



# Thinking: The Ruin

**Editors:**  
**Matthew Gumpert and Jalal Toufic**

**Istanbul** studies center

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# Catachresis; or, The Ruin

Matthew Gumpert

1.1. Let me begin with Nietzsche’s famous image for *truths* in *On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense*: “illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins” (878; trans. Robert Speirs). *Concepts*, Nietzsche continues, are the “left-over *residue of a metaphor*” (879).<sup>1</sup>

1.2. Truth, in short, is the *ruin* of the metaphor, the metaphor eroded and effaced through excessive use.

2.1. If truth is the ruin of the metaphor, then perhaps the ruin is a metaphor whose metaphoricality has been lost, or forgotten; that which is left behind after a metaphor has ceased to function as one; a metaphor turned into a so-called truth.

2.2. “Truth,” in this formulation, is an ossuary; a sarcophagus after the flesh has been eaten; that which is left behind when all else has dissolved, or turned to dust, or evaporated; the precipitate of life. But “truth,” understood in this way, Nietzsche reminds us, is just another now-defunct metaphor, posing as the enduring monument we imagine truth should be.

3.1. The Greek rhetoricians had a name for such a metaphor. The ruin, I am suggesting, is a *catachresis*: a metaphor whose metaphoricality has been forgotten, or for which there is no “literal” or “correct” term (as in the *leg* of a *table*, or the *arm* of a *chair*, or the *foundation* of an argument).

3.2. “Literally” *katachrêsis* means *excessive* or *improper use*; that it can also refer to (I’m borrowing my terms here from Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon*) the *analogical application of a word* is itself the *analogical application of a word*, and thus itself a *catachresis*. *Catachresis* is defined in H. W. Smyth’s *Greek Grammar* as “the misuse of a word,” and “the extension of the meaning of a word beyond its proper sphere” (677). It’s hard to see, finally, what distinguishes a *catachresis* from a metaphor proper; but, of course, there is no such thing as a proper metaphor.

3.3. Excess is the essence of *catachresis*: the analogical as addiction, or abuse.<sup>2</sup> And with the excessive use of a drug comes, inevitably, the progressive attenuation of its effects.

4. We may construe the ruin then, in its more familiar, architectonic sense, as an extensive or plastic catachresis: an object or structure which has lost much of what it used to mean through excessive use.

5. Istanbul, like any venerable city, is particularly susceptible to this kind of *catachresis*, metaphors so pervasive, predicates

<sup>1</sup> Of course these propositions are also metaphors; metaphors, ironically enough, that have themselves been *ruined* by the very process they indict; so used and abused that their force has considerably diminished.

<sup>2</sup> Its equivalent in Latin is *abusio*, often the abuse of a *metaphor*. Thus Cicero, *De oratore* 3.149–81; or Plutarch, *Moralia* 14d, 346f–348d.

so inevitable, that they have become truths. *Istanbul is a bridge; Istanbul is a crossroads; Istanbul is a mosaic; Istanbul is a museum (living or dead); Istanbul is a palimpsest; Istanbul is a tomb; Istanbul is a ruin*, etc., etc.<sup>3</sup> These are metaphors whose metaphoricity has been severely eroded. We have become anaesthetized to their genealogies. It is hard, now, to remember they too are built structures, and, indeed, must be repaired over and over again in order to function.<sup>4</sup>

**6.1.** “Thinking: The Ruin,” I would suggest, is, at least in part, an effort to resist the anaesthetic or amnesic effects of *catachresis*. Perhaps by turning our attention to these all-too familiar predications (like someone pausing before the same object one ordinarily passes by everyday), we can remember what they mean, or how they work.

**6.2.** This is surely a better strategy than instituting a moratorium on metaphors, as if that were possible, or desirable.<sup>5</sup> (Still, one can entertain the fantasy of placing certain metaphors in temporary storage when it comes to the subject of Istanbul, in order for them to regain their potency.)

**6.3.** No, *thinking* these things is surely a better strategy than not thinking them; thinking about things we have stopped thinking about, because they are the very things by means of which we think.

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<sup>3</sup> Istanbul is a labyrinth: “*C’est vers le Vieux-Stamboul que je me dirige, montant par des petits rues aussi noires et mystérieuses qu’autrefois, avec autant de chiens jaunes couchés en boule par terre, qui grognent et sur lesquels les pieds butent ... J’éprouve une sorte de volupté triste, presque une ivresse, a m’enfoncer dans ce labyrinthe, ou personne ne me connaît plus – mais ou je connais tout, comme m’en ressouvenant de très loin, d’une vie antérieure*” (Pierre Loti, *Constantinople en 1890* [63]).

<sup>4</sup> There is a Marxist argument to be made here. Marx writes in *Capital*: “That which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production” (306). One could say the same thing regarding the value of a metaphor *qua* truth.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag’s strategy in *Illness as Metaphor*.

# All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge

Matthew Gumpert

*To be read in the shadow of the Bosphorus Bridge, as an  
apotropaic charm against the next earthquake.*

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (476)

## Elegy for a Bridge

I begin with the following reference to the Tacoma Narrows Bridge disaster from the Washington State Department of Transportation web site:

Slender, elegant and graceful, the Tacoma Narrows Bridge stretched like a steel ribbon across Puget Sound in 1940. The third longest suspension span in the world opened on July 1st. Only four months later, the great span’s short life ended in disaster. “Gallop­ing Gertie” collapsed in a windstorm on November 7, 1940. (“Tacoma Narrows Bridge”)

One might have expected more *facts*, and less *figures*, from a Department of Transportation. Or perhaps it is only fitting that this citation *transport* us, thus, into the realm of what we might call *poetry*. But this brief snapshot of catastrophe is a perfect elegy in miniature, complete with all the standard literary devices one would expect in a lyrical lament for the dead.<sup>6</sup> We are presented here with the specter of a noble protagonist (a *great span*, the *third longest suspension span in the world*), cut down prematurely (*only four months* after opening), in the prime of life. Anthropomorphosizing modifiers, possessives, and predicates (*slender, elegant and graceful*; the *great span’s short life*; *stretched*), antithesis (*the great span’s short life*), foreshadowing (*Only four months later, the great span’s short life ended in disaster*), metaphor (*stretched like a steel ribbon*), and memorial rituals (marking the date of the event: *on November 7, 1940*) conspire to turn this piece of engineering into a sentient, feminine being whose demise produces the requisite pathos.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I understand the *elegy* here as the formal lamentation of the death of an individual. As such, the elegy is above all a romantic invention, with its roots deep in antiquity. Defined in this manner, the elegy remains one of the central genres in the modern period. Indeed, as Jahan Ramazani writes in *Yeats and the Poetry of Death*, “death often seems to be the *raison d’être* of the modern lyric” (8). For a discussion of the connections between romanticism and the elegy, see Mario Praz’s *The Romantic Agony* 23–50. For a discussion of the general features of the modern poetic elegy, see Ramazani’s *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. For a more comprehensive examination of the elegy in Western literature, see Jacques Choron’s *Death and Western Thought* 156–61.

<sup>7</sup> A comparison of the pontine epitaph above with the follow-

*O Bridge!* The logic of prosopopeia. “2.3 *Summary of Aesthetics*. In the key areas of aesthetics this bridge succeeds, it is a simple and elegant bridge that exhibits the structure clearly. The change in colour of the bridge between day and night is almost like the bridge is changing its mood and, because of this, the character changes as well, from the calm functionality of the day to the vibrant excitement of the night. It is because of the bridge’s performance in these points that it is a well placed and beautiful bridge. To the lay person the curve of the cable improves the aesthetics of the bridge which may be another reason for its success amongst the local people of Istanbul” (Matthew Smith, “Critical Analysis of the First Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey,” *Proceedings of Bridge Engineering 2 Conference* [University of Bath, Bath, UK, April 2009]).

Could an account informed by knowledge of structural engineering offer us a more objective view of the event itself? But it would seem that, despite themselves, even the most studiously prosaic of accounts grow increasingly poetic as they approach the catastrophe. It may be that some events refuse to be turned into mere facts. The following report is from an online newspaper for Puget Sound and Western Washington State:

Vertical oscillations of the roadbed occurred even during the construction phase and raised questions about the structure’s stability. Some breezes as low as four miles per hour caused oscillations, while stronger breezes often had no effect. Prior to the bridge’s opening, hydraulic buffers were installed at the towers to control the stresses. The undulations continued, however, and further studies were undertaken at the University of Washington.

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ing inscription, taken from a Hellenistic stele, and viewed by the author in the National Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, reveals many points in common: “O stranger, this burial mound conceals the son of Menios, who left behind him many tears, Moira, full of malice, destroyed Menios, leaving his friends bereft and alone; at the early age of twenty-five, he reached the river Acheron, the entrance to Hades; what resounds within the house ... is not the joyful tunes of the couch of matrimony but the cries of mourning for the (nymph) Echo” (“Gravestone of Menios”; translation courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum).

Their recommendation of the installation of tie-down cables in the side spans were implemented, but to little effect. Throughout the early morning hours of Thursday, November 7, 1940, the center span had been undulating three to five feet in winds of 35 to 46 miles per hour. Alarmed by this constant motion, highway officials and state police closed the bridge at 10:00 A.M. Shortly thereafter the character of the motion dramatically changed from a rhythmic rising and falling to a two-wave twisting motion. The twisting motion grew stronger with each twist; span movement had gone from 5 foot to 28 foot undulations. This twisting motion caused the roadbed to tilt 45 degrees from horizontal one way and then 45 degrees from horizontal the other way. For about 30 minutes, the center span endured the twisting. At about 10:30 A.M., a center span floor panel dropped into the water 195 feet below. The roadbed was breaking up, and chunks of concrete were raining into the Sound. At 11:02 A.M., 600 feet of the western end of the span twisted free, flipped over, and plunged down into the water. Engineers on the scene hoped that once this had happened, the remainder of the span would settle down. The twisting continued, and at 11:09 A.M., the remaining bridge sections ripped free and thundered down into the Sound. When this happened, the 1,100 foot side spans dropped 60 feet, only to bounce up and then settle into a sag of 30 feet. As for the center span, it rested on the dark and tide-swept bottom of the Narrows. (“Galloping Gertie—Tacoma Narrows Bridge”)

This entire passage, faithful as it tries to be to an objective sequence of empirically verifiable phenomena, betrays a certain dramatic structure, a tragic logic designed to inspire fear, and, perhaps, pity, too. Even during its infancy (I admit, my own analysis here conspires with the very figures it attempts to describe), in *the construction phase*, it appears that *questions* were *raised* about this structure’s fate: its *stability*. A tragic protagonist is born, one whose destiny is already written, as it were, in its very constitution. Efforts to change the course of that destiny prove, naturally, futile: measures are *implemented, but to little effect*. The abrupt shift to the day of the disaster (*Throughout the early morning hours of Thursday, November 7, 1940*) marks the transition

from the prologue to the tragedy proper, a perfect, compact, neo-Aristotelian drama that obeys all the unities of time, place, and action. The relentless advance of the clock is dutifully recited (*at 10:00 A.M., At about 10:30 A.M., At 11:02 A.M., and at 11:09 A.M.*), serving both to distinguish the precise sequence of events, and to escalate the dramatic tension generated by those events. Note that these two purposes are not necessarily harmonious, and may even be mutually exclusive; but here, as elsewhere, in any case, it is difficult to distinguish between events themselves, and the telling of them. Sudden shifts in phenomena here are both structurally dramatic, and dramatically effective (just after 10:00 *the character of the motion dramatically changed from a rhythmic rising and falling to a two-wave twisting motion*). A brief interlude allows us to dwell on the object in its final agonies before the inevitable fall (*For about 30 minutes, the center span endured the twisting*), the judiciously chosen verb *endured* conveying the notion of *suffering* both as an impersonal process, borne by an insensate object, and a psychological event, experienced by an animate being. The catastrophe of the fall itself is narrated in a series of increasingly dramatic phrases that, nonetheless, accurately represent an aetiology of progressive physical collapse (*dropped into the water; The roadbed was breaking up; chunks of concrete were raining into the Sound; the span twisted free, flipped over, and plunged down into the water; the remaining bridge sections ripped free and thundered down into the Sound*): the effect is one of progressively heightened degrees of pathos. A temporary reprieve is granted, as it will be for the tragic hero, and then is quickly retracted (*Engineers on the scene hoped that once this had happened, the remainder of the span would settle down. The twisting continued ...*). Certain images manage to sound both literal and lyrical simultaneously (*chunks of concrete were raining into the Sound; the remaining bridge sections ... thundered down into the Sound*); others capitalize on intransitive verbs apparently describing simply physical effects, but nonetheless implying sentience or will (*twisted free, flipped over, plunged down, ripped free*).

The *tragedy* of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge (both the *fact* and the *figuration* of its collapse), ends, as it must, with the tableau of its body, recumbent in its watery grave: *it rested on the dark and tide-swept bottom of the Narrows*. Note that it remains undecidable, again, whether the

predicate verb *rested* is a literal description of the bridge’s physical demise, or a metaphorical fantasy of its death.

Note that even after death the body of the bridge has an after-life. According to a page of the Washington State Department of Transportation web site devoted to the “Tacoma Narrows Bridge: Extreme History,” “The bridge became famous as ‘the most dramatic failure in bridge engineering history.’ Now, it’s also ‘one of the world’s largest man-made reefs.’ The sunken remains of Galloping Gertie were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 to protect her from salvagers.”

*City-Ossuaries*. The 1912 Galata Bridge (4<sup>th</sup> in a series of bridges built linking Karaköy and Eminönü) was damaged in a fire in 1992, and subsequently towed up the Golden Horn. It has recently been further dismembered; pieces of it remain in the Golden Horn today. Today’s Galata Bridge (the 5<sup>th</sup>) was completed in 1994.

### The Syntax of the Bridge

This undecidability between fact and figure is a typical feature of catastrophic narrative in general. But it is also an essential property of the concept of the bridge. And thus the fall of a bridge is a catastrophe at once particularly singular and generic: the tautological catastrophe, the catastrophe of catastrophes.

*The fall of a bridge as generic catastrophe: Mostar*. “For nothing attracted international attention in 1993 as powerfully as the sight of rubble where the beautiful Bridge of Mostar had stood since 1566. When the bridge’s destruction became the symbol of all other Balkan casualties, aporia was the standard response. What could the destruction of such a bridge mean? Who could say? There was a feeling that the bridge stood for a fundamental human standard. By that standard, its destruction revealed nothing less than the end of humanity ... The broken bridge occasioned nostalgic reflections on the idea behind its construction. What is a bridge but a concrete statement that nature can be tamed, human differences spanned, harmony achieved, and union created out of division?” (Artemis Leontis, “The Bridge between the Classical and the Balkan,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 98.4 [1999]: 638).



For the function of a bridge is, in essence, the connecting of two things that were formerly separate and distinct: it is thus the very principle of syntax itself, embodied in metal and asphalt (or stone, or wood). A moment's reflection will show that it is impossible to decide if the bridge is a metaphor for syntax, or an example of it. For all syntax is itself an act, quite literally, of *bridging* disparate entities. Is the bridge a metaphor for syntax, then, or is syntax a metaphor for the bridge?

We need to be more precise in terms of this *pontine* syntax. If the bridge is an architectural sentence, then what kind of sentence is it? The most simple of all sentences: a *copulative* sentence: a sentence that connects or unites a subject and a complement, or one noun with another noun, or one clause with another clause. In linking these disparate elements, the copulative sentence establishes an *identity* between them. We may consider the bridge a *copulative conjunction*, a way of saying, *this place AND that place*; as opposed to a *disjunctive conjunction*, a way of saying *this place OR that place*. Or we may classify the bridge as a *copula* or *copulative verb* (often referred to as a *linking verb*), a way of saying, in effect: *this place is that place*; or, alternatively, *this place is like that place*. A bridge of course, does not *say* these things; it *does* them: which again, makes the question of fact or figurality undecideable. For it is just as true to say that copulative sentences function in the manner of a bridge as to say that bridges function in the manner of a copulative sentence. The same undecideability is encountered if we approach the bridge in rhetorical terms, as the figure, for example, of *zeugma*, which refers to the joining of two elements in a sentence by means of a common verb or noun (Smyth 683). Is the bridge *like* this figure, is it the *figure of this figure*, or is it *this figure itself* (in which case it would no longer be a *figure* at all)?

The *copula* has other functions, of course, than those of *identity*, including *membership*, in which the subject is identified as a member of the predicate, and *predication* itself, in which the predicate locates or characterizes the subject. But the *pontine copula*, if I may coin the term, functions exclusively to *identify* the subject with its predicate. Different languages have specific syntactical and morphological mechanisms for distinguishing subject from predicate. (English, just to give one example, as an SVO, or subject-verb-object language, has a fairly rigid syntactical

structure; so that *John sees Molly* does not mean the same thing as *Molly sees John*.) But the pontine copula has this peculiarity: it is absolutely reversible in terms of its subject and its predicate. In a *pontine copulative sentence*, the subject can become the predicate, and the predicate the subject, depending on the order in which one uses the terms; that is to say, the direction in which one approaches the bridge. New York is New Jersey, in effect, when crossing the George Washington Bridge from the New York side; but New Jersey is also New York, when coming from the New Jersey shore. Other instances of this reversibility may appear more monumental; in Istanbul, the city where I am writing this, Europe is Asia, when crossing the Bosphorus Bridge from the European side, but Asia is also Europe, when approaching from the Asian shore.<sup>8</sup>

People like to commit suicide by jumping off bridges. An act of resistance against the copulative function of the bridge, the bridge as linking verb, predicating this is (like) that. *To be, or not to be (like)*: that is the question. A rejection of *syntax* itself, as in the old American apothegm (proverbially from Maine): *you can't get there from here*. From “Suicide by Jumping: Is Prevention Possible?”: “A number of sites around the world, particularly bridges, have gained notoriety as places from which suicide by jumping is popular (Table 1) and there is debate concerning the value of preventive measures at such sites” (15). The Bosphorus Bridge is high on the list of sites. According to Table 1, “Locations from which suicide by jumping is popular,” in between the years 1986–1995 there were 65 suicides caused by jumping from the Bosphorus Bridge, for an annual rate of 6.5 deaths per year (David Gunnell, Mike Nowers, and Olive Bennewith, “Suicide by Jumping: Is Prevention Possible?”, *Suicidologi* 10.2 [2005], 15–17).

<sup>8</sup> Reversibility in terms of the phrase-structure or clause structure of a language is a vexed issue in linguistics. For a more comprehensive discussion of the copulative sentence, see volume 2 of the *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax* (M. Everaert, H. van Riemsdijk, R. Goedemans, eds.).

*Psychosis as the severing of all syntax*. From the same article: “It has been suggested that people who jump to their deaths are more likely to be suffering from psychosis than those using other methods, but there is some inconsistency between studies. Twelve (38%) of a series of 32 suicides by jumping in Adelaide, 45% of suicides from bridges in Brisbane and 27% of deaths from Westgate Bridge in Melbourne suffered from psychosis (Pounder 1985; Cantor et al. 1989; Coman et al. 2000). Other studies have failed to find such an excess; only 13% of suicides from Jacques Cartier Bridge in Canada, 10% from the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol (UK) and 9% of people jumping from Beachy Head in Britain had a history of psychosis (Prevost et al. 1996; Nowers & Gunnell 1996; Surtees 1982), similar to the proportion of schizophrenics amongst suicides using all other methods (Barracrough et al. 1974). Reasons for these differences are unclear. The proximity of a particular bridge to a psychiatric hospital may affect the pattern of suicide observed; *in addition those who jump from bridges may differ from those who jump from buildings*” (15; italics mine).

Syntax, of course, does not exist independently of semantics. If the bridge is a copulative sentence, then it only makes sense, as it were, in joining two things that are related to each other; more specifically, that are *contiguous* (from the Latin *contigūus*, in Lewis and Short, *bordering upon, neighboring*, or *that may be touched, within reach*), to one degree or another. This makes the bridge, then, a piece of *metonymic* engineering. But is the bridge an architectural metaphor for this metonymical union, or its metonym? Metonymy (which comes from the Greek *metonymia*, or *change of name*), generally refers to a figure of speech in which an object is referred to not by its “proper” name, but by something “associated” with it. If we consider association here as a form of bridging, and if such bridging is an attribute intimately associated with metonymy, then one can see how a bridge might function as a metonym for metonymy itself. In his essay “Aphasia as a Lingustic Trope,” Roman Jakobson writes these “two opposite tropes, metaphor and metonymy, present the most condensed expression of two basic modes of relation: the internal relation of similarity (and contrast) underlies the metaphor; the external relation of contiguity

(and remoteness) determines the metonymy” (1971: 232). Note that metonymy is specifically presented as an inherently spatial or geographical principle: a relation that depends on the “external” or merely contingent criterion of proximity (or distance); metaphor, on the other hand, is an “internal” principle, a relation established through the essential criteria of similarity or difference. Jakobson is thinking, of course, in terms of Saussure’s syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, the first referring to the rules of combination that govern the linear and temporal extension of language, the second to the rules of selection that determine the presence of specific terms and the absence of others (which are present in absentia, at the level of the system). Emphasis upon the one or the other lead to two distinct forms of discourse. “The principle of similarity underlies poetry,” Jakobson argues in “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances”; “Prose, on the contrary, is forwarded essentially by contiguity” (132–33). Metonymy, according to Jakobson, is thus the essential principle at work in realist prose, which depends on the sustained concatenation of contiguous elements represented as external (think of the description of the contents in a room in a novel by Balzac), while metaphor dominates in lyric poetry, which tends to rely on the discovery of equivalences between objects that are distinct from one another.<sup>9</sup> But given that there is no easy way of establishing what constitutes contiguity as an associative principle, and given that such contiguity tends to be understood, to one degree or another, in metaphorical terms (thus the imagery of propinquity and remoteness in Jakobson’s discussion above), one can see why it is difficult to draw strict distinctions between the metonymic and the metaphorical.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jakobson argues that “[t]he primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of Romanticism and Symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies ... the so-called Realist trend ... Following the path of contiguous relationships, the Realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details” (132–33).

<sup>10</sup> That same difficulty is evident in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s theory of metaphor, as explicated in works such as *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. Lakoff and Johnson’s work is largely dedicated to demonstrating that

The *in-between, in and of itself*. “The First Bosphorus Bridge is a steel suspension bridge located in Istanbul, Turkey. The bridge is a well used road bridge that has had a significant effect on Istanbul ... Until the construction of the First Bosphorus Bridge there was no dry crossing between the European and Asian sections of Istanbul ... The bridge is more than just a way of getting from one side of the straits to the other. It has become a tourist attraction in its own right. During the night the bridge is illuminated in coloured light” (Matthew Smith, “Critical Analysis of the First Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey,” *Proceedings of Bridge Engineering 2 Conference* [University of Bath, Bath, UK, April 2009], 1).

Metonymy appears to be a species of metaphor, just as metaphor is a species of metonymy. Recall Aristotle’s definition of metaphor in the *Poetics*: “Metaphor is the application of a *strange* [*allotriou*; from *allotrios*: in Liddell and Scott, *belonging to another*, or *foreign*, *strange*] term either *transferred* [*epiphora*] from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy” (1457b; trans. Fyfe). The point I want to make here is that, in Aristotle’s conception, metaphor is merely the union, made explicit, of two terms which are already connected in one way or another. Metaphor is a bridging of two disparate but contiguous entities. Some of the examples Aristotle provides are in fact closer to what we would call metonymy than metaphor.<sup>11</sup> The bridge, then, is a metaphor for metaphor as much as it a metaphor for metonymy. But not just a metaphor. Note, too, that the reversibility of the bridge’s copulative function is equally visible in its metaphorical function. To speak in the language of I. A. Richards, if every metaphor consists of two parts, a tenor and a vehicle, then in the *pontine metaphor* the tenor can always occupy the

reasoning itself is largely metaphorical thinking, so that affirmations of conceptual relationality, for example, appear to be dependent upon assertions of spatial proximity: “Consider the Similarity is Proximity metaphor, in which Similarity is Spatial Closeness and Difference is Spatial Distance. It is very hard for us to imagine thinking about similarity without this metaphor” (59).

<sup>11</sup> Thus, Aristotle’s example of “a term transferred from genus to species”: “Here stands my ship.” For “Riding at anchor,” Aristotle explains, “is a species of standing” (1457b; trans. Fyfe).

place of vehicle, and vice versa. Or it may be more accurate to say that the pontine metaphor is a metaphor with neither tenor nor vehicle. In Aristotelian terms, the distinction between genus and species is dissolved: in the pontine metaphor, there are only species.

To return to the copulative principle of the bridge: to join any two things together as contiguous is always, in effect, to postulate their identity.<sup>12</sup> This is the truth at the heart of Jakobson’s *poetic principle*, which begins as a way of explaining poetic language’s special density and tautological qualities, but proves more useful as an indice of the intrinsic poetic properties of *all* language: the proof that all language depends, to one degree or another, on the assertion of similarities and differences established by contiguity (the operations of syntax). But in poetry the principle of identity becomes the constitutive principle for building linguistic sequences. This is, of course, what Jakobson refers to as the *poetic principle* (“The Speech Event and the Functions of Language” 78). It is this principle, too, which is at the heart of the very poetry of the bridge, and which renders the bridge both different from and like other forms. For, like the *poetic principle*, the *pontine principle* “projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (78). It is as if (but not only as if), in the architecture of the bridge, the paradigmatic axis were laid on its side, and overlaid upon the very syntax of the landscape. In the bridge, as in the poem, syntax becomes the very sign of

<sup>12</sup> This makes the bridge the essential structure of all metaphor; something evident, again, in Lakoff and Johnson’s representation of metaphor in *Philosophy in the Flesh*: from a “neural perspective,” they assert, metaphors are “neural connections” which “extend across parts of the brain between areas dedicated to sensorimotor experience and areas dedicated to subjective experience” (57); from a “conceptual point of view” they are “cross-domain mappings, from a source domain (the sensorimotor domain) to a target domain (the domain of subjective experience” (58). The copulative merely stands for that act of mapping across disparate domains; as in “Similarity Is Proximity, with the target domain in subject position (Similarity), the source domain in predicate nominal position (Proximity), and the mapping represented by the capitalized copula (Is). This takes the superficial form of an English sentence just to make it easier to read. But technically, it is intended not as a sentence in English, but as a name for a metaphorical mapping across conceptual domains” (58). Lakoff and Johnson’s description of the essential structure of the metaphor itself presupposes, one can see, the metaphorical structure of the bridge. Note, too, the inherent reversibility of this *pontine* structure: the bridge is the very assertion, not only that *similarity is proximity*, but that *proximity is similarity*.

identity. And now we can better understand the copulative nature of the pontine utterance. For equivalence is not the end, but the means of the pontine principle. This makes it, in Jakobson’s terms, an example of *poetry*, as opposed to *metalanguage*. “It may be objected,” Jakobson writes, “that metalanguage also makes sequential use of equivalent units when combining synonymic expressions into an equational sentence: *A = A* (*Mare is the female of the horse*). Poetry and metalanguage, however, are in a diametrical opposition to each other: in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation, whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence” (78). The bridge, similarly, is not a way of establishing identity by means of a syntax; it is, rather, a way of building syntax by way of identity.

### Infrastructure

The humility of the bridge, like its hubris, stems from its all-too human origins; it is, in the end, but a piece of engineering: an effort to dominate the landscape, and the laws of nature, with a few pieces of cable. That makes the bridge at once the most extraordinary and the most banal of objects; a monstrous intrusion upon the surface of the earth, and just another part of the landscape, as natural and as commonplace as a hill or a cloud.

*Just another part of the landscape.* “2.2.5 *Integration into the Environment*. The local environment is urban on both sides of the straits and therefore a modern bridge, constructed using metal, fits well into the surroundings. The tall towers and sweeping cables fit well rolling hills and large expanse of water. 2.2.6 *Surface Texture*. The deck of this bridge is a smoother texture than the tower which is widely recognized as a good aesthetic choice. The deck is not so smooth to be shiny but combined with its slenderness works well with the surroundings giving the hint of a reflection of the water without looking too unnatural” (Smith, “Critical Analysis of the First Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey”).

*An addition to the landscape. The bridge is always the unnatural.* “2.2.10 *Incorporation of Nature*. The First Bosphorus Bridge does not relate to nature any more than any other bridge and does not need to; it is situated in the

middle of a city and is above a busy trade lane, it is likely that to try to incorporate nature into this design would make it look out of place and absurd” (Smith, “Critical Analysis of the First Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey”).

It’s function, we have said, is that of the *copula*, the conjunction, the connective. And as such it is part of a larger category of matter, those objects which constitute, collectively speaking, the very connective tissue of our world. It is, in other words, a piece of *infrastructure*. *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* defines *infrastructure* as: “1: the underlying foundation or basic framework (as of a system or organization); 2: the permanent installations required for military purposes; 3: the system of public works of a country, state, or region ...” There is an apparent tension between the last two definitions, which refer to the structures built within the framework of a system or state, and the first, which, in emphasizing the system constituted by those built structures, seems to refer to that very framework itself. Because the last two definitions have, in recent years, tended to obscure the first, it is easy to forget what they have in common. For the installations and public works that constitute the infrastructure of a state are, more essentially, its connective elements, its articulating members—of which the bridge is the iconic instance. *The Free Dictionary* adds the following “Usage Note” to its definition:

The term infrastructure has been used since 1927 to refer collectively to the roads, bridges, rail lines, and similar public works that are required for an industrial economy, or a portion of it, to function. The term also has had specific application to the permanent military installations necessary for the defense of a country. Perhaps because of the word’s technical sound, people now use infrastructure to refer to any substructure or underlying system.

But infrastructure has always referred to the underlying system of a constructed environment;<sup>13</sup> it has always referred

<sup>13</sup> According to “The Etymology of Infrastructure and the Infrastructure of the Internet” (posted by Stephen Lewis, 22 September



to the built *syntax* of a state.

Because infrastructure signifies the various mechanisms by which a system is articulated, its constitutive elements related to each other or rendered contiguous, the failure of those mechanisms is always regarded as a signal of systemic collapse. Indeed, in recent years, particularly in the United States, infrastructure has tended to refer specifically to a mechanism in decline, syntax as something in crisis.<sup>14</sup> Our faith in the bridge is not what it used to be. The fall of the Tacoma Narrows bridge occurs before such a loss of faith in our capacity to construct or reconstruct the world around us. That faith has now been largely replaced by a profound suspicion of our buildings and our bridges, indeed, of the entire infrastructure of our nation. Today we expect our infrastructure (like our syntax) to fail; we know that we are running on borrowed time, and that it is only through the good grace of God, or the laws of chance, that the train does not derail, that the tunnel does not flood, that the bridge does not collapse.

Once upon a time, we had respect, and even affection for our infrastructure; the way we did for our neighbors (who are, after all, part of the living infrastructure of a community; our commerce with our neighbors is what binds us to the place we live). The Tacoma Narrows Bridge, which was well known, long before its demise, to sway with the wind, was regarded with a peculiar familiarity by its patrons and neighbors, who personified it, and affectionately referred to it as “Galloping Gertie.” (The moniker applied to its successor after the event has an air of regretful nostalgia and defensive inadequacy about it: “Sturdy Gertie.”) Indeed, according to the engineering analysis cited above (“Galloping Gertie—Tacoma Narrows Bridge”), “Although concerns about the bridge’s stability had been voiced, bridge officials were so confident of the structure, they considered canceling

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2008), the term *infrastructure* “entered the English language as a loan word from French in which it had been a railroad engineering term. A 1927 edition of the Oxford [Dictionary] indeed mentioned the word in the context of ‘the tunnels, bridges, culverts, and “infrastructure work” of the French railroads.”

<sup>14</sup> To cite Stephen Lewis again on infrastructure: “In recent years, in the United States at least, infrastructure is a word widely used but an aspect of economic life and social cohesion known more by its collapse and abandonment and raffling off to the private sector than by its implementation, well-functioning, and expansion.”

the insurance policies in order to obtain reduced rates on a new one.”

That kind of faith in the built forms of the world has eroded over the years, along with those forms themselves. Those forms, however, are not just cast in steel or carved in stone: they are also inscribed on pages and disseminated in images. We are no longer confident in the stability of the world we have built around us; but neither are we sure, as perhaps we used to be, in our abilities to faithfully record and represent that world. It is hard to think of the primary role played by the institution of the media today as mimetic; as if it simply attends to the event in order to reproduce it, or reflect upon it. We know that it is no longer so easy to separate the event from its recording. Our contemporary media, in other words, are part and parcel of the infrastructure of our world. This is why we can speak of the internet highway and the latest version of Windows, transplanting the lexicon of physical infrastructure to the virtual realm.

The fact that the Tacoma Narrows Bridge disaster was captured on film is essential: it allowed what would have simply been an event to become *news*—news in that pristine 1940’s sense, untouched by the kind of suspicion of the mimetic act that has become standard in the age of CNN. Today we are all amateur McLuhanites: we are suspicious of the message from the beginning; we know the message is always corrupted by the medium. To appreciate the impact of the recording of the Tacoma Narrows disaster on film, we have to imagine a world before O. J. Simpson and Photoshop: a world where mimesis was still something we could believe in. Today, we know, images can be manufactured, or tampered with (as they have been since the first days of photography); knowledge is now so indissociable from the image itself that for us, today, all images are potentially fraudulent.

The Wikipedia entry (“Tacoma Narrows Bridge [1940]”) on the Tacoma Narrows disaster has this to say on the recording of the event on film:

The final destruction of the bridge was recorded on film by Barney Elliott, owner of a local camera shop, and shows Leonard Coatsworth leaving the bridge after exiting his car. In 1998, The Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse was selected for preservation in the United

States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.” This footage is still shown to engineering, architecture, and physics students as a cautionary tale. Elliot’s original films of the construction and collapse of the bridge were shot on 16mm Kodachrome film, but most copies in circulation are in black and white because newsreels of the day copied the film onto 35mm black and white stock.

Evident here is what seems to be a simple faith, still untested, in the *virtue* of the image: its veracity, its durability, its decency. That Elliott is the owner of a camera shop helps to lend his testimony a humble authenticity; that his film was “selected for preservation” indicates the respect it commands as a physical relic; that it is still shown to students as “a cautionary tale” suggests its enduring power as a didactic instrument, like a story told by of one of our grandfathers, still alive to speak of what he saw once, long ago, with his own eyes. That the original film was shot on Kodachrome is meant to testify to its fidelity to the truth (Kodachrome as a former era’s *sine qua non* of technologically engineered fidelity to the real). That the copies of Elliott’s original are in black-and-white is both ironic, and inevitable: for today it is precisely Kodachrome’s reproduction of the colors of the real world which is seen as suspicious, a sign of fabrication; while black-and-white is our filmic metaphor for verisimilitude and historical truth.<sup>15</sup>

### The Temporality of the Bridge

As an instance of the syntagmatic principle made visible, the bridge possesses a certain intrinsic benevolence. The bridge—this artifact of human engineering imposed upon a landscape hostile to our passage—allows us to do what we could not have done before: to cross from one shore to

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Simon captures the idea in his single “Kodachrome.” An excerpt from the lyrics is instructive: “Kodachrome / They give us those nice bright colors / They give us the greens of summers / Makes you think all the world’s a sunny day / I got a Nikon camera / I love to take a photograph / So mama don’t take my Kodachrome away // If you took all the girls I knew / When I was single / And brought them all together for one night / I know they’d never match / my sweet imagination / Everything looks worse in black and white.”

another. Every bridge is the embodiment of Saint Christopher, who, in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions, forded a river carrying Christ upon his shoulders (indeed, his name is simply Greek for *Christ-bearer*), and who is, not surprisingly, the patron saint of travelers. The bridge is that which brings us safely home, or out of danger, or simply on our way, from one place to another.

*St. Christopher.* “Through a sleepless night, Mehmet Saracoglu kept vigil by his phone in Sunnyside, Queens, thinking only of the family that he feared was killed in an earthquake a continent away. He called Turkey every few minutes until midnight, but got only busy signals ... His prayers were not answered until after 8 o’clock yesterday morning, when his phone rang with the faint whisper of his father’s voice crackling on the other end. His parents, Burhan and Hatice, and three siblings, had escaped unharmed from their vacation spot in Izmit, Turkey, near the epicenter of an earthquake that killed at least 2,000 people. His relatives said they were safe at an uncle’s house on the Asiatic side of Istanbul and were hoping to make it home to the European side, across the Bosphorus. They did not know if their house had crumbled like so many others shown on Turkish television that morning, but they were alive. The call faded out before Mr. Saracoglu could give them his love” (Kit R. Roane, “Earthquake in Turkey: Prayers in New York; Turkish Immigrant’s Father to Glean News from Home,” *New York Times*, 18 August 1999).

And yet there is always the possibility, in the crossing of a river, that we won’t make it across. I have friends who are still possessed by a nameless, archaic terror when faced with the prospect of crossing a bridge; and who are not reassured until they are landed safely on the far shore. Every bridge is an act of hubris—a tower of Babel lain on its side, stretched out from one shore to another, a negotiation with, or even a defiance of both space *and* time. Saussure asserts that all language is governed both by synchronic and diachronic principles. The bridge, in short, is the material form not only of syntax, but also of temporality—temporality as something specifically tragic.

Life, in short, is always a matter of traffic: either it

flows, and circulates, or it coagulates, and clots.

*The body without organs. Infrastructure, or connective tissue.* “Stuck in rush-hour traffic at an approach to one of the bridges over the Bosphorus on a recent evening, a taxi driver cursed the Government for not building a third bridge. ‘Two isn’t enough for a city of 10 million people,’ he fumed. ‘We not only need a third bridge, but also a fourth and a fifth. Then traffic will run smoothly.’ The Government may soon seek to oblige that taxi driver and many others who believe that Istanbul urgently needs at least one more Bosphorus crossing” (Stephen Kinzer, “Istanbul Journal; A New Bridge? Not in My Backyard!”, *New York Times*, 6 February 1999).

“Transportation Minister Binali Yıldırım has announced that İstanbul’s third bridge over the Bosphorus will connect Sarıyer’s Garipçe village on the European side with Beykoz’s Poyrazköy neighborhood on the Asian side” (“Location for Third Bridge Revealed, Project to Cost \$6 Billion,” *Today’s Zaman*, 30 April 2010).

*The ruin as necrotic tissue.* According to the abstract of an article entitled “Restoration of the Golden Horn Estuary (Halic)”: “Restoration of the iconic Golden Horn Estuary in Istanbul, Turkey, was a substantial political, logistical, ecological, and social challenge. Forty years of uncontrolled industrial and urban growth resulted in thick layers of anoxic sediment, toxic bacteria, strong hydrogen sulfide odor, and ecologically unlivable conditions. The major components of restoration, spanning two decades, have included (1) demolition and relocation of industries and homes along the shore, (2) creation of wastewater infrastructure, (3) removal of anoxic sludge from the estuary, (4) *removal of a floating bridge that impeded circulation*” (italics mine). (F. Ilter Aydinol Turkdogan, Heather M. Coleman, Gurdal Kanat, “Restoration of the Golden Horn Estuary (Halic)” [*Water Research* 43.20, December 2009], 4989-5003, [http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=ArticleURL&\\_udi=B6V73-4X54JKG1&\\_user=10&\\_coverDate=12%2F31%2F2009&\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=high&\\_orig=search&\\_sort=d&\\_docanchor=&view=c&\\_searchStrId=1391755695&\\_](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6V73-4X54JKG1&_user=10&_coverDate=12%2F31%2F2009&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=search&_sort=d&_docanchor=&view=c&_searchStrId=1391755695&_)

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For all of us, on our way somewhere, will one day fail to make the journey, or take a wrong turn; all of us, on a bridge somewhere between one place and other, or one moment and another, will one day fail to make it across. And so the collapse of a bridge is one of those catastrophes we must always be expecting. (And when catastrophe comes, as it will one day, it will come in the form of a collapsing bridge.)

In this sense the bridge is the very embodiment of destiny itself: we see it, from afar, massive, sublime, its head in the clouds, waiting for us, as we wend our humble way. There is only one bridge, a feature of the landscape itself; whereas there are many of us, who are merely travelers, passing through. From the perspective of where we sit, behind the steering wheel of our automobile, this is the story of an individual, *our* story: and every time we make the crossing, we know on some level, that it may be our last. In the comfort of our cars we are all potential tragic heroes, on a collision course with destiny. And yet we are merely one of many; and the traffic that flows across a bridge is a collective, atomistic entity, its motion subject not to the whim of any individual, but to nameless, nebulous, and implacable laws. Traffic accelerates, decelerates; stops and starts; and we never really know why. But the bridge is always a potential crisis or catastrophe; it forces us to acknowledge (marked, as it is, with its signposts and its tollgates and its blinking lights) the risks we take when we dare to make the crossing from one shore to another.

*Traffic.* “The desiring-machines themselves are the flows-schizzes or the breaks-flows that break and flow at the same time on the body without organs: not the gaping wound represented in castration, but the myriad little connections, disjunctions, and conjunctions by which every machine produces a flow in relation to another that breaks it, and breaks a flow that another produces” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *Anti-Oedipus* [London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004], 346).

A sign that Istanbul, a body without organs, is still alive: the *Variable Message Signs* on the D-100 Highway System (more commonly referred to as “E-5”) serving the Bosphorus and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, indicating AKIYOR (IT IS FLOWING) or AKMIYOR (IT IS NOT FLOWING). The Variable Messages Signs (VMS), equipped with “mounted full-color LED technology” [29] are one of several “Sub-systems” (2) of the Lane Control Systems (LCS) overseen by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Traffic Directorate (29). There are 45 VMS on the Asian side, 145 on the European side (Maşuk Mete, *Lane Management D-100 Highway, Istanbul/Turkiye [10/12/2009]* [Istanbul: ISBAK, n.d.], [www.polis-online.org/fileadmin/.../Lane\\_Management\\_Istanbul.pdf](http://www.polis-online.org/fileadmin/.../Lane_Management_Istanbul.pdf)).

### Catastrophe Theory

The collapse of a bridge is therefore viewed with a special horror, but also a certain resignation: for it appears to be the most inevitable of catastrophes: a fulfillment of destiny itself, or the very laws of nature. In much *catastrophe theory* the classic paradigm for the catastrophic event is that of the collapse of a bridge. In the 1960’s and 1970’s large claims for catastrophe theory were made, as a mathematical model for studying sudden, as opposed to smooth, changes in a system. As one of its early proponents, Vladimir Arnold, writes, “while Newtonian theory only considers smooth, continuous processes, catastrophe theory ... provides a universal method for the study of all jump transitions, discontinuities, and sudden qualitative changes” (*Catastrophe Theory* 1). Those claims have since been scaled back; but catastrophe theory still remains a significant model for explaining sudden change in what appear to be very disparate phenomena; indeed, therein lies its enduring popular appeal. Catastrophes, within catastrophe theory, are understood as “abrupt changes, arising as a sudden response of a system”—any system, in principle—“to a smooth change in external conditions” (Arnold 2). Catastrophe theory can help to explain, for example, “the change in the shape of an arched bridge as the load on it is gradually increased” (“Catastrophe Theory,” “Britannica.com”). How does this system “undergo sudden large changes in behaviour as one or more variables that control it are

changed continuously”? “The bridge deforms in a relatively uniform manner until the load reaches a critical value, at which point the shape of the bridge changes suddenly—it collapses.” Here is another definition of catastrophe theory for the layman, one like many others that appear on the web:

Mathematical theory that models the mechanisms of sudden and discontinuous change of state in very different types of phenomenon such as buckling of a metal under pressure, freezing of a liquid, fall of a government, or riot by a mob. It explains that a series of gradual changes (such as build up of strain in a structure or frustration of people in a nation) trigger rapid and large-scale (catastrophic) changes such as the collapse of a bridge or an empire. (“Catastrophe Theory: Definition,” *BusinessDictionary.com*)

That different types of phenomena can be explained by the same mathematical model, reduced, as it were, to a set of curves or equations, suggests that those phenomena are not truly different at all: they are merely variations on a theme, representations of the same set of universal principles. That *the collapse of a bridge or an empire* has the same essential form (that of catastrophe itself) is not a proposition I am qualified to assess; but that such a proposition could be written at all, and in this fashion, suggests the extent to which our notion of catastrophe depends on the figure (or the fact) of the bridge. Note that this proposition is formulated as a perfect *zeugma*, two parallel elements (*bridge* and *empire*) yoked together by the same noun (*collapse*). Note, too, that such a formulation is only made possible through the collapse of other elements, syntactical and semantic. *Syntactical:* zeugma always depends on both the linking of certain elements, and the omission, or *ellipsis*, of others. The zeugma above is constructed through the omission of the noun *collapse* in the hypothetical phrase *the collapse of a bridge or the collapse of an empire*. *Semantic:* that an empire can be said to collapse in the manner of a bridge depends on the erasure of everything that distinguishes bridges from empires; as if one had discovered, in the bridge, the essential form of empire itself. This is certainly a proposition one could explore, if one had the time: in both their geographic and temporal



aspects empires possess the properties we associate intimately with bridges (their joining together disparate peoples and provinces and historical periods, etc.).

The Tacoma Narrows Bridge disaster, however, does not correspond to our notion of catastrophe as a *sudden and discontinuous change of state*. The fact that this bridge did not simply collapse (although catastrophe theorists will tell us no bridge *simply* collapses), but seemed *about to* collapse over a period of two or three hours, gave the event an eery languid quality, as if catastrophe itself had decelerated, and abandoned all sense of shame or desire to shock. Catastrophes, after all, are supposed to happen suddenly, spectacularly, when no one was looking. But the Tacoma Narrows Bridge took its time: catastrophe here becomes a form of slow torture, *a danse macabre*, the death throes of a prodigious object. In this slow death there is something more shocking and more shameful than the traditional catastrophe, which burns brightly but, mercifully, briefly. Catastrophe is supposed to be something spectacular, and something sublime: the sudden collapse of order, the dramatic dissolution of syntax. But at Tacoma castrophe has a stability and a syntax of its own: it suggests not simply the dissolution of order, but the emergence of a new kind of order: deliberate, seductive; repetitive, even monotonous; almost banal.

The fact that catastrophe could so calmly, so languidly unfold before our eyes, a spectacle in slow motion: it is this which gives the event its opposite quality, its fantastic, nightmarish, surreal aspect. The fact that destruction takes the form of a recurrent pattern, so that it seems to represent a form of choreography, a kind of writing, gives the event an oracular, transcendent quality. That something as solid as a bridge could become so fluid, suggests a transgression of the very laws of nature, the revelation that solidity itself was always this contingent, that the true desire of every solid is to relinquish its solidity, and bend, and break.

It may be that there is something distinctly modern about this apparent metaphysical revelation. It may be that this epiphany of an essential instability, lying dormant, hidden, immanent in the ordinary objects of the world around us, is part of a larger cultural episteme, part of the very experience of modernity as the expectation of order unraveling, syntax disintegrating. This sounds very much

like Marshall Berman’s description of modernity in his *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. “To be modern,” writes Berman, “is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air’”(15). Marx was referring, in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (476), to the revolution already unwittingly set in motion by industrial capitalism, which renders all tradition obsolete, exposed now as ideology. Revolution, for Marx, is thus inseparable from revelation: a stripping away of the illusory: “The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hithero honoured and looked up to with reverent awe ... The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil” (476), etc. For Berman, the modernists (a category apparently broad enough to embrace Goethe’s *Faust* [*All That Is Solid Melts into Air* 37–86] and Robert Moses’ highway infrastructure [290–312]) are, like the bourgeoisie before them, inspired by impulses both revolutionary and reactionary: they “are moved at once by a will to change—to transform both themselves and their world—and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart. They all know the thrill and the dread of a world in which ‘all that is solid melts into air’” (13).<sup>16</sup>

### The Lyre of God

It is not just the hidden insubstantiality of matter that seems to be revealed in the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. In this catastrophe we seem to be witness to the spectacle of matter as though possessed by another force, become the plaything, and, indeed, the instrument or medium of another power, one that speaks through matter itself. Who could have imagined that a bridge would become the lyre of God? Hence the eloquence of the pattern, this choreography that speaks in recurrent sine waves, and which can be expressed as a “generalized equation” giving “the amplitude of the wave at a position  $x$  at time  $t$  along a single line” (“Sine

<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, Marx asserts in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” “the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange” (475). But, “The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself” (478). In the wake of revolution comes reaction. As Berman puts it, “Thus the dialectical motion of modernity turns ironically against its primary movers” (21).

wave”). Such a pattern “occurs often in nature, including ocean waves, sound waves, and light waves.” That such an order exists in the natural world is something we are willing to accept. But that something as man-made or contingent as a suspension bridge could manifest such an order is unfathomable, and thus gives it the status of a revelation.

*Catalysts of catastrophe. Unnatural disasters: wind. It is when a bridge vibrates at its natural frequency that it is in danger of collapsing. The specter of Galloping Gertie: “3.5 Wind Loads. Suspension bridges are very badly affected by wind loading because of large spans and minimal lateral resistance. It is not just the horizontal force which can damage the bridge; wind could trigger the bridge to vibrate at its natural frequency, leading to severe damage and collapse as demonstrated during the Tacoma Narrows disaster of 1940. To combat the effects of wind loading on the First Bosphorus Bridge, an aerodynamic deck was designed which reduces the wind loading. In addition to the aerodynamic deck the hangers are inclined in a zigzag pattern which gives extra lateral stability”* (Smith, “Critical Analysis of the First Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey”).

*Catalysts of catastrophe. Unnatural disasters: the earthquake. “3.7 Earthquake Loads. The First Bosphorus Bridge is located in an earthquake zone and therefore must be able to survive an earthquake. The movement joints help to alleviate some of the forces which the deck would experience in an earthquake”* (italics mine) (Smith, “Critical Analysis of the First Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey”).

*Catalysts of catastrophe. Unnatural disasters.* “Suspension bridges represent critical nodes of major transportation systems. Bridge failure during strong earthquakes poses not only a threat of fatalities but causes a substantial interruption of emergency efforts. Although wind induced vibrations have historically been the primary concern in the design of suspension bridges, earthquake effects have also gained importance in recent decades. This study involves ambient vibration testing and sophisticated three-dimensional dynamic finite element analysis and earthquake performance assessment of Fatih

Sultan Mehmet and suspension Boğaziçi bridges in Istanbul under earthquake excitation” (Mustafa Erdik and Nurdan Apaydın, “Earthquake Response of Suspension Bridges,” *Vibration Problems ICOVP 2005, Springer Proceedings in Physics* 111 [Netherlands: Springer, 2007]).

The world of human actions and artifacts is messy, and speaks in a Babel-esque cacophony of voices. From the same entry, in *Wikipedia*, on the sine wave: “To the human ear, a sound that is made up of more than one sine wave will either sound ‘noisy’ or will have detectable harmonics.” But the lyre of God has only one string: order of a transcendent nature speaks with a pure and undivided voice. There is something wondrous or sinister in the encounter with such purity. One thinks of poor Robert Schumann, the romantic composer, whose insanity that marked the final years of his life was heralded by the conviction that the unadulterated and sustained note *A* was sounding perpetually in his ears (“Robert Schumann”). This is what terrifies in catastrophe: that it speaks with such undivided purity. And what catastrophe says when it speaks constitutes a new form of “catastrophic information,” in the words of Paul Virilio (*The Accident of Art* 106), a “new knowledge,” one he identifies with “the writing of disaster” as understood by Blanchot.<sup>17</sup>

I return, for a moment, to the idea of information as infrastructure. For us catastrophe is inseparable from the idea of interruption; but for Virilio we can no longer afford to think in this way. Today the idea of a particular segment of film “selected for preservation” as a “cautionary tale” of catastrophe is inconceivable. Today we live in a world of “continuous catastrophic information,” so that what were formerly local events, exceptions to the rule, “have to be connected.” Why? To reach “a prospective knowledge of the threat.” What threat? “Not of terrorists”—nor any other external force. The threat, rather, “of our own power, of our arrogance” (106).

<sup>17</sup> This is perhaps, from Blanchot’s perspective, a trivialization or domestication of the notion of disaster. In *The Writing of the Disaster* Blanchot equates the disaster with the “unexperienced,” and therefore with what exceeds the possibility of writing: “It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes. Which does not mean that the disaster, as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing or extratextual” (trans. Smock, 7).

Virilio’s approach to catastrophe is relevant here, although more narrowly politicized and more historically specific. For Virilio this new knowledge imparted by catastrophe is that of objects themselves; objects built by us. It is the *articulation* of infrastructure itself, as it is in the process of coming apart. Thus the writing of disaster is for Virilio an indictment of our own hubris as architects of infrastructure (this is the hubris, Berman would say, of the modernist<sup>18</sup>). In the course of his interview with Sylvère Lotringer which constitutes *The Accident of Art*, Virilio comments on the hubris that constituted the building (as opposed to the destruction) of the World Trade Center: “It was extraordinary,” he says “to build twelve hundred feet without a structure [that is to say, with no cement core; an omission that would not, Virilio avers, have been permitted in France], with a single steel weave. But this performance came at the price of an unprecedented catastrophe” (107). Long before September 11, it was well known that the Twin Towers, like The Tacoma Narrows Bridge, swayed violently in the wind. Sensors were placed on the towers, which recorded the sounds they emitted in storms; “You can hear the suffering,” Virilio comments. This suffering is, for Virilio, the revelation of catastrophe, the revelation that is, he asserts, “the apocalypse of substance” itself.

That is not, however, a new revelation. Long before the Twin Towers there was the Tower of Babel. We have always been architects of infrastructure. Surely the writing of disaster is not just a verdict on the hubris of a new age; but the revelation of substance itself. All substance, I would argue, must be tortured into speaking the truth.

<sup>18</sup> In the chapter of *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* devoted to Robert Moses, Berman draws an equation between Moses’ “megalomaniac will to power” (308) and the massive building projects that effectively destroyed much of New York City in the 1950s. But Blanchot encourages us to view such efforts to rewrite the world not as the will to power, but as a surrendering of the will, as a form of *passivity*, the essential condition, in *The Writing of the Disaster*, of the disaster: “To want to write: what an absurdity. Writing is the decay of the will, just as it is the loss of power, and the fall of the regular fall of the beat, the disaster again” (11); “If there is a relation between writing and passivity, it is because both presuppose the effacement, the extenuation of the subject: both presuppose a change in time, and that between being and non-being, something which never yet takes place happens nonetheless, as having long since already happened” (14).

Elegy for a Dog: *Point de Capiton*

Not only qualitatively, but quantitatively, the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge fails to conform to our most familiar models of catastrophe: the event lacks the requisite magnitude, whether in terms of temporality (it must happen quickly, and suddenly), force (it must be prodigious), or economic and ethical consequences (it must result in the calculable loss of human life). At the Tacoma Narrows, there was only one fatality: a small dog, named Tubby.

Let us turn, for a moment, to Tubby. For he seems to be an obligatory motif in the reportage of the event, and more recent commentary on it. The thread of remarks on the collapse of the bridge at “Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse in Color” includes sympathetic entries, such as “Too bad about the little dog,” and “Pity about the dog.” The Washington State Department of Transportation maintains a page on the *Tacoma Narrows Bridge History* web site devoted to “Tubby Trivia,” which begins with the following statement, one that transforms the death of the dog into pure melodrama:

“Tubby” the dog fell into fame when Galloping Gertie collapsed on November 7, 1940. As the only victim of that great disaster, Tubby has earned a special place in the hearts of many. His death symbolizes the drama of that terrible day. All that is known about the unfortunate pooch is here. These few facts are a small but meaningful way to honor his unique place in history. (“Tacoma Narrows Bridge”)

Every tragic hero, of course, “falls into fame”—only not so literally—when the order he had formerly taken for granted collapses beneath his feet. That tragic structure is retained in this reading of events; only trivialized, sentimentalized, rendered comically visible. The tragic hero is now “an unfortunate pooch”; one whose demise elicits pity, but no fear.

The *Wikipedia* entry on the “Tacoma Narrows Bridge (1940)” devotes an entire section to “Tubby the dog,” which I reproduce here in full:

Tubby, a black male cocker spaniel dog, was the only fatality of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge disaster. Leonard

Coatsworth, a Tacoma News Tribune photographer, was driving with the dog over the bridge when it started to vibrate violently. Coatsworth was forced to flee his car, leaving Tubby behind. Professor Farquharson and a news photographer attempted to rescue Tubby, but the dog was too terrified to leave the car and bit one of the rescuers. Tubby died when the bridge fell, and neither his body nor the car were ever recovered. Coatsworth had been driving Tubby back to his daughter, who owned the dog. Coatsworth received US \$364.40 in reimbursement for the contents of his car, including Tubby. In 1975, Coatsworth’s wife claimed that Tubby only had three legs and was paralyzed.

The tale of Tubby the Dog constitutes an entire distinct canine epic unto itself, an alternate version of catastrophe, parallel or perpendicular to the official version. How to explain the rise of this cult to Tubby the Dog? I think there is more than just sentimentality at work here, although there is plenty of that. There is something peculiarly riveting about this singular, trivial death. Certainly, this very singularity and triviality helps to give the event its pathos, its sentimental force: to cite the introduction to “Tubby Trivia,” “As the only victim of that great disaster, Tubby has earned a special place in the hearts of many.”

One is reminded here of the death of Elpenor at *Odyssey* 10.550–60, one of the few “ordinary” individuals, as opposed to the run-of-the-mill heroes or divinities we expect in epic poetry, whose name is immortalized by Homer. An ordinary man (“none too brave in battle, none too sound in mind” [10.553; trans. Fagles]), Elpenor dies the most ordinary of deaths, falling off the roof of Circe’s palace in a drunken stupor. One thinks, too, of Elpenor’s Roman cousin Palinurus, Aeneas’ helmsman, who falls asleep at the wheel, so to speak, and perishes at sea at *Aeneid* 5.833–871 (“the god cast him headlong / into the limpid waters” [5.859–60; trans. Mandelbaum]).

As in these other insignificant tragedies suffered by insignificant heroes, our interest in this solitary victim surely stems also from the degree to which he provides a point of identification: someone or something with whom we can sympathize, and from whose perspective we can experience the event, and even learn from it, as if we were

there ourselves. This event may not be of typically catastrophic magnitude, but it does satisfy the requirements of catharsis: this tiny death is a tiny tragedy, but a tragedy all the same, and one that succeeds in generating feelings of pity and fear. The tragic hero is a sacrifice; and so is Tubby the Dog.

*The sacrificial victim.* “The Bridge of Arta” (“*To Gefyri tes Artas*”); a modern Greek folk-tale, of which variants exist in many Balkan nations, in which a human sacrifice must be made in order for the bridge to endure; often the master builder’s wife, interred in the piers of the structure:

Forty-five builders and sixty apprentices  
Were building the foundations [*themelionan*] to a bridge  
on the river at Arta.  
They built all day, and every night their work crumbled away.  
The builders and apprentices began to weep and mourn  
their wasted work.  
“Worthless is all our work and toil, a doom is on our labor:  
We build all day, and every night our work crumbles away.”  
A little bird flew by, it settled on the farther bank,  
It did not sing like any bird, it sang not like a swallow,  
It sang and spoke with a little human voice:  
“Unless you make a human a ghost [*stoiheiosete anthropon*], your bridge will never stand:  
But do not destroy an orphan, a stranger, or a traveler:  
Destroy instead the lovely wife of your own master builder [*protomastoras*],  
Who comes each morning late and late again each evening comes.”  
The master builder heard this and he sickened unto death:  
He sends a message to his wife by bird, a nightingale:  
Let her come slowly [*argaz*], slowly come, and bring him late his dinner:  
Let her come slowly, slowly come, and cross the Bridge of Arta.  
But the bird misheard, and misdelivered what he asked, and said,



“Oh come now quickly [*gorga*], quickly come, and bring him soon his dinner:  
Oh come now quickly, quickly come, and cross the Bridge of Arta.”  
Now she appears and comes in sight upon the gleaming pathway:  
The master builder sees her come, his heart breaks into fragments.  
From far she greets them, and from near she speaks to them and says,  
“Joy, health to you, you builders and to you apprentices:  
But why is the master builder so downcast, and why so silent?”  
“His ring has fallen down below the first arch of the bridge,  
And who will go, and who will go, and bring him out his ring?”  
“Builder, do not lament, for I will fetch it up to you,  
And I will go, and I will go, and bring you out your ring.”  
She scarce was down, and had not reached the middle of the river—  
“Pull up the chain, my love, pull up the chain and me together,  
I have turned over all the place, but not found anything.”  
One spread the mortar, one smoothed with the trowel,  
And the master builder seized a rock, and hurled it down upon her.  
“Alas our fate, our destiny, alas our great misfortune.  
We were three sisters, three we were, with evil dooms predestined:  
For one of us built the Danube bridge, and one of us the Euphrates,  
And I, the youngest of the three, I built the Bridge of Arta.  
May this bridge shake like a poppyhead, so may it shake and tremble,  
And as the leaves fall from the trees, so may the travelers tumble.”  
“Woman, woman, leave off your words, and let your curse be altered;  
For you have but one brother, and he may one day cross this bridge.”  
And the woman left off her words, and let her curse be altered:  
“If the high mountains tremble, let this bridge then

tremble:  
If the wild birds fall from the sky, let the traveler tumble;  
For I have one brother in foreign lands [*ste xeniteia*], and he may cross this bridge.”  
(Ed. Nikolaos Polites, *Eklogai Apo ta tragoudia tou Ellenikou Laou* [*Selections from the Songs of the Greek People*] [Athens, 1914], 219 [n.208].)

But note the apocalyptic prophecy of the master-builder’s wife’s revised prophecy.

Within this tragedy the Tacoma Narrows stands, and falls, as we have already seen, as a particularly literal objectification or actualization of fate, or syntax, or structure, or whatever it is that the tragic hero is made and unmade by. The dog is not just a victim, in other words, of tragic causality, or the decrees of destiny, but of the mechanics of place, or even mechanics *tout court*. The fate of this dog, like that of every tragic hero, has been literally *designed*; it has been *engineered*. Why laugh at little Tubby the Dog? Why sentimentalize him? The tragic hero is always a tiny figure, caught by surprise in a structure (vast, sprawling, insentient) that no longer affords passage. The dog does not belong on this bridge. None of us do. Like any tragic hero, Tubby the Dog remains a figure of incongruity, absolutely out of place. But, precisely because he is such a stubbornly incongruous figure, the hero is our essential point of reference, who organizes this place, and makes it readable for us.

Thus it is not enough to say that Tubby’s death “symbolizes the drama of that terrible day.” Tubby is not just a symbol; he functions, rather, in the manner of what Lacan called a *point de capiton*, and by which he referred to that object in a text whereby everything in it seems to be *quilted together*; the juncture where signifier is *sutured* to signified.<sup>19</sup>

19       Lacan’s notion of the *point de capiton* thus represents a radical departure from Saussure’s idealized notion of a chain of signifiers firmly and durably attached to their respective signifieds. In Lacan’s rewriting of Saussure’s semiology, “[t]he notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier ... comes to the fore” (“The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious”; trans. Fink, 419); but “All our experience runs counter to this, which made me speak at one point in my seminar on the psychoses of the “button ties” [*points de capiton*] required by this schema to account for the dominance of the letter in the dramatic transformation that dialogue can effect in the subject” (419). The *point de caption* is thus the

In itself the *point de capiton* may be an inconsequential sign; and yet it is that which allows us to grasp what we see as a totality or whole. As Lacan explains in *The Psychoses*:

Whether it be a sacred text, a novel, a play, a monologue, or any conversation whatsoever, allow me to represent the function of the signifier by a spatializing device ... This point around which all concrete analysis of discourse must operate I shall call a *quilting point* [*point de capiton*] ... Were we to analyze this scene as a musical score, we should see that this is the point at which the signified and the signifier are knotted together, between the still floating mass of meanings that are actually circulating ... Everything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of material. It’s the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively. (Trans. Grigg, 267–68)

Galloping Gertie, in its superbly eloquent but untranslatable movement, suggests just such a sacred text rendered visible, become space, become structure. This oscillating bridge, this lyre of God, has become, indeed, a kind of spatializing device. Signifiers have literally become untethered from their signifieds: this figure of solid infrastructure become a “circulating” or “floating mass of meanings.”<sup>20</sup> And the only thing that seems to hold it all together is Tubby the Dog.

“All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge” is a revised and expanded version of an essay from Matthew Gumpert, *The End of Meaning: Studies in Catastrophe* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2010).

only thing able to impede the “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier.”

20       As Malcom Bowie puts it in *Lacan*, the *points de capiton* are the places where “the mattress-maker’s needle has worked hard to prevent a shapeless mass of stuffing from moving too freely about” (74).

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Both the man in the painting’s foreground and the diegetic painter in its background have their backs to the spectator. With some strain, the painter is turned toward the foreground figure, observing him in order to add the final touch to a canvas on which we see a representational rendition of his model also from the back! Although a straight line can be traced from the painter in the background to the figure in the foreground to the spectator, the two 180° over-turns undergone by the foreground figure, one away from the spectator he was facing and one away from the painter doing his portrait in the background, do not add up to 360° or deduct to 0°, do not return him to his starting position: a labyrinthine circle.

The real labyrinth in Kubrick’s *The Shining* is not the physical maze in the grounds of the hotel, but the book Jack Torrance is writing, made of the same phrase *occurring* on and on, a writing in circles, a recurrent return to the same point (would the book’s title be the same phrase?). It is because Torrance is already lost in the labyrinth of the book that he is unable to find the exit of the physical maze. Fleeing his murderous father in the latter, Danny retraces his steps backward, at one point jumping to the side and hiding behind one of the hedges, so that his father, following his steps, sees them cease—beyond is virgin snow. Danny, who is telepathic and clairvoyant, is not dealing with a labyrinth, since he deals with a linear, although reversible, time: he sees the linear future and the linear past; and since at no point while retracing his steps backward does he either see or have the apprehension that he would witness them end abruptly.

The closed door of room 237, and the locked larder door of the kitchen, where Jack Torrance is imprisoned by

his wife, are found open, although none of the living occupants of the hotel performed the act of opening either. This does not necessitate resorting to the hypothesis that someone dead opened the door, but can be accounted for by the circumstance that we are dealing with a labyrinthine structure, where the inside is outside—and vice-versa: it is easy to overlook the circumstance that the *overlooking* shots of the credits sequence that begins *The Shining*, showing Jack Torrance’s drive up to the Overlook Hotel, are part of the hotel.

One of Milton Erickson’s induction methods, the *confusion technique*, which he uses when faced with the conscious interference or resistance of the subject, entails confusing the subject so much (“To get there now ... I take a combination of three *right* turns and three *left* turns ... but I don’t know which is the *right* series of *rights* and *lefts* ... all *right*, pay attention very closely, because we’ve got to make it *right* or we’ll be *left* behind ... I’ll take a *right* here [I think that’s *right*], and then a *left* and now I’m *left* with two *lefts* and two *rights*. So all *right*, I’ll take another *left*, which means I am now *left* with a *left* and a *right* and a *right* ...”)<sup>21</sup> that he ends up complying with any leading statement (“Drop into trance”) that would extricate him or her from the confusion. In Stoker’s *Dracula*, the coach driving Harker to the castle keeps for a while going back and forth over the same spot, only then proceeding to the castle. Nosferatu says to Harker, “Enter of your own free will,” only after the latter has been disoriented spatially by the

<sup>21</sup> Stephen G. Gilligan, “The Ericksonian Approach to Clinical Hypnosis,” in *Ericksonian Approaches to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy*, ed. Jeffrey K. Zeig (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1982), 99–100.

back-and-forth episode and temporally by the lapse he had just undergone at the approach of the castle, and no longer knows where and when he is.

Omens and warnings almost always refer to the apparent threshold. There is a *false threshold* to the labyrinth: prior to it one is outside the labyrinth, *past* it one has always been in the labyrinth and can thenceforth be outside it only through it. The threshold between a nonlinear, labyrinthine time, for example that of the undeath realm, and the mostly homogeneous one of conscious life functions as a delimiting boundary only in homogeneous segmented time, thus is a one-way threshold.

Near the beginning of Roman Polanski’s *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, the professor puts the skis on in the wrong direction: a crossing of the *imaginary line*. In Zemeckis’ black comedy *Death Becomes Her*, the undead Madeline Ashton momentarily wanders with a 180°-dislocated neck: an over-turn. In *The Spider’s Stratagem*, to the question of Athos’ son about his father’s three closest friends: “Dead?” Draifa answers: “Dead—no, they’re alive,” and she continues about the main enemy of his legendary father with the cunning phrase: “He doesn’t live ... he rules.” The reader of Dostoevsky’s *The Double* may notice the even slyer usage of the metaphorical to hide the literal: “more dead than alive,”<sup>22</sup> and “He had no more life in him.”<sup>23</sup> Warning that concerns the reader or spectator and not only the character: be cautious about the fact that you are noticing these warnings and omens of the labyrinth in the guise of jokes, parapraxes, and metaphors, since, unfortunately, such foreshadowings continue to occur even after you are already in the labyrinth, seducing you into both thinking that you are not yet in it and into continuing to interpret them rather than revert to an eclipse of meaning. With respect to a labyrinth, the only time when you don’t need the warnings is when you don’t notice them, since one notices these warnings only in the labyrinth. When lost, not only in space and time, but also in one’s mind, one should stop following signs and landmarks, above all disregard the subliminal, what one glimpsed fleetingly at the edge of one’s vision, or had a presentiment of, or vaguely

22 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, introd. Ronald Hingley (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 33.

23 Ibid., 38.

sensed. An eclipse of meaning should occur.

If memory is supported by a spatial mapping (Frances Yates’ *The Art of Memory*), then in the labyrinth one has an erroneous and defective memory, or else no memory at all.

The labyrinth unsettles the one “in” it, so that either he or she becomes explicitly lost to the lost others there, or else, as with the vampire, who while at a certain location does not appear in the mirror there, even when he or she is apparently in a certain zone of the labyrinth, he or she is not in it. To be in a place without being in it (as is made manifest by one’s absence in the mirror there), and vice versa: while not being in a place, to be in it—is this not a good definition of haunting? One is never fully in the labyrinth, but haunts it.

The pursuers of the undead soon separate from each other, usually by first dividing at some crossroads into two groups ostensibly to maximize their chances of finding him. If it happens that there is a pregnant woman among them, she will not encounter the undead until she either aborts her fetus from fear or some other shock, or else gives birth, whether prematurely or not, to her baby only to get separated from him. Why is it one encounters the ghost or the vampire alone? Why is it that when one is with others he or she does not appear? Is it necessarily because he or she is a subjective hallucination of the witness? Rather, it is because the ghost or the vampire belongs to the labyrinthine realm of undeath, a realm where people are lost, including to each other.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who is seen by Hamlet in the company of Horatio and two guards, does not really belong to the undeath realm. It is a different matter with the ghost in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. Lucius responds to Brutus’ offer that he sleep with: “I have slept, my lord, already.” Brutus: “And thou shalt sleep again; / I will not hold thee long ...” (4.3.261–263). Lucius plays music for a short time and falls asleep; it is then that the threatening ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus. We can be lost together in a homogenous space; not so in a

24 Notwithstanding that the ghost appears to one only when one is alone, since he is a labyrinthine entity and in the labyrinth one is lost, including to others; he or she is not necessarily a personal affair, but is often a communal one: commenting on the ghost’s appearance, Marcellus says, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.”

labyrinth, where we cannot be together and consequently cannot be lost together. Now that he was lost to the others, the vampire appeared to him. He began running but failed to evade his undead pursuer although the latter was walking nonchalantly. This failure confirmed the space to be a labyrinth.<sup>25</sup> The circularity of time may still spare the pursued from the result of the circularity of space: he is still fleeing the vampire who has already caught him; the pursued asked himself then: “Was my fatal encounter with the vampire a dream or a hallucination?” If a community can win over the vampire, it is not because each of its members can deploy his or her expertise and knack in their communal fight against the undead, since in the labyrinth, they are lost to each other and so “confront” the vampire alone; but because their different fragments of narrative (letters, ship logs, diaries, etc.), each of which does not and cannot form a unified narrative, allow the intercutting of a smooth story and consequently the establishment of a map. The letters, ship logs, and diaries reaching someone from the various people who have encountered the vampire alone in the labyrinth are a form of telepathy<sup>26</sup> (the tele- mode truly comes into its own only when the separation between messenger and recipient is a labyrinth, the message then reaching the recipient notwithstanding that the messenger was lost and will remain lost in the labyrinth). It is thus fitting that it is the telepathic Mina who assembles them. It is only once the edited chronological narrative and the map that goes with it have been established that a communal encounter with the vampire can happen.

In *The Spider’s Stratagem*, the farewell Athos receives from the only other passenger to leave the train on which he arrived at Tara in the beginning shot of the film marks the temporal threshold beyond which there is no return: Athos should have at that point left henceforth labyrinthine Tara.

It is impossible to leave the labyrinthine realm of undeath. This impossibility can take several forms. I may

25 Or else it is to be ascribed to the vampire’s ability to (quantum) tunnel (“For the dead travel fast”), hence to her ability to be in different places during the chase without covering the trajectory between them.

26 So is the phone call that reaches one of the travelers in the labyrinthine Zone of Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*.

not be able to physically leave: in Kubrick’s *The Shining*, Torrance is fatally frozen in the snow in the physical maze that is part of the labyrinthine hotel. I may lose consciousness at the border, whether in the manner of Harker in Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, who falls unconscious as he lets go of his too short rope dangling from the very high window of the otherwise closed castle; or, more frequently, by becoming entranced, so that not having any recollection of having crossed the border, I cannot be sure that while outside the labyrinth, I, or a version or component of me, am not still inside the labyrinth. Or else, while it may initially seem to others that I left the labyrinth, shortly enough discountenancing indications signal that it is another who left it: thus in Herzog’s *Nosferatu*, while it seems that Harker succeeds in leaving Nosferatu’s castle, it shortly becomes manifest, through his failure to recognize his fiancée, his dreadful repulsion by consecrated wafer, his two fang-like teeth and his remarkable palor, that the one who left the castle is actually the vampire.

Death is not an issue out of the labyrinth.

Jalal Toufic, (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, revised and expanded edition (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003), 75–80.

All the mirages he saw in the desert were of ruins.

I along with my two siblings and my mother deserted the family apartment during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Did this make the apartment a ruin? Yes, and not because it was severely damaged and burned during the last days of the offensive: even after it was restored, it remained a ruin. The usual explanation of why what was damaged during the continuing civil war was most often not fixed or replaced is that people were reluctant to spend a large sum on what could any moment be damaged again or totally destroyed. But should we not invert the way we consider what was taking place? It was because these houses had become ruins by being deserted that the war got extended until they began to turn explicitly into ruins, to manifest their being already ruins. Maybe the refusal of the Bustrus family to sell their house (Jennifer Fox’s *Beirut, the Last Home Movie*) was due less to their obstinate nostalgia to never part with it, and much more to an apprehension that were they to sell it, it may be more readily deserted in a situation of intensive bombing by those who bought it, this ushering and completing its becoming a ruin. Will we one day learn how to live in a place without dwelling in it, so that the act of deserting it would not turn it into a ruin?

“The places I showed in *India Song* were on the verge of ruin, they were unconvincing, people said that they weren’t habitable. But in fact if one looked closely at them, they were not so uninhabitable ... In *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta* these places are definitely uninhabitable.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Marguerite Duras, *Marguerite Duras*, contributors, Joel Farges et al., trans. Edith Cohen & Peter Conner (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), 87.

True? False?

— False, since in war-devastated Beirut many people lived in houses even more destroyed than those shown in *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*. The real uninhabitable buildings in Beirut were the ones whose construction was interrupted by the unexpected hike in the exchange rate of the dollar in relation to the Lebanese pound.

— True, since the actors of *India Song* do not inhabit the characters who inhabit these places. “In *India Song* the actors proposed characters but didn’t embody them. Delphine Seyrig’s fantastic performance in *India Song* came about because she never presents herself as someone named Ann-Marie Stretter but as her far-off, contestable double, as if uninhabited, and as if she never regarded this role as an emptiness to be enacted.”<sup>28</sup> One of the risks of

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 103. For an antithetical, but equally interesting approach, one where there is a definite incarnation, one has to look at the films and aesthetic of one of Duras’ favorite filmmakers, Robert Bresson. Bresson’s models are exempt in principle from reincarnation. Humbert Balsan, who was Gauvain in *Lancelot of the Lake* (1974), reported: “It is precisely on finishing the post-production, that is the post-synchroniza-tion, and while saying goodbye to Bresson, that he told me: ‘Above all, don’t ever again work in cinema’” (Philippe Arnaud, *Robert Bresson* [Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1986], 147). Thus I am disconcerted that Jacques Rivette would use Balsan, whose first screen appearance was in that Bresson film, in *Noroît* (1976)—subsequently, being no longer a model but an actor, it was appropriate for Maurice Pialat, Samuel Fuller and others to use Balsan; or that Jean Eustache would use Isabelle Weingarten, whose first screen appearance was in Bresson’s *Four Nights of a Dreamer* (1971), in *The Mother and the Whore* (1973)—again once she was no longer a model, it was appropriate for Ruiz, Wenders, Manoel de Oliveira and Schlöndorff to use her; or that François Truffaut would use Jane Fonda, whose first appearance on the screen was in Bresson’s *A Gentle Creature* (1969), in *The Green Room* (1978); or that Godard would use Anne



such a performance that introduces the double is that it is now the film itself that has to be double, that has a double: *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*. And if the appearance of the double signals imminent death, then the latter film is not so much the portrayal of the death of the people and places of *India Song* (“the swallowing up by death of places and people is filmed in *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*”<sup>29</sup>) as the death of the previous film itself, of *India Song*. And “let the cinema go to its ruin.”

Ruins: places haunted by the living who inhabit them. When the Lebanese installation artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige write in their introductory note to their piece “Where Were You Between this Dawn and the Previous One?”, “We have met, we have dreamt Sarkis, Aida, Samer, Madam Habra, Elia and the others. Through their accounts, we aim to illustrate two faces of reality, the one with destroyed buildings ... where thousands of people and refugees used to live and continue living, and the other one with a family house which has been left after the owner’s death. Occupied uninhabitable areas, and deserted habitable areas,”<sup>30</sup> should we not take their “we have met, we have dreamt Sarkis ... and the others” as indicative of the sort of uncertainty regarding whether one is dreaming that besets one on encountering a specter?

Wiazemsky, whose first screen appearance was in Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar*, in *La Chinoise* (1967)—after which it was appropriate for Pasolini and Garrel to use her; or that Alain Resnais would use both Roland Monod, whose first screen appearance was in Bresson’s *A Man Escaped* (1956), in *La Guerre est finie* (1966), and François Leterrier, whose first screen appearance was also in Bresson’s *A Man Escaped*, in *Stavisky* (1974); or for that matter that Bresson himself would use Jean-Claude Guilbert, whose first appearance on screen was in Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar*, again in *Mouchette* (1967)—after which it was appropriate for Godard to use him in *Week-End* (1967). Bresson models: Maurice Beerblock, Jean-Paul Delhumeau, Charles Le Clainche, and Roger Treherne in *A Man Escaped*; Florence Carrez, Jean Darbaud, Philippe Dreux, Jean-Claude Fourneau, Jean Gillibert, Michel Herubel, Roger Honorat, Marc Jacquier, E. R. Pratt, and André Régnier in *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962); Philippe Asselin, M. C. Fremont, Walter Green, Nathalie Joyaut, Jean Rémignard, and François Sullerot in *Au Hasard Balthazar*; Laelita Carcano, Nicolas Deguy, Geoffrey Gaussen, Régis Hanrion, Robert Honorat, Tina Irissari, and Antoine Monnier in *The Devil Probably* (1977); Didier Baussy, Michel Briguët, André Cler, Marc-Ernest Fourneau, Bruno Lapeyre, Christian Patey, Vincent Risterucci, and Béatrice Tabourin in *L’Argent* (1983).

29 Marguerite Duras, *Marguerite Duras*, 87.

30 *Specimen #4* (“Habiter/Live in”), January 1998 (Wissous, France: Éditions Amok), 68.

The ruin is not desecrated by the vampire, since he is not really there while he haunts it, as shown by his failure to appear in the cracked mirror at that location.

One has to see the disintegration of statues and ornamentation to know that it is precisely because it contains its memory in itself that organized matter cannot recreate the present. And that on the contrary it is voices which disappear, which are over (voices-over in this sense also) almost instantly and hence have no memory (of their genesis and dissolution) that can recreate the present. From *India Song* to *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*, while the buildings and material objects became older, the voices did not.<sup>31</sup>

How provincial 1992 Beirut would be were it not for its war and civil war ruins. Through becoming ruins, some buildings that were landmarks of prewar Beirut are now its labyrinthine zone. What is site-specific about Lebanon? It is the labyrinthine space-time of its ruins, what undoes the date- and site-specific.

The demolished house left its marks on the walls of the adjoining building.<sup>32</sup> In these houseprints, one witnesses the inside turned into an outside. One can imagine a Cronenberg character living in an apartment facing such a wall who one day, on coming home from work, sees that the building with such a wall has been demolished: that same day symptoms of the drive to turn the inside outside begin to manifest themselves in him.

It is in war-damaged areas that the disjunction

31 The voice-over in Duras functions as either:

1. An ahistorical, unworldly irruption in the radical closure delimited by the temporal end of the world (*Le Camion* [“Look at the end of the world, all the time, at every second, everywhere”], *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*). Had I been offered to produce a science-fiction film on black holes, I would have asked Duras to write and direct it, suggesting for possible title: *Cymergus Song* (such a film would certainly have been as uncharacteristic of the genre as Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*). In *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*, the two unworldly female voices-over talking from the end of the world juxtapose with the mundane gossip of the guests at the reception.
2. A voice-over-witness that reports on what is to the other side of a trauma’s event horizon.
3. A voice-over reporting the monadic unfolding of information at the end of the world in the form of the event horizon.

32 Deidi von Schaewen, *Walls* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

between the street and the buildings lining it become the clearest, and this even when the street framed by the destroyed buildings is filled with bomb-punctured potholes and burned, overturned cars, for while buildings can become ruins thus labyrinths, streets cannot.

Suddenly one comes across a bas-relief in a war-destroyed facade, and it is as if one has made an archaeological find. But it is not really an *as if*: such objects are truly, albeit possibly transiently, archaeological. The war-damaged city center is, at least transiently, part of the archaeological sites of Lebanon—as much a part of it as Baalbak, which is through its colossal structures (mainly temples) one of the most impressive examples of Imperial Roman architecture, and which contains the Mameluk mosque of Ra’s al-‘Ayn and the remains of a medieval city. In 1992, Dîma al-Husaynî, then a fifth-year architecture student at the American University of Beirut, went, as part of an excursion by her class, to the destroyed city center, before the sandbag barricades were cleared and the area officially opened. The duty to look at the buildings from an architectural perspective and to position them within a mental map while the different regions were being mentioned (“This was Sûq at-Tawîla. This was Bâb Idrîs ...”) entered into conflict with the emotional reverberation of these names, and the second-generation memories, imbibed from her parents, they elicited. The too-many stimuli with which she had to deal during the excursion left the whole episode in abeyance, making it very difficult to take stock of what occurred. Later, in her home, she tried to recall what she saw. Instead of the destroyed, deserted city center, it was the city center of the memories of her parents, the colorful, populated city center that sprang to her mind. It was with difficulty that she could recall the destroyed city center and superimpose it on the pre-war city center. This corroborates that there is a very old past that the present of ruins itself secretes, for indeed in that case it is natural that it would be more difficult to remember the destroyed city center, which is maybe as old as Baalbak, in any case older than the 1940s, than to remember the city center imbibed through the memories of the parents, hence which belongs to the 1960s, 1950s, 1940s. It was only by the third or fourth visit to that area that she really felt that the destroyed city center was the reality—what facilitated this realization was her noticing the presence of refugees in some of the destroyed buildings.

Those who are reconstructing Beirut’s Central District under the banner and motto “Ancient City of the Future” are oblivious that ruins secrete and exist in a past that is artificial, one that does not belong to history, was not gradually produced by it. All discourse on authenticity implies a suspicion toward, and prepares the ground for an attack on recent ruins, accepting only ancient “ruins,” archeological “ruins,” many of which while not restored are probably no longer ruins, no longer labyrinthine in their temporality and space.

One can preserve a war-damaged or crumbling building, but no one has any control over whether it will remain a ruin. I am fascinated by how and why war-damaged or crumbling buildings turn from ruins, with their idiosyncratic, often labyrinthine temporality, to more or less precisely datable structures in chronological time. The work of the American architectural firm SITE, for example Best Forest Building (Richmond, Virginia, 1980), where a forest seems to invade the building; and Indeterminate Façade, where a stack of bricks cascades through an indent in the façade, never achieves this idiosyncratic temporality, thus fails to produce ruins (and specters). While some of the war-damaged buildings had become subsumed again in chronological time, many were still ruins, and thus their destruction was as irreverent as would be that of the archaeological ruins of Baalbak: because ruins exist in an anachronistic, labyrinthine temporality, they are instantly ancient. The physical destruction of severely damaged buildings to construct others in their place is sacrilegious not because they are eliminated as ruins: a ruin cannot be intentionally eliminated since even when it is reconstructed or demolished and replaced by a new building, it is actually still a ruin, that is contains a labyrinthine space and time, this becoming manifest at least in flashes. Such physical destruction is sacrilegious because of the brutal unawareness it betrays of the different space and time ruins contain. It exhibits the same brutality that was shown during the war. The demolition of many of the ruined buildings of the city center by implosions or otherwise was war by other means; the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing. We can detect whether a certain war-damaged building is a ruin by whether it is haunted (or reported to be haunted—is there a difference?), or induces fantastic or horror fiction. Whether



Lebanon would be hospitable to the undead depends on whether some of the numerous war-damaged buildings are still ruins, with an anachronistic temporality.

Judging from what happened in Beirut’s war-devastated city center, even ruins, thus labyrinths, can be bought and sold! Were the system that is presently in power, the capitalist one, to maintain its hegemony far into the future, then I project that even black holes, which while not psychological—except in bad horror films and novels—are spiritual, as is indicated by their temporality that is not limited to the chronological but is often labyrinthine, and which do not belong to the universe but border it, will be bought and sold by the universe’s denizens.

Sometimes I have the apprehension that the reconstructions in Beirut’s Central District are not real, that one day I may actually see them the way the protagonist of Kenji Mizoguchi’s *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) perceives the exquisite mansion as a ruin on finding out that the lover he meets there is actually a revenant; or the way, toward the end of Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980), Torrance’s wife witnesses the hotel her husband was brought in to maintain as a ruin;<sup>33</sup> or the way in Herzog’s *Nosferatu, the Vampire* (1978) the shots of Harker’s trip and then visit to Nosferatu’s castle are intercut with shots showing the castle as already a ruin. For as long as there still are war-damaged buildings in the Central District, one of the areas most severely damaged by the fighting during the civil war, such buildings will still evoke a counter to the enormous weight of the myriad concrete buildings that are being constructed in the rest of Beirut with no regard for urban planning. But some measure will have to be devised to counter and alleviate the effect of satiation by positivity that will happen when the whole of the damaged city is reconstructed or built anew. One such measure is to project at night, Krzysztof Wodiczko-wise, life-size images of destroyed buildings over at least some of the reconstructed ones. Another measure is to start screening on the day when the last building has been reconstructed the aforementioned three films twenty-four hours a day somewhere in Beirut, for example at the war-

damaged Grand Theatre—until the images have so deteriorated that one sees only grains on the TV screens in the cinema vestibule or endless scratches on the film screen. I predict that when war-damaged buildings have vanished from Beirut’s scape, some people will begin complaining to psychiatrists that they are apprehending even reconstructed buildings as ruins. While the imagination of disaster for a city such as Los Angeles, which has not already been reduced to ruins, is that of its destruction, exemplarily in an earthquake,<sup>34</sup> for Beirut it is fundamentally that of its revelation when reconstructed as still a ruined city.

While as physical structures doomed to reconstruction or demolition or slow deterioration, ruins quickly give us the impulse, if not the urge to preserve documents of them in photographs, video, or film, they nonetheless basically instance an architecture implicated with fiction. For while I can reach certain facets of reality, explore them without passing through fiction, or psychosis with its attendant hallucinations, this revealing these subjects as documentary ones even if they are shot in fiction films; I cannot do so with ruins. There has to be a relay between documentary and fiction whenever dealing with ruins—or else a documentary on ruins has to continue with interviews with or a section on psychotics. Fiction has to reveal to us the anomalous, labyrinthine space-time of ruins; and, in case no ruins subsist for the ghost to appear, to supplement reality as a site of return of the revenant. In postwar countries, fiction is too serious a matter to be left to “imaginative” people. The ghost is often fictional, not in the sense that he is merely “1. a. An imaginative creation or a pretense that does not represent actuality but has been invented. 2. A lie” (*American Heritage Dictionary*); but in the sense that one of the main loci for his appearance is fiction, whether novels, short stories, films or videos. It is too dangerous after a civil war or a war, which produce so much unfinished business, for there to be no ghosts both in reality (haunted houses) and in fiction that builds “a universe that doesn’t fall apart two days later” (Philip K. Dick)—the current virtual absence of novels and films

about revenants in Lebanon is one of the signs of a collective post-traumatic amnesia.<sup>35</sup> We are yet to witness the proliferation of a horror literature of ghosts and the undead (fiction may thus bring about a catharsis for the revenant and an exorcism for the living); or to hear many more stories about ghosts in Beirut once its Central District is inhabited, and not as now still largely unoccupied mostly because of the recession. Were neither of these eventualities to happen, then this would be a further instance of a post-traumatic amnesia, this time that of those who died prematurely and unjustly in the war.

Jalal Toufic, (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, revised and expanded edition (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003), 67–74.

35 The Lebanese literary critic Yumná al-‘Îd tells me, based on her extensive knowledge of Lebanese literature, that there are virtually no specters in Lebanese novels and short stories. It seems that the same sweeping judgment can be applied in the smaller domain of Lebanese film and video. A notable exception is Ghassan Salhab’s film *Phantom Beirut*, 1998. In this film, some years into the war and the civil war in Lebanon, a man, Khalil, disappears. His sister and his friends believe he was killed. One day one of them comes across an identical-looking man while at the airport to receive a friend flying in from abroad. He and several of Khalil’s former friends shadow the man in question. When the latter ends up coming to the apartment of the missing man’s sister, both she and his friends are uncertain whether it is actually Khalil or his ghost, one of them apprehensively touching him to make sure that he is actually, physically, there with them. They grow to feel that he is Khalil, and come to the conclusion that his disappearance was a scheme to make them think that he died and abscond with the money collected by their militant association. And yet at the end of the film, in a symptomatic structural mistake, strangers hired to kidnap another person kidnap him instead. The mistake of these kidnapers is mortal even if they do not end up killing him, since he is revealed by their misapprehension as affected, haunted by the other, and therefore someone come back from the dead, a revenant, a phantom. He could fool his sister and his former friends but not *objective chance*.

33 Humor in Kubrick’s film of having the same person who was brought to the hotel as a caretaker to fix any malfunctions and deterioration from lack of upkeep precipitate the sudden turning of the whole place into a ruin.

34 See Mike Davis’ *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) for a thorough investigation of the various scenarios of an imagined destruction of Los Angeles.



# Toufican Ruins?

Gilbert Hage



During Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon (12 July–14 August), Beirut's southern suburbs came under relentless bombardments. The photographs in this section were taken there soon after the ceasefire came into effect.











































Toufican

Ruins?

Jalal Toufic









# Sweet Talk:

## Commission (Beirut): 1991–1995

Walid Raad

In the late 1980s, in the midst of the Lebanese wars, I committed myself to producing photographs in Beirut. I titled this commitment *Sweet Talk* and referred to the various photographic self-assignments as “Commissions.” *Sweet Talk* concentrated on Beirut’s residents, its buildings, streets, storefronts, gardens, and other objects, situations, experiences, and spaces.<sup>1</sup>

My ongoing commissions consist of thousands of negatives and digital files, and each was produced over a period of a few weeks to a few months, beginning in 1987. My original intention was to produce images in a city that was in the midst of radical urban, economic, political and social transformation. Over time, I found it increasingly difficult to print and display my images. It became clear to me that the frames I was exposing were less and less referential of the persons, situations, objects and spaces that faced my lens at the moment of exposure. For example, I would photograph crowded streets only to realize that they appeared empty in the resulting images; open storefronts appeared shut. In some instances, a photograph of a building in one section of

Beirut was also a photograph of two other architecturally distinct buildings in two other parts of the city. Initially, I dismissed these ideas as fanciful conceptual conceits, yet more tired reflections on the question of photographic mediation. But I was never able to abandon the idea that something very unusual was happening in Beirut.

Throughout the last two decades, I continued to document even while great doubt surrounded what exactly was being documented. I resigned myself to a practice that produced a record of Beirut for posterity. Unbeknownst to me, the writer Jalal Toufic had already created one version of the photographer that I was and possibly still am in his essay *Forthcoming*.<sup>2</sup>

This encounter with Toufic and his photographer permits me today to present the following nine photographs from *Sweet Talk: Commission (Beirut): 1991–1995*.

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<sup>1</sup> This project was also shaped by the ending of the Lebanese wars in 1989. By 1992, the security situation had calmed enough in Beirut to ensure that a large part of the city became accessible to its residents in ways it had not been for the past 17 years. It was not long after this that the reconstruction of the Beirut Central District (Beirut’s ravaged downtown area) was under way, announcing within and beyond Lebanon’s borders the possible rise from the ashes of the country itself. Sadly, the country never rose from its ashes. Instead, ashes piled up on more ashes, blood and despair as Israeli incursions and invasions never ceased; as Syria’s political, military, economic and security grip on the country tightened; as frequent bombings and assassinations paralyzed the city again and again; and as the stagnant stench of political and social discord thickened and continues to poison the air we breathe.

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<sup>2</sup> Jalal Toufic, “Forthcoming,” *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Ate-los, 2000).























Matthew Gumpert teaches in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Kadir Has University, where he also served as Director of the Istanbul Studies Center from 2008 to 2010. Gumpert's work represents a series of meditations on idolatry and nostalgia as cultural mechanisms for recuperating the past. Much of his research focuses on the persistence of classical culture in the post-classical world. Gumpert's first book, *Grafting Helen: The Abduction of the Classical Past*, published with the University of Wisconsin Press, treats the abduction of Helen of Troy as a metaphor for Western culture's appropriation of the classical past. Recent work includes articles on early modern poetry in *French Forum*, and tragedy in *Contemporary Theatre Review*. *The End of Meaning: Studies in Catastrophe*, soon to be published with Istanbul Bilgi University Press, is a collection of essays on the persistence of apocalyptic thinking in the West.

Gilbert Hage is a photographer. He lives, teaches and works in Lebanon. His photographic projects include: *Eleven Views of Mount Ararat* (2009), *Strings* (2008), *Pillows* (2007), *Screening Berlin* (2006), *242 cm²* (2006), *Homeland 1* (aka *Toufican Ruins?*, 2006), *Phone [Ethics]* (2006), *Here and Now* (2004), *Beirut* (2004), *Anonymous* (2002), and *Roses* (1999). His works have been exhibited at Espace Naila Kettaneh Kunigk, Beirut (2009), Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaújváros, Hungary (2007), Modern Art Oxford (2006), House of World Cultures, Berlin (2005), Galerie Tanit, Munich (2004), Galerie Alice Mogabgab, Beirut (2004, 2002, 1999), and Videobrasil, São Paulo (2003). He is the co-publisher and co-editor, with Jalal Toufic, of Underexposed Books. [www.gilberthage.com](http://www.gilberthage.com)

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Jalal Toufic is a thinker and a mortal to death. He is the author of *Distracted* (1991; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2009), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), *Áshûrâ: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), *Undeserving Lebanon* (2007), *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (2009) and *Graziella: The Corrected Edition* (2009). Several of his books are available for download at his website: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com>. He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, the University of Southern California, and, in Lebanon, Holy Spirit University; and he currently teaches at Kadir Has University in Istanbul.



The Collapse of the  
Tacoma Narrows Bridge

