

The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster

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Past a Surpassing Disaster

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Those who wish to have a print version of this book (under a different imprint and with a different design) are advised to purchase the multi-volume publication that accompanies Walid Raad's exhibition *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World / Part I_Volume 1_Chapter 1 (Beirut: 1992-2005)*, ed. Clara Kim (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2009): *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* is one of the volumes.

Designed by Hatem Imam



The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster

Jalal Toufic

Forthcoming Books

Books by Jalal Toufic

- *Undeserving Lebanon* (Forthcoming Books, 2007; available for download as a PDF file at <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/publications.htm>)
- ‘*Āshūrā*’: *This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (Forthcoming Books, 2005)
- *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (Post-Apollo, 2005)
- *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (Post-Apollo, 2002)
- *Forthcoming* (Atelos, 2000)
- *Over-Sensitivity* (Sun & Moon Press, 1996)
- *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (revised and expanded edition, Post-Apollo, 2003)
- *Diſtracted* (2nd edition, Tuumba, 2003)

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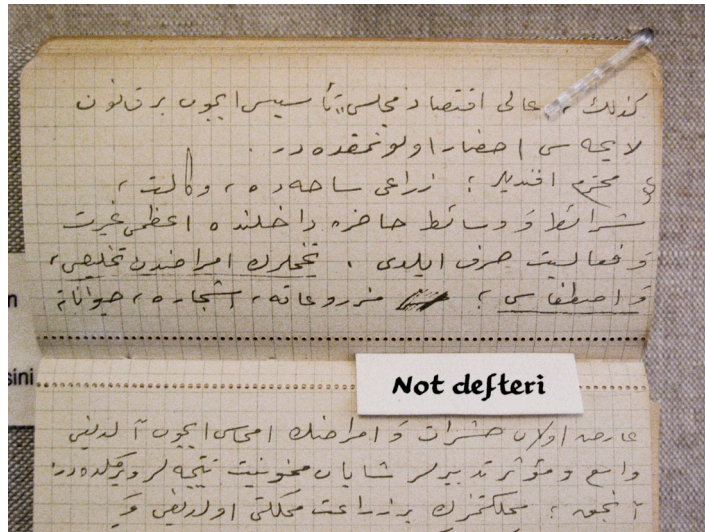
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“Credits Included” is a revised version of the essay by the same title in Jalal Toufic, *Over-Sensitivity* (Sun & Moon Press, 1996); “Forthcoming” is a section of Jalal Toufic, *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Atelos, 2000), 60-75; “Lebanese Photography Between Radical Closure and Surpassing Disaster” is a section of Jalal Toufic, *Distractioned*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 2003), 80-92; “Resurrecting the Arab Apocalypse STOP [THE WORLD]” is a section of Jalal Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon* (Forthcoming Books, 2007), 89-91.

Credits Included

Dedicated to Walid Raad¹

The section that follows complements my video by the same title: it seems that just as multimedia becomes prominent, we will witness in some experimental works a separation that will not be (just) between the sound track and the image track, but (also) between the audiovisual work and the written section, the latter two distanced not only spatially, but also temporally, since a considerable time may elapse between the broadcast or screening of the one and the publication of the other.²



From a notebook of Mustafa Kemal: two pages of the text of his opening speech at the inaugural meeting of the 8th parliamentary year of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

If the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, respectively, are a surpassing disaster then beyond not only the immediate death toll and the manifest destruction of buildings, including museums, libraries and temples, and of various other sorts of physical records, but also the long-term hidden material effects, in cells that have been affected with radioactivity in the “depth” of the body, and the latent traumatic effects that may manifest themselves *après coup*, there would be an additional immaterial withdrawal of literary, philosophical and thoughtful texts as well as of certain films, videos, and musical works, notwithstanding that copies of these continue to be physically available; of paintings and buildings that were not physically destroyed; of spiritual guides; and of the holiness/specialness of certain spaces. In other words, whether a disaster is a surpassing one (for a community—defined by its sensibility to the immaterial

withdrawal that results from such a disaster) cannot be ascertained by the number of casualties, the intensity of psychic traumas and the extent of material damage, but by whether we encounter in its aftermath symptoms of withdrawal of tradition.³

In the case of surpassing disasters, the material loss of many of the treasures of tradition not only through destruction but also through theft to the victor's museums is exacerbated by immaterial withdrawal. Basing themselves on what has been resurrected, some of those who belong to the community of the surpassing disaster can contest the version of history edited by the victors, who, not being part of the community of the surpassing disaster, have the advantage that the works and documents are available to them without having to resurrect them.

What have we as Arab thinkers, writers, filmmakers, video makers, painters, musicians, and calligraphers lost after the seventeen years of Lebanese civil war; after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982; after the symptomatic *Anfal* operation against the Iraqi Kurds; after the devastation of Iraq; and after Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad's regime's symptomatic brutal repression of Hama in 1982?⁴ We have lost tradition⁵ (we leave it to teachers—with all due disrespect?—to propagate “it.” In the aftermath of the surpassing disaster, tradition is in some cases totally withheld from the thinker and/or artist; in other cases, it is withheld from him or her as a thinker and/or artist, but not as a teacher or historian or a person—is this partly why a year after writing the previous words of this paragraph, I began teaching?⁶). We do not go to the West to be indoctrinated by their culture, for the imperialism, hegemony of their culture is nowhere clearer than here in developing countries. Rather, we

go to the West because it is there that we can be helped in our resistance by all that we do not receive in developing countries:⁷ their experimental films and video art, their *ontological-hysterical theater*, their free improvisation, etc.; and because we can there meet people who can perceive, read or listen, and genuinely use pre-surpassing-disaster art, literature, music and thought without having to resurrect them. At this juncture in Arab history, John Barth, the author of the intricate *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991), is a foreigner to me, an Arab writer, precisely because of his proximity to and his ability to use, as if it were completely available, *A Thousand and One Nights*, a book to the other side of the surpassing disaster.⁸ If, following the devastation of Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, and earlier of Arab Palestine, etc., I can have the same close relation with one of the most beautiful books of the Middle East and North Africa, *A Thousand and One Nights*, as Barth and Pasolini (*Arabian Nights*, 1974) can, then I will know that I am either a hypo-critical Arab writer or already a Western writer (in the section of *Over-Sensitivity* [1996], the book in which the original version of this essay appeared, on one episode from *A Thousand and One Nights*, the latter is accessed and addressed through Pasolini's film).⁹ Rather than a common language and/or racial origin and/or religion, being equally affected by the surpassing disaster delimits the community (is it legitimate to consider the Lebanese as one community when those of them who were living in East Beirut and other Christian-ruled areas were implicated in the desertion of besieged West Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon?).¹⁰

Beyond the factor of the language in which one speaks and/

or writes, it is in part whether pre-surpassing-disaster tradition is still available to one irrespective of any resurrection that reveals to one whether one is still part of one's native culture or whether one should consider oneself already part of the culture to which one has emigrated. But for certain musical pieces, books, and miniatures, it appeared that the many disasters that befell their countries of origin in the Middle East and North Africa completely severed Arab exiles' links with these countries and cultures. But this proved not to be the case, for when these countries and cultures were devastated by an additional series of disasters adding up to a surpassing one, these musical pieces, books, and miniatures were immaterially withdrawn even for some of these exiles—this revealing that these exiles were still attached to these countries and cultures and not only to the music, miniatures, and calligraphy, and now need to resurrect the latter if they desire them to be available again. Resurrection takes (*and gives*) time.¹¹ Pending their resurrection, such music pieces can show at most in the credits; although at no point is Munīr Bashīr's performance of *Maqām Kurdī* heard in my video *Credits Included*, it is listed in the music credits.¹²

Although many artists, writers and thinkers are viewed and/or view themselves as avant-garde (for example Nietzsche),¹³ considered to be in advance of their time, when the surpassing disaster happens their works are withdrawn as a consequence of it, this implying that, unlike the vast majority of living humans, who are behind their time, artists, writers and thinkers are exactly of their time (the future component of their work, which maintains its relevance far into the future, comes to them through their untimely

collaboration with future thinkers, writers, artists, etc.).¹⁴ Was my writing my first two books in English (*Diſtracted*, 1991, and *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, 1993), books thus withdrawn from those in the Arab World who are not proficient in English, a symptom of a withdrawal of tradition past one or more surpassing disasters affecting the Arab World? A translator who sets out to translate such a work to Arabic would first have to decide whether writing in English was a symptom of a withdrawal past a surpassing disaster, for in that case to translate into an Arabic that does not itself present a withdrawal in relation to Arabs who are not proficient in English would be a mistranslation.

Concerning a surpassing disaster, *collateral damage* includes much of what those who are insensitive to such a disaster view as having been spared. A filmmaker, thinker, writer, video maker, or musician who in relation to a surpassing disaster still considers that tradition has persisted, never has the impression that he has to resurrect even some of what “survived” the carnage; who can ask, “Why have I survived and why has this building been spared while so much else was destroyed?” without any suspicion that the building in question as well as many books and artworks that had the good fortune of not being destroyed materially have nonetheless been immaterially withdrawn by the surpassing disaster, is hypocritical, that is, hypo-critical, still this side of the critical event of the surpassing disaster.

I have to do my best to physically preserve tradition, while knowing that what I will save physically from the surpassing disaster still needs to be resurrected—one of the limitations of history as a discipline is that the material persistence of the documents blinds it

to the exigency of the resurrection. In rare cases, I feel that a film is not trying to adapt a book to another medium with its own specific parameters and/or to another historical period and hence another temporality, but to resurrect it—after the resurrection, it may still be in the judgment of some filmmakers in need of adaptation to new contexts. Similarly, remakes are not always to be viewed in terms of adaptation to other times or reparation occasioned by the failure of a filmmaker or video maker to heed his or her untimely collaborator who happens to be (also) a filmmaker or video maker.¹⁵ Herzog's remake of Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) can be viewed not so much as a sound and color version of a silent film, but rather as an attempt to resurrect Murnau's film after its withdrawal following a surpassing disaster, the Nazi period. In which case, there are two ways of considering whether it was a successful film: did it succeed as a film irrespective of its relation to Murnau's *Nosferatu*? In case it did not, did it nonetheless succeed as a resurrecting film? *Nosferatu*, one of the nine extant films out of the twenty-one Murnau made, was twice withdrawn: in 1925 it was withdrawn by court order because it violated the copyright for Stoker's *Dracula*—copies of it were back in circulation by 1928; past the surpassing disaster of the Nazi period, and although it was still circulating, it was withdrawn from the filmmakers of the following generation (Herzog: "We are trying in our films to build a thin bridge back to that time"¹⁶). Herzog's *Nosferatu*: a vampire film trying to resurrect an extant film about the undead, about what simultaneously is and is not there, as is made clear by the mirror in which the vampire does not appear notwithstanding that he is standing in front of it; but which, because of the surpassing disaster

of the Nazi period, is itself there and not there for the generation following that surpassing disaster. Godard and Herzog, who have influenced many filmmakers, producing, in Vertov's expression, "films that beget films," have also produced *films that resurrect films*. In his first films Hal Hartley, who knew then nothing about surpassing disasters, could imitate Godard, while Godard himself makes some of his films in the manner of someone who can no longer access his earlier ones (including his films of the New Wave, as the title of Godard's film about resurrection, *New Wave* [1990], implies) as a result of some surpassing disaster(s), for example the one alluded to in his *King Lear*. One of the surest ways to detect whether there's been a surpassing disaster is to see when some of the most intuitive and sensitive filmmakers and/or writers and/or thinkers began to feel the need to resurrect what to most others, and to the filmmaker and/or writer and/or thinker himself or herself as a person or teacher, i.e., in so far as he or she remains *human, all too human*, is extant and available.

Disaster films that are not exploitation ones sometimes include a resurrection of artworks, books of literature, and/or films. In Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (1990), a section showing the explosion of six nuclear reactors in Japan, the variously-colored radioactive fumes forming an eerie aerial palette resulting in the decimation of the population, is followed by a section where the late-twentieth-century protagonist enters, walks and runs in various Van Gogh paintings; in order to allow his protagonist to do that, Kurosawa had to digitally recreate the paintings (using the services of Industrial Light & Magic's post-production visual effects), and this recreation functions as a subtle resurrection. In Chris Marker's

La Jetée (1962), whose events take place for the most part after the nuclear destruction of much of the world, including presumably Chris Marker's favorite film, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), during the Third World War, while standing in the company of his female companion in front of a cut tree trunk, the time-traveler to the past points to a spot beyond its perimeter and "hears himself say": "I come from here" (how subtle is this hint of quotation [of *Vertigo*'s Madeleine]!). Should we view this shot as an attempt to resurrect the shot in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (and by implication the film)¹⁷ where Madeleine, in the company of Scottie, points to a section of the cut trunk of a sequoia tree and says, "Somewhere here I was born"? Wim Wenders' film work, although it includes many references to ends, for example the possible end of the world in *Until the End of the World* (1991), and the possible end of cinema in *Chambre 666* (1982) (one of the questions he poses to the interviewed filmmakers is: "Is cinema becoming a dead language?"), nonetheless rarely attempts to resurrect or evinces resurrections. Two possible exceptions: in *Tokyo Ga* (1985), a film that mourns the possible irretrievable loss of the Japan of Ozu, the 50-millimeter shot of an alley can be considered a resurrection of an Ozu shot. In *Until the End of the World*, the fact that the diegetic writer's narration that begins the film, "It was in 1999 ...", and goes on to relate the events that the film shows, focusing on a special camera that allows the blind to see the images it recorded, is part of a novel he began writing after the presumed nuclear conflagration of the (rest of the) world wiped his earlier novel-in-progress off his computer indicates that we are viewing these protagonists and events from the post-surpassing-disaster

standpoint and requirements. The blind woman, whom we meet for the first time after the presumed nuclear conflagration, embodies the inclusion in the film of the loss of images and of the attempt to resurrect them: we hear her say jubilantly, "I see a blue ... a yellow ... a red ...", as the Vermeer-like shot of her daughter sitting by the window and wearing a blue headband and a yellow dress begins to assemble again and become clear (taking into account that, as *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* points out, it is dangerous to resurrect if one is alone, felicitously the special camera requires for its efficient functioning that simultaneously with the blind person whose brain is linked to a computer simulation of the recorded image, the one who originally recorded the image see the latter by recall in his/her mind's eye). In Godard's *Passion* (1982), the failure of the diegetic director to finish his film is not to be ascribed to an inability to come up with a story and to attain the right lighting; rather the inability to tell stories and to produce the right lighting is in this case merely a symptom of his obscure feeling that he has failed in his unconscious attempt to resurrect what has become withdrawn due to a surpassing disaster, which task he was trying to accomplish by producing a series of tableaux vivants of either the whole or part of paintings from earlier centuries, for example Delacroix's *The Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople* (1840). As far as those who commissioned Godard to do a film adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* that was to be ready in time for the following year's Cannes Film Festival, the Cannon Films producers, Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, were unconcerned, the play was obviously available. It was available too for the screenwriter, Norman Mailer, for whom "the

mafia is the only way to do *King Lear*,” and whom we see finishing his cinematic script of *King Lear* at the preliminary section of Godard’s *King Lear* (1987). It was also available to the filmmaker Godard, who remarks that he said to Mailer, who at that point was not only the screenwriter but was also still contracted to play Don Learo, “Kate [Norman Mailer’s daughter] enters your room and kisses you when she hears you finished the play—not your play, but *the* play.” But then we hear, over the intertitle “No Thing,” a voice-over: “And then, suddenly, it was the time of Chernobyl,¹⁸ and everything disappeared, everything, and then, after a while, everything came back, electricity, houses,¹⁹ cars—everything except culture and me.” Taking into consideration Godard’s view that “culture is the norm, art the exception,” the protagonist later amends what he said: “I don’t know if I made this clear before, but this was after Chernobyl. We are in a time now when movies and more generally art have been lost, do not exist, and must somehow be reinvented.” What can be included among what was and continued to be lost, withdrawn, no longer available even after “everything” came back? Films by Robert Bresson (for example *Pickpocket* [1959], *Au hasard Balthazar* [1966], *Lancelot of the Lake* [1974], *L’Argent* [1983]), Carl Theodor Dreyer (for example *Vampyr* [1932], *The Passion of Joan of Arc* [1928], *Ordet* [aka *The Word*, 1955]), Pier Paolo Pasolini (for example *Theorem* [1968], *Arabian Nights* [1974]), Fritz Lang (for example *M* [1931] and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* [1933]), Leos Carax (*Mauvais sang* [*The Night Is Young*, 1986]), who plays Edgar in the film; Virginia Woolf’s book *The Waves* (1931), a copy of which we see on the beach in Godard’s film; Van Gogh’s *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890);

Giotto’s *The Lamentation of the Dead Christ* (ca. 1305); works by Shakespeare, including *King Lear*, the play Godard’s film was supposed to adapt! What about François Truffaut’s films? With the possible exception of *La Femme d’à côté* (*The Woman Next Door*, 1981), his films continued to be available past the surpassing disaster. Is the work of the American theater director Peter Sellars, who plays William Shakespeare Junior the Fifth, including his production of *King Lear* in 1980 and the Shakespeare plays he directed while he served as director of the Boston Shakespeare Company in 1983 and 1984, included in what was withdrawn by the surpassing disaster mentioned by Godard? No. Were Norman Mailer’s books published prior to 1987, as well as his script for Godard’s *King Lear*, withdrawn past the surpassing disaster announced by Godard? The script seems not to have been withdrawn, so that we end up with a give-and-take where Shakespeare’s play is itself withdrawn and requires the resurrecting efforts of William Shakespeare Junior the Fifth, but many lines from it are available to the two characters Don Learo (an aging mobster) and his daughter Cordelia through the script Mailer adapted from the play, and end up in the resurrected play: “Thanks to the old man’s daughter, I [William Shakespeare Junior the Fifth] had some of the lines.” Taking into consideration the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster, what is one of the tasks of an artist or a writer? “My task: to recapture what had been lost, starting with the works of my famous ancestor.... Oh, by the way, my name is William Shakespeare Junior the Fifth.” According to the protagonist, he was assisted by a certain Professor Pluggy, played by Godard, whose research, he had been told, was “moving

along parallel lines to” his. Is Godard’s *King Lear*’s image of the joining of torn petals back to a dead flower, which resuscitates, a citation of Cocteau’s resurrection of the shredded flower in *The Testament of Orpheus* (1960)? Is it an attempt to resurrect the flower? Is it a resurrection of the image of a resurrection of a flower in Cocteau’s film about the undead? It is the latter. Godard’s *King Lear* tackles the three tasks of the filmmaker and/or artist and/or thinker and/or writer or and/or video maker concerning a surpassing disaster: 1) to reveal the withdrawal of tradition, and therefore that a surpassing disaster has happened. *King Lear*: “I know when one is dead and when one lives” (William Shakespeare, *King Lear* 5.3.260); past surpassing disasters, it is important to know when something is available, and when it is no longer available since withdrawn: the play, which is ostensibly available to the producers of the film and to its screenwriter, Norman Mailer, is no longer available to the community of the surpassing disaster; 2) to resurrect what has been withdrawn by the surpassing disaster, which is the task assigned to the protagonist, a descendant of William Shakespeare, who rediscovers *Hamlet*’s “to be, or not to be” while in Denmark, and manages to rediscover 99% of, if not the complete *King Lear*—yes, past the surpassing disaster, “the image will appear in a time of resurrection” (these words are attributed by Professor Pluggy to St. Paul); 3) and, in some ominous periods, to imply symptomatically by the timing of the film that a surpassing disaster is being prepared in scientific experiments in various laboratories and/or by governmental and/or non-governmental covert operations, etc., thus functioning as an alarming implicit appeal for thoughtful intervention by the minority

of *contemporaries* to prevent the imminent surpassing disaster from happening.

We have to distinguish between on one side quotation, remake, “repetition” of oneself, and, on the other side of the surpassing disaster, resurrection. Sometimes, one accuses some filmmakers, writers and artists—indeed they themselves sometimes voice the apprehensive self-accusation (for example, Wenders in his *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, 1989)—that they may be beginning to “repeat” themselves. In some cases, they are indeed beginning to “repeat” themselves (Wenders’ *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*); but in some other cases, they are actually attempting to resurrect their work and art in general following a surpassing disaster, one which may be explicitly invoked in their films or their interviews. Past a surpassing disaster, and taking into account the withdrawal of tradition, as a historian and archivist of myself, I can imitate myself, “repeat” myself, but as a filmmaker I cannot do so even if I wished since my previous work is no longer available—I have to resurrect it before being able to “repeat” myself. Preservation of an artistic film that was made prior to a surpassing disaster requires not only the actual conservation of the filmstrip in excellent condition, without deterioration of color, etc., but also the resurrection of the film. The surpassing disaster alluded to or explicitly presented in a film may remain just part of the latter’s diegesis or it may reach beyond the diegesis to the film itself or to a previous film or films or paintings, with the consequence that the spectators may then witness, as a countermeasure to the withdrawal, the apparition of resurrected images in the film. In Tarkovsky’s last film, *The Sacrifice*, the shot of the bedroom curtain flapping in the wind

and modulating the light while the child sleeps is reminiscent of the scene in the hotel room in *Noštalgia* in which the advent, change in intensity, and then stopping of rainfall alter the light coming through the windows. Later, those gathered to celebrate Alexander's birthday hear warplanes flying overhead, experience an unexpected power failure, discover that the phone is inoperative, then are informed by a radio announcement of the imminent threat of a nuclear disaster. Alexander prays to God, vowing that if the world is spared, he would willfully lose everything: his family, house ... When following his vow and the "averted" disaster, Alexander returns to his child's room with its lightly-flapping curtains, I feel that there is "repetition" neither of the scene in *Noštalgia* nor of the shot's earlier appearance in *The Sacrifice*, but rather that we are watching the latter shot's resurrection. A beautiful differential coexistence of "repetition" and resurrection within the same film: to one side of the surpassing disaster, unfortunate "repetition" by the filmmaker of a shot from one of his previous films; to the other side of the surpassing disaster, a resurrection of a shot from the same film. Untowardly, after filming that shot as a resurrected one, Tarkovsky got sidetracked from the surpassing disaster by the script—the script should be delimited by the surpassing disaster. Nonetheless, in *The Sacrifice*, a sort of *answer of the real* made the camera break down in the middle of the shot in which Alexander sets fire to the house, leaving Tarkovsky with both an unusable shot and the burned-to-the-ground house (one more unusable celluloid strip in a film of the surpassing disaster, to join the one on the floor of the editing suite over which the protagonist crashes in Godard's *King Lear*). Tarkovsky accompanied his character not just through

identification and empathy,²⁰ but also through this parapraxis^{21,22} confirming that even though the house still stood there, it was withdrawn and had to be resurrected in order for it to be available for the shot of its burning by the protagonist. Past the surpassing disaster, Tarkovsky had to rebuild an exact copy of the house in order to film its burning, and this time he used two cameras to cover the event. A filmmaker who had contributed to rendering visible in his films *Solaris* (1972) and *Andrei Rublev* (1966) respectively instances of what was otherwise either invisible, the world of Stanisław Lem's science fiction novel *Solaris*, or for the most part no longer visible, fifteenth-century Russia, had then to deal, in *The Sacrifice*, with what *was materially present*, the house, as unavailable to perception expect through a resurrection. Whereas in other Tarkovsky films an unworldly version of something that is no longer there sometimes repeatedly irrupts in a radical closure, for example Hari in *Solaris*, in *The Sacrifice* what is materially still there is immaterially withdrawn as a consequence of a surpassing disaster (that was seemingly averted). In this film which begins with Alexander planting a dry tree trunk in the sand and telling his little son about a monk who for three years daily watered a dead, dry tree until it blossomed again, and ends with the small child carrying two heavy buckets of water to the tree and watering it, Tarkovsky resurrects one of his shots and the house. Here cinema deconstructs what it ostensibly usually does, preserve what is disappearing (Bazin), what is withdrawing into the past: it shows us the withdrawal of what it preserved from disappearing (into the past).

Any building that was not razed to the ground during the

surpassing disaster, materially subsisting in some manner; but was immaterially withdrawn by the surpassing disaster; and then had the fortune of being resurrected by artists, writers, and thinkers is a monument. Therefore, while many buildings that were considered monuments of the culture in question are revealed by their availability, without resurrection, past the surpassing disaster as not monuments at all of that culture, other buildings, generally viewed as indifferent, are revealed by their withdrawal to be monuments of that culture.

It is highly likely that the artworks and literary and thoughtful texts that, past a surpassing disaster, imply the withdrawal of other artworks and literary and thoughtful texts; and/or the messianic movements that, past a surpassing disaster, reveal the withdrawal of the religious dispensation and law would have themselves been withdrawn past the surpassing disaster had they existed when it happened. The two kinds of artworks and literary and thoughtful texts or of religious movements, the withdrawn and the one that reveals the withdrawal, are part of the same tradition.

Past the surpassing disaster, tradition is inaccessible by traditional, “legitimate” means. In 1941, in Buenos Aires, Borges published a collection of eight short texts, one of which is titled: “Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*.” What surpassing disaster could Pierre Menard have felt and that made him attempt to write the ninth, the twenty-second and the thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote*? What surpassing disaster could Borges have felt for him to think of writing such a text, specifically in September 1934? Had this something to do with the recent congress of the Nazi party at Nuremburg in the same year and month? One of the

manners of looking at Sherrie Levine’s (re)photographs of the work of other photographers, for example “After Walker Evans,” 1981 (the Evans photograph dates from 1936), “After Edward Weston” and “After Eliot Porter,” is to view them as a resurrection of the works of these photographers (it may be that as a postmodern artist, she can resurrect only in series: the six “After Andreas Feininger,” 1979 ...). A title like “After Walker Evans” is really “After the Surpassing Disaster—Walker Evans.” What surpassing disaster(s) separate(s) Sherrie Levine from these works? In her later work, the *After* takes place in parenthesis (*The Bachelors (After Marcel Duchamp)*, 1989), implying that the appropriation (the casting of the fountain in bronze in *Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp)*, 1991; the change of the painted billiard table of Ray’s painting *La Fortune*, 1938, into an object made of felt, mahogany and resin, and multiplied six times in *La Fortune (After Man Ray)*) is occurring on the basis of the prior resurrection that made the works available again (such Sherrie Levine works as “After Walker Evans” and “After Edward Weston” may have contributed to resurrecting what has been withdrawn past the surpassing disaster in question, so that there was no need to try to resurrect the aforementioned Duchamp and Ray works specifically). That is why the critics’ anachronistic commentary on the earlier rephotographs in terms of appropriation and the questioning of originality and authorship should be displaced to the aforementioned later works²³—one cannot appropriate if one is resurrecting, for prior to the resurrection the works are no longer available ... for, among other things, appropriation (and this irrespective of the mode of producing the post-surpassing-disaster work: Levine often uses tracing of copy-book prints of

the works in question). Since I view the earlier Levine work in terms of resurrection of what was withdrawn past a surpassing disaster rather than in terms of appropriation of available past works, I am surprised by “Untitled (After Alexander Rodchenko),” 1987: what nerve to do this minimal appropriation, making a work by merely re-photographing another! What would have been appropriate following the “After Edward Weston,” 1981, is, rather than “After Edward Weston,” 1990 (a bad repetition of her earlier work—granted re-photographing another photograph, but the gesture is the same), an “Untitled (After Edward Weston)” with the same photograph as in the 1981 Levine work—the placement of the *After* in parenthesis implying a move from resurrection to appropriation.

With the passage of time, tradition loses much of its potency and relevance not only due to the advent of new kinds of temporalities, but also because following surpassing disasters one continued to treat it as still available (this is the other disaster: that one does not discern the extent of the disaster), this preparing for yet another, future disaster; in the case of a work like *A Thousand and One Nights*, which with its tales within tales within tales is certainly not outdated in this era of fractal self-similarity and hypertextuality but actual, it is the latter cause that is paramount in the curtailment of its potency and relevance. In many instances, a good part of what unconsciously motivates the attack on tradition is the intuition that a surpassing disaster occurred before one’s birth or in one’s childhood and that no attempt was made to resurrect tradition, this leaving it a counterfeit of what it was.

A distinction has to be maintained between an understandable

“willful” rejection by some of the defeated of what they associate with the defeat; and an objective withdrawal that has nothing to do with the intentions of individuals or communities, although the latter can *sometimes* be read as a symptom of the objective withdrawal. Following a surpassing disaster, one should in no way confuse those who are trying to resurrect what has been withdrawn, and which functioned as a counter to the state of affairs that led to the surpassing disaster, assisting thinkers, writer, artists, filmmakers, and messianists in resisting such an ominous state of affairs; with those who, as a cheap reaction, are advocating a return to tradition without noticing that it has been withdrawn—a withdrawal that largely accounts for the widespread ignorance and forgetfulness of tradition in all these post-surpassing-disaster returns to “it.”²⁴ All returns to tradition in the aftermath of a surpassing disaster have to be fought because tradition has been objectively withdrawn, and hence the “return” would be to a counterfeit tradition, one characterized by reduction to the exoteric and lack of subtlety. From this perspective, invoking tradition as the domain of the genuine is derisory, since in many cases tradition did at one point or another undergo a surpassing disaster (for the Jews, the destruction of the temple, the expulsion from Spain, and the Nazi-period extermination; for Twelver Shi‘ites, the slaughter of imām Ḥusayn, his family, relatives and companions at Karbalā’; for the Ismā‘īlīs, the delay in the answer of the Second Emanation in a Gnostic drama in Heaven, which delay produced its retardation to the 10th rank; for the Armenians, the 1915-17 genocide; and for the Turks, who, in the first decades of the twentieth century, exemplify one of the clearest cases of the withdrawal of tradition,

for instance of the Arabic script, Sufi lodges, Sufi music and Ottoman art music, and the fez—well, it is for the Turks to answer “this question mark so black, so huge it casts a shadow over him [or her] who sets it up” [Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*]), and hence is, in the absence of the resurrection of what has been withdrawn by the surpassing disaster, rather the arena of the duel with the double and of the suspicion of usurpation by the counterfeit (prior to the Mahdī’s/messiah’s resurrection of tradition, there is the danger that his double, *al-Dajjāl*/the Antichrist, will be mistaken for him). Following the surpassing disaster, I am confronted with the counterfeit/double in one form or another: without the seemingly absurd attempt at resurrecting what for most people is extant and available, the succeeding generations will have received counterfeit tradition; but every resurrection by anyone who is not “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25) is ironic, insinuates a distance between the one or the thing that has been resurrected and himself/herself/itself: in so far as I am not “the resurrection and the life,” I can never be sure that the one I resurrected is the one who was deceased rather than an other, his or her double (Godard’s *New Wave*). Coming to check on him as he lay very sick, *covered with sores*, in the dry, hot weather, his sisters saw that Lazarus had fallen asleep. They thought hopefully: “If he sleeps, he will get better.” He soon woke up, anxious, and, when questioned by his sisters, told them the dream he had just had: “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate I, a beggar, laid, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked my sores. The time came when I died and the angels carried

me to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with myself by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”²⁵ Later, many Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. One of them, their neighbor Abraham, a rich man, was dressed in purple and fine linen. He was accompanied by his five sons—the sixth had died recently. None of the rich old neighbor’s five sons were convinced by Lazarus’ rising from the dead that Jesus is “the resurrection and the life.” Instead of repenting, did one or more of them go to the Pharisees and tell them what Jesus had done? Taking into consideration that Lazarus was resurrected by Christ, “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), it is felicitous that we no longer hear about him in John. But what would have happened

had Lazarus been resurrected by someone other than the one who is *the resurrection and the life*? In that case, while it is possible that he would have gone back to his two sisters, been viewed by them as their brother until the end of their earthly lives, and was reconciled with his life,²⁶ it is thenceforth also possible that, one hour, two days, three months, or four years later, on looking up from all her preparations for the supper as Mary poured perfume on her brother or sat on the floor listening to what he said, Martha would have had the apprehension that the man she was looking at is not Lazarus, not really their brother, and would have begun to manifest the symptoms one associates with those suffering from Capgras syndrome. Indeed it is possible that a Lazarus who has been resurrected by someone other than *the resurrection and the life* would sooner or later apprehensively suspect that he is not Lazarus, suffering from depersonalization.

It is often the case that the thinker, writer, videomaker, filmmaker, artist or religious figure attempting to resurrect pre-surpassing-disaster tradition feels that he or she failed to accomplish such an incredible task. But while he or she may be the best judge as to whether there has been a withdrawal, he or she often proves not to be a good judge as to whether the resurrection succeeded or not. That is why oftentimes those insensitive to the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster have the last word against those sensitive to it since they can, after the latter's acknowledgment of failure to resurrect, point out rightly that tradition is available—resurrection is often a thankless task. The vanity of some thinkers, writers, artists, and filmmakers is revealed not by their attempt to resurrect what has been withdrawn past a surpassing disaster but

by their considering that they are the best judges of its success or failure (were I to try to resurrect but then consider that I failed to do so, I would most probably feel that the preceding words are unconvincing or do not apply to me!). In an interview in the May 1982 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Godard confesses to feeling slightly hypocritical in making *Passion's* protagonist, the film director Jerzy, unable to film because he does not feel that he has achieved the right lighting for the tableaux vivants, when he, Godard, thought on the contrary that the lighting is right, filming these tableaux vivants. Rather than being viewed in terms of hypocrisy, this presence of double standards is to be attributed to the infelicity that the one doing the resurrection, in this case Jerzy, is not the best judge as to whether it succeeded or failed, which makes him continue to feel that his attempt has failed when it has succeeded for another. The coexistence in Godard's *Passion* side by side in the same camera movement of different tableaux vivants from different historical periods is not so much postmodern as the one we expect in the case of *the resurrection of the dead* (on Judgment Day? Rather on the day of the *critique of judgment* [or should I write, *critique of the power of judgment*?] preparing one, albeit inadequately, *to have done with the judgment of God*). If one feels unequal to the attempt to resurrect what was withdrawn by the surpassing disaster, tradition, then it can be argued that at the end of the “season in hell,” one is to abolish tradition altogether: “absolutely modern” (Rimbaud). A modernism that willfully rejects tradition or is indifferent to it never really becomes absolute, but remains a relative one that quickly turns abstract when it attempts to become absolute—hence its tone of exaggeration then.

Only those who fully discerned the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster, tried to resurrect tradition, failed in doing so, may become truly absolutely modern.²⁷

Forthcoming

The God of the Nizārīs and the En-Sof of the cabalists are certainly beyond speech, the unspeakable, but not Hell or the Apocalypse (see the Bible, the Qur’ān, Dante, Hieronymus Bosch, many accounts by schizophrenics, etc.), and therefore not the concentration camps (even if one is able to write and speak concerning them only with a voice-over-witness). What is indecent is not speaking about the surpassing disasters of the atomic devastation of Hiroshima, the Rwandan genocide, Auschwitz, the Khmer Rouge 1974-1977 rule in Cambodia, the genocidal US-imposed UN sanctions on Iraq; but any implied attendant disregard of the consequent withdrawal. The tact of Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* is that while speaking about and showing the nuclear conflagration of Hiroshima, it stresses that there has been a withdrawal: “You have seen nothing in Hiroshima.”

What is appropriate past the surpassing disaster is either a “more sober, more factual ... ‘greyer’” language (Paul Celan), or the dazzling, colorful language of the messianists.

One way of viewing the difference in Islam between the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) is to consider it a consequence of individual spiritual encounters and events alerting some Moslems to other meanings of what they might otherwise have taken only in a literal sense: this is what one encounters in Sufism. But Sufism did

not initiate the differentiation between the *bāṭin* and the *ẓāhir*; such a distinction first appeared among “extremist” Shi’ites (*ghulāt*). The battle of Şiffin between the fourth caliph, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and the renegade Mu‘āwiya was tilting toward a victory by the caliph, when Mu‘āwiya ordered his army both to raise all the available *maṣāḥif* (copies of the Qur’ān) on their lances and to say: “Their contents are to be authoritative in our dispute.” This order was given in 657, barely twenty-five years after Muḥammad delivered to his community the last revealed words: “This day have I perfected for you your religion and fulfilled My favor unto you ...”; and only a few years after the recension of the canonical version of the Qur’ān in the final years of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 656)! Lo and behold the five hundred or so copies of the Qur’ān available to the Syrian army were raised on lances. What Mu‘āwiya hoped for happened. Led by a band of Qur’ān reciters (*qurrā*) in ‘Alī’s camp, a large group of the caliph’s followers pressured him to put a stop to the battle. The Qur’ān, extensively cited by many of the combatants during their declamations preceding their individual duels, continued to be cited during the debate concerning whether or not to discontinue the battle. I imagine that becoming weary of resisting the obstinate and insolent pressure of the dissenters, and feeling deserted by many of his followers, ‘Alī was on the point of acquiescing when, catching the unsettling sight of the copies of the Qur’ān on the lances, he, known for his vaticinal gifts, had a vision of horsemen shouting with reverence his name while trampling Qur’ān copies and slaughtering pilgrims. I imagine him disconcerted to hear in the vision the ‘*Alī*’ of helpless invocation screamed by some of the pilgrims (who, at the approach of the end,

were letting go of their *taqiyya* [dissimulation] and disclosing their allegiance to him and his descendants) echoed by the triumphant ‘Alī of the terrific horsemen who struck nonetheless. Instead of persuading him to consent, such a vision would have made him more vehement in his insistence that the battle resume. I envision him saying to the dissenters: “If we do not unintentionally trample the *maṣāḥif* now, in the commotion of the battle, they are certainly going to be intentionally trampled, and justifiably so, around and in the Ka‘ba itself. I see this happening as I see you.” Only after being threatened with murder by Mis‘ar b. Fadakī al-Tamīmī and Zayd b. Ḥusayn al-Ṭā‘ī, al-Sinbisī, and a band of *qurrā’*, “‘Alī, respond to the Book of God when you are called to it. Otherwise we shall indeed deliver you up entirely to the enemy or do what we did with Ibn ‘Affān,” did ‘Alī, aware through the quite recent example of the murder of the third caliph of the catastrophic consequences such an assassination would have on the fledgling Muslim community, acquiesce. “Do not forget that I forbade you to do this, and remember your words to me.” One group at the battle of Ṣiffīn remained largely unaware that the Qur’ān was affected fundamentally by being inserted in the conflict: the Umayyads—one more indication of their distance from and basic indifference to the Qur’ān. Another group, the proto-Khārījīs, whose nucleus was the band of reciters of the Qur’ān in ‘Alī’s camp, intuiting the danger of withdrawal, asserted all the more vehemently the absoluteness of the Qur’ān, refusing the subsequent arbitration between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya, since the Book should and can be the sole arbitrator. Only the (proto-)Shi‘ites were really attuned to this gesture, sensing that the Qur’ān has somewhat been withdrawn.

The fundamental difference between Shi‘ism and Sunni Sufism, giving them their different tones, is not so much the displacement of the spiritual leader from the imām in Shi‘ism to the shaykh/pole in Sufism, but that they largely came to esotericism by different routes: the latter mainly through unveiling (*kashf*) and taste (*dhawq*); the former mainly through a withdrawal of the literal.²⁸ The following words were attributed to the sixth imām, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq: “Coming from Him, this Word [the Qur’ān] returns to him.” His imāmī disciple Hishām b. al-Ḥakam declared: “The Qur’ān is an abrogated concept ... which left the Prophet’s Companions and returned to heaven when they apostatized and established Abū Bakr [the first caliph] in place of ‘Alī.”²⁹ The dubious gesture of the Umayyads, purported to unite all Moslems around the Qur’ān, by implicating that sacred book in the divisiveness and the catastrophic battle, instead separated it from itself. Among the differential symptoms and consequences of the withdrawal of the Qur’ān according to various Shi‘ite sects, one can note:

— Viewing it as created, differentiating between it and *Umm al-kitāb* (the Archetype/mother of the book) as the transcendent, uncreated word of God, limiting the withdrawal to the former.

— Differentiating between a *ẓāhir* and a *bāḥin*, a differentiation reportedly introduced by Abū Hāshim ‘Abd Allāh, a grandson of ‘Alī, and that goes far beyond the basic distinction mentioned in the Qur’ān between sūras that are *muḥkamāt* (clear) and ones that are *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous).

— The primacy given in certain Shi‘ite sects to the esoteric sense over the exoteric one, with a consequent downgrading of the messenger Muḥammad: in Ismā‘īlism, Muḥammad is considered

just the legislator of the Qur'ān in its exoteric, literal sense, with 'Alī and the other imāms raised in rank to become those who alone know its esoteric meaning.

— The Ismā'īlī belief in “cycles of occultation” (*adwār al-satr*), during which the esoteric meaning is concealed behind an exoteric one.

— The discarding of the exoteric sense for the esoteric sense(s), the sole legitimate one even when it is the exact opposite of the literal sense.

— The view of many of the *ghulāt*, but also of such pre-Buwayhid Twelver Shi'ite authors as the Nawbakhtīs and al-Kulaynī that the Qur'ān, in the guise of the canonical version recensed under 'Uthmān, is somewhat forged, parts of it having been altered, and parts not included, suppressed. The faithful recension of the Qur'ān, initially detained by 'Alī and passed through his descendants, the imāms, is going to be publicly revealed only with the parousia of the presently occulted twelfth imām.

— The Ismā'īlī notion of the cyclical abrogation of one prophetic legislation by a subsequent one, a descendent of 'Alī and Ḥusayn being the one who abrogates the revealed legislation of Muḥammad (this in spite of the insistence in Moslem dogma that Muḥammad is the seal of the prophets). This abrogation had its most sublime form in the Great Resurrection of Alamūt and other Nizārī strongholds from 1164 to 1210; it also took place briefly in Yemen under the *dā'ī* 'Alī b. al-Faql.

— The trampling of the *maṣāḥif* around the Ka'ba itself in 930 by Abū Ṭāhir Sulaymān al-Jannābī's Qarmaṭīs. The Qarmaṭīs' trampling of the Qur'ān, an action that orthodox Sunni theologians

and writers prefer to attribute solely to attempts by Persian, Hellenic, and other non-Arab elements in the land of Islam to subvert the conquering religion, is the reflection, in the distorted mirror of the surpassing disaster, of the placement of the Qur'ān on the lances by the Umayyads in 656. These are two images of a parallel montage across around three centuries.

When the Umayyad army raised the *maṣāḥif* on their lances, they said: “Who will protect the frontier districts of the Syrians if they perish, and who those of the Iraqis if they all perish?” But were the Arab Moslems spared by the raising of the *maṣāḥif* on the lances and the subsequent cessation of the battle? The answer to the sparing of Moslems by the Qur'ān in the battle of Ṣiffīn was the slaughter of the pilgrims by Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī's Qarmaṭīs in 930. As customary with the general population, they were offended and scandalized by the Qarmaṭī action but not by the Umayyad one. Can one have enough contempt for the general population? I would answer with a categorical “No” were it not for my knowledge that these people are also mortals, therefore already undead, and thus cannot be limited to their petty measure as living common people.

The same phenomenon of withdrawal of tradition due to the surpassing disaster is encountered in Judaism following the expulsion of all professing Jews from Spain in 1492; the forced mass baptism of the Jews of Portugal in 1497;³⁰ and the mass reprisals against Jews in Poland during the 1648 Ukrainian revolt, led by Bogdan Chmielnicki, against the extremely oppressive *Arenda* system of land use in which many Jews were implicated—these latter events were experienced as particularly depressing and unfortunate since according to many cabalists basing their

calculation on *gematria*, 1648 was to be the year of the redemption. This withdrawal is intimated in the messianic movement around Sabbatai Zevi. “Radical” Sabbatians advocated the systematic violation of the Torah, now viewed, in contradistinction to the Torah of *atzilut*, of the messianic time, as the Torah of *beriah*, of the unredeemed world. From the perspective of the surpassing disaster, the Torah has been withdrawn and this withdrawal has to be made plain through the Torah’s transgression or even through apostasy—the latter extreme step required the surpassing disaster of the apostasy of the messiah himself (messianism is a problematic response to the surpassing disaster, not least because it often itself turns into a no less devastating catastrophe). Thus the conversion of some “radical” Sabbatians, the Frankists, to Catholicism; and, following Sabbatai’s example, of some others to Islam: the Dönme. It is characteristic of the bigoted journalist Elie Wiesel that he should inveigh against the Sabbatians in his preface to a fiction book on Jacob Frank.³¹ He, the ostensible upholder of tradition and memory after the surpassing disaster of the Shoah, the self-proclaimed “emissary of the survivors and the dead,” has no appreciation that the Sabbatian response is a just, albeit problematic, reaction to a surpassing disaster—can any genuine response to a surpassing disaster be other than problematic? It is disingenuous and simpleminded to divest oneself from Sabbatians, Nizārīs, and Qarmaṭīs by branding them nihilists. Past the withdrawal of tradition following a surpassing disaster affecting Islam, all Moslems are placed in the position of nihilists, whether they care to assume expressly such nihilism or not; past the withdrawal of tradition following a surpassing

disaster affecting Judaism, all Jews are placed in the position of nihilists. Indeed, past the withdrawal of tradition following a surpassing disaster, it is those who do not clearly assume explicitly the nihilism into which they have willy-nilly been placed who are the most treacherous nihilists (Wiesel is more insidious than the reportedly sinister Jacob Frank). Nizārīs and Qarmaṭīs, who abrogated the Muḥammadan revealed religion and its law, are Moslems, for it is in reaction to Moslem surpassing disasters that their abrogations were enacted. Similarly, and notwithstanding the bigoted view of their Jewish opponents, “radical” Sabbatians are Jews because their transgressions of the religious law and even their conversions were the consequence of their sensing that Jewish tradition, including religion, has withdrawn due to the preceding surpassing disasters affecting Judaism, including the apostasy of the Messiah. Excommunicated, the Frankists, engaged in several disputations with the rabbis. If I had to side with one of the two antagonistic parties, I would certainly concur with the Sabbatians that they, including those among them who converted, were then legitimately who they called themselves: *the believers* (*ma’aminim*). At that point the rabbis were the unbelievers through their continued belief in a tradition and a religious law that, owing to their withdrawal past the surpassing disaster and in the absence or failure of their resurrection, had become counterfeits of themselves, with the consequence that it had become as sinful to still follow the commandments of the law as it was previously obligatory to act in accordance with them. This reversal, which was also enacted by the Nizārīs under imām Ḥasan ‘*alá dhikrihi*’*l-salām*, started with Sabbatai’s “strange actions,” which included

causing ten Israelites to eat “fat of the kidney” in 1658, an act which is strictly prohibited by the Torah and punishable by “excision” (getting cut off from among one’s people); reciting the following benediction over the ritually forbidden fat, “Blessed are Thou, O Lord, who permittest that which is forbidden”; and abolishing the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz in 1665. It progressed to the abrogation of the Lurianic devotions, “which had now become not only obsolete but almost positively sinful;”³² and culminated in the conversion of the “radical” Sabbatians to Islam or Christianity. The Sabbatians’ response to the surpassing disaster revealed that the majority of the official rabbinical authorities, customarily considered the elite, belonged to the common people, those not sensitive to the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster. I include among the common people those rabbis who excommunicated or banned Sabbatai Zevi solely for abrogating the Law; I do not include among them those rabbis who excommunicated Zevi or endorsed his excommunication not for transgressing the Law and the prohibitions of the Torah, but because he proclaimed himself the Messiah. Nizārīs and Qarmaṭīs are Moslems, and the Sabbatians are Jews, also because their abrogations fundamentally affected respectively Moslem and Jewish religions. The reinstatement of the Sharī’a in 1210 by the grandson of Ḥasan ‘alā dhikrihi’l-salām can be viewed as a diplomatic move to ward off the intensifying threat to his initiates from a Sunnism again on the ascendancy, the Nizārīs again resorting to *taqiyya* while maintaining their esoteric beliefs; or as due to a new period of *satr* (occultation); or as a realization that enlightenment and salvation can only be achieved by individuals³³—in which case the subsequent amalgamation of

Ismā‘īlī Shi‘ism and Sufism would not be solely a result of the Mongols’ destruction of the Nizārī strongholds and their persecution of the surviving Nizārīs in the Sunni empire they established. But it is also possible that the abrogation of the Law—a response to the latter’s withdrawal—contributed toward its resurrection, and therefore toward its reinstatement forty-six years later. Those Qarmaṭīs who returned to the fold of traditional Islam after the debacle of the episode of the false messiah Zakariyya al-Iṣfahānī with its abrogation of the Muḥammadan revelation could validly do that because the preceding Qarmaṭī reaction contributed to resurrecting that religion and its sacred books and places. Those who returned to the fold after the devastating apostasy of Sabbatai did so possibly successfully because of the redeeming measures the Sabbatians took in gauging the measure of the disaster. The rabbinical authorities and the ‘ulamā’ had the last word because what the Sabbatians, Nizārīs and Qarmaṭīs did probably resurrected what was withdrawn.

The withdrawal of the holiness of Palestine past a surpassing disaster affecting Jews is clear in the Sabbatian outlook, where for the majority of the adherents, including Nathan of Gaza, there was an opposition to the notion of immigration to the Holy Land, which opposition became even more intense in the aftermath of Sabbatai’s apostasy, turning toward the middle of the eighteenth century into a distinct anti-Palestinian bias especially among the Frankist wing.³⁴ Indeed, one of the theses the Frankists submitted in their disputation with the rabbis in Kamenets-Podolsk from June 20 to 28, 1757, was: “We do not believe that Jerusalem will ever be rebuilt.” One still finds lapses in the vigilant sensibility

to the surpassing disaster even among the Sabbatians: the notion advanced by some of them that one should immigrate to the Holy Land because breaking the Law in Jerusalem is a more effective transgression is still a (negative) stress on, and thus continuing election of, the traditional specialness of the land of Palestine. Similarly, an objection to immigrating to Palestine in terms of eschewing a *forcing of the* [messianic] *end* through the ingathering of the exiles—one of the preconditions for, or changes of the messianic era—implies a continuing election of the traditional specialness of the land of Palestine—unless the advanced reason be merely a pretext not to go to a land one senses no longer to be the Holy Land. It is from the standpoint of the withdrawal of the holiness of Mecca that one is to interpret and evaluate the symbolic setting of the pulpit to face west on the day when the Great Resurrection was proclaimed in Alamūt, a direction opposite to the one toward which all Moslems have to turn during their prayer; and in an even more valid manner (since the Nizārīs’ placement of the pulpit precisely in the opposite direction to the Ka’ba in Mecca can still be construed to give a negative emphasis to the latter, at least to still refer to it), the sacking and desecration of the Ka’ba by the Qarmaṭīs, and their transfer of the Black Stone to their capital, al-Aḥsā’. Can one easily displace the *axis mundi*, which is the closet spot to Heaven on earth, and which cannot be truly viewed outside its complements in the World of the Archetypal Form (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), and which is circumambulated not by humans but by angels?³⁵ I think that the Qarmaṭīs’ action was not to consecrate a new *axis mundi*, but to indicate the withdrawal of the traditional one as a consequence of a surpassing disaster.³⁶ If the Nazi “final

solution” to the “Jewish question” was a surpassing disaster, then a withdrawal of the holiness or special traditional significance of Jerusalem has ensued. Therefore the question that intrigues me is not the hypocritically naive one, “How did victims of a racist state (Nazi Germany) become racist oppressors?” but rather: How is it that the surpassing disaster of the Shoah has not produced a widespread attitude among Jewish artists, writers, and thinkers that reveals the withdrawal of the traditional holiness or specialness of a particular land, more specifically of Jerusalem? While a good number of Jewish writers and thinkers have written about the death of God in Auschwitz, rare are those who have written or talked about the demise of the holiness of the land (it seems it is more difficult to relinquish belief in and cathexis of the holiness of a certain land [and in the messiah] than in God!). Notwithstanding the sanctimonious discourse of those Jews who while underscoring the Shoah encourage or at least condone the renaming of occupied Palestinian cities, towns, and villages with Biblical names, and decry the remissness in accomplishing the ingathering of the exiles through the *aliya*, the ascent to the holy land, it is to the Jews’ honor that the Diaspora has continued despite the establishment of the state of Israel. I believe that many Jews have not gone to Israel owing to an intuition of this withdrawal rather than because they had become assimilated in the host countries, or because of the dangerous and harsh conditions in the early years of the establishment of the state of Israel, or because of ethical and political qualms concerning the colonial origin of that state, as well as its continuing expansionist and racist policies toward its neighboring countries and its brutal illegal occupation of Palestinian land.³⁷

The continuing Zionist discourse, in its emphasis on tradition and on the ultra-special significance of the land of Palestine; let alone the ultra-orthodox view of Gush Emunim and Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook that the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine is a religious messianic event, are thus an obliviousness to the “Final Solution” as a surpassing disaster, through its treatment as a vast, extreme catastrophe with localized effects. The ambivalence that many of the Zionists in Palestine betrayed toward the survivors of the Shoah,³⁸ especially during the early years following World War II and the establishment of the state of Israel, is to be ascribed not only to a wish to forget the figure of the Jew as a passive victim; but also, possibly, to an intuition that the more the Shoah is underscored and pondered, the more it would reinforce the feeling of the withdrawal of the holiness or simply traditional ultra-special significance of the land of Palestine. Thus while it is fitting that there are memorials to the Shoah at Treblinka, Auschwitz, and in the United States, home to around a third of contemporary Jewry, it is unsettling and dismaying to encounter such memorials in Israel, the “Jewish state” (Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem, Nathan Rapoport’s *Scroll of Fire* [1971], the Day of Holocaust and Heroism [*Yom Hashoah Vehagvurah*], etc.): only if, consequent of the surpassing disaster of the Shoah, Israel is no longer viewed as the holy land, would the presence of memorials to the Shoah there be valid. One can easily argue that unlike the Qarmaṭīs who were in the tenth century a formidable military power, the Jews, up to the recent establishment of the state of Israel, were in no position to desecrate Jerusalem to reveal the withdrawal of its holiness, for instance by possibly further damaging the remains of the Wailing Wall.

But they are in a position to do that now. Yet I do not see any response on their part that comes close to what the Qarmaṭīs did (certainly some of the ultra-orthodox view the secular situation in Jerusalem as already a sort of desecration—but they condemn such a condition).

When it comes to surpassing disasters, the damage is never only the material one; it is also, especially in past eras, the withdrawal of spiritual guides and allies, and of divinities. Reportedly, shortly before his death, the last deputy of the twelfth imām, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samarrī (d. AH 329/940-41), received a note from the imām saying: “In the name of God. O ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samarrī ... do not appoint anyone in your place, since the complete occultation has taken place.” When Shi‘ites came and asked him about his successor, he said: “The matter is in the hands of God, and He will bring it to accomplishment.” The Greater Occultation of the twelfth imām was thus ushered.³⁹ It is crucial in relation to a certain Shi‘ite and Jewish rhetoric of powerlessness and victimization that not only continues unabated even during periods when these communities have achieved political ascendancy, but sometimes intensifies despite that ascendancy, that one take into account that the patterns of response the chronic persecution of these two communities must have inculcated in them cannot fade in a short period. In turn, it is critical that one unmask the hypocritical abuses to which such a rhetoric can lead. In turn, it is vital that one not become oblivious of the withdrawal past a surpassing disaster, which is the reason that would validate the continuation of such a rhetoric. Could the mighty empire and great civilization of the Safavids have genuinely and legitimately, rather than hypocritically,

experienced itself as an empire and civilization of disaster? Yes, it could have. Did it experience itself in that manner? Yes, it partly did, since for many Twelver Shi‘ites in the great Shi‘ite state that was Safavid Iran, the determinant circumstance continued to be the withdrawal of the imām. Once the Greater Occultation began, either it is persisting, in which case the notion, position and function of the *Nā‘ib al-‘āmm* (the general representative of the Hidden Imām) assumed by the ‘ulamā’ (who argued that what has been canceled by the twelfth imām is not the function of representative as such, but that of an individual representative, of the *Nā‘ib khāṣṣ*) is a travesty; or else there is a *Nā‘ib al-‘āmm* and thenceforth the assumption of a continuing Greater Occultation should be replaced by that of the resumption of the Lesser Occultation. Who among the ayatollahs and ‘ulamā’ has the audacity to clearly instigate this move, which entails an imminent parousia? At one level, there is a manifest and crucial difference between on the one hand Twelver Shi‘ite Safavid Iran, and on the other hand the Nizārī state during the Great Resurrection (1164-1210), the Qarmaṭī state during the Zakariyyā al-Iṣfahānī episode in Aḥsā’, and the Fāṭimī state. In the former, past the initial period of the extremist (*ghuluww*) view of the Shah as the imām himself, especially among his Turkmen followers, the Qizilbash, and prior to the time when the notion and function of the *Nā‘ib al-‘āmm* was introduced—a move alleviating the occultation of the imām—the sensibility to the withdrawal, in the guise of the imām’s occultation, continued despite Shi‘ite rule; in the latter three, the imām was present in the world in the form of their leader. And yet even in the Nizārī Alamūt of the proclamation of the Great Resurrection, an intimation of withdrawal was

maintained, however transiently, amidst the manifestation of the esoteric sense: in his *Khutba* on the 17th of Ramaḍān, during which he proclaimed the Great Resurrection abrogating the Muḥammadan religious legislation, Ḥasan II placed himself as the imām’s *khalīfa* (deputy). It is only later that his son and successor, Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad II, explicitly claimed the imāmate for his father and for himself. The process by which the Great Resurrection was proclaimed may be considered sloppy from the strict perspective of the messianic advent as a supernatural event: Ḥasan ‘*alā dhikrihi’l-salām*’s speaking in the name of another could then be fully ascribed to his having been successfully pressured during the reign of his predecessor and ostensible father, Muḥammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd, to publicly divest himself both from the claim that he was the imām and from those of his followers who were making such a claim on his behalf; and/or to a reluctance on his part to assume such a momentous role. But from the perspective of the conflation of a withdrawal past a surpassing disaster with a messianic manifestation, that Ḥasan ‘*alā dhikrihi’l-salām*’s announcement of the manifestation of the esoteric sense and the abrogation of the exoteric Law is done in the name of another, the still hidden imām, is not sloppy, but rigorous and precise, since it allows, at least until he himself is clearly declared the imām, the maintenance of the tone of withdrawal even amidst the messianic epiphany. The surpassing disaster produces a withdrawal of tradition, which the one proclaimed Messiah/Qā‘im “merely” enunciates.⁴⁰ In which case, if there is an ominous imprecision to be resisted, it is the danger of mistaking the proclamation of the abrogation to be a performative rather than a description of what has already taken

place owing to a surpassing disaster: the messiah/Qā'im does not annul the Law but manifests a condition that has already occurred, namely that the Law has withdrawn. The *Khutba* of Ḥasan 'alā *dhikrihi'l-salām*, in Alamūt, with its two-step revelation, minimizes this danger.

According to a Talmudic saying, the son of David would appear only in a generation that was “either wholly sinful or wholly righteous”;⁴¹ and in Islamic tradition, the Mahdī is going to fill with justice an earth filled with oppression. If the messiah appears in a generation that is wholly righteous, the manifestation of the esoteric, barred under the law of the cycle of occultation, ushers the messianic era proper, the cycle of epiphany. The abortive manifestation of the esoteric in a generation that is not wholly righteous can function as an occult sign that the parousia is near, since it indicates that the world has been totally given over to impiety: the highest, secret name of God has so much withdrawn that even its manifestation won't reveal it. *Taqiyya* (dissimulation) and the discipline of the arcane are no longer mandatory in the aftermath of the surpassing disaster, since they are already implemented by the consequent withdrawal. As long as *taqiyya* is still obligatory, the withdrawal has not become maximal and the time of the messianic revelation has not yet come. It is the circumstance that the first manifestation did not reveal anything that announces the necessity of the messianic ushering of the cycle of epiphany. In such a situation, the messianic manifestation has to be done twice: once, abortive, to intimate the time of total occultation; another, auspicious, the messiah having received, in complement to the holy *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah* which he already has, the highest

soul-light called *yehifah*,⁴² thus becoming capable of inaugurating the period of redemption.

The surpassing disaster does not, and perhaps cannot, remain an external circumstance: for the Shi'ites, the slaughter of imām Ḥusayn, imām 'Alī's son and the grandson of the prophet Muḥammad, with most of the prophet's family and many of his companions, etc.; for the Jews, the destruction of the Temple, the *galut* (exile), the expulsion from Spain, etc. It sooner or later becomes internal: the surpassing disaster for the Ismā'īlīs is the delay in the answer of the Second Emanation in a Gnostic drama in Heaven, which delay produces its retardation to the tenth rank and its subsequent attempt to catch up and ascend again to the third rank;⁴³ the surpassing disaster for the Lurianic cabalists is the *breaking of the vessels* that were supposed to contain the supernal light, this leading to the dispersal of sparks of that light in the *qelippah*, the demonic realm.

Have the desertion of West Beirut by the Arabs and the rest of the world during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the continuing sanctions against Iraq, now [1996] in their sixth year, divested these two communities from the rest of the Arab world, undoing any notion of an Arab community? If so, is it accurate on my part to have written in *Over-Sensitivity* that the conjunction of catastrophes affecting the Arab world in Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon, and earlier Palestine added up to a surpassing disaster? Is the tradition for such communities no longer the one that used to be theirs, but the other communities of the surpassing disaster: Gnostics, Nizārīs, Qarmaṭīs, Sabbatians? Unfortunately, these communities, which have tried to deal with the withdrawal consequent of a surpassing

disaster, have been subjected to another kind of withdrawal, a material one enforced by their orthodox enemies: most of the works of the Nizārīs, Qarmaṭīs, and of the Sabbatians have been burned or destroyed (the Mongols' destruction of the library of Alamūt, etc.).

In his *Heidegger and the "jews"*, setting it against the activism of the resistance fighter Robert Antelme, Lyotard appreciates the attitude of the Jews of Sighet, Romania, on the eve of their deportation to the concentration camps, as described by Elie Wiesel in his book *Night*: obliviousness to the imminent catastrophe—an attitude widespread among Jews then. Unfortunately, the dichotomy Lyotard sets is not only between the Jewish community of Sighet and that of Jewish resistance fighters, but also between Wiesel and Antelme. To set the latter dichotomy, one has to be colordeaf—and in case one is as attuned to timbre as Lyotard is, one has to colordeafen oneself—to Wiesel's critical tone in *Night* concerning his community's attitude. The discernment of such a tone—an easy enough task for the impartial—would spare one, particularly in a book addressing the shock induced by the depth of Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis, from being taken aback by Wiesel's subsequent lauding of the activism shown by the Israelis, and his total embrace of the actions of the Israeli army in a series of flagrantly prejudiced articles.⁴⁴ When the obliviousness to the surpassing disaster continues past it, is it permissible to wax appreciative about such obliviousness? Wiesel's failure to feel the Shoah as a surpassing disaster is shown not only in his extremely negative attitude to the Sabbatians, but also in his very positive attitude to the Zionist enterprise and his unquestioning

adherence to the state of Israel.⁴⁵ "But Jalal, How can you write about an obliviousness on his part? Are you forgetting Wiesel's express 'This is why I write certain things rather than others: to remain faithful'⁴⁶?" Is it simple to remain faithful to the dead, who, undergoing *every name in history is I*, thought-insertion and doubling, are betraying themselves, betrayed by themselves (Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*)? Wiesel: "I owe the dead my memory. I am duty-bound to serve as their emissary Not to do so would be to betray them."⁴⁷ To think and write about the dead as they were when still alive is already a forgetfulness of them—as undead. Wiesel: a bigoted, hypocritical sort of Horatio. How much filtering out and repression of the dead is going on in Wiesel's books for him to think that the dead need an emissary, and to pompously feel the duty to be that emissary. Were Wiesel to harken more, he would discover that while playing his role of the emissary of the dead, they are already interfering with his discourse on them as they were when they still lived. One has to have died before dying to encounter modes of the dead-as-undead, those who do not know and are alien to the laws of the living, the sort of entities Judge Schreber encountered. Were the author of *Twilight*—a novel purportedly revolving around the mad and madness and largely set in an asylum, but that at no point induces in the reader any feeling of anxiety, of the uncanny—to encounter the insertion of ostensibly alien thoughts in his head, and to hear unsolicited voices at inopportune moments that speak in the name of people who died in the concentration camps but sometimes exchange obscene remarks in lascivious, demonic tones (the dead are in one of their modes obscene, as obscene as the Nazi guards

at concentration camps), would he listen to them? Would he not so much welcome them—who can welcome the uncanny?—as try not to repress their talk as quickly as possible? Were Antonin Artaud, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski, Judge Schreber, the Jean Genet of *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, or the author of (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* to have proclaimed themselves emissaries of the dead, this would be barely bearable; but that Elie Wiesel should do that is the epitome of the derisory. But precisely none of these authors would claim to be the emissary of the dead; they are aware how indecent it is to talk for the dead. Even such a revengeful spirit as Hamlet's dead father has the decency of not doing so: "But that I am forbid / To tell the secrets of my prison-house [including of "myself" as dead], / I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / ... But this eternal blazon must not be / To ears of flesh and blood." Even the dead (as revenant) does not speak in the name of the dead (as undead); even the ghost, ostensibly a revenant, is not allowed to speak about himself or herself as dead, to fully be his or her own emissary. But then the revengefulness of the ghost of Hamlet's father is as nothing compared to that of Wiesel. Can one blame Wiesel for that revengefulness? No; but neither does one have the right to accept gullibly what he proffers and confer on him the Nobel Peace Prize. The revengefulness of the living is somewhat determined, and limited; even when seemingly totally indiscriminate, it usually spares someone: one's child, mother, or the stranger. That the revengefulness of the revenant is motivated, a demand for a specific retribution, would thus indicate that the ghost still belongs, however tenuously, to life, that he is

not fully a creature of the undead realm. And when we encounter such sort of restricted revengefulness in the writings of someone, we can be sure that he or she does not speak in the name(s) of the dead (in the undeath realm), for the revengefulness of the latter is not circumscribed. The latter revengefulness is of no use to the revengeful living human, all too human Wiesel. What is also of no use to Wiesel with regards to mortality is that "everything mortal expresses defenselessness. It is just as clearly inscribed above the head of a young bird as above the skull of a human petrified by evil and stupidity. But it requires great spiritual strength to see the likeness and the correlation in it" (Vilhelm Ekelund). Even the Nazi concentration camp guards, even the torturers in Israeli, Bosnian Serb, and Iraqi prisons are mortal and therefore infinitely defenseless, that is both utterly exposed and—notwithstanding the vile justification the Nobel Peace laureate and journalist Wiesel gives through one of his characters in his book *The Fifth Son* for the torture of Palestinians by the Israeli army: "Now Ilan is convinced: the thought, the prospect of not suffering worries the terrorist. Yet he does not appear stupid. Ilan doesn't understand, but he hides his irritation. Then, he sees a shudder quick as lightning go through the prisoner. It lasts only a fraction of a second but Ilan notices. What is he so afraid of if it is not suffering? And suddenly, the answer is obvious: he wants to suffer. He has prepared himself for suffering, for torture, probably for death. The reason? Perhaps to set an example. To lengthen the list of Palestinian martyrs. To feed anti-Israeli propaganda. And also to force the Jewish adversary to practice torture, therefore to betray himself, therefore, to choose inhumanity"⁴⁸—unjustifiable.

In collaboration with students, Jochen Gerz collected extensive data on the Jewish cemeteries that were in use up to the National Socialist dictatorship. Between April 1990 and May 1993, during the night and with no authorization, the students removed cobblestones from the pathway to the entrance of the Saarbrücken castle, temporarily replacing each with a substitute. After incising on the underside of each removed stone the name of one of the cemeteries, they secretly placed it back in the path, the name facing down. The result was *2146 Stones—Monument Against Racism, Saarbrücken*. One can discern in this monument and memorial both withdrawal: the most complete list of Jewish cemeteries in pre-Nazi Germany is provided in an unavailable form;⁴⁹ and, through the undetected temporary substitution of the stones, the counterfeit associated with resurrection. Past a surpassing disaster, the memorial and memory have to pass through the ordeal of the impression of counterfeit since the events and knowledge they are accessing are being resurrected. Rather than taking away from this act of reminiscing, the withdrawal and the impression of counterfeit signal that it is reliable. What would have proven that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God is not simply his bringing Lazarus back from the dead, but also that following the latter's resurrection, not once did any of those who encountered Lazarus feel, whether fleetingly or for an extended period, that he is not really Lazarus, but a double, a counterfeit. If there was a miracle, it would have resided less in bringing back Lazarus from the dead, than in the absence of the impression of dealing with a double that accompanies resurrection. For the early Christians, the surpassing disaster could already have started with Jesus Christ's abandonment on the cross as well with

the absence of the series of catastrophes that he had prophesied to end the world within a generation and usher the Day of Judgment. This (Son of) God who in the New Testament presumably brought back from the dead a man without any impression of counterfeit, of the surreptitious replacement by the double ever haunting the latter, was in all probability himself affected with a withdrawal and a sense of counterfeit in some Christian sects, especially of the Gnostic strain.

In countries, such as Bosnia, Lebanon, or Rwanda, that have suffered a brutal civil war, one encounters myriad cases of traumatized survivors. Many of these survivors seek psychiatric treatment to regain a cathexis of the world, including of tradition and culture in general. But that subjective working through cannot on its own succeed in remedying the withdrawal of tradition, for that withdrawal is not a subjective symptom, whether individual or collective, and therefore cannot be fully addressed by psychiatrists or psychoanalysts, but demands the resurrecting efforts of writers, artists, and thinkers. Without the latter's contribution, either the psychiatric treatment fails, or else though the patient may leave ostensibly healthy, he or she soon discovers that tradition, including art, is still withdrawn.

With regard to the surpassing disaster, art acts like the mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there. "You have seen nothing in Hiroshima" (Duras' *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1961).⁵⁰ Does this entail that one should not record? No. One should record this "nothing," which only after the resurrection can be available. We have to take photographs even though because of their referents' withdrawal, and until their

referents are resurrected, they are not going to be available as referential, documentary pieces—with the concomitant risk that facets relating to the subject matter might be mistaken for purely formal ones. A vicious circle: what has to be recorded has been withdrawn, so that, unless it is resurrected, it is going to be overlooked; but in order to accomplish that prerequisite work of resurrection to avert its overlooking, one has initially to have, however minimally, perceived it, that is countered its withdrawal, that is, resurrected it. But how can one speak of a withdrawal of civil-war Beirut buildings when refugees still noticed and lived in them? Yet aren't these refugees, who are marginalized because of their lack of political power and their economic destitution, affected with an additional overlooking through their association with these withdrawn buildings? The Lebanese's overall obliviousness and indifference to documenting the carnage through photographs, films, and videos cannot be fully explained by the circumstance that toward the end of the civil war they must have grown habituated to the destruction around them, as well as by the fact that many of these ruined areas were declared military zones, off-limits to cameras. Can photographs of these withdrawn buildings become available without resurrecting their withdrawn referents? It seems such photographs become themselves withdrawn. There is going then to be "a time of development" of the chemically developed photographs taken during the latter stages of the war. The documentation is for the future not only in the sense that it preserves the present referent for future generations, but also in that it can function as a preservation of the referent only in the future, only when the work of resurrection has countered the

withdrawal. He thought that until such photographs become available, one of the appropriate sites for their exposition is the Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, next to the spaces left blank following the 18 March 1990 theft of several famous paintings from the museum, this confronting the viewer with two different kinds of unavailability, a material and an immaterial one. While in the West there has been a proliferation of new museums (Mario Botta's San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain; Steven Holl's Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland; Steven Holl's Knut Hamsun Museum, Prestied, Norway; Hans Hollein's Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art; Daniel Libeskind's Felix Nussbaum Museum, Osnabruck, Germany; Richard Meier's Getty Center, Los Angeles ...); extensions to existing museums (Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, an extension of the Berlin Museum; the Grand Louvre Project [1981-1999], which involved the doubling in size, to 60,000 m², of the exhibition areas of the museum ...); new libraries (Sandy Wilson's British Library, St Pancras, London;⁵¹ Dominique Perrault's Bibliothèque nationale de France; Mete Arat, Hans-Dieter and Gisela Kaiser's German National Library, Frankfurt am Main ...); of cataloguing and inventorying, as exemplified by Macmillan's *The Dictionary of Art* (1996), with its 34 volumes, 41,000 articles, 6,802 contributing scholars, and 15,000 black and white illustrations, Afghans, Bosnians, and Iraqis have been divested of much of their artistic tradition, not only through material destruction, but also through immaterial withdrawal. Even were substantial parts of the contents of both the National and University Library and the Library of the Oriental

Institute in Sarajevo, and of the National Library in Mostar to be recovered, this would not be enough to make them once more fully available. Increasingly in the West, absence is affected with a mode of presence through telepresence and telesensing; increasingly in the “Developing” countries, presence is affected with an absence through the (negative) matting due to the withdrawal of tradition past surpassing disasters.

After the surpassing disaster, while the documentation of the referent is for the future, the presentation of the withdrawal is an urgent task for the present. If he tried to document specifically Beirut’s *Aswāq* area [the central district], it is not that it particularly was withdrawn since physically turned into ruins, but because large sections of it were in imminent danger of being erased without true deliberation, to provide space for the construction of a new city center. He had to explicitly show that these ruined areas have been withdrawn, as a preventive measure against others, although ostensibly perceiving them, unconsciously acting as if they weren’t there. To allow the discussion about the future condition of these ruined areas not to be a foregone oversight, it was crucial not only to criticize the financial interests at stake, and the subjective wish to forget whatever had strong associations with so many individual and collective traumas; but also to either resurrect these buildings or make manifest their withdrawal through art and architectural works, so that they would still be available for the argument against their demolition. What contributed to the failure to save these ruined or deserted buildings in the *Aswāq* area was that artists and filmmakers managed neither to resurrect them nor to manifest their withdrawal, so that the withdrawal not having become explicit,

hence not having become a factor that one could consciously and intentionally try to counter when thinking and planning the future of the city, these withdrawn buildings could so easily be overlooked, and thus could so readily be demolished so that a new commercial center could replace them. Did they erase many ruins to forget, or was it rather that they were able to erase them so easily because these ruined buildings were withdrawn by the surpassing disaster and therefore somewhat already quasi forgotten, so that the erasure largely implemented the forgetfulness embodied in these ruined buildings? Not being part of the community that suffered the surpassing disaster that ravaged Sarajevo, the American architect Lebbeus Woods can notice the ruins and recommend in a book their integration into the future reconstructed city. But, as a consequence of the withdrawal, those belonging to that community are likely to treat that book with obliviousness, overlooking it and its recommendations. After the surpassing disaster, the duty of at least some artists is to disclose the withdrawal (Duras’ *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1961; Godard’s *King Lear*; Boltanski’s *Monument: La Fête de Pourim*, 1988) and/or to resurrect what has been withdrawn (Godard’s *King Lear*).

Jocelyne Saab’s *Once Upon a Time: Beirut (Kān ya mā kān Bayrūt)*, 1994, is a film about forgetting, unfortunately mainly in the sense that it is an unmindful film: it is grotesque how quickly it forgets even the memorable Duras epigraph with which it starts. Memory is not to be limited, as in Saab’s film, to human recollection and archival images. The loss of memory in *Hiroshima mon amour* is implied not only in the French woman’s melancholia as to the ineluctability of forgetting her German lover and the devastation

of Hiroshima; but also in the Japanese man's repeated "You have seen nothing in Hiroshima." Forgetfulness is not always the result of subjective factors, but is sometimes an effect of an objective withdrawal of beings due to a surpassing disaster. Memory of what has thus been withdrawn is a betrayal of it, a false memory. To take the measure of Duras' opening words regarding the desperate attempt to remember set against the ineluctability of forgetfulness would have entailed showing that the archival documentary footage Saab presents, for example the images of Lebanon in the 1920s, is withdrawn. Is there a more effective way to hide that the images are inaccessible than to have the characters enter in them? But past a surpassing disaster, one's appearance in images of an earlier period rather than implying that they are available, and that they thus provide and instance some form of memory, would in a genuine film, on the contrary, suggest that the country that underwent the surpassing disaster was so divested from the others that it turned into a radical closure. The radical closure allows the irruption of unworldly ahistorical versions of the two protagonists in the images,⁵² but the images themselves are withdrawn. The film reel that is forgotten in the taxi cab and presumably lost gets returned to the two young female protagonists and projected: a missed opportunity to subtly imply the withdrawal of the images. Saab could still have intimated the withdrawal by designing the insertion of the two present-day female actresses in the archival images in such a way as to put in doubt the authenticity of these images; or else by having the images of the two characters in the film scenes they shot of each other in contemporary Beirut manifest the same impression of artificiality and overlaying as the clearly

matted shots earlier. Unfortunately this is not the case in Saab's work. It is not fortuitous that Beirut is represented mostly through bad Egyptian movies in a film directed by a journalist, that is, by someone belonging to a profession that has not provided examples of sensing the need for resurrection, let alone accomplishing such a task. While, with rare exceptions, commercial culture, which to many is what is most linked to actuality, has not been withdrawn by the series of catastrophes that hit the Arab world and that added up to a surpassing disaster; much of "avant-garde" writing and art; as well as all genuinely traditional art and writing, which is viewed by many as the part of culture least connected to contemporary events, have been withdrawn by the present surpassing disaster. After a public reading from his book *Over-Sensitivity*, he played back *taqāsīm* on *maqām nahawand* performed by Riād al-Sunbātī and on *maqām kurd* performed by Munīr Bashīr. Soon after the music started, and except for him, the Middle Easterners present there began swaying their heads to the sounds. After the music stopped, he said: "I am trying to resurrect to be able to really hear this music again, accompanying it with the quasi-*dhikr* of a musical high (*Allāh! ... Allāh! ...*)."⁵³ Judging from their reaction to the surpassing disaster, many presumably elitist artists and writers are much more in touch with actuality than commercial culture, even before the present financial prominence of the Gulf states reduced the latter, especially in Egypt, to utter crassness. Tradition is not merely what materially and ostensibly survived "the test" of time: in normal times a nebulous entity despite the somewhat artificial process of canon-formation, tradition becomes delineated and specified by the surpassing disaster. Tradition is what conjointly materially

survived the surpassing disaster, was immaterially withdrawn by it, and had the fortune of being subsequently resurrected by artists, writers, and thinkers. Many works one had thought part of tradition are revealed by their availability past a surpassing disaster as not really part of tradition; contrariwise many modernist works of art which vehemently attacked “tradition” are, prior to any reluctant gradual canonization, revealed by their withdrawal to be part of that tradition.

There were two fundamental kinds of out-of-focus and/or of sloppy compositions in the photographs, films and videos of the period around the Lebanese civil war:

— Those from the civil war’s period itself were due to one or several of the following factors: the threatening conditions under which the photographer was taking them; the hasty looking away on encountering the gutted, decomposing corpses; the proximity of the dead—come to prevent the world’s desertion of those suffering a surpassing disaster from turning into a radical closure—against whose freezing, not as corpses (*rigor mortis* is still a variety of motion) but as creatures of the undeath realm, all motions, including the restless motionlessness of the living, appear blurry; the entranced states in which the encounter with the dead often occurs.

— Those from the aftermath of the civil war were due mainly to the withdrawal of what was being photographed.

Like so many others, he had become used to viewing things at the speed of war. So for a while after the civil war’s end, he did not take any photographs nor shoot any videos, waiting until he learned to look again at a leisurely pace. This period of adjustment

lasted a full two years. Yet even after he became used to looking at buildings and experiencing events at the rhythm of peace, the photographs of the ruins in Lebanon taken by this Lebanese photographer, who classically composed those of his photographs shot in other countries, still looked like they were taken by a photographer lacking time to aim since in imminent danger, the compositions haphazard and the focus almost always off. He was asked if he was influenced by such works as Vito Acconci’s *Fall* (1969): a series of photographs Acconci produced by clicking his hand-held camera as he reached the ground while repeatedly falling forward; or Michael Snow’s *Venetian Blind* (1970): twenty-four snapshots he took with his eyes closed, each showing a blurred Snow against the accidentally framed background of a section of Venice. He was aware of and attracted by the blurring in Snow’s piece and by the random compositions in Acconci’s photographs. But he could recognize no basic similarity between these works and his current photographs, since the earth and grass in the Acconci photographs, the sections of Venice in *Venetian Blind*, as well as the road, filmed without looking through the viewfinder, in Snow’s *Seated Figures* (1988) are available to Acconci and to Snow. The question revealed a misunderstanding, since in his work the out-of-focus and/or the haphazard framings were not a formal strategy but due to the withdrawal and thus unavailability to vision of the material.

They sent him to shoot a photographic portfolio of the destruction in Bosnia. He returned with thousands of largely blurred and haphazardly framed photographs of intact buildings with no shrapnel or shrapnel marks, indeed not even broken glass.

He insisted that these photographs should be grouped into an exhibition titled *The Savage War*. Some felt offended at what they found to be tasteless humor; others had to admit that they were surprised that so many buildings had weathered the war unscathed. Many thought that he was facetious or that he was apologetic for the aggressors. Someone remarked critically: “One more example of a disciple trying to outdo his master: a Baudrillardian photographer implying that not only the Gulf War but also this one did not take place.” He did not care to reply to someone who simplified both his work and that of Baudrillard. Someone unaware that due to the withdrawal past a surpassing disaster something in the referent cannot be localized exactly, whether with regards to framing or focus or both, asked critically whether the blurring and hit-or-miss framings were intentionally created by him to give the sensation they were shot during the war. “No.”

Someone had forgotten a high quality laser reproduction of Boltanski’s *Altar to the Chases High School* (1988) in the copy of *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (Rizzoli, 1995) that he checked out from a library. Is the blurring in Boltanski’s reproduction of a graduation photograph he found in a school yearbook an enhancement of the expressivity of the photograph, as curator Lynn Gumpert proposes (“Boltanski transformed them into skeletal vestiges—their eyes reduced to empty black sockets, any hint of a smile metamorphosed into a grimace of death”⁵³)? Does it render for us the loss of individuation to which those depicted would have been subjected in the camps? Is it to give the sensation that those depicted are already fading from memory? Or is it rather to render the stereotypical association of the dead with haze and

furtiveness? None of the above. These blurred photographs disclose to us nothing beyond their referent’s withdrawal and possibly their own withdrawal as a result of a surpassing disaster.⁵⁴ After looking at that Boltanski photograph for a few minutes, he went back to looking at the illustrations and photographs in the book. He could no longer really focus on them. They had become blurred and distant. He felt that it was with eyes adjusted to the blurriness of that Boltanski photograph that he was looking at the Auschwitz prisoner identification photographs included in the book. Is it conceivable that a curator would place a Boltanski piece such as *Reserves: The Purim Holiday* (1989), based on a photograph of Purim celebration at a Jewish school in France, 1939, in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC? It is certainly conceivable, since the vast majority of curators would be oblivious of how this would affect all the items there with blurring. In which case, I would not be surprised were some spectator at the museum’s cinema to suddenly yell: “Focus!” Who may have such an experience on seeing Boltanski’s blurred photograph? Is it everybody? Not at all, and this despite what Boltanski himself implies in an interview in the journal *Autrement*, 1996. Only those who belong to the community of that surpassing disaster would have such an experience.

The “You have seen nothing in Hiroshima” said by the Japanese man to the visiting French woman could at one level mean: You, a French woman, removed from the direct experience of either the atomic explosion or its radioactive aftereffects should not have the presumption to consider that you have seen anything in Hiroshima. At yet another level, it includes her in the community, since she is

experiencing the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster. If she reacts negatively to the Japanese man's words, insisting that she has seen certain things, it must be because being an ethical person, she is not sure she is yet of that community.⁵⁵ Those Americans who managed to pressure the Smithsonian to an out-and-out scaling back of the exhibit "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II" it planned to hold in 1995 at the National Air and Space Museum are certainly not ones who "have seen nothing in Hiroshima"; they are merely ones who do not want others to see what they think is perceptible. To very few Westerners would I say: "You have seen nothing in West Beirut" or "You have seen nothing in Iraq." How little has Herzog, the director of *Lessons of Darkness*, 1991, seen in Iraq and the Kuwaiti theater of operations in the aftermath of the Gulf War! With rare people would one progress from "You have seen little in Iraq" (most frequently because they have scant historical knowledge and no direct experience and depend for their political outlook on the biased mainstream media of the West) to "You have seen nothing in Iraq," because they now belong to the community of the surpassing disaster and thus are affected with the withdrawal. The first expression is critical and exclusive; the second is inclusive when in relation to communities that underwent a surpassing disaster. I highly respect Duras for having "seen nothing in Hiroshima"; I feel contempt for her for how little she saw in Palestine and in Iraq. I certainly would not have said to the living Duras: "You have seen nothing in Palestine and Iraq. Nothing"!

In the two film series I curated at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, I did not

show any works whose main function is to provide a critique or parody of stereotypes of Middle Easterners, let alone works that do not even furnish such a critique but merely the occasion for subsequent verbose discussions full of resentment. Anyone whose "art" merely revolves around how better to express and convey such a critique reveals that he is an academician himself or herself precisely through this obliviousness even at the intuitive level to the connection of stereotypes to the unconscious. Certainly by now any aspiring academician who intends to once more catalogue the litany of stereotypes the majority of Westerners have of Arabs, Iranians, etc., as his or her contribution to one more anthology negotiating something or other around issues of multiculturalism, orientalism, etc.,* has to ask himself or herself how much these stereotypes are linked to the unconscious and its processes—no widespread stereotype is not implicated with the unconscious—and therefore, while arguably effective at the rational, conscious level if not at doing away with these stereotypes then at least at problematizing them, how little effective is the placement of a *no*, a negative sign, a critical attitude before these views whose addresser and addressee is mostly the unconscious, which admits of no negation; indeed how largely counterproductive they are at the level where it really matters with stereotypes, the unconscious level. These critics and academics are playing an important role in the maintenance of these stereotypes at the level of the unconscious; moreover, they are indirectly propagating such stereotypes to sectors previously immune to them, since many people from other cultures and ethnic groups relax their vigilance when dealing with these academics seemingly defending them. I find the encounter

with such ostensibly critical academic catalogues of stereotypes of Arabs even more oppressive than the rude transactions with prejudiced airport security officials or embassy employees. All in all, that the representation of Arabs and Iranians in the most simplistic manner (up to denying their existence: the description of Palestine by many of the early Zionists as “a land without people”) can facilitate the Israeli destruction of villages in South Lebanon in the name of a defense against terrorism (even guerrilla operations by the Lebanese against military targets in the part of Lebanon illegally occupied by Israel are termed terrorist!) is no excuse for limiting oneself to critiquing or parodying such widespread misrepresentations. “A woman cannot do much harm to a man. He carries all his tragedy within him. She can bother him, provoke him, she can even kill him—that’s all.”⁵⁶ That is, all is not all.⁵⁷ To any totalizing “that is all,” we, laconic mortals, have the reaction, and not tautologically: “That’s all.” That which exceeds the all is this difference between *that’s all* and *that’s all*. The margin is the difference between *c’est tout* and *c’est tout*. Every artist, every writer, certainly Shakespeare, knows that we cannot be reduced to creatures who can bleed, laugh, and biologically die. They can make us bleed, laugh, they can treat us like potential terrorists and kill us—that’s all. But is that all they can do? Kill us—in the hundreds of thousands? Unfortunately, they can do worse: produce a surpassing disaster and thus a withdrawal of tradition.

A Kashaya Pomo chief and scholar recently expressly discontinued the transmission of a tribal dance. Something must have indicated to her that the discontinuation of the transmission of the dance would be less detrimental and problematic than its

handing down. Were it the case that their forebears had undergone only a vast catastrophe, the issue for the contemporary Native Americans would plainly be to do everything possible to transmit the traditional songs and dances to their contemporary youths in spite of the latter’s acculturation and indifference. But in case what was suffered was a surpassing disaster, one must be sensitive to the eventuality of the withdrawal, and, in the absence or failure of the resurrection of tradition, of the obligation to suspend transmission, so as not to hand down counterfeit tradition.⁵⁸

Lebanese Photography Between Radical Closure and Surpassing Disaster

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

In addition to so much Lebanese photography that remained at the level of artistic documentation, for instance the work of Samer Mohdad (*Les Enfants de la Guerre: Liban 1985-1992*; and *Mes Arabies* [Éditions Dār an-Nahār, 1999]) and Fouad Elkoury, who were treating and continued to treat the civil-war and war as

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

Where is the rest of the world? What is the world doing? How is the world allowing such atrocities not only to happen but also to go on being perpetuated for months and years? The incredible desertion of the world is the leitmotiv of the indignant exclamations one hears in zones under siege: the Palestinians and the Lebanese in West Beirut during the Israeli siege of that city in 1982; the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the start of their closures then sieges by the Israelis; the inhabitants of Sarajevo during its siege by Bosnian Serbs; the Tutsi minority during the Rwandan genocide of 1994; the Iraqis since the start in 1990 of the on-going sanctions. Is it strange that some feel, or make artworks that imply that these places became radical closures? Can we detect in such places one of the consequences of radical closures: unworldly, fully-formed ahistorical irruptions? As usual, it is most appropriate to look for that in artworks. The “document” attributed by Walid Raad to Kahlil Gibran and projected as a slide for the duration of Raad’s talk “Miraculous Beginnings” at Musée Sursock in Beirut;⁵⁹ and the eight small black and white photographs of group portraits of men and women that were published in Raad’s photo-essay “Miraculous Beginnings,” and that—the reader is told—are part of twenty-nine large photographic prints and fifty-two documents (handwritten notebook entries, letters, typed memoranda and minutes) unearthed in 1991 during the demolition of Beirut’s civil war-devastated Central District, processed by laboratories in

France and the USA,⁶⁰ and handed to the Arab Research Institute,⁶¹ can be legitimately viewed as unworldly ahistorical irruptions in the radical closure that Beirut may have become at one point.⁶²

We live in a block universe of spacetime, where nothing physically passes and vanishes, but where occasionally things withdraw due to surpassing disasters. Palestinians, Kurds, and Bosnians have to deal with not only the concerted erasure by their enemies of much of their tradition: the erasure by the Israelis of hundreds of Palestinian villages in 1948 and their renaming with Jewish names,⁶³ and the erasure of hundreds of Kurdish villages during the *Anfāl* operation in Iraq, etc.; but also the additional, more insidious withdrawal of what survived the physical destruction. The exhibition *Wonder Beirut* by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (Janine Rubeiz Gallery, Beirut, July 1998) revolves around a photographer who, along with his father, was commissioned by the Lebanese State in 1969 to do postcards, and who four years into the civil war and while shutting himself off in his studio takes down all these postcards, “which no longer referred to anything” since what they showed—Martyrs’ Square, the souks, policemen on camels, etc.—either was destroyed or no longer existed, and “burns them patiently, aiming at them his proper bombs and his own shells ... thus making them conform better to his reality. When all was burned, it was peace.” Thus the following model sequence: photographs of burned buildings and scorched walls taken by him from the window of his studio a couple of years into the conflict; then, four years into the war, burned photographs that are later exhibited (this indicating that the war was then not yet a surpassing disaster, but just a localizable catastrophe); then in

1999, undeveloped photographs, a symptom of the withdrawal past the surpassing disaster that Beirut must have become: “Today, this photographer no longer develops his photographs. It is enough for him to take them. At the end of the exhibition [*Wonder Beirut*], 6452 rolls of film were laid on the floor: rolls containing photos taken by the photographer but left undeveloped” (from Hadjithomas and Joreige’s text “*Tayyib rah farjik shighli*” [“OK, I’ll Show You My Work”], *Al-Ādāb* [January-February 2001]). Hadjithomas and Joreige are currently preparing a show titled *Latent Image* in which they will frame and mount on the gallery’s walls textual descriptions of photographs taken but left unprocessed. Here are six examples from film roll no. PE 136 GPH 160:

— Master shot of the dead end from the window of the room. It is raining.

— Close shot of the seepage under the living room’s windows.

— The water enters into the kitchen.

— Close shot of the floorcloth in front of the living room’s windows.

— The rain on the room’s pane, with the camera focus being on the drops.

— Close shot of the spots of humidity on the wall and the ceiling.

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

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

Felicitous photographs of Lebanon many years into the war and then many years following it: photographs taken by

nobody—unworldly irruptions in a radical closure—but developed (*Miraculous Beginnings*); and photographs taken by someone but left undeveloped because of the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster that was Beirut (*Wonder Beirut*, 1999).⁶⁴

It is one thing for an academic scholar like the Palestinian Walīd al-Khālīdī to do archival work (he is the editor of *Kay lā nansā: qurā Filasṭīn al-latī dammarathā Isrāʿīl sanat 1948 wa-asmāʾ shuhadāʾihā* [*All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*]); it is, or at least it should be, another matter were Walid Raad and Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige to do so. Walid Raad is already a member of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), and Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige would, in my opinion, be fine candidates for membership in the same foundation, which was established in Lebanon in 1996, and whose aim is “to promote photography in the Middle East and North Africa by locating, collecting, and preserving the region’s photographic heritage.... Material in the collections will date from the early nineteenth century to the present.” Raad is also implicated through his artistic practice in both the Arab Research Institute’s archival collection *Miraculous Beginnings: the Complete Archive*, which as of 1994 comprised, we are told, forty-six hundred documents; and the Atlas Group’s growing collection. While for now the artistic practices and issues at stake in these latter two archives have not affected or interfered with the collection of the AIF, it is quite conceivable that they will, through Raad, do so, problematizing the historical authenticity of its photographs, with the probable consequence that we will learn about new Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh, Kamīl al-Qāriḥ, or Alban photographs. I envision, as

a first stage, the archival collections of both the Arab Research Institute and the Atlas Group ending up equaling the collection of the AIF, presently around 30000 photographs; then at a later stage, the AIF archive becoming just an appendage of Raad’s (largely virtual) archive, the latter occasionally referring to the former as holding a small number of photographs that it does not have: “For an additional 23 photographs of the work of Kamīl al-Qāriḥ, as well as for an additional 20 photographs by Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh, we refer you to the Arab Image Foundation’s collection.” What would happen to the AIF’s “long-term goal of ... the creation of a center in Beirut for the preservation and exhibition of its photographic collections ...” were Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige to end up becoming members of the foundation? How would the AIF’s goal of preservation be affected by the presence of two artists who have burnt some of their photographs then exhibited them? How would the Foundation’s goal of exhibition be affected by the presence of two artists who have included in one of their exhibitions myriad rolls of unprocessed photographs, therefore of unexhibited photographs? How would the Foundation’s goal of archiving and therefore also dating be affected by the presence of two artists who assigned two different dates to what seems to be the same postcard of pre-civil-war Beirut’s Central District, and wrote through the mouth of their fictional interviewer, the twentieth-century Pierre Menard of Borges’ “Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*”: “I have here two images, one taken by the photographer in 1969, the other a 1998 photograph of this same preexisting postcard.... By simply photographing these images you invent a new path, that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution”?

Resurrecting the Arab Apocalypse STOP [THE WORLD]⁶⁵

From time to time, there occurs what suspends time, revelation—at least for certain people, martyrs. But then the apocalypse, revelation, is withdrawn, occulted by the “apocalypse,” the surpassing disaster, so that symptomatically *apocalypse*’s primary sense (from Greek *apokalypsis*, from *apokalyptein* to uncover, from *apo-* + *kalyptein* to cover) is occulted by its secondary meaning, and *martyr*’s primary sense, *witness*, is occulted by its secondary, vulgar meaning: “a person who suffers greatly or is killed because of their political or religious beliefs.” One of the symptoms of such a surpassing disaster is that one of the twentieth century’s major Arabic books of poetry, Etel Adnan’s *L’Apocalypse arabe*, published in 1980, has been out of print for around two decades. *L’Apocalypse arabe*, an Arab book of poetry?! Notwithstanding that it was written originally in French (1980) then rewritten in English (1989) by an author who lives for the most part in the USA and France, it is an Arab book of poetry in part because it was withdrawn, occulted by the surpassing disasters that have affected the Arab world. A small number of Arab writers, video makers, filmmakers and artists, some of whom live abroad, have been working to resurrect, make available again what has been withdrawn by the Arab “apocalypse,” including Adnan’s *L’Apocalypse arabe*. Have they succeeded? Adnan’s book was reprinted in English in 2007 by the Post Apollo Press—if the current date of reprint of this book that’s untimely except in its relation to the surpassing disaster is timely and therefore symptomatic, this reissue would

indicate the book’s resurrection. The reader is soon alarmed by the repeated telegraphic STOP of this book that orbits the following doomed objects: the Sun, and Tall al-Za‘tar and Quarantina, two refugee camps that were besieged and criminally destroyed during the Lebanese civil war (“the Quarantina is torching its inmates STOP”, “7 thousand Arabs under siege thirsty blinded STOP ... 7 thousand Arabs in the belly of vultures STOP”). While the Arab “apocalypse” as surpassing disaster leads to a withdrawal of Arabic tradition, the apocalypse as revelation leads to Arabic tradition’s vertiginous extension, so that it comes to include many a bodhisattva as well as many a schizophrenic/psychotic who is not an Arab by descent and/or birthplace but who exclaims in his or her dying before dying: “Every name in history is I” (Nietzsche). Due to this apocalyptic extension of tradition, one has—away from the cumulative shade of the many “100% Lebanese” banners that were raised during the massive demonstration that took place in Beirut on 14 March 2005 in indignant commemoration of the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri a month earlier—an anamnesis, recollecting, as an anarchist, that “the sun is a Syrian king riding a horse from Homs to Palmyra open skies preceding” (cf. Antonin Artaud’s *Heliogabalus; or, The Crowned Anarchist*, 1933), and, as an ancient Egyptian, “a yellow sun crammed in a boat,” etc. A poet whose country and its refugee camps were being shattered by explosions during its protracted civil war managed nonetheless, perhaps because she poetically felt, like Judge Schreber with his solar anus and his singular cosmology, “a sun in the rectal extremity” and “a sun in the arms in the anus,” to heed this news, “The radio says History

allocated 10 billion years to the sun / the SUN has already lived half its age,” and, while Frank Tipler and other Western physicists were trying to devise long-term emergency measures to deal with the future explosion of the scientific age’s Sun, a yellow dwarf of spectral type G2, screamed: “An apocalyptic sun explodes.” Have Arabs, who, with very rare exceptions, continue to indulge in their petty concerns, taken notice? Was it enough to have *The Arab Apocalypse* translated into Arabic in 1991 for it to be read in the Arab world once it is resurrected? Even before having it translated to Arabic by someone else, it seems that the author, also an artist, had already partly translated it into graphic signs for the so many Arabs (38.7 per cent in 1999, or about 57.7 million adult Arabs [UN’s *Arab Human Development Report* 2002]) who are illiterate, for whom Arabic is as illegible as English and French—may they be jolted by its graphic signs ... into, at last but not least, learning to read—and then actually read (doesn’t the great seventh-century Arabic apocalyptic book, which has reached us through the prophet Muḥammad, enjoin us to do so?).

Q and A

Stephanie Sykes <[REDACTED]>
Sat, Feb 23, 2008 at 4:25 PM
To: Jalal Toufic <jtoufic@gmail.com>

Dear Jalal,
I hope this email finds you well. (...)
Jalal, I am hoping that you will permit me to query a term that

surfaces quite a bit in your writing. You make references to the “surpassing disaster,” and I do not have a firm grasp of your use of “surpassing.” Do you mean this in the literal sense, in which case it would refer to the scale of disasters that exceed social/personal anticipation? Or, alternatively, is the use more abstract, similar to the way Maurice Blanchot perceives disaster/the writing of disaster in that it is unknowable, that it becomes the “other” in a sense?

(...)

Kind regards,
Stephanie Sykes

Jalal Toufic <jtoufic@gmail.com>
Fri, May 9, 2008 at 5:40 PM
To: Stephanie Sykes <[REDACTED]>

Dear Stephanie:

The surpassing disaster I have conceptualized is more limited than the disaster Blanchot writes about in his great book *The Writing of the Disaster* (“The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact”); the surpassing disaster leads to the withdrawal not of everything, but of tradition, and touches not everyone, but a community, with the caveat that this community is reciprocally defined by it as the community of those affected by it, and this tradition is defined by it as that which withdraws as a result of the surpassing disaster. And while the disaster Blanchot writes about “takes care of everything,” and “is not our affair” since it “threatens in me that which is exterior to me—an other

than I who passively become other”; the surpassing disaster is “our affair”—thus defining the community—and it is thinkers, writers, artists, filmmakers, musicians, and dancers who can “take care,” by resurrecting it, of what has withdrawn as a result of the surpassing disaster. Notwithstanding that Blanchot’s disaster puts “a stop to every arrival,” it is not rare, since “it is always already past,” while the surpassing disasters I write about have been rare. Even those who had the fortune of not undergoing a surpassing disaster have already been ruined by the disaster Blanchot writes about; and even what has been resurrected by artists and thinkers following its withdrawal past a surpassing disaster continues to be ruined and left intact by the disaster Blanchot writes about.

Jalal

Jalal Toufic is a thinker, writer, and artist. He is the author of *DiStracted* (1991; 2nd ed., 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (2005), *‘Āshūrā’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), and *Undeserving Lebanon* (2007). His videos and mixed-media works have been presented in such venues as Artists Space, New York; The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel; and the 16th International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA) in a “Focus Jalal Toufic” program. He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, and the University of Southern California, and he currently teaches at Kadir Has University in Istanbul.

<http://www.jalaltoufic.com>

Textual Notes

1. What would be an appropriate gesture regarding an artist who feels such kinship to my concept of the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster that he co-taught with me a seminar around it at Unitednationsplaza, Berlin, from 31 January through 11 February 2007, and had earlier written, “I also realize that I read about all this somewhere else, most likely in one of Jalal Toufic’s books. I mentioned in our earlier conversation that I am likely to quote Jalal quite a bit in any exchange we have simply because I am not able these days to find my thoughts without passing through his words, books, and concepts” (Silvia Kolbowski and Walid Raad, *Between Artists* [Canada: A. R. T. Press, 2006], 6)? It is to dedicate to him this revised edition of the essay that introduced the concept.
2. Yet another manner of action at a distance was planned for *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*. While in Lebanon in 1992, I met with the director of Lebanese TV and proposed to him the production of a video to be broadcast simultaneously on two channels, TL1 (Télé Liban 1) and TL2, to investigate issues of telepathy in a country where the long civil war induced both the isolation of the country *and* an exile from the local—the video’s two-channel broadcast version could have been also known as *Telepathy; or, the Exile from the Local*. He agreed to produce and broadcast the work. I informed him that I had to leave the country in one and a half months. He promised to provide the equipment shortly. I contacted actors and actresses, and scouted for locations. The program was to start at 7:00 p.m. Following the title, *Credits Included*, the audience would have seen the protagonist, Safa, sitting at Le Thé cafe. In the background, the placard with the inscription “Le Thé” would have been complemented by keyed-in space-time coordinates: Beirut, day and month of broadcast, 1993. There would have been no channel logo on the two channels. Safa would have looked sideways. A young woman sitting at another table would have been looking in his direction; her automatic *reaction* would have been to avert her look. He would have then looked at his watch: it would have indicated 7:01 p.m. He would then have written: “7:04 p.m. How can one be sure that what one is seeing is in front of one, that is, perceived

in a normal way rather than telepathically? For instance, how can the TV spectator be sure that he or she is seeing what is being broadcast on the channel he or she chose rather than telepathically apprehending what happens to be broadcast on another channel (at the same time?)” (*Credits Included* would thus have been a work that incorporates zapping—zapping against zapping). As he would have reached the middle of the last sentence, the spectator would have been able to hear the faint sound of a door opening and someone saying in a clear voice: “Are you videotaping this program for TV?” Safa would have finished writing the sentence, then he would have said: “Cut ... We will redo the shot. Come to think of it, this time I will say the words instead of writing them.” Safa would then have looked again at his watch: it would have indicated 7:04. While uttering the words, his voice would have been out of sync, this indicating possibly that it is issuing from another channel. In the same setting, he would have written: “How can I be certain that what I am seeing telepathically right now does not come from a later or a previous time, that is, how do I know that I am not seeing the future or the past?” This logo-less shot would have been shown on the two channels at a different stage in the progression of each of the two tapes. Around a month after my meeting with the director of Lebanese TV, I received a phone call asking that we meet again and that I “explain” to him once more what the video was all about. I ended up shooting the video with no help from the Lebanese TV; unfortunately, *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green* is presently a single-monitor video, and the above-described scene was cut out.

3. Were no books, paintings, and buildings to withdraw past a disaster, does that imply necessarily that that disaster was not a surpassing one? Is it possible rather that there was no withdrawal past the disaster not because the latter is not a surpassing one but because that culture, however much it trumpets its self-proclaimed “tradition,” does not really have a tradition? Yes!
4. Telegraphy, the medium through which one used to receive the news from the colonies, where most of the atrocities were committed, had for appropriate punctuation the symptomatic *stop*. Journalists now phone or use faxes; gone is the resonant *displacement* of the *stop* from the horrified reaction to an atrocity to the standard punctuation of the telegraphic medium.

5. By losing traditional music, we lose tradition to the second power, since this music, which enfold an impersonal memory, is not just a component of tradition but envelops it. A society will never have a tradition if it remains at the level of history and does not attain to instances of impersonal memory—and its attendant possibility of impersonal amnesia. In Şerif Gören and Yılmaz Güney’s *Yol* (1982), this music, while in rhythm with the relatively slow movement of horseback-riding, functions as an almost instantaneous transport (the affinity the most advanced sector of the population feels toward this traditional music is not so anachronistic, but has in part to do with the almost instantaneous transposition performed by this music), so that Ömer arrives *twice* in his village, physically, by means of boat, then train, then feet, then horse, but also by means of this kind of music—with the attendant danger of double arrival: labyrinthine imprisonment (Buñuel’s *The Exterminating Angel*)—one cannot truly leave places to which one arrived doubly without having left in between, except if one accomplishes a double departure. The coexistence of many historical stages in developing countries is paralleled by the coexistence of many modes of arrival in these countries: in the case of the village, double arrival: one physical (the slow modes of transportation leading to the village are slowed even further by the frequent military checkpoints encountered in many regions of the South [*Yol*; Michel Khleifi’s *Wedding in Galilee* (1987); Maroun Bagdadi’s *Little Wars* (1982)]), and one musical; in the case of the majority of the inhabitants of the city: a single arrival; in the case of the most advanced sectors of the city, who no longer fully belong to it, but are in interface with the rest of the “global village”: *generalized arrival* (Paul Virilio: “Currently, with the instantaneous broadcasting revolution, we are seeing the beginnings of a ‘generalized arrival’ whereby everything arrives without having to leave, the nineteenth century’s elimination of the journey [that is, of the space interval and of time] combining with the abolition of *departure* at the end of the twentieth, the journey thereby losing its successive components and being overtaken by *arrival* alone,” *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose [London, New York: Verso, 2008], 16).
6. Without for that matter becoming a teacher—one who teaches others lessons (“teach someone a lesson: punish or hurt someone

as a deterrent: *they were teaching me a lesson for daring to complain*” [New Oxford American Dictionary]; “teach: to cause to know the disagreeable consequences of some action <I’ll teach you to come home late>” [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/teach]—in this sense most teachers are outside universities and schools.

7. One of the counterproductive consequences of the decade-long Arab boycott of Egypt following its Camp David accords with Israel in 1979 was that the other Arabs received the bad from Egypt—its soap operas, and its melodramatic, moralizing films, etc.—while being prohibited from going there and discovering in Egypt what resists the Egypt that was being exported to the rest of the Arab World (for example, Shādī ‘Abd al-Salām’s *The Night of Counting the Years* [1969] ...). Thus, the reason I qualify my dislike of contemporary Egyptian culture is that it is mostly the bad, and sometimes only the bad in a culture that gets imported by other countries.
8. In his musical compositions for my *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*, 1995 (“Credits Included (A Video in Red & Green),” *Filmworks IV: S & M + More* [Tzadik CD7310, © 1997]), my ally and friend John Zorn sampled sections from pieces of classical Arabic music performed by the Iraqi musician Munīr Bashīr.
9. I find it inappropriate that when a university department in the USA is to show an Arab film, even a Palestinian, Lebanese, or Iraqi one, the first person they think of asking to present the film in this period of multiculturalism is an Arab filmmaker or thinker, oblivious to the eventuality that the disasters that have befallen that area may have been surpassing ones inducing a withdrawal of tradition, with the unfortunate consequence that an Arab filmmaker or thinker would be unable to access these films, while, in such a situation, other writers, scholars or filmmakers possibly can.
 Unlike in 1996, when I could access *A Thousand and One Nights* only through its adaptation by Pasolini, a filmmaker for whom this literary text was not withdrawn since he was not part of the community of the surpassing disaster that beset the Middle East, in my book *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (2005), specifically its section “Something I’m Dying to Tell You, Lyn,” I could access it directly. This would imply that *A*

Thousand and One Nights was resurrected sometime between 1996 and 2005, and that it continued to be available following its resurrection notwithstanding the looting of the Iraq Museum and the sacking of the Iraq National Library and Archives and other Iraqi libraries in April of 2003, in the first days following the US army’s occupation of Baghdad; and, since then, the hundreds of car bombs and suicide bombers targeting civilians; the widespread sectarian killings; the beheadings by the degenerates of al-Qā’ida in Iraq ...!

10. Anyone of the perpetrators of hostilities that result in a surpassing disaster is part of the community of such a disaster if he or she is sensible to the withdrawal that affects books, buildings, etc., in the aftermath of such a disaster—he or she is a member of the community who should be condemned.
11. That resurrection takes time is in the case of humans partly because it requires arriving too late; see “Arriving Too Late for Resurrection” in my book (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, revised and expanded edition (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003), 215-227: “‘Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days’ (John 11:5-6). The narrator of [Blanchot’s] *Death Sentence* writes: ‘I think in saying that, she was announcing that she was going to die. This time I decided to return to Paris. But I gave myself two more days’” (Ibid., 223).
12. To be more accurate, we have lost one kind of tradition; we may still encounter that other, uncanny tradition, the one secreted by the ruins in a labyrinthine time, often a time-lapsed one (“Ruins,” in (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, revised and expanded edition [Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003]). The fact that in the aftermath of my writing in (*Vampires*) (my doctoral dissertation by the same title was defended in 1992) about the ruined *Aswāq* being as old as Baalback (p. 36), major archeological discoveries of the Phoenician, Byzantine, and Roman Beirut were made in that area does not confirm my contention of the first kind of oldness, but resonates with it, layering oldness on oldness.
13. Nietzsche: “What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the

- advent of nihilism.” From an entry in the projected preface, dated November 1887-March 1888, to *The Will to Power* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Random House, 1968], 3).
14. See my book *Disfracted*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 2003), 32-42, on untimely collaboration.
 15. My experience of collaborating in an untimely manner with Gus Van Sant was not a happy one. Had he heeded my suggestions, he would not have tried to do a remake of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) in which he reproduced each frame of the original largely in the manner of Hitchcock, but would instead have done a *Psycho* in the manner of Sokurov, so that the resultant film would have been: *Psycho*, School of Sokurov (as *The Betrothal*, circa 1640-50, is by the School of Rembrandt). Such a programmatic film would have proved all the more appropriate when Sokurov went on to do a seemingly programmatic cinematic work, *Russian Arc* (2002), a 96-minute film videotaped in one continuous shot. Since Van Sant did not heed my suggestions for his remake of *Psycho* (1998), I made the video *Mother and Son; or, That Obscure Object of Desire (Scenes from an Anamorphic Double Feature)* (41 minutes, 2006), in lieu of the failed untimely collaboration.
 16. Nigel Andrews, “Dracula in Delft,” *American Film* 4, no. 1 (1978): 33.
 17. I’ll mention in passing that *Vertigo* was withheld from circulation for an extended period: it is one of five films to which Hitchcock had the rights and which he removed from circulation in 1973—while his lawyers negotiated new financial arrangements for their screening in theaters and broadcasting on television—and which were rereleased in 1983-84.
 18. “The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 was the most severe in the history of the nuclear power industry, causing a huge release of radionuclides over large areas of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation” (<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Booklets/Chernobyl/chernobyl.pdf>; see also http://www.who.int/ionizing_radiation/chernobyl/who_chernobyl_report_2006.pdf). The loss of movies and more generally art attributed to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Godard’s *King Lear* is to be considered in terms of the immaterial withdrawal past a surpassing disaster rather than as a fictional exaggeration of the historical material damage.
 19. What about for example Alexander’s house in Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice*!?
 20. Notwithstanding Tarkovsky’s empathy for his film’s protagonist, Alexander, there is a crucial difference between them. The fact that Alexander can burn his house successfully on his first try indicates that for him the disaster was not a surpassing one, that it was indeed averted (through his prayer?). By the time Alexander sets his house on fire, and as revealed by the parapraxis during the filming of *The Sacrifice*, for Tarkovsky the house had become withdrawn, unavailable as a result of a surpassing disaster. From the perspective of their relation to the disaster, Tarkovsky and his protagonist Alexander do not belong to the same community, do not form a community.
 21. Unlike the botched filming by Tarkovsky’s crew of Alexander’s burning of his house in *The Sacrifice*, the loss of a considerable part of the initial footage of *Stalker* (1979) due to a lab mistake remains extraneous to the released film.
 22. In Michal Leszczyłowski’s *Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky* (1988; aka *The Genius, the Man, the Legend Andrei Tarkovsky*), Tarkovsky’s wife informs us that “it was a tragedy for him ... He was crushed,” and indeed we see a clearly frustrated Tarkovsky standing next to the cinematographer Sven Nykvist and his assistants on the location of *The Sacrifice* and saying: “The last thing I expected was for the camera crew to foul up.” And yet despite Tarkovsky’s reaction, the crew’s bungled action reveals that Tarkovsky’s wish and demand that the crew members not merely execute orders but be truly implicated in the film was actualized during the filming, for their bungled action here answers to the demands of the film. What Tarkovsky writes about the filming of *The Mirror* applies even better to the filming of *The Sacrifice*. “Camera-man and set designer were doing not merely what they knew how to do, what was asked of them, but in every new situation they pushed out the boundaries of their professional capacities a little further. There was no question of confining themselves to what ‘could’ be done, but of doing whatever was needed” (Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, translated from the Russian by Kitty Hunter-Blair [Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987], 38)—what was

- needed at that point was for Sven Nykvist and his assistants not to confine themselves to what “could” be done by them, but for the filming of the shot of the burning of the house to fail!
23. It could be that the surpassing disaster is no other than the subsequent appropriation: she is trying to resurrect the work from the surpassing disaster that her subsequent appropriation will inflict on it.
 24. The deterioration in the standard of education caused by the surpassing disaster, with the destruction of numerous schools, the high casualties among intellectuals, artists, and teachers, and the resultant increasing ignorance of the populace, etc., is certainly a significant contributing factor.
 25. Luke 16:19-31. Did Jesus or Luke hear this “parable” from Lazarus?
 26. Cf. Leonid N. Andreyev’s “Lazarus” (1906) for an uncannier Lazarus, a Lazarus who is the last man. Had Jesus Christ—even the resurrected Jesus Christ?—encountered the resurrected Lazarus of Leonid N. Andreyev’s short story, would he have cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)? Is it possible that the eponymous “protagonist” of Blanchot’s *The Last Man* once read Leonid Andreyev’s “Lazarus”? Is it possible that Blanchot’s narrator, who calls “the protagonist” the last man, has read Andreyev’s “Lazarus”? Would that narrator refer to the Lazarus of Andreyev’s short story and the man he had called the last man as the last men? It would be a misreckoning were he to do so, for “*lašt men* is not a plural of *lašt man*; the *lašt men* are described negatively and critically by Nietzsche in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, while the *lašt man* is portrayed by Blanchot in his book with that title” (Jalal Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon* [Forthcoming Books, 2007], footnote 45, page 105). Can such two men meet, for example can Blanchot’s last man encounter the Lazarus of Andreyev’s short story? Can they meet except in a thought experiment? I hope to be spared this thought experiment, for I have the dreadful apprehension that it will be the last man who will do it, that by the “time” someone does such a thought experiment, he “will” come to the (resigned?) realization that the most discerning of his acquaintances has come to consider him the last man.
 27. This is by no means to rank the absolutely modern as better than the relatively modern, but merely to differentiate them.
 28. One can appreciate the intense tonality of withdrawal in Shi‘ism if one remembers that in that branch of Islam one reaches the esoteric through the imām rather than through unmediated experience, and then notes that since the tenth century the imām has been occulted in Twelver Shi‘ism.
 29. Quoted in Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 139-140. See also Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Abū’l-Ḥusayn Malaḥī (d. 987), *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa’l-radd ‘alā ahl al-ahwā’ wa’l-bida’* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā/Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1968), 25.
 30. On page 76 of *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (translated by Eric Prenowitz [Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), having quoted Yosef Yerushalmi’s statement in his *Zakhor*: “Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people,” Jacques Derrida asks: “How can one not tremble in front of such a statement?” Why and how does Derrida implicitly presume that Yerushalmi did not tremble while writing such a statement? I have trembled while writing many an idea in my books, most recently the exigency of the slaughter of the pilgrims by Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī’s Qarmaṭīs. I have enough respect for Derrida to know that he must have trembled while writing a number of his statements. Even more disturbing is trembling Derrida’s response to that statement: “Unless, in the logic of this election, one were to call by the *unique* name of Israel all the places and all the peoples who would be ready to recognize themselves in this anticipation and in this injunction . . .” (p. 77). What a disconcerting solution from Derrida in a book that invokes Yerushalmi, the author of *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto; Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (Columbia University Press, 1971), a book that dwells on the forced mass conversion of the Jews of Portugal! Such a response does not make me tremble—the deaths of over 576,000 Iraqi children as a result of the US-imposed UN sanctions does. But this rhetorical and quasi-performative conversion forced on some other presently existing, or yet to exist peoples certainly

induces in me the queasy sense of a threat (my qualification of the performativity of that Derridean gesture is due to the circumstance that the question of who has the right to convert is currently a quite contentious issue for Jewry, many Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews vehemently contesting the legitimacy of conversions performed by Conservative and Reform rabbis, indeed demanding that the [then] Israeli government of Netanyahu enact this illegitimacy and promulgate it). Unfortunately, such a kind of statement is not exceptional among a number of otherwise admirable contemporary French philosophers. In his book *Heidegger and the "jews"*, Lyotard writes that he is using "jews" to indicate that he is not writing only about the Jews, but about those hostage to an unconscious affection. I could respond: why not use "shi'ites"—except the logic and structure of these quotation marks, of designating by the unique name of one people other peoples, is loathsome to me even when it does not, as is virtually always the case, quickly degenerate, despite qualifications and disclaimers, into either a restriction of the ones who would be designated with the quotation marks to solely those who are usually designated without such marks: when Lyotard lists three pairs of "jews" and Christians, all the former turn out to be Jews: Kafka, Benjamin, Celan; or entailing some sort of conversion.

31. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Man Who Would Be Messiah*, foreword by Elie Wiesel (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988).
32. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 278.
33. Is enlightenment communal as in messianism (the Nizārī communities during the Great Resurrection, etc.), or individual as in Sufism? I feel it is neither, but universal, affecting not only all humans but all sentient beings, as in Mahāyāna [Great Vehicle] Buddhism.
34. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 121-123.
35. See "The Configuration of the Temple of the Ka'bah as the Secret of the Spiritual Life," in Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. Philip Sherrard, with the assistance of Liadain Sherrard

(London: Kegan Paul International, 1986).

36. Contemporaneous with this sacking of the Ka'bah that is to be understood as an act revealing the withdrawal of its holiness past a surpassing disaster, there is the rhetoric of Sufi internalization in Ḥallāj's insistence that the Ka'ba is in the heart of the believer. Ḥallāj was accused of being a Qarmaṭī, or at least of having Qarmaṭī affinities; if such an accusation was legitimate, then his view that to perform the pilgrimage incumbent upon Moslems one did not have to actually travel to Mecca in West Arabia, but could do it in the locale in which one happened to be, would not be a consequence of an internalization and spiritualization of the exoteric pilgrimage, but a response to the withdrawal of the holiness of the Ka'ba, until then the *axis mundi*.
37. Anyone who has not protested vehemently against the barbaric sanctions imposed on Iraq, the land where three great Semitic civilizations have flourished: the Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Arabic; and who either fails to protest, condones or even encourages the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians, who are Arabs, and therefore Semitic, brandishing the accusation of anti-Semitism only when Jews are being unjustly attacked, is a hypocrite. If one does not protest the former acts of injustice as anti-Semitic but only the latter, one should by now, half a century after the Shoah, use the term *anti-Jewish*. The Anti-Defamation League, the self-proclaimed "world's leading organization fighting anti-Semitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry," is actually one of its loci since it never considers that there is an anti-Semitic attack when Arabs are slandered and discriminated against in the US, France, or Israel. Indeed since one of the main loci of anti-Arab bigotry is Israel, the latter is one of the major anti-Semitic countries.
38. See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).
39. The ushering of the Greater Occultation at that time cannot be fully explained just by the sociological, historical, political, and economic conditions that were prevalent then and that made the continuation of the Lesser Occultation quite problematic: conflicts were beginning to arise among the various claimants to the deputyship, partly over disposing of the fifth of the Shi'ite's

earnings due to the imām; the expiration of the optimal human life-span of seventy-five years since the purported birth date of the imām ...

40. Nietzsche: “*This, too, is worthy of a hero.*—Here is a hero who has done nothing but shake the tree as soon as the fruit was ripe. Do you think this too little? Then take a look at the tree he shook.”
41. Regarding the appearance of a messianic figure in a generation from which all evil has been abolished, see the section “*You Said ‘Stay,’ So I Stayed*” in my book *Forthcoming*.
42. See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 41 and 53.
43. See “Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism,” in Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983).
44. See *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel*, selected and edited by Irving Abrahamson (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985), vol. II, 171-218, and vol. III, 139-143; Elie Wiesel, *A Jew Today*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Random House, 1978), 33-39 and 101-113; Elie Wiesel and Philippe-Michael de Saint-Cheron, *Evil and Exile*, trans. Jon Rothschild (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 137-150. My apology to the reader for exposing him or her to such poisonous material, and my apology to my book for dirtying it with such references. Does anyone who has even the barest clue as to what a brutal, unjust phenomenon any war quickly becomes have to get acquainted with the disclosures about massacres perpetuated by Israeli soldiers on Egyptian and Syrian war prisoners (See Ronal Fisher, “Mass Murder in the 1956 Sinai War,” *Maariv*, August 8, 1995; and Gabby Bron, “Egyptian POWs Ordered to Dig Graves, Then Shot by Israeli Army,” *Yedi’ot Aharonot*, August 17, 1995. Both pieces were translated in the October 1995 edition of Israel Shahak’s *From the Hebrew Press* and reprinted in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 99 [Spring 1996]: 148-155) to feel incredible revulsion at lines such as these: “During the Six-Day War the Jewish fighters did not become cruel [how does Wiesel, who moreover was living then in the USA, know that? But one should not be surprised by such a statement from someone who assumes the role of ‘the emissary of the dead,’ talking in their name(s)]. They became sad ... And if I feel something towards them, the child-soldiers in Israel, it is profound respect” (*Against Silence*, 195)? I hold

the one who said these words, a Nobel Peace Laureate (!), to be ethically an accomplice in any crimes perpetrated by Israeli soldiers during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (including in this atrocity if it is confirmed: “National Infrastructures Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer of Labor may be joining the long list of political officials currently under investigation, following a claim that the reconnaissance unit he commanded during the Six Day War killed 250 prisoners of war.... Last week, Channel 1 aired *Ruah Shaked* [The Spirit of Shaked], a documentary compiled by journalist Ran Edilist. It claimed that Ben-Eliezer’s unit killed 250 unarmed Egyptian prisoners of war in the Sinai desert after the fighting had stopped.... Former education minister Yossi Sarid told Egypt’s *Al-Ahram* that ... he had not seen the documentary, but that he was aware that Israeli forces had committed such acts” [“Egypt Wants Probe into ‘IDF massacre,’” *Jerusalem Post*, March 3, 2007]). “Do you think that there is a single Israeli soldier who enjoys what he’s doing? I am ready to swear on the Torah that not a single soldier is acting with joy or pleasure. But that is forgotten” (quoted on page 145 of *Evil and Exile* from an address by Wiesel to the Rashi Center, Paris)—no, what is forgotten is that no war, at least no modern war, has not tainted at least some soldiers, certainly among the victors, with *jouissance*. Had the aforementioned words come from a decent Frankist or Dönme adherent, people who have sensed and acknowledged the withdrawal of the Torah (of *beriah*), I would appreciate their irony. In any case, I infinitely prefer the attitude of detachment of the Samurais and of the sword masters of Japan, and the karma-yoga, the yoga of action, that lord Krishna teaches his disciple Arjuna (*Bhagavad-Gita*), to sadness. [Updated footnote.]

45. See pages 43-47 of the present book.
46. Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), 16.
47. Ibid.
48. Elie Wiesel, *The Fifth Son*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Summit Books, 1985), 142.
49. Unless this monument acknowledging and presenting the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster has resurrected and made available again such information, it was a mistake on the part of Gerz to have accepted the publication of a book that makes

available the names chiseled on the underside of the stones: 2146 *Steine Mahmal Gegen Rassismus Saarbrücken* (Verlag Gerd Hatje).

50. I have the feeling that although in all likelihood they despised horror films, Duras as well as the Tarkovsky of *The Sacrifice* would have nonetheless been impressed by the mirror device in vampire films, the undead not reflected in the mirror.
51. The library's design dates from 1975.
52. In the first edition of *Over-Sensitivity*, I used the term *eruption* to describe the sudden appearance of unworldly entities in radical closures. I now prefer and use the term *irruption* since eruption, if considered not in the sense I wanted, as an indicator of tone, namely the breaking out of a rash on the world, but as a violent or sudden release of some pressure, could easily be misunderstood in terms of a return of the repressed.
53. Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 103.
54. Certainly in the voluminous work of Boltanski, the out-of-focus in some other instances reproduces a stereotyped image of the dead as revenant (some of the photographs of the series *Detective*); in yet other instances, it is simply formal.
55. Does the "You have seen nothing in Hiroshima" automatically include the non-Japanese film spectator? No. In principle, most film spectators are not included in such a statement.
- *. The author must be referring to the deservedly forgotten plethora of 1990s books, mostly anthologies, with the title "Negotiating —" [the note was added by some future editor of this book].
56. Quoted in Godard's *New Wave*. Some women might feel oversensitive to and wary of such formulation. I have no patience for a reflex reversal, or any other abstract reaction; what I can appreciate is some reformulation from a concrete filmmaker, for example, Nina Menkes or (disregarding her inane *A Couch in New York*, 1996) Chantal Akerman.
57. This is clear also in the case of a radical closure and the structural eventual irruption of fully-formed ahistorical entities in it: the radical closure is all, but, as is made manifest by the irruption of unworldly entities, that all is not all.
58. Past some surpassing disaster that caused the withdrawal of *Don Quixote*, it is not the ninth, the twenty-second and the thirty-

eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* that are written by the Menard of Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*" that are counterfeit, but rather Cervantes' book.

59. Walid Raad, "*Bidāyāt 'ajā'ibiyya—miswadda* (Miraculous Beginnings—A Draft)," trans. Tūnī Shakar, *Al-Ādāb* (January-February 2001): 64-67. The document in question appears on page 65.
60. Walid Raad, "Miraculous Beginnings," *Public*, no. 16 (1998): 44-53.
61. Is the role of art to reestablish the search for truth in the aftermath of wars, with their many falsifications and distortions? Is it on the contrary to insinuate and extend the suspicion to reality itself? Would the aforementioned Raad works be ones that extend the problematization and suspicion not only to the discourses and behavior of politicians but also to reality?
62. So can the video *Hoŝtage: the Bachar Tapes (English Version)*, 2000, produced by Walid Raad and whose purported director is the hostage Bachar Souheil notwithstanding that historically there was no hostage by that name.
Is it at all strange that the director of the radical closure film *The Birds* (1963) should conceive the following scene for *North by Northwest* (1959)? "Hitchcock: 'Have you ever seen an assembly line?' Truffaut: 'No, I never have.' 'They're absolutely fantastic. Anyway, I wanted to have a long dialogue scene between Cary Grant and one of the factory workers as they walk along the assembly line. They might, for instance, be talking about one of the foremen. Behind them a car is being assembled, piece by piece. Finally, the car they've seen being put together from a simple nut and bolt is complete, with gas and oil, and all ready to drive off the assembly line. The two men look at it and say, "Isn't it wonderful!" Then they open the door to the car and out drops a corpse!' 'That's a great idea!' 'Where has the body come from? Not from the car, obviously, since they've seen it start at zero! The corpse falls out of nowhere, you see! ...' 'That's a perfect example of absolute nothingness! Why did you drop the idea? ...' '... We couldn't integrate the idea into the story'" (François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott, rev. ed. [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984], 256-257). In radical closure films such as *The Birds*, the

Hitchcockian suspense is abrogated—the first, abrupt attack of a bird breaks with the principle of alerting the spectator to the dangerous element—and we switch to surprise (and then, past the first irruption, to free-floating anxiety). The haunting quality of Toba Khedoori’s *Untitled (Doors)*, 1995, and *Untitled (Apartment Building)* does not emanate from some possible presence of lurking people behind the rows of closed windows and doors, but from the eventuality of untimely irruptions. Consequently, despite the resemblance between her *Untitled (Apartment Building)*, 1997, and Hopper’s *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, there is a fundamental difference between these two paintings, since Hopper’s space is not a radical closure. Sooner or later (better later, when he or she has become adept at impressing on us the difference between a relative closure and a radical one), a radical closure artist paints or produces prisons or prison-like structures (the prison of Robbe-Grillet’s *Topology of a Phantom City*, of Magritte’s *Universal Gravitation*, of Khedoori’s *Untitled [Chain Link Fence]*), but the radical closure is elsewhere: the blank of Khedoori’s *Untitled (Auditorium)*. It is unsettling to see the museum guard walking in front of a radical closure painting such as Khedoori’s *Untitled (Park Benches)*, 1997, with its life-size benches, for such a painting gives the impression that the guard himself, supposed to prevent people from touching the painting, could irrupt in the latter (as happens to the museum spectator in the “Crows” section of Kurosawa’s *Dreams*). Because dogs guard against strangers, they are irrelevant in situations of radical closure: they cannot shield from the irruption of what does not come from the surrounding space and does not enter a house or other enclosure through an opening. If in works by radical closure filmmakers, dogs still appear, they fittingly do so in the manner of irruptions of unworldly barking sounds (Lynch’s *Loſt Highway*). At one point in Duras’ *The Man Sitting in the Corridor*, the till then extra-diegetic narrator tells the female protagonist, whose eyes are shut, that the man who was standing in the corridor is coming towards her: “We—she and I—hear footsteps ... I see and tell her, tell her he is coming” (Marguerite Duras, *The Man Sitting in the Corridor*, trans. Barbara Bray [New York: North Star Line, 1991], 19). Notwithstanding André Bazin’s proposition in 1951 that unlike in theater, with its flesh-and-blood actors, there is

no presence in cinema, these irruptions introduce a presence in that medium: the women who irrupt in the final few minutes of Duras’ *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta* can be viewed as the fictional characters Anne Marie-Stretter and one of her party guests, but also as the actresses themselves. In Kubrick’s *The Shining*, before leaving the hotel on his yearly winter leave sometime in the 1970s, the psychic cook told the psychic child of the middle-aged Jack Torrance that he should not worry about the visions he might see in the Overlook Hotel, for they are like pictures in a book: they cannot hurt him. But precisely with radical closures, there is intermixing of world and media, and therefore what is inside a picture can intermingle with what is outside it, and vice versa. Did the child’s father end up becoming one of these, a picture in a book: the photograph with the inscription “Overlook Hotel, July 4th Ball, 1921” in which he appears as a middle-aged man?

63. See Walīd al-Khālidī, *Kay lā nansá: qurá Filasṭīn al-lati dammarathā Isrā’īl sanat 1948 wa-asmā’ shuhadā’ihā (All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948)*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1998).
64. Alongside the irruption of ahistorical fully-formed unworldly entities in the radical closure that the 1982 besieged West Beirut may have become (Walid Raad’s *Miraculous Beginnings*, 1998 and 2001, *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs*, 1996-1999, and *Hoſtage: the Bachar Tapes [English Version]*, 2000); the withdrawal of tradition past the surpassing disaster that Lebanon may have become during and even after the 1975-1990 war (my *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*, 1995; Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige’s *Wonder Beirut*, 1999); tracking shots from a moving car that are not followed by reverse subjective shots and therefore do not indicate vision but the condition of possibility of recollection in Beirut (Ghassan Salhab’s *Phantom Beirut*, 1998); the fourth most important aesthetic issue and strategy in relation to Lebanon is that of the archeological image, a subject already addressed by Gilles Deleuze regarding Straub-Huillet’s work (with the break in the sensory-motor link “the visual image becomes *archaeological, stratigraphic, tectonic*. Not that we are taken back to prehistory [there is an archaeology

of the present], but to the deserted layers of our time which bury our own phantoms ... they are again essentially the empty and lacunary stratigraphic landscapes of Straub, where the ... earth stands for what is buried in it: the cave in *Othon* where the resistance fighters had their weapons, the marble quarries and the Italian countryside where civil populations were massacred in *Fortini Cani* ..." [Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 244]); Serge Daney in relation to Palestine ("As for the missing image, it is, still in *L'Olivier*, when Marius Schattner explains in a very soft voice that beneath the Israeli colony [which we see] there is, buried, covered over, a Palestinian village [which we don't see]. I also remember this because we are among the few, at *Cahiers du cinéma*, to have always known that the love of cinema is also to know what to do with images that *are really missing*" [Serge Daney, "Before and After the Image," trans. Melissa McMuhan, *Discourse* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 190]); and myself, mainly in *Over-Sensitivity's* section "Voice-over-witness" in relation to the Shoah. Clearly, the issue and aesthetic of the archeological image belongs to any of the zones that have suffered massacres and mass graves: Lebanon, Rwanda, Cambodia, Srebrenica, etc. Do we witness an archeology of the image in those sections of Danielle Arbid's *Alone with War* (2000) where she goes to the Šabrā and Šhātīlā Palestinian refugee camps and to the Christian town ad-Dāmūr, the sites of massacres and mass graves in 1982 and 1976 respectively, asking playing Palestinian children whether they have come across anything arresting while digging in their makeshift playground? Regrettably, the possibility of an archeological image is somewhat botched because what we hear in relation to these images is not a voice-over-witness, but journalist Arbid's commenting voice-over. It is therefore better to look for this archaeology of the image in Paola Yacoub and Michel Lasserre's *Al-Manāzīr* (The landscapes), 2001, where at the corner of some of the photographs of the green landscapes of south Lebanon one can read the inconspicuous terse factual information about Israel's invasion; and where one can hear the disincarnated voice of the stretcher-bearers ascend from this archeological earth to relate work anecdotes and describe life during the long Israeli

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

65. On stopping the world, see Carlos Castaneda's *Journey to Ixtlan: the Lessons of Don Juan*.

Visual Notes



How to Read an Image Paŕt a Surpassing Disaster? 1



Detail of image on facing page



How to Read an Image Past a Surpassing Disaster? 2



Detail of image on facing page



How to Read an Image Pašt a Surpassing Disaster? 3



How to Read an Image Pašt a Surpassing Disaster? 4



How to Read an Image Pašt a Surpassing Disaster? 5



How to Read an Image Pašt a Surpassing Disašter? 6



Jalal Toufic is a thinker, writer, and artist. He is the author of *DiStracted* (1991; 2nd ed., 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), *'Āshūrā': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), and *Undeserving Lebanon* (2007). His videos and mixed-media works have been presented in such venues as Artists Space, New York; The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel; and the 16th International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA) in a "Focus Jalal Toufic" program. He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, and the University of Southern California, and he currently teaches at Kadir Has University in Istanbul.

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