

WITNESSING *UNTITLED*

by

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Abstract

This thesis marks my encounter with Vancouver artist Jayce Salloum's *untitled* project. The *untitled* project is a series of three video tapes. *untitled part 1: everything and nothing* presents a conversation with Soha Bechara, a prominent figure in the Lebanese Resistance to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. *Part 2: beauty and the east*, traces a journey Jayce made through the Balkans. *Part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)* combines footage from the 1982 Israeli sanctioned, Phalangist massacre at Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps with a refugee's story of his return to the site of his former home in Palestine. The different parts also combine together to form the *untitled* installation. In thinking through this work, I draw upon the figure of the witness as outlined by Giorgio Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz* to examine the manner in which subjectivities are enrolled in performances of witnessing, and the difference particular geographies make to these processes. Witnessing also brings into play a specific ethics of representation, which I trace through our encounter with Lebanon, the Balkans and Palestine when watching *untitled*. This in turn leads to a close examination of the ways in which *untitled* works with and challenges sensationalized and Orientalist representations of these places. Finally, I think explicitly about the political importance of Salloum's work and the micropolitical spatial practices that it engenders.

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Every image in this thesis is courtesy of, and used with the permission of Jayce Salloum. The images are designed to circulate semi-autonomously through the text and resonate with what is written. While I have obviously circumscribed this process by placing the images at certain points, I hope there will still be enough flexibility for different readers to have different engagements depending on the contexts that they bring to this thesis. To this end, I have left the images untitled, except to indicate to which part of *untitled* or which version of the *untitled* installation they correspond.

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Acknowledgements

'Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd... We have been aided, inspired, multiplied'.

Deleuze and Guattari, *a thousand plateaus*, 3

Inspired by his work, aided by his immense generosity, and encouraged by his gentle but firm criticism, I owe Jayce Salloum more than I can ever express here. Thank you Jayce.

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Introduction – Encountering the *untitled* project

It all began one night in October 2002. I went to the Pacific Cinematheque in Vancouver, to see a series of films which the program informed me was part of the *untitled*, three films made by locally based media artist Jayce Salloum. At the start of the evening I knew nothing about either the filmmaker or the films? By the end of the night, this master's thesis had begun.

Or maybe it began a few weeks earlier because the reason I went that night was because I had previously enjoyed three other nights of short films, which together had made a program called *intangible cartographies: new arab video*. This series was curated by Jayce, and brought together recent work by Arab filmmakers, who for reasons of necessity or love, made their work on video.

Perhaps I need to go back even further. Possibly it began during my first year at Bristol University (1999), when I met two Jordanians, who would become close friends. Through living with and knowing these people I became interested in Arabic culture. Not especially interested; just a vague casual interest in the life of my friends before they had come to Bristol.

But maybe these things don't have beginnings... better start back in the middle again.

untitled is an on-going series of (currently) three films, which combine together to form a gallery installation. The tapes were all made by Jayce Salloum, a Canadian with Lebanese grandparents, whose previous work explored Lebanon and the ways in which it is represented in the West¹. Building on this work, *untitled part 1: everything and nothing* is a forty-one minute conversation with Soha Bechara. Soha, who was a member of Lebanese forces resisting the Israeli occupation of Lebanon during the early 1980's, was taped in Paris in 1999. *Part 2: beauty and the east*, filmed in the same year, traces a journey Jayce made through the Balkans. *Part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)* is an eleven minute short - a fragment of an as yet uncompleted *part 3*. The tape combines footage from the 1982 Israeli sanctioned, Phalangist massacre at Sabra and Chatilla Palestinian refugee camps with a Palestinian refugee's story of his return to the site of his former home in Palestine.

Since October 2002, I've seen these films a countless number of times, and each time something inevitably changes. I pick up on a particular comment I previously hadn't paid attention to. I've become more familiar with the series, and gradually started to pay less attention to the films as a whole, while focusing almost surgically on minute parts. Each time I've watched them, I've inevitably been somewhere else. Standing (we ran out of chairs) in a classroom in the Scarfe Building, UBC, as Jayce shows clips on a very narrow screen as part of a Geography department colloquium. Sitting in chairs that force you to lean back

¹ *This Is Not Beirut: There Was And There Was Not* (1994); *Up To The South (Talaheen A Junuub)* (1993) with Walid Ra'ad. See also *Mugaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal (Introduction to the End of an Argument): Speaking for oneself .../Speaking for others...* (1990) with Elia Sulieman which looks at Palestine.

too much, while almost being deafened by *part 2: beauty and the east*, as it played at the Signal and Noise video and sound festival, held annually at the Video In Studios. Using clips from *part 1: everything and nothing* for the benefit of a group of academics at the 2004 Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Philadelphia. Sitting in a plastic chair in the Western Front artist run centre, watching *part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends...* while people mill around me at the opening of Jayce's exhibition. Since October 2002, it seems the *untitled* project has followed me around almost everywhere I've been. Although in fact, maybe I've just been following the *untitled* project as it has made its own way through the world. Whoever's following who, it's become harder to distinguish two separate paths.

As I've worked my way through graduate school, and simultaneously these films have moved through their infancy (Jayce's words not mine), I've begun to think about my project more and more as ethnographic. It will have lasted for almost two years by the time I complete this thesis, and I have no doubt that this will only mark a very artificial end to proceedings. Over this period of time, I have grown increasingly fond of the project, whilst also experiencing periods of exasperation, insight, boredom, complete disinterest and excitement. To suggest that this project was about 'watching' films would, I think, barely describe the relationship I have with Jayce Salloum's work. Now of course, this depends on what exactly is meant by watching, and there were many types of 'watching' that went into this work. However, talking about an ethnographic commitment produces, for me at least, a far more vivid picture of the sorts of embodied

desires, beliefs, emotions and commitments that have been just as much a part of this study as watching the films.

Ethnography, prone to distractions, tangents, surprises and impediments, is effective for valuing the messy and contingent ways in which research proceeds. Thinking about my project ethnographically is also a gesture which seeks to reject ways of thinking about film as a purely visual experience, or more precisely as a visual experience of a particular nature. In other words I want to think about studying film as ethnographic, because I take seriously the various, by now long standing critiques of what we might call optical visuality². This is a type of vision which is distant and thus separates the viewer from what is viewed. This has various consequences, such as the tendency to produce disembodied knowledges in which viewers extricates themselves from what they are viewing, and thus ignores the important visceral and affective³ ways in which they are implicated in the interpretations they offer. Sitting awkwardly in a plastic chair at the *untitled* installation, with a pair of headphones that didn't quite fit 'right', the fundamentally embodied nature of this experience was inescapable.

The reason I am keen to foreground the embodied and affectively charged nature of my experience with the *untitled* project is not just to work towards a more 'accurate' or 'complete' description (which is a futile goal anyway). Rather, the importance of literally incorporating what 'touches' me, is the ethico-political

² We could of course go back to Walter Benjamin's work, although Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* is a more recent attempt to reckon with the effects of this type of vision, and does so in a far more comprehensive manner than I manage here. Donna Haraway's work is also well worth recalling at this point.

³ We can think of affects as intensities which flow through events, a description I elaborate on in chapter 2.

potential that such encounters have. In *neuropolitics*, William E. Connolly examines the ways in which film can work viscerally and affectively on the viewer to create particular cognitive habits and embodied dispositions. In highlighting this Connolly opens up, while never fully exploring, the potential for films to do micropolitical work. I think it is important to look at how the *untitled* actualizes this potential in *and* across a range of geographical contexts, precisely because micropolitical work is quotidian and banal. Hence, while the effects of micropolitical practices are often hard to immediately discern, they nonetheless constitute the substratum on which larger scale geopolitical acts rest.

In order to investigate this micropolitical potential, this project stands ethnographic video on its head, to treat the video as the object of the ethnographic process, (to the extent to which ethnography can be partitioned along these subject-object lines). Since following *untitled* means encountering it as a gallery installation, limiting this ethnographic project to one particular site would be as inadvisable as limiting it to one particular sight. As I have suggested at the outset, the *untitled* project has moved around during the period of my research, and I have moved too. I want to make it clear at this point, that these two trajectories are exactly that – two different paths, albeit intertwined on occasions. The *untitled* project spans numerous locations, so while I have parts 1, 2 and 3b as video tapes sitting on my shelf as I write this, the same three films are simultaneously being played on looped projections at the Western Front artist run centre, Vancouver. Versions of the *untitled* installation have exhibited in Hull (Canadian Museum of Civilisation), Prague (Eurovision2000) Amsterdam

(World Wide Video Festival), Vienna (Kunsthalle Exnergasse) California (Santa Monica Museum of Art) Belgrade (The Museum of Contemporary Art), Toronto (YYZ gallery), Ottawa (Gallerie 101) and Montreal (Dazibao gallery), none of which I've seen. The point is that the *untitled* project is too excessive to be 'captured' or even 'documented'. This ethnography then, focuses on those moments when I have crossed paths with *untitled* in its various forms, and what emerged from those moments. My project is therefore grounded in a representational paradox: how do you write about something which nevertheless refuses to be disciplined by your writing; something which will always exceed whatever you say about it? This paradox represents many of the representational dilemmas within *untitled* itself, which I will discuss in the following chapters. It is also through pursuing this paradox that I have come to engage with the major theoretical influence on this work, Giorgio Agamben.

In his book *Remnants of Auschwitz*, which forms part of a broader study of the logics of power, Agamben confronts the difficulty of representing Auschwitz concentration camp, in particular through survivors' testimonies. Agamben is immediately confronted by an essential lacuna at the core of testimony: 'survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to'⁴. In other words, their very status as survivors precludes them from having known the 'true' horrors of Auschwitz. In place of studies that have either sought to understand this paradox too quickly or have refused to understand it at all, placing the events that occurred in Auschwitz beyond any comprehension, Agamben works with,

⁴ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 13

and attempts to listen to, this impossibility. As he himself suggests, this was not fruitless work, and, concurring with his opinion, I have found some of his insights useful for thinking about my own ethnographic study. In particular, the figure of the witness has become central to thinking through some of the representational issues which *untitled* presents. It is through the witness and the act of witnessing that I have conceptualized my particular ethnographic approach.

The witness, at its simplest, is subjectivity; a subjectivity which is not *a* subject. In other words, the witness, just like subjectivity, is a process; a process in which a possibility of speech bears witness to an impossibility of speech. The witness as subject is a disjunction and dislocation that moves between, while never being reducible to, the living being and the speaking being. As such, the subject/witness is precisely what is at stake in what Agamben calls ‘the biopolitical struggle for Being, in which a decision is made each time on the human and the inhuman, on “making live” and “letting die”’⁵. Witnessing then, as a process, is the refusal to separate the living being from the speaking being, or the inhuman from the human. The product of this process is testimony, the inseparable intimacy between a potentiality and an impotentiality of speech; an impossibility and a possibility of speaking⁶. However, this product is hardly separate from the processes which constitute it, and visa versa. Rather they themselves emerge from a zone of indistinction in which it is not possible to separate (nor collapse on to one another) the testimony from the process of witnessing.

⁵ Ibid., 147. On this point see for example Derek Gregory, *The Angel of Iraq*.

⁶ Ibid., 146.

In the following chapters, I use Agamben's work to think closely about the political potentialities *untitled* creates and also work through some more theoretical concerns about the ethics of representation. This also allows me to make explicit the importance of different spaces and spacings to both *untitled* and acts of witnessing. Chapter one begins with *part 1: everything and nothing*, and unpeels the various forms of witnessing that are enfolded within that tape. This leads me to consider more carefully the iterative and unstable nature of subjectivity in any act of witnessing, and the necessity of different geographies for this process.

Chapter two travels with *part 2: beauty and the east* to consider the ways and means by which audio-visual testimony enrolls different perceptual and affective capabilities. While the cover to Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* is a video still, he barely discusses this form of testimony in the book. In this chapter I want to ask how audio-visual (filmic) testimony can proliferate means of political engagement.

In chapter three I focus more closely on the link between witnessing and traumatic events through the on-going Palestinian dispossession. Looking at both the temporality and spatiality of trauma in *part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)* leads me to argue that witnessing can be associated with 'the new' in circumstances other than trauma, such as beauty.

Finally in chapter four, I encounter *untitled* as an installation. Taking seriously Jayce's suggestion that the experience of the installation should be archival in nature allows me to explore the question of the future in relation to the *untitled* project. In so doing, I trace various future possibilities which *untitled* materializes within the space of the installation.

Chapter 1: 'Just time and a conversation', or *everything and nothing*?

My name is Soha Bechara, I was born in Beirut, from a village in South Lebanon that is under Israeli occupation. I was born June 15, 1967. I joined the Lebanese National Resistance Movement (Jabhat al Muquawama al Wataniyah Lubnaniya) in 1986. On (November 7), 1988 I was captured following an operation that I executed against the symbol of collaboration Antoine Lahad. As a consequence of this operation I was detained and I spent the next 10 years in El Khiam detention centre. It ended by my release on September 3, 1998.¹



Figure 1.1: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

¹ All italicized indented quotations in this chapter are taken from *everything and nothing*. Unless prefaced with 'JS', the speaker is always Soha Bechara (SB). The footage was shot in 1999, the year before Israel withdrew from South Lebanon, hence Soha's use of the present tense when describing the occupation of her village.

It is with these words, that *untitled part 1: everything and nothing* begins. This clip provides an introduction to Soha; it tells an audience something about her, and colours the visual image in front of them with a little bit of context. It's easy to understand, works at a very straight-forward, factual level and allows people to create a certain identity for Soha, albeit a very limited one.

In this chapter I want to explore the layers of witnessing enfolded within *everything and nothing*. Therefore I want to begin by asking how can we understand this one-dimensional rendering of Soha Bechara at the beginning of the film? The first reason I think the tape begins this way is because people simply don't know who Soha Bechara is. Certainly in Canada, where this work has been shown most frequently, very few people will be familiar with Soha's story. Even those of us who have read Robert Fisk's *Pity the Nation*, one of the most accessible and critically-minded accounts of recent Lebanese history, will probably fail to link the following unnamed footnote on page 560 with this woman.

Lahd [sic] was gravely wounded by a woman who called at his front door and shot him with a pistol in 1988.²

² Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, 560. Lahad was the leader of the South Lebanese Army (SLA), the Israeli proxy force in South Lebanon during the occupation. The assassination attempt was actually far more elaborate than this description, and involved Soha posing as a fitness instructor to Lahad's wife for a number of months beforehand. See Soha Bechara, *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon*.

So, this introduction, which gives a very brief synopsis of her personal history, gives audiences some sense of who Soha is, and what's she's done.

However, this explanation, which assumes that the people don't know anything about Soha and the contexts in which she moves, is problematic, as it reflects my position when I first saw these films. It's important to recall Laura Marks suggestion, that the circulation of intercultural films is community bound; it occurs and is reinforced through 'networks both ephemeral and concrete, from gossip and e-mail to community organizations, university classes and funding agencies'³. So rather than being wrenched from one context to another like a mainstream film, intercultural films such as *everything and nothing* multiply their contexts to create specific pathways or trajectories of reception, akin to a form of coalition building⁴. For instance I encountered the *untitled* project at the Pacific Cinematheque, where Jayce was present at the screening. It was then through me that Jayce was able to show and discuss some of this work at UBC. Jayce suggests that each film he makes is like a child, which in its infancy is closely nurtured. While he cannot completely control the reception, he does try to establish 'a critical field' around each film through placement in 'preferred venues'⁵.

If this community bound circulation is the case, then some of the people who watch this piece may well have also seen some of Jayce's earlier work, such as

³ Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 21.

⁴ Ibid., 20-1.

⁵ Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See appendix A1, page A1.7

Taleen a Junuub (Up from the South), which deals with the occupation of South Lebanon. They might therefore have a much better sense of the histories and geographies which Soha is intertwined with and encircled by, than I did. Indeed Jayce's earlier films such as *Taleen a Junuub* may well have established an audience-constituency through shared social and political ties to Lebanon. This is particularly the case with *intercultural* films such as *everything and nothing*, which mediate between at least two different cultures and thus appeal to diasporic groups. I have little doubt that the context in which I first saw this film – the in/tangible cartographies series of new *Arab* video at Pacific Cinematheque – attracted for the most part a very specific, 'knowledgeable' audience of Arab-Canadians.

If it is problematic to assume that the audience is a group of unknowledgeable individuals, then it is also highly problematic to assume that various contexts of reception will be homogenous. Jayce's account of the (literal and metaphorical) journey which gave birth to this film⁶, suggests that in France there was a much greater degree of engagement with Lebanon, and Soha in particular, during the 1990's, than there was here in Canada. Indeed, the campaign to free Soha from Khiam was spearheaded internationally from France, and some of these activists who lobbied for Soha's release had seen *Taleen a Junuub*⁷. This engagement can of course be traced back to France's colonial presence in Lebanon, and as Jayce

⁶ Jayce Salloum, *sans titre/untitled*.

⁷ Salloum, *sans... 8*.

suggests, a sort of post-colonial paternalism⁸. Then there is the further problem of assuming audiences in different national contexts are citizens of that country, which ignores the many immigrant peoples who also reside in countries different from their birth. Jayce is often promoted as an 'Arabic' or 'Arab-Canadian' filmmaker (although not by himself), and his work will often be marketed to appeal to those from or interested in 'Arab' societies⁹.

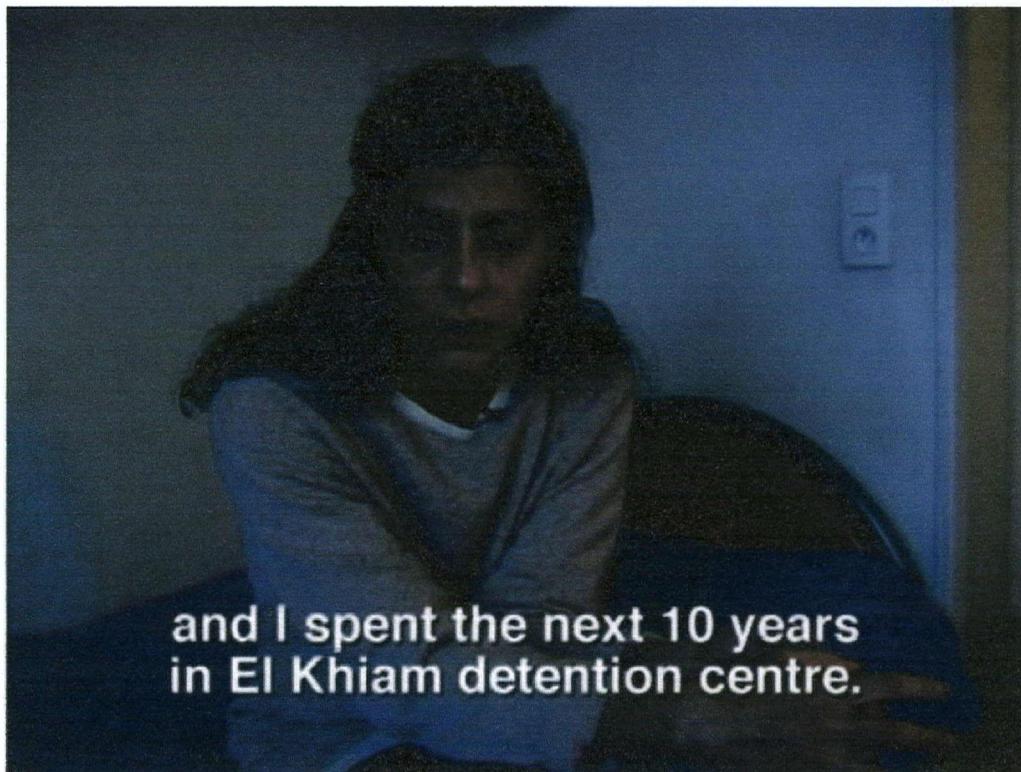


Figure 1.2: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

Finally, although this piece will often be seen in 'Western' contexts, it has of course been shown elsewhere, including Lebanon itself, where it has been

⁸ Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See appendix A1, page A1.5 For an account of France's colonial presence in Lebanon, see Fisk, *Pity...*

⁹ Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See appendix A1, page A1.4

entered into numerous film festivals. In Lebanon, especially in the South, Soha is a hero of the secular resistance. Her picture hangs from lamp-posts and sits on top of mantelpieces next to family photographs¹⁰. She is a celebrity who voluntarily left the country to escape the media bombardment after her release¹¹. In this particular location, the introduction to the film may very well be largely redundant.

So the plurality of contexts, and the variety of different receptions that will occur across them, destabilizes my original point that this introduction gives people in the audience some idea of who Soha is and what she has done. While many viewers won't know who she is, many others may in fact be much more familiar with her biography. The opening piece of dialogue is doing another kind of work as well. Very subtly, this form of introduction to Soha creates another context. This context is the representational milieu that circulates around Soha. In this way, the clip tells us something not just about who Soha is, and what she's done, but also how she's come to be represented; how her whole life has been boiled down to this one, exceptional event. This of course, is vital for what follows, because in witnessing Soha, and in my subsequent witnessing of *everything and nothing*, is it important to understand that Soha is largely 'known' as an ex-detainee and a resistance fighter. This is because, as I will go on to discuss, the tape explores the manner in which she is known, and I have become interested in how as a consequence of this, the tape proliferates Soha's subjectivities.

¹⁰ Salloum, *sans...*, 2.

¹¹ Bechara, *Resistance...*, 176-7.



Figure 1.3: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

The opening clip also provides a justification for filming Soha Bechara. In establishing Soha's representational context as someone who has been imprisoned for ten years, the tape marks Soha as extraordinary and unusual. She is extraordinary because she is a 'living martyr', a paradox which Soha uses in *everything and nothing* to describe herself and why people keep wanting to talk to her¹². This self-identification neatly captures her role as both tortured ex-detainee (what I later describe as sub-human), and as a hero of the resistance (super-human). If then *everything and nothing* also proves exceptional, and hence worth watching, it is because it goes beyond this split representation. The

¹² This paradox is further accentuated by the fact that Soha calls herself a martyr even though she is a member of the *secular* resistance.

film begins with this two-pronged representation of Soha to give the audience some contextual background, but also to act as a point of departure for what follows. Just as Agamben suggests that 'language, in order to bear witness, must give way to non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness'¹³, I suggest that *everything and nothing* begins with this representation of Soha in order to explore how her various subjectivities go beyond it. I would argue that this introduction establishes what is about to take place in the tape as an act of witnessing, in the sense outlined by Giorgio Agamben.

Agamben begins thinking about witnessing through the Latin word *superstes*, which 'designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it'¹⁴. The witnesses Agamben draws upon are survivors of Auschwitz; people who have lived through the events there, and can therefore bear witness to them. However, as Agamben notes, these survivors bear witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to. Their very nature as *survivors* means they have experienced a privilege of sorts; they did not experience the common destiny of most prisoners. They therefore speak by proxy, on behalf of the 'true' witnesses, who are prevented through death from bearing witness to their experience. However, this picture is further complicated by his suggestion that the 'true' witnesses, even if they lived, would have nothing to say. The de-humanizing processes in Auschwitz reduced many prisoners to *Muselmänner*, literally

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 39.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

translated as 'Muslims'; the name in the camp for those who had lost all will and consciousnesses, and existed in a semi-vegetative state. These 'true' witnesses were denied a voice or even thought by very experience of Auschwitz. '[T]heir death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves'¹⁵. It is in this manner that the survivors bear witness to something that it is impossible to bear witness to. In marking this impossibility of speech within speech itself, witnessing becomes the disjunction between two impossibilities. 'Language, in order to bear witness, must give way to non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness'¹⁶. Witnessing is the bringing of language to that which does not have language, in what Agamben terms a zone of indistinction, where ultimately it not only becomes impossible to link, but also to separate the two. Soha's paradoxical status as a living martyr bears great similarity to Agamben's witness, just as *everything and nothing*'s exploration of her subjectivities can also be thought of an act of witnessing. In what follows, I want to pursue this assertion more vigorously and attempt to unravel the layers of witnessing which are folded into my interpretation of *everything and nothing*. I begin with Soha's witnessing of Khiam before focusing on intimacy as the means by which *everything and nothing* witnesses Soha's subjectivities. In so doing, I hope to complicate Agamben's notion of witnessing by drawing out the importance of particular geographies in this process.

¹⁵ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 84.

¹⁶ Agamben, *Remnants...*, 39.



Figure 1.4: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

Soha and Khiam

There's something about Soha Bechara, a certain sort of 'charisma' in front of a camera, that makes her very compelling to watch. Maybe it's the look she has in her eyes - accentuated by the dark rings underneath - which at points during the film can appear very serious and concentrated, at other times thoughtful, and at other moments yet again gentle and compassionate. Perhaps it's the sound of her voice, speaking a language I don't understand, rising to a crescendo as she talks about resistance, then pausing and trailing off as she discusses other detainees. It could even be the occasional smile she gives the camera, and the way in which it

still puts a slightly stupid grin on my face every time I see it. The truth is I honestly don't know.

Nonetheless it is clear that I cannot divorce these ways of seeing and hearing Soha from the film itself. To conclude that my compulsion to watch Soha was a result of her affective and libidinal energies - her 'charisma' - would be to miss an important point. The film itself, as a mediating device, plays an important role in co-constituting Soha and her 'charisma'. However, Soha's witnessing of Khiam is nevertheless still important in creating this charismatic force, which is why it is necessary to begin with Soha's witnessing in order to think through *everything and nothing*.

To suggest that Soha Bechara is a witness is entirely in keeping with the way she projects herself. During her conversation with Jayce, she explicitly conceptualizes what she is doing as witnessing.

All these meetings give us the chance to talk, and act as witnesses. This is why I will continue to speak out, to witness.

In *everything and nothing*, Soha comes across as a powerful and passionate orator. In this way she bears a striking resemblance to Agamben's key exemplar, Primo Levi. Levi sees himself as being like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who

cannot help but tell his story to everyone and anyone he meets¹⁷. In continuously talking about Khiam in conference presentations and interviews Soha, like Levi, speaks for those who 'touched the bottom' and therefore cannot bear witness to what they went through. The following description which she gives of herself at the end of the conversation also bears a striking resemblance to the way Agamben describes Auschwitz's witnesses emerging from a zone of indistinction between the survivors and those who touched the bottom.

I am a person who seeks to preserve, at least her own humanity, and who is capable of maintaining it by her sacrifices for the others who herself and them are one.

The representational context created at the outset of the film is Soha's detention in Khiam, after her attempted assassination of Antoine Lahad. Soha, working for the secular resistance attempted to kill Lahad, the leader of the South Lebanese Army (the Israeli proxy force in South Lebanon), by posing as his wife's fitness instructor. After being captured immediately, she was then taken to Khiam, questioned, tortured and incarcerated without trial for ten years, six of which she spent in solitary confinement¹⁸. In bearing witness to Khiam, Soha is not only bearing witness to the detention centre and what occurred there, but also to the broader detention of Lebanon and its people.

¹⁷ See Agamben, *Remnants...*, 16.

¹⁸ See Bechara, *Resistance...*

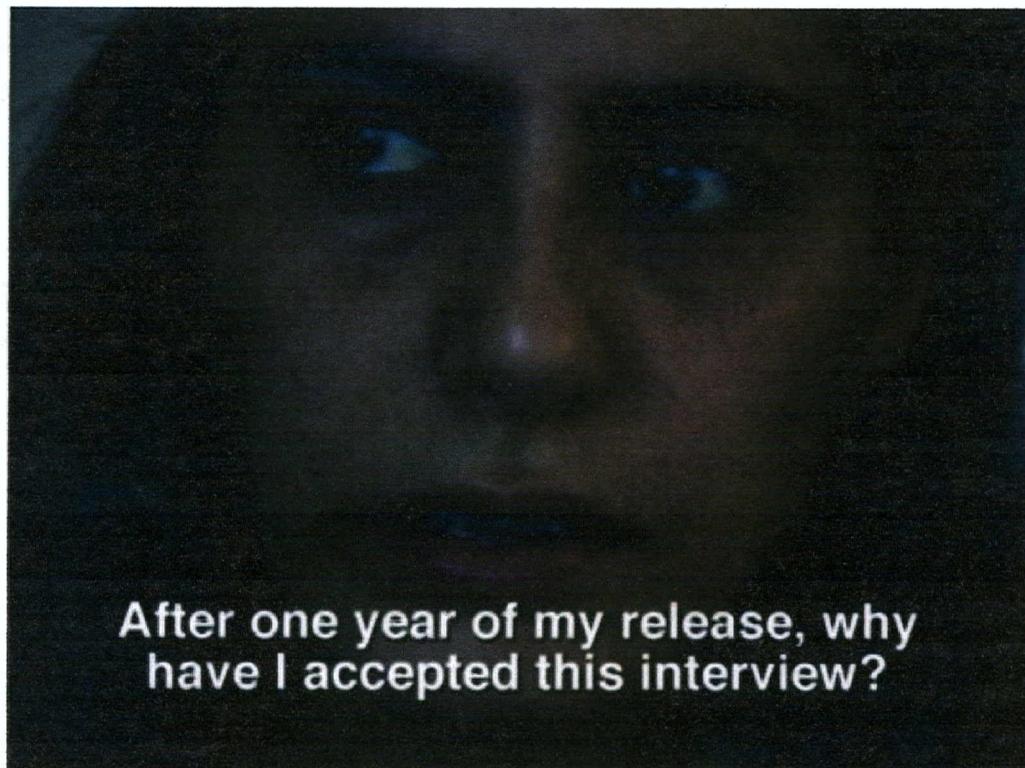


Figure 1.5: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

After one year of my release, why have I accepted this interview? Why have I agreed to have this conversation even though our mission has not ended? To shed some light on what happens to someone in the post-release period, what the decisions are, the possibilities and choices, what is to come in the future and what each of us is planning to do after spending years in the detention centre. That is the reason I agree to participate in interviews, conferences, and various meetings. All these meetings give us the chance to talk, and act as witnesses. This is why I will continue to speak out, to witness. First because of what happened in Lebanon, not only since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut, not only what took place in 1978, "the first Israeli invasion" and that should be placed

between parentheses because that was not the first invasion. The first invasion was in 1948. Contextually this date should not be forgotten because it repeats the history that we share with many other nations living through the violations of human rights, confiscation of land, the killing of children, transforming Lebanon into a military testing ground, one example being the massacre of Qana, where the Israelis tested new artillery, American weapons, and phosphorus bombs.

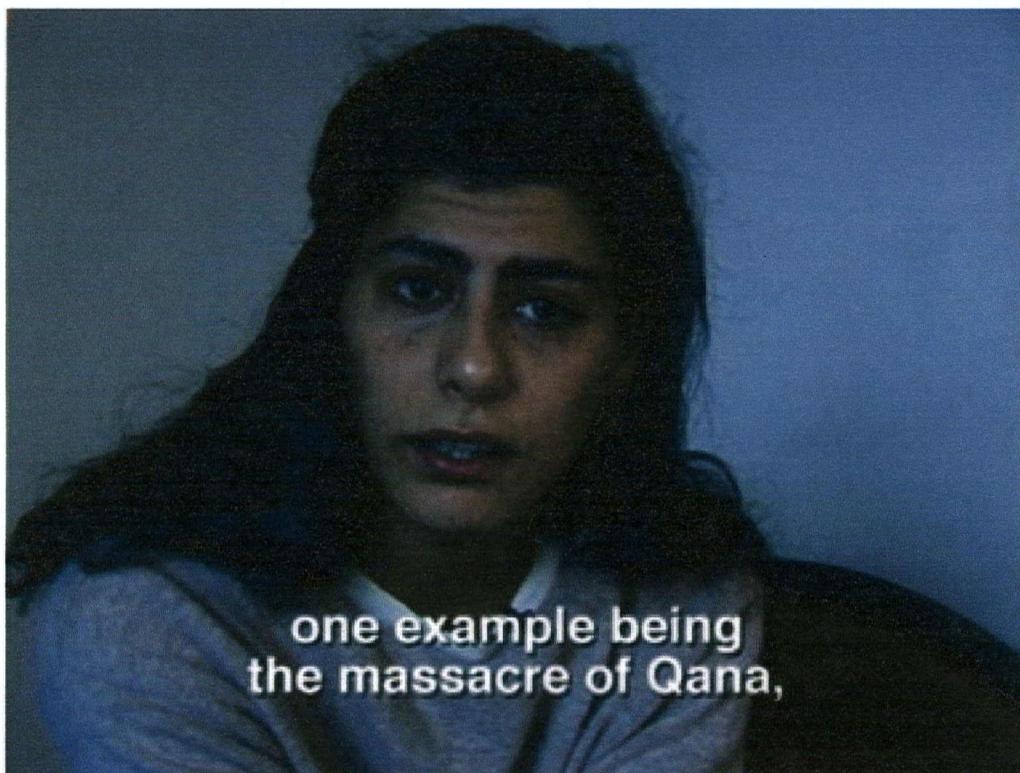


Figure 1.6: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

I look back - and it's there in front of me - to constantly see... a mother being detained daily, the child that is being detained every day, the youth, the elderly, even Lebanon, the land itself is being detained. The

abduction is also evident in the dust that Israeli soldiers carry away in their boots and take inside Israel.

Soha bears witness to detention in its various forms for a number of reasons. First, she wants to elaborate what life is like during and after imprisonment. However, she also sees witnessing as being much more than just discussing certain experiences for the sake of letting people know what it's like. For her, these conversations are *part of* the resistance to the Israeli Occupation of South Lebanon¹⁹.

One has to acknowledge and share the conditions that one is living. Resistance for me is a mission and part of this mission is the talking about it.

Witnessing - talking about her experiences as part of the resistance – is therefore vital for two reasons. Firstly, she suggests there is an obligation on her part to share her stories with people who cannot imagine what resistance, occupation and detention are like, let alone the connections between them.

For me as long as there is someone raising questions, that automatically implies that he does not know. And as long as I have the capability to answer, it is my duty to answer.

¹⁹ The occupation 'ended' in 2000, the year after this tape was shot. However, to this day Israel still retains control over the Shebaa Farms area in South Lebanon.

We are on the turn of the second millennium and people are asking, "Is it really possible that someone was martyred, dying of torture because of excessive whipping and beating in a detention center somewhere in this world?" Or, "Is it possible that there still exists isolation cells that measure 90 cm x 90 cm x 90 cm (3' x 3' x 3')." Of course, this makes people interested... inquisitorial. This is human nature. They ask in order to satisfy their curiosity.

We live in societies of alienation, at times close but generally when it comes to subjects like resistance, or what it means to lose your land it is difficult for others to understand, like what it means to struggle, or what occupation is. The French today, have heard how their grandparents lived through an occupation during World War 2, but that seems far in the past, over fifty years ago. They cannot touch or feel this experience now. Likewise for most Americans and the West in general, they have not lived through similar situations. For them it is as though seeing something, meeting someone who has lived this... reminds them of stories they have heard or that their grandparents lived through but they themselves had no way of feeling, no way of engaging with a witness to such events. This is why first hand accounts, testimonies are important.

As this last quote reveals, Soha's witnessing is both temporal and spatial. She bears witness to something that exists in a different time-space for those in living

in 'America and the West'. Soha's discussion of her experiences demonstrates that witnessing emerges not only from a zone of indistinction between subjects, but also between geographies. Soha's witnessing emerges not only from ten years spent in Khiam, *but also* from living in Paris where *everything and nothing* encounters her. She moves between Lebanon and France, neither fully inside nor outside one or the other. It is this position, or more accurately trajectory, which allows Soha to bear witness to Khiam and link her experiences there with a French history of occupation. In this way her witnessing forces different time-spaces to intersect one another, so that they can no longer be easily distinguished or separated. This is important because Soha's recounting of her experiences in the West prevents Western audiences from consigning them to another time or another place. The Resistance of which she is part is brought to bear on these audiences by means of this interstitial geography; an in-between spacing that connects 'here' and 'there', Soha and the West.

Secondly, witnessing as a form of resistance to the Israeli Occupation is also a means of articulating a different future, (something I discuss in more detail in chapter 4).

This history should be documented and preserved, remembered, and talked about in order to be able to know where we, who are a small drop in the world, are heading.



Figure 1.7: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

And it is this 'we', which as I will suggest in the next section could be both Lebanon and also humanity at large, that Soha builds upon at the conclusion of the interview.

One has to resist and work on oneself - for the cause - which in the end leads to the service of humanity in the broader sense and one's own personal improvement in a particular sense. Liberation of the land is the priority, and then continuing in political, economic, social, and cultural struggle. We have no boundaries, our boundaries should be the love that continues forward. If we want to define that movement, it goes beyond acceptance, beyond tolerance, it is the capacity to reach an empathy with

the other in a way that encompasses everyone, democratically, with liberty, equality, and justice, and it's the creating and maintaining of a system that asserts itself without attacking, and without assaulting the other on a daily basis.

It is important to note in this last excerpt that Soha's witnessing is of a different nature from the sense of witnessing I have been discussing thus far. In this statement Soha is no longer speaking for those who cannot speak but rather in the name of democratic love and justice. This notion of witnessing is suggested by the Latin term *testis*, a third party at a trial. Soha is also addressing the juridical concerns which Khiam provokes. It is important to recognize this difference, because while Agamben's notion of witnessing addresses the 'truth' of an event which lies beyond the law, such events must also be legally accountable. As he notes, 'not that a judgement cannot or must not be made... The decisive point is that the two things not be blurred, that law not presume to exhaust the question.²⁰'

Intimacy

If Soha's witnessing of Khiam is the first layer of witnessing I have analyzed, the second layer enfolded within the first is *everything and nothing's* witnessing of Soha. In one of the interviews I conducted with Jayce, he suggested that his relationship with Soha was one of allies in the resistance. She was trying to free

²⁰ Agamben, *Remnants*...p17.

Lebanon, as was he, and although his work in the cultural sphere was very far removed from her on-the-ground resistance fighting, they shared an affinity of goals²¹. It is this affinity that I want to move on to now, because in witnessing Soha, *everything and nothing* bears witness to Khiam and resistance only through Soha (rather than directly). Although the occupation had ended by the time Jayce finished this piece, his approach to resistance, as a 'worker' in the cultural sphere, leads him to pursue different ends from Soha (who witnesses Khiam). I would argue that what *everything and nothing* bears witness to primarily, beyond Soha's experiences, is intimacy as form of relating. Indeed, Jayce introduces the video as 'just time and a conversation, and intense intimacy at a close and unbreachable distance'²².

²¹ Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See appendix A1, page A1.5

²² See video guide & installation guide.

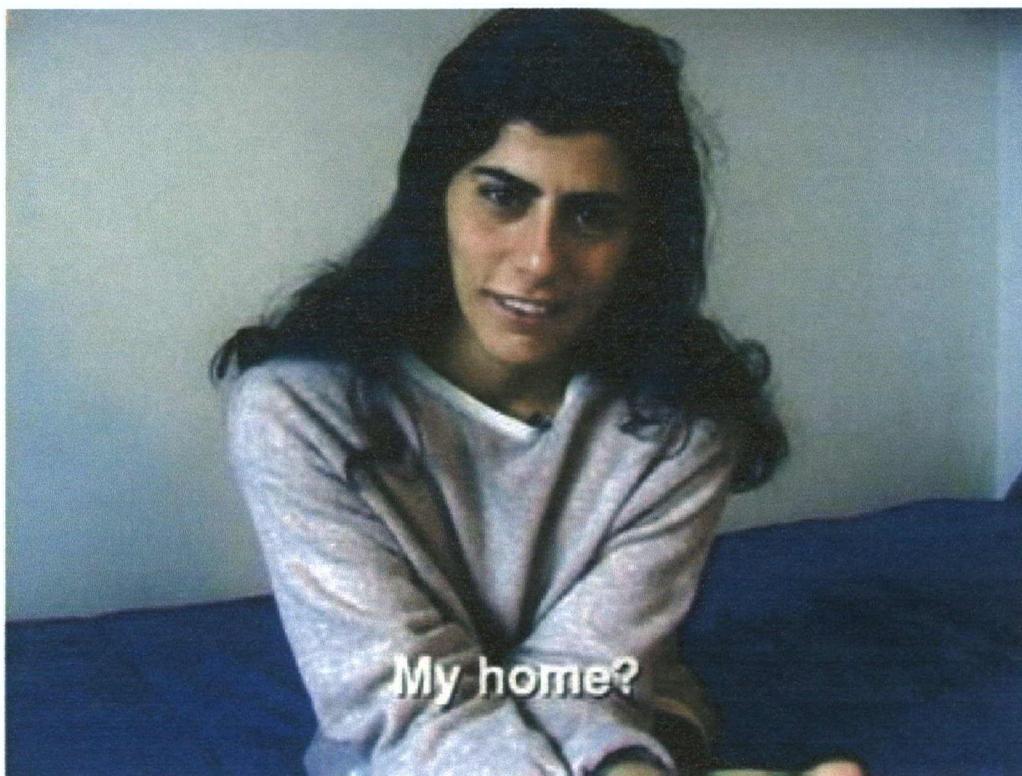


Figure 1.8: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

everything and nothing is a forty one minute dialogue between Soha Bechara, and Jayce Salloum who is off camera. The tape takes place entirely in a small dorm room in Paris, where Soha was living in 1999 when the film was shot. Essential one shot, the material was edited only to remove repetitions in the dialogue. Jayce says in the notes which accompany most screenings that he 'asked her about the distance lived between Khiam and Paris, and Beirut and Paris, and what she left in Khiam and what she brought with her, a story about flowers and how she never puts them in water, how it felt for her now to be under

such demand, and who she was, and what the title of the tape should be, and a few other things'²³. In essence, *everything and nothing* is a conversation.

Intimacy is, at least for me, a central part of this conversation. This is in spite of the fact that Jayce and Soha only met the night before the film was made. After moving to Paris following her release, Soha spoke of her experiences and the resistance at an event where Jayce also showed *Taleen a Junuub*. After the event, Soha and Jayce went for dinner, and the next morning the taped conversation took place. As Jayce recounts, Soha was being 'interviewed to death' by both the Arabic and European press after her release from Khiam²⁴. He was ambivalent about even asking to tape her; unwilling to add to the pressure and fatigue that all the interviews, conferences and meetings had caused Soha. However, as the film testifies to, Jayce did eventually request Soha's permission to film, and she agreed²⁵. Based on the fact that they barely knew each other, I want to explore how intimacy is created under such circumstances. I also want to interrogate the ways in which a certain style of intimacy is enacted within *everything and nothing*, because as I will argue in the following section, it is intimacy which enables *everything and nothing* to multiply the representations of Soha.

JS: I have no idea what... that's ok though... how...?

SB: Your questions are very sweet. [In French] Your questions are very nice.

²³ Jayce Salloum, Video guide.

²⁴ This particular quotation, which can be also be found in the video guide and installation guide that Jayce provides at screenings and exhibitions, was taken from Salloum, *sans...*, 8.

²⁵ The events in this paragraph are described in much more detail in Salloum, *sans...*

JS: Thank you.

This is *the* moment that springs to mind when I begin to think about intimacy in the film. This instant of 'flirtation' crystallizes something which I sense is present throughout the tape, and is one of the ways in which intimacy is generated between Soha and Jayce, which the audience is then invited to share. However, although I've called this affective resonance 'flirtation', this word is barely adequate for describing the sort of engagement that goes on during the conversation. I use it to give some sense of the encounter's playfulness. As Jayce suggests, flirtation in this context is more about describing a form of engagement on another level, or a form of social interaction designed to provoke the other person²⁶.

Another direct form of intimacy is the question Jayce asks at the beginning and end of the tape: who is Soha Bechara? The very personal nature of this question also marks the encounter between Jayce and Soha as intimate. However, there are a number of other, less apparent ways in which *everything and nothing* witnesses intimacy, which implicate the viewer more directly. One of these is the way in which the audience is made aware that Jayce, who cannot speak Arabic, can understand very little of what Soha is talking about. He simply asks a question, lets her respond, and then asks another question.

SB: You don't understand?

²⁶ Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See appendix A1, page A1.5-6.

JS: I don't understand but it's ok.

SB: What I've been speaking about is ideas, mostly political ideas.

JS: I prefer to film... until the end of the time that we have now, rather than trying to understand what you are saying at the moment. Afterwards I will understand...

Intimacy is created in this scenario, through the demonstration of trust. Jayce, who cannot understand Soha, has to trust that she will open herself up to the camera, and say something that will be worth filming. Although not as apparent in the film, Soha also has to trust that the film-maker will use the recorded material in an appropriate manner. Jayce and Soha have not yet seen each other since this material was filmed, and although Jayce sent Soha the tape, he never found out what she thinks of it²⁷. Therefore the trust involved in the process of film-making is re-doubled, as the film-maker has to believe that he himself is using the material in a manner the subject would find appropriate. Finally, the intimacy of trust is also present in the manner in which the film demands trust on the part of the viewer. As Jayce explains, because this work is deliberately non-sensational, the viewer has to trust that they will be rewarded if they spend time with this film²⁸. There is no instant gratification. Rather, in the very act of watching, the viewer must work to become intimate with *everything and nothing*.

²⁷ Ibid., page A1.5

²⁸ Ibid., page A1.7

Intimacy is also created by the way in which the film is formally shot. The film consists of basically one shot – Soha sat on a bed – which is only punctuated by the sound of Jayce's voice, speaking poor French from outside the frame. There are very few 'effects', save for a few edited sections, which removed material which was repetitious. However, the use of these very subtle mediation devices in fact allows the audience to see and hear more of the filming process than most documentaries would allow. This is further emphasized by the inclusion of Jayce's request for Soha to change position on the bed, while the camera is rolling.

JS: Wait... can you move...

SB: You trap the ideas...

JS: Can you move a bit, like this?

SB: Like this?

JS: Like that. Yes. Can you put that here please? Don't throw it...

These tactics create the sensation of intimacy because they allow the viewer to think that they have access to the bare bones of the encounter, even while it is still being self-referentially mediated.

Another very subtle camera effect, which nevertheless does a great deal of work in producing an intimate encounter, is the use of zooms and close-ups. At various points the camera lingers on Soha's mouth as her lips articulate words or her eyes

as they gaze into the distance while she considers her response to a question. These moments are good examples of what Laura Marks terms haptic visuality. Haptic visuality is a way of seeing in which the eyes function like organs of touch rather than delimiting clearly defined and outlined objects, as is the case with optical visuality. Haptic vision work at a close and intimate distance, and thus sight becomes a matter of discerning surface textures, rather than distanced outlines²⁹. The tight close-up of Soha's lips and eyes invite the viewer to pay very close attention to the darkened patches under Soha's eyes, or the way her lips rest on her teeth. These shots allow the audience to see Soha as though we are physically very close to her. As the camera touches Soha's face, it creates the sensation of brushing up against her cheek. This gesture, like a lover's caress, is incredibly intimate, and implicates the viewer in almost tangible ways with Soha as she speaks.

²⁹ Marks, *The Skin...*, Introduction.

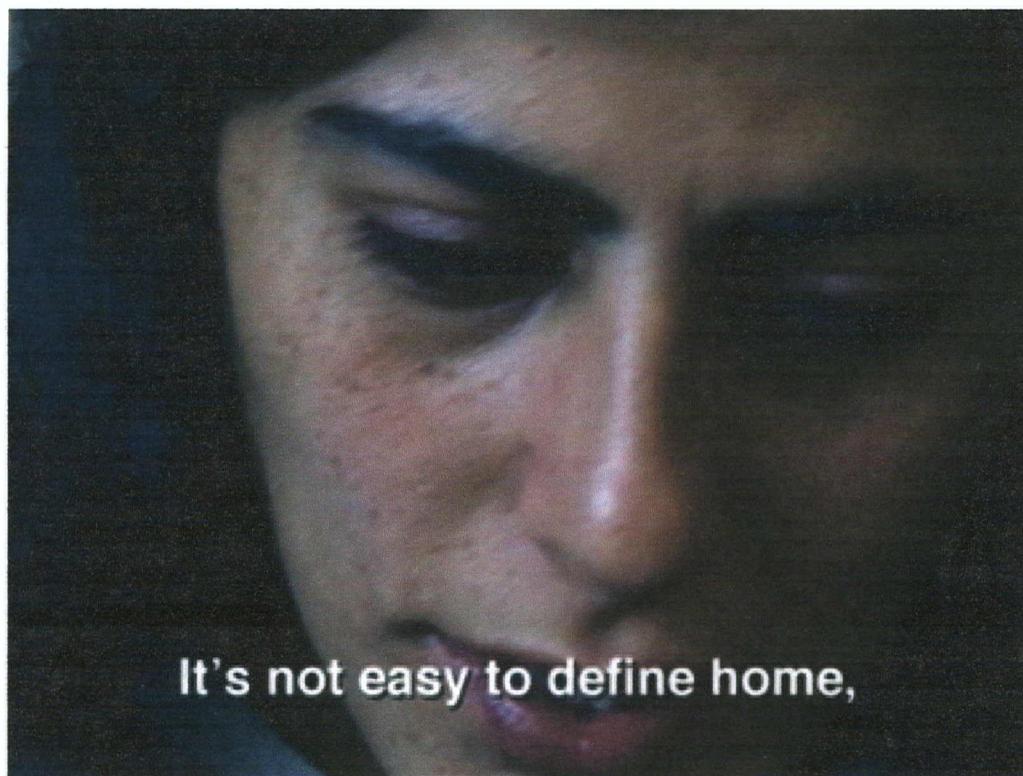


Figure 1.9: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

Complimenting the visual image, the audio track also draws the viewer into the conversation. The only sound is Soha's soft voice, speaking quietly to the camera. This becomes very apparent when I watch this piece on video at home, because I have to turn the volume up far more than normal to hear what she is saying. Even then, the almost whisper-like quality creates the sensation that I must be physically very close to Soha in order to hear what she is saying.

The ways in which the quotidian is wrapped up in *everything and nothing* also helps create a sense of a close engagement. The space in which Soha is filmed, her dorm room in Paris, is very ordinary and also very personal. Being invited (as Jayce literally was) into this personal space is obviously an intimate gesture. This

space also fulfils another function within the film. Mimicking the cell in which Soha was incarcerated, the dorm room subversively reenacts that space in which part of Soha's life is still confined every time she talks about Khiam³⁰. It is through the creation of intimacy that *everything and nothing* is able to move us away from the sensationalized landscape of Khiam to the more private surroundings of the dorm room.

Similarly, some of the questions Jayce asks Soha about her everyday life both in Khiam and since her release, have a banality to them which makes them very personal too, especially because such ordinary things are rarely the focus of filmed conversations.

SB: I am speaking here of things that I've never spoken of.

JS: Really?

SB: Yes, I have never spoken of all these accounts, everything I've just told you, all I've just said. It's not new but nobody has ever asked me these questions before.

JS: I like those, the questions like that.

These questions include her thoughts about the distance between Khiam, Lebanon and Paris, what she brought with her and what she left in the detention centre, and what an ordinary day is for her. This 'unusual' focus on the ordinary

³⁰ This is Soha's representational confinement as sub or super-human, which I elaborate on later in the chapter.

enrolls a form of intimacy when filming Soha, precisely because she has so often been asked to talk about the extra-ordinariness of detention, torture and life as a resistance fighter. Like an anecdote to more sensational accounts of her life, the banal and the quotidian – the way in which the film ends because Soha has other things to do – opens an avenue into her experiences which other interviews and conversations haven't explore. And it is to Soha's 'life' that I now want to turn, to peel back another layer of witnessing; one in which *everything and nothing* multiplies Soha's representational subjectivities.

Many Humanities

Focusing on the ordinariness of Soha's life is unusual because she is enmeshed in a particular representational lattice, which *everything and nothing* tries to untangle in places and to make more complicated elsewhere. In so doing, *everything and nothing* proliferates Soha's subjectivities. It is important to note that these are subject *trajectories* rather than *positions*. This difference in terminology is important. While the term position might seem appropriate, since it often seems that the film 'captures' or stabilizes a certain subject performance, these performances are always being reinterpreted, and thus re-constituted every time the film is watched. Since Jayce Salloum attends most public screenings of his work, the dialogues that have taken place around *everything and nothing* literally follow the film around as they become embodied in him. This thesis in turn takes as its point of departure this ever accumulating body of knowledge (through interviews with Jayce). Hence the word trajectories not only helps to

emphasize the movement involved in these processes – their iterative nature – but also suggests that these processes, like any trajectory, are subject to changes from without as much as they are from within. Particularly in the case of Soha's subject trajectories, a number of the processes which I discuss originate from outside her, and ultimately this is where many of these trajectories return 'her' to.

There are two subject trajectories which circulate around and through Soha most frequently when she is encountered through mediated means. These trajectories also result from intimacy of a different nature – the more intrusive and exploitative intimacy which only wants Soha to perform two roles, although sometimes these two become one ('living martyr'). These roles are the former detainee of Khiam, who underwent torture and lived in isolation for six of her ten years in captivity, and the hero of the resistance, who after attempting to assassinate the head of the Southern Lebanese Army, defiantly survived her unjust sentence. Soha Bechara is introduced through these roles at the beginning of *everything and nothing*, in order to establish the ways in which she is commonly represented.

These first two subject trajectories, which function side by side, can be thought of as Soha as less-than-human, or sub-human, and Soha as more-than-human or super-human. To activists fighting for her release, and in interviews and conferences afterwards, Soha becomes an individual who has been viciously oppressed and de-humanized. For example, in the press release accompanying the English translation of her autobiography, Soha is introduced as the woman

who after attempting to assassinate Lahad, was 'immediately apprehended, interrogated, and tortured for weeks, she was sent to Khiam, a prison and death camp, regularly condemned by humanitarian organizations. She spent tens years there, without trial. Six years were in total isolation, in a six- by two- foot cell, with one meal per day and ten minutes to eat'³¹.

At the other end of the spectrum, we are presented with a larger than life hero of South Lebanon, whose picture adorns lamp-posts and mantelpieces alike. In an analogous way although for different reasons and purposes, Soha has also become a more-than-human figurehead of sorts for the *untitled* project. Her image is often used in promotional material such as the poster produced for the Geography department colloquium at UBC³², and the installation is introduced as 'everything and nothing and other works from the ongoing video installation, "untitled", 1999-200?'³³ Finally, in Soha's description of herself as a 'living martyr', the two trajectories combine to become one. These subject trajectories – the sub-human and the super-human - establish Soha as an exceptional figure. She is someone who is different from everyone else; to be pitied or worshiped. The consequences of these representations is in effect to produce another period of solitary confinement. Soha becomes scripted outside the 'human' once again.

³¹ Soft Skull Press, Press release for Resistance: My Life for Lebanon. Available from author.

³² Other examples of her image standing for the whole project that I am aware of include the front cover of the journal *Framework*, for its special issue on Beirut, in the Cinematheque program, and on the post-card for *untitled* when it exhibited at the Daziboa gallery, Montreal.

³³ See promotion material from Daziboa gallery, Gallery 101 and the Western Front.

It is at this point that intimacy, in the manner in which it is enacted in *everything and nothing*, proliferates the representations of Soha as a subject. It is through intimacy that the viewer is not only able to watch Soha on film, but also to enter into an intersubjective movement with her. Rather than being exceptional – literally standing outside the rest of humanity – intimacy establishes a fleeting bond between the audience and Soha.



Figure 1.10: Still from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

Witnessing according to Agamben, is bearing the impossibility of speech within speech itself, allowing the speaker and the silent one, the human and inhuman, to enter into a zone of indistinction. This is why he suggests that witnessing is a vertiginous movement in which it is impossible to establish the position of the

subject³⁴. The witness-subject is always already in motion, an intersubjective process taking place between things or people. It is through intimacy, that this claim is fulfilled in *everything and nothing*, as the intersubjective takes precedence *between* Soha and the audience. This 'between' does not indicate a movement from one thing to the other, but rather, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, a transversal relationship, which sweeps one and the other away, like a river eroding its banks and picking up speed in the middle³⁵. It is through intimacy that Soha becomes intersubjective, with not only Jayce but also the viewer.

I am a person who seeks to preserve, at least her own humanity, and who is capable of maintaining it by her sacrifices for the others who herself and them are one.

Soha's self proclaimed entrance into a zone of indistinction with 'the others' resonates with Agamben's description of witnessing as a vertiginous movement outlined above. While this implicates Soha as a witness, the question remains who are these 'others'? This is a question which is never unambiguously answered. From the context of the tape, it is possible that she is talking about other ex-detainees of Khiam. Her role as a resistance fighter for Lebanon also implies that these others could be the Lebanese population at large. However, in the context of that particular section of the tape, in which she discusses the ideals

³⁴ Agamben, *Remnants...*, 120.

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *a thousand plateaus*, 25.

of humanism at an abstract level, it seems to me when I am watching that these others could in fact be the very viewers of this film. We are also the people Soha is sacrificing herself for, and thus becoming one with, implicated by the film and the intimacy within it. It is in this manner that *everything and nothing*, as a form of witnessing, is an explicitly ethico-political gesture, one that calls (Western) audiences to the injustice of Soha's and Lebanon's detention.

Soha's humanism provides an opening on to the final subject trajectory that I wish to elaborate. In witnessing Soha, I have suggested that she appears as both sub- and super-human, and as intersubjective, or becoming with an-other. Is it possible for Soha to simply become human? What exactly would it mean to become human? To make my point clear, I think we need to return to those moments when Jayce asks her about the very banality of her life, whether in Khiam, or after her release. I think it is in these sections that I experience Soha's excess; not the excess of her humanity which I have just mentioned, but rather the non-representational excess: that part of 'her' which cannot be represented on video. I think in the moments when the quotidian is brought most directly into focus, Soha's affective and libidinal energies – what I earlier described as her 'charisma' - come most sharply into focus. In witnessing Soha Bechara, *everything and nothing*, a video tape, bears the impossibility of representation within what it represents. It gestures at something I can almost sense when watching but cannot articulate. I choose to call this the becoming human of Soha, because this is precisely what constantly keeps escaping in her media appearances. The true originality of *everything and nothing* is its ability to

witness this subject trajectory, albeit through gesturing at the impossibility of ever knowing the truly 'human' Soha.

I am not suggesting that in *everything and nothing* Jayce Salloum is giving Soha her humanity back, as though he were offering a gift, which was never his to give in the first place. Rather, it is from the space between Soha and Jayce that this becoming human emerges. It is this zone of indistinction, what Jayce describes as 'a close and unbreachable distance', which lies at the heart of witnessing. In a similar manner, I am not bringing forth these subject trajectories from the film, as much as they are emerging from a similar space, generated in the process of witnessing *everything and nothing*. In fact, some people may object, to the contrary, that what I have written about could already be found in the film and Soha's experiences. However, to try and separate out our respective parts would be futile, because what exists in this space of indistinction – the relation *between* me and *everything and nothing* – is a term all by itself. The river, while bordered by its two banks, sweeps both away in charting its own course. In other words, this zone of indetermination, this between things, exceeds both parts and their sum.

Witnessing as I have presented it through Agamben's work, involves a vertiginous movement, in which someone bears witness to an impossibility of language or representation. By bearing this impossibility of speech within speech itself, the silent and the speaker enter into a zone of indistinction, such that, as Agamben suggests, 'it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the

"imagined substance" of the "I" and, along with it, the true witness.³⁶ In this chapter, through witnessing *everything and nothing*, and attempting to write about *visual* images, 'I' enter into a zone of indistinction with the tape. However, there are a number of other enactments of witnessing contained within this one. *everything and nothing* bears witness to Soha, and the ways in which she is known. Soha in turn bears witness to detention and resistance. Each of these enactments of witnessing is another vertiginous movement. In witnessing *everything and nothing* I hope to have also witnessed these other movements, and in fact it did not seem possible to do otherwise. Witnessing contains within it a citational structure, which in this instance ultimately leads back to Khiam. As I hope to have shown, key to this cascading of witnessing events is the spatio-temporal trajectories which link Khiam to Paris, and Paris to a variety of viewing contexts.

Witnessing is not then simply a subjective process (what Agamben describes as being subject to a desubjectification³⁷) but also always intersubjective. Just as Soha, in witnessing Khiam, enters into a zone of indistinction with 'others', each time we witness we also get caught up between things. Becoming intersubjective then, can take place not only with 'human' subjects, but in fact with a whole variety of things: video tapes, detention centres and even events such as an interview in a Paris dorm room. And thus this process of becoming intersubjective in *everything and nothing* is also resolutely spatial. In witnessing

³⁶ Agamben, *Remnants...*, 120.

³⁷ Ibid., 151.

Soha in her dorm room, as I noted earlier on, we the audience are moved from the sensational space of Khiam to the mundane world of Paris. However, the way in which the dorm room mimics the cell also allows for the many layers of witnessing I have tried to unpeel throughout this chapter. In the same way, the distance between Lebanon and France allows Soha to reflect on her experiences in a way that would have not been possible without the space (and time) between them³⁸. The different enactments of witnessing I have covered in this chapter are therefore a complex mixture of interwoven subjectivities and time-spaces. Encountering any one particular trajectory or time-space inevitably causes a cascade into the others.

To conclude, I want to return to the question contained within the title of this chapter: 'just time and a conversation', or *everything and nothing*? 'Just time and a conversation' is how Jayce describes this film in the guide which accompanies both public screening of this tape and the installation. In a certain sense this is exactly what happens in the tape. And yet in many ways the tape is also about everything and nothing. As Soha says at one point, when she left Khiam she left everything and she left nothing there. We also encounter the everything of Soha's life as a living martyr, and the nothing of her banal everyday experiences. The intimacy which pervades the whole film could also be thought of as both fleeting everything and subsequently nothing. In each case, everything and nothing become difficult to distinguish, so that in the end the film truly is

³⁸ Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See appendix A1, page A1.3

everything *and* nothing. Ultimately therefore, the title to this chapter should in fact read: 'Just time and a conversation' **and** *everything and nothing*.

Chapter 2: 'Geography doesn't play a role anymore'. beauty and the east and the ethics of knowing others at a distance.

<We are greeted by a carpet of clouds. Big, white, fluffy clouds. The sort that look like cotton wool. The camera pans upwards to show blue sky, and a higher layer of more fragmented, wispy clouds. The low hum of an airplane's engine can just be heard in the background, as can some faint, low tempo music. I feel calm and relaxed, while at the same optimistic, just like at the beginning of a journey. With this image of clouds still in front of us, a woman begins to talk.>

"Like when I tell the story about the house being raided quite often the response from people who have never even... who can't imagine that kind of a situation,"



Figure 2.1: Still from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

<*Woman appears against a white background. Dark black hair, dark eyes, red lipstick, attractive.*>¹

The beginning of *beauty and the east*, which I have tried to evoke above, immediately establishes that this film will be very different from *untitled part 1*. Rather than focusing on one (stationary) person, the film begins with a shot of clouds from a plane window, which creates a sense of weightlessness, freedom and movement. However, after hearing the first sentence, I am rapidly brought back down to earth, just as the image returns to a static focus on the woman who has just begun to speak. This movement between ethereal clouds and violent house raids gestures towards a number of subjects I want to discuss in this chapter – motion, interstitiality and different types of engagement. In so doing, I want to explore the possibilities of witnessing place through an audio-visual medium.

beauty and the east follows an actual journey while also creating the sensation of movement. We encounter numerous subjects through the tape, who give their views on the various (historical) relationships between 'East' and 'West', ethno-fascism and forgiveness, and terms of belonging and identity among other things. Interspersed with these talking heads, we see shots of trees and distant villages rushing by, worn out looking building façades and shots of the sky with an airplane moving back and forth through the frame. In assembling such a

¹ All indented, italicized text in this chapter comes from my ethnographic transcript of *beauty and the east* unless noted. < and > indicate my description of the image, ' and ' indicate dialogue.

cacophony of people and landscapes, *beauty and the east* bears witness to a place, one that is constructed not only by the people and landscapes, but also the cultural and social imaginaries that circulate around and through them. However, as the fragmentary nature of the film hints at, this is not a place which can easily be summed up into any whole. While there are some people who appear more than others, no one particular subject forms the focal point of the film. In the same way, there are a number of topics discussed, and various visual foci too.



Figures 2.2, 2.3: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

Much like the literal journey that formed the basis for the filming process, these foci are nodal points which act as relays rather than cores around which everything else revolves. Even while *beauty and the east* presents us with a partial and fragmented look at how in this place 'the present' was being experienced (in 1999), shards of the past and occasionally the future continually erupt into the film; a number of discordant space-times jostle for position even as they are also connected by the film itself. And amongst these various intersections of times, spaces, cultures and subjectivities, the notion of

interstitiality ferments and bubbles up. However, before I get ahead of myself too much, I want to first dwell on how *beauty and the east* creates a particular notion of 'place', and how this relates to the various places through which the film weaves.

Beyond Yugoslavia?

I have suggested that while *beauty and the east* bears witness to a place, this is not a place that can be easily be summed up. To illustrate exactly what I mean by this, let me begin by trying to name the place in question. When I first saw this film, I was quite happy to say that the place which provided the context for *beauty and the east* was the former Yugoslavia. After all, in both the video description and in subsequent accounts of this work², Jayce himself says that this is where his journey took place. The description – the *former* Yugoslavia – presents this place (at the time the film was made) as existing both in what Salloum calls an interstitial state, literally between things, or what Agamben calls a state of exception, where the exception becomes the rule, and thus all things become immanently possible. (The tape was shot just after the NATO bombing, when Milosevic was in power.) It is precisely from places such as these that testimony emerges, responding among other things to the trauma of interethnic conflict and the subsequent collective loss of language. This is a loss which, as the man with silver-grey hair suggests, is quite literal in this particular place.

² Jayce Salloum, *Sans titre...*

<Cut to the grey-black hair man>



Figure 2.4: Still from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

"I don't use it, if it has some future, I don't know. There is certainly a kind of pleasure, within, deep inside, maybe the knowledge, or the language would go out somehow, but there is no space for the expression. So I have this dead language. And this one language lives somewhere..., but where."

However, to call the place which *beauty and the east* witnesses 'the former Yugoslavia' is in fact highly problematic for two reasons in particular. Firstly, this label, although it provides a convenient short hand for audiences of the film, in fact submerges some very complex histories of place. Yugoslavia itself was only a temporary creation, lasting anywhere between fifty and eighty years depending on the precise definition of the nation. Therefore, to refer to this place as the *former* Yugoslavia, continues inferring a privilege on what was itself a temporary, contested and fragile achievement of nation building (and concomitant

dismantling of other 'nations', which have since re-emerged). In effect, this place to which *beauty and the east* bears witness has been continually made through various performances, which sometimes have sought to construct this place as a nation (Yugoslavia), and at other times have sought something different altogether. The changes which were occurring when Jayce made his journey, and which continue to this day, are not part of some logic of return, whether to a past defined by its relation to Yugoslavia or to the republics that existed before Yugoslavia, (even though some of the 'new' republics bear the same name.) It is precisely this emergence of a new place that *beauty and the east* witnesses. In calling upon the language of interstitiality, Salloum is able to resist a strict demarcation of what is in process and in between definitions.

Secondly, placing *beauty and the east* in the former Yugoslavia is also contested geographically, by the locations which weave in and out of the film. As Jayce suggests³, his journey began in Vancouver, and the tape also moves through (although not in a linear fashion) New York and Vienna, before reaching 'the former Yugoslavia'. In this way, the place that *beauty and the east* witnesses, is incredibly complex and difficult to define. Not only is it created by incorporating networks of people who have lived in a particular, material location at one time, but it also envelopes others whose only relation is empathic. One such person, Carmen Aguirre, the woman who talks about her house been raided at the beginning of the film, is in fact talking about events that took place in Chile when

³ Ibid. This information is also contained in the video descriptions which accompany most public screenings.

she was growing up⁴. It is perhaps only through *beauty and the east* that her experiences come to be related to another part of the world, and the events that took place there. For the remainder of this chapter, I refer to this place which *beauty and the east* witnesses as the 'Balkan region'. This deliberately vague definition, in the context of the discursive fields which circulate around and through the film, is designed to register my dissatisfaction with the label 'the former Yugoslavia' for the reasons stated above. In place of this descriptor, I hope this nomenclature might act instead as a marker, pointing to something far more complex which eludes easy titling, the outlines of which I have also just tried to gesture at.

If what has preceded provides a rather hasty summary of what *beauty and the east* bears witness to, it does so with good reason. Rather than focus primarily on what *beauty and the east* witnesses, I want to think instead about how it enacts that process. It is through *texts*, that Agamben for the most part witnesses Auschwitz. However, I want to think carefully about what happens when witnessing particular events or time-spaces proceeds through film, or in other words a particular form of *audio-visual* testimony. In other words I want to question what different media make possible for the act of witnessing. In following this question, I hope within my discussion to develop further my rather curt witnessing of *beauty and the east*.

Witnessing the Audio-Visual

⁴ Personal interview, 19th February 2004. See Appendix 1.2, page A2.1

In thinking about different enactments of witnessing, I have found the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on art very useful. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that works of art are blocs of sensation⁵. While different enactments of witnessing may or may not take place through art, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of sensation has broader relevance for the sensual nature of many different materials. Hence I begin by suggesting that audio-visual forms of witnessing create different blocs of sensation from printed testimony. What is a bloc of sensation? Deleuze and Guattari suggest that it is "a compound of percepts and affects"⁶, where affects are the non-human becomings of humans, and percepts, the non-human forces of nature⁷. In order to gain a more precise appreciation of what blocs of sensation are, it is thus necessary to understand these two other concepts.

Affects are not affections. This is to say that they are not emotions - something felt at an individual level (e.g. happiness). However, affects are not entirely separate from emotions. For example, when I watch *beauty and the east* I feel (at times) disorientation. Disorientation is an affection (emotion), but not an affect. This intensity which I feel and signify at an individual level as disorientation nevertheless exceeds my self. This excess is affect. Affects go beyond affections, which is why we can say that strictly speaking, affects are without a subject. Brian Massumi describes affects as intensities that flow through events, but cannot be

⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 164.

⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁷ Ibid., 169.

localized in any particular body present at an event⁸, and this seems to me to be a very productive way to get near to that which is difficult to put into words. Affects are immanent to us, and yet not us. They are not part of us but they do play a role in constituting us and our emotional states. And they are not only immanent to us. In fact, through out this piece, I am discussing the affects made possible by my encounter with a video tape, VCR and television in my living room⁹. Affects flow through all manner of things, organic and non-organic, animate and inanimate, while never been reducible to any of these things. Hence Deleuze and Guattari can truly say that affects are non-human becomings of humans. That which causes us (and not just us) to become something-other than ourselves.

Deleuze describes percepts as a perception in becoming¹⁰, which is to say it is our ability to perceive raised to a second level. This second level is not sight as we normally comprehend it, but rather a knowledge of the world enfolded in us by our entire sensory array. To see in this sense, 'is always to think, since what is seeable is part of what "structures thought in advance". And conversely to think is always to see'¹¹. Since our ability to perceive raised to a second level involves such an intimate relationship between seeing and thinking, it is no surprise that percepts are therefore interpreting and evaluating¹². That is to say, they are able to 'see' the ways in which various forces constitute events and things. As a result of being able to diagnose forces, percepts can also 'see' how things could be

⁸ Brian Massumi, *The autonomy of affect*.

⁹ An encounter which has in turn been influenced by many other things.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 112.

¹¹ John Rajchman, *Foucault's Art of Seeing*, 71. Seeing in this manner might be thought of as more of an un-common sense. See Nigel Thrift, *Summoning Life*.

¹² Francois Zourabichvili, *Six notes on the percept*, 192.

different. In other words, percepts take stock of what forces are capable of, what further becomings particular forces make possible, what new events they may give rise to. Hence percepts are the ability to see, or better register, the forces that constitute the world as a becoming, or in other words the ability to register the creative push of life as a permanently differentiating process. This is why Deleuze and Guattari describe percepts as the non-human forces of nature.

So if affects and percepts form blocs of sensations, then the specificity of an audio-visual testimony is the result of particular compositions of affects and percepts. With these conceptual tools at hand, I would like to engage with *beauty and the east* once again, to focus on one particular sensation that is created – that of motion. This means, of course, that it will be necessary to examine some of the particular affects and percepts that constitute the sensation of motion.

<The image on screen shows trees passing by quickly. We are back on the train. The man with silver-grey-black hair begins to speak again.>

"I have something behind, but nothing in front of me, and this is the problem. I don't have an answer as [to] what should replace the national state. I have only the question. How can I still live within this national state? It makes no sense for me anymore. That is the problem. I cannot identify myself with the national state, not in political, not in a cultural way."



Figures 2.5, 2.6: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

<As the man talks, we cut to a shot of a building, whose façade is flaking. Part of a stop sign, can be seen reflected in the window of the vehicle from which the camera films.>

"Not even in the sense of my identity, individual or collective identity. And, er, I don't know where should I express, or realize, or express this, this, problem, in what kind of reality."

In this clip, I am struck by how precisely the forces which constitute this man's subject trajectory are both registered, and their potential to create another trajectory also exposed. The lack of a fixed point for identification, put so urgently here by the silver-grey-black haired man, is one particularly striking way in which *beauty and the east* creates the sensation of motion. Many other people in the film also talk about identity in terms that resist fixture and permanence. One woman offers one reason why this might be.

<We see a shot of what looks like a building, obscured by something which might be branches of a tree, but it is too close to the camera to make out.>

"Well I'm Croat origin. My parents are Croat. And I don't have anything against that, but I don't want to be Croat as, in this political term, which, er, if you are Croat in Croatia, you have all, all rights,"

<Cut to a shot of the woman who is currently speaking. She has short, brown hair, and a red jumper.>



Figures 2.7, 2.8: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

"And if you are not in the same Croatia you don't have any of the rights, and this is not just a question of Croatia of course, it is everywhere where the nationalists are in power. It means that I don't want to identify myself as..., when somebody asks me who you are, I would say, either ex-Yugoslav, or post-Yugoslav, or,"

<laughing>

"Or, well, somebody from Sarajevo or before from Belgrade, or in the beginning from Zagreb, you know. But I don't like this collective identities."

If her subject trajectory resists fixture in conventional categories such as nationality, it does not necessarily follow that a fluid subjectivity in the 'Balkan region' is any more desirable, as the woman in this clip underscores so effectively. Her rejection of nationality as a category for identification is obvious, but despite her attempts to reject it, there is a need to identify with some where (and when), whether this place is Sarajevo, Belgrade, a Yugoslavia that used to exist, or whatever exists now in its place. Her subject trajectory can neither be a territorially based nationalism, nor some kind of extra-territorial cosmopolitanism. Neither tied to land and state, nor free to roam wherever it chooses. Whatever it is, it is hard to articulate, and resembles as the silver-grey-black haired man suggests, much more of a problem (with its double meaning as both a challenge and a dilemma) than a solution. The sensation of motion is thus ambiguous, in the same way that various subject trajectories, the fluid space of the former Yugoslavia, globalization and neo-nationalization are all simultaneously dangerous and opportune. In fact, watching *beauty and the east*, I (quite literally) get the feeling that fluidity presents more dangers than opportunities.

<The shot is of the silver-grey-black haired man. His eyes continue to dart around as he speaks.>

"As an immigrant, there are no borders anymore for the global capital, but there are new walls around us, and, the people from the Western Europe and the Western world think that walls and borders are not, are part of our past, our sad communist past. But people coming from the third world, to the Eastern Europe, trying to survive let's say, they face these new walls, which are as closed as they used to be during the time of Communism. And there is no freedom in that sense, and that's something we know, all of us, we know that, but it's not the same way how we feel it. If someone just tries to come into fortress Europe from its outside,"



Figures 2.9, 2.10: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

<Cut to shot of a rather grey sky from a moving train.>

"From its excluded outside, he would feel it, very, as something very real."

If percepts of different subject trajectories are one way in which the sensation of motion is created, then there are also a number of ways in which affects also

contribute to this sensation. One key way in which this is done is through the motion within the image itself. At various points, we see people walking past a shop window in the reflection of the glass. Trees frequently rush past, as they are filmed from a moving train, as do houses and the sky at other times. A plane almost bounces around the edge of the image's frame, and it is frequently obscured by houses which pass in front of the vehicle from which the camera is filming.



Figures 2.11, 2.12: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

Even when Salloum (the cameraman) is stationary, the camera often remains restless, moving over the various objects it encounters.

<The shot begins with a close-up of a table. There are many objects on this table, which come into focus as camera pans over it. We see a pile of books, then a pad of paper, with a few doodles and a pen on top of it. A box of tissues. We hear the sound of someone breathing close by, possibly the cameraman. In the distance a voice starts to speak.>

"You know what"

<The camera pans over an answer phone. Voice becomes unclear as receipt and chewing gum pass through the frame.>

"You think you can take out of Eastern Europe,"

<A CD, playing cards, and some loose paper pass by.>

"Not so much nationalism,"

<A camera manual.>

"But, also, sort of..."

<A lamp, more CD boxes and CDs, and another two boxes of tissues.>

"Actually before the political changes we didn't live in the real world, it was just we enjoyed fiction or our imagination."

<We see a computer, keyboard, disks, a plastic cup – the table is a mess.>

"You know what I'm taking about, erm, it's hard to, it's hard to describe.

<The camera pans back to the pile of books, then cuts to a woman standing in a doorway, who has reddened skin. >

"We didn't live here now, we just always lived in, in, erm, some,"

<Camera pans out, shaking slightly.>

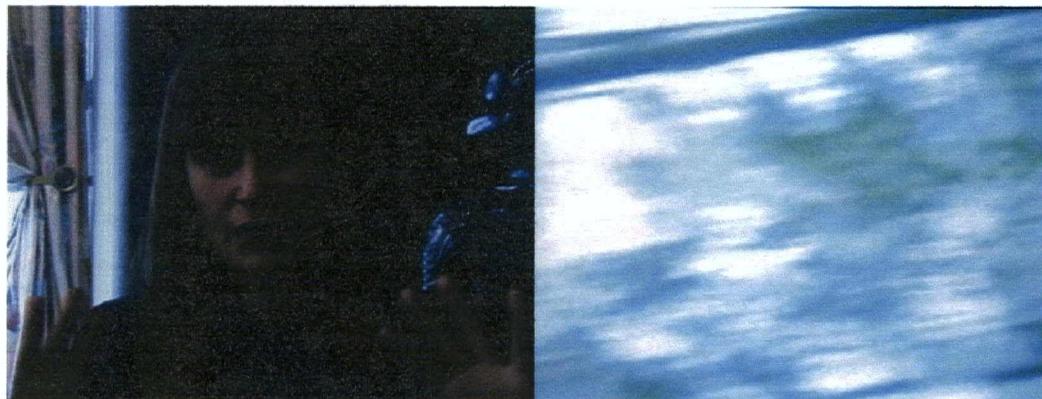
"Metaphors, and now, this is why the reality seems so fascinating for me now, the real world, because suddenly we got grounded, like before the political changes nobody went to the museum because we lived in a fiction."

In this scene, which my ethnographic transcript barely evokes, we get a very strong feeling of restlessness. The camera's constant motion, which occurs below the level of focused attention a great deal of the time¹³, generates the affective intensity which I've called a feeling of restlessness. What this clip also shows is the way in which *beauty and the east* juxtaposes these manifold moments of movement, (either of things within the image, or by the camera itself), with the still shots of the subjects as they speak. The people are filmed from fixed positions, and apart from panning in or out occasionally, the camera remains still. This technique complements the perceptions of subjectivities within the film's dialogue with an affective charge. The people interviewed are presented as static, caught within a landscape that is moving. However, as Jayce suggests, although they are visually static, this is to only 'see' them in a literal sense, ignoring the social and historical contexts which the subjects move within, and which move the subjects¹⁴. In fact, often even these images are not able to remain static for long either.

<The woman sat in a café has been speaking about relations with Western Europe. [I have taken this excerpt from the end of this particular scene].>

¹³ See William E. Connolly, *neuropolitics*.

¹⁴ Personal interview, 19th February 2004. See Appendix 1.2, page A2.2



Figures 2.13, 2.14: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

"And then in Eastern Europe you have the monsters. This kind of people that are showing constantly that they are piece of shit on one point and they are actually trying to erm, to take the articulation in their hand."

<Cut to shot of the sky, again from a moving vehicle. Spots of rain cover the window. As the vehicle moves, trees come into frame horizontally. After a while I realize that the camera is being held sideways. While this happens, the woman has continued to speak.>

"So monsters for me are a new kind of agents and they are part of this new eastern European context."

In this moment, as in many others, the fluid landscape interrupts the immobile speaker. However, rather than displacing her completely, the continuation of her voice in some way frees her from the stasis of the café shot, as part of her becomes part of this more itinerant landscape - a world turned not on its head, but rather on its side. While many of these moments occur abruptly, there are also occasions where the image of a person fades out slowly, and thus is literally

imprinted on the landscape. This process also works in reverse too, as landscape shots fade into the people speaking. One particularly striking example of this occurs when the image of a merry-go-round - plastic horses and bright lights spinning past the camera - fades into a fixed shot of a woman speaking, significantly, about how processes of globalization can also lead to an increase in nationalism. As Jayce suggests, the landscape and the subjects invert each others' positions or movements¹⁵.

Indeterminate Sensations

To summarize, both the topics spoken about and use of the filmic image are two ways in which the sensation of motion is generated in *beauty and the east*. And motion is not the only sensation generated by the film. Consider the following moment.

<Silhouettes of people's heads pass by as the camera stares out on to the runway and the cloudy grey sky beyond. As a woman begins to speak, this image changes colour to grey.>

¹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 2.15: Photograph of *untitled installation* at Museum of Civilization, Hull, Que.
showing image of part 2: *beauty and the east*

"The in-between space is the undefined space between two concrete points of space, which everybody is able to define".

<Cut to woman, wearing a hair band, who is looking down at her lap, as if reading aloud. The image remains grey (colourless).>

"You meet someone, you leave someone, you love someone, you hate someone, there is the inside and there is the outside. The two concrete points give us the frame in which the undefined space is in. The undefined space one cannot touch because it is not concrete".

<She looks up at camera as the image fades to black.>

At this particular point in the tape, the very colour of the image, caught between black and white, affectively bolsters the woman's discussion of the 'in-between space', creating a sensation of what I term indeterminacy. I draw attention to this scene in particular, because I think the way in which these blocs of sensation -

motion and indeterminacy - are created is specific to an audio-visual medium. This is not to say that such sensations cannot be created in other media. However, as my attempts to evoke motion with words in my ethnographic transcript demonstrate, certain media can be more effective at producing certain blocs of sensation than others. *beauty and the east* offers, in my opinion, a particularly effective way of witnessing the 'Balkan region' through the sensation of motion. The effect of such a sensation is to underscore that the Balkan region's interstitial state is not so much a stable place, as a process. Like a journey without a particular destination, it is the process of traveling itself that becomes important.

To think further about the effects of different sensations, the different forms of testimony that result from them and in particular *beauty and the east*'s exploration of interstitiality I want to focus on the forms of engagement within the tape. In *everything and nothing* intimacy is generated through a sustained engagement between Soha Bechara and Jayce Salloum. In *beauty and the east*, not only are there a number of subjects who only speak for very short periods at any one time, but Jayce is no longer present in the film. The engagement with the subjects in this tape therefore takes a very different form from *part 1*.

The lack of any sustained connection in *beauty and the east*, in terms of the time spent continuously with any one person in the film, prevents a close intimacy such as I experienced when watching *part 1*, although some characters do exhibit a similar sort of charisma or screen presence (such as the man with silver black

grey hair). Jayce suggests that viewers get engaged in this tape and then a series of anti-climaxes forces them to pull out and then become engaged once again¹⁶. In this way the fragmentary nature of this engagement, and any intimacy that results from it, reflects the broader ways in which *beauty and the east* encounters the 'Balkan region'. *beauty and the east* does not present a rich historical context for Jayce's journey, even though such a context does infiltrate many of the conversations that occur. As Jayce suggests, working in this area demanded a different strategy of engagement from his previous work dealing with Lebanon¹⁷. Rather than dealing with the ways in which this place has been represented within the West, *beauty and the east* is more concerned with how people living there articulate their experiences of the present moment. This means the film presents something which in some ways is more 'shallow', since the material is not wrapped up quite so tightly in the historical and spatial contexts that both the filmmaker and those being filmed bring to the tape. However, if this approach lacks depth, the relatively context-free approach to engaging with the interviewees is perhaps something we, the audience, experience more frequently in our everyday lives than the close intimacy of *part 1*. In other words, through offering a 'snap-shot' of place based only on fleeting encounters, it mimics the majority of our own engagements with the world – brief, unplanned and often uninformed.

¹⁶ Ibid., page A2.7

¹⁷ Ibid, page A2.4

Any close engagement in *beauty and the east* must therefore emerge from encounters which are fleeting and often short lived. The fragmented nature of the film, which pauses in the company of different people for short moments before moving on again, forces these immediate and transitory connections. Hence in a similar way to taking a trip, it is possible to share moments of intimacy with some of the people we meet, but these are always brief. Experiencing the pride of this man as he tells this short vignette was one such moment for me.

<Cut to slightly older man, hair resting on neck>



Figure 2.16: Still from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

I mentioned to you that I was writing. That I published a book. What was..., I mean..., I mean many people publish books, but this was very important for me, because this was war, when a Bosnian guy with Muslim name, published a book in Belgrade, in 1994, when people were losing jobs, on television, in newspapers, because of their name."

The sense of connectedness that is possible for an Anglophone audience is also dependant in this film on the interviewees' ability to speak English. Hence our engagement is tainted, based as it is on the ability of the subjects to speak English. This implicates both them and us, the Anglophone viewer, in the processes of colonialism and globalization which have led to the predominance of the English language. The flip side of this, as Jayce suggests, is that it is also a way for them to engage with and have agency in these very same processes and flows¹⁸.

It is this notion of a transitory and impure engagement that I want to build on in thinking about some of the implications of enacting witnessing through an audio-visual medium. While using an audio-visual medium has many potential effects, I want to explore how *beauty and the east* offers a means of ethically knowing and relating to others at a distance.

Ignorance and Alienation

If *beauty and the east* tape creates knowledge about other people in other places, it does so through a commitment to a lack of knowledge and dissatisfaction. As I have suggested, the intimacy that I felt when watching the film was short-lived and sporadic. While feeling 'connected' to the subjects for short durations, the sensation I experienced most of all was in fact frustration and ignorance. Each cut to another person denied me the chance to get to know any of the subjects in

¹⁸ Ibid., page A2.6

any sustained way. Rather, each time I watched the film I felt like I left having only caught a glimpse of these people. All I have is a small fragment of their time, in which they have only spoken about a small fragment of their experiences, hence my heightened awareness of my own ignorance each time I engage with the tape.

However, although this ignorance is frustrating, I have also come to think of it as being productive in a certain way. Through confronting my ignorance about the subjects in the film, I have been forced to become aware in a very real, embodied sense of just how partial my knowledges about the world are. In particular, *beauty and the east* witnessing of place – this ‘Balkan region’ – transpires in such a way as to necessitate modesty when relating to the people on camera. When I watch this film, I simply cannot imagine how it would be possible to ‘know’ in any complete sense, the people or place before me, at least from the film itself.

The style of discourse in the film is also causes me frustration. The participants in the film are listed in the accompanying guide as ‘migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, residents (permanent and transient), students, workers, and cultural producers’¹⁹. What links them together is their resolutely intellectual nature of their filmed discussions. The majority of participants offer some kind of theorization of certain events and processes. While very interesting, I also find the intellectual content of the film hard going and occasionally alienating because of the work it requires me to do as a viewer. This alienation creates distance

¹⁹ Video guide.

between the subjects in the film and myself, and seems to oppose an intimate engagement. However, I think in fact this style of discourse foregrounds the audio-visual aspects of the tape which cannot be directly reproduced in text, and the manner in which these aspects create a certain sort of transitory and impure intimacy. One such aspect is the use of haptic visuals.

<A hand holding a pen can be seen, as discordant music plays quietly in the background. The hand is writing something in a note book, which looks like it is resting on someone's lap. The notebook is only partially in shot and slightly out of focus. Since the hand writing is also fairly scruffy, it is difficult for me to make out what is being written. A woman begins to speak.>

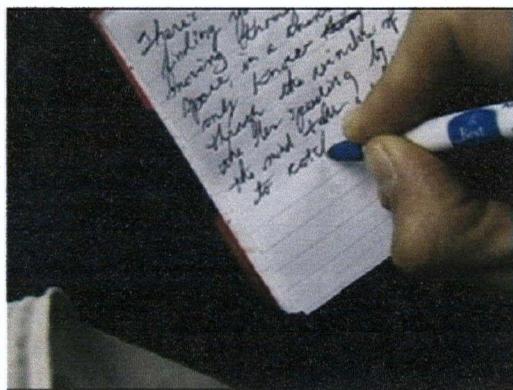


Figure 2.17: Still from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

<After a few seconds the hand finishes writing, and I can make out the last three words: 'to catch up'. The camera suddenly moves very slightly, so that the top of the page comes into view. As I start to read what has

been written, the notebook fades out, and a picture of bridge over a river comes into view.>

The haptic nature of the image in this scene has two effects. In not being able to read what was written, the careful detail and technique of the act of writing became apparent instead. The words on the page became a carefully constructed set of black lines, and the wrinkles and folds of the skin on the hand came into view. However, I also felt a sense of frustration and ignorance as I couldn't read what was written. This experience was repeated a few minutes later.

<The shot is a close up of part of someone's arm. The camera pans slowly up the arm to thick black hair (with some grey streaks) on top of someone's head. As this happens, soft music abruptly begins. The camera continues to move slowly through the hair till I can just about make out a pillow or towel, and part of another arm, upon which the hair has been resting. As the camera lingers on the second arm, the music abruptly cuts stops, as if someone has turned a tape recorder on and off.>

In scenes such as these, the brief use of haptic visual both creates the sensation of touching, rather than looking at, what is on screen, while also enforcing a very literal partial perspective. This association between engagement and ignorance is further propelled by a number of sounds - whether something which sounds like organ music or a radio station - which suddenly start and just as suddenly stop at a number of points though out the tape.

Another means by which this association between ignorance and engagement develops, is through the anonymity of the various people and places in *beauty and the east*. There are no captions identifying the landscapes or the people speaking. This manoeuvre on the part of the filmmaker both resists positioning the participants with easily reductive labels, and simultaneously ensures that we don't know who they are. However, the participants are listed in no particular order in the handout which accompanies most screenings of the film. This slightly unusual crediting process, which acknowledges the individuals who participated without specifically identifying them, allows only viewers who already know these people through other means to recognize them. For the majority of viewers (including me) who don't know any of these people, this separation of name from image forces a visual kind of knowing. That is to say, rather than simply referring to their name, the audience comes to know them through other means, such as hair colour and clothing, specific things they say or the surroundings in which they were filmed. This process only allows very limited and specific things to be known about these people, most of which can literally be seen or heard.

Similarly, while *beauty and the east* produces a partial perspective of place, that does not mean that the film creates an anonymous landscape. Rather the place which *beauty and the east* bears witness to, (which I have called the 'Balkan region'), is in fact one which is situated in particular networks of knowledge and experience, albeit ones that lie outside the confines of this tape. This is to say that

it is possible to know some of these landscapes and people more intimately, but not through the film itself. As if to underline that knowledge of this place is confined to certain networks, some viewers who I have seen this film with, did recognize some of the people and landscapes.

Caring as a Form of Relating

In discussing the relationship between engagement and ignorance in this film, I have stressed that this coupling literally performs a partial perspective with regards to seeing and knowing the 'Balkan region' through *beauty and the east*. While this emphasizes the ignorance side of the equation, there is also another effect of this way of 'seeing'. Although *beauty and the east*'s perspective is partial, I would argue that it is also caring.

This caring is evident in the haptic visuals, as they touch - lightly in this instance - what they see. It is also evident in the way in which the film avoids exploiting the recent context of this region. Jayce notes in the accompanying handout that his trip took place after the NATO bombing. However, rather than create representations of this region as a war zone or an area of inter-ethnic conflict, *beauty and the east* opens up a filmic space of indeterminacy, in which the East becomes a multiplicity of spaces, times and experiences colliding, interacting and supplementing each other. The link between *the east* and the beast – the pun which the title of the film plays upon – is severed, to reveal that *the east* and beauty can exist contiguously, rather than as two polar opposites. *beauty and the*

east offers a form of caring, both materially and affectively, for ephemeral encounters.

The ephemeral nature of viewer engagement in *beauty and the east* reflects the way in which Jayce himself interacted with the subjects. Jayce enters this territory as someone who knows little about its history. Thus, feeling less at liberty to deconstruct their positions due to his own ignorance, Jayce suggests that this tape is only about his experiences traveling through this region and not the region itself²⁰. This space of travel within *beauty and the east* not only establishes the East as a space of indeterminacy but also creates a connection between the East and West, through the collage of experiences that result from the filmmaker's journey through Vancouver, New York, Vienna, Ljubljana and from there south through the region. This link, enacted through the partial, caring knowledges I have gestured at, breaks down the East/West binary so that *the east* is not just internally but also externally indeterminate. That is to say, the tape multiplies the relations between West and East to the point where these categories no longer make sense as spatial or ideological demarcations. As the silver-grey-black haired man suggests,

²⁰ Personal interview, 19th February 2004. See Appendix 1.2, page A2.4



Figures 2.18, 2.19: Stills from *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

"It is the space of confusion I would say. I would, er, I would prefer to use these types of terms to describe it: not geographical terms <cut to shot of man's face>, because geography doesn't play any, any role any more, for me, in...erm, because it was heavily ideological. It used to be. Eastern Europe is an ideological term...but <smiling at camera rather sinisterly> Western Europe is as well <Laughing now>. It is ideology and not geography.

Hence, not only does *beauty and the east* offer one form of ethically relating to others at a distance in cases where a sustained commitment isn't possible, but it also seeks to question categories which continue to separate a Western 'us' from an Eastern 'them'. This is an important political statement at a time when the Balkan region was largely represented as a war zone by the mainstream Western media.

Sensationalizing Testimony

To conclude this chapter, I want to return to the potentialities and possibilities created by different forms of testimony. If witnessing is to experience and recount an event, and in doing so bear an impossibility of speech within what is said, then I would argue different forms of witnessing bear this impossibility in different ways. Within this chapter, I have tried to enfold the ways in which I think *beauty and the east* bears the impossibility of representing and knowing a place – what I have awkwardly termed the 'Balkan region'. I have also foregrounded the specificity of the sensations involved in this act of witnessing to an audio-visual medium. This is not to suggest that written testimony cannot generate sensations such as motion and intimacy, but these very sensations will be different in nature precisely because of the media through which they come into being.

It is important to think about different sensations because I would argue they have the ability to enfold different audiences. While I find the *untitled* project very compelling, others may not. Similarly, Agamben's account of Auschwitz will resonate with some and not with others. The point is that different forms of witnessing can enfold different political audiences and constituencies to different extents. We might suggest that different forms of testimony can act as different tools or weapons in the biopolitical struggle for being, to extend Agamben's scenario²¹. Proliferation of political methods is particularly important when you view politics as a matter of constant experimentation and quotidian strategizing

²¹ See Agamben, *Remnants...*, 146.

as I do. Proliferating styles of witnessing offers the potential to enfold different (political) audiences into such accounts, and thus propagate different knowledges about the world, such as (nearly) contemporary experiences of living in the 'Balkan region' in the case of *beauty and the east*.

I will return to the political importance of the *untitled* project in its various parts in the final chapter. At this point, I want to consider the implications of different forms of testimony for telling stories about the world, or in other words, Geography. Geography in this instance is not thought of as an academic/institutional discipline so much as a set of disciplined practices which intersect in a variety of ways with a variety of other practices which are constantly (re-)creating the world. To proliferate the bounds of geography in this manner, is to suggest that at the heart of any geographical project, academic or otherwise, is a concern with the difference space and place make. While some within the discipline have recently argued for new ways of doing geography within academia²², I think there are valuable (political) lessons to be learnt from those practicing geographies in other arenas. Jayce Salloum is one such person, and *beauty and the east* offers a very compelling geography of the 'Balkan region'. While I am not proposing that *beauty and the east* is in anyway better than various other accounts, this particular form of geography ensnared me in a way the other accounts haven't. I realize that this will not be the same for everyone, and this is precisely the point. If we believe our understandings and practices of space and place to have important political consequences, then it is equally

²² See Nigel Thrift, *Afterwords; Summoning Life*.

necessary to share and disseminate such understandings. To do this, geographers need to start taking seriously the affective force of their argument as much as the intellectual content. In engaging with those who already practice geography in different ways (as well as proliferating our own styles of academic writing), there are key alliances to be made. In writing about the *untitled* project, I am trying to forge one such alliance myself. It is my hope that doing this will increase the ways in which I am able to intervene in the world politically and ethically. Of course, there is no way of knowing whether this will work or not.

Politics is by no means an apodictic science. It proceeds by experimentation, groping in the dark, injection, withdrawal, advances, retreats. The factors of decision and prediction are limited²³.

²³ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *a thousand plateaus*, 461.

Chapter 3: Trauma and Beauty in *as if (beauty never ends...)*

“Many a burning tear did fall when you went away...”¹



Figure 3.1: Still from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

I begin this chapter with a quote and an image from *untitled part 3b* as a means of foregrounding both the trauma and beauty in *as if (beauty never ends...)*. Listening to Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan’s story of his house’s destruction, whilst watching images of dead bodies interspersed with orchids (or should that be orchids interspersed with dead bodies), this tape provides a very visceral experience of the ongoing Palestinian dispossession that began in 1948. In this chapter, I begin by thinking about how *part 3b* deals with the trauma of the Palestinian dispossession. In doing so, I want to explore both temporalities and spatialities that make trauma visible within the tape, and how they aid in resisting ‘coping’ strategies which seek to nullify trauma’s critical potential². I

¹ Indented and italicized text is taken from my ethnographic description of *as if (beauty never ends...)*. < and > indicates my description. All other text is Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan’s dialogue.

² Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, see chapters 2 & 3 in particular.

then focus on the beauty which closely attends the traumatic in this tape. This leads me in conclusion to challenge trauma as the sole analytic lens for witnessing the Palestinian dispossession through *as if (beauty never ends...)*.

Trauma Time and Palestine

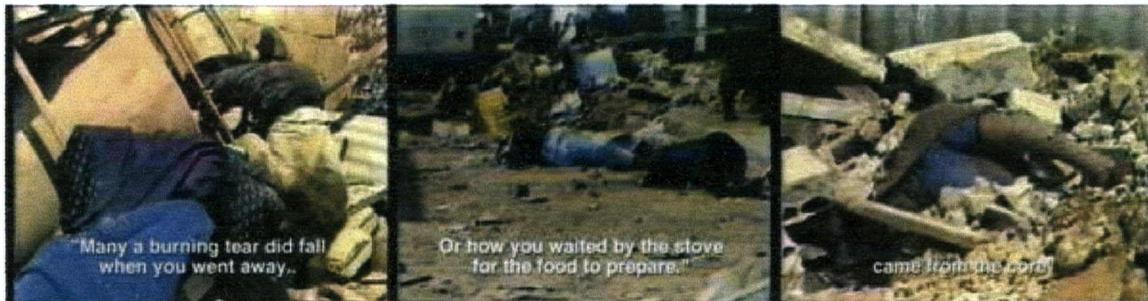
In her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins suggests that trauma is 'the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness and horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge'³. In a strict sense, Edkins suggests, trauma isn't experienced at all, where experience is thought of as a form of cognitive comprehension. Rather trauma exists as a series of sensations which are constantly relived due to the failure to allocate meaning to them. While in my opinion, the word experience can describe a sensual encounter as much as cognitive understanding (as far as these two processes can be separated out in practice), I otherwise find Edkins' notion of trauma very useful.

Since traumas by their very nature elude cognitive explanation, Edkins argues that such experiences therefore create and exist in a different temporality - what she calls 'trauma time' - from the time of everyday life. What cannot be comprehended cannot be neatly fitted into a linear narrative form (with a beginning, middle and end). Instead, trauma returns as nightmares or flashbacks⁴. It is timelessness; experienced in the form of a constant, open-ended

³ Caruth quoted in Edkins, *Trauma...*, 39-40.

⁴ Edkins, *Trauma ...* 1-2.

repetition. However, this is not to imply that trauma time is separate from linear time. Rather 'each implies the other: they are inextricably entwined. Trauma time is inherent in and destabilizes any production of linearity'⁵.



Figures 3.2 - 3.4: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...) is grounded in the traumatic experience of the Palestinian dispossession. However, as the tape makes clear by weaving through the 1982 massacres at Sabra and Chatilla, the dispossession did not just 'happen' in 1948, but continues to this very day. Jayce suggests that he was motivated to make this film by the 2002 Israeli invasion of the Jenin refugee camp, and the atrocities that were committed there⁶. At the present time of writing (June 2004), the Israeli incursion and house demolitions in Rafah represent another continuation of the on-going violence perpetrated against Palestinians. Their dispossession is open-ended, just as the occupation which causes it also lacks finitude or remedy.

⁵ Edkins, *Trauma...* 16.

⁶ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.1

Within *part 3b*, the audience's link to the dispossession is the voice of Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan, a Palestine refugee now living in Bourg al Barajinah Camp, Lebanon. During the tape, Hassan describes returning to Palestine, thirty years after being forced to leave, and encountering the ruins of his former home. However, far from being dead, his house begins to speak to him, asking about the fate of Abdel, his relatives and the Arab world, while also letting Abdel know what happened when he left.



Figures 3.5: Still from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

*"What about Khalil, Fadl and Abdullah,
Do they walk amongst us or is it 'God rest their souls?'"*

*- The house then told me what had happened to it after we had left –
It said...*

"Many a burning tear did fall when you went away..."

*When it cried the Israelis came to question the reason behind the tears,
and they warned the house that it would be demolished if it did not stop
crying*

- And then it asked me about what happened to us during nightfall -

How did we find our way...

Did we seek the stars and planets for guidance -

"Many a burning tear did fall when you went away

But destruction and demolition was the threat of the day

...

It then says

"Look what happened to me...

When they occupied me by force

They told me that they

Would have killed you all had you stayed behind

By force they took me

And asked if it was quite clear...

But any bright person would have understood...

My dear

They turned me into rubble

And even took away my stones...

What will they do...

Sell them for money or build new homes?

Will they use my wood to teach others a trade?

Oh what has befallen me and my mates?

Even you have added to my disheartened state."

- *Then he asks me about the Arabs and the Arab world...*

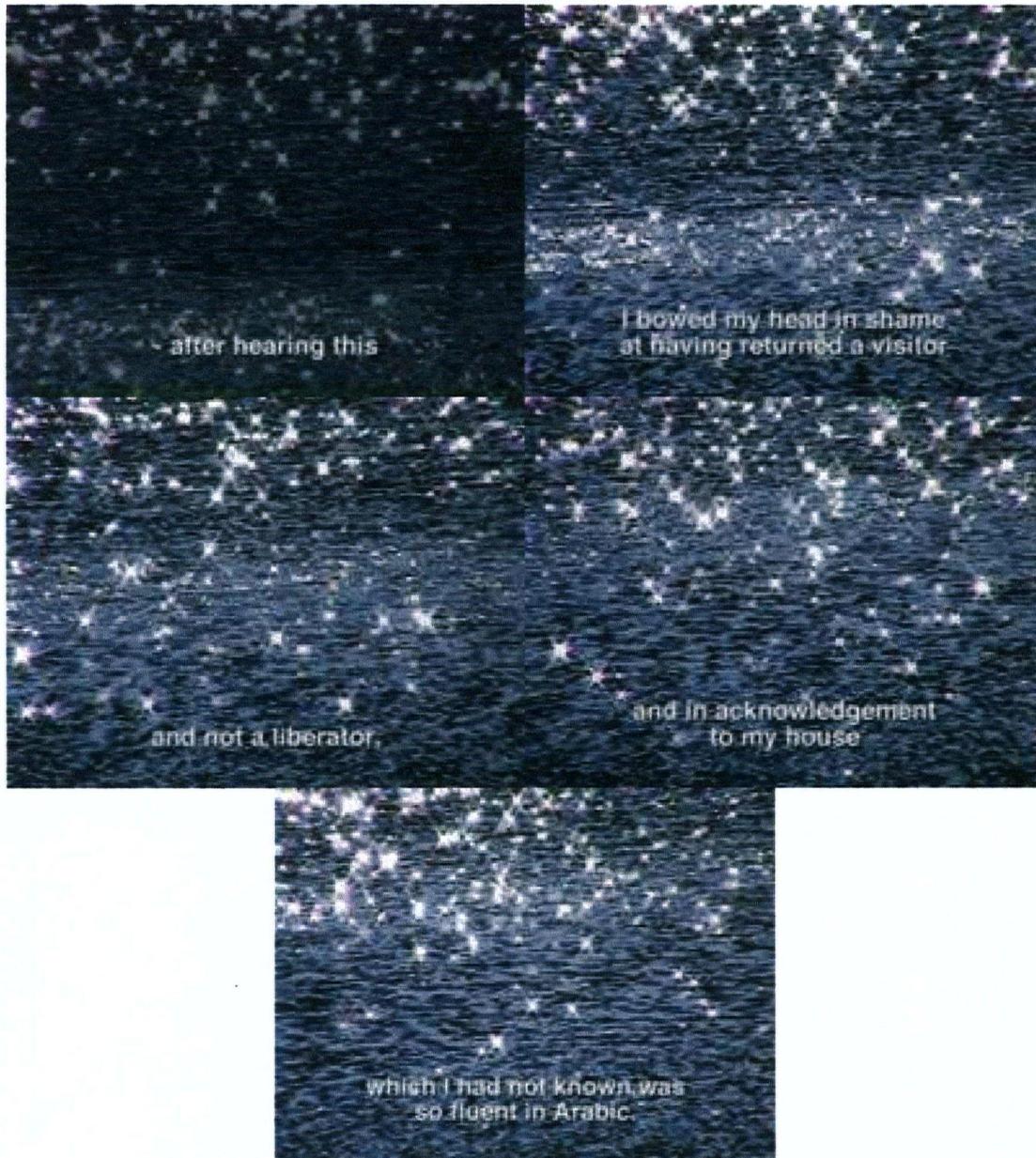
"Where are they and what have they done to liberate me."

He gives me a message to relate to them -

"Tell those cowardly eyes about me, should they ever sleep."

Abdel's poetic account, and the imaginary words of his house recalled long after his visit, enact a double trauma. Not only is the dispossession of 1948 relived through his story, but also the more recent visit to his former home generates another, related feeling of anguish. As he goes on to say:

*After hearing this [story] I bowed my head in shame at having returned
as a visitor and not a liberator, and in acknowledgement to my house
which I had not known was so fluent in Arabic.*



Figures 3.6 - 3.10: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

This reliving of both his original loss and his unhappy return is 'trauma time', the painful repetition of what cannot be comprehended and subsequently forgotten. This experience of trauma is also redoubled in another way. Just as Abdel retells and relives his experience of dispossession, his house, although destroyed, is also not at rest. In *as if (beauty never ends...)* the very built environment experiences trauma, something I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

At this point though, I want to note that while a great deal of imagery on this tape attests to the manner in which the dispossession exceeds linear structuring, it does have a beginning (1948) and hence also middle. In *part 3: occupied territories: footnotes to the book of setbacks*, the installation based 'sister' film to *part 3b*, Nameh Hussein Sulieman even projects a future end, albeit after she is dead. Thus, although the trauma of dispossession may be experienced as timeless, as Edkins suggests, the narrative-like structure of everyday life begins to creep in. In fact, traumatic events seem to recur with such alarming regularity within this community, that trauma time itself seems to blend increasingly with the time of everyday life. As Amira Hass suggests,

Calamities... are enormous, unusual once-in-a-lifetime events. The opposite of routine. But the nature of the Palestinian effort to cope with the series of IDF raids means adapting to a routine of disaster after

disaster. There is no time to get used to the results of one disaster before the next one comes.⁷

It becomes very difficult to make a concrete distinction between Palestinian suffering experienced as a result of what *has* happened, and the suffering that is due to the *current* continuation of dispossession.

Trauma Spaces - Circulation

Complementing this temporality, there is also a complex spatiality in *as if (beauty never ends...)* through which trauma both works and is itself produced. This spatiality of the dispossession is performed through a number of different but interconnected scales. This intricate geography of trauma begins with the circulation of the film itself, in its role as a memorial to the dispossession. Rather than being located at the 'heart' of any particular nation, such as the Cenotaph in London or the Vietnam Veterans Wall in Washington D.C.⁸, *as if (beauty never ends...)* occupies transnational networks of movement, stopping for periods of time at the various cinemas, galleries and other venues where it is shown⁹. This transnational approach allows the tape to interact with a larger audience than if it remained in one location. Such cross-border movements encourage a form of

⁷ Amira Hass, quote in Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 130.

⁸ See Edkins, *Trauma...*, chapter 3.

⁹ Part 3b has been part of exhibitions at Hull, Canadian Museum of Civilisation; Prague, Eurovision2000; Amsterdam, World Wide Video Festival; Vienna, Kunsthalle Exnergasse; California, Santa Monica Museum of Art; Belgrade, The Museum of Contemporary Art; Toronto, YYZ; Ottawa, Gallerie 101; Montreal, Dazibao Galerie; Vancouver, The Western Front. The film has also been shown a large number of single channel screenings.

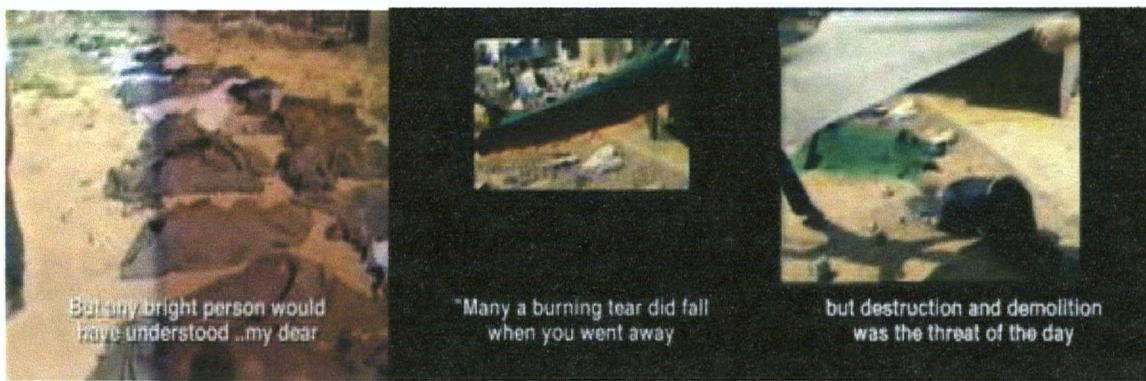
solidarity which stretches across national divisions, which is important for a Palestinian diasporic community now dispersed across many countries and lacking a clearly identifiable nation-state. The relatively easy movement across national boundaries also marks a disjunction between the film and the movement of Palestinian refugees such as Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan, to Lebanon (and elsewhere). The discrimination and increased hardship faced by these transnational 'migrants'¹⁰, is in stark contrast to the (Western) privilege of being able to choose when and where to travel. This disjuncture marks the difference between the experiences of Palestinians and most audiences' experiences of the dispossession while watching this film. This disjuncture forms the background for all of the ways (and spaces) through which the dispossession is made real and current for audiences of *as if (beauty never ends...)*, which I will now discuss.

The Body

Within the film itself, perhaps the most immediate space of trauma is that of the physical human body. Accompanying Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan's words are the truly horrific images from the Sabra and Chatilla camp, after the massacre that took place there in September 1982. Here is one excerpt from my ethnographic transcript of *part 3b*, describing some of the images in front of me:

¹⁰ Palestinians living in Lebanon for instance cannot by law work in a number of (well-paid) professions and few live outside the refugee camps. They have few legal or political rights.

<The colours fade to an image of blankets, stretching far into the distance. It is obvious that beneath each blanket is a dead body. The image lingers on the bodies for a moment, then fades to white, before fading to black. A small box appears in the middle of the screen, in which two men are picking up one such 'body blanket' and turning it through 180 degrees. We can hear the sound of voices speaking. This same short sequence is repeated. Fade to black. A fuzzy image of a woman throwing her hands in the air (in anguish?) appears. The tracking of this image keeps shifting so that the woman never really comes into focus. Fade to black, then cut to camera moving across a sandy floor towards a body in a shroud. Cut to black. Then cut to an image of a piece of earth, covered with a few small, unidentifiable objects. The tracking 'jars', before a quick fade to what looks like a wig or a scalp. Another quick fade shows a single shoe lying by this mass of hair. Then another quick fade to a sandal, before another quick fade to a straw hat lying on wet, muddy ground. Another quick fade shows a walking stick lying amidst debris. The screen becomes completely fuzzy, as if the tracking is completely out of sync.>



Figures 3.11 - 3.13: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

The numerous images from the Sabra and Chatilla massacre fade in and out with great speed and also great persistence. However, despite their fleeting and ephemeral nature, I find even these brief glimpses of the often grotesquely disfigured remains and lifeless objects still almost too much to bear. Unlike the ‘picture’ of Soha we are given in *part 1*, these images are quite literally *sensational* – they work on me very directly at an affective and visceral level. This body-to-body encounter forces me to engage with the corporeal suffering caused by the dispossession in what feels like a very immediate way.

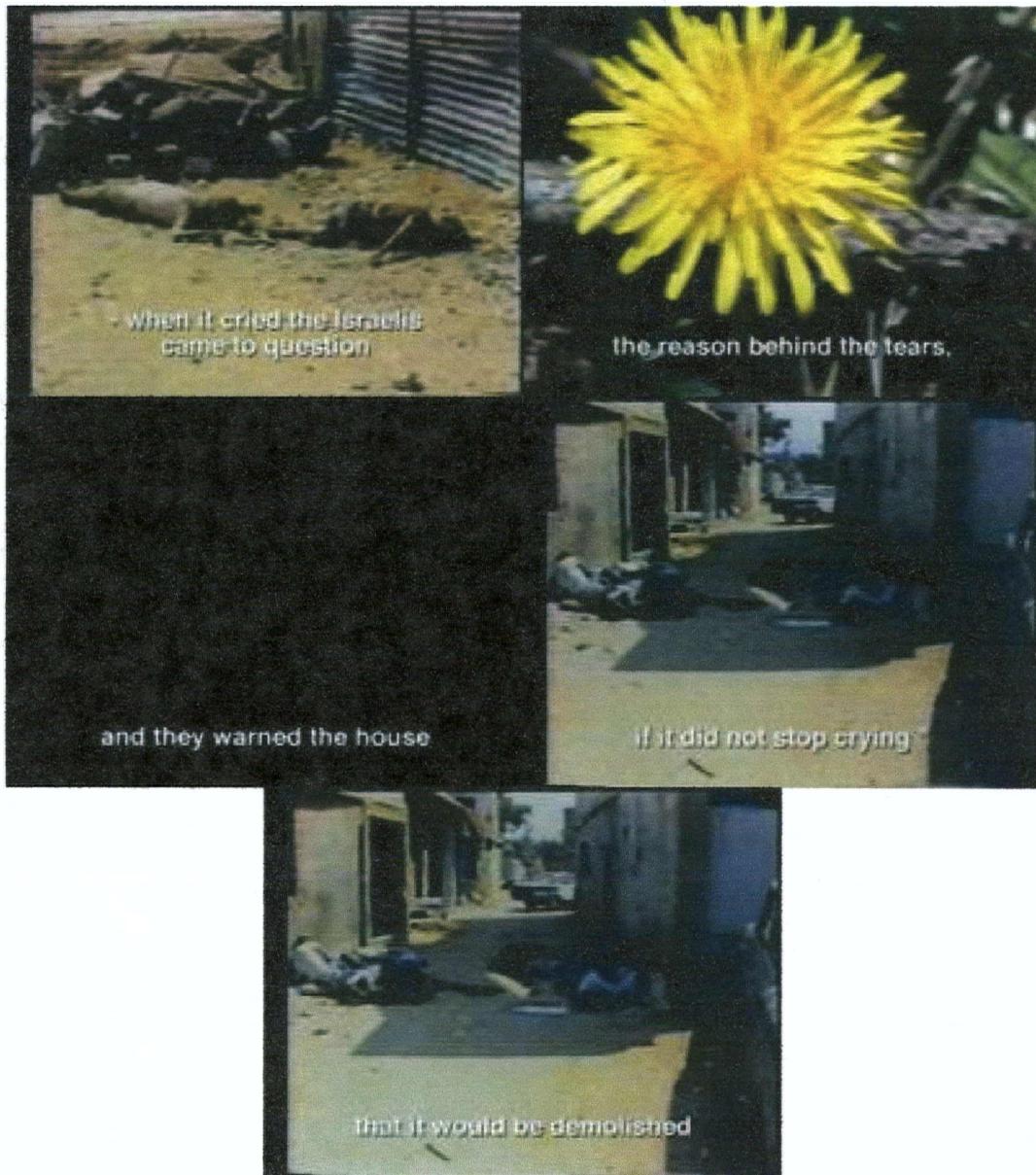
The disturbing sight/site of murdered bodies also recalls Agamben’s thesis, that at the root of trauma lies the violence of biopolitical regimes and (quite literally in this case) bare life. Bare life is an existence which has been designated by sovereign power to be beyond politics and the law (both human and divine), but also, by means of this exclusion, paradoxically included within the juridico-political regime¹¹. Hence, since it is beyond the juridico-political regime, killing

¹¹ See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

such a life does not constitute either murder or sacrilege. However, since bare life can be killed with impunity because of this exclusion, it is also included within the same regime (as the life which can be killed but not murdered). Just like the homines sacri of ancient Rome, or the Muselmänner in Auschwitz, the Palestinian bodies we see in *part 3b* lying in the rubble of the camp could be thought of as bare life; killed with impunity by Phalangist militia after being abandoned by the Israeli occupation force who were responsible for ‘guarding’ the refugee camps.

Thinking about the images of the bodies in this manner, forces us to make the tacit link between these Palestinian bodies, and the biopolitical regimes of the Israeli and Lebanese states¹². This is important to do because as Edkins points out, trauma even at the level of the individual, often intersects in various ways with the operations of nation-states. Palestinians who remain in the Occupied Territories, exist both beyond the Israeli state (since they are not citizens) yet are included within it, by multiple everyday enacts of physical violence and colonial control. Those who live as refugees in Lebanon, barred from working in over eighty professions and many social and political activities, exist in a similar space of exception. The murdered bodies therefore lead us to the space of the nation, as the second geographical thread weaving through the trauma of dispossession in *as if (beauty never ends...)*.

¹² I acknowledge that the sovereign power that led to the dispossession and the subsequent production of homines sacri that we see in *as if (beauty never ends...)* cannot be limited to the Israeli state alone. However, I identify the sovereign power as the Israeli state in this case, because it is the institution primarily responsible for Palestinian dispossession. For a more detail discussion of the complexity of sovereign power with regards to Lebanon see Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, and Palestine, see Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*.



Figures 3.14 - 3.18: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

The Nation?

Edkins suggests that trauma represents a challenge to the sovereign power because it exposes the violent contradiction at the heart of nation-states: 'a

promise of safety, security and meaning alongside a reality of abuse, control and coercion¹³ She goes on to suggest that states therefore attempt to codify and appropriate trauma in order to mitigate its critical potential and effects. However certain memorials, she argues, such as the London Cenotaph and the Vietnam Wall to a certain extent resist cooption into state narratives of explanation. Instead these memorials ‘encircle’ trauma, marking the impossibility of comprehending it and the contradictions inherent in any society which cause it. Such memorials reach beyond the state, constituting and also simultaneously created by different communities of belonging, such as Vietnam veterans’ community in the case of the Vietnam Wall, and a more global (although still largely Western) community in the case of the guide books at Dachau¹⁴.

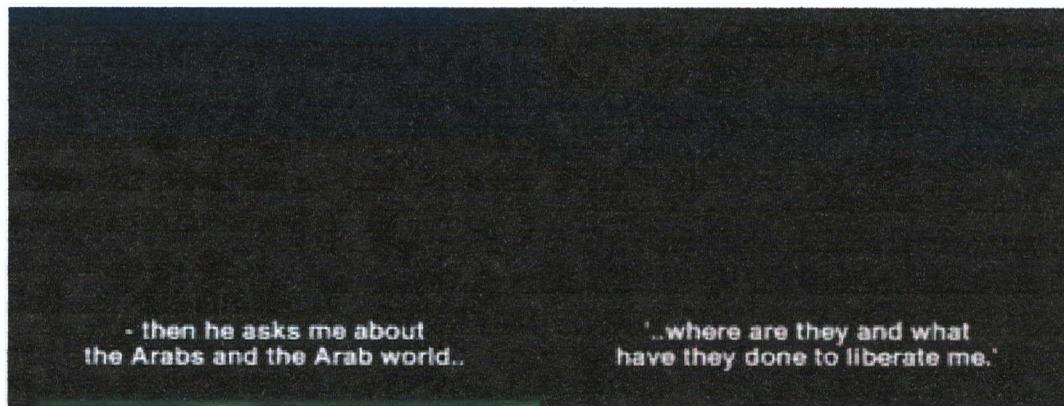
as if (beauty never ends...), encompassing the Sabra and Chatila massacres and motivated by the 2002 invasion of Jenin, circulates through many different national contexts. In witnessing the trauma of dispossession, the community that the film creates extends far beyond the already Escher-like borders of the Occupied Territories¹⁵. However, while the dispossession cannot be divorced from the transnational movements of the film and the Palestinian diaspora, the role of nation-states such as Israel and Lebanon must also be reckoned with. Palestine’s own ambiguous position as a nation without a state captures the tension in *as if (beauty never ends...)* between nationalizing and trans-nationalizing forces. I would argue that there is in fact a considerable degree of

¹³ Edkins, *Trauma...*, 6.

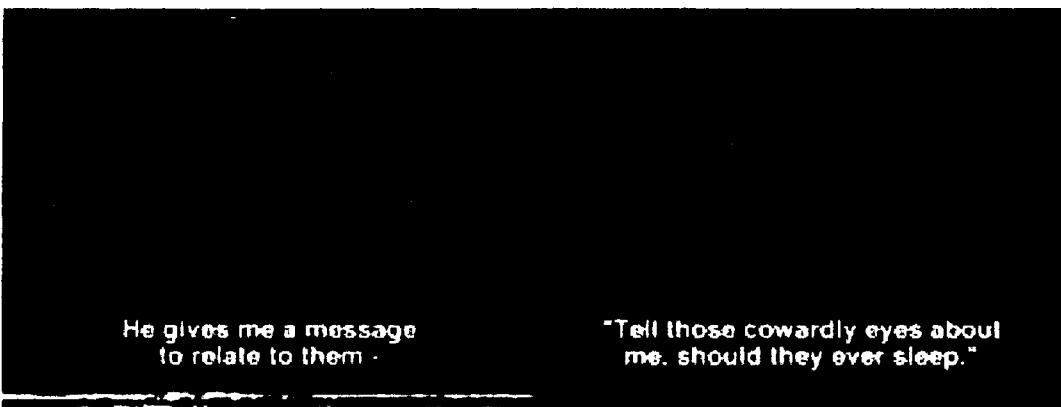
¹⁴ See Edkins, *Trauma...*, chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

¹⁵ See Eyal Weizman, *The Politics of Verticality*.

ambiguity with regards to the spatial scale and organization of the community which *as if (beauty never ends...)* creates. While the role of states such as Israel and Lebanon is criticized, the concurrent bitterness toward other Arab states who failed to come to Palestine's aid, seems to reject any form of pan-Arabism. (This criticism of pan-Arabism is reinforced in the as yet untranslated Arabic song at the end of the film.¹⁶) The fact that Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan's poem closely resembles a famously nationalistic poem, invoking themes of nationalistic belonging and loss of homeland, unwittingly suggests that within the film the nation may be a viable community through which to encircle the trauma of dispossession. Importantly, this tension is never resolved, and the national and transnational impulses remain in solution throughout the film.



¹⁶ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.5



Figures 3.19 - 3.22: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

The Home

The violence of dispossession and its consequences also extend to the material corpus of the urban environment. Marianne Hirsch, in her analysis of photographs of Poles who were detained in concentration camps during the Second World War, argues 'it is precisely the displacement of bodies depicted in the pictures of horror from their domestic settings, along with their disfigurement, that brings home the enormity of the holocaust destruction'¹⁷. In other words, trauma is emphasized through the absence of the home. However, with regards to trauma in *as if (beauty never ends...)*, it seems that precisely the opposite is true. What is perhaps most disturbing is that we see the images of charred remains within the very spaces – the homes and streets – in which these people lived. The enfolding of the home into the dispossession in *as if (beauty never ends...)* is very obviously conveyed through Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan's poem, in which the ruins of his old house describe the hostility it endured.

¹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 21.

By force they took me

And asked if it was quite clear...

But any bright person would have understood...

My dear

They turned me into rubble

And even took away my stones...

What will they do...

Sell them for money or build new homes?



Figures 3.23 - 3.25: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

In personifying and thus attributing agency to the house, Abdel's story demonstrates the manner in which his home is enrolled within the dispossession of Palestine. The house is both traumatized ('Many a burning tear did fall when you went away') and the object of Abdel's trauma ('I bowed my head in shame'). However, having granted the house this agency, throughout his story Abdel also feminizes it by casting it as maternal ('are you aware that it was my arms which

received you, the day you were born'), over-emotional ('many a burning tear did fall') and invoking a rape scenario ('by force they took me'). This feminization contrasts with the masculine roles that he and the Arab world occupy within the story; a masculinity grounded in the failure either to protect or liberate the house. By casting himself and the Arab world as failed protector, the (feminine) house is (once again) objectified and robbed of agency.

Feminization as a means by which to exclude domestic spaces and those who live in them from the political sphere is of course a long standing tactic¹⁸. This exclusion becomes particularly significant when these easy gender distinctions I have suggested above start to become blurred. Throughout his poem, Abdel uses the words home and house interchangeably. (For example, 'We reached the areas where our *homes* used to stand, they had all been demolished with nothing left but the foundations of the *houses*, standing bare of the stones which had been stolen.') However, in Arabic the word house is grammatically feminine while home is a masculine noun. The house in Abdel's poem also works as an allegory for his life, the Palestinian community and the Arab world as a whole, who have also been 'raped' and denied agency within the processes of occupation. Hence the feminization of the house, and by implication of Abdel and Palestine as a whole, emphasizes the political impotence experienced as part of the dispossession. The slipperiness of spatial scale involved in the transfers between

¹⁸ See Lynn Staeheli, *Publicity, privacy and women's political action*, for both a summary and a contestation of these arguments.

Abdel, his house and the Arab world, also gesture once again at the complex spatiality of trauma in *as if (beauty never ends...)*.

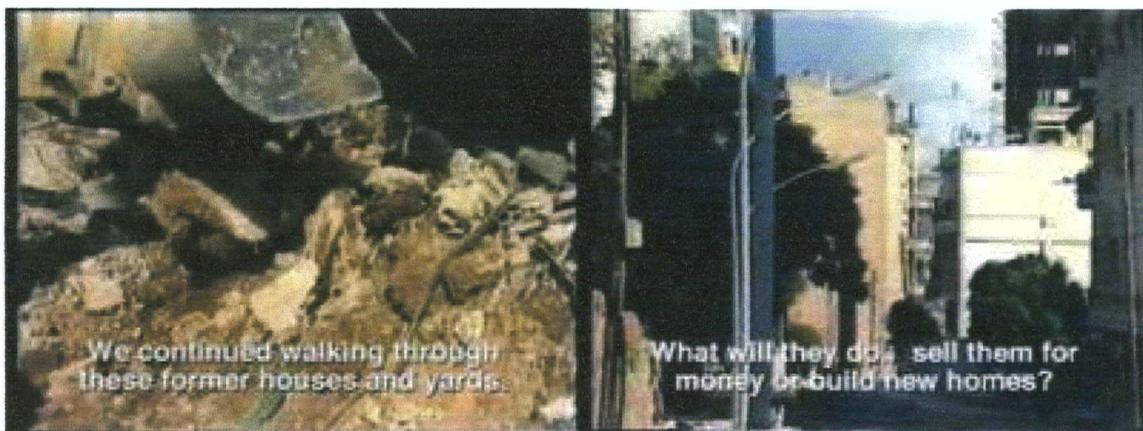
The City

There are also two short sections near the end, where the film steps back from an immediate and (visually) close engagement with the destruction of houses and streets, to take in a wider panorama of the effects on the broader urban landscape.

<The blackness quickly fades to close up of a wall, which, as we can see on the far right side, has a hole in it. The camera moves towards the hole, and looks out into the cityscape, before moving back inside the building. Then, a quick fade to a box in the middle of the screen, showing another urbanscape, this time of one storey buildings – many damaged and riddled with bullet holes – in what looks like a refugee camp. Cut to a street, in which debris has been piled high on both sides of the road. Then cut to black, occasionally interrupted by static.>

The destruction of the urban landscape we witness in this part of the film is something which is experienced through Palestinian cities and refugee camps. Nearly all of these landscapes – the urban body of Palestine - have been subjected

to 'urbicide'¹⁹, the prevention of a city-based modernity through the calculated destruction of urban infrastructure. Trauma is visibly imprinted on the built environment, a cruel complement to the on-going suffering of the human subjects. These urban landscapes within *part 3b*, unlike the more monumental Twin Towers or Tiananmen Square which Edkins discusses, are anonymous and prosaic: piles of rubble, walls with holes in, half-dilapidated houses. Trauma is not so much wrapped up in the symbolic spaces of the nation-state (which barely exists anyway), but rather the very body politic itself and their quotidian spaces of daily life. These shots, filmed in 1992 and 2000, are also another testament to the on-going nature of the dispossession²⁰.



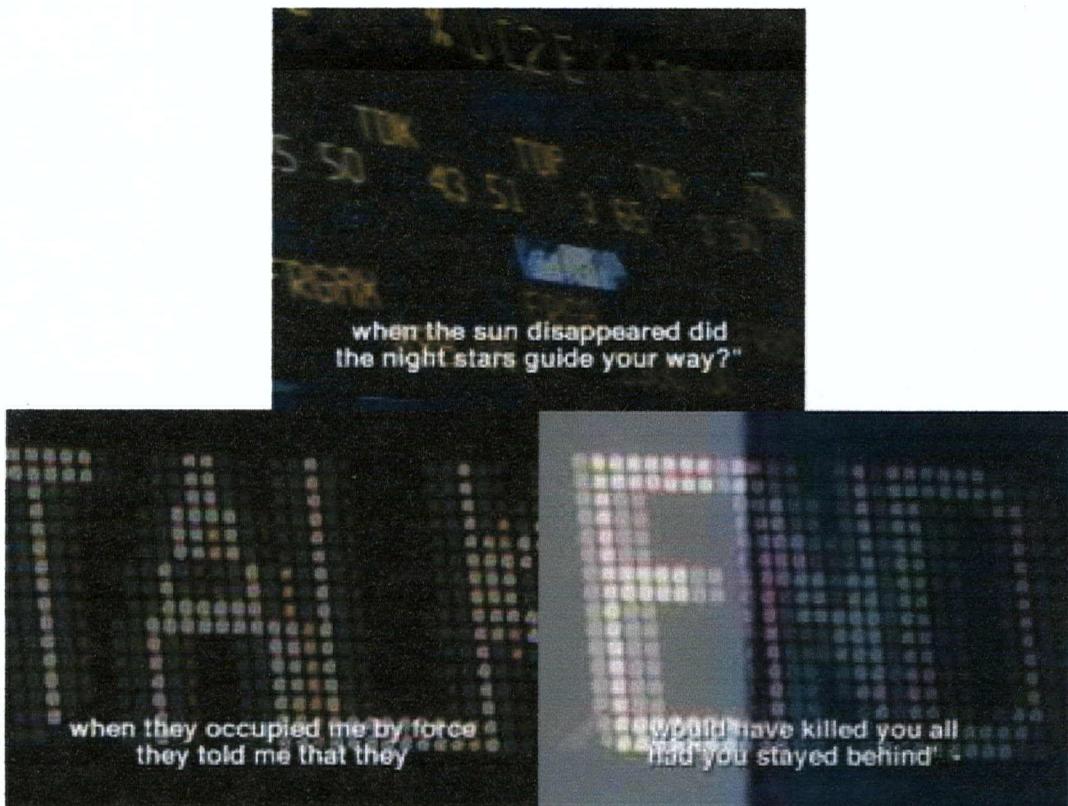
Figures 3.26, 3.27: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

When focusing on Palestinian urban centers (and in the case of *as if (beauty never ends...)* Lebanese urban centers) we also inevitably encounter the space of the camp. For me the images of Sabra and Chatilla invoke Agamben's discussion

¹⁹ See Stephen Graham, *Bulldozers and bombs: The latest Palestinian-Israeli conflict as asymmetric urbicide*.

²⁰ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.3

of the camp as the 'hidden matrix of politics in which we are still living'²¹. The camp in Agamben's discussion of sovereign power and bare life is the exemplary space in which the law is suspended and the exception becomes the rule. In such a space, which is posited beyond the law and thus paradoxically also incorporated (through its exemption) within the law, anything becomes possible. Agamben goes as far as to suggest that the camp is in fact 'the political space of modernity itself'²², and one which now appears with alarming regularity. In other words 'today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West'²³.



Figures 3.28 - 3.30: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

²¹ Agamben, *Homo...*, 175.

²² Ibid., 174.

²³ Ibid., 181.

This last quote raises two interesting issues. Firstly, within *as if (beauty never ends...)* it is difficult to set apart the spaces of the city (Beirut) from those of the camps (Sabra and Chatilla). As Derek Gregory suggests, ‘the gap between life in Palestinian cities... and life in the cramped alleyways and cinderblock homes of the camp has narrowed dramatically’²⁴. However, far from contradicting Agamben’s thesis, this zone of indistinction rather confirms it: ‘in the camp, city and house become indistinguishable’²⁵. Secondly, if the camp is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the *West*, what relevance does this have to Palestine and Lebanon? Although common sense tells us that Sabra and Chatilla are not ‘in’ the West, within *as if (beauty never ends...)* the massacre there and the dispossession itself, are not simply ‘outside’ the West either. The most obvious connection within the film, is the image of the ticker tape (in Time Square²⁶), which shows (on close analysis) ‘AGREE TO CEASE-FIRE AND PREPARE TALKS TO END 18’. There are also the more abstract connections with Western Scientific Materialism, in the form of the Hubble imagery, and the images which look like pieces of meat on an infrared background from The Visible Body²⁷ (see figures 3.31-2). Jayce even traces a link between the image of the bulldozer near the beginning of the film, and Caterpillar, who have produced a bulldozer specifically for demolishing Palestinian homes²⁸. These traces of Western capitalism, and their links with the

²⁴ Gregory, *The Colonial...*, 308 N73.

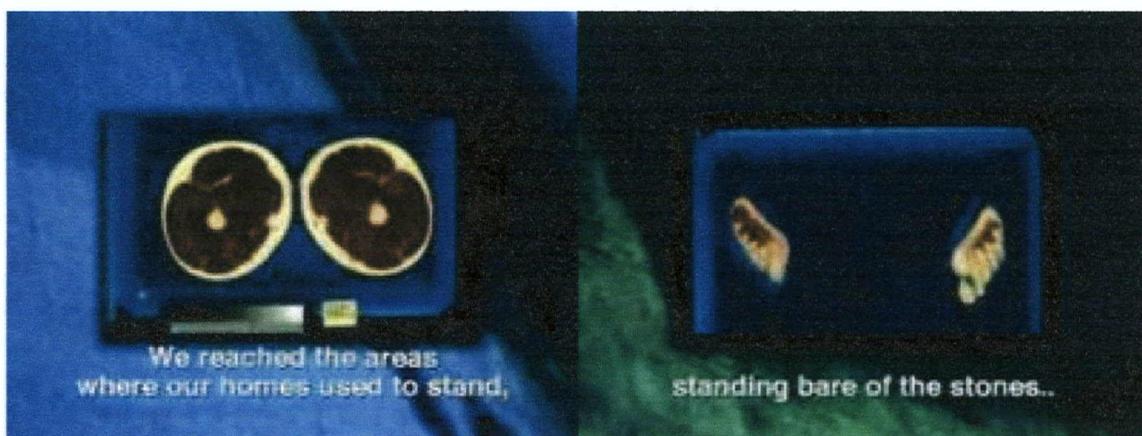
²⁵ Agamben, *Homo...*, 188.

²⁶ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.6

²⁷ The images are in fact pieces of meat! The Visible Body project began by cutting a Texan convict into quarter inch lateral strips from head to toe, photographing the cross-sections, and then animating them in quick succession. Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.6

²⁸ Ibid.

complex histories of colonization and re-colonization, bring not just Palestine, but the whole of the so-called ‘Middle East’ into a zone of indistinction with the West. Palestine is paradoxically both excluded from and incorporated within Western sovereign power²⁹; just as currently we have the quartet’s Road Map to Peace (sic), the US, France and Italy all had troops in Beirut in 1982. When *as if (beauty never ends...)* witnesses the dispossession through the Sabra and Chatilla camps, it also implicates the role of various Western nations in this history of violence and trauma. The fact that there are only *traces* of the West within the film is all the more significant, because it mimics the West’s self-effacement within the region’s politics and history.



Figures 3.31, 3.32: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

‘Coping’ with Trauma

Edkins discusses three strategies by which sovereign power attempts to ‘cope’ with testimonies of traumatic events: mythologisation, medicalisation and

²⁹ For more detailed accounts of these histories, see Fisk, *Pity...*, and again Gregory, *The Colonial Present*.

disappearance³⁰. Briefly put, 'mythologisation works by reducing the traumatic event to a set of controlled and contained narratives.' In medicalisation, 'the testimony is seen as a product of the illness, a symptom, and its political value is destroyed.' Disappearance occurs when the very existence of the trauma is denied by undermining the credibility of the survivor³¹. As I will elaborate on, *as if (beauty never ends...)*'s complex geographies specifically combats the first and last of these tactics with regards to the Palestinian dispossession.

as if (beauty never ends...) explicitly rejects the mythology of the nation-state, and its encapsulation of trauma in politically convenient narratives or glory and sacrifice. Jayce suggests in the notes which accompany this tape, that the film can be seen as an essay on dystopia. The Palestinian dispossession should not be subsumed by either nationalistic or religious narratives of martyrdom and divine redress. There was nothing glorious or redemptive about what began in 1948 and what happened at Sabra and Chatilla. However as I have suggested, while the film's geographies go beyond a nation-state focus, they do not preclude this scale of analysis completely. Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan's poem, echoing the voice of a famous nationalist poet, opens up a space for national trauma which nevertheless seeks to encircle rather than appropriate it.

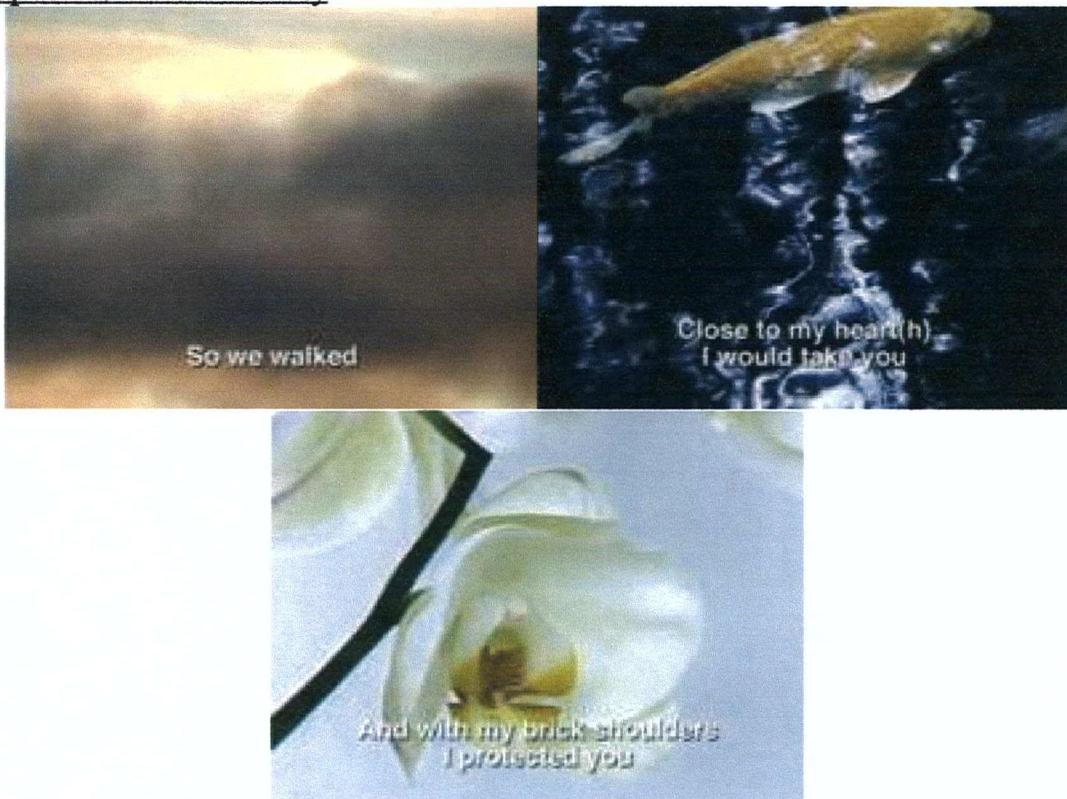
Through images of the bodies and the city/camps, *as if (beauty never ends...)* also confounds strategies, and the narratives that derive from them, that seek to

³⁰ Edkins, *Trauma...*, 190.

³¹ Ibid.

deny the dispossession ever took place; in effect to make it 'disappear'³². The graphic images we see before us when watching this film bear indisputable witness to the events which began almost fifty years ago, and continue today. The complex temporality and spatiality of trauma also reaffirms the place of the Palestinian dispossession in the contemporary West's consciousness and conscience. While this is primarily achieved through the circulation of the film in Western contexts, as I have suggested the legacy of Western colonial enterprises in the region may also be invoked. Such a legacy may also resonate for viewers attuned to the current Western colonial processes in the region.

Dispossession and Beauty



Figures 3.33 - 3.35: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

³² While I don't have the space to elaborate on these narratives, Norman Finkelstein's *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* does so in considerable detail.

In the visual interstices of these temporalities and spatialities within *as if (beauty never ends...)* there also exists something in excess of trauma. As the very title suggests, and many commentators have noted, *as if (beauty never ends...)* is also about beauty and a certain sort of optimism. Mireille Kassar wonders 'how can this beauty survive in a shantytown amidst all the killing past, present and future?'³³ Rahat Kurd suggests that 'the idea of beauty evoked ... serves as a corrective'³⁴ to the various forms of violence we encounter both here and elsewhere in *untitled*.

To begin thinking about this aspect of the tape, it seems important to me to think about the 'as if' part of the title. As a precursor to both beauty which never ends, and also what we see in the tape itself, these two words mark the film as inescapably speculative. Beauty is a performative speculation rather than an empirical description. There is both a tone of hope for a different Palestine, which in turn is haunted by the spectre of a reality far from this modest utopia. The beauty which follows in the title is itself bracketed – subject to this preceding and uncertain combination of optimism and pessimism. Jayce suggests that within Palestinian theatre, the term 'pessoptimism' has been coined to describe this state of affairs³⁵.

³³ Mireille Kassar, *beauty never ends...*, n.p.

³⁴ Rahat Kurd, *A Voluntary Detention*, n.p.

³⁵ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.4

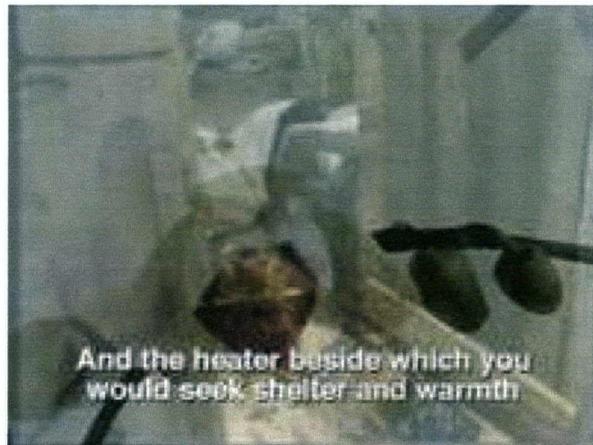
The most sustained ‘beautiful’ image throughout the film is that of the orchids blooming. These images, which seem almost to force their way into the events at Sabra and Chatilla, create an incredibly striking contrast, both visually and affectively, with the dead bodies. Orchids are of course commonly associated with mourning. Stretching back to the ‘Dead Man’s Fingers’ in Hamlet³⁶, this long standing association emphasizes the elegiac nature of *as if (beauty never ends...)*. However, as Jayce suggests, this Romantic vision sets aside other readings, and thus obscures the complexity and depth of Palestine life³⁷. This nostalgic notion of orchids is challenged in *as if (beauty never ends...)* by the constant juxtaposition of the orchid imagery with dead bodies. Beauty becomes something which bears the weight of trauma within it. This is something I will discuss in more detail below, but before I do so, there are also other ways in which the orchids are significant. Orchid history, strongly marked by (eco-)colonialism, Orientalism and the violence of dispossession³⁸, mirrors similar accounts of Palestine. Jayce also suggests that at a very personal level the orchids, since they were shot in his studio, evoke domesticity and bring the trauma and beauty of *part 3b* closer to home³⁹.

³⁶ Merle Reinikka *A History of the Orchid*, 8.

³⁷ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.2

³⁸ Reinikka notes that after all the orchids were taken in the 18th Century, certain parts of Central and South America have not seen a naturalized orchid since. Reinikka, *A History...*, 51.

³⁹ Personal Interview, 9th August 2004. See Appendix 1.3, page A3.3



Figures 3.36: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

There are also many other short moments which evoke and recall the beauty foregrounded in the title: the clouds at the beginning of the film, the running water and the goldfish which swim in it. Jayce suggests that water – one of the basic elements needed for survival – provides a ‘sense of the eternal’⁴⁰. This creates hope in the form of potential, since the actual conditions and short term history of dispossession offers little optimism. Near the end of the film, the image of the water glistening with the suns light prefigures a similar image of stars seen through the Hubble space telescope, which creates a similar sense of eternity. The sound of a girl singing at the end of the tape moves beauty beyond the purely visual register, albeit only for Western audiences. What draws these various sounds and images together under the banner of beauty for me is both their everydayness and relatively universal qualities. Just like the clouds and the stars, water and a child’s song can be found in almost all places and amongst any peoples the world over.

⁴⁰ Ibid., page A3.4

Like the urbanscapes of trauma discussed earlier, these images are banal quotidian fare, and thus when framed by the film, seem to present a very simple, enduring and democratic form of beauty. This beauty is placed at the heart of Palestinian dispossession, particularly through the literal interspersion of the orchid imagery with the dead bodies. Salloum's frequent use of the fade in this tape, (rarely seen in the other parts of *untitled*), literally blends longstanding suffering with a concomitant beauty, which endures alongside all that has happened since 1948, including of course the massacre at Sabra and Chatilla. This is a relationship in which beauty and trauma are neither identical, nor totally separable; they exist in another zone of indistinction.



Figures 3.37, 3.38: Stills from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

To suggest that beauty and trauma in *as if (beauty never ends...)* are both inseparable and yet non-identical is to refuse to look at Palestinian dispossession myopically. Kurd suggests, following Elaine Scarry, that beauty in Salloum's *untitled* project can be a moral tool, since it invites us to ethical fairness through

the desire to prolong it⁴¹. Not only does this strike me as a very idealistic conception of ethical motivation, but it also ignores the traumatic aspects of the different tapes. Edkins on the other hand, discussing other forms of witnessing, focuses solely on trauma. I think the effect of reducing the various events she discusses, and in turn the act of witnessing, to the discourse of trauma can be gauged by her rather pessimistic conclusion to her study. By imperfectly aligning beauty with the traumatic aspects of the Palestinian dispossession, *as if (beauty never ends...)* finds hope even amongst the bodies and horror of Sabra and Chatilla. However this optimism does not (nor can it) spring from conveniently forgetting suffering, nor from dissociating beauty and trauma, but rather from confronting the space in which they move together. In this movement both representations of Palestine as traumatic and violent place, and Romantic notions of beauty as a form of resistance undo each other. The optimism that remains in this deconstructive space is thus modest but resolute. As Agamben suggests, 'it is on the basis of these uncertain and nameless terrains, these difficult zones of indistinction, that the ways and forms of a new politics must be thought.'⁴² It is this politics which I elaborate on in the final chapter.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Agamben, *Homo...*, 187.

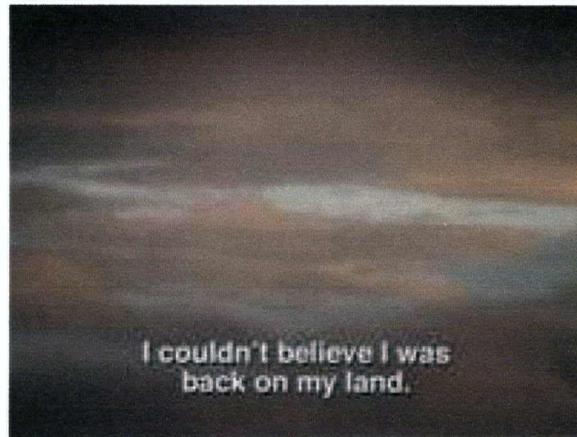


Figure 3.39: Still from *untitled part 3b: as if (beauty never ends...)*

Trauma AND beauty

The Palestinian dispossession as witnessed through *as if (beauty never ends...)* cannot be disassociated from trauma. However, I have argued that other registers exist alongside this trauma. Witnessing *as if (beauty never ends...)* demands an acknowledgement between the trauma of the Palestinian dispossession within the film, beauty exists. To suggest is to complicate an Agambenian notion of witnessing that has largely focused solely on traumatic experiences. As Agamben suggests:

What is borne to witness cannot already be in language or writing. It can only be something to which no one has borne witness. And this is the sound that arises from the lacuna, the non-language that one speaks when

one is alone, the non-language to which language answers, in which language is born⁴³.

Hence ‘perhaps every word, every writing is born, in this sense, as testimony’⁴⁴. If this is the case, then witnessing need not necessarily be about trauma at all. Rather, what defines witnessing is a response to ‘something to which no one has borne witness’. Trauma, outlined at the start of this chapter as ‘the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness and horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge’⁴⁵ is certainly one form of response. The very literal lens of Jayce Salloum’s camera in *part 3b* demonstrates that beauty may provide another vocabulary through which to bear witness. In saying this I am not suggesting that in traumatic instances, this trauma can be witnessed in other ways. I am suggesting that trauma can be more complex, and indeed interact with other registers of being, without losing its ‘traumatic’ character. In pairing beauty with the Palestinian dispossession, *as if (beauty never ends...)* does not witness an old event in new ways, but in fact creates a new event altogether. A traumatic event certainly, but one that seeks to find some form of hope amidst such trauma. A beautiful event too, but one that cannot be dissociated from the violence of dispossession. It is a politics which is attuned to such events which I now move on to in the final chapter.

⁴³ Agamben, *Remnants...*, 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Caruth quoted in Jenny Edkins, *Trauma...*, 39-40.

Chapter 4: A New Archivist?

A new archivist has been appointed. But did anyone actually appoint him?

Is he not rather acting on his own instructions?¹

It's about 1:30pm, Saturday 8th May, and I'm sitting in the *untitled* installation at the Western Front Gallery, Vancouver. This is the second time I've been to see this installation. The first time was a few weeks earlier at the installation's opening. I'm sitting with my back against the wall, just underneath the screen on which *untitled part 2: beauty and the east* is being projected. There are a number of other people scattered around the room, including quite a few others who are sitting on the floor like me. The reason we are sitting around the room, which is unconventional even for an installation which seeks to let the viewer choose their own path (something I'll come on to later), is because Rahat Kurd, a freelance writer is talking about the installation as part of the Canadian Art Gallery Hop in Vancouver. Rahat entitles her talk 'Voluntary Detention'. Playing on *everything and nothing* in which Soha speaks about her confinement, Rahat suggests that we choose to let the various parts of *untitled* hold us. I like this idea. It's a clever way of emphasizing how captivating these pieces are, and the way in which the installation itself often causes people to spend more time there than they thought they would.

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 1.



Figure 4.1: Photograph of entrance to *untitled* installation, Western Front, Vancouver, BC

Immediately after the talk I go into the lobby. In the talk, Rahat made reference to the monitor just outside the gallery entrance, on which *appendix ii: clouds* plays. In a manner very similar to Mireille Kassar², she spoke about the way in which these images act as a prelude to the traveling that takes place within the

² Mireille Kassar, *beauty never ends..*

installation. Jayce also suggests that this monitor is supposed to mimic those you see in airports. However, as the images shot from a plane window as it enters or leaves the clouds suggest, this plane has already left or not yet arrived, depending on your perspective³. Right from the outset we encounter the interstitial, or at least that's the intention.

The reason I reacted to this part of Rahat's talk, was because when I had entered the gallery, I hadn't even noticed this monitor. I didn't notice it the first time I went to the exhibition either, and I wanted to know what I was missing. So I stood there, staring at these images of clouds. But I didn't feel like I was floating away anywhere, and I didn't get the sensation of going on a journey either. In fact, after a few minutes of staring at a monitor which was just showing clouds, while other people came and went, the only thing I started to feel was stupid. Why would anyone stare at this monitor for more than a few seconds? Only a master's student researching the *untitled* project would do something like this, and even then only to be frustrated. This feeling was supplemented and accentuated by the fact that Jayce had told me on a number of occasions about this monitor and its intended function. Not only did I feel stupid for staring at it for such a length of time, but I also felt like I'd missed the point.

The Installation as Archive

³ Personal interview, 17th May 2004. See Appendix 1.4, page A4.2

I begin this chapter with a description of my second visit to emphasize the contingency of any encounter with the *untitled* installation. While the installation will shape and limit the range of possible experiences in a number of ways, there still remain a countless number of potential interactions within those limits. I didn't feel the sensation of beginning a journey which others have described when seeing the monitor in the foyer. Her description of the installation as a form of voluntary detention on the other hand, did resonate with my experiences. In this chapter I want to explore what possibilities the *untitled* installation opened up for me. Specifically, this will involve thinking about the politics of Salloum's installation, and film's ability to participate in what William Connolly calls micropolitics, or the visceral, quotidian, banal and intersubjective processes which form the basis for macropolitical processes such as representative governance.

When writing about the installation, Jayce has suggested that it is modeled on a subjective approach to research, rather than any particular model of viewing art⁴. When experiencing *untitled*, viewers are to a certain extent responsible for the knowledge and opinions they generate. They must choose their route through the piece, whether or not to spend time with each of the tapes, and how long they are going to commit to each part. It is this approach which has led Jayce to conceptualize the installation as an archive, which documents certain histories and is always open to new additions. In this chapter, I want to take Jayce at his word, and think carefully about the ways in which this installation is (and is not)

⁴ Jayce Salloum, *Sans Titre*.

like an archive, and what the implications of this are for thought and political action.

As the sub-title of his book *Remnants of Auschwitz: The witness and the archive* suggests, Agamben spends a great deal of time considering the relationship between witnessing, testimony and the archive. Agamben takes his definition of the archive from Foucault's earlier work, and in particular *The Archeology of Knowledge*⁵. Thus the name 'archive' is given to 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements'⁶, where statements are not the text of discourse, but rather its taking place; its pure existence⁷. As may be obvious, the 'archive' in this instance is neither what we traditionally think of when we use that word – what Agamben calls the archive in the strict sense – the place where the residue of what has been said is consigned to future memory. Nor is it what Agamben terms the 'Babelic library', an abstract place which houses the 'dust of statements' – that which was not materially archived, but can be brought to life by historians⁸. Rather, the Foucauldian notion of the archive, as seen through Agamben, is 'a set of rules that define the events of discourse'⁹. Agamben's most direct definition of the archive is therefore 'the mass of the non-semantic inscribed in every meaningful discourse as a function of its enunciation' or in other words, 'the unsaid or unsayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of

⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, although for the purposes of this section, I shall largely be drawing on Agamben's interpretation of this work.

⁶ Agamben, *Remnants...*, 143.

⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁹ Ibid., 143.

being enunciated¹⁰. It is from this point - the said and unsaid - that Agamben is then able to explore the relations between the possibility and impossibility of language itself, to which he gives the name testimony.



Figure 4.2: Photograph from *untitled* installation, Western Front, Vancouver, BC

However, I am interested in the material ways in which *untitled* opens up potentialities, and thus I want to focus on the installation as a resolutely material space, which requires a resolutely material notion of the archive. In order to do this I therefore turn to the work of Jacques Derrida, and in particular *Archive Fever*. In this wide ranging text, Derrida discusses how the archive as a material space functions in (Anglo-French) society. Specifically, he interrogates the

¹⁰ Ibid., 144.

material practices of archiving which have created a particular and selective set of knowledges and collective memories. While this argument develops towards an exploration of psychoanalysis which doesn't concern my work here, Derrida comes to some typically im/precise conclusions about the nature of archives, which have helped me a great deal in thinking about *untitled*.

Derrida suggests that the concept of the archive is fractured, and proceeds in his usual manner to multiply the cleavages from the outset. I want to begin at a much slower pace, in order to ponder the resonances between what he writes and the *untitled* installation. So beginning with his assertion that any archive is both topological *and* nomological, which is to say that it is both a material space and a practice of law giving, I'll want to temporarily isolate the topological side of this definition.

Topology/Materiality

Derrida suggests from the outset, that 'archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence'¹¹. He then traces the meaning of the word archive from the Greek word *arkheion*, which was initially a house or domicile. Gillian Rose has also given a detailed account of the inescapable material practices and forms of embodiment that made her archival study of Victorian photographs possible. She suggests that archives are carefully constituted material spaces, designed to create a particular type of disciplined, disembodied

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

researcher through various forms of ordering. However, in establishing these forms of ordering, archives also simultaneously create forms of dis-ordering, which in some cases re-affirms the materiality which the very same practices sort to deny¹².

In thinking through the *untitled* installation as an archive, there are various similarities and differences with the archives that both Derrida and Rose allude to in terms of the materiality of the space. On entering the *untitled* installation at the Western Front for the first time, the carefully planned layout of the room struck me immediately. Each of the four walls had different videos playing on them. To my left, two large screens dominated the wall, one showing *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*, and then right next to it, *appendix i: lands*. In front of me on the far wall, there was a smaller screen showing Soha in *part 1: everything and nothing*. Immediately to my right, in the corner *part 3a: occupied territories: footnote to the book of setbacks* played on a small monitor, while almost the entire wall to my right, and part of the wall just behind where I stood, was covered with the images of *part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends...* On the floor, three sets of three chairs were arranged in front of each of the main parts (1, 2 and 3a), with a stand just behind each of them on which three sets of headphones rested. Thus the *untitled* installation disciplines bodies in a manner very similar to the archives Rose discusses. There are specific places to sit and watch, and even when people choose not to sit, I noticed that they inevitably stood directly behind where the chairs were placed. I also noticed that the

¹² See Gillian Rose, *Practising Photography*.

movement of people through the installation followed a fairly specific route, such that people would walk behind the chairs that were in front of part 2, so that they wouldn't walk in front of the screen. However, this unwritten rule seemed to be disrupted quite frequently, particularly by the gallery staff. The general darkness of the room, which was in stark contrast to the illumination of each monitor, also served to accentuate the screens as specific focal points, in a way which to a certain extent concealed my own physical co-presence.

However, while these orderings did exist, there were also a number of ways in which the installation sought to actively resist the disembodying processes which were characteristic of many of the archives Rose describes¹³. Each of the films, as I have suggested in the previous chapters, works to connect the audience with the subjects on tape in (almost) tangible ways. Jayce suggests that the installation itself is actually designed to mimic the inside of a film, so that the viewer has the feeling of literally walking around *inside* the work¹⁴. When I moved around, I found my physical presence accentuated on a number of occasions through my shadow, which I would suddenly catch draped over monitors and frequently across the wall on which part 3b was projected.

There were also other ways in which I became consciously aware of my physical presence, which were perhaps unintentional. When I sat down and put a pair of headphones on, I noticed how the seat, although plastic, reclined quite

¹³ While Rose suggests that archives do in fact materialize the researcher in specific ways, she suggests they do this unintentionally, and these processes actually contradict the intentions of the ordering procedures. What I am suggesting here is that *untitled* fully intends from the outset to embody the viewer.

¹⁴ Personal interview, 17th May 2004. See Appendix 1.4, page A4.2

considerably as I sat on it. I also became slightly discomforted by the headphones as is usually the case, because they didn't sit comfortably on my ears. Furthermore, while listening to the audio feed coming through the headphones, I was also aware of the voices outside the gallery, perhaps because they disrupted what I imagined would be an intimate (auditory) experience.

Rose, in discussing the various material practices wrapped up in archival work, wants to show that these practices have very significant effects on both the researcher and the knowledges produced. She argues that these constitutive materialities are often written out of research accounts, as people 'buy into' the model of the disembodied researcher which many archives seek to implicitly produce and promote. *untitled* on the other hand as I have suggested, highlights the viewers' role in experiencing the tapes, and thus seeks to explicitly position them and their interpretative practices within the knowledges that they produce¹⁵. This of course is another form of ordering; one that prevents people from disregarding the subjective content of what (knowledges) they take with them after visiting *untitled*.

While the nomological aspects of the archive which Derrida foregrounds are (inevitably) beginning to creep back in to my discussion, I want to pause just a little longer on the topological aspects of *untitled*. I want to do this because while Rose focuses on the spatialities of archives, she says little about the temporalities

¹⁵ Again I want to point out that this does not mean it is possible to produce any knowledge, since the tapes also always condition the borders of possible interpretation.

that also constitute this place. Archives, in their role as storage spaces for various collections, are almost implicitly considered as permanent structures, albeit ones that are often continually being augmented. However, unlike the archives which Rose refers to, *untitled* is ephemeral and normally exists only for durations of five to six weeks at a time. Coupled with this ephemeral existence, *untitled* also literally moves; it is not just open to future augmentation, but (quite obviously) travels from one gallery to the next¹⁶. (This material mobility as well as mobility of the materials, draws attention to the fact that art galleries are the primary sites to ‘house’ *untitled*, rather than museums, universities or libraries¹⁷, another marker which would seem to differentiate *untitled* from spaces more traditionally thought of as archival).

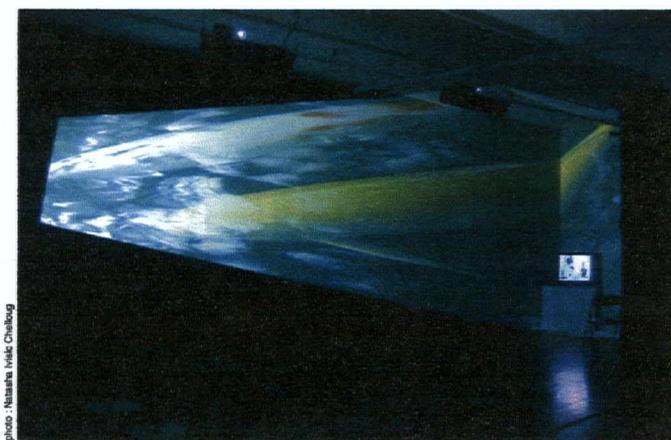


Figure 4.3: Photograph from *untitled* installation, Dazibao Galerie, Montreal, Que.

¹⁶ As of August 2004, versions of *untitled* have exhibited in the following places: Hull, Canadian Museum of Civilisation; Prague, Eurovision2000; Amsterdam, World Wide Video Festival; Vienna, Kunsthalle Exnergasse; California, Santa Monica Museum of Art; Belgrade, The Museum of Contemporary Art; Toronto, YYZ; Ottawa, Galerie 101; Montreal, Dazibao Galerie; Vancouver, Western Front.

¹⁷ The exception is the Museum of Civilisation, where *untitled* made its first appearance.

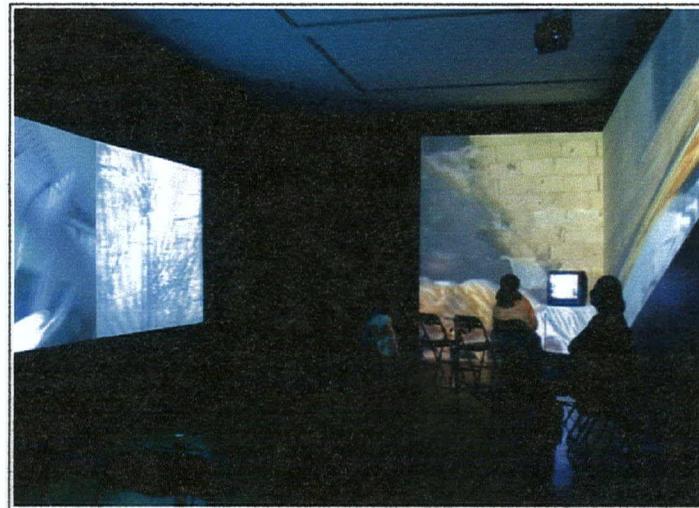


Figure 4.4: Photograph from *untitled* installation, Galerie 101, Ottawa, ON

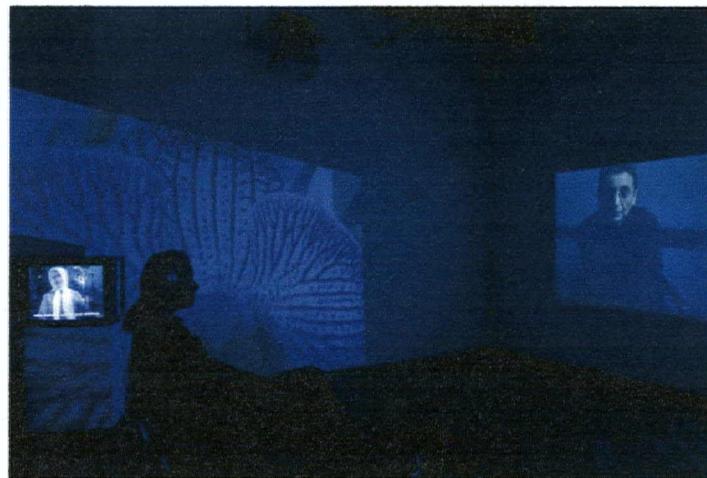


Figure 4.5: Photograph from *untitled* installation, YYZ, Toronto, ON

Nomology

It is in fact very hard to separate the topological aspects of archives from the nomological. The first and perhaps most obvious way in which archives are nomological is through the means by which they allow themselves to be encountered. I have already alluded to the spatial ordering – or the material

arrangement – of *untitled* in the previous section. While this is one means by which archives dictate the terms on which they are encountered, I want to explore a number of other forms of ordering through which collections are hierarchically prioritized. Rose discusses how labels and titles imbue particular ways of seeing (in her case photographs) with authority, a practice which is common in many archives. As the very name of Jayce's project suggests, *untitled* eschews this particular facet of archiving, to a certain extent. The very fact that *untitled* remains titled, through the present absence of the signifier *untitled*, serves to foreground the very archival practices on which the installation is modeled. This act simultaneously challenges the authority and convenient reductionism which the act of naming produces, while also taking part in this act. The fact that each individual part of *untitled* has its own specific title suggests that the installation only subverts this archival convention to a limited degree. However, the abstract nature of these labels refuses single interpretation or semantic inscription.

The collection Rose deals with is also arranged sequentially through index cards and the practices of cataloguing. Again, *untitled* makes it possible to disrupt this aspect of archival practice. While each of the parts are numbered sequentially, inside the installation they can be watched in any particular order. For instance, when I went to the exhibition for the second time, because the Canadian Art Gallery Hop talk has attracted a number of people to the gallery at that time, I began by watching part 3a, since that was the only station at which there was a free seat. The tapes themselves also have no opening or closing credits, and due

to the nature of the looped playback, the majority of viewers will begin to watch each part somewhere in the middle. Jayce even suggests that *untitled* is one long tape, that currently has seven interchangeable parts¹⁸. Rather than create a linear path through the material, *untitled* encourages a more rhizomatic movement in which the viewer creates their own connections, to co-exists alongside the more linear ordering created by the installation handout.

However, the nomological force of archives not only dictates how archival spaces will be encountered and the knowledges they make possible, but also the very content of archives. This, as Derrida notes, has profound consequences.

The technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. This is also our political experience of the so called news media.¹⁹

This is to say that any particular archive is founded on a set of inclusions and exclusions, which dictate not just what can be said about the past, but in fact allow only a very particular version of the past to be created. In other words, while archives usually aspire to produce comprehensive collections, such as the collection of photographs Rose uses, these claims to totality hide an inevitable

¹⁸ Personal interview, 17th May 2004. See Appendix 1.4, page A4.4

¹⁹ Derrida, *Archive...*, 17. Emphasis in original.

partiality. And this partiality not only constructs the past in particular ways, but also constructs future events by establishing an epistemological approach which is comprised of a particular set of inclusive and exclusive relations. As Derrida neatly puts it, ‘every archive... is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional’²⁰.

Derrida also draws our attention to the news media as an archive that both produces and documents events. This is precisely the context from which *untitled* seeks to untether itself. As Jayce suggests, the abundance of mediated televisual imagery in Western societies creates a context from which any media art or artist cannot avoid, or entirely dissociate their work²¹. *untitled*, as Jayce goes on to suggest, must be seen as part of a larger, global media archive, although its relation is highly critical.

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ Personal interview, 17th May 2004. See Appendix 1.4, page A4.9

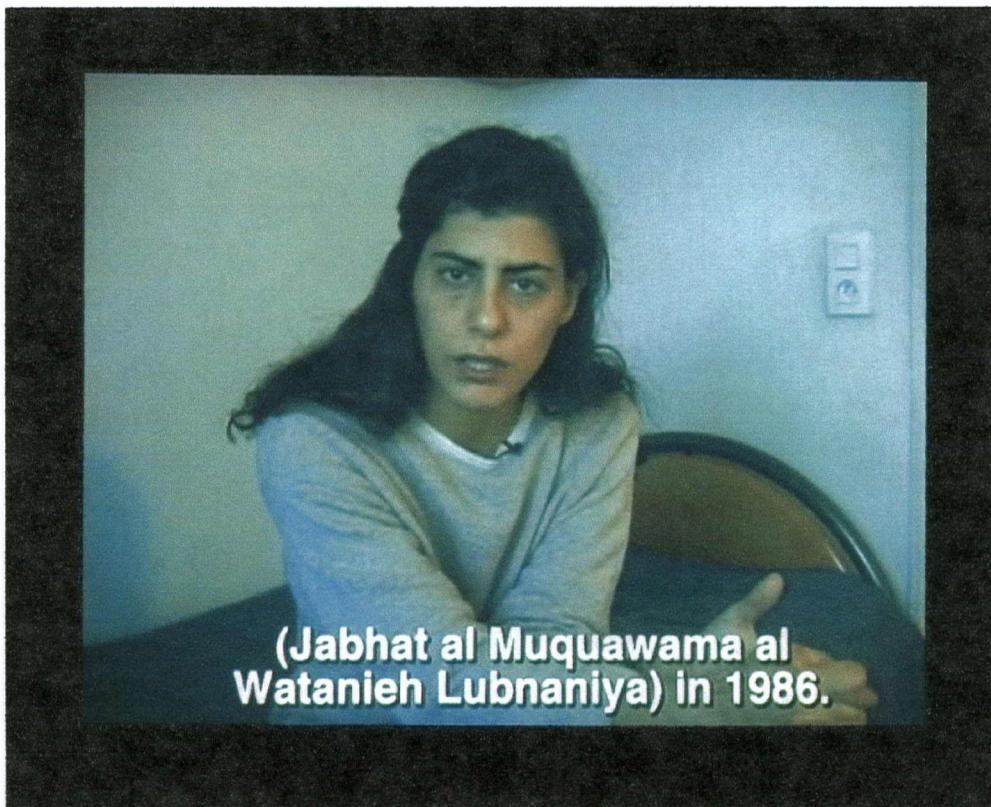


Figure 4.6: Photograph from *untitled* installation, Western Front, Vancouver, BC

If *untitled* produces the events which it seeks to document, it does so in a more transparent manner than the dominant media, by eschewing particular conventions of news media and documentary. In so doing, it also redefines the very events themselves, and thus the ways in which we as an audience encounter them. In *part 1: everything and nothing*, we see the filmmaker move the subject while he is still filming. Jayce's voice from off camera, and his suggestion that he performed the role of the filmmaker²², spotlight the ways in which this film does not document Soha's various subject trajectories in her encounter with Jayce, as much as it creates the very encounter itself. Jayce's refusal to name the multiple

²² Personal interview, 11th March 2004. See Appendix 1.1, page A1.3

subjects (whether humans or places) in *part 2: beauty and the east* again does not only refuse to sum up the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, but in fact refuses to reduce all that has happened in that place to that one particular event. *part 3a: occupied territories: footnotes to the book of setbacks* and *part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends...* redefines the terms on which the Palestinian dispossession is encountered, by viewing the events through the lens of beauty.

The *untitled* installation, even beyond its various constituent parts, critically challenges the archive's nomological imperative for comprehensiveness. Rather than *aiming* for an all encompassing and 'complete' collection, *untitled* seeks exactly the opposite. It is always in the process of becoming more open-ended and creating events which are more rather than less complex. What began with five channels, and moved to seven, will eventually be augmented with *part 4*, which has already been filmed. *untitled* is thus far more concerned with multiplying the connections and layers of interaction, than with foreclosing events, resisting both the narrative structuring of the large majority of televisual accounts, or the simplified and short term orientated responses of politicians. Jayce notes how even the finished tapes are just fragments of longer interviews and collections of footage – in other words a larger archive²³. Within *untitled*, the various events which flow through each tape, also begin to permeate the other parts, as the borders between the various people and places become indistinct. Sitting in the installation for quite some time after the Canadian Art Gallery Hop talk, I began to loose track of what I had seen and what I hadn't seen on that

²³ Personal interview, 17th May 2004. See Appendix 1.4, page A4.6

particular visit. Jayce suggests that some people leave *untitled* and begin to confuse the different stories they have heard, with ‘interesting’ results²⁴.

Outside/time-space

We can glimpse the importance of *untitled*’s ‘style’ of archiving in Derrida’s suggestion that ‘what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. Archivable meaning is also and in advance co-determined by the structure that archives’²⁵ Furthermore, ‘there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside’²⁶. When Derrida talks about the outside, I think it is important to realize that he is not simply using this concept spatially. That is to say, he is not just referring to other contexts which lie beyond the material place of any particular archive, such as Lebanon, Palestine, the Balkan region and the various contexts of the viewers which interlace with the physical space of *untitled*. The ‘certain exteriority’ of archives as Derrida terms it, also works temporally, and hence archives are always open to past and future events (and time-spaces).

But ‘where does the outside commence? This question is the question of the archive’²⁷. In working towards answering this question, Derrida posits the question ‘where’ as temporal rather than spatial. Perhaps this is because ‘the word and the notion of the archive seem at first, admittedly, to point towards the

²⁴ Ibid. page A4.3

²⁵ Derrida, *Archive...*, 18.

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

past, to refer to signs of consigned memory, to recall faithfulness to tradition'²⁸. However, as he goes on to argue, 'as much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should call into question the coming of the future'²⁹.

What does Derrida mean by this counter-intuitive argument that the archive should in fact call in to question the coming of the future? I think it's possible to better appreciate his point through a closer look at the *untitled* installation. At a very basic level, *untitled* is always in the process of transition, and thus always being defined by what is yet to come. As I have already mentioned, *untitled* began life as a five channel installation before developing into seven channels. Jayce suggests that the part 4 may consist of footage shot in Cuba or filmed in his apartment in Vancouver³⁰. Part 3 is also currently a work-in-progress, and it will be augmented and edited further later this year. The very title of the installation, *untitled*, may also evoke a connection with another installation piece of the same name, which Jayce exhibited during the late 80's and 90's³¹. While this installation piece covered very different ground from the present *untitled*, the similarity of the title and archival approach to exhibiting creates an on-going continuity across projects which flows through Jayce as the archivist. In these ways, *untitled* is always open to future modulation, reformulation and expansion.

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Personal interview, 19th February 2004. See Appendix 1.2, page A2.10.

³¹ This *untitled* ran from 1988-1998, and consisted of photographs of New York streetscapes. Each time the installation was exhibited it bore a different name, and the photographs were arranged in a different 'syncopated' manner. See Jayce Salloum et al, *untitled*.

However, all of the above openings, if we can call them that, are part of the archive's repetition of itself; its ability to continually produce more archive. They are determinable future presents, and thus a form of terminable incompleteness. They pertain to the archive as it is usually thought about in historiographic work. However, Derrida has an entirely different conception of the future in mind. This is the archive as the irreducible *experience* of the future³². In this instance, the future is always something which is yet to come, and is thus impossible to experience. As such, Derrida argues that the only way to experience this future which cannot by definition be experienced is as a promise or an affirmation; the experience of 'a promise of a secret kept secret'³³, and hence this future to come cannot be known and cannot be knowable as such³⁴.



Figure 4.7: Photograph from *untitled* installation, Western Front, Vancouver, BC

³² Derrida, *Archive...*, 68. My emphasis.

³³ Ibid., 69.

³⁴ Ibid., 72.

If this is the case, then we are left with a very awkward problematic. ‘Good sense tells us there is no history or archive of the future to come. Is there a historian of the promise?’³⁵ In order to consider this question more closely, we must once again return to *untitled*. Each part of *untitled*, in fairly obvious ways, documents a particular, situated history. *Part 1* traces Soha Bechara’s life, both while she was detained in Khiam and subsequently after her release. *Part 2* charts a certain version of the present moment in the Balkan region during a few weeks in 1999, and in doing so provides (among other things) a particular history of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. *Part 3* chronicles the dispossession of Palestinian people almost fifty years ago, and how those events reverberate through to present day Lebanon and beyond. In fact, Jayce suggests that one of the common threads which linked the making of each tape was to ask the different participants (in different ways) about what happened to them in the past, where they stood now as a result of past events, and what they thought was to come in the future.

In briefly describing these histories, there are two areas which I want to draw further attention to when considering the promise as the experience of the future. Firstly, in bearing witness to this particular set of histories (or time-spaces), something else is also happening. As I suggested in chapter 1, in witnessing Soha, *everything and nothing* proliferates her subject trajectories. *beauty and the east*, as I explored in chapter 2, creates a sense of place which exceeds descriptors such as the Balkan region or the former Yugoslavia. (*as if*) *beauty never ends*, coupled

³⁵ Ibid., 70.

in the installation with *occupied territories: (footnote to the book of setbacks)*, opens up the experience of Palestinian dispossession and life in diaspora to the aesthetic of beauty. Each of the individual parts then, not only records a certain history, but also opens up a set of possibilities or utopic longings. These possibilities are accentuated in the installation, through the interconnections and intersections between and among the seven different sections of *untitled*. These manifold possibilities are for different futures; futures which are not attained in any of the tapes, and nor will future work be able to realize them, however concrete some might be. Rather, these possibilities are affirmations of a different future. In this sense, could Jayce Salloum be one such historian of the promise?



Figure 4.8: Photograph from *untitled* installation, Western Front, Vancouver, BC

Secondly, each of these histories, while dealing with a certain temporal sequence of events, is also cross-cut by particular spatial relations and locations. I bring this point up, to return to and reaffirm that thinking *untitled*'s exteriority necessarily involves a spatial tenor as much as a temporal one. In documenting contexts which lie beyond but also intersect Western imperialism this spatial exteriority offers the potential for a postcolonial archive. Unlike the postcolonial archive that Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy argue for in the work of Gayatri Spivak³⁶, *untitled* primarily performs this role not by historical excavation, but rather through geographical exploration. The postcolonial therefore becomes not a matter solely of temporal specificity but also of spatial relations. These relations are always constructed through the perspective (or camera lens) of a Westerner. However, Jayce's uneasy position within the West (as a hybridized Canadian) makes him, in the role of archivist, far more critical of the colonial relations which enable his postcolonial archive. As I will go on to discuss in the next section, *untitled* challenges us to develop more ethical and caring relations *within* the context of this colonial history.

Political Futures

In order to think further about the possibilities created by *untitled*, I now want to move away from Derrida's account of the archive, which is more concerned with an archival desire for origins, (hence the title of his essay - Archive Fever). In order to continue thinking about my experiences in very specific material ways

³⁶ Sandhya Shetty & Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, *Postcolonialism's Archive Fever*.

which perhaps Derrida does not fully allow for, I want to turn to the work of William Connolly, who offers a sophisticated account of the manner in which film and politics become intersect with each other and with us. This will also allow me to focus on the political possibilities of *untitled* which are not deconstructively based.

Connolly has spent a number of years exploring the possibilities for articulating new forms of democratic politics, which genuinely engage with the plurality of moral and religious convictions present within the contemporary American context³⁷. More recently, this has led Connolly to focus on the ways in which politics is not just a series of formal processes which he terms macropolitics (i.e. voting, parliamentary debate) but also a much larger and more diffuse set of daily processes in which we all participate, which he terms micropolitics. Connolly suggests that micropolitics can be thought of 'as a cultural collectivization and politicization of arts of the self', and gives the example of the many recent show trials and the neighbourhood gossip, news programs and films which have surrounded them as vintage events of micropolitics³⁸.

In order to understand the wide gamut of practices which the word micropolitics encapsulates, Connolly begins in his latest book by exploring brain research and cinema. He does so in order to argue for the layered character of thinking and culture, which enfolds both affectively imbued habits and embodied dispositions,

³⁷ This progression can be traced through, but not limited to, William Connolly, *Identity/Difference; The Ethos of Pluralization; Why I am not a Secularist; neuropolitics*.

³⁸ William Connolly, *neuropolitics*, 108-9.

as much as cognitive thought processes. Politics, for Connolly, is something which exceeds rational debate, to incorporate sensuous, affective and quotidian forms of agonistic engagement with the world around us. It is through films, such as *Vertigo* and *Eyes Wide Shut* that Connolly demonstrates the potential of cinematic technique to viscerally modify the moods and perceptions of the viewer. I think it's possible to trace similar effects when experiencing the *untitled* installation. The chairs which are close to screen showing *part 1*, combined with close-up shots of Soha and her various facial features as she speaks, created a much more embodied sense of intimacy than when I watched this film at home. The juxtaposition of *part 2* and appendix 1, both of which have a great deal of footage of passing landscapes on large screens, created a far more visceral sense of motion, than just watching *part 2* on my (much smaller) television at home did. The relatively small size of the monitor on which *part 3a* played, dwarfed by the projection of *part 3b* affectively underscored the lack of agency which Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon have in the face of events which are beyond their control. The side perceptions of other monitors, through peripheral vision and/or reflection, continuous performed a kind of subconscious work on me, emphasizing the connections and inseparability of the different tapes and the events which tape place within them.

These perceptual and visceral cues, which may or may not affect different viewers of *untitled*, have a great deal of micropolitical potential to work on our habits, embodied dispositions and the way we think. However, beyond even this, I think the films themselves are forms of micropolitical practice. This agency can be

traced to two intertwined conceptions of political action. These conceptions of the political also bring us back to the future to come and its relations with the historical aspect of the archive. The first of these political trajectories is, to use Connolly's terms once again, a politics of being. That is, a politics which deals with established causes and constituencies which constitute what is widely recognized as Politics (that is, political causes which have been integrated within legal and governmental/institutional structures). Soha's detention in Khiam without trial and her treatment there, the ethnonationalistic destruction (genocide) of people and place in the Balkan region, and the dispossession of the Palestinian people are all such issues, which fall within established frameworks of political, legal and moral argument and agency.

However, prior to the establishment of distinct causes and constituencies, there are a number of far less defined trajectories of political desire, some of which will in future become established within the realm of the Political. These desires constitute politics of becoming, amorphous and embryonic movements which subsist below the level of formal Political processes. Connolly gives the example of the gay rights movements, which even now is moving from a politics of becoming to a politics of being. While difficult by their very nature to outline and categorize, I think there is a new media based form of anti-colonial, anti-racist politics which flows through *untitled*. This is a politics of becoming which seeks to re-appropriate resistance as a critical practice, by offering different representations of (the West's) distant others. These representations seek to engage with the structuring practices of the media industry, in order to open up a

space – the very installation itself – for the reduction of distance and a form of intimacy which is close, but still exists at an unbreachable distance; an ethico-political project which seeks to balance the grievances of the past with the task of articulating a different and novel future.

In this manner, the future to come is not only inseparable from the archive of past events, but is conditioned by them. In returning to the question of the archive, (i.e. the question of the future,) it seems appropriate to end this chapter by returning to the question of whether or not *untitled* is an archive at all. As I hope to have already shown, *untitled* bears many resemblances to Derrida's and Rose's formulation of the archive, whilst also being dissimilar in a number of ways. But there is a far more interesting relationship between *untitled* and Derrida's archive which I have tried to elaborate upon. I think *untitled* feeds off many conceptions of what an archive should be or do, whilst also embodying certain critiques and challenges to particular notions of archival practice and space. This opened ended relationship between *untitled* and the archive opens up a set or field of possibilities (rather than probabilities) for political action. These possibilities are more like little experiments, whose unpredictable nature is precisely their potential. However, as I hope I've also shown, *untitled* does not ignore pressing contemporary issues at the expense of these experiments, and offers tangible options for addressing such issues. In this manner, I think *untitled* does provide one particular history of the promise, and functions as a micropolitical relay with a clearly defined ethos of engagement.

Postscript: Letter to a Gentle Critic

Letter dated 14 April 2004

Dear Jayce,

Next week all the master's students have to give a talk in department at this event called the Spring Symposium, so I thought I'd take the opportunity to reflect on my thesis by writing a letter to you. (Is it still called a letter when it's sent via e-mail?). It's an open letter, in the sense that I'm going to read it out to everyone at this event. I hope that's ok, and doesn't make it impersonal or contrived – you'll have to be the judge of that.

I thought one obvious place to start would be our collaboration over the course of my project so far. However, just as I've written those words, I've also begun to wonder whether you consider the time we've spent together a collaboration? I mean, you make films and I write about them, and while you've certainly commented on my writing, I haven't changed the films much. I would like to think that that statement is a bit narrow-minded since I'm only taking into consideration the production stage. Certainly the reception and circulation is just as important in making a film what it is, or what it is constantly becoming. I was reading the introduction to Laura's [Marks] book again the other day, and she talks about how interpretative discourses stick very closely to intercultural film and art because their distribution and circulation are bounded to very specific

communities. So maybe my work is having very small effects here and there – it's difficult to tell really. I do feel like I've helped a little bit getting people to watch your work – not that you need my help of course - it's just nice to feel like I've contributed something.

And when I think about it, I do feel this need to do something. Not necessarily to give you something back, because I don't feel like these films are gifts which you've passed on to me as part of some logic of exchange. It's more like something you own in some way, and I've had, and continue to have, the pleasure of sharing it. And in sharing the untitled series, I feel this need to add something to it. And don't misunderstand me; I'm not trying to make my mark on it. It's more like I want to take it in slightly different directions, as a way of acknowledging my encounter with it, and the small changes it has caused in me. I guess I'm hoping that in that encounter the project's changed a little bit too, but perhaps I'm trying too hard. Perhaps in sharing your work with me, I've already had some small effects, even beyond what I've already listed. Hm, it's difficult to say.

All this talk of sharing certainly bears some similarities to the witnessing I'm always going on about in my essays. What do you think of all that? You should read Giorgio Agamben's 'Remnants of Auschwitz' – it's a beautiful book - you'd enjoy it. It's really profound and also very humble and gentle. And it's about far more than just the idea of witnessing which is what I've taken from it. This witnessing, for me, is the sharing which I've just been writing about. A way of

relating to your films and your experiences as a film-maker, without trying to claim that I've had them too or can fully understand them. It's more like I can empathize with you a little, and by showing the gaps, also show what I don't, and in some cases can't, know. And this is why I find witnessing such an effective way of looking at your work, because I feel this is what you do too, when you make your films. When I watch, it's as if you too are trying to relate to the people you meet, while constantly coming up against the impossibility of every truly getting to know them.

Something else I've found interesting in attempting to bear witness to your work, is that there are certain similarities between witnessing and reading a book, such as Agamben's. I feel I've become much more attuned to the responsibilities which are involved in reading as a result of my project. And I think that's because in working with you and your work, I've become more aware of what goes on when you discuss someone else's work. What it means to actually discuss something which someone, a real, living, in the flesh person has actually produced. Because, you really can't separate the work from the person, and so I think I've learnt what it means to really work with something and become responsible for what you write and say about it, and in turn the person or people who produced it, whether film or text. But perhaps you'll point out I'm too hasty in using the past tense here. And perhaps you'd be right.

I mention this responsibility because I've just realized that I haven't really represented Agamben's project in the way I've come to think about it. (You'll

know already that there's no way I can speak for his project!) I think witnessing for him is very much about working with the unsaid and the unsayable, which may even extend to the unthinkable. It's a way for him to make space for what cannot be said in the very speech that we use to bear witness. Witnessing is, if you like, the paradox of bearing or impregnating what is not possible to say within speech itself. If this is starting to sound contrived to fit my presentation (and I think you might be right), I wanted to bring it up anyway, because this aspect of Agamben's thesis resonated so vibrantly when I saw part 1 for the second time, (I saw part 1 for the first time before I'd read any of Agamben's theories). The way in which in you bore witness by just filming a conversation and not talking about torture or stuff like that seemed to me to say more about Soha's experiences in Khiam than any other interview could.

But having said that, I'm always so wary of reading Agamben's theories on to your work, although it's so appealing because they do seem to give me so much purchase on what you are doing. This is a long standing conflict, which keeps recurring every time I write something about the untitled project. I want to talk about your work, on its own merit. But I'm also conscious of the ways in which we always meet the world laden with particular types of baggage. Everyone knows this already, but I still often wonder what you think about the particular baggage I've brought with me? Do you think I'm giving your work a space of its own, while still showing the connections it has with other people's ideas? I know you thought that first essay I wrote didn't accomplish this. I still can't thank you enough for that criticism – it's valuable on so many levels. I hope my connections are better

now? I like to think that forging new connections, and seeing where they lead is where you were pointing, and your criticisms were more about how I combined the theory and your work.

Perhaps one of these connections is the sense of politics and ethics which I've found inspiring in both Agamben's writing and your work. I say sense, because I think, unlike him, the politics in and of your films is more implicit – to an extent. I've always thought that you are much more concerned with filming politically, than you are with making political films, to paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard, whereas Agamben is far more direct, which is what you'd expect of a political philosopher. He talks about a coming community, in the sense that we must always be making our collectives afresh, in constant anticipation of new ways of being in the world. Perhaps you offer something more grounded, and also more anxious about present injustices. Your treatise on the Palestinian dispossession in part 3b certainly demands a response to a community that's actually already existing, although in contrast part 2, seems all about opening out to the future, and being open to the people you met on your trip in a way very similar to what Agamben thesis.

I don't know if I told you about the work of William Connolly that I've also been reading recently. He's an American political theorist, and he talks about the necessity of both a politics of being – or dealing with what is – and a politics of becoming – or affirming what is to come, (although these two practices are far from separate). This seems like a neat way to think about the sorts of work you're

doing, and I struggle to achieve something similar myself. I find carrying out a politics of becoming in practice to be very difficult. I don't find actually doing it so difficult as much as having that sort of work appreciated. I guess it's like the way many people steer clear of political art. I've never had to contend with galleries who won't show my work like you have, or at least something equivalent to that, but I wonder sometimes whether people who will be listening to me talk about my work, think it's 'just' cultural geography. (In geography circles, this is the kiss of death, because it means your work is supposedly not political or economic.) It's no so much a problem in my department, but I still have this linger suspicion that some people will sit there thinking, 'who does he think he's kidding!' Well, nevertheless, I believe this work is politically important, although admittedly I do so anxiously. I find it difficult acting in an arena in which there are no guarantees, and rarely any tangible outcomes. How do you cope with this? I know you said in one interview we did that you make your work for a small group of friends, and anything beyond that is a bonus. Is this really true? I feel I move in such small circles as it is, but perhaps I just need to have more faith in what I'm doing. I'm forgetting the other sorts of work I've done – at the Signal and Noise festival, and then writing that piece for Front. Although when I presented at the Video In I did feel a little disheartened and stupid. There were so few people there, and I thought what I said was pretentious sounding nonsense. I have no confidence in my ability to be artistic.

Anyway, this is starting to sound a little narcissistic and neurotic. I'd much rather talk about how much fun I've had working on this project. The films were so

inspiring the first time I saw them – a vague and distant memory now - and I've found them so rich to work with since then. I think I've enjoyed every aspect of it. I've learnt so much about the film-making process, at least in the case of a small independent film-maker. And each film has given me a thread which when pulled has opened up entire histories and geographies I had no idea about before I started. If I want my thesis to achieve one thing, it will be to share these histories and geographies, and the way you make them, with others. I think in my discipline we are constantly telling stories about people and places, but I find your method of story-telling not only more compelling, but also more considered and generous. I think it's so easy for us to use the same old ways of doing things to create our geographies and the stories we interlace with them. And I just hope that by using your work I can tell these stories a little differently, on the off chance that doing this might make them appeal to a slightly different group of people. Or that they might make the same old group of people see things a little differently.

Now I'm worried this is starting to sound like a goodbye letter, which would be incredibly premature since I'm nowhere near the end of my project? In fact, I'm sure my project won't have an end as such – a bit like yours. I'll move on to doing other work after a while, although no doubt I'll be haunted for years to come, especially since this has been such an engaged and sustained piece of work. And that's something to look forward to. Plus, part 3 won't be done for a while yet either.

Oh, I meant to ask to, do you have any ideas for a title? I thought since you'd got someone else to name your project, I could pull the same trick on you. I thought about borrowing the title that you used for the Arab video series you curated: in/tangible cartographies – what do you think? I like how it foregrounds the inseparability of the physical present and the invisible. It's something I've really latched on to when writing about your work.

That also reminds me of how I should talk about your work. I keep using the word film-maker, but then realize that that only tells part of the story. I know you used the term media artist, although I find this term vague. Perhaps this is why you use it? How about video artist?

Well, having said this is not a goodbye letter, I should probably say goodbye now. You probably got bored on the 2nd page, so just think what everyone in the audience at this Spring Symposium will be thinking. Plus, I only have 20 minutes, which makes for a bloody long letter doesn't it. If you've found time to read this before Friday, I hope all the preparations are going well. I'm very excited to see the show finally – and the reception should be good too. I'll see you then.

Chris

P.S. It turned out contrived didn't it, and I really did try not to let it go that way.

Date: Thu May 06 20:36:53 PDT 2004

From: JSalloum@aol.com

Subject: Re: Spring Symposium

To: harker@interchange.ubc.ca

Dear Chris,

I am finally getting back to your letter, on the plane to the east coast, if you receive this I will have arrived somewhere.

(Is it still called a letter when it's sent via e-mail?).

Yes, why not.

It's an open letter, in the sense that I'm going to read it out to everyone at this event.

No Problem.

I've also begun to wonder whether you consider the time we've spent together a collaboration?

Collaboration for me does rest in production for the most part but I would agree with you that discursivity or critical 'post'-production dialogue around or about things already produced that leads into new or unforeseen

ventures/productions/presentations/objects/considerations is also a form a collaboration.

So maybe my work is having very small effects here and there – it's difficult to tell really. I do feel like I've helped a little bit getting people to watch your work not that you need my help of course – it's just nice to feel like I've contributed something.

Yes, of course you have contributed in this regard and have increased the circulation of the work. For instance, just that one opportunity you initiated and organized at UBC allowed the work to be received by many people that would not have come into direct or indirect contact with it, that also led to meeting other folks like Will Bragg, Peter and Derek, the profs etc, the piece you did for Front magazine, and on and on... besides this, when you present my work in panels etc (even though I've never seen you do this) this is another type of collaboration, I have to trust you for this to happen, and I do trust you with the work. In this regard the work doesn't necessarily become something else, the work doesn't change, but the reception of it does, which does change the work in some people's minds (the ones' whose minds you are directly influencing/engaging with). The work continues to be what it is regardless and becomes different things for different people depending on the context of viewing/encountering, all of this within the parameters set up by the work, or foreseen in it's production.

When I watch, it's as if you too are trying to relate to the people you meet, while constantly coming up against the impossibility of every truly getting to know them.

Yes, I agree, because it is not about the 'knowing', it is about the learning, the listening, and the contact, the human contact or engagement.

I feel I've become much more attuned to the responsibilities which are involved in reading as a result of my project. And I think that's because in working with you and your work, I've become more aware of what goes on when you discuss someone else's work. What it means to actually discuss something which someone, a real, living, in the flesh person has actually produced. Because, you really can't separate the work from the person, and so I think I've learnt what it means to really work with something and become responsible for what you write and say about it, and in turn the people or person who produced it, whether film or text. But perhaps you'll point out I'm too hasty in using the past tense here. And perhaps you'd be right.

The past or present, both tenses are relevant. The responsibility is also without tense, it continues.

It's a way for him to make space for what cannot be said in the very speech that we use to bear witness. Witnessing is, if you like, the paradox of bearing or impregnating what is not possible to say within speech itself.

But it can be said/spoken sometimes. Sometimes one can speak directly of the experience, and be heard, not of all things, but of some.

But I still often wonder what you think about the particular baggage I've brought with me? Do you think I'm giving your work a space of its own, while still showing the connections it has with other people's ideas?

Yes, in your later writings it has. The Front piece is something though, something else more akin to 'creative writing' though. I'm curious to how it was/is received. For me this piece was not about my work (which is fine of course). It was about you and some thoughts you were engaging using my work as a background or illustration. I don't have a problem with this, but is was at another end still resting in the middle of something, unfinished, beginnings, curious to see if it was pushed further what type of writing it may turn into... seems like it would be, like I mentioned, at the other end of your practice, or another branch or entity of its own.

We must always be making our collectives afresh, in constant anticipation of new ways of being in the world. Perhaps you offer something more grounded, and also more anxious about present injustices. Your treatise on the Palestinian dispossession in part 3b certainly demands a response to a community that's actually already existing, although in contrast part 2, seems all about opening out to the future, and being open to the people you met on your trip in a way very similar to what Agamben thesis.

Both are needed, fresh approaches and ways of relating to constituencies, as well as extending, continuing, and building on the communities you are affected by,

you have affected, or participated in, a nice concept but exhausting in reality but still is needed.

I don't know if I told you about the work of William Connolly I've been reading recently. He's an American political theorist, and he talks about the necessity of both a politics of being - or dealing with what is - and a politics of becoming.

Yes, that's funny, this is just what I was trying to write in the above bit. It's part of a process, not just one but several processes, and not all of them are possible to be directing, in control of, or even aware of all of the time or even most of the time.

Well, nevertheless, I believe this work is politically important, although admittedly I do so anxiously... I find it difficult acting in an arena in which there are no guarantees, and rarely any tangible outcomes. How do you cope with this?

It is difficult to gauge the effects of one work but it is important to do so and to learn how to be more effective while staying true to your values/beliefs/aims, sometimes there has to be a separation where a part of someone's life, an activity very different from their work, becomes their 'political work'. I try to continually make these one, my work and my politics, and they are, they don't however... well at least the political part doesn't always feel to be enough... so I do try harder or try to find new avenues for what I do... I do feel I can always be doing more politically but it is equally important for me to pursue my work and path in this

and to demand a space for this work in spite of the odds... maybe it is a megalomaniac concept or just one of an artist.

I know you said in one interview we did that you make your work for a small group of friends, and anything beyond that is a bonus. Is this really true?

Yes, and no. Yes, in that if I make it for other reasons I will continually be disappointed. I will also never know what really happens with my work but I can know a lot about how my friends react to it. I have to make it for myself first, this is really true, because each piece may take several years of my life, the outcome has to be worth this time of living my increasingly limited years on this planet, and the time of ruined relationships (not all), and the time taken away from other things. So it is what I love, and the end object has to be made to be fulfilling in this way, and usually is, or I keep working on it until it is, then it has a life of its own, and that is a bonus. The 'no' part to the response is that I also make the work to be seen by anyone and everyone in the world and am constantly surprised when that works even though I presuppose it. Not that everyone in the world will see it, but one person whom I didn't expect will see it and be moved by it, like at the Front the other evening when Maia-Rose, the 5 or 6 year old daughter of a friend on mine who live across the street came up to me at the opening party and started talking about how much she liked all the videotapes but what the guy with white hair said was the most interesting for her, "he had good stories..."

Oh, I meant to ask to, do you have any ideas for a title?

A title, yes. These are important. No, not "in/tangible cartographies." That has been used and done already, and beaten to death. Something else would be better and more appropriate for you project. Something with life. Maybe something about 'witnessing' as that is one of the foci. Here's a suggestion, I'm sure you can come up with something better: "witnessing untitled"

That also reminds me of how I should talk about your work. I keep using the word film-maker, but then realize that that only tells part of the story. I know you used the term media artist, although I find this term vague. Perhaps this is why you use it? How about video artist?

Just 'artist' is fine, as I work in many media/mediums. Media artist is ok as well. But video artist is really too narrow.

P.S. Maybe I could use this piece as some sort of epilogue to my thesis - what do you think? Seems a shame to let it go to waste!

If you like. It is alright with me but I would like to have the chance to at least check my grammar as emails on airplanes are not always too coherent. I've scanned one of the interviews we did and was pleasantly surprised that there was actually some material there that may be useful. Perhaps we can (edit first) and publish one or both of these at a later date. Those were collaborative.

It has been a pleasure working with you Chris.

It is a beginning.

Sincerely,

Jayce

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Interview with Jayce Salloum about *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*. Conducted on 11th March 2004 in Salloum's video edit suite.

Chris: Right, so, my first question, which is very broad, is to ask you to articulate what this film's about, because it concerns Soha, who as she's just telling us, lives this quite extraordinary, or quite uncommon life in many ways, but it doesn't seem the film's really about that, that particular life or those events. So just, kind of as a lead off, what do you think? In your opinion what do you think the film's about?

Jayce: Well, the film is about – the tape is about – let me turn this [tape volume] down a bit – is about many, many different things. It's not about one thing. There's larger circles of things that it's about, like, that sort of circulate throughout the piece, then within the piece, there's more sort of minor elements, or subsets of elements, that it's talking about. And, it's talking about things literally and it's talking about things metaphorically, so even when it's talking about one thing it could also be talking about a whole other set of things. So, ostensibly, it's an account of Soha Bechara's - a partial account – it's an accounting of Soha Bechara's – in response to – I won't say her life, it's not about her life. But it's about our conversation on one level, or it's reflective of our conversation, so in being reflective of our conversation it's about that I guess. It's not about conversation *per se* as a conversation, but it's about the specific moment of our talk and our interaction so it's performative in a way. It's about this moment of time, where we interacted, and where she is performing, and I'm in a way performing but also sort of guiding the mediation that's happening, and she's reacting, and I'm reacting to her reacting to that. So, structurally it's about a conversation and what happens within a conversation. And it's about the articulation of one's experience and one's history. And the articulation of that to another, a person listening, to a listener, what I call... and to somebody – to an audience. Not just a listener that's on the other side of the camera or the filmmaker, but to a presumed audience that's going to be watching and listening after the fact. So, it's about all of these webs of connectivity in a sense, and, all the works of *untitled* deal with these webs, this web of connectivity. Issues of people and places, of subjects, subjectivities for instance. So the tape is structurally about a conversation, or it acts, reenacts a conversation. It looks at the articulation of experience, the way one, the way that Soha, the way that one can articulate an account, can account for experience. And then specifically in more banal terms, her experience of detention, like informationally on that level, what it was to be able to survive the period of detention, like the more, the quotidian elements of her life of detention and her life after it. So each of those things – ok the life of detention and also, we also talk about the occupation of South Lebanon. So the very basic historical facts, of the occupation, of the resistance, the secular resistance which not very many people know even existed or still exists, or existed up until 2001, because of the problems of Hezbollah. So it's about these basic historical – well not basic – it's about historical complexities of the occupation of the South, of the resistance of the South, of the history of the Israeli incursions into the South, and then also their connectivity to other forms of resistance, in other places, including Palestine. And resistance in general and how – ok, expanding beyond the historical denotations, how issues like, resistance and struggles for liberation, and struggles for dignity can be talked about in more general terms as far as being a citizen and citizenship and a responsibility of a person or their culture. Ok, so that's the historical, sort of the historical, extending from the historical. It's also about – the film's also containing a critique, because of the nature of the way it's made and the way it looks and what it does, it contains a critique of traditional ethnographic and anthropologic and documentary approaches. So the critique is inherent in the form and content of the piece, and the style of the piece, more so than – there is no commentary about documentary *per se*, outright, it's more a result of what the piece is or what the piece does. In other works I've had, clips from other tapes and films and I've commented upon them and I might have that in future work, but this piece very formally, in a way, very formally, simple. It's got, you know, one or two elements. It's got one shot of a - of Soha talking on a bed - of the subject basically, of the ostensible subject because she looks like she's a subject but there's this whole myriad of subjects surrounding her, and our encounter. So, the formal elements being this conversation with her, and the subtle mediation, the subtle framing devices that happened, and then the second thing being my voice which comes on, and what happens in between. So it's very simple formally and

subtle, but more complex than it looks. So, it's about the approach of a filmmaker to a subject, on another level. It's about how to, find an appropriate means to describe a, for describing experience. So it's not just about articulation, it's about how as a film maker finding an appropriate means, finding the appropriate question to be able to map out the bits and pieces of somebody's life. Or to be able to map out this moment in which we had this conversation in. So it's also about language. It's about the literalness of language and the literal use of language, but also about how language can and cannot do certain things. So it's about representation as well. Linguistic representation as well as visual representation, and also representational subjects – subjects being representative of something larger than themselves, or as part of a movement, so, or part of a time, part of history, part of a period, or part of a culture, which is more tangential. But people do identify her as Arabic culture - Lebanese people have taken her up as symbol. So those are some of the things that it's about. It's about distance as well, which we've probably talked about and how distance and alienation, about how distance, how the different forms of distance that are talked about or that are encountered within the tape or within the film are useful in becoming closer to a subject. The distance of – linguistic distance, the distance she articulates between geographical distance and chronological distance, the way that she has, the time periods spent in different parts of her life, and how they connect to the other time periods which relates to the geographical distance. The emotional distance, you know, of being somewhere and not being somewhere else. And the distance of culture, of my culture, of her culture, or us being raised in different environments, but also how, how close I can get, how there's always some space in between. So it's about that, it's about interstitiality, and the notion of the interstitial state, and the interstitial subject, and interstitial time and space, and how that becomes a more physical, or how the film tries to make – have a materiality, or a physicality about this interstitial space or time. Both in the conversation and in the interstitial aspects of the subject's experiences, and the experiences of us, our encounter. So that's basically what it's about. [Both laugh]. There's other things...

C: Ok, so I'm going to skip to what I thought was my more interesting question, and...

J: Sorry, I was thinking about, because I've thought a lot about this tape lately. It's also about intimacy, which extends from that. Intimacy as form of engagement.

C: Yeah, so what I was going to ask was - the relationship of this tape to Lebanon, both in the sense of how this tape relates to your previous work, to your former work, which has been quite explicitly about Lebanon. But then also the fact that this is shot in Paris, so, I guess the question would be, is it about Lebanon, and if so in what ways and how do those ways, how are they problematised or at least challenged by the fact that this is being shot in Paris, and what does that mean in thinking about a certain kind of idea of Lebanon, or even Lebanon as some kind of material place, or national place, a place of belonging, or – does that make any kind of sense?

J: Well, you know this word that you use, 'about', it's very problematic. I use terms like, 'dealing with', or... because about is, about kind of determined in a way. The works that I make are very kind of, are some ways are indeterminate. They're pushing areas of indeterminacy, pushing areas of exploration and examination, into more open fields. And the questioning static constructions of things. So, to delimit something to 'about' something, then that's limiting it right away. So, that's why, trying to answer that other question, the 'aboutness' is very large, very...

C: Not over all.

J: Yeah, it's not just about one thing, but it's about many different – or you talk about the different fields of activity that it encounters, or that...

C: Sort of different fields of engagement.

J: Yeah, engage with, yeah, that I'm trying to engage or deal with. In any case, the previous work, or this work, have never been 'about' Lebanon, or about Lebanon per se, or Lebanon as a

country or as a state. They've always questioned the construction of Lebanon as one thing, or as a representation that's easily consumable, like the media, the movie industry would, the dominant media industry, would portray it as, or would portray an issue in the state as being this, but you know, this, not this. But usually it's about being. It's portraying it as representative of the subject as being this. And it's not talking about what it's not being. This is saying, ok, Lebanon is this, and that's where it stops. It's this and it's not that, and it could be this. And it's like in the terms of language today, what terms are – like terrorism. They don't, it's no longer questioned, whether the activities are the reflections of some other activities, some other history. It's automatically denoted that this is a terrorist act, and there's no other context for it.

C: It's 'irrational'.

J: Right, in a simplistic, reductive way. So, the video works were more about the construction of different representations of Lebanon, and not just of Lebanon, but the issues surrounding what Lebanon came to represent – of resistance, of occupation, of struggle, of civil war, inter-confessional conflict, of history, of Orientalism, colonisation, of all those things. So, this – in regards to that, this work continues that approach, of not being about Lebanon per se, but of being about the field that Lebanon represents in terms of representation, in terms of history and the history of representation of conflicts, about the history of representation and the use of representation, not just historical but in general. And in Paris, the shooting in Paris I relate a lot to this notion of distance that is engaged with in the film, because part of the dialogue is about the triangulation between Beirut, Khiam and Paris. In a way I've circulated these three areas, myself but also inside the film they're circulated and they're joined, and sort of expanded. So this triangulation has also broken open. And the distance from Paris allows both of us to approach her history in Lebanon with a perspective that would be different if we were in Lebanon I think. Like, she's more detached, and has had several months of speaking professionally about her experiences in Khiam, that she's created a whole other set of representations of her history, that in the film is my job, or that in the film I have, I take on the role, or it, my role of the character it is to kind of penetrate this façade. Not the façade, but this really solid representational force that she's created of her own identity. So, thus in the film you see this malleability, this permeability, malleability of that image created trying to be, trying to permeate that images, and make it flexible and you know try to be much more fluid than it is during the more, professionalized moments of articulation, which many people will represent, and which don't occur that often in here, but often you see other films of Soha, she's always very genuine, but she's also very good at representing herself and her history and what she represents as a member of the resistance. She represents herself as the resistance or as... So, Paris in a way was a ground – I mean Paris is also interesting because of the French colonial history in Lebanon, after the British mandate, or during the British mandate when they carved out the Middle East, that created so many other sets of problems or issues. There's so many other – and the histories that coincide with that type of colonization, brutal colonization, which all colonization is, and that it was in a way a conversation, a compensatory act that France has with its former colonies that you see over and over again. And sometimes it takes a position of responsibility, like a paternal or a condescending type of position, like with Haiti, like with other places as well. It's the first country, the only country which offered Soha a position, financially, an education position to come and study at the Sorbonne and give her a scholarship immediately after her release. And also it was the country that was the home for the, or the main site of the activity to free her. So there's that interesting relationship of, colonial relationship, or sorry, post-colonial relationship because that can only happen after liberation, there's still these ties.

C: So, the ties in many ways would seem to almost problematize the relationship between the colonial and the post-colonial, as two separate periods in some ways.

J: Yeah, it's a different relationship than the colonial.

C: So, something else I thought would be interesting to talk about would be the – I mean I've found as I've worked with this work it's been – I've started to really get into who Soha is, and think

about her and her subjectivity in this film and things like that. And then it occurred to me that something I hadn't really looked at was your role in the film, which is kind, I think I kind of overlooked it, but I think that's also an important part of the film. So I guess I was wondering, just about your relationship with Lebanon, and the fact that sometimes I see you described as Lebanese-Canadian hyphenated video artists, and maybe thinking about this – cos I'm interested in the intimacy in the film. It's an intimacy between two people, it's not just Soha, so I'm interested in your relationship with Lebanon, and maybe also how that Lebanese-Canadian hyphenated – I don't know if you actively embrace it – but how that kind of hyphens works almost?

J: Sure, ok just to carry over from the previous question, the idea of Lebanon in this work is infused – the work is infused with an idea of Lebanon, or with some idea of Lebanon, that sorts of permeates or surrounds, like hovers around. Just because, well, she's Lebanese, I'm Lebanese-Canadian. But it's also this – Lebanon is such a charged representation, the word Lebanon, the mere mention of the word Lebanon, and the notion – everybody has some idea, or set of ideas about what Lebanon represents to them when they hear the word. And for Lebanese and for people who have visited Lebanon, especially pre-war visitors, there's a sense of belonging in a way, or a sense of attachment, ok. Especially for Lebanese, but even for people who just happen to have been there as tourists, there's always a sense of nostalgia, of loss, of regret. And it has to do with loss, with the terms of nostalgia, of the pain of returning home basically – etymologically – of *nostos* and *logos*. And that pain is because theoretically they can't return, cos it's not longer what they imagined it to be, which wasn't anything in reality anyway, which was a fiction anyways, usually [laughing] because they were living in a fictional life as tourists when they were there. And even the Lebanese themselves had different issues of class, and religion that separated a lot of the Lebanese from the positions of power. But for the Lebanese it's different because, they're loss it because they went through the seventeen to twenty-five years or whatever of war, and have come out the other end with things being very much the same as what they were, if not worse, because of the loss. So, it's a very heavy cloud, it's a very complex sort of fog that surrounds when Lebanese people get together, when we, when Lebanese people go to a restaurant [laughing] or people just have Lebanese friends and they go with them it's a very rich fog, a very dense fog, a very dense – it's not really a fog – a very dense thing that people carry around with them, like the notion of baggage or set of representations or values. So, for me, growing up as a Lebanese-Canadian, you know, from the time I had consciousness I knew I was of Lebanese ancestry, my grandparents and all that. But being Lebanese in Canada, other than the aboriginal Canadians, even the aboriginal-Canadians, everyone is a hyphenated Canadian, cos you're like, well if your aboriginal-Canadian, well there's a hyphen for you, if your native-Canadian, or native-American, I don't know if they use the hyphen anymore. I mean much to their regret, and some of our regret, they are also implicated, now that they've been colonized in this hyphenated identity, in the brutality of colonization that they under went, here in Canada. So, our hyphenation, our dual identity, was in a way, in my way, because I wasn't an immigrant I was born here, but my grandparents were immigrants, so my level of hyphenation is more benign, much more benign than being a colonized subject, in a way. So I'm sort of in that grey area, I'm not a – I'm here by birth, I'm not an immigrant, I'm not a colonizer per se, or a settler, and I'm also nowhere near being Lebanese, because the more time I spend in Lebanon, the more time I realize I'm not Lebanese, I'm only, only in certain, sort of vague ways am I, I dunno, genetically or experientially attached, and it's usually through sets of filters, and more sets of filters, that happen through the distance and through the lives that have passed on and whatever they've passed on to me, while I was growing up. So, I mean, the hyphenation or the politics of identity, hyphenation I think helps, if a subject that is of - that has experiences with - I think everybody has experiences with more than one culture, and if they embrace them in a way that sort of opens up both sides of that, then I think that's, for me that's an interesting place because it also brings back to this project because it's more of an undefined space, where you choose to construct your identity in the long run anyways, so if you realize that, that identities are fluid, they're based on one's own desires and subjectivities, then it becomes a more fluid place to be productive from. So the Lebanese-Canadian thing – I don't, I don't bill myself as Lebanese-Canadian, but other people do for purposes of publicity, of Orientalism, of traces of Orientalism. Especially after 9/11, the sorts of tokenism of the more liberal ends of culture, wanting to embrace something Arab, or what they

think is Muslim culture or Arab culture, which are two completely different things. So, I don't mind being labeled as Lebanese-Canadian but I don't label myself that, really. The notion of Canadian is already problematic enough – my, many of us have this ambivalent relationship, ambivalent relationship at best to the idea of a nation-state, and all the problems that ensued from that development of a nation, that idea of a nation-state. So, yeah, the last part of that, that leads into talking about Soha, my relationship with Soha was, Soha knew of me through this friend Mireille, who's writing for this brochure [for the Western Front exhibition] and who became a friend of mine. I knew Mireille first of all, because she invited me to Paris, again [laughs]. She invited me to Paris in 1995, and I used to hate Paris because I go there and all the French were pretty stand-offish and it wasn't until I met Mireille that I started to love Paris, because none of her friends were French [laughter]. They were Iraqi and Italian, and British, so it was this whole community to go and visit with and hangout in Paris and have great parties – there might be one or two French friends thrown into the mix because they enjoyed the exoticism of the Orient, you know, the other people. People still remark about that, when I go to Paris, and they'd come with me and visit and hangout and have parties. So Mireille invited me without knowing me, to the screening, but knowing the film – *Up to the South*. So at that time Soha was detained - you know the story right, I don't have to repeat it.

C: Yeah.

J: She forms this committee, blah, blah, blah, blah. Ok, so Soha, I think Soha did already know of me, of my work through Mireille, so we had this a priori sort of, I think knowledge of each, but probably also, more than just knowledge, we had a type of respect for each other.

C: Could it be like, a kind of affinity.

J: Yeah, it was an affinity, it was more than just knowledge, it was a type of affinity because she knew I was working on trying to liberate the South of Lebanon, in vastly different ways than she was. I mean she was working on the ground, resistance fighting, I was working on the cultural field, as far removed as you can be from being a resistance fighter on the ground. But in a minimal way we had, there was this affinity of, that I was supporting what she was embrace, what she identified herself and, that she identified herself as being part of, and the subject of. So in a way we were allies, ok. So when we did meet it was automatic that, it was so of very natural, sort of very automatic that we clicked, that we just started talking, in my bad French, and her bits of English, and, after that screening that one night what did we do... we just, we both just fled to a Lebanese restaurant [laughing] and had dinner. So, yeah, there is an intimacy, of allies, of colleagues in a way, that wasn't very real till we met each other. I mean we haven't talked to each other since. I still feel close to her in a way, but I haven't talked to her since. I sent her the tape – so I'm not really sure how she feels in reaction to any of this, anything that happened. I'm quite curious to know, I keep on intending to contact her and find out, and I will at some point. But in a way she knew that she was giving me something and in a way she was giving me, she was lending me these things, she was agreeing to participate in this conversation on tape. I'm sure she wasn't sure exactly what it was, but she offered her time, her... collaboration in this. And that she trusted that I would do something positive from her point of view, like something constructive as far as her position. So, the, we had a rapport, and in the conversation that we taped, there's also, you know, as people we liked each other, there might be some, there's probably some level of flirtation, because we enjoy each others company. And flirtation in a way of - which is much different culturally, because it's the way I would have an engagement with her mother for instance, you know what I mean. It's a very, it's not a cold type of friendship that develop. There's always this, for lack of a better word, I call it flirtation. But there's always this type of playfulness - people provoking each other on many different ways. It's, I mean I wouldn't call it flirtation, if I could figure out another word. I mean it's more like engagement on another level – you have conversations and you sit down and you spend hours talking to people in Lebanon. Lebanon historically – I'm told the cell-phone has invaded in the last couple of years – you'd just go out and talk and eat, and eat and talk, and just get to know each other. When I was working there in '92, it was very hard for me to stay home one night, any night to work – people would just come to my

door and drive me out. So it's a very social atmosphere, and it's a very socializing culture, and I think the conversational aspect is part of that, and also the history of oral articulation and the oral history tradition, and the traditions from oral history led to theatre traditions, the al-hadquati[?] which were theatre based on the stories of villagers, people from the villages, which they would take into the cities so people could find out what's going on, or people from the community within the city. So, with the question, the questions that I asked and the environment I set up or she allowed to have set up, that we set up with the film, with the video tape, allowed for an openness. The questions were trying to lead her in a way to have to respond in a way that she wouldn't have thought of before, a non-preparative way. Cos after you give the answer to a question once, usually you give that same question a very similar type of answer. It becomes routine, it becomes practice, kind of like lecturing, cliché.

C: Kind of like my first questions to you [laughs].

J: Alright, like what is, who is Soha Bechara. So I asked her some simple questions like that just to see how she would respond, and as information level to have some aspect of that, but I asked her that at the beginning. Well at the beginning I asked her that, at the end I asked her that, and she gave a completely different response at the end. You don't have my voice at the beginning asking her that, she just starts out by saying I'm Soha Bechara, blah, blah, blah, blah. I don't want you to use the word flirtation unless it's qualified because it's got the sexual innuendo with it, which is – I mean it's there on a level but people have taken that to unrealistic degree.

C: Yeah, I used it in one talk to mean it like, like you mentioned, but then someone was like, it's gender dynamic

J: There is a gender dynamic for sure, but

C: But as you said, it's not anything, it's, I don't know how I described it but – it's something beyond this gender thing. It's more about two people.

J: Well, there is a... it happens in the other tape too. But it's different. People like being listened to, and if you're open and you're listening then your conversation goes in different paths, and that lends a strength to their narrative you know. It lends a... sort of responsibility, it parlays a responsibility that they understand to be real. That the filmmaker allowed - took seriously.

C: So, maybe I'll skip to the last question.

J: Which ones are you missing [looking at question sheet].

C: Oh, we've covered so much anyway. I mean I was going to ask something about this [gesturing at question about the tape's reception in Canada, where Soha isn't well known about], but that's not a particularly interesting question necessarily. Maybe it's something more broader, but I don't know.

J: You know Canada, she was – her mother did come while she was in detention to Montreal. She was part of Amnesty International and other types of committees brought her in, and she did a tour, but mostly in French Canada. I don't think she came out West. Yeah, well the reception, we can talk about that too. We talked about it before though, like in the lectures and stuff. How it was received in Lebanon, how it was received in the West.

C: Maybe I'll just talk about, ask about how you relate to this work now. It was completed in 2001 this tape?

J: Yeah, it was shot in 1999, shot in '99, completed 2001. Er, it takes like, the tapes are part of you [laughs] whether you're happy about that or not. No, this tape still – I've grown more fond of it the more that I, more and more, cos it takes a long time to understand the work, even after you

make it. And, understand it, or at least get closer to it, I guess if understanding's possible with these tapes, but you closer and closer to it. So the past tapes that I've done, they've become like your children – you send them off, they go and live their own lives and people interact with them however they want to. When you first release them, or when they're first made you have a real determination to get them seen, to get them appreciated, to make sure they're loved, and for those that hate them to issue manifestos and to engage in those debates and those arguments with people who have problems with them, or whatever – to develop a critical, sort of, field for them, anyways, for whatever perspective people have on them. Or at least to engage in a debate – I should stop that [mini-dv rewinding] – so you have this whole energy surrounding the release of a tape, and also because you've worked so many years on a tape that when it finally does come out there's this relief, and you don't want it to turn into post-partum depression. [laughter] So you keep yourself busy going to festivals, showing and talking about it until you're tired of talking about it. So your older tapes now, I'm much more loose with what people do with them – if they want to copy them blah, blah, blah, send them, show them. I mean I'm not completely but I'm much freer, but you're more careful when the thing is just made, and you want to establish it in a particular way as far as its reception. I mean there's never any control completely, but you want to place it in different places and see if they're receptive to it, and there is like preferred venues of releasing it, and then other venues that will also partake in that, at some level afterwards. So when this tape first came out in 2001-2002, I think I dated 2002, just because it took so long to get it out, or maybe it was 2001, no it's 2001. And, I guess all my tapes – when I finish part 3 it'll be, I'll have shot that in 2000, and it'll be 2005, so it'll be five years, by the time I finish. There's an urgency to get the material out sometimes, because of the historical thing, the historical debates that are going on, or the things you want to participate in, of the moment. But I'm never usually that successful at getting things out immediately so. So, this tape when it first came out, it wasn't – well even now – when it first came out it wasn't very well accepted. I mean it's the same with now. It's not a tape that people look at and are thrilled by. I mean when people watch it, usually when I send it out to programs or to people in positions of power to place it where audiences can see it, nine times out of ten it will get rejected, because people aren't used to watching this type of work and engaging with this type of work, you know. They're used to something that's more sensation, something that will grab them and they don't have to work for, that they don't have to pay attention to. This tape is demanding, and requires a certain amount of attention. I mean all my work requires a certain amount of attention but this doesn't have the visual flights of fantasy that doesn't, that can grab people and can pull them in.

C: So it wouldn't be like part 3 where you've got the orchids and bodies, and all that kinda...

J: Right, this the viewer has to, commit themselves to for a certain period of time, and right of the bat, because it may not seem like they're going to be rewarded. So they have to trust that the piece is going to be rewarding. And once they do watch it, most people do, most people have had an experience that they've appreciated, right. So, in that way it's very difficult to get this tape shown or seen, because of the format, the ways it's made we talked about earlier, just the formal qualities. And then there's this whole other level of politics, that people won't show it because it's critical. In some parts of it, it's critical of Israel, it's critical of America, you know, and of imperialistic conquests, and it talks about resistance, so that also rules it out of a lot of conservative art venues which are the dominant ones. I mean most of the art venues are conservative – conservative whether they're artist run spaces, or museums or galleries. There's this increasing level of conservatism that is determining what is being seen in cultural milieus around the world, let say. It's a little better in Europe than here, but it's still enforced in Europe. So, it was a struggle to get this tape seen anywhere, and it still is. The place where it gets seen more is not in an art venue, but it's more in a film scenario, like cinematheques which show it, some cinematheques. And, it wasn't a tape that was embraced by the art world at all. It was sort of shunned by the art world. And it had a very rocky beginning, you know with the Museum of Civilization episode that sort of clouded its future, that coloured its future, that it was going to be a tape that people always attached to these contentious issues, which doesn't bother me, but it does – it's the first thing people want to talk about. Like, 'oh yeah, what about the Museum of Civilization?' I mean, that's the last thing I want to talk about now. I mean it was productive, it was

interesting at the time, and it was, people write about it, but it's not, it's like one of the conversations that happened at the meal, it didn't have much to do with the food that was served, speaking of Lebanese metaphors. So, the tape now though, I mean I like it as a tape and I know what it does now. I mean I can't say I fully understand it completely, but I know a lot better now what it does and how it works, and at single channel screenings it's really rewarding when it's a full theatre, and people feed off each others emotional engagement or attachment, and the high and lows throughout the forty minutes of the tape. And with an audience that has certain members that know a little bit about the history, and certain members that know French, and certain members that have Arabic as their language, then you get this really rich audience engagement where people laugh at the right times or are serious at the right times, I mean people, because of the person sitting next to them sort of leads the way, so it's a group thing. And then when it's in the installation it's much more of a solo engagement, a one-to-one engagement which works as well quite nice, because you're putting the headphones on and you're shutting out most of the rest of the peripheral, and you can see the other images taking place which provide a context, but then you're engaging almost directly with Soha for her taped conversation, cos you're, you might have two people sitting beside you, but usually that's the most. It's usually two or three chairs at each station, and it's much more direct, you know with headphones, the sound quality is much more direct. So people can spend the forty minutes watching that tape, or if they want to spend five or ten minutes or two minutes, there's a certain quality of experience that they'll get from watching the tape. So, I think it's, for me it's also interesting to try to do something. I mean I made this tape the way I made it for a number of reasons, both because of the subject matter and the subject, but also I wanted to see what could happen if it was just reduced to a conversation, the tape. And afterwards I decided I wasn't even sure I was going to make a tape out of it when I taped her. So I think it works, and it works in a lot of ways, and I'd like to try it again with another subject at some point to see how it would work differently. I remember when I showed the tape to some people I respected a lot, one of the comments was, it's going to be a very hard tape, a very demanding tape, it will be very hard to get programmed.

C: What's that art's people or cinema?

J: Well, both, arts and academic. You know academia has a, academic circles, you know I've been invited to talk now more than before. People want to hear me talk about it, they don't necessarily want to watch it [laughing] if they haven't seen it. I mean the people that have seen it still want to hear me talk about it, but the people, it's easier to get a gig talking about the tapes now than it is to get to show the tapes. So in a way, I do usually show this whole tape or a large part of it when I can in those environments. So, it, it has a baggage that it carries with it, I think, it has a discourse, it a discursiveness that it's part of, or that, also that it encourages, and in that regard I become more discursive in relationship to the work. Something, I've always talked about my work, and always been invited to talk about it, but this tape is usually one that people want to ask questions about, cos they're curious. It's like Soha says, they're curious, they may not have, they usually have not experienced war, they have not experienced resistance, they hear about it, they use to hear about it on the news, now all they hear about it terrorism, and the resistance doesn't exist. It's been eliminated from the vocabulary and the G. W. Bush category has not been forbidden to utter the word resistance. So, I think people appreciate that it sort of resurrects a discourse, or it has a discourse that resurrects different notions of resistance and the whole variety of ways that people can struggle against different things. So the activist community is useful and people find it useful. Academic, I think, because of its difficulties, people embrace it better than in other, like art worlds, cos people in the art world are used to looking at something for an average of 2.5 seconds when they go to a museum. Painting, another painting, looking at the floor, looking at the ceiling, another painting. So it's, demanding art is always difficult for people who aren't willing to commit to the experience. So that's why, that's another reason why the installations are interesting, because the installations usually take place in an art environment, except for the Museum of Civilization, I don't know what that is. It's a museum of civilization am I right? [laughter]. It's a more populist environment, most people there wouldn't go to an art gallery, which is why it's interesting for me to do that installation in the first place. But in an art gallery most people will usually walk in and they won't know what to make of it at first. And then they'd

slowly get into something and they'd spend ten times as much information, ten times longer than they thought they would've. They would have thought they'd have gone in for fifteen or twenty minutes, but they end up spending an hour or sometimes they come back. So that archival notion of the installation, or the installation always bigger than the experience than the experience, the complete installation always being larger than the time, the time permitted, or the time one person allots for it, or the larger experience of the individual, the experience of the archive is always larger, than people can digest. So there's always this notion of incompleteness, and provisionality within these fields you know. So the person is forced to be responsible to, for their own experience at a certain level, within the collection of materials.

C: It's interesting thinking about what you were just saying, thinking about the need to talk around it. Because I find, or at least the first thing I found this tape the most compelling of the three parts as an individual channel. And in some ways, I prefer just watching the tape or just showing the tape, I think it is very compelling, of its own accord. It seems I have a different opinion from other people. I mean, maybe because as you said they didn't want to put the time in, or maybe cos I also saw it in a cinema first.

J: Where did you see it?

C: In the [pacific] cinematheque.

J: Well, yeah.

C: I mean, it's very rewarding. As well as the fact that you've got to put a lot of time in, you get a lot out of it as well. I mean, there's many layers as you said, there's lots of things to get out of it, and there's just the compulsion to watch Soha as well. Then there's the intimacy of your conversation draws the viewer in, and there's a part of that.

J: Yeah, it's compelling once you're engaged, and the hook is to get somebody engaged. It starts off very quietly, so it's not, there has to be some connection, the viewer has to start connecting at some point earlier on, otherwise they don't get engaged. So, either they're interested in the history, they're interested in what they've heard about the tape, they're interested in the subject, or they're just interested in some of the ideas that they have presumed the tape is about. I'm you came because someone brought you right?

C: No, no. I was interested... I guess my own personal history is that I've lived with a couple of Jordanians during my time at Bristol, and I visited Palestine and Israel and Jordan, and so I came to see the Arab cartographies, the whole program, and then I came to see that piece.

J: Oh, I see, so you were at some of the other programs?

C: Yeah, I think I saw all of them, all three, it was in three sections. Yeah, and also cos I was interested in film, generally.

J: So you brought, did you tell Refqa about it?

C: Yeah, she's into films as well, so it was like a mutual interest, we kind of came together. I didn't drag her along or visa versa. Yeah, so I guess that's how I got into it.

J: Why did I see her? Did I see her in Bristol? Not Bristol.

C: London?

J: Did I see her in London? Did she come to my screening?

C: Well she's in Oxford isn't she, so she probable came down to London.

J: I don't think I did see her. It's a blur. So, anything else?

C: No, that's good. I thought there was an interesting conversation aspect, I'm glad I didn't ask too many questions.

<End of tape>

Interview with Jayce Salloum, about *untitled, part 2: beauty and the east*. Conducted on 19th February 2004 in the video edit suite at Mr. Salloum's home.

Chris: So my first question, and I guess it does relate to this clip a bit (we are watching the opening scene of *beauty and the east*), was, you kinda traveled through, this film was, a kind of journey and I wondered how – did the film follow the journey, or did the journey make the film? Do you understand what I mean? So, did your itinerary – was it created by a desire to film certain places or was the film itself a result from the itinerary?

Jayne: Yeah, actually the two are pretty unrelated. The itinerary and the structure of the film are two completely different things. The way I see it. The itinerary I basically went from top to bottom of the former Yugoslavia. – You want to test it [the tape recorder]?

C: No, no, it's good.

J: The itinerary I basically went from top to bottom, but I started taping here [Vancouver], I taped in New York, I taped in Vienna. Then from Vienna I took the train to Ljubljana, and from there down South, stopping in the different capitals of the different republics. So, that was very linear. I arrived in Macedonia at the end and then flew out to Germany. So the tape has nothing to do with that. The tape has – the tape is structured in series of sequentially related parts. There's people talking around these subjects, and then there's some of the people talk around these subjects. But it's also broken up and interspersed with other things that are not such large sections of the tape - people just saying or expressing one or two different things.

C: So it's kind of arranged thematically according to the subjects?

J: A little bit. The themes are – build off, play off of each other. I mean there's no grand overarching, like 'OK this section of these five speakers is dealing with this theme, because they do flow, they're meant to flow into each other – they help each other that way. In the other tapes I had are more sequential, like this area's dealing with that, this area's dealing with that. But these overlap as they go along.

C: So it's kind of like a journey of a different sort? You're going from one point to the next to the next, and there's that continuity if you like.

J: Yeah, but it's a journey without a destination because you can – the beginning could be the end really. The first clip could be the last clip and the last clip again could have been the first clip. There's no chronological, itinerary, itineraristic if that's the word (laughs) itineraristic logic to the sequence. Where the clip is placed is more where I thought it would make the most sense as far as leading into something else, or making an introductory statement.

C: So it's more valuing the journeying process itself.

J: Yeah

C: The tape ends...

J: It does start off with some more introductory stuff though. Like this Asprilla talking about colonialism and Ella talking, the clouds, and her, Carmen talking about what happened in Chile basically, when she was a girl. So it starts off with some more introductory pieces and then later on we get to see more of some of the same people talking for longer. [Gesturing at the monitor] Like these are more of the introductory remarks.

C: So it does conform somewhat to a more, say, linear narrative, with an introduction

J: Yeah

C: And towards the end I get the sense that there's also something getting towards a sort of closure.

J: The introduction though is still very fragmented, as is the sense – there's not really closure, but there's an ending – it's not really closure.

C: And I guess, something following on from this idea of the journey and the movement – I mean you've stated that this tape is about developing your ideas around interstitiality, and I wonder how these ideas about movement and interstitiality kind of work together and interact, or maybe don't work together...

J: Movement in what term – what do you mean?

C: Well, in this kind of journeying, whether it's your personal journey or whether, in the kind of movement inherent in the structure of the tape.

J: Yeah

C: How that fits together with this idea of interstitiality, which is a sense of betweenness, so I guess there could be that connection.

J: Well I sort of allude to that but I don't really talk about that in the paper I sent you¹. But it's an interesting thing to consider, but for me it's all rather – like my movements. When I talk about it before - I incorporate the times in between when I'm taping people. So those interstitial times between meeting people, like jotting notes on the bus or these types of things when you're on the train. So I'm taping constantly and picking up landscapes. So there's all these in between moments, of these parts of your life where you're going from conversation or person to person, that can become the main parts of your life. Right, that are as insubstantial as the rest – like these types of in-between parts of the journey, where you're not picking up at the station, you're in the middle of something. So physically you're interstitial in terms of being in-between different destinations and that type of thing. But it's also a very productive space and time. And it's also analogous to the interstitiality of the tape – of the subjects of the tape. The tape positions itself.

C: Yeah, cos it was just something that - I got the sense – you have the train moving and then the plane shots. You really get a sense of the motion by just watching it. But it's interesting because of all the scenes like this where all the subjects are very static. It's an interesting dynamic, and I wonder if you could say anything about that dynamic?

J: Well, the dynamic - the subjects may be static because they're sitting down and they're talking, and these might be moving pictures because I'm moving through the landscape or through the air or where ever. But the subjects they're static only feels that way because historically and psychologically they're in this interstitial position. So they become metaphors for each other – both the land and the subjects and the people. They're metaphorically inverting each others positions in a way. So, I don't think of the subjects as being static. I mean visually they're pretty static. They're sitting there talking – talking head, but I'm looking more at the space they are in – the social space, the context that, where they're set, where situated, is. So when I see them I think of them more of the context of the time, of the history, of the social and political situation that surrounded - that they were part of at that time.

C: Well I guess moving on from that, what was interesting about this, within the handouts – I guess it's common to refer to this as the 'former Yugoslavia' and yet when I was thinking about,

¹ Salloum, J. (forthcoming) 'sans titre /untitled: the video installation as an active archive' In: Migration and Location: Transcultural Documentary Practice (Wallflower Press: London).

there's very much more a sense of Yugoslavia itself is a very fragile concept. I mean Yugoslavia only existed for, I dunno, sixty or seventy years. So in a sense it was Yugoslavia that was – I mean it's just an odd term in that sense, 'the former Yugoslavia', when really it was Yugoslavia itself that was this kind of, temporary 'creation' if you like, and I just wondering how this fits in with your ideas of interstitiality around this tape obviously.

J: Well, these last three things we've talked about are all interrelated. So they all – the notion of interstitiality in this tape and this part of the project – they're all multi-layered. They are all dealing with different terms – 'the actual', 'the historical', 'the physical', 'the visual', 'the psychological', what have you. But the period of Tito - Because Tito, Yugoslavia – when was Yugoslavia formed? More or less I think Yugoslavia was a creation after the First World War or between the wars? But anyways, it seems Tito is analogous to Yugoslavia. Tito's period, I don't know historically is either just before that or just after that, it would be interesting to check. In terms of the tape, I was interested in - I didn't look back before Tito's period but I was interested in how people recounted their experiences of living under Tito, which for me signifies Yugoslavia. And after Tito, and during Milosevic – it was before Milosevic, it was during Milosevic's reign that I was taping people so there was no post Milosevic – so the discussion about that only took place in the speculative, in thinking, what people...because it was near the end but it wasn't the end yet. But people could foresee it wasn't that this, well not foresee, but they were hoping this was going to be the situation for a long time. So, Yugoslavia was always, Tito held Yugoslavia together – all these different regions and different ethnic groups and solidified it. As one person in the tape says, 'we didn't need to go to the museum during that time, we lived in a fiction'. But, I don't have that clip in there, for instance, to have to be saying, yes, we have no relationship to reality. It's just the construction of the state homogenized things, some things – in the communist state – that lent themselves towards unification. Sort of a forced unification, but people accepted it. And within those confines, which were sometimes quite confined, they felt a sort of freedom, under Tito. Everyone who talked about living under Tito expressed a certain amount of freedom that they had to move around, freedom to travel, freedom of expression. Some people may read that as oppressive tolerance right. People have freedom so they don't rebel. But whatever your feelings are towards Tito, the people that lived it did feel before the break up, before Milosevic came to power before Tito died, that they had a lot more liberties, they had a lot more - people were taken care of, you know, there was, they idealized it in a way. The ideal communist state. So even that construction whether - how much of that's real and how much of that's fiction – the glory days under Tito – is also something that shifts. The description of that time would shift from being something – if they were under Tito they probably wouldn't have expressed it the same way after Tito.

C: Kind of nostalgic maybe?

J: Yeah, a little bit or a repression of history, because the oppression was even worse before or during Milosevic.

C: So, who's this guy here who's talking [point to screen]?

J: That's Boris Buden.

C: Because one of his quotes that's quite memorable is when he's talking about 'he doesn't have an answer, he just has this question, and I think that's just a wonderful expression for this searching, but you know, not being able to grasp anything. I can't remember if it comes up here... [watching screen]

J: This is interesting too, because now terrorism has taken the place of communism.

C: Is that in the Balkans as well.

J: I'm talking about it in a more general way, a more global, in terms of, sort of imperialist conquests these days. Communism was the significant other that everything was done in reaction to. Now that the Communism's been defeated, more or less, they've turned – they've had to come up with a new strategy. They've completely built – counter forces as terrorist forces.

C: So I was wondering – I don't know if this is an effective segue but, the idea of terrorism evokes for me a very racist, anti-Islamic kind of stance, pretty much. And I guess - this is a bit tangential – but I was wondering how this work intersects with your other work, which has been much more based within the 'Middle East', within Lebanon. Just because this wasn't a context that you as filmmaker had a lot of history with, and so I was just wondering how you approach this context as something newer than the Lebanon of part 1, or in some senses the Palestine and Lebanon of part 3. Just how – maybe also how it relates to the space of Lebanon or the space of the 'Middle East' more generally, with which, as a filmmaker, I guess you're more familiar, or at least have a kind of longer history with.

J: The thing about labeling – if you take, if you look at the way Reagan signified the Sandinistas versus the Contras. I think that's where the terminology, the present day terminology got its beginning, as far as deciding that these people don't - you want to carry out your foreign policy, so you call them terrorists and that enables you to do whatever you want to do. You're not even going to call them resistance fighters any more, you have to call them terrorists and you have to do whatever you want to do. You're allowed to do preemptive strikes now as part of the global mandate – the new Monroe doctrine, whatever you want to call it, based on the old doctrine that you were not to go to another country and destroy them before they destroyed you. But in going to Yugoslavia, I knew I wasn't familiar with the territory as I was with other regions that I was working in previously. So I had made a decision specifically not to really have it, really integrated with the history, not to make it a historical project. To make it a project in the sense of bringing up dates and issues that were all caught up before I get there, before I engage with it as a subject. So I never describe the tape as a tape about Yugoslavia. It's a tape about my experience of traveling through there, after the NATO bombing and the conversations I had with people, and the general project about interstitiality. So, it's got a slightly different positioning because I'm entering this area in a different way – having a different approach to entering this material and these contacts with these folks that I was able to tape. So the similar - it's quite similar structurally in that I'm not deconstructing their position as much as I felt at liberty to do with something I was more familiar with – the construction of Lebanon, and how that was used and consumed. So I'm not dealing with the way, I'm not dealing hardly at all with Yugoslavia's representation which the other projects like *This is not Beirut* and *Up to the South* were dealing with the representational issues of, like how the 'Middle East' was represented, how Lebanon was represented? How these issues of terrorism, of occupation are represented, of resistance are represented. So part 1 dovetails that – those previous interests. Part 1 has this similar dismantling or challenging of representations and how we understand them, but does it in a much different way – in a more intimate and more direct conversation way which leads into part 2 as far as the visual strategy goes – the formal strategies. But it also starts becoming less about representational issues and more about people's experiences. So part 1 does both of those things, part 2 does less – it still has issues about representations of Communism, like I was just talking about once more how people were experiencing these movements and changes, and about governments coming to power and their ruin. So in a way it's dealing with politics in a much more direct way, and how people experience themselves being governed on a daily basis.

C: So I guess following from that, a two phase question if you like. The first part is very banal, in how did you get to meet these people, and then following that, I'm interested in thinking about how we know the other in different contexts. You talked about how – I think your work on representation kind of touches on this issue of how we know people in distant places. What we know about them, how do we know them. So I guess, what kinds of ways do you think this film allows us, or doesn't allow us to know the people in this space – the people you were talking to.

J: What was the first part again?

C: So the first part was just how you met them, very banally.

J: Well, I met, I tried to arrange an itinerary before I left and sent a notice out amongst a bunch of different e-mail list serves and different e-mail groups. And circulated a notice saying, 'look, I'm coming down, wanted to go through Yugoslavia, and do some taping – who should I meet, who's of interest – so people recommended people. So I just started e-mailing people and was able to, in each city, have several people that I could, that I made contact with. And then it was a matter, if they were going to be there on those days. So it helped that I had set up X days travel and I was working alone. So I would just try to set up stuff as much as possible and when I got to the city if there wasn't stuff set up, continuing setting the things up until I ran out of time. And then move on to see whoever it was that was in town, so tape and make contact there. So, some of it was set up before hand and some of it was just on an ad hoc, just as I was traveling through. But for the most part a lot of it, contacts were set up, and I got phone numbers and things and exchanged e-mails. But I didn't know anybody, any of the people that I taped in Yugoslavia. I did some tapes of the people along the way that I knew but once I got to Yugoslavia I didn't know anybody. I did some taping in Vienna that also helped me get in contact with people in Yugoslavia, because there were people in exile from Yugoslavia, that were based in Vienna. Like Boris [Buden] I taped in Vienna. Then when I went to Zagreb, I went to his office and taped his partner, that ran this magazine called 'Arkzine' – a publication about cultural projects in Zagreb, about bringing different ethnic groups together, about physically and cultural and social settings. So that's how I met the people I met. And there's a couple of significant list serves that were very, that exist, that are mostly about Eastern European artists and cultural workers that I would use. There was a lot of discussion about those issues in the crisis in Yugoslavia, and that was the two list serves where – 'At time' and 'Syndicate', yeah those two – and they still exist, but they're not as vital as they used to be, because they used to be a way for people to share resources and help people seek asylum and get lots of cultural exchanges going on that were all very, underground. Now the underground, the arts element in the Yugoslavia has come to the surface and running all the spaces there. So, as far as knowing the other in their space...it's not about that for me. It's not about knowing the other. My standard position on that is, it's about gleaning some position, or getting a sense of some of the relationships on the ground and the way people are living and experiencing their lives in those particular times and those particular places. And it's about developing a sort of empathy with the process of their lives, and reflecting on ones own life in that process. So it's about the relationships of people with other people in this space. But for me it's not about a knowledge of the other, or understanding per se, or knowingness, because I never think that's possible – this idea of knowingness is possible. That understanding and any sense of completeness is ever possible, but you can get bits and pieces about their lives and you reflect upon their lives and you share some type of, you might share some type of understanding or relationship with what they're expressing either directly or indirectly with other things you may know, and bring it back into a more relative sphere of your own position in culture – social position.

C: So how do you think – another interesting element which I guess comes into what you're saying about, kind of empathizing, or sharing moments of understanding or relation in some sense, is that everyone's speaking English on this tape. And for me it's interesting because on the one hand it does allow this, as an audience, it allows some kind of empathetic identity to a certain extent, and on the other hand it obviously points to this history of colonialism, as was talked about earlier. The fact that this isn't their language – there's that sense there that, it's a taintedness almost. So how – firstly, just say, how did you manage to find all these English speakers, and then what that means for what you were saying about empathy and understanding and stuff.

J: The – well, because I create these for mostly an English speaking audience, well, I am creating these for an English speaking audience per se. I mean other people will watch them but it's primarily for an English speaking audience. Having English speakers worked out in a way that most - I mean, when I tape people I ask them to speak whatever language they're most

comfortable with. So a lot of the people I taped were academics, and a lot of their academia is based in English, the texts are in English, they teach in English, some of them had actually taught in English countries and were now back living where they were living. Renata Salecl teaches in the New School in New York... So for me to communicate with people via e-mail they had to have a certain grasp of English because I don't know any Serbo-Croatian, and my French, as we see in part 1, isn't that great either [Both laugh]. So that in a way lead me to people and – I mean English is, if there is an international language it is English, due to the colonial nature of the American cultural prophets ok, so that's convenient for English speakers [Both laugh again]. I mean it's not, I mean it's completely, of course it's problematic and carries all these histories with it, but it is useful especially if you're creating things for an English audience. I mean it's like post-colonial theorists always write about the colonial subjects taking up the language of the colonizer in order to deconstruct it, and resist and to dismantle the colonization. So, in a way, the people speaking English in this tape enact that operation. They're able to, they're talking about their own positions a lot, they're also talking about some of them, in relation to - the way the West has related to them and the way they're related to the West.

C: So you see it as a form of resistance in some ways? Or something more complex maybe...

J: Yeah, it's more complex. I wouldn't say it's resistance. I would say it's more of a, a maybe an effect – a way to engage – it's a more engaging sort of, it's a way for people to be engaged in the global influence of their lives, because there's a lot of English spaces that are coming into their social sphere and their political sphere. I mean, I don't think – I think it's more – I think if you don't speak English that's more of a notion of resistance, is that you refuse to speak English, you refuse to speak the language of the colonizer. But in a way that eliminates you from participating in certain discussions, except through translation. So I did tape two or three people in Serbo-Croatian, which was the language of the time as it was called, before it was re-broken up and idiosyncraticised into five other languages of Slovenian and Croatian and Bosnian and Serbian and Macedonian, which is now – they've reintroduced the idiosyncrasies and they've accentuated and exaggerated them so they can have different textbooks. Even in Bosnia, there's an international aid programs trying to develop just one textbook, so people can understand these texts. Of course people have to go apart before they can come back together. So the – it's a problematic issue taping people in a language. But people, as you can see, are very fluent, they're completely fluent, so that – so in a way, the thing that doesn't bother me as – is that it works well, it's more indicative of my experience of going through these regions and these areas and meeting with these people than it was if, so it's about my, so it reiterates it's not so much about Yugoslavia as it is about me encountering these people and them talking their encounters – their accounts of living in Yugoslavia. So it's more – it's very appropriate then that they're speaking English because I don't, you know... and for a working methodology it was the only way I could have worked because otherwise I would have had to have a translator in each city. It's not the only way, it's just, it was the most efficient way. I only had four or five days, four days or so in each city, so in order to be able to tape them. So I think it's completely – it's not ideal but it's very reflective of travelers, of the project in my position, and my relationship to the subjects and the project itself. So the empathy – yeah I mean I don't know. I mean Soha, with Soha she's speaking with subtitles and most people will understand her with subtitles, and these people are speaking English, the subjects in this tape were speaking English, and we don't need subtitles – I don't think one makes you more empathetic than the other. I don't think it's the use of subtitles that helps or hinders that, or brings you closer to them. I think it's more, it's something else, it's something else that's more intangible, that brings you closer to understanding, or closer to knowing, or brings you closer to the subject or some type of relationship. I think it's a commitment. It's a commitment on both people's parts. You know on the viewers part to be responsible and dedicate an amount of time of their life to watching and engaging. It's also whether the person speaking decided to open up and make themselves vulnerable in a way.

C: Kind of related though, to this idea of commitment – in part 1 it's this long conversation with Soha and it's just you and Soha and very intimate occasion. And in this film you kind of flitter between different people, and everyone... so I guess I'm asking do you think intimacy's possible

and I guess it's a different type of intimacy in this film? Do you think it's possible? And also I'm trying to get at what type of intimacy do you think we can experience watching this film, where's it's not sustained – really kind of spending time with someone.

J: Well, yeah, people do get engaged and they connect to what people are saying in this tape, but it is fragmented so, it's like you get in engaged, and then there's like an anti-climatic, a demure en mal, you come down again, then you have to get engaged again. It's more like, it's more constant with *part 1*. This is much more fragmented, and it's also – the country is very fragmented at this time you know, right after the NATO bombing, Milosevic was still in power, before things were all splitting up, countries were splitting up, some are more solid than the others, they're being reformulated again. So it was all, it's more of a - the appearance of this tape is more of a direct result of the way it was made, the process of making it, as well as the predicament itself, the subjects at the time. So it's a much different relationship to the viewer, to an idea of – you know before I go on I want to go back to the notion of empathy with, speaking English and not speaking English. Within the dominant media, you do have that effect, and it's very very distinctive that if there's an English speaker we identify with the English speaker. A non English speaker we don't identify with them at all, and we usually don't support their cause because of that, or many times the people will have an empathy with the cause if they are speaking English but the non speaking English are seen as the other, the barbarians, as in the instance of the Israeli-Palestinians. Arafat, if he had any political savvy at all, if he had any political intelligence, he would never...he would become fluent in English basically [both laugh]. Because then you go back to Netanyahu or any of the Israeli speakers and they're Yale trained basically, and they're speaking an American-English and people identify with them automatically, and they see themselves as white, and they see him as white. And you know, it's a very racist empathy, empathy based on racism, that based on too a certain self-identification of who they identify with. I mean, African's will identify more with Palestinians usually, or my African, Canadian-African friends etcetera, etcetera, because they'll see the power dynamics at play, whatever. Usually most people within the white world will identify with the white speakers that speak English, but that's in the dominant media. So my piece is, in a way, it reverses in way. I mean we still identify – for me, we identify more with Soha than with the people of the former Yugoslavia become the other, but they're the ones speaking English [laughs]. But I want to make those issues more complex, or recognize their complexity. It's not a matter of race or language per se.

C: Cos I mean definitely with Soha this kind of affective bonding, like a kind of charisma there...I mean I don't want to talk about her I want to talk about the other tape. And I think it's interesting, when, is it Boris on this tape, the grey haired man, he's very charismatic as well. If there's one person who stands out on this tape for me at least it's him, and then also the woman in the café who talks about, people from Eastern Europe being pieces of shit and the monsters.

J: Yeah, well there's three main characters in the tape. There's Rana, Boris and Marina who's in the café. They're the ones I go back to as sort of the main subjects, that are talking more throughout the tape. And I made that choice after I went through the all material, found out who was saying the things I want to have be in the tape more, and they become the more featured speakers. So we circulate with other people and then we come back to them.

C: So how did you choose them in particular?

J: Because of what they were saying, and the amount of material that they had that was strong. And they've all come from quite different perspectives, even though they're all quite theoretical, one of them's like a video-artist writer, a video-artist basically, a new media person. One of them's a magazine publications writer type person, and then there's Rana who's an anthropologist. And they're actually all from three different regions as well. One's from Slovenia, one's from Croatia, and one's in Serbia. I mean there's the other woman who appears a couple of times from Bosnia, but she's not as prominent as those. So what were we talking about before, before we went back to empathy? Yeah, this tape – when I made Soha, I was trying one thing. I mean, I was trying to make it as whole, as something more holistic. And this one I was, just by the

nature of the experience, the nature of the material, I was much more like, going to be much more like bits and pieces – similar to *Up to the South* where I have a lot of stuff from different people and have to figure out a way to weave it in together. So the landscapes does tie the stuff in, together, and becomes metaphorical, but it also becomes literal to what's happening in the tape.

C: So, in that essay I wrote about this piece, I kind of actually suggested that you were a kind of geographer of sorts and I just wondered how you think your work relates to geography, or how it relates, or if it does relate at all, or is geography an important, kind of issue, concept for you, more generally. But then also specifically in regards to this tape. Because in my imagination of geography our whole conversation has been interwoven with geographical things but I'm interested to know what your take, or how you see, or what you think of as geography almost. I mean it's a very different, people see it...

J: So what's, how would you define geography?

C: [laughing] Anything to do with space and place, and the relation between them. I leave it very vague like that.

J: Well, I mean I never think of this work in terms of geography, per se. I never of my work, I never think of geography per se, but I think of place and space all the time. So I think how you define geography, but I don't think of the term geography, if you know what I mean.

C: Is that something to do with the titling, or the, you know, *untitled*. It's something you don't try and think in those categories.

J: Well, I just never, I'd never thought of that discipline, that discourse, if there is a specific discourse to geography, or the discipline of geography, the same as the, it hasn't – I mean art has more of a relationship to other disciplines, like, comparative literature and stuff. It's just I've never encountered the geographic, geography as a discipline, in my history. But I encounter lots of geographies. You know, my work's always about that sense of place, and how it relates to other senses of places, and how that gets inscribed into the subject, and the psyche of the subject, and how people are in relationship to each other within a space and how the space, or the place, whatever it is, relates to the individual. So it's always working from the singular person out and from the things that are larger than the single person back in. In those really broad terms it's, it is, it fits within a discipline of Geography, but I've never related it to the term geography, because you know, my understandings of geography are based on, you know [laughing] high school geography, like you know, finding things on a map, you know. So, I do a lot of mapping in the work, it's a lot about mapping out experience but also about mapping out places, but in a way that's not a traditional form of mapping. I literally do make visual maps when I'm configuring pieces, and relating them to different things. Then my other installations I've had these maps on the wall and you can actually see the different subjects I've written out and charted and diagrammed out. So coming from this experience of someone who uses pen and ink, paint and drawing, and then using that in video, moving that to video, or a time-based medium or to the space of an installation, there's always issues of space, contiguity, of metaphor, of autonomy, of synecdoche, of how these different ideas of metaphor represent the spaces, and visa versa, how the spaces are representing the issues. And the beauty of the single channel time-based piece, it's not as elegant as a painting can do it, but with a painting you can't really deal with the time difference, the time element. But a time-based medium like video you can stretch out spaces, you can have them envelope things. You can weave them and enter them in a number of ways you know with the material you want to deal with. And I think finally now this version of *untitled*, the installation – I'll show you some slides afterwards – you actually do get a sense walking into it, that like your walking into it and the video is wrapping around you.

C: So how do you think that time works, in part 2, in a sense of the history, that type of time, or is there another.

J: Oh no, I think the time of the history is reflected, like I stated before, the people expressing their particular positions at this particular time in history, so time is like distance. So time and distance and space – oops [drops pen]. Time and distance and space are worked on, and revealed and also are issues in the tape, but, and there are all on similar number of levels of time, distance and space. I mean, like time, in a way time, it's, there's real time that's being dealt with, I'm working real time but I'm also working with this fictional time while I've taken people out of there spaces. You know, edited clips of them together, so I've created the time of the tape, the fifty-five minutes, the fifty minutes whatever it is, of the tape. So as long, let's see it's fifty one minutes and twenty seconds. So there's the time of the tape, there's that linear element of the tape that when you're actually building the tape itself on the timeline, it's called a timeline, you have your different tracks, you know, up to whatever up to a hundred tracks, it usually is, ten tracks might be the most, sometimes five video tracks. So, you have this beginning, you have this end, you have this whole sense of linear time element of the tape. So that's a very physical and very formal element of the tape. And then there's this other time, that you're weaving, this whole other time, this fictional time, that's also the time of the tape, but it's not, you don't think of it as a formal device, you think of it more of a, experience in a way. How's the person watching this going to be engaged, and how they're going to be engaged on different levels, or if they're going to be, if this is going to be, where the different levels of energy are through-out this formal structure of time? So you, so in a way you're using yourself as the viewer, to play off things off of, and you don't really know, until you show it to people, how, if your assumptions are accurate, your guesses are along the right – and they're different for each person. So if you use yourself as your own idealized viewer, then, well, at least it's somebody [both laugh].

C: One person.

J: Yeah, cos if you use somebody else, it's going to be somebody else. So it might as well as be whoever you have closest at hand. And so, yeah, it's like when you write a book, or when you make a painting, or when you're doing anything else, you want to make it as rich as possible for yourself basically. I mean you make it for other people to read, but you know, when you're writing, you're thinking how it's being read, but that doesn't stop you from writing whatever you want to write.

C: So I was wondering, again I think it's a poor segue, but thinking about time, and thinking about the future, and I mean, your work has got a very direct political and ethical content – I don't really want to say message, but it's full of these political and ethical ideas, in some senses, maybe at a very deep level, and I just wonder, how do you think this works, in terms of this film, in terms of part 2, in terms of how we look towards the future, or how we as individuals or as collectives, not so much build a better future, but how do we 'go on' and what does this tape help us to do, or what does it – I don't want to say shows, but what does it say about how we go on in the future, in terms of politics and ethical ways of going on. That's the best way I can think of putting it, kind of, enacting our futures.

J: [Gesturing at screen where the final clip is playing] The guide.

C: Well I guess that's the appropriate point then.

J: Well, you know, in a way, there is no future, or there is no notion of the future in – if you want to talk about this tape in particular, everybody's talking about the present, they're talking about the past, and they have some prognosis about the future, the imaginary future. But the tape itself is mostly rooted in the present. It's rooted in the present with implications towards future occurrences, or history, in the same way they framed historical things. But the historical things are based on stuff that always happened, and things in the future are always based on a speculative notion of what people have experienced. But in a way this tape is more, I dunno, in a way it's diagrammatic, as far as the subjects in it go. It's very sort of, I think it's very sort of clear about the issues are it's trying to [tape runs out and is changed] The subjects are rooted in the present, oops we're not taping, are we taping?

C: Yeah, we're taping.

J: Oh ok, I'll stop this [video player] so there's not that level of hum. Yeah, so the subjects are rooted in the present, so we related to them as if we are in their present, their present space, their present time, but also they're alluding to the past, their referencing the past and they're alluding to the future, or speculating about the future, so the tape itself doesn't provide any type of, it's not a guide, I don't see myself as guide, but I use that at the end because it sounded nice [both laugh]. I mean it sounded like, I mean that's partly, that's what the tape is, it's about me, my journey, you know I've sort of been my own guide through, you know trying to see what life is like for people living there at that time, and what we can share as far as other people's lives, so, it's really hard to, if I knew exactly what it was that we were, or how it was that we wanted to, sort of, influence things, influence things, influence viewers, influence or effect change. Well in certain projects it's much more clear than in others, like in certain parts of *part 1*, and my other previous projects have a very particular aim or focus. Plus, I wanted to deal with and play with a lot of different ideas, you know different formal ideas, issues of representation. If you look at all the way from my earliest tapes in the eighties they're about deconstructing, literally deconstructing television, they're all made out of television footage my first few tapes. It's all about looking at how the media creates the psyche of the individual and constructs the psyche, but then, and the next tapes, well then I did a bunch of other stuff, but you know I did some tapes about the 'Middle East'. One was dealing with the representation of the 'Middle East' in the West, one was meant to dismantle the stereotypes that has been constructed about the 'Middle East' and that succeeded, but actually now there's a whole other set of stereotypes, but actually that tape is still been shown, even though it was made in nineteen ninety, it's thirteen years old and it's still as relevant now as it was back then, so it hasn't really succeeded. It's sort of pathological, it indicates a sort of pathology that's never been cured. And then *Up to the South* was, had many different things happening, but part of it was about the occupation of the South [Lebanon] and, most benignly or most basic aim was to liberate the South of Lebanon, and it worked [laughter].

C: Congratulations!

J: Yeah, to free the detainees.

C: So when *part 3* gets made, Palestine gets freed.

J: Yeah, Palestine gets liberated.

C: So you're holding things up a bit!

J: Yeah, I've just been too busy. The timing should be perfect. A few years after that's released, Palestine will be liberated. Now, they have these, what do you call these, they have these very crass, political aims to them, but that's just one thing you know. It's what sort of maybe keeps poking at you through-out, while the other stuff keeps you interested, the other issues you're dealing with, the issues of representation, , the formal issues, the issues of enunciation, the subjects, the empathy, the certain sort of emotional connections with the subjects, and just the visual pleasure of playing with the material. So this tape is more related to, in a way it's related to *This is not Beirut*, this other tape, but once again, because it's not Beirut, and I don't have these other ties, it becomes in a way more distant. But the thing – I look at it more as, it's probably going to be the tape that illustrates the interstitial state more than you know, than I do of this series. I don't think interstitiality will necessarily be the prime subject after *part 3*. *Part 4* it's going to start shifting. I've already got two other tapes shot, but not edited. One was shot in Cuba, and one was shot on the floor here [laughter].

C: Should be interesting.

J: Right, so inevitably interstitiality will be part of what I'm doing, but it may not be the predominant...so this becomes the predominant, sort of, theoretical push behind this tape, and everything they say, and everything in the structure plays off interstitiality and there's the interstices, there's the editing, it's all very simple, but it's not very – like there's no effects, there's no special effects basically. The closest we get to an effect is two layers of imagery for a couple of seconds here, and a couple of fades and that's it. So I think that's, so I find this one's more – being able to identify, if it has a mission, it's more about being able to identify, one's position and how that can be articulated and, historically, and how people have identified their positions in order to, like, come up with a picture of where they're at a particular time, and where they can, what can they do to move forward, and what are the influences of the past. So it's not, like a, instrumental tape, saying go out and do this. It's more reflective.

C: So I guess one final question, which leads back into...

J: Did you try your tea?

C: Yeah, it was good. I drank the whole cup.

J: Here, I'll give you some more.

C: So I finally, you talked about this personal journey that you've been and I guess I was thinking that the tape itself, if you're watching it without that type of knowledge, it seems to be very much about the identities of these people, i.e. they're discussing their identities, and discussing what nationality means, and ethnicity means for them. So I guess I was kinda of wondering how – I guess with the idea or sense that, with any intersection between identities are a relation, so both identities are changed. So I guess it comes down to quite a banal question of just how did this tape change you. And thinking about not just the process of, the actual journey itself, but the subsequent editing and, you know, the showing of it. Can you kind of, see changes, or is it something that's much harder to discern, and happens below the level of conscious attention?

J: Yeah, there's no, there's no way to know. There's no way to know if, how this is, if this is effecting me or how this effecting me. I want to go back to - I'll come back to this in a sec – I don't think of the, I don't think the people are discussing issues of identity, they're not talking about identity. For me, it's more, it's actually more, it's not about identity, it's more poignant in a way, it's more about their lives, and they sometimes they relate to something about ethnicity, but usually their not talking about identity in terms of how identity is politicized as movement or as form of content. Do you know what I mean?

C: Do you mean in the kind of identity politics terms of discourse?

J: Yeah. The thing that they're saying are much more, it's much, it's deeper than that, and in some ways it's also more relevant, in that it's not dealing with their individual identities, it dealing more with, how to, how enunciate, how to articulate what it is that's happening around them. And, the politics, identity politics is something that they've – I think the discourse they're engaging with is a discourse that goes beyond identity politics. Because for me, I won't, I don't, I wouldn't do something about identity politics per se, because it doesn't, doesn't have any effect anymore, I don't think, except for people who just want to figure out where they stand themselves in the world, and want to make something about themselves and their position. It seems to be more a phase right, or a period, I think, that people have to go through, to get through to do something else that's more complex. I mean identity politics is complex, especially if you're of mixed identity, and you're in a multi-cultural society or whatever, but I'm, I always think of that as being more personal journey or something, and then people get something out of it or not, but for me it doesn't have, it doesn't mean much. So the, so I never think of these things in terms of my own personal change, or my own development. I sort of just do it. I do what I do, you know. I just sort of, I have a project, and I have another project. I mean, the projects are basically, my life and my projects aren't very different from one another. They're the same thing. That represents three

weeks of traveling in my life, and a few weeks at either end doing other stuff, and a year later editing, and those few – so they represent chunks of my life, so it's not like – you know if I did them or I didn't do them I'd be doing something else, so, that would be in the similar vein but maybe a different product. So I don't know if, I don't think individual pieces, they don't change, I don't think, for me they don't change me. They make me, they sometimes make me more optimistic about things, sometimes they make me more pessimistic [laughs], but the things that happen with them are maybe more, more important, after they're made, it's not – making them is part of my daily life, and the things that happen after them will sometimes provide windows into other possibilities, or give me reason for hope or for, lack of hope, depending on the day. Cos some days you'll find somebody's used it, and you'll be surprised with how they've used it, its results, and you'll be pleasantly surprised. And other days you'll find it hasn't been shown or it hasn't been accepted here and here and here, and you'll go, well that's par for the course. I mean, not that I expect it to go to a lot places but, it's still a very, very conservative, politically conservative and also formally conservative milieu that I work in, as far as getting things in certain places. They're used to the way something should look, you know, and they can't accept something for the way it does look, at a formal level. Then there's always the question of politics as well. But, this tape I think works better as an installation tape, than it does as a single channel tape. It works ok as a single channel tape, but people sort of, leave floating a bit. They're in this space of, interstitial space, that leaves them in – I mean it does provide some, like Boris' geography and ideology quirk, quirk, and other stuff. There's some stuff for them to tangibly grasp on to all the way through-out the tape, but it doesn't polarize people, it's not meant to polarize people, in the way that the other tapes are more polemic. This one's more anti-polemic. I mean the other tapes, you see Soha, you hear about her experiences, and you either don't care, or care, or whatever, but this tape, in a way, people are speaking more philosophically, theoretically, and if you don't, maybe you come out more analyzing, and you need to go for a beer, but for different reasons [laughing] than when you're finished with that one.

C: How, so what's

J: You go for an ale, as opposed to a beer.

C: Oh, right, so added in the, or how do you think it works in the installation differently?

J: Well, they all work differently in the installation. What the installations does is it's, you know people will watch it just for a period of time, and then watch something else. And in the way this tape plays off of that tape it will create some other meanings that people can give...

C: In it's relations with the other pieces.

J: Yeah, some are like restful take in a way to the other ones. They'll watch the other ones which are more demanding, then they'll come here and this will be more...

C: Yeah, thinking about part 3...

J: Yeah, part 3 was, was for me very, it was, the need to make it was very demanding. I mean, I just had to make it, and once I made it, now, I don't have that emotional connection to it. It sort of exists – cos I'm thinking of the larger project now – but I'm not as moved by it as I was. I mean the story, after you hear the story a hundred times, you know. It's like Soha's story. Some people hear it, some people still, some people cry when they hear that story. I mean I like watching Soha, but it's like, I have to get on with other things, I've got other projects to do [laughing].

C: I've run out of questions. Is there anything else you wanted to say about part 2?

J: Part 2! Well you know, there's such an assortment of people on that tape that, that also leaves it open in a lot of ways, because each, each person and personality, each psyche, has their own take, and I think in that way it does give you, the way that people analyze the situation it does

give you an optimism of living, a productive notion of one's life being productive in the sense of being able to articulate experience that other people can, you know, other people can encounter or learn from in a way. So in a way that they are able to articulate their condition, conditions, their states, whatever you want to call it, it does give you some sense of, some sense of some inertia, sort of a view on...[looking out window] Those crows, this is the time of day when they come back from work. They're in the park [Stanley] and they go back home to Burnaby, usually out of that window.

C: Where do they work?

J: Oh, Stanley Park. Their work is breaking clams open, muscles open, feeding themselves. They stop, a lot of them land in these trees, you see these trees, and then they go on to Burnaby. That's where they camp out for the night for some reason.

C: Maybe property's cheaper over there.

J: Yeah, so anyway, I can't think of much more to say. You have all the texts I've written anyway.

C: Yeah, I tried not to cover the same ground but you inevitably do.

J: Well, I think you can take it in terms of, you can take it, you can write about it in terms of geography, in a way that I haven't that much, like when you asked me what makes that other more distinctively spatial dynamics, for a particular time or place, especially in *part 2*. I could have done a lot with it. I could have written about dates and facts, but after I went back over what I had, there was enough there. You use the parts that were, you know, gems in themselves. You know the way they are made – you can turn off the tape now.

[Tape off. Jayce explains about how he writes each shot on individual index cards, and then uses the index cards to compose a rough cut. Then Jayce shows pictures of the installation.]

Interview with Jayce Salloum about *untitled part 3/3b*, conducted on 9th August 2004 in his flat.

Chris: So the opening lead off question was you described *part 3b* as an essay on dystopia, was that right? Or something along those lines, and I was wondering if you could elaborate on what you meant by that, or what you meant by that in the context of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon or the Palestinian dispossession?

Jayce: Well *part 3*, well I don't know if I should speak about *part 3* as a work in progress or a completed work as it is, cos it will be a much longer and more complex piece. So I'll probably be clear about what I'm speaking about, the larger *part 3* or *3b*. But as far as *3b* goes, it was made in response to a number of things. One being the continued, ongoing massacres, process of cultural genocide of the Palestinians, by the West and the Israelis, which I consider part of the West. And during the time of the Jenin massacre, I was moved to do something directly related to that, right. And seeing as that's a continuation, one moment in the history of episodes of a similar nature, especially where Arik Sharon was implicated, and there was one motivation. So in a way it was trying to recognize that history and come to grips with how I could represent that history, besides just acknowledging it, but represent that history, other than through the paradigms that already existed, or that already exist for the Palestinians to be able to be recognized. So, cos what we have are certain dominant representations that fulfill our expectations of representation when it comes to the terms of the Palestinians. So, with the imagery that I'm using, in a way I'm trying to evacuate those representations or trying to figure out a way to critique those images or the history of those constructions in relationship to the density and richness of Palestinian culture and Palestinian life, right, and how that could be represented. So in a way the images, it's dystopic in a way because I'm dealing with massacres and genocide, not, it's dealing with in reverse ways, it's dealing reversely, adversely with an image that I want to construct positively, it's like a double negative right that I'm working with. So I'm working, in trying to critique or deconstruct, reconstruct, I use these images, traumatic images and in a way annihilate those images or mean something else. So, through this action, through this negative deconstruction, there is something that I hope is constructive and positive that comes out of it. So, that's how, one way it's dystopic because I'm dealing with this massive body of meaning, of death basically, of annihilation and it's happening during another moment of, another massacre, another genocide, or part of an ongoing process, so it's another massacre. So, it's taking place during the time of another trauma. So it's like a series of traumas and in a way the piece tries to, tries to also dismantle the dystopia that has come to represent the Palestinian people right. So if you have the images of the corpses and the images of the flower, those are the two images that people key on, because they're obvious and they're powerful and they take up more time in the tape, and they're sort of iconic, iconographic. And I'm trying to do the same thing with both of those sets of images, but sort of in reverse in a way. So that's why they're sort of paired up with each other, they overlap and they flow together. And it's looking at both the romantic imagery and the traumatic imagery, or the conflictual imagery and trying to invest it with a new set of purposes. Does that make any sense?

C: Yeah. So I thought of another question and this is about the larger *part 3*, the work in progress. Is it the larger one that's called *footnote to the book of setbacks*?

J: That's the working title, yeah.

C: So I wondered, why use the word *footnote*? I mean how's that positioning the film? Why did you choose to make it a *footnote*?

J: Well for me the book is the book of life, right. The book is being written by the people living it, so this is like a commentary, so it becomes a *footnote*. Sort of a response that can't carry the weight of a political life, but it can provide some type of reference or would be referring to a larger book. That title actually comes from a Syrian poet's book that he wrote, about the Arab, the Pan-Arab movement and how the Palestinians in particular, which I've never been able to find that book or that quote, which I've been trying to do.

C: So is his title 'The Book of Setbacks'?

J: Yeah, let's see. [Stop recording while Jayce checks files]. Yeah, that's where the working title came from, and I'm not sure if that's what the title will end up as, but it'll be something like that, of the overall piece. Because I like that idea also that it's referring to a textual interplay, which I can see video is.

C: Yeah, I mean it's interesting that a footnote's in the paratext, so it's in this position it's not outside the text, but it's not in it either. So there's that kind of ambiguous spatial positioning, and I wondered whether that played into it.

J: Yeah maybe.

C: Maybe it just resonates for geographers.

J: Well, I think footnotes do that anyways. If you take a position of writing from the footnotes, it's like, I've always. I've written essays where the footnotes are actually much longer than the text and for me that's more interesting. So it's like the constant, I mean hypertext, computer documents are great that way because you can just click on and go to another level and get lost and come back and try to figure out where you were right. Sort of like the installations in a sense, walk in CD-ROMs of sorts, and the collections of files. And the book of setbacks is the history of the Palestinian people.

C: So I also wanted some very straight forward information about the images. So why the orchid, or what kind of aspects of orchids are you drawing on?

J: Well, orchids were, well they were partly like I was saying at first, was that it was a predominant imagery of mourning, and 3b was also made as a eulogy or an homage to the Palestinians that had died, or were dying in these massacres, in these, yeah, and the murders, assassinations. So, I wanted to have that superficial reading of the flowers with that romantic, sort of nostalgic sense to them, and the flowers, they're blooming in slow motion, and time lapse photography. So you have a sense of time passing which also plays off the clichés of time lapse photography and of the narrative, of the story, and sort of those... Like two guiding metaphors, the bodies, I mean there's about twenty different metaphors in that tape that come back a few times that come back here and there, but I guess the dominant ones are the orchids and the corpses. So the orchids for me like I was saying before was also about providing a counter point to the motif of the corpse, and doing sort, with the bodies, part of that tape is about looking at how those images are captured, those images are documented. And the actual through the lens of the found footage, while that footage was given to me, through the found footage, or the given footage.

C: Is this the orchids?

J: No, I'm taking about the bodies, and that you actually get a sense of the camera person behind the frame. You get a sense of the framing that's taking place. And with the flowers, you don't notice it. It's like the opposite, there is no frame, it's just a flower in the middle of the frame basically. So I wanted one motif to be the inverse of the other so they end up being conflated. So you know, the flower...you get this metaphorical, poetic thing happening, but I'm also trying to also vacate the dominant readings of the orchids, and the romantic tendencies, readings of them, romantic sort of sense. Because the romantic sense does the same thing that the murderous sense does, right. It eliminates all the peripheral and all the center, and you're left with this sort of skeletal dominant representation, that evades other readings right. That sets aside all the other readings. Well that's the same thing that the corpse does. So in a way it's a critique of both sensibilities.

C: They both critique each other. So while you mention it, I wanted to ask where you got the footage of Sabra and Chatilla from?

J: Oh, just a sec. Let me go back to the orchids. Cos it's also this thing with beauty that the tape deals with, right. *as if (beauty never ends...)* And so, it helps to place a notion of beauty. When I showed this in New York a few months ago, we had a whole hour long discussion and people were, well what do you mean by beauty? So I started to talk about beauty, and what it came down to was, the aspect of beauty that I'm interested in is not the imagistic, but that's necessary to hold the viewer and to have an engaged audience. There's another beauty which for me is the more pertinent one, is the profundity of depth and richness of life basically, that doesn't end; that doesn't get acknowledged, but it also doesn't end. So it's if beauty never ends. It can also be read as if beauty ends, because it's, if it's not acknowledged then it's ending, but it's never ending because it's still living in somewhere else even if you're not acknowledging it. But for people who are reading those representations and are not seeing anything else, then it has ended.

So Sabra and Chatilla footage came from a number of sources. When I was working in Lebanon in 1992, which was ten years after the Sabra and Chatilla massacre, one of the stringers, or camera people that was shooting for a European thrust, French, Press François, whatever it is, EFP? He was working for them, so he gave me a copy of his raw footage on VHS. He generally shot it on Beta or something like that, because he had entered the camp really recently after that.

C: What was this guy's name?

J: I don't know his name. At that point, it had gone through a couple of pairs of hands. I think Walid [Ra'ad] ended up getting it and then giving it to me, but Walid was the one who received it so I don't know the guys name. But anyways, so he shot all that and it was like, when I was there a number of people gave me footage all during the stay. Like, here, if you're interested, do something with this. Somebody gave me a tape, which I still haven't done anything with, of all the newscasts during the war, from like '73 to '92. And it was, you could see on the tape, the styles changed, the technology changed, the background, the weather, the painted wall, the haircuts, so it's quite interesting in that regard.

C: Was that the Lebanese news?

J: Yeah, it was like the three main channels, even though by the end of the war there was like fifty channels. Everybody had their own channel, but there was still three main channels: a predominantly Christian channel, a Muslim, Hezbollah channel, like a Sunni channel and a Shiite channel, cos each of the militias had control over different media sources. So that's where a lot of that footage came from and what I found was that, when I was there too I was searching through the archives of a Communist TV station, but they had collections of footage shot by all different newscasts. So I collected a lot of material there and I didn't know what I was going to do with it. I didn't really consciously know that I also had it in another form. So what ended up happening was, I had two or three different versions of the same footage, shot literally one foot apart from each other, where the three reporters were standing right. So when I'm overlapping two or three images of apparently the same footage, it's actually three different shots of the same place at the same time, but just askew a bit, so you see this sort of jitteriness in the imagery. And then what I did too was I shot in 1992 in Sabra and Chatilla. So I've got a lot of the shots, a lot of the pans of the camp at that point were Sabra and Chatilla ten years later. And then I went back to the camp later, like in 2000, and shot some more. So it's a combination. The bodies themselves are from news footage.

C: So I also wanted to ask about some of the other imagery.

J: Oh, the orchids too, in a way, was a way to bring domesticity, my domesticity and domesticity in general into play too, because I taped them in my studio and for me they're very much about the domestic as well. So bringing it back home.

C: So I wanted to ask about stars and the water and the fish too. And the stars becoming water, at the end, and the fish.

J: Yeah, there's a number of waters.

C: I mean you can take them one at a time or whatever you want to do.

J: Well for me the clouds and the water are similar. They're sort of fields of projection in a way. The water's, let's see, there's water with the... OK, there's the water at the beginning that's taken from the back of the ferry, the ferry water, that greenish water with the bubbles before they arrive at the village. And then there's the water in the fish pond, with the Coy, the Goldfish. And then there's the water that's rippling at the end, the silvery water, which goes into the stars, the celestial footage, which is actually Hubble, the Hubble footage, from the web. You know what they've done there is it's a series of stills they've animated, by putting the stills, frame by frame with the telescope. So it looks like you're traveling through time, but it's actually just stills, a few moments apart, or milliseconds apart as the stars are going by the earth. So, well the water in a way like I said is a field of projection, so whatever's being said at that moment, the water sort of carries the meaning and those thoughts along. And it also, the water also is one of the, the water at the beginning and the water at the end, the notion of water is also one of the vital elements of life. Yeah, so it's one of the elements that you need to live, for survival. But most of the time I'm using it as an ambient imagery to sort of, just provide background and like I said projection for the other things that are happening at this moment in the tape. That's what happens at the beginning. I'm mean, it's like the orchids, the water's moving in slow motion, and it's also acknowledging or illustrating the passing of time. I mean you can carry those metaphors further about water and, the cleansing of it, and the refreshing of it through the tape. And the Coy, the Goldfish, these also are part of that playing with ideas of beauty right, that. OK, say if you're Palestinian, you're life isn't just made up of hellish moments. There's also your daily life, many moments of beauty, many moments of contemplation, many moments of things people have in their houses and round their houses that are beautiful things and are pleasurable things. I mean there's all these elements, all these layers that get reduced, that don't even get reduced, they don't even get considered as part of their identity, or part of your constitution because you're not allowed to have this, because, OK, with the liberation struggles that's more important and that's the sort of thing that you identify with publicly, but privately you have very different senses of, you know, very richer senses of life. So the fish remind us of that. There's no direct, literal, I don't see any literal reading of those per se, the fish or the water, which I mean you can have a literal reading but I don't read them literally. There more as a field and as ambient imagery. The water at the end, I mean, in a way they're eternal too. The water is eternal because you can have a sense of it existing forever. The waves come in, the waves go out, the waves go in, and that's part of history. That's a good analogy for history, because Palestinians always say time is on their side, right. Well demographically it is, but also it has to be, because if you look at the short term, nothing much has happened, it's just gotten a whole lot worse, as the short term goes on. But acknowledging that there's this eternalist, I mean nothing's absolute, but there's this sense of the eternal through the water coming and going and coming and going and fluctuating and changing, that it provides hope basically. Hope for better conditions and better possibilities. And at the end, I think it has both a somber note as well as a hopeful note, or an optimistic note. Sort of playing off of that concept that is in Palestinian theatre that is, I forget the theatre director but the contemporary Palestinian theatre director coined the term, based on one of his characters, was the pessoptimist. So there's always the duality of the dread of the current and the hope for something else happening simultaneously right, if you're under attack. Not all moments are moments of dread either. So the water simultaneously carries the eulogy, the eulogistic feeling, as well as the more fertile optimism for other potential, has a lot of potential, the water has this potentiality about it. Without this you can't survive, there is no potential. So it blends into the stars. I mean, for me that ending is still unfinished and in the larger piece it'll be much more complex. It'll also be a chapter within a chapter. She's actually, the girl that's singing, the fourteen year old girl I taped in Sabra and Chatilla, Chatilla's actually the camp, Sabra's the neighbourhood, was during the beginning of the second intifada, where all the tires were burning outside and there's

another moment of hope. Now it's not, but at the beginning of the second intifada, the Al Asqa Intifada, there was a lot of hope throughout Lebanon and throughout other refugee camps, ok now's our time; this is actually going to accomplish something. At the beginning that's what was thought, and that's what was felt. And she's actually singing a ballad that's like a lament, of where are we going, where did we come from and where are our Arab brothers and sisters, why aren't they helping us? So it's not as, it's sentimental but not as positivistic as you might think without understanding the Arabic, and the Arabic will be subtitled at the end, in that part. We'll probably go right into her singing and then we'll see talking a bit. She's wearing a hijab over her head, a scarf, but she's wearing overalls with Snoopy on it! So the water for me is also very, like video, it's very flat, it's very two dimensional in a way. I mean it adds, because of the way it moves and the thing with the orchids, it adds a three dimensionality, but you can still feel the image, the permeability or the ephemerality of the image.

C: So I have this question and then a longer one which is, where is the Bourg al Barajinah, the camp?

J: Bourg al Barajinah is a camp.

C: Where abouts is it?

J: It's just on the outskirts of Beirut. In the Southern, sort of South-Central outskirts of Beirut. And it's, each of the camps is controlled by different political parties, the militias, they used to be militias, but now the militia element is more subdued, it's mostly the political party. I think that was a PFLP camp, I'm not sure, you'll have to look it up.

C: Who was the PFLP?

J: The democrat, the Palestinian Front, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. One of the camps was PFLP and the other one was the Democratic, DFLP, Democratic Front. They're all, I mean that tape, I've taped in seven of the camps for this projects and the guy I used in part 3b is one of the elders of that camp.

C: So the final question was, do you think this film acts as some kind of memorial or monument, in a kind of postcolonial sense. I guess what I'm trying to think through is, is there any relationship between what's going on with the Palestinian dispossession, the links with Lebanon, and the links between the West and the dispossession, and the West and Lebanon, and you know, that whole kind of...the way it's networked together. So, do you think there is a postcolonial element to it, or a monumentality, kind of memorial, I guess we've discussed that with the dystopia.

J: Yeah, those are two different things though right.

C: Yeah.

J: I mean in a way it does, but it's more complex than that. I mean it's still, it's not even postcolonial, it's postcolonial in global terms perhaps, rhetorically, but it's still very much a colonial situation. So you have the colonial happening in a postcolonial moment and it's still on that level, and there's other aspects of neocolonialism taking place within the very limited functions of the corrupt Palestinian authority. Also within, there's also the postneocolonial whatever you want to call it, I don't think it's been termed yet, what happens when there's a vacuum created by these corrupt neocolonial powers at the time of colonialism that happens, that creates the rise of the fundamentalist branches and the appeal of that, the popularity of that. The popular religious movements in a way become dominant because of colonial and postcolonial situation happening simultaneously. So, and because the tape takes place, or focuses on material from Lebanon, that, ok, it's the colonial condition of the dispossession but it's, in the year 2000 so it's a postcolonial time, but there's also that distance that takes place, that's even how a simultaneous commentary happening because it's displaced outside of Palestine, the discourse,

but it's also firmly rooted historically, because people left Palestine in '48, but then still it has references to the camps that are in the Occupied Territories. And, so it's important for me that it wasn't taped in Palestine per se, because that distance, you know I'm always interested in what happens when distance allows you to do certain things and give you certain freedoms. But also I think it makes it more complex and does point to the West connection, implication in all that, which through the 19th century, up until now, that's been the dominant power to effect the negative change has taken place and it still is the Western power. So in the tape you have Wall Street, not Wall Street, Time Square ticker tape, and there's certain text on it, and there's three other shots, Time Square ticker tapes; there's a couple of other Time Square images that are more abstract that you wouldn't know; there's things that refer to the, scientific materialism basically. America's or the West's brutality in their scientific discovery basically, with the cutting of the body, the dead Texan convict, that was executed in Texas and then they sliced his body into quarter inch strips. That's what that animation is, it's a cross section of the body. Just by showing them like that it becomes animated, but if you stop each of them there's a hand showing or a colour card. That animation, it's a signifier of the brutality of the quest for capital and science, which is always linked to capital at all costs right, which is what colonialism was as well. Dominating the market! So you get that, and then at the end you get the more contemporary version, well I think that body cross cut was done in the eighties or seventies. It's called the visible body. It's on the web, that where I got it from the web as well. It's pretty amazing. Then the Hubble star, celestial shots at the end was done in a similar way, but with telescopic imagery. So you've got the close up cross-section, then you've got the outward looking, both following the same trajectory of the scientific expedition, and of course it's always tied to foreign policy and profit, which are always tied together. So in that way the West is always, in commenting on the relationship between the West and what's going on, it's not as direct as you might think, in that chapter. In the larger piece there'll be more people talking about those relationships and I'm going to actually write a script, but for the *part 3b* it's kind of ephemeral and oblique, but it's there. And you get the bulldozer, there's an image of a bulldozer at the very beginning, near the beginning before you go into the, all you see is the hand and the bulldozer. That bulldozer was digging up bodies from Sabra and Chatilla, and if you look really closely you can see some of the bodies but they're covered in mud so they're hard to see. You have the same images at Jenin, it's the same type of image, it's the same Caterpillar equipment that's still being used. They've actually designed, Caterpillar have designed a huge piece of equipment for demolishing Palestinian houses. So the memorial, for me they are linked, the monumental, the memorial aspect and that resonates throughout the analysis of the colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial conditions.

C: It's interesting, I quite like it in *part 3b*, cos it is like a faint, faint trace of the West, and you can see it through close analysis. I'm not sure I saw it just when I watched it for the first time. But I think it's kind of neat because it mirrors that condition of the West effacing itself, and yet there is always that slight trace or echo there to be found and it obviously can be amplified once you get hold of it.

J: It like, you have to go down the long road in the Wizard of Oz till you finally meet the wizard. But you can still see his work everywhere you go. His work, the hand of god is everywhere. The hand of the wizard. What was that road called, the yellow brick road. There you go, I should have a shot of the yellow brick road. Sort of the yellow brick road map to peace. Always ends up in the machinery of the Americans. I'll see if I can get a Dorothy. I mean part of the problem is, everybody is looking for a wizard, looking for a saviour, the messiah, a lot of messianic derivatives of searching for the rescuer. That's why everyone always tries to claim, well my road map is better than their road map. Ours is the only one that will work. It's got the support of these guys. I don't know what these guys want but they don't count, and then there's these other guys. But all roads lead to the same place.

<End of Interview>

Interview with Jayce Saloum, 17th May 2004 about the *untitled* installation

Chris: So my lead off question was to ask whether, how this piece came about. Was it something you thought of first, in the first instance as an installation, or was it that you were thinking about making certain tapes and then after you made the tapes you thought they'd go well as an installation? So what kinda of came first?

Jayce: Actually, the idea of an installation came first. And then when I was shooting the material I didn't know it was going to be used within this installation. The idea for an installation came when I was asked to be in a show in 1996. I was having a show at the National Gallery, and the curator of the Museum of Civilization came over to visit me while I was installing, and she drove me back over to the museum and showed me all the work that she was getting together for this show of Arab-Canadian artists. It was going to happen 2001, that's '96. She invited me to be in that exhibition, and she was trying to convince me so she was showing me the work of all the other artists. So I wasn't so interested because most of the work was work that I wasn't particularly fond of, or inspired by, except there was one artist that I liked. So I went away, telling her that I'd have to think about it, but I didn't think, you know I wasn't sure. But I thought about it more, and she told me the show would have to do with the way Arab-Canadian artists interpret issues of immigration, ideas of immigration, their immigration I guess is what she was referring to. So that didn't interest me. But over the next couple of years I started thinking well interesting looking at ideas of movement, and then thinking further about that, like how movement is a force in all of our lives, that we move from place to place or... and then I started thinking about ideas of transition. That means thinking ideas of transitions and how that's more pertinent because even if you don't move from your place you're always going through certain transitions, when there's a political change, ideological challenges, and cultural changes or cultural adaptations going, so transition's always an important sort of thing to reflect upon, but it's also a space or a sense that's thought of, that's going from point A to point B. It's always about leaving something behind and arriving somewhere else, so it's always about moving through. It's never really looked at as a concrete entity in itself. So, thinking, and it's always devalued, transition's always devalued. It's not meant to be an object of contemplation or necessarily a time of production. So I thought further about this and this lead me to thinking about the space of interstitiality, or the space and the time of interstitiality. How those, how can I look upon that as a productive space or a productive time or else if not productive, something that was very concrete. So it became, that became a focus for the idea of an installation, even before I started shooting anything. So I went traveling in '99 between shows and started taping Yugoslavia, taping Soha on that same trip, a long trip. As I was doing the taping I started thinking about these questions. That's why I started asking the questions about distance you know, inbetweenness of different sorts, but couching them in terms of can you describe then, you experiences before, your experiences now, what are the differences, what are the different spaces or can you articulate the different senses of space or time, or how you position yourself within those different domains or different times. So trying to ask questions where people would articulate their experiences of interstitiality, of living in interstitial spaces or times, which almost any time is. So then after taping people and hearing their responses I started thinking about how they could fit into an installation, how they would fit into the concept of the installation, without really knowing the format of the installation. So the installation concept came first, and then the taping came afterwards, then they grew, there wasn't any difference, the content shaped the installation shaped the editing of the tapes in a certain way that fed into the installation as well as having them function in a way as a single channel, in single channel format; single channel meaning one TV or projection gallery, theatre, or whatever space. So the concept of interstitiality or different subjects, the Palestinian subjects or other subjects was floating around at the same time I was thinking about the structure of the installation. Does that answer your first question?

C: Yeah. So what do you think the installation brings to the tapes when the tapes are together? Cos I mean obviously the tapes are doing certain things by themselves on their own, and then, what happens when they come together, and maybe, one of the ideas I had was thinking about ideas of subjectivity which kind of circulate around, in the installation, through the various tapes.

J: Well the installation for me, there's different, we talked about, I think we talked about this but maybe not. The tapes function on their own in a single channel format, they're more cinematic in a way, and they play upon those expectations of the viewer in a cinema space. The, one of the things that viewers complain about when they watch these tapes is there is a lot that isn't said. There's a lot about absence; there's a lot about what's outside the frame. It's this question of absence that is very much centered, because people are talking about experiences that aren't necessarily illustrated right, for the most it's just people talking. You see some landscapes coming by or some other referential images, ambient images but it usually came out of directly showing you the location or the, illustrating what they're saying, so there's a lot of referring to other things to it. There's a lot about absence outside the frame, there's a lot of absence in other ways as well. So the tapes themselves when you watch them in a single channel the, there in a single frame so you focus on what's inside of that right, and then you have to acknowledge what's outside of it. And you're also in a cinematic space where people get to feed off each other in a way that's sharing sort of emotions, emotive expressions. Now inside the gallery it's different. The installation, you walk in, it's much more of a sculptural, architectural, sculptural environment, where you enter and it's a very silent space and the video wraps around you basically. You enter, you come through the lobby and you see the clouds floating by, and it's sort of, for me the monitor represents, or is meant to simulate the arrival and departure lounge of an airport. So it's hanging above and you have to look up to see what time your plane leaves, but all you see going by is clouds, the planes already gone. But maybe it hasn't arrived yet, but anyways you're floating. These clouds I tape, usually the passage between, I don't know if it's the atmosphere and the stratosphere or whatever those areas are called, below the clouds and above the clouds. I've always like the entry into the clouds and the exiting, when you're descending coming back into that. So it's about moving through these different states. And so that's what you see first, before you enter the space, the rest of the installation. And that's silent, the clouds are silent. So you enter the space and there's images that literally wrap around you, one of them curves around two walls, and maybe a floor, a ceiling and the rest. And it's very silent, all you hear is the machinery. So right away the engagement with the viewer is on a, it's a different type of physicality and materiality. You entering as a figure within a space, and there's more tangible, sculptural presence of the images. I mean they're very ephemeral, very thin as far as materiality of the image goes, but there's a sensation of light and colour surrounding you that you're walking in, and some what becoming part of. Your shadows, you fill the space and the installation is not complete without the viewer, and then, so there's this interplay. And then you can approach the content and then the images, so the images play off each other visually, and then you decide if you want to get into any of the tapes further to sit at one of the chairs and put the headphones on. So when you're watching a tape, any of the three main tapes – there's three tracks at this point, three audio tracks, three main tapes, three central tapes – you're watching and you're focused on one tape or one channel, but you've also got the presence in your peripheral vision of the others. So while you're listening you can glance over, and there's relationships that develop in a way that's, from channel to channel, from screen to screen, that play off of each other. So they become more referential because you can walk from one to the other and it's different, you can see part of one, you can see part of another, listen to part of the other while you're watching something from the other one that you left. So there's more of an interplay and they feed of each other in that way. You carry the engagement with one over to the next, so they're more cross referential. They're more, there's more of an intersection. They're cross referential in that they start layering upon each other. So I think the experience becomes different from watching one tape in a cinema. The other things is, it's a quiet space that you enter into in the installation. I guess it would be in a theatre as well, but the theatre you don't get the physicality so that's probably the big difference too.

C: In a certain, and this is relating to the last question, each of the individual channels, each of the individual tapes has got a certain type of politics to it, in a certain sense. You know, there's various types of politics wrapped up with each individual tape. Do you think the installation as whole, with the ways these various tapes are interacting, and referencing one another, and then

also perhaps with what you were saying about interstitiality or transition, do you think there's a politics to the installation, beyond what happens in each of the individual tapes.

J: I don't know if you can stretch it to that. There's a carving out, there's a certain demand that's placed on the viewer, whether it's, in both cases. In the installation, so the demand for me is also a form of engagement, and it's a politicized space in a way that for us to be engaged with anything in our lives, requires our time, requires a commitment, requires a conscious affinity of one sort or another, a conscious agency. So when you enter the space of the cinema or gallery, you've made that choice to engage in what it is I'm presenting here. Now that, as far as the installation, both the space is for me is an opportunity to engage people, in a political way, or it can be politicized. So the space itself, the gallery is never usually commercial, or a space of consumerism. They're usually or they always have been up until now, non-profit spaces or museum spaces. I mean the space isn't necessarily political, I mean it's not the space that's political, in a sense, I mean as far as the terms of politics I want to engage with. I mean it's political if you look at the structure of funding and all sorts of things like that, the economics of artist run culture, the non-profit sector. But for like the global politics or the geopolitics I'm interested in addressing, and the levels of subjectivity. One thing to go back to in that first question, when you were talking about subjectivity. If you're watching a single channel the subjects remain more intact. In the installation there's a certain sort of integration, or disintegration that happens between us, as an individual subject starts to roll up with another. So you'll have people coming out saying, sort of mixing up stories, which is interesting. They'll take what they want out of one, and layer it on top of another. So the installation doesn't function anymore politically, I mean it would be a far stretch to say that because it's a gallery space, and it's a space of contemplation and mediation and people enter it, and they give you that hour, half hour, ten minutes or three hours, that you, that it becomes a more political space. I don't know that that's the case. I don't think, because it's such a nebulous thing trying to talk about your work being political, because it talks about political issues. But being political, what does that mean? Does it mean only when it affects somebody in a way that they go and do something that involves themselves, the body politic, that somehow has an effect on our governance, or how we govern ourselves or how we're being governed by others, or how we govern others. I mean that's what politics is. So if it changes people's lives then it's, in a way it's political. So I don't think, I mean the space doesn't change peoples lives, it's what people do after seeing it, so people decide whether they want to be political or not. It's not really the work, the work can only be a catalyst. I mean it's, sort of ambiguous, saying the work's political, I have an ambivalent relationship towards that because it's not, you know what I mean? It's not the work; it's what happens after, or what's done with the work. I mean the work tries to set up certain possibilities that can happen with it, or it tries to create avenues of interchange, in the most, in the best way could possibly lead to somebody doing something, or thinking differently or changing their perceptions, or at least challenging their own perceptions. Is that what you, were you asking what this a different type of political, or more or less political?

C: Yeah, I was just wondering, beyond what's happening within the tapes whether there's anything else. I mean obviously the installation is not divorced from the tapes at all, and what's going on in them, so it's...

J: In a way that the tapes do, the installation challenges people, that normally think that an art gallery should be this, or an installation should be this, so it's always challenging people's expectations. People are always surprised when they walk into the space; it's not what they would normally expect to see. And then if they watch the material, the tapes it's not normally what they would normally expect to see on a wall, or projected or in a gallery, so on a very subtle, it's changing people's perceptions or challenging their perceptions of this cultural milieu. So in a very minor way it does that. It's very, they're very ephemeral pieces you know. I mean if you turn the projectors off, there's nothing. You turn the screen off there's nothing, so it's a certain reliance on technology that is not necessarily a good thing. The ephemeral nature, I like that too though, cos I can walk in there and say, that's playing, they're playing that DVD wrong. They've got it set on

chapter repeat instead of title repeat. There goes the flower over and over again, but nobody else would notice. And that's ok, because it becomes some of their experience.

C: Maybe this is something you don't want to go into detail, cos it's not that interesting, but I was wondering how you planned, how you actually designed the space. You've said you wanted to create the wrap around video effect so it maybe less to talk about that again. But maybe how, did you decide to put certain monitors where they are, or how did you decide to include the little appendices? How did you decide the angles?

J: There's a couple of things. When I was making the tapes, as I said, I wanted to make them so they could be used alone, I'm talking about the three main tapes, so they could be used on their own, or in an installation. And when they're used on their own, when they're not part of the installation, I mean even when they are part of the installation, I think of the tape as one long tape. I mean people know it's cut into, in this instance, seven channels right, or seven parts. So I think of the tape as one long tape. There's no credits, no opening or ending credits. There's no text, no introduction or summaries, conclusions. So each piece can easily be put in front of another one, in front of another one, in front of another one so they flow together. Thus we have parts one, two, three, four, five, ad infinitum. So the installation, it's like having a book, the chapters of a book, and opening them up, and putting them around and having those come to life in different corners of the room basically. There's a link through out all of them. So there's certain things that I knew that I couldn't do within a single part of a tape and expect somebody to watch it, or at least to watch it and not to get up and walk away. So I have an hour or what ever it is, a half hour of landscapes going by, which doesn't work in the single channel format, but in the installation you can have half an hour of landscapes going by, and then because they're focusing on the talking heads more, the speaking subjects. So I don't remember how those came together, but when I was editing, ok take part 2 for instance. When I was editing the tape, I had like hours and hours of material shot by, shot from the bus, shot from the train as I was going from city to city. And I was incorporating bits and pieces between the conversations, to separate them, provide some visual pleasure, and also some space of contemplation or rest between the different intensities of people talking. And then, I know, I understood I had a lot of pretty amazing looking landscapes, or interesting looking landscapes that wouldn't fit into this fifty one, fifty two minute piece. It was actually around an hour I started at. So at that point, I started thinking all those landscapes can be used also in the installation in another way. And at some point I thought well, you know, why don't we put them together, side by side. Because there is landscapes within the speaking subjects, and landscapes if they're next to them, to the right of them, will provide an ambient set of images, describing certain lands, certain relationships to lands. And then they're flowing together or contradicting each other, as far as the movement of the camera. They're moving up and down or together or away from each other or they're colliding when there is two landscapes on each screen. So that became one of the elements of the installation was this pair of screens that is always put together, this pair. It's like a dual screen format now, those two when they're in the installation. And it doesn't work when they're on monitors, because they have to be overlapping by one pixel maximum, those two squares, otherwise you know when they're separated; they have to have that contiguity to mesh. That always takes about half a day, actually a day to line those up. So that's it's both a practical and conceptual and aesthetic process that comes together. I mean it's not laying out the format of the installation and slotting things in to fit it, it's just part of the structure. So Soha, I've always wanted her to be on her own, because she's always on her own because she's, I wanted her to have own space and time. She's got her own part of the tape; she's got her own wall usually. It's usually a large monitor or a small projection. And the level of, and the chairs are close to her so it's like a one to one engagement with her. In part 2 with the Yugoslavia material, you're back a bit further because you've got the two screens and it's more, it's like a drive-in, drive-in movie theatre. Then part 3 with the Palestinian material which is still in process. At first I didn't have the ambient, I just had that little monitor kind of like a thirteen inch, it could have been a nineteen inch monitor, but it couldn't have been a very big monitor, with the first version. In the first version I wanted the Palestinian subjects to have their own part and their own space, and I knew that was eventually going to be its own tape, so I wanted to separate that material. Now the for this installation, there was so much happening,

there was the Jenin massacres and all the other subsequent stuff that was happening during the rise of the second so called intifada, the, it was just a, I had very little time. It was a matter of, there's a show that I'm in of Arab-Canadian artists, and it's going to be a big show, it's going to be up for eighteen months, I have to have something in their dealing with the different Palestinian issues, otherwise the whole show's going to be a big farce. Like how can ridiculous can you get. I'm lucky it did it, because in the other work, there's nothing referring to, I don't think there's any Palestinian artists, Palestinian-Canadian artists, and there's no reference to Palestine. So it was an absolute necessity for me to do that and include the stories of the two '48 Palestinians, Abdel Majid Ali Hassan and Nameh Sulieman. So what I did was I went to my forty hours of material that I just shot a few months before that, and got some translated, got as much as I could translated, just skimmed through and find two interesting stories and put those up there. So that was that first version. Then in subsequent versions I started going through thinking about how I was going to present the rest of the material. Actually the Jenin massacre happened afterwards, and that wasn't the impetus for having the Palestinian material. It's just the subject of the Palestinians wasn't being represented, and I needed somebody to do that. So the other material I put together at the time of the Jenin massacre as a single channel tape to have some impact, some commentary on what was happening, and what keeps happening, so I put together this short with part of Abdel Majid's story and some other ambient imagery that I was shooting that I thought would work together with that. I'd been shooting in all different places and I put it together. I wasn't that I went and shot for the tape. But I did shoot some more orchids for the tape. So yeah, so then, I thought, this was for my show in Toronto, the first time I sandwiched these two together, so I thought well, should I have two monitors. So initially I was thinking let's play off two monitors, one with the guy speaking, the guy and the women speaking, and then the flowers and the other imagery, the ambient imagery, have them together, have then a different angle, but that didn't seem to work, having one on the ground pointing up. You have to think about the intensity or the relationship is. They can't be equal because the ambient imagery isn't equal to the other material. The other one is more of a back drop. So then I, at some point, it didn't happen until I was inside the gallery, I thought well, maybe I can project, just on top of the TV and have a black square around it with the ambient imagery. So then playing with the projector within the space, refined the, radically altered the installation. I mean there's always refinements within each space. I put the projector in the corner and pointed it at the monitor, and then it wrapped around the room, and I thought wow, this is perfect, so I did that. And it wraps around, so that's become a permanent fixture at this point in time of the installation. I've done four different versions of it with that wrapping, in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and now here. So it's all a matter of process. In a way it's contingent on the material, and the presentation of the material is always becomes, the aesthetics becomes part of the concept and helps conceptualize the same way that. I mean the aesthetics are a concept, not just part of a concept. So the aesthetics of the installation, the planning, the mapping of the installation all has to do with the material and the presentation of it, and finding the most appropriate modality for it, in its engagement with the viewer. So each of them are unique, each of these in a way, in a subtle way anyways, installation. Where they are in the installation, and how they are presented. Now there's the monitor on the floor. That didn't happen till I guess it was in Toronto. It wasn't in the first version. The monitor of the floor I kept on thinking of as outtakes, it's still called other, the thing that sits on the floor. And over time I think I'll work on that more, but now it's literally a dustbin. It's got a picture a dust ball and hotel rooms I've stayed in, and the bed and the curtains and the windows, so, and my date book, where I write my plans, my agenda book. So it's more of a personal, domestic space in that corner. It's meant to be one of the last things you look at, fleetingly. Or just stop and look at. It's got no audio. It's on plinth on the floor that makes it point upwards at a forty five degree angle so it becomes almost a table but not quite. So that's one, two, we've talked about all seven. Does that answer that question?

C: Yeah, sure. So another point that was interesting was, you've discussed previously somewhere, that audience needs to take almost an archival approach to the installation in some senses. So I was wondering if you could say more about how the installation works like an archive and just elaborate what you mean by this archival approach, the ways you think that's an interesting metaphor to use, or whether it's not a metaphor but more literal.

J: Before we go, there's something else I wanted to show you. Also this installation has these images around the wall, it follows on from two other installations I did. One that I did from '95 to '98, and one that I did from '96, nope, '98, '99 to 2000. So the first installation, Kan yi ma Kan, not the first, but in this set of three that I'm talking about, had images all over, and folders all over. Have you seen pictures of that? It's got a very, very, dense and it was literally like walking into a studio where there were millions of things going on. So there's clusters and arrays of objects and collections. I mean it's very archival, and there's all these file systems that people can spend hours going into, personal letters, UN documents and blah, blah, blah. There's piles and files and stacks and shelves and everything. So after that installation, the next installation I did was a few years later, was all these images of New York neighbourhood. And I also did this at the Contemporary Art Gallery. There's images going up and down the wall, and different sizes and there's actually one size that isn't represented here [in the catalogue] that I started to print later, so it becomes very panoramic.

C: So what was this installation called?

J: That was called 'untitled', but every time I showed it, I'd name it a different thing. You see, untitled, 98-99. Every time I showed I would, there was a different title coming out of the, like, 'untitled 22 oz. thunderbolt', it was a different text taken out of the images themselves. So you see there's a certain process of refinement going from that all encompassing file system to this, to these images going around the wall. You see the relationship. But each of them are translate to themselves, but there is a relationship and the process of moving from one body of work and the way it's presented to another. And that work I was also seeing if I could do an installation without relying on all those textual documents. It was just the images, and then images serving as captions for other images. And because in this installation [Kan ya ma Kan] there was actually little video monitors, like little three inch video monitors that were like captions. So it was inverted. The video became captions for, or they're very ambiguous, very abstract at certain times, but they became captions for the mass of the other amounts of material. So then the relationship here is that all the textual materials is folded into the tapes. And there's no captions once again, it's all within the material. It's all contextual within what people are saying. You have to rely on the context of the people's articulations, enunciations for them to specify any type of locating that takes place. And so the question was about archiving. So the notion of archiving and going to here from here is actually very similar. There's a density of material, there's a voluminous amount of material that you wouldn't expect one viewer to be able to get through. I mean actually one viewer could watch everything in the tapes, it would just take an entire five hours or so, four or five hours. But in this instance [Kan ya ma Kan], it would take them months and months and months. Probably a year, so nobody's ever done it, the shows never last that long. I mean I'm the only one who's gone through all the material over something like a ten year period, right. It does take a long time. It takes a couple of weeks to install that show each time. Even if you could physically, if you spent a day there, twenty four hours there, you'd be able to see everything, or six hours or whatever. But people enter the space and you get the sense that there's more than you can possibly see. When you are watching it, you know that you're not watching everything, you're not getting to see everything, so even if you get to watch just one tape, you also know you're not seeing the whole story of her story, or their story. So there's this notion of the archive that there's a larger volume of material that exists outside the fragments that you're interacting with, or that you have the time to review or see. So there's always this notion of incompleteness, because archives are always incomplete. Otherwise they're dead. They're always being added to, they're growing. But even if they're a static archive of someone's holding, then they're dead, they're always incomplete in a way that you're never able to see the whole archive. And then there's always where the archive leads. So in a way, that's sort of on a schematic level, but on a basic sense, these are documents, the documents within this archive are people's stories. There's another archive which they refer to which is the complete stories which I've edited the material from, that now exist in my video room, as well. So there's an archival sort of reference and then there's the archive apparent inside the space, so it's another form of absence, the material that's not there. So in a way I'm documenting these stories and recording these stories,

they become documents. They're also, the people within the tape are also documenters of their stories and other people's stories. So it's like an archive of their archive, of their base of history and experience of... they're subjects, or carriers of an archive themselves right. Some of these are very, for me are very important stories that either don't get heard, or don't get acknowledged or valued. The clouds are an archive too – part of my cloud collection. And my unmade beds in hotel room collection. Or views outside of hotel windows.

C: So my next question kind of leads on to that, as that was thinking about the ways in which obviously the three main pieces primarily but as you say also the other appendices, work as documenting histories in a certain way, which is kind of obvious in what we've discussed, what you've just said. I was wondering, I was trying to think through the relationship between these histories and then also the sense of future, and the way in which for instance, the archive's also opening out into the future, it's always incomplete. But then also how these kind of histories also offer maybe ways, reorientations, very subtle reorientations in terms of the viewer perhaps for the future, trying to re-orientate the viewer in tiny, almost imperceptible ways perhaps. So what I'm trying to get at is the relationship between these pieces, the installation which is an archive, it's a collection of histories, but then what are these histories promoting in terms of future orientations, or interactions, or future perspectives.

J: You mean the installation differently than the single channel?

C: Well I guess at this point I was thinking about the installation as the different channels are wrapped up in it.

J: Everybody that I talk to on tape I ask them to talk about different periods that they've lived through, the period that they're living in currently, and then what's next, what's coming up, to speculate about the future. To think about what these paths would lead to, or could lead to, what they fear, what they're looking forward to, whatever. Or what their role is at this point in time, if they don't have a speculative notion of the future, at least, how they see themselves now, and tomorrow, at least within the society they're functioning in. So in that way, each of them does reflect upon a future; a future tense outside of, or beyond the present. And, are you asking about them as subjects, or the viewer engaging with them?

C: I guess the viewer perhaps, more than the, I can't see it being disentangled from what the subjects are saying in a certain way.

J: OK, I try to have the material, the installation tapes whatever, the material, the work, I try to have the piece, so it worked with people as I'm going through it that, I mentioned that it's always challenging people's perceptions in a way but it's also, I think the work can also elucidate people's context, predicaments and positions, as they elucidate their own or as they articulate their own sense in regards to their positions or predicaments or contexts or whatever it was – I've got a very short term memory. When they articulate theirs, then other people can reflect upon their own right. So as a viewer, I like to think of myself as watching this material, finding out about these people's theories of the world, of life, of action, of politics, and seeing how they reflect upon them at the same time we as viewers we would always be reflecting upon our own contexts, and our own positions and our own relationships. So in a way it identifies certain relationships, the work identifies certain relationships within each piece and within the pieces and between the pieces, helps us to look at and analyze and appreciate perhaps, but also reflect the relationships we are involved with, political relationships and personal relationships, in both, in the social and political and cultural field. So in an ideal world that's how it would function, and that's what I aim for, that the work does engage the viewer enough to influence how they see certain aspects, you know within that time I have with them. I don't know what happens afterwards, it's not anything you can predict or have control over. So I'm setting up these different fields for people to enter into and hopefully engage on levels that would sort of elucidate certain things. It sounds very new agey to say enhancement, sort of outlining, a form of illumination. But it's the person's responsibility, I'm not illuminating things. With them and their interaction, perhaps they get

illuminated, like go oh yeah, that's interesting, I was thinking about that the other day in relationship to this, or they can put that into words what was I was thinking, or it's all bullshit actually, I was thinking the opposite. Or I knew you were going to say that, I saw you on TV last night. It's like watching sports, I mean it's the opposite of watching sports. You know they interview hockey players right. Baseball players aren't as bad, but basketball players and hockey players, they always say the same thing. Oh, we got to work harder, we got to focus, we got to take one game at a time, it's always funny. I don't really watch sports, but it's always so redundant, it's like they're hit over the head with some tautology. It's like, I don't know, pre-programmed. So it's sort of the opposite of that. The opposite of sports – there you go, there's a title for your thesis. It just isn't hockey. It maybe Canadian but it's not hockey. There's no world cup of installation.

C: My last question, is just broader. I've come up across, quite a number of media artists who are using an archival approach now, Walid Ra'ad, the Speculative Archive people down in California, so I was wondering why, what your opinion was on why this has become popular. Do you think it was always popular maybe? Is there a secret, link almost, or a similarity, a connection, an affinity in ways of thinking or ways of approaching your art that kind of unites you, into using this one particular form.

J: Can you name other cases?

C: Beyond those two, no.

J: Yeah, I mean those two are friends of mine.

C: So it's not even a secret link, but a very

J: Yeah, Walid was my assistant and we saw the development of the Kan ya ma Kan installation. So his notion of re-working the archives in a way is a very direct relationship with my work, because he grew out of this work basically. He had his own interests, but then through this work it gave him his own ideas and possibilities. I think he would say that too, and he would say that himself. And then both David and Julia have seen both my work, are intimately familiar with my work and Walid's work, as they were making the, before they started making their work. But there was other people, let's see who else uses archival, let's say foundations in their work? A lot of people use the notion of a personal collection and I don't think it's necessarily an archive. There's a lot of work that superficially references or has images of archives, but they're not, they don't have an archival basis to the work. I mean I don't mean archival in the academic sense, I mean they don't have a detailed collection of materials, put together over a number of years, that they're working from. Usually they're images of somebody else's collections, somebody else's archives, somebody else's mediation, and they've made art out of that, or they've made art out of the process of this type of mediation. But they're not their own archives which they've put together. Through years of research and study, either they have a faux archive that they're working from or they're dealing just with the first layer, the superficiality of somebody else's archive. Or they're using somebody else's archive to go deeper into their own research. Because I did a lot of work in photography, I did some drawing, painting, filmmaking but then I really got into photography for a couple of decades and I still do a lot of photography. And when you're doing photography, you're making pictures, you end up with an archive, you end up with binders and binders full of negatives and prints and proof prints, made by boxes and boxes. So you inevitably develop forms of archiving, systems of cataloguing. That all becomes part of your vocabulary, and you have like a reference number to each image, each negative and on and on and on. So my approach to video when I started working with video was very similar to what I would do with photography, was collect massive amounts of material, catalogue it, sort it, identify it and edit it. So video from the beginning for me was always an archival process, the same that photography is; that you have tones of material, and you sort through it, you collect it, you keep it, you put it into storage somewhere in case you want to use it in the future, which you never usually do, and then you pull morsels and snippets out of it. So whenever you see a photograph,

say you see a photograph of any of these people, like Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, any of these street photographers whatever, Nan Golden or people like that, that use a camera, that take pictures, or show that as art, you always know that that's one frame out of a roll of twenty four or thirty six or twelve depending on the format they're using, or if it's a single sheet if they're loading sheets into the view camera. But it's always this notion that it's a sequence, that it's out of sequence, that it's something taken out of a serial approach. So photography's intrinsically an archival medium and so is video. But the other work I was doing was all, when I was working in the Middle East and that collection of work from ten years became *Kan ya ma Kan*, that was an even more expanded notion of the archive, because it wasn't just the video, it wasn't just the photography, it was everything. It was all the photographs I took, all the video, all the ten thousand feet of film I collected in bombed out movie theatres. It was all the files and faxes and letters that people wrote me, that I wrote back. It was all my documents of studying on the UN, documents over the period, the British mandate, the French mandate, the pre-mandate times and the pilgrimages, the approach of Napoleon and all that. It was maps, it was draws full of objects that were collected and found. So the, it's always been a labour, a real intense labour, process of labour, it's about heavily intensive, labour intensive the process of art making for me, because trying, when you're deciding, you're always making decisions all the way along, and you're filtering, filtering, editing, editing, mediating, mediating, that at some point you just go, why don't I just show the whole thing. And set up different frameworks and different parameters for doing that. Well, you can never just show the whole thing, cos you can never show the whole thing, even if you wanted to. So the best I could do was put most of the things inside a room, which is what I did with *Kan ya ma Kan*. Then I thought I want to control this more, I want to narrow it down, refine, so that next two projects, the video and the photo work, became much more refined. So in this way there's still a notion of the archive but it's not as immediate, as walking into. That wouldn't be the first thing that came into your mind was an archive when you walked in here, but when you walked into those, the *Kan ya ma Kan* one anyways, that would be one of the first, the New York Times reviewer wrote, oh, it's really interesting. There's this, that, and everything, I don't know if it's art, but it's worth investigating. So I like that, the notion that it's not, the first thing people think when they walk into a gallery is it art, and it's probably the same still, it carries on into this piece. It's not the first thing on your mind, people always think of the content first. And the installations have a strong presence in themselves, but it's not, that's not the predominant issue of the work I hope that people carry away with them. It's the way the work's arranged in the space. I mean it's important but it's not the main emphasis. So that question about the archive?

C: I was asking about how it relates to the other artists.

J: Oh the other artists yeah. So what I was talking about earlier, that book called people looking at archives, for me it's more about the image of an archive. I don't know of any, I was trying to think when I was going through that book, I mean there are other people who probably do use personal and intense collective archives. Whether it's timely – there's probably always been people, like Duchamps, he had different arrangements and collections. So I think, I think occasionally there are artists who like to reflect upon, not just the single solitary object, the modernist notion, even pre-modernist notion of the object of art begin the be all and end all. So when people start to think outside the single frame, the some artists, well not a lot, but there are some artists who have explored that notion. A lot of people working in print photography too, end up putting photographs together, together, together, so the serial works kind of in-between a single image piece and an archive. So serial works or collections of things. I think maybe, I think it's more a reflection now, a lot of politically minded artists now, especially working with media, because we have such an abundance of televisual material and media imagery, dominant media imagery, that people want to develop their own relationship too, to take a position in regards to it. So people are going to use that material to try to dismantle, or deconstruct or counter, counter-project to that. So a lot of them will use that same material, so it has, coming from television, it has that, and every video has a relationship to television whether they acknowledge it or not. It's part of that larger archive, that media archive that exists in the world. And people, I mentioned Walid and David and Julia, I mean we are all interested in history and the construction of history, and how that history influences us as people in the world and as citizens, and also as, how it's used and manipulated

for different policies and as part of our governance. And if you're looking for answers you know, there's no better place to look than the archive.

C: A continuously deferred answer?

J: Yes, it's not about finding any, it's about looking. And that's, I hope these installations function like that. They don't, that people are curious enough that they keep watching, looking and engaging with, and it's not that they walk away with any answers, but that the process has been worthwhile for them, that it's rewarded them in a sense. It sorts of provides some fodder, some fuel for their movement. Art is fodder. Fuel fodder, fuel art. Well I'm very happy when people use it for certain purposes, you know if they want to borrow a tape or have a tape for whatever it is they want to do with it.

<End of interview>

Ethnographic transcript of *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

Soha Bechara (SB): My name is Soha Bechara, I was born in Beirut, from a village in South Lebanon that is under Israeli occupation. I was born June 15, 1967. I joined the Lebanese National Resistance Movement (Jabhat al Muquawama al Watanieh Lubnaniya) in 1986. On (November 7), 1988 I was captured following an operation that I executed against the symbol of collaboration Antoine Lahad. As a consequence of this operation I was detained and I spent the next 10 years in El Khiam detention centre. It ended by my release on September 3, 1998.

SB: After one year of my release, why have I accepted this interview? Why have I agreed to have this conversation even though our mission has not ended? To shed some light on what happens to someone in the post-release period, what the decisions are, the possibilities and choices, what is to come in the future and what each of us is planning to do after spending years in the detention centre. That is the reason I agree to participate in interviews, conferences, and various meetings. All these meetings give us the chance to talk, and act as witnesses. This is why I will continue to speak out, to witness. First because of what happened in Lebanon, not only since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut, not only what took place in 1978, "the first Israeli invasion" and that should be placed between parentheses because that was not the first invasion. The first invasion was in 1948. Contextually this date should not be forgotten because it repeats the history that we share with many other nations living through the violations of human rights, confiscation of land, the killing of children, transforming Lebanon into a military testing ground, one example being the massacre of Qana, where the Israelis tested new artillery, American weapons, and phosphorus bombs. This history should be documented and preserved, remembered, and talked about in order to be able to know where we, who are a small drop in the world, are heading.

SB: You don't understand?

Jayce Salloum (JS): I don't understand but it's ok.

SB: What I've been speaking about is ideas, mostly political ideas.

SB: Distance carries in its essence so many things, and the question is, is distance measured by kilometers, imposing apartness and determining longing, the greater the distance the greater the pain... and less if the distance is shorter? Or the more I am close to the unjust, the more painful it feels? And the farther I am from injustice the less I suffer? If distance was essential for me and determined my feelings and decisions, we could not have continued on the road of resistance, which is a very difficult road. People once said that Lebanon, this small country that lives in a sea of realities, mired in a civil war, would not be able to resist and confront the formidable forces that have standing behind them the strongest super powers which are ready to arm that 'force' with the most sophisticated weapons. Can we confront them? Yes. The gap is very wide between us but we reduced it through our act of resistance. If I compare my existence here to my being in Beirut, and in the detention centre... in the detention centre I was very close to the detainees geographically, but once I had left the detention center I was even closer. The closer it is, the closer it may feel but we cannot determine distance, it is hard to be measured. Since I came to France the perception is still the same, I look back, - and it's there in front of me - to constantly see... a mother being detained daily, the child that is being detained everyday, the youth, the elderly, even Lebanon, the land itself is being detained. The abduction is also evident in the dust that Israeli soldiers carry away in their boots and take inside Israel. To me, distance was reduced

by our decision to continue the resistance, the struggles for liberation and for any injustice. If one loves, distance is not a factor. It is the 'decision' itself which is determinant. You decide for yourself whether you want to assert distance or abolish it, be close or far, or become dedicated or not.

JS: Have you answered?

SB: Yes, I answered, but you didn't understand. After I want to explain to you what I have just said.

JS: But we don't have much time. I prefer to...to film...enough...to film more.

SB: I am speaking here of things that I've never spoken of.

JS: Really?

SB: Yes, I have never spoken of all these accounts, everything I've just told you, all I've just said. It's not new but nobody has ever asked me these questions before.

JS: I like those, the questions like that. I meant to say before that I prefer to film... until the end of the time that we have now, rather than trying to understand what you are saying at the moment. Afterwards I will understand..

SB: Yes, yes, but...

JS: I do understand the feeling...

- - -

JS: Can you repeat that little story about the flowers... How you..

SB: Oh, the flowers...

JS: Wait... can you move...

SB: You trap the ideas...

JS: Can you move a bit, like this?

SB: Like this?

JS: Like that.

JS: Yes. Can you put that here please? Don't throw it...

SB: It was the first time I asked myself, why, when we are offered flowers in the presence or absence of the people who offered them, we put the flowers in a vase with water. To make them flourish? That is what they say. What is to flourish? I used to agree with this but in the detention centre I was no longer capable of relating to that concept, to that logic. The first time I thought about it was when I was in my isolation cell, tied up, chained hand and foot, with the door closed. I saw a shadow quickly pass by and then I noticed a rose in the middle of the empty cell which did not have either a blanket nor a mattress, nothing but myself. I looked at the rose and started to

think why should it be put in water. It is beautiful in itself, once it is cut why put it back in water, in an attempt to revive all the original meanings which were lost when it was originally cut? The point is not to try to recuperate the rose. When it fades and dies, as it will, despite adding more water, one could add artificial scent as well, but that is not its natural state. I picked up that rose, I stole a piece of cardboard, framed the rose with it and offered it to a Palestinian girl named Kifah, who initially left the rose for me. Unfortunately the guards saw what I was doing and burned it. We were not allowed to make or keep any objects that expressed ourselves, our state of being, or ideology in any form. The flower was burned, anyway I didn't have any water to revive it in the first place. In spite of it all the rose remained a rose, it kept its beauty, and radiance, even after it was burned. That was when I decided, that if someone brings me flowers, I won't put the flowers in water.

JS: What did you leave, when you left Khiam?

SB: What did I leave?

JS: Yes, I don't know if it's the exact word that...

SB: Tell me in English.

JS: *What did you leave when you left Khiam?*

SB: What did I leave behind when I left Khiam?

SB: In my opinion I left everything and I left nothing at the same time. I left... 140 detainees, I left detainees in Israel, I left martyrs who are still there, imprisoned, by the Israelis, even as corpses. I left them but at the same time I didn't leave them – since I still carry the commitment and the promise that I took upon myself one day in 1982. And I hope that I will be equal to the task of that promise to the last day of my life.

SB: If we want to talk about the material things, I left my mattress, I left my mattress cover, I left my pillow, I left my plate and my cup. I left the clothing that I wore, that the families of the detainees brought for their sons and daughters. And the detainees who could never receive any clothes from their families, we used to share our clothes with them. I left these clothes that represent for me, an image of the families' support – for us – for all these years. I no longer have just one family, I have many families equal to the number of detainees who entered the detention centres. Each family, mother; father, brother, and sister, works to bring anything with them, the smallest items, they're bringing them to the detainees, even if it's a package of kleenex, they will bring it to the detainees. This package of Kleenex will pass through the hands of all the detainees and I amongst them. As I said, I left everything and I left nothing.

SB: What did I bring, what did I take out with me... I brought all those memories, a 10 year history. No, not 10 years... A history that started in 1982. In 1982 I never spoke against the occupation in an open and public way, about its goals, its ideas and ambitions. I brought all those memories with me plus some things that we made which translated... the different stages we lived through, whether under torture, or hearing the voice of a baby that was separated from his mother's arms, or when a mother's milk was extracted by force, or when someone died, martyred in the detention centre. At the same time I brought objects that we made for holidays and birthday

celebrations, to celebrate them in a special way, ornaments that we made out of nothing, and out of everything, a needle, thread, and pieces of cloth that were joined to constitute our world, the world of the detention centre, relating our experiences and expressing our resistance. That was very important to us. We even cut up a container and made it into a knife, fork and spoon. We made and created things out of objects that for other people look insignificant like a tin can, a thread...and tried to make out of what can be a meaningless world for most people, something that meant a lot for us. To that degree we became attached to those objects. When the guards burned those objects that we were working on, it was parallel to the rape of one's land, and in a sense a repetition of the occupation inside the detention centre.

JS: Here, this is... your home?

SB: My home. It's not easy to define home, is it where one lives, the house that one was born and grew up in? As Lebanese, the war taught us, - and because we changed homes so many times - that every house is a home. It is enough for me to stay a week somewhere to feel a sense of a belonging and a connection with that place. I feel the same thing regarding this room I am living in now. I also learned from the civil war that the moment after leaving my home, a place that was lost, destroyed by shelling... to stop thinking about it. I should think of the future, if I only think and live in the past, I am bound to fail. One should think of what is to come. The past is a history, a lesson to learn from in order to proceed into the future. I do feel at home here, I have been here for two months now.

JS: I forgot... What is a... 'un' or 'une'... I could never tell the difference... What is a normal day for you?

SB: All days are ordinary days. Maybe I can explain a 'non-ordinary' day. It is when I am not capable of doing anything. I can't think or do anything. I just sit still for 24 hours and at the end I am still sitting. Without opening a book, without answering the phone, without watching television. This happens rarely, once or twice a year. So far this year it happened twice.

JS: Do you want... I want to know, how... ideas... not ideas but... How did you pass the time when you were in Khiam... but also... your ways of surviving in there? But... I don't want to ask you directly about that... maybe you've already talked about it too much, haven't you? Not Khiam, but the stories, little stories... some stories which can demonstrate... tell me... What was a normal day for you there... for you... some things which you hold the memory of...

SB: The 'ordinary' day in my cell passed without anything extraordinary like a telephone ringing, a door that swings opens, handcuffs, guards running in and out, drawers opening and closing, paper shuffles... when I hear these sounds I understand that a new detainee is being brought to the detention centre. Any unexpected sound makes the day 'non-ordinary'. We listen, trying to find out what's going on. The ordinary day is when I am in (Khiam) the detention centre and there are no new girl detainees, or we didn't know of a new girl being interrogated, we would all wake up in the morning, clean our rooms, eat breakfast, go out in the sun, shower, have 'lunch' at noon, go back into our cells, and do some craft work or read some poetry, but that all took place nearer the end after the Red Cross came and started investigating the detention centre, before that of course one of us had to keep watch constantly, all the handmade things were a secret,

there was no reading allowed but there were conversations, ideas we exchanged, stories, film ideas, a search for memories, looking through all that we went through in our lives, we tried to share all that one possessed in their mind. All of that was a regular day.

JS: I have no idea what... that's ok though... how...

SB: Your questions are very sweet. [In French] Your questions are very nice.

JS: Thank you. How... why are people... why do people want to film you, want to interview you, want to ask you questions? Why do you think? Here (in the west).

SB: First of all we represent a special case where we entered in the past and where we exist in the present. We represent the resistance, the detention, the occupation, and a generation that lived the civil war, and defined priorities, that defined a path and walked it. Of course this is not an easy choice. We live in societies of alienation, at times close but generally when it comes to subjects like resistance, or what it means to lose your land it is difficult for others to understand, like what it means to struggle, or what occupation is. The French today, have heard how their grandparents lived through an occupation during World War 2, but that seems far in the past, over fifty years ago. They cannot touch or feel this experience now. Likewise for most Americans and the West in general, they have not lived through similar situations. For them it is as though seeing something, meeting someone who has lived this... reminds them of stories they have heard or that their grandparents lived through but they themselves had no way of feeling, no way of engaging with a witness to such events. This is why first hand accounts, testimonies are important. This is one way of looking at it, but even the Lebanese want to know more of this experience inside a detention centre. When I meet another detainee we have a conversation about dates, things we did, things they did. An exchange takes place. Even though we had a similar experience we remain curious about each other's stories and want to know the things that were not experienced by each of us, or in some cases, were not tangible for them. We are on the turn of the second millennium and people are asking, "Is it really possible that someone was martyred, dying of torture because of excessive whipping and beating in a detention center somewhere in this world?" Or, "Is it possible that there still exists isolation cells that measure 90 cm x 90 cm x 90 cm (3' x 3' x 3')." Of course, this makes people interested...inquisitorial. This is human nature. They ask in order to satisfy their curiosity.

JS: How... how does it feel... for you, to be the subject of all this attention, all these questions, all these requests?

SB: For me as long as there is someone raising questions, that automatically implies that he does not know. And as long as I have the capability to answer, it is my duty to answer. Because one has to acknowledge and share the conditions that one is living. Resistance for me is a mission and part of this mission is the talking about it.

JS: How do you survive, now?

SB: How do I live?

SB: There are several things to be done within this framework. One has to resist and work on oneself - for the cause - which in the end leads to the service of humanity in the broader sense and one's own personal improvement in a particular sense. Liberation of the land is the priority, and then continuing in political, economic, social, and cultural struggle. We have no boundaries, our boundaries should be the love that continues forward. If we want to define that movement, it goes beyond acceptance, beyond tolerance, it is the capacity to reach an empathy with the other in a way that encompasses everyone, democratically, with liberty, equality, and justice, and it's the creating and maintaining of a system that asserts itself without attacking, and without assaulting the other on a daily basis.

JS: Thank you.

SB: It's nothing.

JS: There's still...

SB: Yes.

JS: Who is Soha Bechara?

SB: I am someone born into this world, who opened her eyes, lived... and like most of her generation, lived the civil war, and the continuous Israeli invasions and occupations. I am a person who seeks to preserve, at least her own humanity, and who is capable of maintaining it by her sacrifices for the others who herself and them are one.

SB: Because if you want to continue asking questions we can stay here two hours, not one hour. It's all the same to me.

JS: But we don't... what time do you have to leave?

SB: Quarter after one.

JS: Quarter after one?

SB: Yes... and it's one o'clock.

JS: Now, it's one o'clock?

SB: Yes.

JS: If I make a finished film, like the one of mine we saw the other night, a film from the time we spent together, us two... of what we have just taped... What... what should I use for a title? As a title?

SB: This is up to you, normally you are the one who decides. I don't like titles, if it was up to me I would name your film, "untitled". One can't... you can't find a title. I think... That's enough... A question mark followed by a... an exclamation mark.

JS: Thank you.

SB: It's nothing.

Ethnographic transcript of *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*

<Tape begins. Clouds from an airplane window. Faint music. Woman's voice begins to speak>

"Like when I tell the story about the house being raided, quite often the response from people who have never even... who can't imagine that kind of a situation,"

<Woman appears. Dark black hair, dark eyes, red lipstick, attractive.>

"go, well how come the neighbors didn't help? Right <laughs>

What makes you think that you would help? <gesturing with hands> I have nothing against the neighbors. I understand why they didn't help. They weren't armed. <Shrugs> That's what it comes down to, they were not armed! Ok. What makes you think that, if your neighbors, if you, er, were sitting in your house, and your neighbor's house gets raided, with tanks, jeeps, machine guns, ok, and these are not the mafia, these are the government, erm, that you would do something? How could you?"

<Music. Hand writing on a pad of paper. Words are barely legible. Woman's voice.>

"I was very much aware of, you know, that resisting nationalism is an everyday practice. So we were exposed, you know, everyday to these nationalisms and I would say, ethno-fascist discourse, which excludes the other, which renames the other, which makes us indifferent when the other is disappearing. Then I actually, I started to fight this clashes and stresses,

<hand and diary fade to shot of bridge over water from a moving vehicle (trains?)>

realizing that if I'm going to be... if my body is going to be... is already undergoing these, all these regional political and other cultural processes, I would like to experience it.

<Cut to woman sitting in chair. Short hair. Glasses. Black scarf. Not looking at camera.>

"and I would like to watch it how it goes. And I think at that time, in 93 94, er, in a way, I formed a kind of image <gestures a ball with her hands> of my own strategy, how I am going to survive through this whole transformation, transformation, and it is through exposing my own body to these processes, and making my own body and the surroundings and the context I'm living in, my own research field. Field study."

<Cut to man with grey-black hair. Sharp movements. Expressive face.>

"It happened somehow that I have increased my utopian energies, <camera pans out> to survive. It means, I have been producing more illusions to survive, because without these illusions I cannot survive. And it's what give me energy to do that, to live, to survive, erm, to think that there is some future, even if I don't know how it looks like – how it should look like. And, er, well it's a kind of source for this utopian <camera pans in again> imagination maybe. And it's then it could become, or it's already became a problem of how I fit the reality <smiling at the camera>."

<Cut to woman. Short brown hair. >

"The reality is, that these borders are so strong now, that, you really, I mean to go from Croatia to Serbia, or visa versa, this is almost impossible. To pass this border, to get the visa, and er, and this is something which is not human, which is not natural, this I not politics I mean. This is really... more, and I mean, kind of criminal acts toward the people."

<Cut to shot of trees and houses rushing by, obviously from a train window. Woman's voice>

"It's not just about a recent history. We're talking about a long history, for me going back to the early days of colonialism, <image of book shelves superimposed on landscape> and, Columbus, and the question of what kind of identity was being constructed. Not necessarily in the most fluid way, but rather in brutal fashion. I mean, that Spanish or English became the dominant language of this continent are not a coincidence. It was a mere..., a sheer coincidence of some indigenous people deciding one day,

<landscape fades out to woman sitting in front of book cases. Dark black hair, highly defined eyebrows, dark red lipstick.>

'oh how interesting it would be to learn English'. We're talking about very abusive history. So if you do not know that history, and do not correlate it to, and relate it to contemporary questions of identity, it is a meaningless debate for me."

<Cut to woman sitting across a table, probably in a café. Brown hair, dark red lipstick.>

"West Europe is not the promised land, and that actually we have to deal with the interpretation and articulation of our proper position <gesturing with hands slightly clawed>, meaning in this moment we are the in position to be subject. Because what is the position of the subject? Subject is something that is very splitted. It is not a unity. The person is waking up in the morning and filling the totality of the body, no. the subject is something or some kind of..., almost an object, that is constantly feeling this kind of rupture. That is something and nothing at the same time. A piece of shit and something sublime. And I think eastern Europeans are being at this proper moment of being nothing and a lot."

<Cut to the side of a train speeding past. Golden relection. Grey-black hair man's voice speaks.>

"I'm not an Austrian. I'm not a Croat anymore. I'm not a Yugoslav anymore. Erm. The former Yugoslavia was something specific, already within the space of Communism, and then within the so called space of Eastern Europe. So, I am not originally an eastern European. Not even that. And I don't even feel the problem about it, not being defined so strictly. So I can survive. And to survive is a kind of achievement in these times, which are much more closed towards the future, much more than people usually think."

<Cut to young-looking man, long brown hair.>

"I've seen this city die, more or less. The city I grew up in no longer exists. The people now live in Amsterdam or Vienna, or Sydney, Australia. I mean there are huge communities of them."

<Cut to slightly older man, hair resting on neck>

"The point in that picture of the raft, is that it floats. There is some movement. It moves. But it goes nowhere, but it goes nowhere, because there is no direction. And actually that was my living then. I was moving all the time. I mentioned to you that I was writing. That I published a book. What was..., I mean..., I mean many people publish books, but this was very important for me, because this was war, when a Bosnian guy with Muslim name, published a book in Belgrade, in 1994, when people were losing jobs, on television, in newspapers, because of their name."

<Cut to shot of leaves through which we can intermittently see a plane flying fairly close to the ground, as if it has just taken off. The shot is taken from a moving vehicle (train again) so the movement is sideways, making the plane jump in and out of shot. Man's voice is heard.>

"It was jumping off the cliff and letting my body disintegrate with the rocks. And when I was losing all my parts, I was getting into these states of really calm. I was very comfortable and big calm. But I never saw the end of the cliff, because I was always falling asleep before."

<Two lines of an untranslated song are heard. Then cut to woman sitting outside with fairly big hair, pale face.>

"I can imagine what other people can do, when they have daughter, mother, father killed by paramilitary forces or by Yugoslav army. So they are changed. And I don't believe that this generation, who was in Kosovo, can ever forget what happened. And they are changed. And nothing can help for them. Maybe, other, the next generation can have some different opinion, but even seven or eight years old children, they will never be able to forget what they saw or least what they heard.

<Cut to woman. Tied back brown hair. Blue roll-neck sweater.>

"The transition is inevitably connected with the shift in values. What, what represent a value for you? Which you follow. Which makes you, gives you the ideas what to do, what is the next you have to do, what is the logical of what you are doing. And, erm, this is not such an easy thing for a person and for a society, I think it's equally complicated, because, the values has also a lot to do with the habits, and I think habits are very crucial element of life, which a lot of things we are doing everyday as personal intimate beings and also a social and political beings are much more based in habits than in values, and it is not always easy to admit that."

<Quick cut to golden color from train, woman speaking>

"I was surprised at what was happening. Everything was happening very, very, very fast. <Cut to woman, sitting on sofa, wearing big glasses, and a mole on her left cheek.> and what really struck me, was the level of hate, the speech of hate, now of people, that used to live together, from this moment on, they were supposed to be enemies, they were not anymore friends, there were not connections, <cut to airport with silhouetted heads walking past, as camera looks out of a window at a runway> and everyone was trying to erase what was built before or to offer some other values. I put myself in, my shell, and I tried to live through that, but again, up to..., no it's still on."

<The airport scene continues, as a man begins to speak>

"After a while, you figure out there's nobody left, you're homeless. And then it's like all the people you loved have already gone somewhere else. And the people who stay are the zombies."

<The scene continues as a woman now begins to talk>

"The in-between space is the undefined space between two concrete points of space, which everybody is able to define. <Cut to woman, hair band, looks like she's reading aloud> You meet someone, you leave someone, you love someone, you hate someone, there is the inside and there is the outside. The two concrete points give us the frame in which the undefined space is in. The undefined space one can not touch because it is not concrete. <Looks up at camera as fade to black.>

<A big bright yellow 'S' on a black background, next to a black 'Y' on a yellow background with two arrows pointing left and right, possibly a traffic or airport sign, moves chaotically around the screen. The grey-black hair man begins to speak>

"It is the space of confusion I would say. I would, er, I would prefer to use these types of terms to describe it: not geographical terms <cut to shot of man's face>, because geography doesn't play any, any role any more, for me, in...erm, because it was heavily ideological. It used to be. Eastern Europe is an ideological term...but <smiling at camera rather sinisterly> Western Europe is as well <Laughing now>. It is ideology and not geography.

<Cut to an indistinct reflection in the window of a shop or bar, of a street at night. People are moving by. Short brown hair woman begins to talk.>

"After Tito, and even during Tito, it was an image of..., er, er, you know, certain figure having a look out, and after 87-88, 88-89, a certain figure which everything goes in, everything goes in, in which the concept of time is different. <cut to woman sitting in chair, gesturing with hands as she talks> Someone, before 87 we were looking away, out, and from then on we were suppose to look inside so it could one of those opening processes which gets certain authoratives, and the other is closing process, which has this closure processes, in which we are all sort, er, of hostages now, taking part in or resisting more or less."

<Cut to grey black hair man. Eyes still darting everywhere.>

"Communism, er, has a live postmortem. It still lives, em, as a kind of black hole, being used everyday, and misused. In all these cases we don't have an answer to our contemporary situation. I have this experience from Croatia, from the former Yugoslavia if something doesn't work, it's due to communism, and it is the way how it still lives, as kind of excuse, for all our failures."

<Cut to woman sitting in a café>

"It's not east and west only but it's how, in the east, actually, here in this precise space, it's actually working the process of loosing history, or being actually, a stranger at home."

<Cut to close up of someone's arm, panning up to hair (black with grey streaks) lying on a pillow. Music abruptly cuts in, then a few seconds later, abruptly cuts out again, like someone turning a tape recorder on and off. Cut to man, receding hairline, short cropped hair>

"There are two breaks - Berlin wall falls, and everything becomes different. But when you are looking in more intimate dimensions there are many breaks in everybody's life."

<Cut to view of a town on a hill, from a moving train window. The rain has clouded the glass. Man's voice>

"There are no real borders between three ethnic groups in Bosnia. These borders, these walls are in the heads of the people, and I think that altogether we should work on the destruction of this wall. The wall in Berlin, which fall ten years ago, we think that..., our imagination was, that this was the biggest one, and the worst one, but I can tell you the wall we are building in our heads is much more dangerous, that wall in Berlin."

<Cut to black. Table with many objects on it come into focus as camera pans over it. Pile of books. Pad of paper, with a few doodles, and a pen on top of it. Tissue. We hear the sound of someone breathing close by. Then a distant voice starts to speak>

"You know what <camera pans over answer phone. Voice becomes unclear as receipt and checking gum pass by>, you think you can take out of eastern Europe <cd, cards, paper> not so much nationalism <camera manual> but, also, sort of... <lamp, more cds boxes and cds, two boxes of tissues> actually before the political changes we didn't live in the real world, it was just we enjoyed fiction or our imagination. <computer, keyboard, disks, plastic cup – the table is a mess> you know what I'm taking about, erm, it's hard to, it's hard to describe. <back to a book, then cut to woman standing in a doorway. Blotchy skin. >

"We didn't live her now, we just always lived in, in, erm, some, <camera pans out> metaphors, and now, this is why the reality seems so fascinating for me now, the real world, because suddenly we got grounded, life before the political changes nobody went to the museum because we lived in a fiction."

<Cut to black, and then almost immediate cut to radio control tower, rotating, at airport around dusk. Woman's voice>

"After this collapse in every East European country, soon one encounters a need, to build a new ideological system, or a new symbolic order, a new (unclear) other, so people immediately started identifying with new points of, erm symbolic order, like national identification became the crucial, you know, point to which people started perceiving the symbolic order as a coherent system again."

<cut to woman speaking, sat in a chair, in front of book case. Dirty blonde hair, red shirt.>

"And that's why so many nationalist feelings, and also, hatred towards other nations and so on emerged at the point. So I would say a new belief, a new set of beliefs started emerging, and a new form of how to perceive symbolic order, or the ideological space you live, as having some kind of coherence.

<Fade out to camera, panning along a bookshelf. The author Rawls, Judith Butler's Excitable Speech, and a book called 'Deep Ecology' jump out at me. Woman has continued to talk>

"A new set of stories, meets (unclear) which are crucial for the subjects perception that he or she <a diorama of brightly painted figures, of different ethnicities, wearing different clothes is superimposed on the book shelf> is in a way grounded or entangled in sort of , you know, larger space.

<The bookshelf fades out to leave the camera moving over the figures in the diorama. There is silence for a second, then another woman begins to speak.>

"When the myth is re-lived as the call of an identity, which is used, which Kosovan myth is used for, in this myth, all elements are already there, <camera shows two figures in the diorama with green skin, covered in silver blankets> but they're alive, like we are, either, the only and the greatest defender against the Ottoman Empire. We are on the threshold and we are actually the defender of Europe. Europe should be very grateful to us, it should be very respectful for us, because we were defending Europe, <cut to woman, glasses and scarf, who has been talking> being on the border. So the political and the ideological and psychological investment in one myth is actually political instrument."

<Cut to night scene. Difficult to make anything out, apart from a few silhouetted figures. May be a border. As camera continues to move, woman continues to talk>

"The biggest political work, the precondition of the war in ex-Yugoslavia, was the political work on Serbian identity. In (unclear) Serbian history, and in denying any other alternative to being a Serbian, except being a nationalist or being a xenophobe, or being the very narcissistic, traumatized representative of a big Serbian trauma during the second world war, or during Kosovo battle, or so on."

<Camera continues to move haphazardly, showing the bright spots of electric lights, and two big rectangular signs, one yellow, one white. As man with black-grey hair begins to speak, the camera starts to spin round quickly, so nearly all focus is lost, and just the passing lights remain.>

"It is very, interesting not to believe. It is very interesting not to be..., not to share illusions anymore, <cut to man's face> and, erm, maybe one would feel a kind of resignation, but it is simply reality. And the reality is something you live in, and you don't have even to reflect upon, you don't have even to feel something about it. You just live in, and if there is something promises, and I would say it is the emptiness of our historical moment."

<cut to woman in café>

"In Eastern Europe you can talk about the monsters, or I call the matrix of the monsters, and the Western European matrix is actually a matrix of the scum of society, because the whole history of the west, if I am generalized, is actually part of this counter cultural activities, take everything what you can, make, a kind of blind capitalism, but in..., this is the Western paradigm. I'm generalizing very much, but I think sometimes if you generalizing very much, and you make reference to theory, it's much more easier to understand. And then in Eastern Europe you have the monsters. This kind of people that are showing constantly that they are piece of shit on one point and they are actually trying to erm, to take the articulation in their hand."

<Cut to shot of sky, again from a moving vehicle. Spots of rain cover the window. As the vehicle moves, trees come into frame horizontally. We realize the camera is being held sideways. Woman has continued to speak>

"So monsters for me are a new kind of agents and they are part of this new eastern European context."

<A song is briefly heard, before a man starts to speak. The camera continues to show the trees and sky>

"Yesterday for instance, I was in a house. The house was burning down. I was trying to escape. I get into a bath, the bath was burning. The doors were locked. So I had to jump into the window, in order to get into the bath, but someone was pulling my legs, so I was caught in between."

<Voice fades out, and another man's voice begins to speak immediately. The trees continue to rush by, and now fill the entire screen.>

"Life here really is, it..., I mean there is something about end of the millennium capitalism, I mean, privatization, I mean all of those things are really, characterize us in the way we behave in privacy, in time for ourselves, in space for ourselves and all those things."

<Another man's voice begins to speak, as the ground at the base of the trees enters the picture>

"I would describe as, er, some kind of a, isolated outer space experience; you know like spending a time, in some space ship, completely isolated from any worlds, you know like being a void. Having, having just that space ship as the world to live on."

<A woman begins to speak, as the camera begins to move up the trunks of trees, away from the ground again.>

"You are known, in a way that, I don't think I have ever been known like that since then. But it's not, you know, it is my fault to."

<Another woman responds>

"But part of that is because of the break right? <First speaker replies 'u-hu'> Part of that is the break of continuity and the break of identity!"

<With the trees still passing by, like lines down the screen, another man begins to speak>

"I know the border, and the border defines the countries, and I was always in between, and I could never go, anyway, no back, no forth. I was just in between."

<Cut to the grey-black hair man>

"I don't use it, if it has some future, I don't know. There is certainly a kind of pleasure, within, deep inside, maybe the knowledge, or the language would go out somehow, but there is no space for the expression. So I have this dead language. And this one language lives somewhere..., but where."

<Cut to pan over a patchwork tablecloth>

"In another space, <ash tray filled with cigarette butts comes into view> which are somehow closed to, maybe because this one English <hand stubs out another cigarette, cup of coffee comes into view. Man is laughing as he speaks> is on the stage now, alone, <yellow highlighter pen comes into view> and er, and everything around it is somehow in the shadow, so deep, deep, deep in the shadow <packet of cigarettes come into frame> is also my Russian."

<Cut to slow moving shot looking out over the silhouette of a city, where the sun is just above the horizon. The sky is full of clouds. A woman begins to speak>

"You now ask people to declare themselves as such and such and such, and deny the fact, there are so many people, in mixed marriages, in a situation they cannot say, I'm 100% or I'm 30%. <Cut to a shot of what looks like a building, obscured by something which might be branches of a tree, but is too close to the camera to see> It's completely crazy, but that's the fact, and above all, the political fact, unfortunately, you know. Well I'm Croat origin. My parents are Croat. And I don't have anything against that, but I don't want to be Croat as, in this political term, which, er, which, er, if you are Croat in Croatia, you have all, all rights, and if you are not <cut to woman speaking. Short, brown hair. Red jumper> in the same Croatia you don't have any of the rights, and this is not just a question of Croatia of course, it is everywhere where the nationalist are in power. It means that I don't want to identify myself as..., when somebody asks me who you are, I would say, either ex-Yugoslav, or post-Yugoslav, or, <laughing> or, well, somebody from Sarajevo or before from Belgrade, or in the beginning from Zagreb, you know. But I don't like this collective identities."

<Cut to long shot of people waiting to cross a street. Fountain in the background. Another woman begins to speak.>

"Nationalism as a movement forced the definition of the identity of the nation-state as coherent, as without contradictions, as homogeneous."

<Man begins to speak, as camera pans along street to see people walking around.>

"Had Bosnia been encouraged to develop itself in a direction it might have gone in, I think it presented an enormous threat to American interests in the middle east, in terms of having a state that was secular, it had an Islamic cultural character, <cut to close up of stone façade> erm, and an ostensible democracy, would present a very, very, you know, tempting example to countries like Syria, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, etc, the gulf, erm, you know the idea that, because we've managed to remove Islam and democracy from having any contiguous <cut to trees passing, back on the train. They are vertical again> poles."

<Grey-black hair man begins to speak again>

"I have something behind, but nothing in front of me, and this is the problem. I don't have an answer as what should replace the national state. I have only the question. How can I still live within this national state? It makes no sense for me anymore. That is the problem. I cannot identify myself with the national state, not in political, not in a cultural <cut to building, whose façade is flaking. Part of a stop sign, can be seen reflected in the window of the car from which the camera films> way. Not even in the sense of my identity, individual or collective identity. And, er, I don't know where should I express, or realize, or express this, this, problem, in what kind of reality."

<Woman begins to speak, as camera pans in to the damage part of the façade, were the plaster has been torn off to reveal the brickwork beneath.>

"When you put, when you make the regime on the body of nationalism, in which the representation of ideology is not, is no more representation, but is represented as nature, like are you naturally Serb, <camera slow moves across building to a window, where the leaves of a tree are reflected, before moving across the façade again> are you naturally Muslim or not. Then the so-called ideological battle goes through blood, and through violence, and through death. But in the nationalist regime of the body this fascination is very well hidden, because the other should be eliminated. The point of the fascination still lies but it's in the blood, and it's in the destruction of the other. Because when you want to make ethnically clean something, and then you want to separate people who are not able separated then you start to war, and you start to killing and raping women, in order to make something ethnically pure. But actually in war, and in battle, or in combat, or in rape, <A window frame without glass is shown, with trees growing inside, before cutting to woman, with glasses and scarf, speaking> the blood is actually mixed. So unfortunately for ethno-fascists and nationalists nothing pure is possible. So in a way, rape of women, paradoxically, is..., it's a sign, that the contact is needed, and the contact... There is a fascination with the contact. There is a fascination with the other."

<Cut to the woman in a café>

"After the fall of the Berlin wall, and after ten years, we are now, just this decade, eastern Europeans are really feeling like a piece of shits. That means they are practically in the position to perceive and to feel they are nothing. And again, back to the history, after ten years, it seems that we don't have any history. We don't have enough books, not because we are having not knowledge to write the books, but because this kind of neo-colonial attitude. But Capital, the big 'cer', the big 'C' actually, if we are writing Capital in English, is actually the master. And the master means, that the market actually is satisfied to only have a few of the production, because they have such a lot of other things, that they are not actually thinking about other. So our problem, I think, the main problem, is we are, we can't explain, we can't articulate our position properly. It is articulated, but from outside. When we talk from inside, it is always the problem the language. It's always the problem that we are not enough, enough simple to be understandable. But for me, all these categories, of language, understandable, are very ideological categories, even very political categories. So, I think after all this ten years we are really in a position to feel what is a piece of shit, and also what is the position that you can fill with your body when you are going out. You always have to repeat these basic things. How was it in the past? What can you do now? Are you having enough things eat and so on? I mean these types of stereotypes are repeating constantly. And I told before, it's very difficult to ask somebody coming to the West European case, <quick fade to sky, with black birds flying around> to talk about, I don't know, if you had enough coffee or something like that, but we are losing, when we have to talk about this we are losing the possibility of interpretation."

<birds continue to fly around. Different woman begins to speak>

"If you talk of refuge, you always talk against something. It's like you talk about, it's also, it has got to do with the inside and outside of something. Maybe of a system. So you, if you refuge, well it doesn't have to be a system it can be your body. You can refuge inside or outside, but there is always something which you are afraid of or you don't feel secure. And that might also have got a lot to do with frontiers, and that there is two different points, concrete points <cut to image of trees in a midst, some are covered in snow, again shot from a moving vehicle> like maybe the inside and the outside, like, I don't know. And, you try to feel secure. Maybe if you've got a frontier, or you've got something defined, people often feel secure. So that might be, like we talk before, we talked about nation, and I think that would change something about, there would be any frontiers anymore, any borders, any national borders, just in the state of mind of the people, because they wouldn't maybe, it's something defined. It's like the news coming daily to one. It's something

defined, it's something that makes the people feel insecure. Unless it's something undefined, it's not something defined. But people think it is defined. And people are afraid of something, something foreign, of the other. People are afraid of the other. So they're made to feel secure if they have something defined. Maybe that's why people need to define things, to have definitions, to feel secure."

<cut to grey-black haired man>

"As an immigrant, there are no borders anymore for the global capital, but there are new walls around us, and, the people from the Western Europe and the Western world think that walls and borders are not, are part of our past, our sad communist past. But people coming from the third world, to the eastern Europe, trying to survive lets say, they face these new walls, which are as closed as they used to be during the time of communism. And there is no freedom in that sense, and that's something we know, all of us, we know that, but it's not the same way how we feel it. If someone just tries to come in to fortress Europe from its outside, <cut to shot of sky from moving train> from its excluded outside, he would feel it, very, as something very real."

<As the empty, clouded sky continues to pass, another man speaks>

"Nobody in the East actually speaks about the return of the capitalism, no. That idea of capitalism is erased, you know. We just got democracy, you know. The fact that we got capitalism also is something hush hush <cut to man's face> you know, pssst, no. And, er..., also it's not... an accident, it's not just a simple mistake. It's really part of <fade to merry-go-round, with lots of bright lights> the whole nationalistic idea, or the project of this ruling nationalist party."

<Merry-go-round continues to turn as woman speaks>

"Globalization, increased nationalism, that these are, you know, that this choice between being identified with a small national value system, paradigm, and you know, some kind of global unification, <woman speaking fades in and over merry-go-round> and a new type of, in a way, totalitarianism that can emerge out of it is an impossible choice. But if you have to choose to identify with one of those, you know, erm, for me, no one of this is a choice, a list of possibility. But for a certain part of a society, the fear of losing something essential, of their, of the authenticity of the life they had in a certain geographical, political, cultural space. You know, with the fear that they would lose this under the pressure of globalization, will increase national behavior, nationalistic behavior.'

<Cut to woman with glasses and scarf. Music can be heard faintly in the background>

"There is something, you know, even dangerous, something very dangerous in the critique of the globalization process <gesturing with hands>, which can be used locally, for what I call local ethno-fascism. You know and these contradictions are up to us, locally to see, not to deal only with the general abstract anti-globalization debate. It's what I find, you know, that speaking here, living here, and talking about the, generally about the globalization process in which a certain power is very dominant, I find it rather irresponsible because there is a globalization also, mini globalization processes, which are depriving people also, and which are using this critique of the globalization <fade to trees and sky> as a specific political instruments, to make people think they are special. People think that they are special. And I met a couple of people, you know, because I travel a lot, you know, even congratulating me on Milosevic, who is the only one resisting great NATO powers, and United States as the first super power. And also telling me that Serb people are fantastic people because they resist."

<Discordant music plays, then man with grey-black hair begins to speak. Trees on a background of clouds continue to pass>

"This time it's a normal that you can be killed, on the borders of free Europe, as one who just wants to survive, to find, to buy BMW. Because a lot of people, a lot of immigrants, they are not dreaming about BMW's, they are dreaming about, about having enough food for their children. And they, if they want to get this, would, could be killed. And not mentioned as the victims of totalitarianism. <cut to a façade of a building, with some windows lit, obscured by trees in the foreground. Man continues to talk> So, I think the world today, tries to do the same, to control conflicts within the very close geographic or cultural identities, which are more and more, in that sense controlled, and closed, they have been closing, or the western world, it does something in that sense. It is in its deepest interest, to have these conflicts there, because, it is, it is the way to control it, and to project it out of there of its identity. It's a way to say, yes there are conflicts, but they do have it, we are already beyond the conflict. So there is not politics without conflicts and each conflict can become a war conflict. <camera finishes moving over building, and starts to climb the columns of another building to show a number of statues on the gutter> We know a lot about, wars from the past, but the last war in Kosovo, could, has shown us, we still, in a reflexive sense, in the sense of our logic, that we don't control the war. The war can be under military control, but not under the control of our mind. And this is what happened with the war in Kosovo."

<Discordant music return. As camera finishes moving over guttering, man with grey-black hair fades in>

"These nations now, and their nation states, they are not sovereign. Who decides who has the power? <Mobile phone rings once> of course, and it means, that this space is under control also in that time. Now there is, under the military, very open, real military control."

<Cut to the woman in café>

"And this monstrosity I went again, one, was a little bit back in history, this monstrosity for me, was, is not something that is only psychological, but it is really something very part of the paradigm, it is something that I call very part of the system. It was some structural monstrosity in the way how we read. I connected this monstrosity also to the process that we can learn from Eastern Europe, and that is, that, we today are living in the world of pictures, that absolutely don't want to think about, or doesn't want to think about negativity. All the processes that we are facing is this positivation. What I mean. That everything what's going on, it must immediately be positive. We don't want to think about negative things. This is also another general process. <Fade to trees on a hillside and clouded sky> Everything must be immediately, if it's negative, must be recuperated in the positive way. We always try to think, ok, if this was negative, let's think about the positive things, er, let's make the world positive. And this negativity is still there waiting for us. So I connected this monstrosity with this negativity, and I found actually that the monster can be really a monster. That maybe the Eastern Europeans are not so, just metaphorically monsters, but really monsters, in a way that they want to take the things in their head. They want the right, right. They want the right to articulation. So in this way these monsters are really monsters, and maybe they are teaching us, we are teaching, maybe, or we are teaching ourselves to live with this negativity. And this negativity is again this kind of capital division, or the division of the new post-colonial world. The world that actually, <cut to a blur of green and white moving down the screen> really splitted and makes some people that only a picture, or image, and others that can think and talk."

<blur constantly changing colors. Perhaps landscape and house? Cut to man speaking>

"When the system is going apart, the system that you were growing on, I don't know if somebody can understand what this mean, when, you know, all the things you are getting used, are not there any more. So you have to construct your own personal system from the beginning, without relying on the circumstances, because if you try to rely on the circumstances, circumstances which are, are violent and aggressive, then you become yourself like that. So, it become a challenge of life, how to relate, on the disaster."

<Cut to woman>

"For a society to have a shape, to have a notion about itself, to have its, maybe let's say its symbolic order, its representative frame, you also have to think and reflect upon your own acts, you have, to think about what this activity, what this desire, what this illusion, dreams, you are projecting into a moment of time. What does that mean? Where does it lead you? How this is related to other players in the game, because we always act in a big field."

<Cut to shot of people sitting on a coach, going past, as music and a voice can be heard in the background – perhaps a radio DJ. The woman in the café begins to speak.>

"Differences are important, and differences are actually the new borders of capitalism. This is why globalization wants to get rid <cut to shot of turbulent river> of all kinds of differences, and this is why maybe tribes are very important. Because they are so close in one way, and they are actually acting on differences. They know that there are existing other tribes, but still they are different. So this is why I think globalization and tribalisation are actually two apart processes. Although, I told, they are always used, kind of shifting each other or covering each other.

<cut to silence for a few seconds, as we watch the river continuing to flow. Then a woman begins to speak.>

"One second like you're <cut to woman's face. It's the same woman we met at the beginning of the film.> even in the same room. You're sitting with this group of people, like, for example, my Latino friends who are torture survivors, you know, and you know that one of them has a glass eye, and the one has no balls, and you just joke about that now because that's just the way life is. And all you have to do is get up from that table and walk to table next, and you're with this other crowd, who has no clue that, even in that, on that table..., these worlds are literally separate, there is no integration whatsoever. You can. You can. Live in those different worlds, even within one room."

<Cut to shot of trees passing. The camera looks up through the trees to the blue sky, where a few wispy clouds pass. A woman's voice begins to speak.>

"Yes, this is your body, this is your self, but it's completely open, and you just don't have mechanisms to control it. And it's... sometimes it's completely construction of your self. And again some of the contexts are the same, and it doesn't fit you that much. You don't have means to change it. Maybe you don't have the freedom. Who is going to give you the freedom, the part of you, and then the different level?"

<Cut to hand playing organ keys. We hear the discordant music in the background, and realize that it was this organ that was making the sound. After a few seconds, a man begins to speak.>

"If you understand what, what you can't get to, then you don't have this illusion that you get it, you know, and then it really becomes something to grapple with. So that I think it a question really much more of literally, you know, of mapping, of mapping. So you know, ok, I'm this far from that thing, do I want to get there? Is it worth it? What do I have to traverse to get there? And I think that has to do with mapping and locating, and, and, and just being able to find it."

<Music becomes louder for brief second, before become quieter again, as woman in café begins to talk. Camera continues to float over hand playing keys on organ>

"You are staying in one place, and the best thing that you can do, it's really a question of articulation. <cut to shot of trees going past. The sky in the background is blue. A plane becomes apparent. Small like the black birds we saw earlier. Buildings come into shot blurring the image, and then as they pass, the plane can be seen, again, fleetingly> The best travel that you can do for us, the best guide, because, er, the question of traveling is also the question of guide. Who

will be the best guide? Who will actually give you the shorter way to travel the world and in the end you will not be exhausted? You will feel relaxed. <cut to woman in the café who has been speaking> You will have not problems with your luggage. You will not lost everything what you had with you. You've got, you will actually get a lot of gifts. This person with be the next articulator, the person who will, actually, sort out the most important things in terms of art, culture, theory, er, as a key sentences, and especially that will give the idea that it is not at all about visibility. <cut to shot of electric lights at night> That I can talk with you also with you by phone. It's not absolutely necessary to see my face, because I can be everything and nothing. I can be young and I can be old. It's much more important what I will say, and how I can give you a kind of key, or pass, to understand not me, but you, much better."

<Hip hop music, and the sound of vehicles driving is heard as the camera continues to wander over the lights in the night time. Then cut to black, and after a few seconds the music stops>

End tape.

Ethnographic transcript of *untitled part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends...*

Voice/text of Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan

<We are greeted by an image of clouds – some golden, some grey. As the camera slowly pans over the clouds the voice of Abdel begins to speak.>

'So we walked and I kept looking around in wonder and amazement, I couldn't believe I was back on my land.'

<As he says this the camera enters the layer of clouds, and the image becomes immersed.>

'God is truly great.'

<Cut to an image of swirling water, frothing and foaming.>

'When we got to Kweikat, I bent down kissed the soil. We headed to the cemetery and I noticed the overgrown trees>

<Cut to a close up image of some kind of screen, where we can only see the individual pixels rather than the whole image. As the camera pans out, a yellow electronic image – possibly of a brain – appears superimposed, on both blue background, and on the larger screen.>

'and the untended grass and weeds.'

<The image of the 'brain' morphs into a number of different shapes and colours. We can hear background sound also at this point, although it is too indistinct to make out.>

'I also saw the barbed wire fences that the Israelis had erected to stop the Feyda'een from returning. We reached the areas where our homes used to stand, they had all been demolished with nothing left but the foundations of the houses, standing bare of the stones which had been stolen.'

<The superimposed image disappears and we are left with the images on the bigger screen, which we can still not make out. As if you accentuate our ignorance and confusion, the camera moves over the screen very quickly, blurring the already unspecific image.

'Pine trees had been planted among the ruins.'

<We cut to a close up of a bulldozer scrapping through debris, of what I assume is a house.>

'We continued walking through these former houses and yards.'

<Cut again to an image of some very large goldfish, swimming in shallow water.>

'While looking around I felt as though I could hear something, I imagined that my house was speaking to me... "Are you aware that it was my arms which received you the day you were born? Close to my heart(h) I would take you when you stumbled and fell.'

<The image of an orchid, superimposed, slowly fades in over the water. Once the water has completely faded out, we can see the orchid moving as it follows the sun.>

'I watched over you with care, but you had not known'

<As the image of the orchid fades out, the image of a stone wall with blankets covering something at the base – possibly bodies – fades in.>

'And with my brick shoulders I protected you from the harshness of winter hell.'

<Another quick fade back to an orchid.>

'Have you forgotten the olives and oil that were kept in my store?'

<Another quick fade to what looks like muddy ground, although a much darker colour. As the camera zooms out, the image of an orchid appears, but this time does not fully replace the previous image.>

'And the heater beside which you would seek shelter and warmth'

<Just as a passage way leading to a room or perhaps courtyard comes into view, another orchid image is superimposed completely. The orchid's petals are opening. Just as quickly, we fade almost instantaneously to shot of two bodies, fully clothed, lying in front of a pile of rubble. Although I can't be sure, their poses and the feeling of the film convinces me that they are dead.>

'Or how you waited by the stove for the food to prepare.'"

<Another quick fade to a mid shot of two dead bodies, and then another quick fade to another orchid blooming. The quickly back to the previous image of a man's dead body. The camera seems to 'jump' closer to the man (through a cut), who has a large blood red mark on his forehead, before fading once again to an orchid.>

'- my aunt... married to my elder uncle Khalil who was the Mukhtar,'

<Another quick fade to another dead body, then back to another orchid.>

'we all lived together.'

<Yet another dead body, lying amongst ruins, this time identifiably of a woman, before another fade back to a different orchid.>

'I once told her that I loved clay-oven bread -'

<The previous image of a dead body never completely disappears, and as the camera pans over to two more dead bodies lying in a street, the image fades back into the foreground.>

"Don't you remember the day you told your aunt,'

<Another, very brief flash of an orchid, before another body partially fades in. It is difficult to make out, not only because of the faint image of the orchid clouding the picture, but also because the body is in an 'unnatural' pose.

'It's your clay-oven bread I adore.'

<As the orchid image fades more into the foreground, the shot of the bodies starts to move over debris.>

'And your grandmother whose maternal love for you came from the core'"

<As the camera settles on another body, again awkwardly posed amid a pile of rubble, the orchid fades out once again. Then fade to another dead body amid rubble.>

'-my father is called Fadl, my elder uncle is Khalil and my younger uncle Abdullah.'

<As the camera moves to some twisted debris, the image of an orchid almost mimicking the shape of the debris fades in, before fading out to another image of a dead body.>

'The house was asking me about them -'

<Another orchid slowly fades in, as Abdel's voice begins to break, as if he is close to tears.>

"What about Khalil, Fadl and Abdullah,'

<Another body part can be just about made out – perhaps a knee, before a brief return to an orchid image. This image is quickly usurped by a foot, poking out from beneath a blanket.>

'do they walk amongst us or is it "God rest their souls?"'

<Another quick series of fades, in which body is followed by orchid, by body and then by an orchid prior to blooming. Then we see a grotesque face, flies swarming around, before returning to the same orchid as its petals are opening.>

'- the house then told me what had happened to it after we had left -'

<Another dead face... then after a few seconds, fade to black. Quickly another body, lying in rubble reappears, and just as quickly it is followed by bright pink orchids. Another quick fade to dead bodies lying in the ruins, before a return to the orchids as they open.>

'It said... "Many a burning tear did fall when you went away..."'

<Another series of bodies, including noticeably the body of a small child. Then, instead of orchids, we see a bright yellow daisy.>

'- when it cried the Israelis came to question the reason behind the tears,'

<Fade to black.>

'and they warned the house'

<Cut to an image of a narrow street, bodies lying against houses on both sides. The image is frozen.>

'that it would be demolished if it did not stop crying"

<Suddenly the image 'unfreezes' but moves very little. Cut to black. Then cut again to another 'frozen' image of bodies lying crumpled on a pavement.>

'- and then it asked me about'

<This image 'unfreezes', but hardly moves. Another cut to black. Then another quick cut to more bodies piled up against a wall. Again the image is frozen.>

'what happened to us during nightfall - how did we find our way...'

<The image 'unfreezes' but remains relatively still. Cut to black, then cut to another frozen image of bodies, scattered across stony ground. When this image 'unfreezes', the camera zooms out to reveal more bodies in the foreground.>

'did we seek the stars and planets for guidance -'

<Cut to black. Then on the right hand side of the screen a box appears, which begins to grow slightly and move across the screen. In the box, a pair of gloved hands are moving a body, hidden but for the feet by a white sheet. The box disappears, and then another small box quickly appears, moves and changes shape as Abdel begins to speak again. This time we can see a whole sheet, which is red on the underside and green on top, being placed on top of a body. The box disappears.>

"Many a burning tear did fall when you went away'

<Another box appears, this time a sheet which looks more like a tarpaulin is being placed over another body, next to the one we have just seen covered.>

'but destruction and demolition was the threat of the day

<Cut to black.>

'... and you...'

<Three lines of letters and numbers fade in, scrolling across the screen. We are looking at a stock market board.>

'when the sun disappeared did the night stars guide your way?" - it then says "look what happened to me..'

<Close up of letters scrolling past, which actually form words this time. The sentence 'AGREE TO CEASE-FIRE AND PREPARE TALKS TO END 18' can be read.>

'when they occupied me by force they told me that they would have killed you all had you stayed behind'

<The scrolling words fade out, and we are left with an indistinct image, where one half of the screen is an uneven blue, and the other half a dirty white colour. The blue half moves across the white half, changing colour to read as it almost engulfs the whole screen.

"By force they took me and asked if it was quite clear...

<The white moves back to the centre and then begins to engulf the read area.>

'But any bright person would have understood ..my dear'

<The colours fade to an image of blankets, stretching far into the distance. It is obvious that beneath each blanket is a dead body. The image lingers on the bodies for a moment, then fades to white, before fading to black. A small box appears in the middle of the screen, in which two men are picking up one such 'body blanket' and turning it through 180 degrees. We can hear the sound of voices speaking. This short image is repeated exactly. Fade to black. A fuzzy image of a woman throwing her hands in the air (in anguish?) appears. The tracking of this image keeps shifting so that the woman never really comes into focus. Fade to black, then cut to camera moving across a more sandy floor towards a body in a shroud. Cut to black. Then cut to an image of a piece of earth, covered with a few small, unidentifiable objects. The tracking 'jars', before a quick fade to what looks like a wig or a scalp. Another quick fade shows a single shoe lying by this mass of hair. Then another quick fade to a sandal, before another quick fade to a straw hat lying on wet, muddy ground. Another quick fade shows a walking stick lying amidst debris. The screen becomes completely fuzzy, as if the tracking is completely out of sync. The tracking improves to show a street with buildings in the distance.>

'They turned me into rubble and even took away my stones... What will they do... sell them for money or build new homes? Will they use my wood to teach others a trade?'

<The camera zooms down the street until we can just see a boy running away from the camera in the distance.>

'Oh what has befallen me and my mates'

<Cut to black.>

'Even you have added to my disheartened state.'

<The blackness quickly fades to close up of a wall, which, as we can see on the far right side, has a hole in it. The camera moves towards the hole, and looks out into the cityscape, before moving back inside the building. Then, a quick fade to a box in the middle of the screen, showing another urban-scape, this time of one storey buildings – many damaged and riddled with bullet holes – in what looks like a refugee camp. Cut to a street, in which debris has been piled high on both sides of the road. Then cut to black, occasionally interrupted by static.>

'- "then he asks me about the Arabs and the Arab world... where are they and what have they done to liberate me." He gives me a message to relate to them - "Tell those cowardly eyes about me, should they ever sleep."

<Fade to image of water, with thousands of tiny specks flickering like stars or camera flashes, as the sun shines reflects off the surface.>

'After hearing this I bowed my head in shame at having returned as a visitor and not a liberator, and in acknowledgement to my house which I had not known was so fluent in Arabic.'

<The voice of a boy begins to sing, as the water fades into a picture of stars, taken by the Hubble space telescope. The image moves through the stars into blackness. The boy continues to sing for a short while, then slowly his voice is slowly faded out too.>

Tape ends.

Video/Installation Descriptionuntitled

'untitled' is an ongoing multi-channel video installation continuing my series of projects addressing social and political realities and representations, manifestations, and enunciations, focusing on borders/nationalisms/ movements (shifts, transitions, and interstitial space/time) and subjectivity and the conditions of living between polarities of culture, geography, history, and ideology.

The installation is not modeled on the viewing of art (i.e. painting) but on an approach to research or reading, an active living archive. It can be presented with 3 to 7 distinct videotapes looped for continuous play. Each tape is projected onto its own screen/image area (c. 5 feet x 7 feet/1.5m x 2m) or has an assigned monitor size. For parts 2 & appendix i, the projection screens are butted side by side on the same wall with projectors ceiling mounted. Part 1 is projected on the wall opposite these. Both have sofas (or comfortable chairs placed in front of the projections). The audio from all tapes with sound are heard with headphones while sitting on a sofa chairs. Appendix ii is shown on a medium size monitor hanging from the ceiling facing the entrance to the gallery like an airport arrival/departure display. The appendix iii monitor sits on the floor facing those leaving the space. Appendix i, ii & iii are silent. An atmosphere of visual collision, collaboration, contextualization, critical interference or mutual existence emanates from the tapes themselves and the viewing of the material. The screens play off of each other creating an imagistic experience of the physical/visceral and of the underlying subjectivity experienced through the body, as crisis, nation, and metaphor, or in transition and shift, and in the recounting or enunciatory nature of the interstitial site. Images of the installation can be seen at:

http://www.civilisations.ca/cultur/cespays/images/pay2_20p5.jpg

<http://www.111101.net/Artworks/JayceSalloum/untitled/index.html>

<http://media.civilization.ca/images/land25.jpg>

The dialectical relationship of the speaker and the spoken is highlighted, the speech laid bare and layered between the story, the fields of images, the suggested frames and the butted fictive and documentary process. Difference is articulated in the literal and metaphorical spaces of displacement and dwelling, the constitution of this being viewed as cultural meanings rather than only as an extension of (an)other locale/space or subjective relationship. This work also investigates what types of freedom allow people to stay home and what types of powers force people to move and vice versa. Histories of movement are examined along gender, class and race lines, taking into consideration legacies of empire, conflict and capital, and the contested and conflicted notions of homeland, nation, diaspora, exile, travel, assimilation, refuge, native and other in an attempt to challenge our realities and perceptions and in doing so, reclaim and reconstruct an agency that is complex and self determining.

Versions of this installation were exhibited at Eurovision2000, Prague; World Wide Video Festival, Amsterdam; MoneyNations2, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna ~ 2000; Santa Monica Museum of Art, California; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade ~ 2001; The Museum of Civilization, Hull, Québec ~ 2001-03; YYZ Gallery, Toronto ~ 2002; Galerie 101, Ottawa; Dazibao Galerie, Montréal ~ 2003; and upcoming at Western Front, Vancouver ~ 2004.

part 1: everything and nothing

40:40, audio headphones, (Arabic and French with English subtitles), video projection or large screen

An intimate dialogue that weaves back and forth between representations of a figure (of resistance) and subject with Soha Bechara ex-Lebanese National Resistance fighter in her Paris dorm room after release from captivity in El-Khiam torture and interrogation centre (S. Lebanon) where she had been detained for 10 years, 6 years in isolation. Revising notions of resistance, survival and will, recounting to death, separation and closeness; the overexposed image and body of a surviving martyr speaking quietly and directly into the camera juxtaposed against her self and image, not speaking of the torture but of the distance between the subject and the loss, of what is left behind and what remains.

Soha Bechara is a heroine in Lebanon, pictures of her are seen in many houses in the South and posters of her were seen all around downtown Beirut when I was working there in the early 90's. She was captured for trying to assassinate the general of the SLA, Antoine Lahaad. I didn't ask her anything specifically about the torture she underwent or the trauma of detention, she is being interviewed to death by the European and Arab press over the details of her captivity and the minutiae of her surviving it and the conditions in El-Khiam and the detainees and the resistance. I went to her small dorm room (she is presently studying international law at the Sorbonne), not much bigger than her cell except it had one big window at the end and she sat on her bed and I asked her about the distance lived between Khiam and Paris, and Beirut and Paris, and what she left in Khiam and what she brought with her, a story about flowers and how she never puts them in water, how it felt for her now to be under such demand, and who she was, and what the title of the tape should be, and a few other things. This video material that I recorded of the time spent with her is not precious, just time, and a conversation, and intense intimacy at a close and unbreachable distance.

part 2: beauty and the east

50:15, audio amplified, video projection opposite part 1 screen

This tape continues in the attempt to concretize the notion of *interstitiality*, addressing issues of nationalism & the nation state, polarities of time, alienation, the refusal & construction of political identities, ethno-fascism, the body as object & metaphor, agents, monsters & abjectness, subjective affinities, and objective trusts. Material was videotaped while leaving home, arriving at, and moving through the former Yugoslavia (stopping in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Skopje) shortly after the NATO bombing. The subjects conversing come from a range of constituencies; migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, residents (permanent and transient), students, workers, and cultural producers recounting experience, locating sites, shifts, events, and the theorizing and accounting of the issues at stake, and associated ambient imagery forming specific histories of locations, and locations of histories at the intersection of cultures in this/these particular place(s) and time(s). The speakers are framed closely, creating a complicity with and acknowledgement of the ongoing framing/mediation. Boris Buden, Marina Grzinic, Eda Cufer, Renata Salecl, Dunja Blazevic, Zarana Papic, Slavica Indzevska, Mihajlo Acimovic, Ella Shohat, Ammiel Alcalay, and Carmen Aguirre amongst others are featured. Moving landscapes and cityscapes are used to materialize the verbal and localize the discourse through levels of physicality, materiality and immateriality

part 3a: occupied territories.. footnotes to the book of setbacks / part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends..

(working title, work in progress, 2 tapes, monitor & projector)

23:00 & 11:22, headphones, (Arabic w/English subtitles), perpendicular to tape 1 & 2 axis

Currently a two tape section. The main monitor (3a) featuring excerpts from two conversations, one with Nameh Hussein Suleiman (in Baddawi camp), and the other with Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan (in Bourg al Barajnah Camp), two elder Palestinians that have been living in refugee camps in Lebanon since 1948. Nameh recounts her journey of exile and the present situation of

her life. Abdel Majid discusses issues of dispossession, and recites an eloquent poem told by the ruins of his house in Palestine where once he was allowed visit after his first 30 years of being displaced.

The second videotape (3b) is projected on the (3a) monitor wall displaying a variety of visual material and ambient sound including orchids blooming and plants growing superimposed over raw footage from post massacre filmings of the 1982 massacre at Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Lebanon. Cloud footage, Hubbell space imagery, the visible body crosscuts, and abstract shots of slow motion water, add to this reflection of the past, its present context and forbearance.

The part 3 tapes work together to create an essay on dystopia in contemporary times. A elegiac response working directly, viscerally, and metaphorically while commenting on the condition of permanent temporariness.

appendix i: lands

20:00, silent, video projection adjoining part 2 screen

These images of land and city shot from bus/train rides are juxtaposed with the tape 2 projection screen to alternatively collide and run parallel to the literal and metaphorical references of the subject/speakers. From very close croppings zoomed into detailed edges and shapes to distant views contextualizing the scenes and revealing patterns of colour and form these location shots work by setting up environments for the stories/accounts as well as providing other types of associative imagery, cityscapes and landscapes: ribbons of rivers, disheveled fields and arrays of forests, rolling hills and valleys blanketed in heavy fog where only occasional glimpses of ephemeral objects and homes/houses pierce through.

appendix ii: clouds

15:35, silent, ca. 21" monitor ceiling mounted

Cloud formations recorded from airplane windows, distant shots and close views, disintegrating forms and substantive yet fleeting shapes floating on grounds and/or space(s).

appendix iii: other

6:00, silent, monitor on floor

Interior and static exterior night scenes, rooms lived in/traveled through, dustball/small objects.