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Title: Catastrophic Subjectivity: Representing Lebanon's Living Dead

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Abstract (99 words): Engaging with several artists and filmmakers working in Lebanon's postwar period and the way they use experimental media in order to envision the experience of social catastrophe. Advancing the idea of a withdrawn subjectivity, likened to a state of "undeath," these projects accentuate the gap between sign and signified in order to mediate the phantoms of war without necessarily rendering them visible. Like vampires, the phantoms of Lebanon's wars bear no reflection and they cannot be imaged directly. This paper asks if the representation of monstrous specters can elucidate the invisible, unsayable, and unrepresentable under conditions of "official amnesia"?

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CATASTROPHIC SUBJECTIVITY: REPRESENTING LEBANON'S LIVING DEAD
Mark R. Westmoreland

People are asleep, and when they die, they awake.
-- Prophet Muhammad

I don't have a homeland to say I live in exile...
I live in postmortem... daily life, daily death.
-- Elia Suleiman

On the one hand, this invitation to meet the corpse should not be mistaken for a call to embrace materiality, a return to hard facts and familiar corporeality. For a corpse is precisely that which sheds its own name, becomes unfamiliar. Unnamable, the corpse is unrecognizable and yet tangibly available. On the other hand, it would be equally mistaken to consider the work an invitation to side with a subversive historical narrative written from the point of view of the defeated. Rather, a corpse is governed by a downward-spiraling dialectic coursing endlessly toward ruination; it is incapable of safeguarding a memory.
-- Walid Sadek

INTRODUCTION

Many contemporary Lebanese artists and filmmakers subversively engage the documentary genre in an effort to disrupt the expectations of official and objective "truth telling." This body of experimental documentary provides a critical historiography of Lebanon's recent past, particularly in regards to the country's fifteen-year civil war. The intent is not to replace one 'false' history with another 'true' one, but to go against the grain of sanctioned forgetfulness, commonly referred to as "official amnesia." This cadre of experimentalists, who dominate the public culture of art, documentary, and cinema, have engendered a mission to challenge the dominant political and social discourses implicated by the Lebanese wars.[1] In a manner of speaking, this particular constellation of artists has kidnapped the historical record in an act of urgent sabotage. This provides a distinctly different approach to the spectacular and sensational reporting provided by Western media. Critical of naturalized notions of cultural predispositions toward violence, this work embeds everyday anxieties within historical and political contexts, which have been inscribed with temporal and spatial catastrophe (Chakar 2006). Indeed, much of the Lebanese experimental documentary produced during the last decade explores the everyday violence that permeates the

social landscape and perpetuates a tyranny of uncertainty about the future. This mode of critique is all the more significant considering its emergence during Lebanon's so-called "postwar era," which has been rendered oxymoronic in the return of widespread bloodshed during recent years. Although not explicitly prophetic, the themes of unresolved trauma prefigure the political turmoil that has been unfolding since the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the 2006 Israeli invasion intended, albeit unsuccessfully, to dismantle Hezbollah's military apparatus.

I should note that although I continue to use the term "postwar" – sometimes in quotes or parentheses for emphasis – I remain suspicious and antagonistic to the falsely forwarded premise that postwar means the end of violence. I retain this terminology precisely for its contentious ramifications, contradictory claims, and tired insufficiencies. Thus, my use of "post" is always issued as a critical prefix. When the Lebanese are celebrated as resourceful people, resilient in the face of despair, and playful despite bombardments, this "postwar" tendency forgets the draining depression, horrific hopelessness, and virtual violence that Lebanese resilience must endure on a daily routine. "Post" nevertheless engenders a periodization by marking moments of significant transition. Robert Fisk notes that the mythology of Lebanon's history is premised on a recurrent destiny of destruction and revival. North of Beirut at *Nahr al-Kelb*, (Dog River), "inscriptions, steles, cuniform reliefs and plaques" commemorate 2500 years of conquesting armies, from Nebuchadnezzar II to the British army in 1941 (1992:53). The Lebanese spirit of rejuvenation that is quick to say, "Beirut will rise again," fails to mention that by the same premise it will likely fall again, too. How does one write a history of recurrent violence? What are the connections between the historical discourses and the mundane lived experience of those who witness the demise of their social fabric? Can mimetic media resurrect the martyrs of the Lebanese wars? And can the representation of monstrous specters elucidate the invisible, unsayable, and unrepresentable of postwar subjectivity? By way of answer, this article examines the types of mediated subjectivities engendered by these experimental historiographies of unresolved trauma.

LATENT PYROMANIACS

Abdallah Farah is an imaginary photographer whose career begins during Lebanon's so-called 'Golden Age' and extends into the recent postwar period. A creation of Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige in their *Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer* installation series (1998-2006), audiences learn that Abdallah Farah began working in his father's photography studio in the mid-1960s. Located in downtown Beirut, Studio Wahad received an order from the Lebanese Tourism Agency to produce three-dozen images of Beirut for the official calendar and a series of postcards. These photographs were meant "to reveal the most beautiful tourist sites in Beirut" (Hadjithomas and Joreige n.d.). In this case, the most beautiful sites are deemed to be the cinemas, souks, hotels, avenues, beaches, and banking district. In other words, "the city's modernity, its diversity and its richness" provide an iconography of photographic idealism (Hadjithomas and Joreige n.d.). We are told that these same postcards can be found for sale today, "despite the fact that majority of the sites they represent were destroyed by armed conflicts and the Lebanese wars," thus implicating a postwar nostalgia for a bygone era (Chouteau 2006).

In the 1960s, the Lebanese Riviera had become a globalizing site of exchange through petroleum, finance, and leisure, described by Khalaf as "a nation of services [and] middlemen" (2001:307). Inheriting the hybrid sensibilities of a colonized nation, plus the amalgamated identity of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish confessions, a modernizing and mediating Lebanon could accommodate both Arab customs and European exoticism. Often remembered as the "Paris of the Middle East" amid the "Switzerland of the Orient," Beirut's cosmopolitan history is deeply entangled in a decadent and violent past that precedes the "civil war" and implicates the duplicity of an 'other' Paris existing in ruins. Although the bikini clad tourists and multicultural modernity of these images highlight an ideal Lebanon, this "prewar" period already bears the markings of a contrary political climate. In the wake of the 1967 "six-day war" between Israel and several surrounding Arab states (not including Lebanon), in which Israel occupied Gaza, the Sinai, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, political violence loomed large on the southern frontier. Sarah Rogers points out that in 1968, "the Israeli Army destroyed thirteen planes of Middle East Airlines (the Lebanese civilian

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airline) as they sat on the tarmac in retaliation for the activities of Palestinian commandos operating on the border" (2007:12).

As for Studio Wahed, we are told that a fire destroyed it after the civil war broke out in 1975. However, Abdallah did succeed in rescuing some of his negatives and hundreds of virgin film rolls, unshot and unexposed. "For an unexplained reason," Hadjithomas and Joreige explain, "Farah kept quiet about embarking on a new venture. Three years after the start of the war, and a few months after his father's death, he began to damage his postcard negatives ... as if seeking a way to have their states conform to his present" (Hadjithomas and Joreige n.d.). On these images of Beirut, Farah would trace the destruction of the city by methodically burning the negatives "in accordance with the street battles and bombardments which were then in progress" (Chouteau 2006). Farah's act of "burning" the negatives (systematic exposure) corresponds to the "burning" of the city. As described by Rogers, "The boils incurred on the surface of the photographs are at once symptomatic of the tensions underlying the city's image of modernity and parasitic of such representational coherency" (2007:13). Furthermore, by burning the image it takes on textured qualities that ground the representation in its materiality and evoke an affective ephemerality, in which the image becomes stuck in the representational gap, neither allowed to stand for what it indexes, nor be fully available in its object form. This is further manifested in the way Hadjithomas and Joreige reproduce and distribute these altered postcards for sale at their exhibitions.

Chouteau remarks that the narrative about Farah's photographic experiments provides a coherency to the visual fragments. She says, "this commentary confers a documentary status upon the images," which in turn supports the believability of this "reasoned fiction" (Chouteau 2006). Hadjithomas and Joreige expand the Farah narrative to examine the prospects of image-making under conditions of mass civil violence. Farah remains largely confined to his house through the war. Using the virgin film rolls salvaged from Studio Wahad, Farah takes photos of his neighbors and neighborhood. Without the lab chemicals, Farah's photos remained undeveloped, waiting for a safer day to be printed. After the war he kept this habit, feeling satisfied just to shoot the photos; well, that is almost satisfied. Without a need to see these images again (as he did see them once

when shooting), "He nonetheless precisely documents each photograph he takes in a small notebook, describing it thoroughly, ... [but] leaving an immense space for the imagination" (Hadjithomas and Joreige n.d.). Cited on their website, Pierre Ménard speaks admiringly of Farah's work, as if he were a real artist, as "a subterranean body of work, endlessly heroic, unequaled and, certainly, perpetually unaccomplished, a sublime attempt to capture each passing minute ..." Farah calls this work the "invisible image" or the "image in the text," but, for Hadjithomas and Joreige, they see it as a latent image.

Hadjithomas and Joreige provide this definition: "Latency is the state of what exists in a non-apparent manner, but which can manifest itself at any given moment. ... Latency is the introduction to the possible, to the state of becoming" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:40). In photography, a latent image is literally an image on an exposed film or print that has not yet been made visible by developing, so a "fundamental question remains" about "the revelation of these images." Hadjithomas and Joreige ask, "At what moment, and to what purpose, would Abdallah Farah choose to develop his films...?" (Hadjithomas and Joreige n.d.). Remarking on the fastidious notation by which Farah documents his unexposed images, Jalal Toufic considers this "a contribution to the resurrection of what has been withdrawn by the disaster" (2006). Chouteau identifies this latent image, with force enough "to transform violence into critical freedom," as an "incarnate image." She says (2006),

> To incarnate is not to imitate, reproduce or simulate. The image is fundamentally unreal. To incarnate is to give flesh, not to give body. The image which gives body, which incorporates, is that which includes the other, without leaving the other space for thought. The incarnate image, however, contains three entities that are indispensable to each other: the visible, the invisible, and the gaze, which brings them into relation.

MEDIATED SUBJECTIVITY

These 'postwar' (or post-orientalist) aesthetics[2] not only foster an awareness of constructedness, but also an affective experience of embodying the dislocation between the historical record and the sites of memory's acquisition. The contemporaneity, virtuality, and

psychological qualities of this imaginary archival record suspend subjectivity within a mist of pixels and particles. This mediated suspension focalizes a viewer's perspective, not in the world of car bombs, snapshots, and assassinations, but within a world of photography, filmmaking, and archival research – an imaginary world of documentary acquisition as the site of interpretation where history becomes fact. By giving attention to the medium rather than the representation, the archive and the historical record become the site of experimental historiography. This does not imply a corrective or a mission of telling the actual "truth" of political violence. Instead, it endeavors to disenchant viewers' expectations about how to understand history and reenchant them with a way of mourning the present.

As this article attempts to elucidate a mediated subjectivity that exists in chronological and geographical dislocation, it is important to consider how the rupture of time and place engenders an experience of exile within one's own nation. The subsequent longing for "home" typically becomes contingent on an idealized nostalgia for the past, but it can also articulate the imagination of impossible futures. While experimental Lebanese documentary endeavors to critique the representational frameworks inherited by rational modes of objectivity, it also engenders new modalities for documenting the dislocation of Lebanon. Whether in exile or in residence, Lebanon exists as much as an idea, or an imaginary image, as it does in bodies, buildings, rubble, and dirt. So the creativity of these impossible narratives endeavors to rethink the relationship between the imaginary and the physical.

In the case of the pyromaniac photographer, Abdallah Farah, these representational moments exist in the time of an unstable archive rather than the time of the historical event. The archival object, displayed with annotation, asserts its authority as evidence, but the fictive narration accompanying the visual representation gives it a subversive pulse. Like other fictive characters concocted in the Lebanese art world, Abdallah Farah's archival "documents" narrate and show an observational subjectivity, one obsessed with looking. This self-reflexive dimension implicates the production of historical content as culturally constructed instead of as a 'real' thing. If this were merely a critique of representational veracity, then many other examples could be given

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from other contexts. Instead, we must also consider the way that these 'false' elements have the potential to reveal something taken for granted.

By affectively implicating the viewer in the contemporaneity of the media object rather than the indexical representation (i.e., a photograph or film negative rather than the image it bears), the viewer is drawn into the subject position of the author rather than into the contemporaneity of the historical moment. For in any documentary image, the immutable realness of the mimetic artifact hides an invisible author somewhere behind the lens. In another time, this image appeared for the first time in a viewfinder of a camera. So to put one's face in the "same" image, to look through the screen, maintains the traces of the face behind the camera. This secondary viewing can evoke the gap between the witness and the document, a position exemplified by the archivist endeavoring to make sense of a fleeting moment recorded in the blink of a camera shutter. By giving attention to the archive of images shifts the authorial perspective from photographer to collector. In between these subject positions exists a liminal space where the differences between documented and undocumented remain undetermined. By subverting the promise of realism, this image also engenders an intersubjective experience of dislocation. The (absent) presence of these authors invites the viewer to witness an imaginary world where the disappeared can be mediated, but not necessarily imaged or rendered visible.

Like vampires, the phantoms of Lebanon's wars bear no reflection and they cannot be imaged directly. Indeed, the concept of mortality has emerged as an imperative issue in Lebanese experimental documentary and narrative film and video. For instance, Jalal Toufic's notion of the "undead," developed around his reading of vampire cinema, has taken literal formation in Ghassan Salhab's *The Last Man / Atlal* (2006), in which a city coroner is mysteriously linked to a series of nocturnal murders. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige have together written and produced films, videos, and installations around the concept of "latency," evocative of an absent presence in both undeveloped film and postwar subjectivity. As these works will be discussed later in the article, suffice it to say that each articulates an important understanding of the interface between subjectivity and mediation of postwar experience.

In his evaluation of the "death of the subject," Heartfield asks, "What if the free subjectivity at the core of our social order is all used up?" (2006:10). In the context of western literature, he implies that "we" have exhausted our narratives. And even in "our" poaching from other cultures, we appropriate difference into our tired ossified structures of telling and feeling. If the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the literary heroic human subject, then Heartfield declares its marginality and erasure in the twentieth century. This trend flows the opposite direction of documentary films, in which Renov notes the increasing prevalence of autobiographical documentaries as an assertion of subjectivity (2004). This disparity makes one wonder if we are witnessing the transference of subjectivity from a primarily written medium to a primarily visual medium.

Accordingly, this article traces the mediation of latent subject positions in the work of several Lebanese artists and filmmakers. This intervention aims to reconsider the significance of postwar experimental media as a site for the incarnation of monstrous subjectivities. In other words, I will try to harness my assertion of 'postwar' aesthetics and its emphasis on remediation in order to assert an "invisible" postwar subjectivity. The phantom subjectivity of Hadjithomas and Joreige's latent themes, Ghassan Salhab's nocturnal world, and Jalal Toufic's ruinous anytime all mark a withdrawn subjectivity – both present and absent – embedded in the mediated object but never fully available.

PERFECT DAY

In Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's second feature film, *The Perfect Day / Yawmon akhar* (2005), the members of a Lebanese family exist in a state of latency. Malek is a handsome, young professional with a sleeping disorder. Whenever he stops moving, Malek instantly falls asleep. He must then stay distracted in order to not fall into a latent state of slumbering. Through the film, Malek is trying to contact his ex-girlfriend in a desperate desire for one "perfect day," but his nostalgia lulls him into sleep and she escapes as he slumbers. It is not slumber that distracts him in this case, but rather wakefulness. Although referencing the American film, *Groundhog Day* with

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Bill Murray, Toufic's notion of a "perfect day" elucidates an anti-nostalgic temporality – "The perfect does not induce nostalgia" (2000:77). Toufic explains, "A man [sic] stuck in the same day tries to get released from it as it repeats itself a stupendous number of times, and he manages to do so only when at last he wills its eternal recurrence" (2000:76). In other words, the non-subject does not desire delivery from the mundane or the recurrence of trauma, but accepts the redundancy of limbo. In this sense, the perfect day for Malek is not finally obtaining some impossible future with his girlfriend, but rather the acceptance of her immanent departure. For Malek, willing the eternal return of the same day would also mean to relinquish his desire for being awake and instead to will the eternal return of the latent state of sleep. Indeed, we never know what sort of promises the ritual of sleep provides for him, however, it is important to note that Malek's distracted state also enables him to fleetingly forget the death-time of his father who disappeared during the war.

For Malek's mother, the perfect day is held at abeyance because she has not mourned her husband. She refuses to leave the house in case he might return. If mourning is the acceptance of loss, then to not mourn is a futile attempt to refuse the eternal return of trauma. This inevitable repetition only ends once the desire for this eternal loss is appropriated. But the distraction of Malek and his mother hint at a broader condition of postwar latency, a subjectivity that refuses the future because it has not accepted the past. But it is Malek's father, who disappeared years earlier, who (dis)embodies the state of latency as an absent presence. For he is one of 18,000 who disappeared during the war and who has not received "proper" burial. For this reason he is not of the dead, but of the undead, a state of latency that exists in "a diffused state, uncontrollable, underground, as if lurking, as if all could resurface anew" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:40).

The notion of the missing corpse plays central in Hadjithomas and Joreige's short film, *Ashes / Ramad* (2003), which depicts the struggles of Nabil (played by Rabih Mroué) to honor his father's cremation request, while also orchestrating a façade to appease his extended family's expectation to have an open casket viewing and burial. While poignantly presenting the struggle with social customs, *Ashes* evokes a powerful metaphor about the war's "disappeared" and society's inability to mourn without accounting for those missing corpses. This obsession with latency in Abdallah

Farah's photography, Malek's sleeping condition, and the war's missing corpses, stems from the fact that Khalil Joreige's uncle disappeared during the war. Neither he nor his body were ever recovered. "He is still reported missing; and, the circumstances of his disappearance remain a mystery" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:47). In 1995 a law was issued that defines the status of these disappeared people as "kidnapped," but after four years the family can petition to have the missing person declared deceased. Joreige points out, families in this situation face a difficult choice, "To declare someone dead without a trace, without the physical presence of a body, a corpse" (2002:47).

Khalil's sister, Lamia Joreige, has also explored this traumatic site. Her video, *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* (2003), probes the social memory of kidnappings during the civil war, by confronting people along the "green line" and probing their memories. Rather than an investigative journalism approach in search of the "true" story, Lamia's video reveals the multiplicity of reactions, not the least of which is refusing to remember. Furthermore, those who choose to remember and talk with her do not provide coherent accounts and her provocation confronts the "official amnesia" that has persisted during the "postwar" era.

Like Lamia's latent witness accounts, Khalil warns that with latency is a risk of loss [… where is the open quote?] it constitutes the hope of something that will be revealed; the confrontation with a real that can be potentially disappointing" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:47). He discusses the difficulty he faced when uncovering a latent 8mm film reel that his uncle had never developed. Khalil's uncle enjoyed amateur photography and filmmaking. This errant reel that lay dormant for fifteen years could contain his last images, however, Khalil pondered for a long time whether to develop it, knowing "that this 'latent' image may reveal nothing, causing a disappointment, which would be impossible to compensate" (2002:47). When he did decide to develop it, the film came out mostly blank, with a few shadowy images sometimes appearing. But like the mourning for the dead, latency presupposes "the acceptance of being revealed and the risk of loss" (2002:48). This acceptance means to live with one's ghosts and "to long for" them. Hadjithomas and Joreige say that by being haunted they "do not succumb to cynicism in the

acceptance of images and of realities in a continuous present" (2002:48). Instead, their work explores questions about the convergence of the self, the social body, and the individual body "in a communitarian society … where it is difficult to pose oneself as an individual … a singular subject" (2002:48).

MONSTROUS SUBJECTIVITY

The fragmentation of the singular subject stands in direct contradiction to the Liberal notion of subjectivity advanced by Hobbes and Locke, in which "individuals are viewed as naturally free, rational, and equal and are assumed to have an interest in their preservation, their liberty, and their property" (Mehta 1992). Under this framework, the pursuit of these interests requires "a superintending authority" to prevent a "*state of war*" (1992). Given these parameters, Lebanon would seem to lack the authority necessary to ensure the liberty, rationality, and equality of Lebanese subjectivity. Considering the integral importance of institutions and technologies to mold and transform "the individual with strange passions, with a frenzied imagination, with undisciplined and chaotic urges … to be rational and self-interested …" (1992:85); do we suppose "a state of war" would have the opposite affect, making unmolded and untransformed individuals. Or perhaps, instead it merely produces withdrawn, latent subjects.

In other words, liberalizing "institutions and technologies" are not capable of replacing the "strange" individual with a "rational" one, because this dualistic pairing at once assumes the exclusion of all others and confers onto subjects an either/or status established by a "superintending authority." To be sure, institutions and technologies may also mold and transform individuals in ways not deemed "rational and self-interested." In the absence of a superintending authority during a state of war, what promise do institutions and technologies offer? In an age marked by the disintegration of the state and the rational subject, the intensified globalizing flows of media, capital, ideologies, and weapons has pronounced effects on people, institutions, and authority. Under such conditions, the state of war is perpetually recurring even when not marked

as such. Under such conditions, the strange and violent exists along with the rational and self-interested.

In Lebanon's "postwar" era, several "institutions" have emerged as facilitators of Beirut's nascent bohemian culture. Largely dependent on funding from international foundations, the main contribution they provide is the creation of sites where the public can engage contemporary cultural production of Lebanese art, cinema, and scholarship. I participated and/or attended several festivals and events sponsored by these institutions during the fall of 2005, however, this article is more concerned with the "technology" used for mediating between contested publics and divergent subjectivities. In fact, the mediation of latent subjects must assume a new model of subjectivity that does not presuppose the existence of a superintending authority, but instead one that grapples more directly with the state of war that produces different types of subjectivities than articulated by liberal rationality. Importantly, this must be done without abandoning entire societies to predetermined behavioral clichés.

In the following pages, I address an endeavor to rework notions of subjectivity by destabilizing the notion of a Cartesian rational subject, which foregrounds Liberalism's structuring of citizenship. Resisting a philosophy that might be nostalgic for the lost subject, Rei Terada (2001) attempts to reclaim the self-divided subject as a norm. She assumes that there never were any subjects, that subjectivity in the rational self-knowing sense was a fiction. In American "cold war" culture, this fiction manifests as the perfect consumer, that is, as a zombie. In Steven Shaviro's reading of George Romero's "living dead" films, he explains, "The life-in-death of the zombie is a nearly perfect allegory for the inner logic of capitalism ... [c]apitalist expropriation involves a putting to death, and a subsequent extraction of movement and value – or simulated life – from the bowels of that death" (1993:84). The absence of emotion in the death-time of the zombie – "that we would have no emotions if we *were* subjects" (Terada 2001:4) – is contrasted by the emotional nonsubject. The Cartesian subject, in its rational wholeness, is a subject devoid of affective intensities, and the zombie is a consumer of intensities who even when attacked exhibits zero change in disposition, or as Terada (2001:156) puts it,

[T]he living dead emblematize postmodern subjectivity: everyone knows that if there's one thing dead subjects don't have, it's emotion. Actually things are the other way around. Romero's living dead are notably undivided about their desires … they are mere needs and compulsions … they are pure intentionality.

But let's not forget that there is a deep "evil" at work in the zombies' consumerist intentionality. The zombies with their pure intentionality are directional in only one direction at a time, whereas the non-subject as a "living system" is multi-directional, self-differential, and self-divided. "When critics literalize the 'death of the subject'" says Terada, "[t]he persistence of monstrous metaphors suggests that the non-subject the functional but self-differential being needs to be seen as someone else" (2001:154).

This parallels Hadjithomas and Joreige's acceptance of the repetition of loss and the latent risk of disappointment. This new subjectivity also relates to Jalal Toufic's work on the "undead," which should be differentiated from Romero's "living-dead." In a jab at the ivory tower, Toufic has said that he "has more affinities with the 'un-dead' and the vampires of cinema than with the 'living-dead' who populate much of academia" (Bensmaïa and Toufic 1998:15). Toufic's undead stand in stark contrast to "Romero's zombies [who] seem almost natural in a society in which the material comforts of the middle class coexist with repressive conformism, mind-numbing media manipulation, and the more blatant violence of poverty, sexism, racism, and militarism" (Shaviro 1993:83).

This state of distraction means that the zombie, with "no conscious knowledge of the history from whence they come, are unable to mourn past wars and are haunted by the images of the dead who they have outlived" (Chouteau 2006). Like Malek with the sleeping disorder, the zombies live nostalgically in ever-reoccurring "imperfect" days. In contrast, Terada evokes Philip K. Dick's treatment of "replicants" crying when one discovers she is not a human, which indicates that "destroying the illusion of subjectivity does not destroy emotion, that on the contrary, emotion is the sign of the absence of that illusion" (2001:156-57). In other words, zombies are non-feeling subjects, while those who have experience what Toufic calls a "surpassing disaster" are feeling non-subjects. As explained by Terada (2001:156),

Romero's zombies have no feelings *because they* are *subjects*. They do not represent the poststructuralist post-human; they represent the 'death of the subject' in the strongly genitive sense, the sense in which if there were subjects, they would have to be dead.

Since emotion is often experienced as an uncontrollable and unknowable eruption, as an irrational state, then the presence of emotion produces non-subjects as subjects do not have emotions. When we feel emotion we are strange to ourselves. The antithesis of the zombie is then the unmaking of the subject, what Deleuze and Guattari would call becoming a "body without organs." Brian Massumi suggests, "Think of the body without organs as the body outside any determinate state, poised for any action in its repertory; this is the body from the point of view of its potential, or virtuality" (1992:70). In an inorganic and undetermined state of becoming the nonsubject is an intensely feeling body without organs. And yet, when building a body without organs but full of virtuality, one must be cautious of self-destruction. As Massumi says, the process of becoming-other engenders "the madness of the imagination" (1992:108). Thus, Toufic's advancement of "undeath" ushers in unimaginable potentials – becoming a non-subject, becoming latent, becoming monstrous – then enables the resurrection of imaginary memories that may or may not have occurred in the past as a way to mourn the invisible and disappeared, if only by witnessing it askance. After all, the disappeared, the undead, can never be imaged directly.

The tracing of mediated subjectivity in experimental film and video reveals a withdrawn subjectivity, one enacted by the virtuality of the medium and suggestive of its ultimate absence. While I find these textual representations of subjectivity and non-subjectivity compelling and revealing of a broader social condition, I am not prepared to dispense with the notion of subjectivity. Whether in a monstrous or deathly state or mediated between documentary veracity and aesthetics, I follow the definition of "subjectivity" employed by anthropologists Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman. They describe subjectivity as, "the felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power" (1997:1). Furthermore, Das and Kleinman argue that the occurrence of state pathologies happening in the everyday requires a closer examination of the ordinary, as they ask, "Is the ordinary a site of the uneventful, or does it have the nature of something *recovered* in the face of terrible tragedies?" (1997:7). In order to

represent the ordinary, one must show that "nothing happens." If one can sustain this narrative of uneventfulness, then the entrancement of peripheral vision (looking askance) allows viewers to see the ghosts in the walls of ruinous catastrophe.

RUINS

Several filmmakers and video artists have endeavored to address the current state of post-war recovery and dire economic recession, which filmmaker Ghassan Salhab describes as a crevice: "Beirut *is* a crack," one in which daily life cannot escape from a perpetual present; the past is irretrievable, the future unavailable. Every moment contains the potential for "radical closure," which denies access to temporal escape for the victims of history. Toufic's concept of "radical closure" relates to the post-traumatic, postwar existence in Lebanon in which he grew up, before leaving with his mother and siblings during the 1982 Israeli invasion. Under such conditions, the disappeared face a radical closure if they are forgotten, so Toufic asserts, "the presentation of the withdrawal is an urgent task for the present" (2000:67). In other words, if the desire for preservation indicates that "tradition" is already withdrawn, then according to Toufic it is imperative to document the withdrawal rather than a nostalgic vision of tradition. Toufic's work on the threat of a radical closure of memory represents the "irruptions" of withdrawn entities as a declaration that "they are not party to their desertion by the rest of the world" (2000:98). Toufic prefers the term "irruption" instead of "eruption" in order "to described the sudden appearance of unworldly entities in radical closures," because the latter could be misunderstood as the breaking out of a rash or as a "return of the repressed" (2000:250 n.49). Toufic argues that in the threat of a radical closure of memory, characters more accurately "irrupt" inside the images even while remaining withdrawn (2000:69). The representation of withdrawn memory as an irruption in the image, in contrast, "does not do what memory otherwise often does: falsify, beautify, interpret; it does not even fool one into believing/feeling that the event happened an original time" (Toufic 1993:10). Rather, the irruption of unworldly entities in Lebanese experimental film and video puts the authenticity of the image in doubt. To show the images as inaccessible, would instead

acknowledge the impossible referentiality that results in the wake of a disastrous ordeal, what Toufic calls a "surpassing disaster."

For Toufic, the undead serve a critical purpose in the mediation of postwar society, they "come to prevent the world's desertion of those suffering a surpassing disaster from turning into a radical closure" (Toufic 2000:70). The undead, as a allegory for postwar subjectivity, builds its constitution in opposition to a particular fantasy about memory. This fantasy presents an imagined idea of how memory works without reliance on accuracy. Toufic writes, "To think and write about the dead as they were when still alive is already a forgetfulness of them—as undead" (2000:61). This is the presumption objective documentary theories make about evidence – that what is indexed is still available. This is why the mediation of the undead is of critical concern to the Lebanese documentary experimentalists, who are faced with representing the erased history and disappeared bodies. Toufic believes that artists who have experienced a "surpassing disaster" must acknowledge the "withdrawal of tradition" that occurs therein, that tradition "has effectively disappeared even in cases where it seems to have survived" (Colla 1998:308). The resurrection of the undead in films is not a preservationist compulsion, but a desire to acknowledge the passing of traditional subjectivity. He connects the withdrawal of the referent (not as real but as another image) to the withdrawal of "postwar" subjectivity, which as the result of witnessing a surpassing disaster has had tradition withdrawn. In circumstances where one has suffered a surpassing disaster, Toufic warns, "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 culture" (2000:75).

Sensitive to this eventuality, these experimentalist documentarians do not claim a "counterfeit cultural," that is as something "mis"-represented, as something "artificial," or "fictitious." These categories remain as "real" as facts, documents, and historical archives. In this regard, the undead, as non-subjectivity, enables Toufic to trace the process of depersonalization and disrupt the transmission of counterfeit culture. His use of vampires—the undead—is not reducible to mere "literalization." According to Colla (1998:315, n.8), Jalal Toufic ...

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would insist that he is not using a metaphor in describing the experience in that way since what has happened is an actual change in experience: a different state of mind has come into place, one which is not unlike how vampires would be if they existed or as (for Toufic) they do exist in the survivors of the [Lebanese] Civil War or other disasters.

The fragmented existence of postwar survival is a notion Toufic would consider oxymoronic. To experience an event as a surpassing disaster does not allow for escape. The notion of escaping with one's life means of course to experience one's ultimate death. Toufic sees communities as defined by the disasters they have survived. As Elliot Colla comments, "Toufic suggests paradoxically that the heart of community and culture is a recognition of loss. … it may appear that some people and objects actually survive a catastrophe. The fact is they do not, because what survives the catastrophe is no longer what was before the event" (1998:308).

Originally included in Toufic's dissertation-turned-book, *(Vampires) An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993), and reprinted a decade later (2003), his essay on "Ruins" has recurrently been reproduced in expanded form in various volumes on Lebanese experimental visual culture (Toufic 2002, 2006a, 2006b).[3] In this essay, we learn how Toufic and his family deserted their apartment when fleeing the war. Rather than physical destruction, Toufic says that the act of desertion constitutes a place ruinous. Neither its destruction nor its reconstruction affects its state of ruin. Ruins can be identified as "places haunted by the living who inhabit them," be they refugees or squatters inhabiting the damaged buildings or the vacant houses of dead owners (Toufic 2006a:8). As described by Hadjithomas and Joreige, ruins exist as both "[o]ccupied uninhabitable areas, and deserted habitable areas" (cited in Toufic 2006a:8). In contrast to the living haunting those ruins, the undead vampire does not inhabit the houses that he or she haunts, evidenced by his failure to appear in a mirror.

The "labyrinthine space-time" of these ruins, Toufic says, "undoes the date- and site-specific" (2006a:9). He recounts the story of a woman who visited downtown Beirut on an architectural tour just after the war. On hearing the names of streets and buildings, the decimated city scene could not accommodate the mental map created from memories her parents had told. After the tour she had difficulty recalling the destroyed city and it was only after several visits and

noticing the presence of refugees living in the buildings that "she really felt that the destroyed city center was the reality" (Toufic 2006a:10). Remarking on the massive reconstruction of Beirut's Central District and its prerequisite bulldozing of much of downtown, Toufic calls this destruction "sacrilegious because of the brutal unawareness it betrays of the different space and time ruins contain" (2006a:11). In fact, he suggests that this reconstruction exhibits the brutality of the war, "the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing" (2006a:11).

In these conditions threatened by radical closure, Toufic calls for a "relay between documentary and fiction" in order to address the withdrawal of a surpassing disaster. In settings that have experienced such a disaster, he warns, "fiction is too serious a matter to be left to 'imaginative' people" (2006a:13). The ghost or vampire is fiction, not because it is an imaginative creation, but because fiction provides the "main loci for his appearance." Toufic considers the absence of specters in the fiction of a postwar society to be a dangerous sign of collective amnesia. In Lebanon, Ghassan Salhab[1] provides the exception. Salhab's films explore the disaffected subjectivity of postwar Beirut haunted by phantoms, ghosts, and vampires. *Beyrouth fantôme / Ashbah Beyroot* (aka *Phantom Beirut; Ghosts of Beirut; Bring Back*, 1998) tells the story of Khalil's mysterious return after disappearing during the war. Presumed dead for ten years, his old friends sight Khalil (played by Aouni Kawas) at the airport, a master symbol of departure and return. But reoccurring sightings begin to enrage his friends who had stayed in Beirut to fight. When they confront him about the truth of his disappearance, his withdrawn emotional state provokes an intensified self-examination of their existentiality. Toufic's "vampire" subjectivity never reveals the violence of his or her emotions. While the nonsubject is intensely emotional, its affect is withdrawn and seemingly dispassionate. These undead entities have been rendered mute, and yet, their "invisible" presence is evoked in the image, revealing their withdrawn absent presence.

As this experimental thriller unfolds, Salhab intercuts interview segments with the cast commenting on the film's narrative, creating a multi-diegetic approach for reacting to the war.

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[1] Born in Senegal, Salhab moved to Lebanon in 1970, where he spent much of the war years.

These self-referential "documentary" moments bear witness to the experience of war and survival characterized by fleeting encounters with phantoms from the past and ever-present uncertainty about the future. In effect, we have stepped outside the story of Khalil and into the history of postwar Lebanon. Nearing the end of the film, "in a symptomatic structural mistake," Khalil is mistaken for someone else and kidnapped, which reveals him as a phantom of "objective chance" (Toufic 2006a:15, n.9). In other words, his return to the world of the living was a fluke; his fate had already been determined, so his abduction also serves as a rescue mission if it delivers him from the cycle of immortality.

Salhab again actualizes Toufic's vampiric vision in his latest feature, *The Last Man* or in Arabic *Atlal* (2006), meaning "ruins." Khalil Shams (Carlos Chahine) is a general physician participating in the autopsies of a recent rash of victims drained of their blood. As the movie slowly progresses, Khalil begins to link himself to the victims and suspects that he is responsible for their deaths. Khalil Shams, literally "the companion of the sun," is another ironic name for a character becoming a nocturnal vampire, who feels repulsed by the sun. Engulfed by the darkness of night, Salhab's film reveals a "concealed space that slowly swallows [Khalil Shams]" (Chakar 2007:71). Shams has entered a new world, in which he is withdrawn. Tony Chakar says that this world is "made of darkness, of quiet, of wet, of stillness, of loneliness, and of blood, lust, and hunger" (2007:71). Retreating from the light and the distracted people living in the sun, Chakar calls the vampire "a metaphor for the extreme isolation of individuals, and their perpetual fight to remain individuals …" (2007:71). Both Jalal Toufic and Aouni Kawas (the Khalil from *Beyrouth fantôme*) make cameo appearances. Toufic appears as a psychiatrist who Shams is consulting about his malaise. Kawas serves as the Lestat-figure (Anonymous 2006), i.e., the vampire responsible for Khalil's affliction. This intertextual film traverses catastrophic space and time and bears witness to the process of depersonalization in postwar Lebanon. Witnessing the process of becoming a nonsubject, a body without organs, reveals a double violence, first, in having to bear witness to an originary violence, and second, as withdrawn from the violence by the repetition of its

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representational occurrence. Acknowledging a lost space and time inhabited by the parasites of the underworld requires one to confront the deep violence invoked in the mourning for one's vampires.

The absence of citizenry in Lebanon, sectarian affiliations notwithstanding, is pervasive and multifaceted – from the 75 year-old census that has ossified the political demographics, to the half-million resident Palestinians refused citizenship and its attending rights, to the 150,000 deaths during the "civil" wars, to the 18,000 disappearances, to the detainment of prisoners without legal recourse, to the occupation by foreign armies, to the millions of Lebanese living in exile, to those assassinated by bombings, to those massacres of mass victimization. Faced with all these violent forms of disappearance Lebanese experimental documentary has endeavored to resurrect these latent bodies in order to break the official silence and collective amnesia that keeps the Lebanese distracted by nostalgia. The next section I stay with the work of Jalal Toufic, but move from his "fictional" articulation of postwar subjectivity to the realm of ritual withdrawal in order to argue for a *shaheed* subjectivity. Defined precisely, shaheed subjectivity implies a martyr who has "witnessed" a surpassing disaster and accepted the repetition of loss. This move attempts to ground the ephemerality of vampiric non-subjectivity back into the ordeal of the ordinary and establish the vitality of postwar mediation.

SHAHEED SUBJECTIVITY

The word used in Arabic for martyr is *shaheed*. My use of this term, on the one hand, is meant to disabuse the understanding of martyr in its universalist application that otherizes the orient and in its synonymous status as a *jihadi* terrorist. On the other hand, the usage is for precision of meaning. A martyr is one who dies for his/her cause, but a shaheed is a witness, one who bears witness. Of course, to witness the ultimate suffering could cost one his/her life, but even if not murdered in a massacre, the withdrawal of subjectivity for the witness is imminent. A living martyr has "witnessed" his or her own death as a surpassing disaster, but remains among the living as a withdrawn subject – a spokesperson for the dead. Since there is no language to describe the horror of touching bottom, a non-survivor can only experience it mediated. Through deep intimacy

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with withdrawn subjects, documentary experimentalists establish a fleeting bond between the undead and the viewer in an intersubjective space of witnessing personal and collective violence.

The "evil" of this violence requires that we do not given in to an urge to valorize the undead, rather the undead require both mourning and public trial. The undead spread their affliction throughout society, but the engineers of distraction banish this affliction to invisibility. These artists employ 'postwar' aesthetics of withdrawal and latency to engender representations of unacknowledged specters forcibly silenced by way of official discourses and the state apparatus. These subjectivities irrupt in Lebanese experimental film and video in ways that remark on the latent violence still invisibly walking the streets of Beirut. In other words, among the undead are militiamen whose amnesty has not provided them with redemption, but confines them to stalking the darkened avenues and government buildings. Based on the definitions provided of witnessing, the mass murderer and the militiaman are then the ultimate witnesses of suffering, able to kill and "live" to tell about it. But if the undead cannot name the dead by name, we must ask how can the guilty bear witness against himself or herself, what evidence does the murderous body provide besides a confession? This issue emerged in the controversial screening of *Massaker*, by featuring several Maronite Phalangist militiamen who recount the way they perpetrated the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila in 1982. For Toufic, *Massaker* also failed to acknowledge the withdrawal of these killers' affect. By showing them photographs of their victims, reveals a false expectation that the images will provoke an irruption. These men too are victims, the victims of lost innocence, fallen to sectarian distraction and desire for killing.

Instead, let's consider the representations of martyrdom made by jihadist groups before their suicidal missions. Performance artist Rabih Mroué and novelist Elias Khoury addressed this very issue in their video-performance entitled, *Three Posters* (2000). Mroué explains how the practice of videotaping martyr testimonials would be screened on the evening news after they had executed their missions. Because government-run Tele-Liban was the only operating TV station in Lebanon, the majority of Lebanese remember this as a singular element in the finality of this man's death. Mroué and Khoury attained the "uncut rushes" of a fourteen year-old testimony made by

Jamal El Sati, a combatant for the National Resistance Front in Lebanon. Disguised as a local sheikh, El Sati loaded a donkey with explosives and exploded it at the headquarters of the Israeli military governor in Hasbayya.

In the rushes of El Sati's martyr testimonial, he repeats his testimony three times, making slight changes in each attempted version. Although the differences between the versions may be inconsequential, his hesitation in the repetition of his rehearsal signals an awareness that the testimony had more significance than the actual mission, as a final statement of his manhood and humanity before leaping into the void of radical closure. And yet, these televised testimonials recurring on the nightly news engulfed individual identity in the seriality of forgetting. In which case, the official celebration of collective death in the name of ideological slogans quickly slips into amnesia. By recouping this repeated testimony, the artists obstruct the commemoration of heroic death and reveal the human being, who even in the preparation for death has accepted the responsibility of representation. This footage reveals the space-time of the undead, the liminal state between El Sati's testimonial rehearsal and detonating his donkey. This deferred testimony must bear the weight of a corpse, because Mroué reminds us, "we know the body of the fighter will never be found. He has disappeared …" (Mroué 2002:117).

The undead may already know that they are dead, and yet, they thirst for life. Perhaps, they thirst for resurrection, because they have not been mourned. Perhaps, they thirst for judicial closure, because their crimes have been ignored. Because they are not regarded as withdrawn by popular discourse, the threat of radical closure compels them to thirst for life, to thirst for blood. Until the undead can be put to rest, they will further compel violence. My reading of subjectivity and non-subjectivity, juxtaposing zombies/living-dead with vampires/undead, should not delimit the range of other possible postwar subjectivities. Furthermore these categories are both slippery and contradictory. The assigning of categories becomes tenuous in the dislocated space/time of catastrophe. Nevertheless, these representations provide a generative effort to talk about the various forms of violence of bearing witness in postwar societies.

ENTRANCED BY TOUFIC

> I already feel even the blood in my veins to be spilled blood irrespective of any wounds
> suffered in my life; since I already feel that I am bleeding in my veins.

-- Jalal Toufic[4]

Despite the latent violence of the vampire, Toufic seems principally concerned with those who have witnessed a surpassing disaster without necessarily perpetrating it, but he would insist that even a perpetrator must be revealed as withdrawn by his own violence. Since shaheed subjectivity must accept the repetition of loss in martyrdom, a mediation of the everyday must provide an examination of the mundane rhythms of violence and the ordeal of the ordinary. This type of examination engenders the sites of everyday lifeworlds with the vitality of self-mediation and the empowerment of the incarnate image. This is a tentative theory that applies to the mediated subjectivity enacted by post-orientalist aesthetics, or rather a mediated subjectivity *entranced* by post-orientalist aesthetics. Here I sketch out a hypothesis about the vitality of mediation, which will require fuller ethnographic and religious research in order to elaborate.

As pointed out by Boris Groys (2007), Toufic's videos lead the viewer to feel like a witness of a ritual. This is literally the case with Toufic's pieces on the Shi'a tradition of *ashura*, which commemorates the mourning of saint Hussein ibn Ali. Groys also notes the more private rituals mediated in *The Sleep of Reason*, which uses long extended takes of sleep followed by the slaughtering of cattle. Groys says, "The ability to reveal the inner complicity between ritual and the medium of video is one of the reasons Toufic's videos so powerfully capture the imagination of the viewer" (2007:83). He goes on to proclaim that religion is not based on a set of opinions, but that rituals preclude opinion. These rituals of Toufic's are neither true nor false, neither sacred nor profane, they are rituals of the mundane.

The image's magical ability to captivate audiences is inextricably implicated in the "soul" stealing modernity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, these artists of a post orientalist digital age draw on multiple registers of mimetic layering to participate in the revoicing, or remediation, of these "captivity" narratives. As Groys indicates, the repetitive reproducibility of

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video enables Toufic to reveal the ritual protagonists "in a state of ecstasy, or in sleep, or in a mood of deep mourning" (2007:83). "The video image is the moving icon of the unmoving and invisible digital code," so by foregrounding a deep connection between mediation and ritual enables video's hidden digital data to visualize the invisible, to render visible the "invisible God" (2007:83). The mechanical reproduction of the dead image and its loss of aura (Benjamin 1969) constitute "the most radical religious experience under the conditions of modernity" (Groys 2007:84). For Toufic's, the repetition of ritual and video provides the possibility of rearticulating the deferral the loss.

Toufic's 2005 "short" video, *The Lamentations Series: The Ninth Night and Day*, subverts time to enact a feeling of eternity. For "sixty minutes,"[5] we watch a continuous shot of an Ashura rite of self-flagellation. In endless repetition, the men swing their arms up to strike at their forehead or crown. Most of them have blood flowing down their faces from these self-afflicted wounds. After about a minute, the video slows to a fraction of its normal speed as we watch the same ritual scene unfold. After several minutes, the viewer cannot help but become entranced by a single man staring directly at the camera. The rhythm of this commemorative self-flagellation at extremely slow speeds gives way to a slower, more latent, rhythm of entrancement. While his compatriots remained entranced by the mourning ritual, this transfixed man, entranced by the camera, looks into the eyes of the audience thus captivating them in the entrancement of a staring contest. Noting the acknowledgements to Shi'a Imams who had given Toufic permission to film, one Lebanese artist commented to me that the man was probably instructed to keep an eye on Toufic. Since his eyes never leave Toufic, does suspicion entrance? If so, in what way does Toufic's video camera mediate this trance to viewers? While the man on screen is forced to repeat this entrancement regardless of audience, the audience can try to refuse the hypnotic trance. In fact, it is common to see people walkout of Toufic's screenings in frustration, exclaiming, "Nothing happens."

But what is the Shi'a man really looking at? Is he looking at Toufic? Is he looking at us? No, he is looking at the camera. Of course, the camera is also looking at him. Toufic asks, "In what state may I feel that an object is gazing at me? Vice versa in trance, when an object gazes at me, either I enter into trance or this indicates that I am already entranced" (2004:9). But more importantly,

looking through the mimetic object entrances Toufic who stands behind the camera. Jean Rouch describes his work on spirit possession as a choreography of entranced participation, "it is the 'film-trance' (ciné-transe) of the one filming the 'real trance' of the other" (1978:8). Given the parameters of the spirit world with "fragile mirrors," Rouch asserts, "the observer's presence can never be neutral" (1978:7). In the case of Toufic, recording the *ashura* mortuary rite also activates suspicion through the gaze of entrancement. This entranced intersubjectivity implicates the viewer in the realm of suspicious complicity.

VITALITY OF MEDIATION

For Jalal Toufic, the unconscious acceptance of the ontological link between model and image remains powerfully in play. He attributes this belief not to its realism, but to the laws of magic, particularly "contiguity and similarity" (see Mauss 2001). Images have a very important relationship to the ghostly figure of the undead as the magic of mimetic technology provides the only means for revealing evidence of these ghostly figures. The evidence produced is not one of "reality" – you do not see ghosts on the street if distracted by dominant discourse – but the incarnation of a latent imaginary. In the words, the entrancement of mediation presents an opportunity to visit with the undead, ghosts, and phantoms of Lebanon's cultural amnesia. The incarnate images provide media with a vitality capable of resurrecting the dead even at the risk of disappointment as discussed earlier.

Naficy suggests, "for such a person [an accented filmmaker] mediation is somehow life itself" (1996:217). By intimating at the vitality of media, Naficy identifies an affective relationship between filmmakers and their tools of mediation. Unfortunately, Naficy did not elaborate on the way mediated vitality informs larger social conditions of displacement, violence, and politicized forms of 'othering'. In the context of Lebanese experimental documentary I offer five possible explanations for why Naficy ascribes this "vital" attribute to accented aesthetics: First, the micro-ritualization of the moment provides simple joy in its experience, like a tourist, but also answering the "demand to activate all the senses" (Löfgren 1999:98). Second, one is compelled by a sense of

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duty to bear witness to the disappeared and occupied. Third, a desire to replace tired and ossified narratives with alternative imaginary ones. Fourth, one maintains belief in resurrection or hope in psychoanalytic recovery. Or, fifth, one has become entranced by mediation.

If we further consider how "media are not merely conduits for social forces, or expressive of social realities, but possess logics and power that are constitutive of thought, identity, and action" (McLagan 2003:605), then the vitality of mediation should translate to audiences in particularly significant ways. The circulation of these sensibilities through "new media" and "small media" and their ability to embody, act upon, and think through contemporary forms of social disempowerment presents an important context for understanding connections between personal agency and public expression.

The vitality of mediation signals the latent images of Hadjithmas and Joreige's unexposed rolls of film, the incarnate image of nocturnal ruins of the undead, the repetition of video ritual; but one is compelled to ask why take a photograph of an image if never to develop it? This freezes the image before it has become a representation, it cannot be represented but by the material reference to drawers full of film spools – media objects in a latent state. Representation revealed, not as the mimetic image, but by the materiality of its mediation, not as a photograph, but as a spool of latent images. Trapping the magic of mimesis in invisibility corresponds to both the virtuality of digital information and the corresponding invisibility of undead subjectivity.

The urge to collect, archive, and comment upon the constructed nature of media is pervasive in Lebanese 'postwar' aesthetics. The impulse to record and collect one's social, cultural, and political experience represents a strange sort of vitality in the act of resistance to radical closure, a vitality based not on life per se but on the deferral of loss in order to reclaim it without denying its inherent absence. By way of comparison, the deferral of invisibility, Group Tuesday, an informal think tank consisting of Walid Sadek, Bilal Khbeiz, and Fadi Abdallah, considers the image suspect, but the potentiality of mimetic tools sustains their critical commitment to the visual. Critical of the image and its representational presumptions, these artists prefer to write their witness accounts. Sadek (Wilson-Goldie 2007:27) says,

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What we try to do when we write is slow images down. We try to give them weight. We experience, we who live in the third world, that to be in an image, to be photographed, is almost like a death warrant. But we are equally uneasy about standing behind the lens. We work and live somewhere between the lens and the photograph.

In Toufic's reading of Nietzsche, escape is only achievable by embracing the repetition, and denying the desire for escape, that is, as Hadjithomas and Joreige say, to live with your ghosts, to mourn their absence as an eternal presence. This recognition of loss is what the distracted zombies in Lebanon ignore in their official amnesia, but for the undead nonsubjects, who have witnessed the surpassing disaster, they are cursed with not being able to forget, particularly those who perpetrated the violence. The counterfeited Lebanese culture exists in a withdrawn public imagination, nostalgic for the "golden age" and the "civil war." That is to say, they live for a time other than the present in which they can imagine life without absence – of houses ad landscape. In other words, the excesses of cosmopolitanism and civil war co-exist in the violent excess of present potentials for reenacting a sectarian war.

END TIME

In Lebanon, where society has undergone a "surpassing disaster," it is important to acknowledge that not only is justice withdrawn but also the materials of tradition. In the labyrinthine space-time of Beirut's ruins, one finds interlocutors with the dead. You can visit them if you have witnessed your own surpassing disaster in a massacre or in the rituals and technologies of repetition. The undead live in catastrophic time and space, taking form across non-linear time and dislocated space. Their subjectivity emerges not as distinct entities, not as individualists, but as dividualists on the highest order. These withdrawn vampires feel intensely and violently, but their violence is not inbred. On the contrary, their violent urges have been manifested from the evil lurking behind the ruinous rubble and in the walls and foundations of construction sites. It waits in the dark, in the long sleep of life, in the rituals of martyrdom and resurrection, in the incarnate images of Lebanese experimental film and documentary video.

By mediating subjectivity, demarcating thresholds of referentiality, these works invite the viewer into an embodied experience of contemporaneity and intersubjectivity. The documentary experimentalist invites the viewer to see, not through his or her eyes, but through his or her camera eye. As stipulated by Walid Sadek's epigraph (2007), "this invitation to meet the corpse" is not about embracing materiality, or a return to familiar corporeality, but it is about embracing virtuality. That is, the ephemerality of digital media which is tangibly available, but still nameless and unrecognizable as virtual data. This invitation does not narrate the legacy of the defeated and victimized, but marks the endless ruination and constant risk of historical withdrawal.

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[1] The political violence that mired Lebanon from 1975 to 1990 is typically referred to as the "Lebanese civil war." Following the critique of many Lebanese intellectuals and artists, I find this phrasing problematic. First, the hostilities involved both regional and international players that greatly challenges the Muslim vs. Christian framing this war usually encumbers. Second, the shifting alliances and periods of intensity and lull in addition to the "civil war" in 1958 and the continued hostilities since the 1990s challenge this clean packaging.

[2] Elsewhere I have argued that the poetics and politics of documentary and narrative cinema in postwar Lebanon articulate a Post-Orientalist Aesthetics that pushes Said's critique of orientalism and of historical representation into new domains (See Westmoreland 2009).

[3] The 2006 versions are accompanied by French and German translations.

[4] See Toufic's *Forthcoming* (2000).

[5] The movie only last about half an hour, but several listings accessed by the author erroneously say sixty minutes. I suspect that this farce is intended to challenge people's expectation of cinematic time.