

choose what he should see, here [with depth of focus] he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives.”<sup>89</sup> Montage is important in films about hypnosis, doubles, and/or undeath because it can impose on the spectator first one interpretation, then one or more other interpretations that enter in contradiction with the first, as in Robbe-Grillet’s cinema.

Can what has stolen any reception from one itself receive (for example one’s style)? In most cases, this is tantamount to asking: can a black hole receive a particular entity when it reduces everything to just mass, electric charge and angular momentum?

#### **Coincidences(?):**

We aristocrats, who value distance and hence prefer chance connections, are not unaware that there is no pure chance.

6/24/1990. I enter for the first time Waverly Café in Greenwich Village. The place is crowded with people placing orders. I look for a banana-honey muffin. There are none left under the tag. I ask for a bran muffin. The busy employee asks: “Did you say ‘Banana-honey muffin?’”

#### **Absence of Sitting (Except while Sleeping):**

She said to the vampire: “You’re short.” How imperceptive! Unlike Ancient Egyptian seated figures,<sup>90</sup> the vampire almost never sits (Browning’s *Dracula*), but either stretches out or stands: indeed, the height of the dining room chairs in Nosferatu’s castle in Murnau’s film is that of a standing man. He is taller than most people, for they sit frequently—how short is a sitting body! At a café, late at night, he looked on and on at the section “Sleeping” in *Weegee’s New York, 335 photographien, 1935–1960*: the only sitting agreeable to him is that of people sleeping in seated positions, whether in bars; in cafes; behind the wheel of parked cars late at night (chauffeurs); between nightclub

acts (performers); on park benches or in crowded night shelters for the homeless.

#### **Close-Up:**

In a cinematic close shot of a specific hand, while we can witness what is particular about that body part, we no longer perceive to whom it belongs, and where and/or when it is at that moment. Similarly when the hand becomes a close-up in hypnosis, for instance in hand-levitation induction, it no longer belongs to the subject both because it is no longer subject to his will but to that of the hypnotist; and because as far as the hypnotized subject can tell, it undergoes changes that render it different from his familiar hand: longer or fatter or more hairy. The close-up achieved in life through hypnosis or meditation (“See the vase as it exists in itself, without any connections to other things. Exclude all other thoughts or feelings or sounds or body sensations ... Let the perception of the vase fill your entire mind”<sup>91</sup>) can, as in cinema, act as a switch between two different times and/or locations—the hypnotist repeated: “Where are you now?”

#### **Ruins:**

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

I along with my two siblings and my mother deserted the family apartment during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Did this make the apartment a ruin? Yes, and not because it was severely damaged and burned during the last days of the offensive: even after it was restored, it remained a ruin. The usual explanation of why what was damaged during the continuing civil war was most often not fixed or replaced is that people were reluctant to spend a large sum on what could any moment be damaged again or totally destroyed. But should we not invert the way we consider what was taking place? It was because these houses had become ruins by being deserted that the war got extended until they began to turn explicitly into ruins, to man-

ifest their being already ruins. Maybe the refusal of the Bustrus family to sell their house (Jennifer Fox's *Beirut, the Last Home Movie*) was due less to their obstinate nostalgia to never part with it, and much more to an apprehension that were they to sell it, it may be more readily deserted in a situation of intensive bombing by those who bought it, this ushering and completing its becoming a ruin. Will we one day learn how to live in a place without dwelling in it, so that the act of deserting it would not turn it into a ruin?

“The places I showed in *India Song* were on the verge of ruin, they were unconvincing, people said that they weren't habitable. But in fact if one looked closely at them, they were not so uninhabitable ... In *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta* these places are definitely uninhabitable.”<sup>92</sup> True? False?

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

— True, since the actors of *India Song* do not inhabit the characters who inhabit these places. “In *India Song* the actors proposed characters but didn't embody them. Delphine Seyrig's fantastic performance in *India Song* came about because she never presents herself as someone named Ann-Marie Stretter but as her far-off, contestable double, as if uninhabited, and as if she never regarded this role as an emptiness to be enacted.”<sup>93</sup> One of the risks of such a performance that introduces the double is that it is now the film itself that has to be double, that has a double: *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*. And if the appearance of the double signals imminent death, then the latter film is not so much the portrayal of the death of the people and places of *India Song* (“the swallowing up by death of places and people is filmed in *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*”<sup>94</sup>) as the death of the previous film itself, of *India Song*. And “let the cinema

go to its ruin.”

Ruins: places haunted by the living who inhabit them. When the Lebanese installation artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige write in their introductory note to their piece “Where Were You Between this Dawn and the Previous One?”, “We have met, we have dreamt Sarkis, Aida, Samer, Madam Habra, Elia and the others. Through their accounts, we aim to illustrate two faces of reality, the one with destroyed buildings ... where thousands of people and refugees used to live and continue living, and the other one with a family house which has been left after the owner's death. Occupied uninhabitable areas, and deserted habitable areas,”<sup>95</sup> should we not take their “we have met, we have dreamt Sarkis ... and the others” as indicative of the sort of uncertainty regarding whether one is dreaming that besets one on encountering a specter?

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

One has to see the disintegration of statues and ornamentation to know that it is precisely because it contains its memory in itself that organized matter cannot recreate the present. And that on the contrary it is voices which disappear, which are over (voices-over in this sense also) almost instantly and hence have no memory (of their genesis and dissolution) that can recreate the present. From *India Song* to *Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*, while the buildings and material objects became older, the voices did not.<sup>96</sup>

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

The demolished house left its marks on the walls of the adjoining building.<sup>97</sup> In these houseprints, one witnesses the inside turned into

an outside. One can imagine a Cronenberg character living in an apartment facing such a wall who one day, on coming home from work, sees that the building with such a wall has been demolished: that same day symptoms of the drive to turn the inside outside begin to manifest themselves in him.

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

Suddenly one comes across a bas-relief in a war-destroyed facade, and it is as if one has made an archaeological find. But it is not really an *as if*: such objects are truly, albeit possibly transiently, archaeological. The war-damaged city center is, at least transiently, part of the archaeological sites of Lebanon—as much a part of them as Baalbak, which is through its colossal structures (mainly temples) one of the most impressive examples of Imperial Roman architecture, and which contains the Mameluk mosque of Ra's al-'Ayn and the remains of a medieval city. In 1992, Dīma al-Ḥusaynī, then a fifth-year architecture student at the American University of Beirut, went, as part of an excursion by her class, to the destroyed city center, before the sandbag barricades were cleared and the area officially opened. The duty to look at the buildings from an architectural perspective and to position them within a mental map while the different regions were being mentioned (“This was Sūq at-Ṭawīla. This was Bāb Idrīs ...”) entered into conflict with the emotional reverberation of these names, and the second-generation memories, imbibed from her parents, they elicited. The too-many stimuli with which she had to deal during the excursion left the whole episode in abeyance, making it very difficult to take stock of what occurred. Later, in her home, she tried to recall what she saw. Instead of the destroyed, deserted city center, it was the city center of the memories of her parents, the colorful, populated city

center that sprang to her mind. It was with difficulty that she could recall the destroyed city center and superimpose it on the prewar city center. This corroborates that there is a very old past that the present of ruins itself secretes, for indeed in that case it is natural that it would be more difficult to remember the destroyed city center, which is maybe as old as Baalbak, in any case older than the 1940s, than to remember the city center imbibed through the memories of the parents, hence which belongs to the 1960s, 1950s, 1940s. It was only by the third or fourth visit to that area that she really felt that the destroyed city center was the reality—what facilitated this realization was her noticing the presence of refugees in some of the destroyed buildings.

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

One can preserve a war-damaged or crumbling building, but no one has any control over whether it will remain a ruin. I am fascinated by how and why war-damaged or crumbling buildings turn from ruins, with their idiosyncratic, often labyrinthine temporality, to that of more or less precisely datable structures in chronological time. The work of the American architectural firm SITE, for example Best Forest Building (Richmond, Virginia, 1980), where a forest seems to invade the building; and Indeterminate Façade, where a stack of bricks cascades through an indent in the façade, never achieves this idiosyncratic temporality, thus fails to produce ruins (and specters). While some of the war-damaged buildings had become subsumed again in chronological time, many were still ruins, and thus their

destruction was as irreverent as would be that of the archaeological ruins of Baalbak: because ruins exist in an anachronistic, labyrinthine temporality, they are instantly ancient. The physical destruction of severely damaged buildings to construct others in their place is sacrilegious not because they are eliminated as ruins: a ruin cannot be intentionally eliminated since even when it is reconstructed or demolished and replaced by a new building, it is actually still a ruin, that is, contains a labyrinthine space and time, this becoming manifest at least in flashes. Such physical destruction is sacrilegious because of the brutal unawareness it betrays of the different space and time ruins contain. It exhibits the same brutality that was shown during the war. The demolition of many of the ruined buildings of the city center by implosions or otherwise was war by other means; the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing. We can detect whether a certain war-damaged building is a ruin by whether it is haunted (or reported to be haunted—is there a difference?), or induces fantastic or horror fiction. Whether Lebanon would be hospitable to the undead depends on whether some of the numerous war-damaged buildings are still ruins, with an anachronistic temporality.

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

Sometimes I have the apprehension that the reconstructions in Beirut's Central District are not real, that one day I may actually see them the way the protagonist of Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) perceives the exquisite mansion as a ruin on finding out that

the lover he meets there is actually a revenant; or the way, toward the end of Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), Torrance's wife witnesses the hotel her husband was brought in to maintain as a ruin;<sup>98</sup> or the way in Herzog's *Nosferatu, the Vampire* (1978) the shots of Harker's trip and then visit to Nosferatu's castle are intercut with shots showing the castle as already a ruin. For as long as there still are war-damaged buildings in the Central District, one of the areas most severely damaged by the fighting during the civil war, such buildings will still evoke a counter to the enormous weight of the myriad concrete buildings that are being constructed in the rest of Beirut with no regard for urban planning. But some measure will have to be devised to counter and alleviate the effect of satiation by positivity that will happen when the whole of the damaged city is reconstructed or built anew. One such measure is to project at night, Krzysztof Wodiczko-wise, life-size images of destroyed buildings over at least some of the reconstructed ones. Another measure is to start screening on the day when the last building has been reconstructed the aforementioned three films twenty-four hours a day somewhere in Beirut, for example at the war-damaged Grand Theatre—until the images have so deteriorated that one sees only grains on the TV screens in the cinema vestibule or endless scratches on the film screen. I predict that when war-damaged buildings have vanished from Beirut's scape, some people will begin complaining to psychiatrists that they are apprehending even reconstructed buildings as ruins. While the imagination of disaster for a city such as Los Angeles, which has not already been reduced to ruins, is that of its destruction, exemplarily in an earthquake,<sup>99</sup> for Beirut it is fundamentally that of its revelation when reconstructed as still a ruined city.

While as physical structures doomed to reconstruction or demolition or slow deterioration, ruins quickly give us the impulse, if not the urge to preserve documents of them in photographs, video, or film, they nonetheless basically instance an architecture implicated with

fiction. For while I can reach certain facets of reality, explore them without passing through fiction, or psychosis with its attendant hallucinations, this revealing these subjects as documentary ones even if they are shot in fiction films; I cannot do so with ruins. There has to be a relay between documentary and fiction whenever dealing with ruins—or else a documentary on ruins has to continue with interviews with or a section on psychotics. Fiction has to reveal to us the anomalous, labyrinthine space-time of ruins; and, in case no ruins subsist for the ghost to appear, to supplement reality as a site of return of the revenant. In postwar countries, fiction is too serious a matter to be left to “imaginative” people. The ghost is often fictional, not in the sense that he is merely “1. a. An imaginative creation or a pretense that does not represent actuality but has been invented. 2. A lie” (*American Heritage Dictionary*); but in the sense that one of the main loci for his appearance is fiction, whether novels, short stories, films or videos. It is too dangerous after a civil war or a war, which produce so much unfinished business, for there to be no ghosts both in reality (haunted houses) and in fiction that builds “a universe that doesn’t fall apart two days later” (Philip K. Dick)—the current virtual absence of novels and films about revenants in Lebanon is one of the signs of a collective post-traumatic amnesia.<sup>100</sup> We are yet to witness the proliferation of a horror literature of ghosts and the undead (fiction may thus bring about a catharsis for the revenant and an exorcism for the living); or to hear many more stories about ghosts in Beirut once its Central District is inhabited, and not as now still largely unoccupied mostly because of the recession. Were neither of these eventualities to happen, then this would be a further instance of a post-traumatic amnesia, this time that of those who died prematurely and unjustly in the war.

#### Undone Circles:

In a state of altered consciousness, midway in a circular path, one

suddenly felt that there is a drastic distinction between the left and right paths, one direction becoming the good one, the other the evil one.

#### Labyrinth:

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

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

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

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

One of Milton Erickson's induction methods, the *confusion technique*, which he uses when faced with the conscious interference or resistance of the subject, entails confusing the subject so much ("To get there now ... I take a combination of three *right* turns and three *left* turns ... but I don't know which is the *right* series of *rights* and *lefts* ... all *right*, pay attention very closely, because we've got to make it *right* or we'll be *left* behind ... I'll take a *right* here [I think that's *right*], and then a *left* and now I'm *left* with two *lefts* and two *rights*. So all *right*, I'll take another *left*, which means I am now *left* with a *left* and a *right* and a *right* ...")<sup>101</sup> that he ends up complying with any leading statement ("Drop into trance") that would extricate him or her from the confusion. In Stoker's *Dracula*, the coach driving Harker to the castle keeps for a while going back and forth over the same spot, only then proceeding to the castle. Nosferatu says to Harker, "Enter of your own free will," only after the latter has been disoriented spatially by the back-and-forth episode and temporally by the lapse he had just undergone at the approach of the castle, and no longer knows where and when he is.

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

delimiting boundary only in homogeneous segmented time, thus is a one-way threshold.

Near the beginning of Roman Polanski's *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, the professor puts the skis on in the wrong direction: a crossing of the *imaginary line*. In Zemeckis' black comedy *Death Becomes Her*, the undead Madeline Ashton momentarily wanders with a 180°-dislocated neck: an over-turn. In *The Spider's Stratagem*, to the question of Athos' son about his father's three closest friends: "Dead?" Draifa answers: "Dead—no, they're alive," and she continues about the main enemy of his legendary father with the cunning phrase: "He doesn't live ... he rules." The reader of Dostoevsky's *The Double* may notice the even slyer usage of the metaphorical to hide the literal: "more dead than alive,"<sup>102</sup> and "He had no more life in him."<sup>103</sup> Warning that concerns the reader or spectator and not only the character: be cautious about the fact that you are noticing these warnings and omens of the labyrinth in the guise of jokes, parapraxes, and metaphors, since, unfortunately, such foreshadowings continue to occur even after you are already in the labyrinth, seducing you into both thinking that you are not yet in it and into continuing to interpret them rather than revert to an eclipse of meaning. With respect to a labyrinth, the only time when you don't need the warnings is when you don't notice them, since one notices these warnings only in the labyrinth. When lost, not only in space and time, but also in one's mind, one should stop following signs and landmarks, above all disregard the subliminal, what one glimpsed fleetingly at the edge of one's vision, or had a presentiment of, or vaguely sensed. An eclipse of meaning should occur.

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

The labyrinth unsettles the one "in" it, so that either he or she becomes explicitly lost to the lost others there, or else, as with the



vampire, who while at a certain location does not appear in the mirror there, even when he or she is apparently in a certain zone of the labyrinth, he or she is not in it. To be in a place without being in it (as is made manifest by one's absence in the mirror there), and vice versa: while not being in a place, to be in it—is this not a good definition of haunting? One is never fully in the labyrinth, but haunts it.

The pursuers of the undead soon separate from each other, usually by first dividing at some crossroads into two groups ostensibly to maximize their chances of finding him. If it happens that there is a pregnant woman among them, she will not encounter the undead until either she aborts her fetus from fear or some other shock, or else gives birth, whether prematurely or not, to her baby only to get separated from him. Why is it one encounters the ghost or the vampire alone? Why is it that when one is with others he or she does not appear? Is it necessarily because he or she is a subjective hallucination of the witness? Rather, it is because the ghost or the vampire belongs to the labyrinthine realm of undeath, a realm where people are lost, including to each other.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the ghost of Hamlet's father, who is seen by Hamlet in the company of Horatio and two guards, does not really belong to the undeath realm. It is a different matter with the ghost in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Lucius responds to Brutus' offer that he sleep with: "I have slept, my lord, already." Brutus: "... And thou shalt sleep again; / I will not hold thee long ..." (4.3). Lucius plays music for a short time and falls asleep; it is then that the threatening ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus. We can be lost together in a homogenous space; not so in a labyrinth, where we cannot be together and consequently cannot be lost together. Now that he was lost to the others, the vampire appeared to him. He began running but failed to evade his undead pursuer although the latter was walking nonchalantly. This failure confirmed the space to be a labyrinth.<sup>105</sup> The circularity of time may still spare the pursued from the result of the circularity of space: he is still fleeing the vampire who has already

caught him; the pursued asked himself then: "Was my fatal encounter with the vampire a dream or a hallucination?" If a community can win over the vampire, it is not because each of its members can deploy his or her expertise and knack in their communal fight against the undead, since in the labyrinth, they are lost to each other and so "confront" the vampire alone; but because their different fragments of narrative (letters, ship logs, diaries, etc.), each of which does not and cannot form a unified narrative, allow the intercutting of a smooth story and consequently the establishment of a map. The letters, ship logs, and diaries reaching someone from the various people who have encountered the vampire alone in the labyrinth are a form of telepathy<sup>106</sup> (the tele- mode truly comes into its own only when the separation between messenger and recipient is a labyrinth, the message then reaching the recipient notwithstanding that the messenger was lost and will remain lost in the labyrinth). It is thus fitting that it is the telepathic Mina who assembles them. It is only once the edited chronological narrative and the map that goes with it have been established that a communal encounter with the vampire can happen.

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

It is impossible to leave the labyrinthine realm of undeath. This impossibility can take several forms. I may not be able to physically leave: in Kubrick's *The Shining*, Torrance is fatally frozen in the snow in the physical maze that is part of the labyrinthine hotel. I may lose consciousness at the border, whether in the manner of Harker in Murnau's *Nosferatu*, who falls unconscious as he lets go of his too short rope dangling from the very high window of the otherwise closed castle; or, more frequently, by becoming entranced, so that not having any recollection of having crossed the border, I cannot be sure

that while outside the labyrinth, I, or a version or component of me, am not still inside the labyrinth. Or else, while it may initially seem to others that I left the labyrinth, shortly enough discountenancing indications signal that it is another who left it: thus in Herzog's *Nosferatu*, while it seems that Harker succeeds in leaving Nosferatu's castle, it shortly becomes manifest, through his failure to recognize his fiancée, his dreadful repulsion by consecrated wafer, his two fang-like teeth and his remarkable palor, that the one who left the castle is actually the vampire.

Death is not an issue out of the labyrinth.

#### **Transit Visa to the Labyrinth!**

The title of a May 2001 workshop organized by Lebanese video-makers Mahmoud Hojeij and Akram Zaatari, for which they invited seven persons from four Middle Eastern countries and from various fields (cinema, video, graphic design, etc.) to come to Lebanon, join two Lebanese, and make, along with these latter, each a one-minute video by the end of the workshop, was *Transit Visa*. Doesn't postwar Lebanon have anything labyrinthine about it? If it does, does it make sense to have a transit visa to it? Does it make sense to have a transit visa to a labyrinth? Isn't it impossible to leave the labyrinth? Doesn't the whole notion of having a transit visa to Lebanon imply that notwithstanding its war-damaged, ruined buildings it is not a labyrinth? Will the title of my coming, first feature film be *Transit Visa to the Labyrinth*? The film's three protagonists have to do with problematic vision: the filmmaker of *Phantom Beirut*, Ghassan Salhab, since his tracking shots from a moving car are not followed by reverse subjective shots, therefore do not indicate vision but the condition of possibility of recollection in Beirut; the video artist and producer Walid Raad, whose doctoral dissertation was (*A La Folie*): *A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s*, who has come from New York to Beirut to produce a video on hostages, and

who on his visits to Hamra Street has himself blindfolded so as not to witness the unsightly urban fabric; and a vampire, who was intrigued enough by the video images of both war-damaged and reconstructed buildings sent to him by a Lebanese real estate agent to come to Lebanon, and who, dead, has no vision. When soon after arriving in Beirut, the vampire was asked: "Why did you come to Lebanon?"<sup>107</sup> he answered bluntly: "For ruins and blood ..." "I can understand that one would come to Lebanon for its war-ruins; but why would anyone come to Lebanon in 2002 for blood? The war and civil war have ended a decade ago!" "Like most Lebanese, you are overlooking the yearly ten-day commemorative event 'Āshūrā'. In a letter a writer sent me from Lebanon, he wrote: 'During 'Āshūrā', one again feels that one's body is a *jasad* (in Arabic *jasad* means "the body, with the limbs or members, [or whole person,] of a human being, and of a jinnee (or genie), and of an angel ..."; and *jasida* [aor.; *jasad*, inf. n.] means "It (blood) stuck, or adhered, *bibi* [to him, or it]; and it (blood) became dry").<sup>108</sup> Moreover, and as I was saying before you rudely interrupted me, I came to Lebanon also because 31.7% of the population in this country is under the age of 15 according to the latest United Nations' Human Development Report." The vampire tries to find his territory in this foreign city—while knowing that the dead are in a labyrinth, therefore unsettled, in permanent exile. On first meeting his employer, the agent was surprised: for some reason, he expected him to be older. Oddly, he found himself having this expectation at each of his subsequent meetings with the vampire. A few nights later, the vampire visited with him seven war-damaged buildings. He was not satisfied with any of them. But then he suddenly asked to see the interior of the reconstructed building that faced the last of these. Once inside it, he told the agent that he wanted to buy it. The agent exclaimed: "But you specified that you wanted a ruin! I don't think you should so quickly lose hope of finding what you wanted, a ruin." As the agent finished saying this, he saw in a flash





Jalal Toufic, Beirut

Walid Raad, New York:

I arrived in Lebanon on 10/23/1999. I was initially struck by the unsightliness of the nondescript architecture in much of Beirut. Almost all of those among the inhabitants of that city whom I encountered told me I would get habituated not only to the bad manners of its drivers but also to its architecture. One of them even volunteered: "You have to see not only the beautiful but also the ugly, otherwise you will never have the possibility of acceding to the abject and the sublime." "The ugliness of the majority of the buildings of Beirut is not of the sort that allows one to continue to see it: it is unsightly." When after a while I no longer complained about the latter, they thought that indeed I had gotten used to it. I began instead to nag about my new inability to write. My eyes were oppressed by the relentless mass of unsightly architecture and the constrictive arrangement of space, and so each time closed a little more. My initial impulse to use close shots to extract from these nondescript buildings something to see vanished. There came a day or night when my eyes had almost closed completely: "Though seeing, they do not see." (Matthew 13:13). Then, momentarily, light, which no longer served to illuminate anything, rather than as usual making things visible while remaining itself unseen, became visible for itself, shone and glared with an unmitigated brilliance. Did this brilliant light complete the blindness of the eye from overexposure? No. On 12/5/1999, there occurred for the Nietzschean and Deleuzian writer that I am a kind of minor reversal of Platonism: my eyes opened again in the magnificent Jeita Cave. After being oppressed for weeks by the lack of empty space in the city—the pavements occupied and the parkings jammed by vehicles, and the narrow roads often blocked by cars disregarding the one-way signs—to see empty space even inside a mountain! I felt again the desire and ability to write. I realized then that my writer's block was merely a symptom of my inability to see, and became aware how crucial vision is in my writing even when I am not addressing cinema or art or dance. Maybe with time, I would have resumed writing even without such an opening of the eye in the Jeita Cave, but my writing would have had to have changed radically, become linked to another sense: touch? Or would I, who does not smell except when people point out a scent for me, now smell (and consequently better remember)? I am considering starting a service in this country infamous for its hostage-taking that, for a reasonable fee, would provide incognitos who place over the passenger's eyes on his or her arrival to Beirut's international airport a blindfold to be removed only once he or she is in his or her apartment. It certainly would not be to simulate the conditions of hostage-taking in much of what used to be West Beirut, but so as to spare its users blindness on encountering so much unsightly architecture. What is preferable: that people see again at the risk of the resumption of a civil war to destroy so much revolting architecture? Or that they continue to be blind in the midst of the unsightly architecture?





At the airport, Walid Raad, the videomaker of *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel* Hangs, 1996-1999, and the producer through the Atlas project of *Hostage: the Bachar Tapes* (English Version), 2000, is approached by two men who place blindfolds over his eyes and put him in a car and drive him to the Union Building at Spears Street in Sanayeh. There, he thanks the two men, pays them a hefty tip and then ascends to his apartment. "In Beirut, I drive and walk only in Achrafieh, the Central District, and the Sodeco area." "Do these areas not include some ugliness?" "Yes, but not unrelenting unsightliness. When I have to move to another area, Hamra for example, I call the Blindfolds service, which was started by my friend Jalal Toufic. Why don't you too put blindfolds when in Hamra Street?" "Since as a film sound person I can see when there is sound, be it ambient—I can actually see better then—but not when there's the artificial silence that forms as one places one's hands over one's ears, I do my errands in Hamra Street ears covered." "What about you?" The addressee of this question, a writer, did not answer the question. Raad wondered how come being exposed to such unsightly architecture did not blind this visionary author? He later discovered that that person is a vampire, one who, as dead, did not see what was in front of his open eyes. Once, when he had to attend a meeting of an artistic association at the Hamra apartment of Saleh Barakat, the owner of the gallery Ajyal (General Affairs), the entire mobile staff of the Blindfolds service, two employees, happened to be sick. He tried hard to devise a way to go to the meeting without being affected by a loss of the ability to see as an effect of the unsightliness of the architecture. He ended up calling me for any suggestions. My recommendation was to walk there while videotaping all along the way with a camera having a black and white viewfinder, so that the act of seeing and therefore its consequences on him would be delayed till the viewing of the shots in actual color, and to later not looking in color footage, but tape over it. And that is indeed what he did. He walked to the meeting in Hamra while taping with a video camera, at several points even crossing from one side of this street with no traffic lights to the other while still looking through the black and white viewfinder. Then he gave me the tape. I taped over it my students' discussion with him following the premiere of *Hostage: the Bachar Tapes* (English Version) at my Video Art class at Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK). "I now shoot two kinds of things: what I intend to possibly use in a video; and what I shoot with a black and white viewfinder precisely so as not to be exposed to the unsightly (shooting with a film camera would also do the trick, since in cinema, especially if one is not an excellent cameraman, vision happens truly only once the negative footage is developed, so that it suffices not to develop the negative—unfortunately, shooting in film is too expensive)." The wives of several of the artists who used the Blindfolds service soon developed a fetish for that contrivance: "I want you to fuck me with the Blindfold on."



one of the rooms as a ruin and the vampire as a very old man, and then the room appeared again in mint condition and the vampire again a youth. The vampire said: “Where are you now?” and the ostensibly reconstructed house appeared again as a ruin, with a few yellowish, rotting papers strewn on the floor. The agent picked up the closest to him. It showed the living room. He picked up a second photograph. It showed him in the building. He screamed: “But, I’ve never been here before!” While he was picking up a third photograph, the vampire remarked: “The moment you enter the labyrinth, you’ve been there before.” The agent let go of the photograph he had just glimpsed, uttered a scream and fell unconscious: the photograph showed him lying on the floor, blood on his neck. Several nights later, feeling a powerful urge to sustain himself on blood, the vampire went out in search of a prey. He took with him a wind-up toy as a bait, placed it on his table in the café and then started looking at a book full of reproductions of Hans Bellmer’s doll works. Around an hour later, a woman came and sat on the chair next to him. Notwithstanding his repulsion by the stench of pubescents, in the unavailability of a prepubescent the drive for and addiction to blood was simply too strong to resist. He was on the point of engaging in a fascinating conversation with her to lure her to his lair and attack her, but quickly desisted as he espied a prepubescent girl enter the café. Fifteen minutes later she approached him, and asked him if she could play with the toy. He thought that courtly love (*amour courtois*) can still exist—towards prepubescents. When he looked at a prepubescent, he could feel the prepubescent’s irreplaceability without the latter having to pass through death. If we continue to be irreplaceable once we reach puberty and can reproduce sexually, it is no longer from a biological standpoint, but in the Christian marriage—once we understand *till death do us part* to imply following the spouse to the undeath realm and being parted from him or her by the labyrinth there; and, more generally, in that as mortals we are already dead (even as we live):

while people can fatally sacrifice themselves for me, i.e., lose their lives for me, no one can experience *every name in history is I*,<sup>109</sup> i.e., my replaceability in death, in my place. The vampire asked the prepubescent girl: “What is my name?” “I don’t know. I will call you ‘M.’” “Hum, why ‘M?’” “Because you are a Mister.” “What is your name?” “Elsa.” “Elsa, the abbreviation of ‘Mister’ is ‘Mr.’ not ‘M.’<sup>110</sup> I will give you the toy if you successfully parse these sentences for me.” He opened the entry *al-mushtabāt* (The Desired Female) in Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Tahānawī’s *Mawsū‘at kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa-al-‘ulūm* (Encyclopedia of artistic and scientific terminology): “‘*inda al-fuqahā’ imra’a yarghab fīhā al-rijāl wabiya bint tis’ sinīn wa ‘alayh al-fatwa. Wa ‘an al-shaykhayn anna bint khamis sinīn mushtabāt idha ishtubīyat mithlubā. Wa ‘an Muḥammad anna bint thamānin aw tis’in mushtabāt idha kānat ḍakḥmah kamā fī al-Muḥīṭ kadhā fī Jāmi’ al-asrār*” (“In the opinion of the [Moslem] jurists, she is a woman craved by men while a girl of nine years—this is the decision of the law respecting this matter. And in the opinion of the two Shaykhs, a girl of five years is desired if she is desired in like manner. And in the view of Muḥammad, a girl of eight or nine is desired if she is large, cf. both *al-Muḥīṭ* and *Jāmi’ al-asrār* [The compiler of secrets]”).<sup>111</sup> She started to do it. When she finished, he told her: “Notwithstanding that you made two mistakes, here’s the toy.” He gave her the wind-up toy. He then opened his notebook and jotted down: “While I tend to agree with what Jalal Toufic wrote in *Distracted*: ‘To let the house crumble until there remains a wall. A wall cannot be demolished. The one who tries to demolish it turns into a normal person, becomes himself a wall. To perforate the wall. The dangerous necessity of becoming a rat ... Perforation should go on until one reaches the most terrible, best hidden of all walls: one’s teeth. The teeth themselves must get perforated, become ones through which the universe circulates’; I would, fetishistically, except the uneven teeth of prepubescent girls.” He looked up at her to see her uneven teeth again. He discovered that she had already broken the

toy. He liked that they were metaphysicians and theoreticians, these prepubescents: “The overriding desire of most little brats, on the other hand, is to get at and *see the soul* of their toys ... On the more or less swift invasion of this desire depends the lifetime of the toy. I cannot find it in me to blame this infantile mania: it is the first meta-physical stirring ... He [the child] twists and turns the toy, scratches it, shakes it, bangs it against the wall, hurls it on the ground ... finally he prises it open ... But *where is its soul?* This moment marks the beginnings of stupor and melancholia” (Charles Baudelaire, “The Philosophy of Toys”).<sup>112</sup> He looked at the works in front of him in the book and saw the same pattern of disjointed limbs. He felt erotically aroused. On some excuse, he got her to come to the reconstructed war-damaged house he had purchased in the Central District, and placed his lips on her neck, and felt first the warmth of her skin. He then sucked her blood. Satiated, he let go of her. But then as he glanced at her again and saw the blood still seeping from her neck, he again felt aroused. He licked the line of blood flowing down her neck until he reached her nipple; he bit her there and licked the blood that jutted out.<sup>113</sup> Since in the unavailability of a prepubescent the drive for and addiction to blood was simply too strong to resist, a fortnight later he sucked the blood of a woman. A few nights thenceforth, she told him: “Yesterday night, on seeing a man walking alone in the street, I had the compulsion to drink his blood, i.e., I already saw myself attacking him. It appears that in compulsion, one is late not so much in relation to one’s plan but to the action itself, so that it is no longer an issue of deciding whether or not to do it, but of catching up with what one somehow has already started doing. And indeed, I threw the man to the ground, leapt over him, and sucked his blood. *The moment of his death escaped me, really, because even at that moment, and even after—yes I can say even after—I can say I could not find the slightest difference between his dead body and mine. I could find only resemblances between this dead body and mine!*”<sup>114</sup> “Then you have seen nothing since then,

nothing.” “You’ve given me *the malady of death*.” “Would you like to go to the premiere of Jalal Toufic’s video *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* at Madina Theatre or would you prefer to stay ‘here’ and read?” They opted for the premiere. While waiting for the film to begin, he said to her: “I am relieved that Beirut is not as crowded as I thought it would be.” “Given that you are frozen still during the day and are aroused only at night, I do not find it surprising that you would find Beirut, or for that matter any city, not crowded.” “I was worried that the seemingly empty Central District would be even more crowded with revenants than the rest of Beirut is with living people.” During the scene of the butchering of animals at a slaughterhouse, many people left. Following the video, the vampire overheard one person then another remark that the video was unbalanced. He became clearly annoyed. When she asked him why he was so annoyed, he answered: “I have noticed that the majority of spectators are not sensitive enough to the uncanniness of certain statements, for instance to the two epigraphs that open the video: ‘On the authority of Hudhayfa and Abī Dharr, may God bless both: The Apostle of God, may God bless and save him, would say on going to bed: “In your name, O God, I die and live;” and would say on waking up: “Praise be to God, who hath revived us after putting us to death, and to Whom is the Resurrection”’ (narrated by al-Bukhārī, in *Al-imām an-Nawawī, Gardens of the Righteous*) and ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up (John 11:11),’ either because they take them figuratively; or because they implicitly, unconsciously correct the author, substituting for the strange original statement what they think the author must have meant (to most spectators of *Hiroshima mon amour*, Duras must not have really meant: ‘You have seen nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing,’ but something along the lines of: ‘[Given that you are a foreigner and/or that you were not in Hiroshima during or in the aftermath of the nuclear explosion, etc.,] you have seen very little in Hiroshima’—they actually think that one



of the great authors of the twentieth century was unable to write exactly what she felt should be written); or else because they have gotten used to the institutionalized interpretations of these by now canonical statements. If one is not sensitive enough to the uncanniness of its two epigraphs, then the eruption of a traumatic real in the video, namely the protracted slaughter of the animals, especially of the second cow, would indeed eclipse the other sections, including those in which the uncanny statement(s) appeared, thus giving the spurious impression that the video is unbalanced. I fully excuse and condone people's leaving the cinema during the slaughter of the cow, but I would have liked to also see at least one spectator leave on reading the video's epigraphs, John 11:11 and the tradition regarding what the prophet Muḥammad used to say on going to bed and on waking up." Unable to find any good dancers in Lebanon, the vampire went to see a musical whenever one was playing: this night, one of his favorites, Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris*, was showing in a cine club. Unfortunately, during the projection, he was annoyed by the persistent conversations and comments of many of the Lebanese spectators. When one of these inconsiderate talkative spectators went to the bathroom during the projection, the vampire followed him. After finishing urinating, the man began washing his hands. He looked at the vampire and said: "An awful film, don't you think?— anyway, I don't care for dance and musicals." "If by *awful* you mean 'commanding awe' then, yes, it is awful. But how come you came to watch it if you don't like musicals?" "My new girlfriend is a dancer. She insisted that we watch this film, one of her favorites, together. How could I refuse the earnest request of someone who the night before had exclaimed to me: 'You cannot believe, in fact I myself cannot believe how much I love you. I love you more than I love myself! I want to accompany you all the time.'" "What is your name?" "Sāmī.... Do you like dancers?" "Yes." "What is it that attracts you about them?" "Well, for one thing, that we are both threatened in the

contemporary world. 'The desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly' (Walter Benjamin), which is one of 'the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura,' would mean that dance and also death will increasingly come under attack in an attempt to do away with them since they are almost the two last loci of the aura, and thus of distance—one is never totally with the dancer or the undead who are elsewhere, in an altered realm.<sup>115</sup> Are you familiar with how a film is fabricated?" "Yes, I work in a TV station." "You must know then that you should keep your mouth shut since your voice is not part of the soundtrack of this film that does not subscribe to John Cage's aesthetics. You shouldn't talk when you're watching a film, because it should be like having a dream or like death: one finds oneself in these alone." At this abrupt turn of the tone of his interlocutor and his implying that he was dead, the man intuitively turned away from him towards the mirror and saw there only his own reflection.<sup>116</sup> When he turned back toward the vampire to check whether he was still there, he was taken aback to see instead a wolf, who leapt on him and sank his fangs in his neck (the animal is not mortal; but a human, who is a mortal, can have a becoming-animal in his or her death). Suddenly he was high up in one corner of the bathroom watching impassively a man whose back was to him being attacked by a wolf. When he woke up the next morning in his bed, he tried to dismiss the events of the previous night, thinking to himself: "It was only a dream or a hallucination." But when he looked out of the window a few minutes later, he saw the passersby walking in slow motion. He wondered: "Am I in a movie?"<sup>117</sup> He heard a voice behind his back whisper clearly: "If you are, then one way of averting being surprised is to reach the stage of rushes, since the breaks between them are not perceived as jump-cuts." Despite his dread, he managed to turn, but found no one. He turned back toward the window: the passers-by were frozen, as in Minnelli's film.<sup>118</sup> There were two clear differences between a tableau vivant and what he was

seeing: the people seemed definitely dead, and the objects in the street and even the passing cat had a jittery movement and therefore were out-of-focus. He felt dizzy. He called his boss at his mobile phone to report that he is sick and would not come to work. His boss did not answer. But a little later, he began to hear the ringing of a phone. Strange: it was not the familiar tone of his cellular phone—the only phone he had. Anxiously, he looked for his phone and was confirmed that it was not ringing—meanwhile the ringing continued in the apartment! Such a ringing comes as it were from a realm outside the dream of the dreamer. By its insistence, it reveals to the one who hears it how much his or her seeming going along with life is itself insistent, how insistent is his or her continuing belief in mundane reality despite so many signals that should make him or her think otherwise. Suddenly, the ringing stopped. Fearing to stay alone, he called his girlfriend and asked her to come and stay with him for a few hours. She promptly came. Notwithstanding her nightshift, she offered to remain with him, but he declined her offer. Readying herself to leave to work, she put on make up in front of the mirror. He looked out of the window; again, he saw people walking in slow motion. He screamed her name. She turned toward him. He pointed to the street and was on the point of saying that people were walking in slow motion, when he noticed that they were now walking in a normal way. He apologized for startling her. She smiled compassionately, then turned back to resume her make up. But now, it was her turn to exclaim: her image in the mirror was not facing her, but still looking in his direction.<sup>119</sup> After she left, and despite his dread, he went back to the same cinema, The Scene of the Crime, to try to understand what happened the previous night. Strangely, when he tried to order a ticket for the double feature playing that night, Duras' *India Song* and *Les Enfants* (*The Children*), he was unable to utter the words, so that he had to point to the two films' posters. Obviously, this time he did not talk during the projection. Indeed half of an hour into *India Song*, he was seized by

A Film by  
MARGUERITE DURAS  
JEAN MASCOLO  
JEAN-MARC TURINE

# Les Enfants



Axel Bogousslavsky

REPRODUCTION  
PROHIBITED  
MAGRITTE 1937

Martine Chevalier

André Dussollier

Daniel Gélin

Tatiana Moukhine

Cinematography by Bruno Nuytten  
Original music by Carlos d' Alessio

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anxiety and paranoia as he saw that the on-screen protagonists too did not open their mouths. What a coincidence: why was it on this singular day on which he unexpectedly found himself unable to talk that this cinema was playing, of all films, *India Song*? He rushed to the bathroom, to be away from these speechless characters and to take a tranquilizer and wash his sweaty face and hands. He heard the vampire's voice: "Sāmī, turn toward me." He turned but found himself still facing in the same direction, away from the vampire.<sup>120</sup> The vampire continued: "He, an undead, with his back to him, turns toward him, but his turn is overturned by an over-turn, so that he continues to look in the original direction. Do you know the beginning of T. S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*: 'Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to turn / Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope / I no longer strive to strive towards such thing / (Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?) / Why should I mourn / The vanished power of the usual reign? / Because I do not hope to know again / The infirm glory of the positive hour / Because I do not think / Because I know I shall not know / The one veritable transitory power / Because I cannot drink / There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again?'" Later that night, at "his" ruin, the vampire performed a ritual for his new victim that allowed the latter to talk again. "Thank you for making it possible for me to speak again! For a moment yesterday while you were sucking my blood, I thought that you would go all the way and kill me!" "Are you sure that you're presently alive?" The vampire's interlocutor was seized by anxiety and remained momentarily speechless. The vampire resumed: "The dead cannot talk until they go through the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth. What one sees in *India Song* are dead people who have not gone through such a ceremony." In one sense, one cannot be completely sure at any moment that one is not dead: since one is always entranced at the entrance of death, and so always finds oneself

already at the other side, which at first (for one minute, ten minutes, a week, several weeks ...) seems to be more or less the same world that one left (albeit with intenser colors, etc.), I never immediately think that I must be dead. It is rather through a series of eerie, otherwise unexplainable happenings that I come to the conclusion: "I must have died." And indeed the vampire's victim came in this manner to this conclusion and felt that he was henceforth existing on borrowed time. When the vampire met his victim a few nights later to go to a cinema to watch Paradjanov's *Sayat Nova*, he exclaimed: "Die on!" Back at the vampire's ruin, the vampire told him: "For a number of years, Paradjanov's *Sayat Nova* was not screened because of extrinsic reasons: the repression by the Soviet regime with its credo of social realism in the field of art and cinema, etc. But films are not seen sometimes for intrinsic reasons, and this time their invisibility is not to be decried. 'You have seen nothing in Hiroshima, nothing': this statement from Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour*, said by the Japanese man to the French woman, applies to the film spectator, who is performatively withheld his or her vision by it, as much as to the female protagonist, who is or becomes part of the community of the surpassing disaster, and thus is affected by the withdrawal of tradition and things past such a disaster. From *Sayat Nova* on, Paradjanov's films are not seen because the jump cuts recall the spectator to his or her inexistence in an atomistic universe of renewed creation. I want to recall you to your nonexistence: look at the mirror." And indeed, on looking in the mirror, the vampire's interlocutor did not see himself. He felt vertigo; he did not know where exactly he was: whether in the ruin or not. "How disorienting and strange: while looking at the mirror, I do not see my reflection there, and therefore I feel that I don't have a body, indeed that I don't exist at all; and yet I've never been so aware of my body, because ever since the night you mortally sucked my blood, I vertiginously feel that I am indefinitely falling. Indeed I am experiencing now additionally the vertigo of the

contrast of these two vertiginous experiences, one indicating that I have a body, albeit reduced to a cadaver, an endless fall; and the other implying contrariwise that I don't have a body! I assume you too feel this kind of vertigo constantly?" "Yes. None would have experienced as strongly Spinoza's 'no one has yet determined what the Body can do ... the Body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its Mind wonders at' (*Ethics*, II: 142.5–13) as Christ in the same body as Jesus, a human mortal, thus someone whose body is virtually a cadaver. Among the things he would have experienced is an indefinite fall; indeed he died one of the kinds of death most linked to gravity: hung on a crucifix (the right panel of Francis Bacon's *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962). We are heavy because we live on a rather massive planet and because we are virtually cadaverous mortals; it is only the latter that is our intrinsic weight. Do you know anything about black holes?" "Very little." The vampire headed towards his bookshelf. As he passed the mirror on the wall, neither he nor his interlocutor appeared in it. He took out a book, opened it and began reading from it: "What is the distance from the horizon to the singularity? .... Since the singularity is so small,  $10^{-33}$  centimeter, and is at the precise center of the [black] hole, the distance from singularity to horizon should be equal to the horizon's radius. You are tempted to calculate this radius by the standard method of dividing the circumference by  $2\pi$ . However, in your studies on Earth you were warned not to believe such a calculation.... space can be so extremely warped near the singularity that the chaotic region might be millions of kilometers in radius though only a fraction of a centimeter in circumference ..."<sup>121</sup> Similarly, while the human corpse is physically less than three meters long, one can fall 'in' the cadaver indefinitely." "Did you feel vertigo when you were alive too?" "Yes, and I remember the first time I felt it. It was not while standing on the balcony of some high-rise but when I read about the relativity of motion. But, back to black holes, since one doesn't leave (the subject

of) black holes easily. In the summer of 1995, the Lebanese artist Ziad Abi al-Lami' distributed a written request to the other 44 participants in the collective Šnāyi' Garden project,<sup>122</sup> asking them to grant him a space of  $30\text{ cm}^3$  in each of the 23 projects being prepared: to actuate his own intervention. While some granted the request, many refused it. Indeed two of the participants felt offended by it. Maybe their refusal stemmed from an obscure feeling that they had not yet produced the outside that has to do with their artwork, its outside (for instance the crows of Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows* or the matted birds with markedly electronic sounds of Hitchcock's *The Birds*), an outside without which it cannot remain consistent; and therefore that it was premature to add his alien outside. My qualm with the move of Abi al-Lami' is that it tends to imply that the anomalous element has to be provided from outside, that the artwork does not itself have it, when in fact any 'universe that doesn't fall apart two days later' (Philip K. Dick) manages to avoid this eventuality precisely because it contains in itself its own zone(s) where it breaks down ('in' our physical universe, in the form of black holes with their singularities where the curvature of spacetime becomes infinitely large and spacetime ceases to exist). Does one encounter, hit against an impossibility in the creation of a universe? Yes, but that does not mean that it is impossible to create a universe, but rather that each universe contains ipso facto an impossibility. The other participants in the Šnāyi' Garden project, including the two who refused Abi al-Lami's request, were doing the same move in relation to nature: works of art are in a sense these ' $30\text{ cm}^3$ ' that artists request or impose on the universe, inserting through them in nature something that does not belong to it, for instance the over-turn. Isn't *Reproduction Prohibited* a ' $30\text{ cm}^3$ ' (to be precise,  $75 \times 65\text{ cm}$ ) space requested or imposed by Magritte on the universe or at least on nature, which does not contain over-turns? Our world is consistent enough not only to subsist for more than two days but also not to fall apart with the introduction through artistic and literary works

of what is *out of this world* (in both senses, literal; and idiomatically informal: ‘extraordinary; superb’)(would our world fall apart as soon as the Gnostic alien Savior appears in it?). Sophisticated as they are, artists and writers should try to ‘build a universe that doesn’t fall apart two days later’ (Philip K. Dick; cf. Nietzsche: ‘I teach you ... the creating friend, who hath always a complete world to bestow’) and then try to avoid credulously becoming sucked totally in it (Nietzsche again: ‘It is necessary to disperse the universe, to lose respect for the whole’).<sup>123</sup> Attempting to break up and disperse a universe (a gesture one finds in Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, and Abī al-Lami’s proposal at the Ṣnāyī‘ Garden project) presupposes a universe that doesn’t fall apart on its own two days after its creation—I do not think that this had already happened with the participants in the Ṣnāyī‘ Garden project; consequently, it was too early to disperse. The percentage of successful universes, ones that last for more than ‘two days’ is no greater in the physical universe than in fiction and art: a plethora of the *baby universes* that appear in the physical universe do not have enough consistency, and so disappear in less than ‘two days.’ What can resist, and resists the expansion of globalization is not the local of every country, but the universal of artistic works, which present each a universe that is not part of the expanding universe in which humans materially live but borders it.” Along his initiation, the vampire’s latest victim soon felt the need to find a dancer, one who can be in a place and simultaneously not in it but elsewhere. It was now clear to him that his girlfriend was no real dancer. He visited several dance companies, but was dissatisfied with them. Did he in the absence of real dancers in Lebanon try to recreate the impression they induce of being superimposed on a different backdrop than the one where they ostensibly are by going out with a weathercaster, given that the background against which the latter provides her forecast is keyed in? Yes. He managed to lure her to the reconstructed building that was given to him by the vampire, and which gave onto the gutted and shrapnel-

poked Grand Theater. Standing with her at the window, he wondered aloud: “How many more bombs will it take to produce in Lebanon not just holes in buildings, but a hole, however small, in reality, a tear in reality itself, so that it would no longer be seamless and so that there would be a crack in it à la that in Bergman’s *Persona*?” (As he finishes saying this, the camera would pan to the mirror, where the vampire does not appear, is a hole in it.) When she came back to consciousness, she felt famished. She headed to a restaurant. She felt relieved that it was not as crowded as usual, for she was presently feeling hypersensitive to sounds. She stood in front of the counter to order. She felt nauseated by the smell of the food—a smell that she would have found exquisite before. One Lebanese man, then two others, then a fourth came and stood before her to order. Notwithstanding the presence of three seated customers, one of the two men standing in front of her looked back and said: “It’s empty tonight!” His friend agreed. She felt anxious that they were not seeing her, and that that was because she no longer existed. She rushed to the bathroom and looked apprehensively at the mirror there: she appeared in it! She was relieved that the disregarding behavior of the four customers at the counter was to be attributed merely to the Lebanese’s common uncivilness. She spent the next few nights “with” the vampire. When her fiancée met her next, she was so anemic she had to be rushed to the hospital. He waited in the hall outside the emergency room. He could see from one of the windows a man outside pacing back and forth. Every time he would pass a certain spot in front of the facing house, the automatic light would come on, then be off again once he had moved away from that spot. After a while, that man headed to the emergency room to check the condition of the father he brought in shortly before. When the fiancée looked from the window again, he saw another man pacing back and forth. He was unsettled by the phenomenon he next saw: the light did not turn on when that man passed the same spot in front of the

house. He thought with jealous admiration how unselfconscious, how withdrawn that man must be for even light not to detect him. In the coming days, the fiancée was to discover that that man was a vampire. A few nights after her discharge from the hospital, the weathercaster was back at the vampire's house. He said to her: "Do your weather forecast." "Here? With no blue screen or maps?" "Yes." She began moving her right hand across the air, stopping it momentarily and pointing at certain invisible marks: "In Beirut, it is 82°F (high: 82; low: 63); in Tehran: 84°F (high: 84; low: 72); in Esfahan: 84°F (high: 84; low: 52); in Paris: 57°F (high: 70; low: 57); in Berlin: 57°F (high: 59; low: 52); in London: 61°F (high: 63; low: 61); in Bremen: 61°F (high: 66; low: 54)...." She looked in the mirror and was hypnotized by the absence of the vampire in it. His response was: "They have eyes, but do not see." Then he, who continued not to appear in the mirror, asked her: "Where are you now? In London? Bremen? Transylvania? Lebanon?" He bit her on the neck and began sucking her blood. At this point the latter's fiancée rushed in: "At long last I found you!" The vampire's mocking response was: "Where?" The lover ran toward her body, touched it, waved his right hand in front of her eyes to ascertain whether she was dead, then shrieked: "You've killed her!" Given his hypersensitivity to the micro-movements that announce a gesture, the vampire not only followed with his eyes, but also predicted all macro-gestures—except one: that of the movement of the hand in front of the eyes of someone to check that he does not see. The moment the fiancée stopped waving his hand, the vampire regained his seeming vision, tunneling just next to him. Instinctively, the fiancée repeated the same waving gesture but now in the direction of the vampire. The latter's eyes suddenly become glazed, and once more he no longer saw. Regaining his composure, the lover said to the vampire: "After all, as you must know, the dead cannot see." Unseeing, the vampire responded: "Insensitive that you are, I cannot reciprocally tell you: you have seen nothing in Beirut, the

site of a surpassing disaster, nothing." While continuing to wave his left hand in front of the vampire's eyes, he reached for a dagger with his right hand and stretched it toward the vampire's back and stabbed him deep inside the region of the heart. *We stab the dead*, those subject to over-turns, *in the back*.

*Transit Visa?* Does the ghost, who does not stay in a place but haunts it and who is thus the in-transit being *par excellence*,<sup>124</sup> need a transit visa? It does not seem to be the case: while on their respective arrivals on the platform before the Elsinore castle in Act I, Scene I of *Hamlet*, first Barnardo is told by Francisco at his post: "Stand, and unfold yourself" (to which Barnardo responds: "Long live the king"); then Horatio and Marcellus are ordered by Francisco: "Stand, ho! Who's there?" (to which Horatio responds: "Friends to this ground," and Marcellus elaborates: "And liegemen to the Dane"); the ghost is not asked to "stand, and unfold" himself when he appears on the platform. The dead is not with us in the same space, nor for that matter in the same country: while the vampire ostensibly standing with us is revealed not to be in our company through not appearing with us in the mirror; the ghost is shown not to be with us through troubles in communication, which is thus revealed to be not a local, in-person one but actually a telecommunication with the beyond, indeed a telepresence (of what no longer has a presence):

*Two remote audiovisual conferencing set-ups are linked across continents (Elsinore, Europe, and Beirut, Asia) through the internet. Barnardo, Marcellus, and Horatio await the arrival of the signal. "We have tried this set-up twice already, most recently yesterday. We got a signal only for a short period: the second time for the span during which 'one with moderate haste might tell a hundred'; the first time for somewhat longer. Then it broke off." After a few minutes' wait, a signal appears.*

*Enter the Ghost*

MARCELLUS

Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again.

BARNARDO

In the same figure like the King that's dead.

MARCELLUS

Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO

Looks it not like the king? mark it, Horatio.

HORATIO

Most like: it harrows me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO

It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS

Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!

*The signal becomes gradually weaker.*

...

Stay, speak, speak. I charge thee speak.

*By this point, the signal has become too jumbled and weak, drowned in noise.*

MARCELLUS 'Tis gone and will not answer.

*They tinker with the computer and soon enough the connection is reestablished and the signal is clear again.*

*Enter the Ghost*

HORATIO

But soft, behold, lo where it comes again!

...

Stay ...

...

O speak.

BARNARDO ... 'Tis here.

HORATIO 'Tis here.

*The signal again becomes too weak and blurred and then is off.*

MARCELLUS 'Tis gone.

When Horatio asks the ghost of the late king to speak but the latter doesn't talk, the scene looks very much like one of the initial experiments in using the internet to establish a live audiovisual communication between individuals in various countries or continents, the sound signal failing to reach Horatio although the image does (to Hamlet's "Did you not speak to it?" Horatio answers: "My lord, I did; / But answer made it none: yet once methought / It lifted up its head and did address / Itself to motion, like as it would speak ..."). Yet even if the ghost fails to articulate properly his linguistic message; or moves his lips but his voice is not heard at all by his interlocutor; or his words are drowned in some eerie rumble so that his interlocutor does not get what he says; or the connection is off frequently, his mere appearance conveys all by itself an important part of his message, namely that there is something wrong, indeed rotten in the family, or the village, or the country, or the world (commenting on the ghost's appearance, Marcellus says: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark"). Isn't Lebanon, a country that underwent fifteen years of civil war as well as foreign invasions and numerous massacres, haunted? How can the Lebanese live normally when their government's debt is the highest among all rated sovereigns according to the international credit rating agency Standard & Poor's, and is expected to increase from the estimated 163% in 2001 to at least 170% of GDP in 2002; when according to the 24 August 2001 Middle East edition of *Le Monde* (p. 3) around 150,000 Lebanese emigrated in 2000 from their country, whose total population is a mere 3 million; when Israel, the country at Lebanon's southern border, has a warmonger, Ariel Sharon, as premier; when Iraq, a fellow Arab country, is still under barbaric sanctions; when Elie Hobeika, who was the head of the Phalangists' intelligence division in 1982 and who was blamed by Israel's Kahan Commission for personally directing the slaughter of hundreds, possibly thousands of Palestinians in the Šabrā and Šātīlā refugee camps between 16 September and 18 September 1982, served

three times as a minister in various postwar Lebanese governments, and was for a number of years the member of parliament for B'abdā; when religious sectarianism is still entrenched in the population even after fifteen years of civil war; when wiretapping is legalized and the use of car pollutants is condoned; when there is a flagrant remissness in enforcing a livable urban plan, etc. According to Deleuze, one of the characteristics of “the crisis which has shaken the action-image [and which] has depended on many factors which only had their full effect after the [second world] war” is “events which never truly concern the person who provokes them or is subject to them, even when they strike him in his flesh: events whose bearer, a man internally dead, as Lumet says, is in a hurry to extricate himself.”<sup>125</sup> This is the price that the Lebanese are paying for giving up the ghost, for the repression of the revenant now a decade after the war. When the ghost is banished or repressed, people turn into zombies, act insouciant in the weirdest and most alarming of situations. Henry Miller: “Once you have given up the ghost, everything follows with dead certainty, even in the midst of chaos” (the opening line of *Tropic of Capricorn*). After vast catastrophes, we need the ghost to keep implying to us by his mere haunting how rotten is the country where we live (when Hamlet returns from his encounter with the specter, Horatio asks him: “There’s no offence, my lord.” Hamlet answers: “Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio, / And much offence too”), and thus prevent us from turning into zombies. In postwar Lebanon, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc., the survivors are faced with the following choice: either they tolerate the ghost, resist the temptation of repressing or banishing him, or else they gradually turn into zombies (in the Haitian sense). With its unjust death of King Hamlet, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* deals with this alternative. Prince Hamlet’s words to his mother in her closet characterize her as a zombie:

HAMLET (*to his mother*)

... Ha! have you eyes?

...

... Sense sure you have,

Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense  
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,  
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne’er so thrall’d  
But it reserved some quantity of choice  
To serve in such a difference. What devil was’t  
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?  
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,  
Or but a sickly part of one true sense  
Could not so mope.

As Hamlet finishes describing his mother as a zombie,<sup>126</sup> the ghost of his late father appears. We are thus provided with an occasion to witness the cause of her state as zombie: she has repressed the ghost (and hence does not see him).

*Enter the Ghost*

HAMLET

Save me and hover o’er me with your wings,  
You heavenly guards!—What would you, gracious  
figure?

GERTRUDE

Alas, he’s mad.

...

HAMLET

How is it with you, lady?

GERTRUDE

Alas, how is’t with you,  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,  
And with th’incorporal air do hold discourse?