an almost identical one but with a different meaning. To go from *les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard* (the white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table) to *les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard* (the white man’s letters on the hordes of the old plunderer), one has to cross all the events and geographies of *Among the Blacks* or *Impressions of Africa*. In case the universe, which started in a singularity, were to implode back to a singularity, I would like to imagine that the difference between the two would be of the same measure as that between the *p* (of *pillard*) and the *b* (of *billard*) in Roussel’s two phrases, the whole universe coming to pass through this minimal difference between the singularity of the Big Bang and that of the Big Crunch: *Impressions of the Universe*. The risk one faces when one works with these virtually identical entities is the insinuation and proliferation of doubles (Foucault has done a thorough job intermittently tracking the doublings in Roussel’s work in his book *Death and the Labyrinth*).

Style: a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table. Style: from *les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard* to *les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard*, across a universe of events. No image is created from the association of such stylish literature and films with the safe, removed, at best chic reality of virtually all American film criticism, especially the journalistic kind.

She’s sitting on the subway seat opposite mine. Her beat up sneaker, and just a little higher the miraculous tenderness and smoothness of the skin of her leg: as if each has gone through a different life.

Elias Canetti: “A nightbook, a ‘nocturnal,’ no line of which was written by day. Parallel to it a real daybook, a journal, always written by day. To keep the two apart for a few years, never comparing them, never confusing them. Their ultimate confrontation.” Was this entry written during the day or at night? Is their confrontation to occur at sunset or at sunrise? Or would it occur when both are co-present, each occupying a different part of the field of vision: a diurnal sky over a nocturnal landscape with a lit street lamp and a house with its lights on (Magritte’s *L’Empire des Lumières*).

Christ: “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” That is, don’t applaud—unless you’re a Zen master: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

Drunk. Each hand is solitary now, does not instinctively know where the other one is.

“I’m drunk. Don’t mind my laugh: it is an equilibrium device.”

Sober people feel that drunk ones reveal too much, but every drunk person knows that he reveals far less of himself during his inebriation than the sober ones reveal to him while he is drunk. So many of people's expressions are not caught by the sober: they are destined to the drunk. We perceive, unless drunk or in another altered state of consciousness, only the poses other men and women reveal to us—even the secrets we discover are poses. While drunk, one apprehends the gesturing with the static parts of the body: this long nose is a continuous gesture. The foam in the just filled beer glass from which I am drinking vanishing little by little, and little by little the voices of the persons becoming foam. I am feeling like a lamplight around which sounds and voices, like moths, are circling and bumping. I am feeling that every label on the liquor bottle is implicitly uttered, by itself. If in the state of drunkenness objects have their own light, then they probably have their own focus; I took off my glasses: yes, they continued to be in focus. For the fourth time in the last ten minutes, I racked-focus from an image to a sound. His loud laugh like an umbrella over our talk. Will jealousy-inducing be her way of making me "sober," of detaching the person she is presently speaking with from this mixing of voices-persons, the re-establishing of sync? Now that I've rested my head against the wall, trying to get away from the latter is like trying to disengage from a hug. This liquid quality of the voices that spill behind me as I leave the hall.

The wind is moving round and round like a dizzy drunkard, and it is we who fall.

The sound of a bell or of a hard object hitting against metal has a resonance that does not so much propagate across, as *dissolve* the distance between things.

An aphoristic writer is constantly interrupting himself—laconism—and being interrupted by the ideas that never come on time.

Nightclub. Asked three women for a dance. Three *Nos* (from the same mouth, saliva as eyebrow make-up, and the "No"). Now waiting, like a woman, for the idea to come to me.

Most people earn money by working from one specified hour to another. Is it surprising that they spend that money only on what begins and ends at prescribed times (almost everything has the inscription "Sell by...")?

Grand Central Station. Can one of these hurried people mistake the breeze on his arm for his breathing, this undoing the heart-clock, making him forget both the timetable and remembering the timetable? Not a one none nary one not any I'll be hanged if there is one far from it not by a long shot nohow not for the world no such thing of naught by no means by no manner of means on no account in no respect in no case under no circumstances on no condition at no hand never no way no nope nay nix unh-unh certainly not no sir no mam not a bit no such thing nothing of the kind nothing of the sort not so not to be met with nonexistent existless unexisting missing not a sign of not a like or smell no sirree shucks no! As soon as they have the apprehension that they will get at their destination before the appointed time, they begin to trip or to collide against each other. Anything is permissible, even becoming temporarily inefficient, so long as it allows them not to get too early somewhere, for then somewhere becomes nowhere, and time, long imprisoned behind the hands of watches, floods all clocks. Remains that which these immortality-loving people abhor the most: the sterility of time.

Not to evade time as waste through wasting time.

The everyday is that to which I am repeatedly inattentive: every day I inattentively shave carefully, every day I inattentively hang my trousers neatly. Something I see or do daily but to which I pay complete, detached attention does not become an everyday thing, is not repeated from one day to another even if it occurs in each. Not only is inattention part of the repetition compulsion, and therefore of death, death is inattention. That is indeed how death befalls us: we were inattentive for that fatal moment, we looked aside, we misplaced a foot. Inattention cannot but produce the repeatable, therefore the mortal accident I had through inattention either is itself reproduced, possibly in the kind of universe proposed by the Many-World interpretation of quantum physics; or else, if singular, unrepeatable, was the result of the attention of the one who willed it in a magical universe.

They repeat to forget what has been forgotten.

Against her ex-boyfriend's blackmail phrase: "I can't live without you," I told her: "You can't die without me." Nonetheless, she attempted suicide. There is no necessary link between attempting suicide and being suicidal. Suicidal people *live* in a suicidal manner. Moreover, while with the non-suicidal who kills himself, there is, however minimally, the sort of surprise one witnesses in films and books on doubles when the protagonist fleetingly realizes that while killing the other he has killed himself; the suicidal experiences no surprise as he or she falls mortally wounded after shooting himself or herself.

I hit a cockroach. Intense feeling at seeing the half-squashed insect still advancing very slowly. I hit it again. Speaking about

it, I would not have said *cockroach* but *like a cockroach*.

Given that clichés are implicated with the unconscious and given that the unconscious does not admit of negation, clichés can be undone by prefixing a "no" to them *only* by the one who has no unconscious, for example the yogi, or the mystic in moments of *fanā'*, of annihilation [in God], and with respect to what has no unconscious, God—we find ourselves here in negative theology, with its apophatic utterances that negate all clichés about God: existence, name, etc. Thus "What is the Divine Darkness?", Chapter 1 of Dionysius the Areopagite's *The Mystical Theology*, begins with these words: "Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness."

In Islam the world itself is a series of *āyāt* (signs) that hint toward its Creator. Thus in the Moslem philosopher Abū Bakr b. Ṭufayl's philosophical allegory, *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān (Living, Son of Wakeful)*, a person who is alone on an island, with no communication with others, including messengers, whether human (prophets) or angelic, reaches by reason alone all the tenants of Islam. Contrariwise communication receives an essential role both in a Gnostic world, since nothing in the world can act as a sign toward the alien God, who has to send someone to tell us about Him; and in a world where teleportation(/numerical emulation) has become possible, since the addresser himself or herself can then be communicated (these two sides of essential communication are present in Andy and Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix*, 1999).

Loneliness, for one can no longer meet people. Utter loneliness, as one has lost the ability to meet streets, words, images. Then loneliness disappears, for one no longer meets oneself—except sometimes a drop of rain passes slowly all the way from hair to lips.

The tree outside the window. For a while today there was no boundary between us and I knew that the shit *in* me is manure for it.

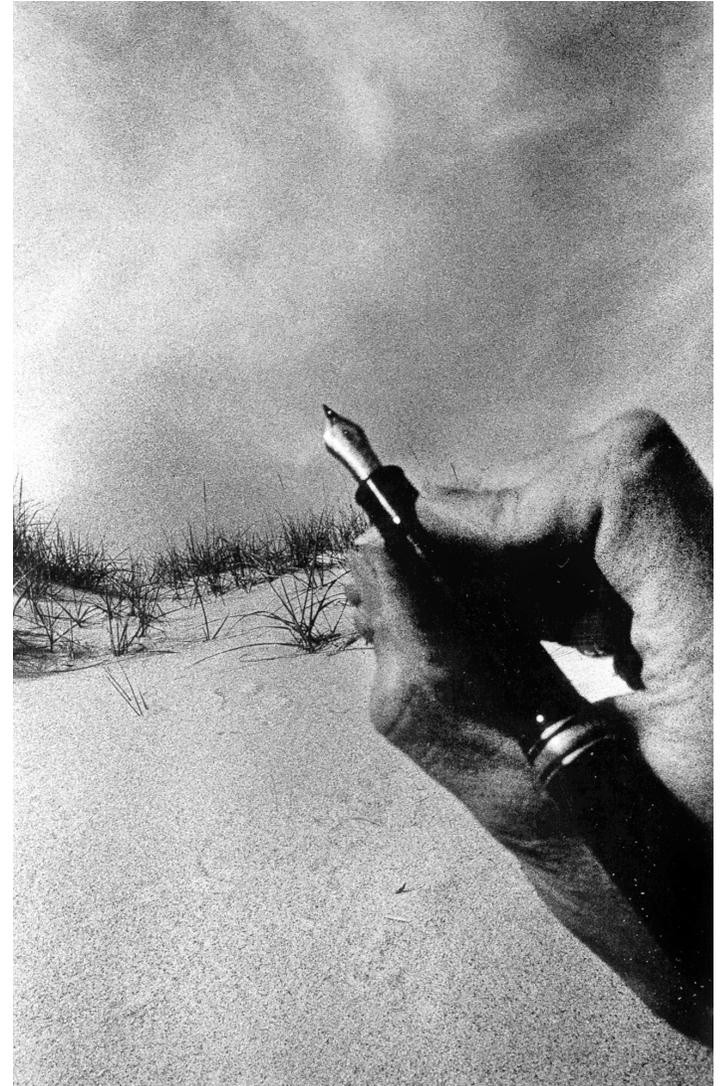
The distinction private/public is irrelevant to the solitary.

June 26, 1987. I felt shy passing a tree and the grass.

The real question is: Will one ever be able not to answer?

Should one want to continue to deserve to be the reader of one's book, this precluding one from degenerating to a much lower level of existence? Or should one risk change fully?

The last page finished, closing the book. It is as if rain has just stopped and one can go outside.



Real temptation is not of this world, but has always already introduced one for however minimal a time into another realm, intimated to one that the world one lives in is only one among so many.

May 1989. I took LSD for the first time. Three of my friends are conversing next to me. Then I deduce that I must have undergone a lapse of consciousness. Presently distance itself has receded. Passersby walk in slow motion. Their voices change in loudness, cease at times even while they continue moving their lips. Everything becomes frozen momentarily. Then I anxiously call my friends. They turn and look at me without recognizing me, extremely annoyed that I have disturbed them. I walk away on the sand: my feet begin turning into sand ones! I see four persons standing across the playground. Not only does no sound reach me from them, but they seem so far away that my first thought on how to communicate with them is to send them letters. For one's mind to take control, the world has to withdraw. Were an event that happened a long time ago to occur again, how would I know in which of the two occurrences I am since due to the withdrawal of the world no *period* indices exist any longer? I now remember any past event either as part of a conspiracy to make me take the drug, or else as a hallucination that I had after taking the drug—but did I really take it? Or is it rather that I have always been like this, and the events I remember as happening before taking the psychedelic as well as the event of taking the psychedelic are themselves hallucinations? Somehow I am managing to turn my eyes toward a person just before he or she starts a certain movement or gesture, catching him or her as he or she initiates it. This telepathic ability that is making me turn or look only where things are on the point of beginning is causing me to feel whenever on looking at someone I detect no movement either that the person has become frozen still or that he or she is an

actor that has relaxed his or her performance at the inopportune moment, unintentionally betraying that he or she is part of a conspiracy. One of the persons I saw earlier walking in slow motion passes by again: encountering twice a person separated from one by infinity seems unnatural, a sign of conspiracy. I have to evade the conspiracy making me think in terms of conspiracies. In Islam the outcast devil whispers to one; on hallucinogens, it is outcast reality that whispers to one. I walk to the public phones. The three are occupied. I wait then walk away so as not to witness with my own eyes or with my own hallucinations the talkers go on speaking forever. I walk back to the phones. One of them is free: at last to speak on the phone with reality! I call Mick. No answer. I call Janalle. No answer. I call Mark. Mark's voice. I have to redirect the words in their physical shape before saying them to him: if a word is facing in the wrong direction when uttered, the meaning will come out wrong or be gibberish. "Can you meet me in fifteen minutes?" Some time later, I ask a woman about the time. "6:30." Fifteen minutes must have passed since my conversation with Mark. I find it trying to continue waiting for him, for if he doesn't show up in a few minutes, this may imply that I have hallucinated the conversation with him. I begin to move away. Fortunately, I spy Mark coming in my direction. I tell him that I took LSD and suggest we go to Mick and Katherine's apartment and then to a restaurant. In the car, I ask him what time it is. He says: "6:30." I am seized with the dread that time had stopped. "Show me your wrist!" He does. I look at his watch. It is 6:33. Great relief. He buzzes Mick and Katherine. No answer. He looks around and says: "Strange, their car is here." Why did he say that? Did he really say that? We go to a diner. The objects there are illuminated by their own light, which, however bright, does not provide any additional illumination for adjoining objects. When a body is illuminated by such a light, it seems to be framed and

to be all aura. We order. An interval of silence follows. I observe Mark. Using very short time intervals in photography, the pose of the person is undone; getting to even more elementary intervals, the movement's own pose can be undone, one discovering within it many other kinds of motion. Going to even more elementary intervals one gets to expressions of preconscious processing of subliminal stimuli; these fraction of a second appearances-expressions, which usually cancel each other at the level of large time intervals, are seen during an LSD trip. To displace my attention away from these micro appearances-expressions that I am glimpsing on Mark's face, I start talking: "John Corbett decided to go to Milwaukee because he was tipped that an LP by Beuys & Paik that sells in Germany for fifteen hundred dollars can be purchased in a record store in Milwaukee for twenty dollars. When he, Michael, and I got there, he didn't buy it. We went to a restaurant. They had a sign with the word THINK attached to the glass window..." I interrupt myself. Does he think I am delirious? For why would a record sell in Germany for \$1500 and for only \$20 in Milwaukee? Why would John drive there to buy it and then not do that? Why would the sign "THINK" be on a restaurant's glass window?

The schizophrenic and the person undergoing a bad psychedelic trip have experienced labyrinthine temporality and have felt terrifying disorientation. The reason many of them nonetheless do not commit suicide is that the rationale for doing so, namely the labyrinthine form of time, is itself what prohibits the belief in a death that would happen at a specific time, ending everything.

Once the *imaginary line* that separates life and death is crossed, one is struck by how, due to over-turns, one's dialogues with

others disintegrate into monologues, the dead turning their backs to, and thus on, one, and one turning, against one's will, one's back to the living; but also how one's monologues are simultaneously dialogues (with the voices in one's head).

In a café, three weeks after taking LSD and witnessing how distant and withheld the world can be, how far objects can withdraw: the coffee cup is near again! This joy at feeling I am going out on a date with a cup of coffee.

The world has been so distant that now that I can again touch things, I feel I am caressing them irrespective of any movement of the hand.

Those who postpone often order their experiences and thoughts *to go*. This is not possible during an LSD trip. If at all, it is LSD that orders us *to go*: flashbacks.

The relation with the past has nothing to do with memory and everything to do with telepathy.

Night. Trees under which darkness hides from darkness.

One penetrates mystery only by becoming a mystery, since owing to the obliteration of the perception of the mystical vision in the third stage of *fanā'* (annihilation [in God]), esotericism applies in relation not only to others but also to oneself.

The title of an Arnulf Rainer Overpainting is what creates the secret.

Believing that the revelation of a secret is dependent on those

who participated in it or witnessed it betrays an ignorance of the secretive nature of the encounter itself: did it happen?

A secret is the indistinguishability of truth and lie.

A secret cannot be revealed since its revelation introduces the *speaker* and the listener into another world—hence it is as dangerous to hear a secret as to tell one. The real secret is this furtive displacement.

A secret cannot be made manifest, because, like a black hole, it imprisons that which makes visible.

Only schizophrenics have the right to use voice-over since they suffer from it.

It would be stupefying if there is not even one play where a character, and we with him, hears the/a prompter, whether because he is mad or a saint, etc.

Bus #30 in Milwaukee, 12:30 p.m. A deaf person is “talking” to himself in sign language.

Although a mortal, I am not fluent in any of the languages of the voices!

Conscious malice always bored him; only unconscious evil interested and scared him. Was it anomalous that conscious malice should bore him when it was itself the product of boredom?

Many Sūfīs played *the devil’s advocate*. Ḥallāj: “There were no lawful declarations except those of *Iblīs* (Satan) and Muḥammad”

and “There had been no monotheist (*muwahhīd*) comparable to *Iblīs* among the inhabitants of heaven” (“Ṭā’ Sīn al-Azal wal-Ittibās,” *al-Ṭawāsīn*); Aḥmad Ghazālī: “He who does not learn *tawḥīd* [profession of God’s Unity] under *Iblīs* is only a *zindīq* [heretic]!” They thus became at times the Devil, for the Devil is just the devil’s advocate.

How to know whether one is changing or not when the measure of change, time, is itself mutating?

That phrase, “Sunday, March 2, 1986. I touched a branch,” may somehow save me from the delirium of time.

You cannot imagine, J.J., how excessively old I was while writing (*Vampires*). Age difference is the possible objection to a relationship between us, but not in the way you think: not the fact that you are thirteen years older than me, but that I have become infinitely older than you as a consequence of dying before dying.

The two extremes of solitude: that experienced during a bad LSD trip, when a zoom-out of the world occurs and humans become lifeless extras; and that of no longer believing in the existence of untimely collaborators.

The absence of untimely collaborators cannot be remedied, except, perhaps, by going through a dissociation à la Alan Gray’s in Dreyer’s *Vampyr*, but with the attendant danger of one of the dissociated entities turning against the other—the most widespread form of the double, the malignant.

A writer is at the juncture of absolute aloneness, which is not to be reduced to sociological and/or psychological solitude;

and absolute collaboration, which is not to be reduced to an explicit cooperation with other artists, with the audience, or even with nature.

Art is inextricably linked to the unconscious, not only in those artworks, such as surrealist ones, that explicitly foreground such a connection, but generally through the processes by which the images are reached and linked (condensation, displacement, etc.). Thus it is connected to death not as organic demise but as the realm of undeath. As an artist or writer I am basically alone, neither because I am an individual (a limited, largely bourgeois notion), nor because I am alienated (a limited, largely Marxist notion), nor because of the withering of civil society in the late twentieth century, but because “dying... is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative” (Martin Heidegger).¹⁹ After the experience of the great desertion by the world, including by oneself, who is part of the world, on the “Day of Judgment” in the undeath realm, and the realization how alone one is in death and other extreme states of altered consciousness, it is difficult not to drift into solitude, any talk becoming insignificant as long it cannot, like certain lamas’ recitation of the *Bardo Thödol*, overcome the inaccessibility of the dead. In Lynn Marie Kirby’s video *Paris and Athens, June*, 1994, when the image freezes, the diegetic sounds often continue. Sound has a double power: that of betraying the image; but also of assisting and enlightening the dead: after neither images nor smells reach us any longer from the world of the living, a certain voice may still reach us, that of the Tibetan monk or ancient Egyptian lector priest reciting from

19. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 297. While it is true that “dying... is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative,” with the exception of spiritual masters such as yogis, my death is always purloined by some double across the lapse at the *imaginary line* between life and death.

their respective books of the dead.²⁰

Nonetheless, and despite this basic aloneness of mortals in general, every artist and writer, even the most solitary one, is an untimely collaborator. His or her untimely collaboration can be with his or her amnesiac variant to the other side of the threshold of death; but also, irrespective of the unconscious, with other creators across time. What is intuition? It is both the connection, out of direct awareness, to what one experienced in an altered realm of body or consciousness, such as dance or death, that one reached and “left” across lapses; as well as the untimely collaboration with future dancers, writers, thinkers, etc., who are not wedged fully in chronological time. It is because of this untimely collaboration that many artists don’t feel any urge to collaborate with explicit, historically contemporary others. What makes letters in literary books irreducible to a private affair is not only that they are refracted through formal issues, but also that one collaborated with future writers or artists in an untimely way in writing them. While I experience most artworks in the far less demanding manner of a spectator or a critic, this was not the case with Paradjanov’s *Sayat Nova* and Van Gogh’s *Wheatfield with Crows*. I felt that I had incurred a debt, that I have enjoyed these accomplished works on credit. Collaboration in the arts and literature is frequently the locus of the sort of paradoxes one encounters in time-travel situations. Is it possible for me to physically die before I fulfill my part of an untimely collaboration whose resultant is already present, i.e. before I accomplish what I had seemingly already done?

Given the *trance*/lapse that almost always seizes one at the *entrance* between life and death/undeath, one never crosses from

20. That in Godard it is on the contrary the diegetic voice and sound that abruptly stop while the image continues is an earmark of his stress on the image and his suspicion of the voice, which is linked to the text; but also indicates that Godard’s world is basically that of the living.

one to the other, but always finds oneself already in either; therefore one can receive from the undeath realm only by creating. Literature, radio art, and film are three of the main ways for us to receive from the realm of death/undeath, enabling us to think in relation to it (one cannot use film as a device to reveal certain facets of death and then discard the formal and mediumistic attributes of film, for, as in quantum physics, the measurement apparatus with which we observe a phenomenon that has to do with a realm that does not admit of negation, the unconscious/sum-over-histories of subatomic particles, affects the phenomenon that's studied, inflects it). Creative writing that is received from the dead is most often also addressed to them: the undead and schizophrenics, who are assailed by the thoughts inserted in them and who are often in dispossession of their own thoughts, may receive back from the writer their thoughts, which he or she received from them by creation. While the first edition of *Distracted* was written for the living, (*Vampires*) wasn't, at least not solely and fundamentally (there is a tradition of writing and art addressed to the dead: the *Bardo Thödol*, the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the Egyptian statues and reliefs that were not to be seen by the living [at least during the Old Kingdom] but buried in the tombs with the dead). That is why while I was not disheartened by the meager response (from the living) in relation to (*Vampires*), I was so by the disregard of the first edition of *Distracted*. But should I have been disheartened by the latter? With the widening dissolution of the aura, as a result of the loss of distance in the twentieth century (a phenomenon addressed by Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," and by José Ortega y Gasset in his book *The Revolt of the Masses*), has not aphoristic writing become anachronistic?

The world acclaimed his first book too late: by that time he was no longer satisfied with it, could tolerate it only in the guise of a shorter future second edition. The world's belated acclaim of the first works of avant-garde writers is one more revengeful sign of its rancor towards those who are not behind their time but of it.

Is *Distracted* a book of aphorisms? It is an aphoristic book, thus one that admits of no prefaces and one whose first edition did not vaccinate against itself since no part of it had already been published (in articles, etc.); but a book that, as far as its first, 1991 edition was concerned, announced itself, since a finished part of it, the first edition of (*Vampires*), hence something simultaneous with it, was published later than it, in 1993. *Distracted* was published too early, a too early that cannot be circumvented since the telepathic—(*Vampires*)—affects from a distance in time and space. As can be seen (and prior to that, sensed—always the too early), a book *about time*.

Jalal Toufic resided in Lebanon for seventeen years. His deceased father was Iraqi. His mother is a Lebanese citizen of Palestinian origin (born in Haifa). "How does it feel" (Bob Dylan)—*does it still feel?* (Jalal Toufic)—to be related to three countries that have become synonyms for devastation? Was *Distracted* simultaneously what resulted from, what was salvaged from and what resisted this devastation? Yes it still feels. Will *Distracted* itself manage to withstand the devastation of (*Vampires*), a work that resulted from, was salvaged from and resisted another devastation, dying before dying? An old acquaintance who did not try to dissuade me from finishing and publishing (*Vampires*) strongly advised against publishing a revised edition of *Distracted* (an alternate title for this edition could be *Distracted Revision*). He does not seem to understand that (*Vampires*) is

the real threat to *Distracted* in *any* of the latter's editions. The "Author's Note" to the 1991 version indicates that *Distracted* and (*Vampires*) form the two volumes of one book: this was partly a defensive measure to ward off the eventuality that (*Vampires*), which was initially to be my second book, turn into a double of *Distracted*, subverting and ruining it.

Bonus:
An Interview with Jalal Toufic

by Aaron Kunin

*Most things that are strange are actually strange in a fairly predictable way—e.g., “You’re different from me, but I understand you completely; I know exactly what you’re going to say.” Jalal Toufic, who is, in his own description, “a writer, film theorist, and video artist,” writes books that really are different from anything else I’ve encountered. To say, for example, that they’re about film or dance would distort the way in which they’re engaged with—or obsessed with—these subjects. To say that they’re about politics or psychology would require forgetting their fundamental disengagement from politics as it is usually practiced, and from conventional accounts of consciousness. To say that they’re autobiographical would be missing the point: they’re about death and undeath as well as life. Toufic’s books include *Distracted* (Station Hill, 1991), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (Station Hill, 1993), *Over-Sensitivity* (Sun and Moon, 1996), and the recent *Forthcoming* (Atelos, 2000). His video and installation works include *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green* and *Radical Closure Artist with Bandaged Sense Organ*. He lives in Beirut.*

The following interview was conducted by email between February and May 2001. Generically quite various, it includes letters, scenarios, and short essays. There’s frequently a distinct contrast between my somewhat pedestrian questions and Toufic’s extravagant responses; at one point, he uses one of my questions as the answer to another question. Rather than a detached commentary or conventional profile, the interview is here conceived as an extension of Toufic’s writing.

— Aaron Kunin

Aaron Benjamin Kunin: *How would you characterize your writing formally? You frequently cite Nietzsche as a model “laconic” writer, but “laconic” suggests a limited formal range, whereas your recent books include dialogues, scenarios, texts for installations, essays, and letters, as well as aphorisms. Do you consider all of these to be laconic forms in the same sense?*

Jalal Toufic: At one level, every fine work of art or literature is laconic: it is because an artwork is the densest manner of rendering and conveying something that it cannot be properly viewed in terms of a message—if a reader insists on speaking of the message of an artwork or of a literary work, he or she should consider it to be the latter as a whole. At another level, are laconic only artworks and literary works that effect in their readers or viewers an absence of the interior monologue with its associations.

I'm particularly interested in the way you use letters...

Two of the joyous events of my life were related to letters. I remember a period of about three months during the writing of (*Vampires*) when the most that I would say during the day would be something along the lines of: "Two eggs overeasy, French fries and a coffee.... The check, please." My increasingly harsh solitude was leading me into a deadpan disposition to dullness (for a considerable while the working title of my third book was *Makes Jack a Dull Boy*). It was in this context that on arriving home on 25 March 1993, I found a letter from one of my favorite contemporary writers, essayists and theater artists, Richard Foreman, in which he wrote to the author of a book, *Distracted* (1991), that was then (and still is) unreviewed and of which one could find only four or five copies in the Chicago metropolitan area: "I glanced at it [your book]—and literally couldn't put it down. I find it an amazing book—and I am not easily amazed. I can think of nothing book-like emerging in the U.S. literary scene for many years that seems to come from a consciousness so totally unique, rigorous, 'unfathomable' in the best, most potent sense—and yet gripping in a dramatic and engaging way. I'm truly knocked out." I felt I had received the

letter through telepathy so distant and disconnected from the world did I feel during that period. Shortly after, I received a fan letter from one of my favorite contemporary musicians, John Zorn. This time, I did not feel I was receiving the letter telepathically.

A fan letter presupposes the solitude of the addressee—even a fan letter to someone idolized by millions. Any star who opens a fan letter, unless he or she is totally insensitive, must feel at least momentarily solitary.

You sometimes address people who may not necessarily be there to receive the communication, such as the model Christy Turlington. Why, in these cases, is it important that the letter actually be sent? Or, to put it another way, what is the role of the recipient?

I can now better appreciate the resistance of people to well-written letters: there is actually an intrusion in these publishable letters though less from the reader in general, than from the untimely collaborator.

The letters invariably open conventionally (date, location, salutation) but do not close conventionally: there's no signatory, which sometimes makes the ending difficult to detect; I find myself reading the following pages of the book as a continuation of lines already traced in the preceding letter. Why is aperture strongly signaled and not closure?

"We are perfect for each other. You are young enough not to have read many books; I am an old enough writer to have been forgetting for years now what I learned in books, art, and films. Gone is my erudition and much of my vocabulary. I presently gravitate towards a few films and a few words, like *cadaver*." What he was saying was misleading, a form of seduction: they would have fit better together when he was more erudite.

Sara, Beirut

4/6/2001

Bonjour.

J'ai découvert aujourd'hui vos sites. C'était une belle surprise. MERCI beaucoup d'y avoir pensé. Ils sont intéressants.

Je dois d'abord m'excuser de ne pas vous avoir appelé l'autre jour comme je l'avais promis; quelque chose de désagréable est arrivé: j'ai perdu votre numéro de téléphone. Pour le retrouver, c'est simple, il me suffisait d'appeler Monique. Je l'ai appelée. Elle ne me l'a pas donné. Là, je serai de nouveau en contact avec vous, seulement si vous avez la gentillesse de m'envoyer votre numéro pour que je vous appelle—sinon...

Eh vous barbare, beau sultan, ami du Coeur et du malheur... comment va votre belle allure de fakir cireur? Ça serait sympa qu'on s'écrive de temps en temps.

Allez, je vous laisse de la plume mais non du Coeur.

Sara's college schedule: Monday: till noon; Tuesday: till 3; Wednesday: till 2; Thursday: till 4; Friday: till 2.

Jalal Toufic, Naqqāsh, Lebanon

4/11/2001

Sara, Beirut:

When she was away from him, he, naturally, missed her. Nonetheless, he intuitively did not ask her to write letters to him. But one day he received one. He felt happy. But he soon became aware, having reread her witty letter several times and desiring to receive a second one then and there, that the letters, while at first a way to minimize missing the beloved, were opening another occasion and avenue for missing. He now missed her presence but also her letters; meeting her in person

did not end the latter kind of missing. While waiting for her one day in a café, he wished that she would show up with a new letter and that on characteristically going to the restroom to place water on her hair—"to feel energized"—she would hand it to him to read. "Write to me!" Can this request be satisfied when, however much its addressee writes, the lover will insist that the beloved should have written more, or in such a dense manner that the letter's absorption would take not one or two readings but scores of them? Have Christians been rereading the epistles of St Paul again and again, for many centuries, not necessarily because these letters demand so much perusal in order to be fathomed but because they love St Paul? When a letter is reduced to inscribing the addressee's Name and complaints about the infrequency and shortness of his or her letters, we can be sure that the correspondent has reached the proper state of love.

Did he, naturally, stop missing her when she was with him? "I miss you even when you are with me" (*wahishmī winta 'uṣād ʿnī*, as an Umm Kulthūm love song says). Is this not the unnatural but paradigmatic situation when with the vampire, who is there with her victim and not there—as shown by the absence of her image in the mirror at the same location? Is it at all surprising that so many of the vampire's victims fall in love with her?

Thursday, 4/12/2001

I just called Sara. She cannot meet me today. She is behind in her studies. We are to meet on Sunday.

Sunday, 4/15/2001

I just spoke to Sara on the phone. She has exams. She cannot meet me till next Friday.

Jalal Toufic, Naqqāsh

4/16/2001

Sara, Beirut

Fortunately, I've been getting much better at waiting these last few years, probably as a result of my renewed keen interest in Duodeciman Shi'ites, this hermeneutical sect still awaiting a messiah whose occultation started over a millennium ago.

Maybe the most striking stylistic feature of your earlier books has been the use of parenthesis: the sentence expands both from within (parenthesis, and parenthesis within parenthesis, and so on) and from without (footnotes). (In this respect Nietzsche seems less useful as a model: your punctuation mark is the parenthesis, whereas his is the dash.) This tendency seems somewhat muted in Forthcoming, which nonetheless identifies, in a footnote, "discontinuity, whether stylistic or thematic" as a recurrent effect in your writing. What accounts for the change in style?

At one level, there has been a break between *Distracted* and *(Vampires)*, since I died before dying in the interval between finishing the first and starting the second. At another level, and given that style is the renewed variation of the same, whether motif, figure, etc., there has been no change of style between my books. For example, and as *Forthcoming* mentions, "discontinuity, whether stylistic or thematic, is encountered throughout my work. In *Distracted*, aphorisms separated by blanks [as well as aphoristic dashes and, in the first edition, parentheses within parenthesis within parenthesis]. In *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, the tunneling of the undead and the specific blanks that stop this tunneling, producing a freezing; the over-turns; and the empty space-time sections of the labyrinth, which produce lapses. In *Over-Sensitivity*, the irruptions in radical closures, and the empty space-time to the other side of the threshold that dance crosses. And here [in *Forthcoming*], the

atomistic temporality of Islam." Discontinuity is encountered throughout my work also in the form of the untimely end: in *Distracted*, in the manner of the youthful passionate impatience for suicide; in *(Vampires)*, in the manner of the detachment of sacrificial interruption (the yogic sacrifice of the fruit of the action); and in *Forthcoming*, in the manner of both the messianic end of the world and the renewed creation of the occasionalist atomistic universe of the Ash'arite Moslem theologians and the Sufi Ibn al-'Arabī.

I dislike relative breaks; they can be eschewed either by constant embedding or else by atomistic or aphoristic absolute breaks.

Nietzsche writes: "To say in ten sentences what everyone says in a book..." One can accomplish this objective in a monadic manner. The ten sentences would then have plicated in them (in the form of parentheses within parentheses within parenthesis) or inserted in them (in the form of footnotes—but one would then have to have footnotes within footnotes, which is inelegant) a whole book or even a world. The paradigmatic limit is a monad where the world is plicated or inserted. Interpretation would then be a monadic unfolding: to see a world in less than a grain of sand, in a monad. And that indeed is made explicit in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he writes in the preface: "I have offered in the third essay of the present book an example of what I regard as 'exegesis' in such a case—an aphorism is prefixed to this essay, the essay itself is a commentary on it." So the third essay is the exegesis of "Unconcerned, mocking, violent—thus wisdom wants us; she is a woman and always loves only a warrior (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)." Thus Nietzsche's book can be considered to consist of ten sentences, the rest being the exegetical unfolding of these.

On the level of the sentence, too, closure and aperture appear to be special problems: it's easy enough to enter the parenthesis but it's often quite difficult to find a way out. What effects do you imagine these sentences having on your readers? Do you envision a reader capable of connecting the end of the parenthesis to its beginning, or do you assume that the technology of the sentence will to some extent outstrip the reader's capacity to enjoy it?

If on reaching a parenthesis that at long last closes many intervening ones, the reader cannot remember the beginning of the sentence whose continuation he now faces, he will experience being slower than oneself. Such a structure of writing is thus partly an apprenticeship in that offbeat state of speed.

*Somewhere in *Distracted* (I note that it's sometimes difficult to locate remembered passages in your books) you disclaim any interest in stream-of-consciousness writing. Does your writing present consciousness as something other than a stream (as, say, a series of interruptions)? Or do you not conceive of your writing as presenting an image of consciousness at all?*

Another stylistic effect: the laconic "no." What kind of answer is "no"?

*The copyright notice to *Distracted* says: "The whole of this book or any parts of it can be created by others and hence may be produced by them without permission from the author and the publisher. No part of this book may be paraphrased in any form or by any means." Your other books seem to conceive intellectual property somewhat differently: part of the task of the footnotes, it seems, is to provide elaborate documentation for references to other books (including your own). Moreover, in *Over-Sensitivity*, Werner Herzog is called "dishonest" for failing to credit Iraq as the producer of *Lessons of Darkness*, his film documenting oil fires in Kuwait; in *Forthcoming* you suggest*

that, in the case of a quotation that irrupts ahistorically within a radical closure, it would be irrelevant to give information about the source. What, for you, is the value of citation?

The resort to citation in my books indicates either that I did not receive the unquestionable line or paragraph at the end of a perforation of a wall (*Distracted*); or that I was not the untimely collaborator of the writer I am quoting, that he or she wrote it at the price possibly of his or her madness, that realm where he or she is "alone with the alone," the double, and with the (diegetic) voices(-over). I would not use quotation were my work to become a radical closure in which what *seems* to be sentences or figures from the work of other writers or artists irrupts (despite the remarkable similarity of Toba Khedoori's *Untitled [railing]*, 1996, to one of the panels of Magritte's diptych *The Disguised Symbol*, one should not hastily consider it in terms of influence or imitation or appropriation or citation, since both Magritte and Khedoori are radical closure artists; it would be more accurate to think that the former painting irrupted from the black of the terrace panel in Magritte's diptych—one day another specimen of that Magritte painting may irrupt in the white of Khedoori's painting).

When you cite yourself—when you refer to earlier books or when you refer, inside a book, to another passage in the same book—is that an expression of continuity (demonstrating that you've always been saying the same thing) or discontinuity (you refuse to take responsibility for something said elsewhere, because you're not the same person—as you say, "unique, and thus irreplaceable, that which cannot be replaced even by himself/herself")?

If I sometimes quote myself, it is because I have a loathing of paraphrasing—even myself. In terms of the relation between my various books, the crucial issue is less whether the person who wrote them has changed in the meanwhile, as whether

in the writing of a certain book the author's concern was to establish a universe or to break it up and disperse it (*émietter l'univers*, as Nietzsche says). While the latter was the crucial thing for me in (*Vampires*), what was important to me in *Over-Sensitivity* and *Forthcoming* was producing a universe that, as Philip K. Dick puts it, doesn't fall apart two days later.

It always startles me to see you offer corrections of existing artworks and past historical events; these corrections are sometimes done in the mode of obligation (Saddam "should have" appeared on TV dressed as Hitler), less frequently in the mode of chance (it "would have been felicitous..."). What authorizes these corrections?

I sometimes feel that the writer or artist either did not heed his or her untimely collaborator (in this case, myself); or else that he or she tampered with or paraphrased the unquestionable that he or she received at the end of a perforation of a wall. In such cases, it would have been felicitous...

In several places in Forthcoming, you describe yourself as "afraid," "surprised," "anxious" on discovering any confirmation of what you've written. Why is this possibility so troubling? How do you feel, on the other hand, about the possibility that you could be mistaken? (Is that possibility addressed in your writing on portraiture?)

Why was it of such importance to me to publish (*Vampires*), when it was actually basically addressed to the dead, specifically to my amnesiac version in the undead realm? It was to a considerable degree so that the few living authors whose writings mattered to me would show me how erroneous my scary ideas were, prove to me that they are fancy notions, making it easier for me to dismiss them. What genuine thinker has not been apprehensive that at least some of his alarming ideas prove right? Instead the book was, as usually happens in such cases, for the most part and for a long time overlooked.

There is also the circumstance that whenever one's *out of this world* concepts appear in the world, one has the apprehension of an imminent psychosis (Lacan's formula for psychosis: "What is foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real").

That is the Question

In the diegesis of Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*, 1942, the Polish actor Josef Tura is each time interrupted by the disruptive departure of an audience member at the moment when he declaims on stage Hamlet's "to be, or not to be—that is the question." We quickly discover that this line that begins Hamlet's soliloquy is the coded signal for the pilot infatuated with Tura's wife to meet her backstage. But maybe the more basic reason Tura is recurrently interrupted at that point is that "to be, or not to be" is not the question; the question is rather the one that theater artist Romeo Castellucci poses in and apropos of his *Amleto*, 1992: to be *and* not to be. Indeed soon enough Tura, who is now impersonating the Nazi collaborator Professor Alexander Siletsky, is ushered by the Gestapo into a room where the corpse of the "real," murdered spy Siletsky is seated: Tura is thus intimately implicated in a situation where someone is in both states of being and non-being, is and is not.

Out of the Question

A man enters the hall of a hotel, sits at a table, and begins filling the different blank spaces in a form. First name: Safa; age: 27; hair color: brown; eye color: brown; height: 5 feet 7 inches; distinguishing marks: scar on right palm... At the reception desk, a waiter is speaking on the phone: "Can you please give more specifications? ... Thank you." The waiter places the receiver on the desk and moves to the entrance of the large hall and surveys its occupants. There are only four men there.

Although the man filling the form is clearly busy, the waiter heads towards him and asks him: "Excuse me, are you Sam?" On getting an irritated "No," he goes to the other corner of the large hall and asks the man sitting there, who is in the midst of a heated conversation and who is physically very unlike the first man (the two could not possibly answer to the same description the waiter received on the phone; indeed the man addressed by the conversing person is more physically similar to the one filling the forms): "Are you Sam?" He gets a negative response.

A few days later, Safa gives an attractive woman a dress as a gift. He is unaware that she is the lover of the other, older man who was questioned whether he's Sam. He worries that the dress may not be her size and thus not become fully hers. On meeting her the following day, and before he can ask her whether it is the right size, she says: "I don't want to lead you on; I have a lover. So, please accept your gift back." Nothing could have better indicated to him that that dress was already irrevocably hers; instantly it changed from being possibly not hers because the wrong size to being totally hers, since being a gift to her it would be totally useless and somewhat obscene if returned. He refuses to take it back. When they meet accidentally a few days later, she apologizes. A week later, when she shows up the first time at his hotel room, she is wearing it. He is very pleased to see that it is the right size. "You wonder if asking me to give you my Mondays and Wednesdays is too much to ask. Yes it is too much to ask because it is too little to ask—since you are not asking for everyday, or every other day, of the week." She takes off the dress saying: "I ran from place to place all morning in this humid weather. I am going to take a shower. Can I borrow one of your shirts?" When she comes out of the bathroom, the shirt reaches down to her knees. She looks charming in it. "What initially attracted me, a writer, to you is your name. The first time I heard it was two weeks ago. I had

just been asked whether my name is Sam, when I saw this man come in the room and yell your name; at which point I saw you come out of the phone booth and join him. You may not know this: he is a counterfeiter of paintings. One day he may ask you to assist him in his work."

— So you had never before heard of anyone called Page!

— No, being a foreigner.

— Even so! How long have you been in this country?

— Five years.

— How old are you?

— 27.

— You're young.

— With some people, age is better counted in terms of the number of years separating them from death—so I might be very old.

— Like how old?

The two dissimilar men who were asked whether they were Sam, becoming doubles, embark on separate journeys to try to reach the acquaintances and documents that would redifferentiate them (the 27-year old man, who thinks that because he is suicidal he is older than his passport age, ends up that same year not being 27 because he turns into the double of someone in his late thirties). One of the two encounters a series of obstacles that prevents him from reaching his destination: his car breaks down during the trip; he hitchhikes a ride, but following a series of unexpected misfortunes, the driver, suspecting his companion of being a jinx, rudely ejects him by the roadside. The other reaches his destinations, but either these have been destroyed: the small hospital where his wounded palm was sutured had burned down; or the persons he questions, for instance the doctor-acquaintance who did the suture, have for some reason been affected with amnesia.

Some time later, the two doubles visit Page in prison. Her

hair has been cut very short. One of the two men begins crying, repeating: "You look so different!" Hearing a guard yell that the visit time is over, she instinctively stretches her hand to caress them. A shiver goes through her as her hand touches instead the cold surface of the separating prison glass. The other man quickly finishes scribbling a few words on a piece of paper and holds it against the glass while grabbing the crying man's arm to lead him out. She spies: "Holding his hand, I am feeling exactly like you do as you move your hand over the glass." A shiver passes through her.

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Todo na koorta, espo sipito fueala laquna qui no uisi dar. *Distracted* puelo forta na scusi. "Chorbs trada," "kobingo," "Pressta fenna Tesserae"—ya kibsh Toufic ordinatarae. Tengo no sladin casamo. Morshada!!

Peter Rose, film/video maker of *Analogies: Studies in the Movement of Time, The Man Who Could Not See Far Enough* and *The Pressures of the Text*

Jalal Toufic is a writer, film theorist, and video artist. He is the author of (*Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (Station Hill, 1993; 2nd ed. forthcoming from Post-Apollo, 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (Sun & Moon, 1996), *Forthcoming* (Atelos, 2000), and *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (Post-Apollo, 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 Unightly to See* (2000), *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002), and *‘Āshūrā’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002), have been presented in New York (Artists Space); San Francisco (the San Francisco Cinematheque, the Lab and Yerba Buena Center 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); Umeå, Sweden (BildMuseet); Cairo (Townhouse Gallery); and Beirut. He is a member of the Arab Image Foundation (www.fai.org.lb). 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, San Francisco State University, and DasArts (Amsterdam), and he is currently Head of the MA program in Film/Video Studies at the Department of Visual and Performing Arts, Holy Spirit University, Lebanon.

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