

from: *Migration and Location: Transcultural Documentary Practice*
(forthcoming, Wallflower Press: London, 2005 (N. American dist. Columbia Univ. Press))

*sans titre*¹/*untitled*²

the video installation as an active archive

Last night of spring break. I was a couple of days into the week when I realized that my plans to get lots of work done, and get lots of rest were essentially incompatible. I opted for rest, with a little work. Now, I can't imagine walking back into the classroom tomorrow. It was interesting to see the Soha tape along with the tape of the older man telling his story. It made for a complex layering of the notions of home and loss. The older man is narrative. And, the piece made me think about how narrative is a useful way to structure knowledge. The scene seemed almost pedagogical -- he tells the story while the younger men listen. Narrative is also portable - it's what he's carried with him, and what he can give to those who are younger - a story of loss. The Soha piece is non-narrative - like any conversation, it's about breaks and pieces, interruptions and turning toward what the other said. I see that this was a good way to pull away from the narrative that dominates her - the martyr's narrative. Made me think of the problems with narrative, the fixing of one meaning (she resists the titling). This tape made me think differently about fragmentation, loss, and home. So, anyway, they were interesting together. Couldn't remember if I'd rambled this to you or not.
Love, Anne

'Postwar'

Lebanon, January 1992, months after the city is open and traversing from East to West is made possible again (at least for us more distant from the recent war and the still remote occupation in the South) without fear of kidnapping or worse. Driving around the city, the slightly battered Fiat 128 looking somewhat the worse for wear, silver of sorts but covered in dust from years in the garage makes its way hesitantly down one of the arteries leading into the core of Beirut, or one of the cores as there are many centres here, old, new, destroyed, demolished, rebuilt, each act of construction part and parcel of a previous one of destruction.. Walid drives, I shoot, video, gazing through the camera at the passing layers of modern and ancient architecture, using it like

¹This title coincides with the last discussion of the videotape, *untitled part 1: everything and nothing* [see DVD clip #6]. The tape's subtitle was derived at earlier [see op. cit. n. 22].

² The project title [see p. 13]. The installation has a pre-title which changes for each version e.g. *everything and nothing and other works from the ongoing video installation, 'untitled', 1999-2004.*

an appendage, it inhales³ inadequate images of people, place.. sites of historical and social signification, the fruit vendors, the shattered lives being pieced back together, and more tattered buildings and ruins upon ruins..

Posters of her⁴ are everywhere, lamp posts, shop windows, private homes. She is framed on one side, the wounded Lahad⁵ on the other, floating on a pinkish background. The photograph on the right is from 1988, the year Soha attempted to assassinate the guy, came close, close enough to be an instant heroine, but not close enough to kill him. She was thrown into the 'living' hell hole of Khiam. Those who referred to it as a prison knew nothing about it, others who knew and would raise troubling references referred to it as a concentration camp, colloquially here (or there) it was called something more benign, a *detention centre*.

Before coming to Lebanon and during the year there, the occupation of the South was a predominant concern in our minds. I decided to focus one of the videotapes (*Up to the South...*) on this occupation⁶, the terms of its representation inherent in the discourse surrounding the

³ During the year spent in Lebanon over 200 hours of Hi-8, Regular 8, and VHS videotape was recorded and collected, thousands of photographs made, and a half a ton of documents, objects, and found film salvaged. From this were produced two videotapes: *This is Not Beirut* (1994), and *Up to the South/Talaen a Junuub* (1993); an installation, *Kan ya ma Kan/There was and there was not* (1995); and a photograph series, *(sites +) demarcations* (1992-94). We also set up a media studio where people were invited to produce videoworks of their own. Over 16 of these projects were undertaken. [see op. cit. n. 11]

⁴ Soha Bechara, pictures of her grace many walls in Lebanese houses, in places of honour next to those of families' sons and daughters martyred in the war. A member of the Lebanese National Resistance/Lebanese Resistance Front (the secular resistance coalition), she was captured Nov. 7, 1988 by the South Lebanon Army (SLA) for the attempted assassination of their general, Antoine Lahad. Immediately she was thrown into El Khiam 'detention' centre (a torture and interrogation camp) in occupied S. Lebanon. She was held there for 10 years, 6 were spent in an isolation cell (2.5 ft. wide x 6.5 ft. long x 8 ft. high.) The centre, setup by the Israeli Forces (IDF) in 1982, was administered by the SLA under IDF supervision. All Khiam detainees were held under no due process of law, detentions were arbitrary at the whim of the IDF or the SLA. There were 150-300 detainees at any one time, ranging from 15 to 60 years old, detained for periods of 3 days to 10 years. Various tortures inflicted upon the detainees included electric shock (to fingers, tongue, lobes, nose, toes, breasts, nipples, genitals), beatings, confinement in a cube (3' square), soaking, hanging, and long term sleep deprivation. Soha was released from El Khiam 'detention' centre on September 3, 1998. I videotaped her in Paris, December 1999. El Khiam was liberated along with most of S. Lebanon, May 2000.

⁵ Antoine Lahad, general of the SLA (1979/80-2000), a predominately Christian right-wing proxy militia created, controlled, and funded by Israel to administer South Lebanon and to give a Lebanese façade to the occupation of the South. A surrogate force such as the SLA had been planned by Zionist militias since 1933 and by the Israeli government since 1950. See ex-Prime Minister of Israel & ex-Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett's diaries in: Rokach (1982), and Sharett (1996).

⁶ The continuous Israeli occupation (1978-2000) of South Lebanon was a very sophisticated form of terror and colonization, attacks were carried out on the Lebanese since 1948 during the nation building process of Israel, and more frequently since 1968. The occupied area was ca. 500 sq. miles/1,500 sq. kilometers, approximately 10% of the country, forming a strip from the Southern border ca. 10 miles/15 kilometers wide. The area fluctuated in size depending on the Israeli political climate, generally there were 1,500-3000

issues, (i.e. terrorism⁷, post-colonialism, *occupation*, collaboration, experts, spokespeople, symbols, *resistance*, the *land*), and the history and structure of the documentary genre in regards to the representation of other cultures by the West in documentary, ethnography and anthropological practise and the predicament involved from the perspective of the subjects viewed and the practitioners practising. *Up to the South..* challenged traditional documentary formats by positing representation itself as a politicized practice. We worked with the material and our experiences of living and working in Lebanon with the insistence on a visible resistance to the acts of aggression that documentary partakes in and the violence that is inherent in its means. The videotape developed a mediating 'language' of transposed experience in the guise of a '*reluctant documentary*'. These methodologies are refined and developed further in some of the *untitled* videotapes⁸ which incorporate them in their own strategies and means.⁹

A clandestine evening in Paris

At some point in 1995 Moukhtar Kokache who had recently moved to New York led me to his friend in Paris, Mireille Kassar, who arranged a clandestine screening of *Up to the South..* one evening at the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA). You see, IMA tries to avoid the overt embracing of politics at all costs, at least it attempts to place itself in a space of modernist neutrality without seeing the obvious impossibility of this and it's position of complicity, co-dependency and conservatism. No responsibility for the affair was taken by IMA however the theatre space was quietly donated and one dark and stormy night we arrived to a packed house and a heated post screening discussion. Fortuitously much of the audience was well versed in the issues the tape engages with, it presupposes certain assumptions and proceeded to contest them and their

Israeli soldiers in the area on a normal 'unescalated' day. Approximately 180,000 Lebanese lived in the occupation zone.

⁷ Then and now the terms 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' are historically cleansed and reassigned to those whose actions we disagree with. We have stopped looking critically at the historical context as the reinvention of these terms has been used to obscure the roots of political conflict and nullify a multitude of ways of thinking and living resistance.

⁸ The *untitled* videotape components to date are:

untitled part 1: everything and nothing, 2002.. [see pp. 7-9]

untitled part 2: beauty and the east, 2003. [see pp. 5-6]

untitled part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends.., 2004 [see pp. 10-11]

appendix i: lands, 2001. [see n. 17]

appendix ii: clouds, 2001. [see n. 19]

appendix iii: other, 2001. Interiors, static exterior night scenes, rooms lived in and traveled through, suitcases, diary pages, dust ball, and other objects. Shown on monitor resting on floor at a 45 degree angle.

[see DVD for full videotape descriptions and clips]

⁹ These 'strategies and means' are arrived at through the labouring over the material collected. At some points in the working process they inform the development of the videotape/project and at other points they arise from the material or process itself and the project informs the work that is being done on it. Stylistically the parts and projects may appear to be drastically different from one another even within the same piece of work where an appropriateness of means is sought after, determined, and utilized.

understanding. Somehow it managed to spark or contribute to a spark that led to something much larger than the tape itself..

In the meantime

Concurrent to the production of the 'Lebanon' projects¹⁰ I was gathering vast amounts of research materials since 1982 which in themselves and the process of accumulation became the subject for an installation, *Kan Ya Ma Kan/There was and there was not*¹¹ (1995). It was a transposition of a working studio, an exhausting study paralleling and exposing my projects in Lebanon and challenging the immense history of the construction of *knowledge* of the *Middle East*. It called into question notions of history and research methodology, their role in the effacement of *histories*, and the mediated process inherent in the representation and (mis)understanding of another culture while examining *Lebanon* as a site of production constructed in *our* collective and individual psyches. The audience was encouraged to have a hands-on¹² encounter with the volumes of material in the seemingly endless threads of archives presented. Although the fields and parameters were set out, viewers became part of the process choosing their own paths, initially seduced, compelled and confronted, making decisions and in this manner being responsible for visualizing and re-*constructing* their own cultural/political perceptions¹³.

¹⁰ See op. cit. n. 3.

¹¹ for full description and images see:

<http://www.111101.net/Artworks/JayceSalloum/>

http://www.lot.at/politics/contributions/s_jayce1.htm

[also see DVD text #11]

¹² Museum guards revealed it was the first time they were asked to encourage visitors to handle displayed objects, leaf through files, remove dossiers from the walls and shelves, and make themselves 'at home' in an exhibition. They also admitted they enjoyed the comfort of the sofas where they would take their lunch.

¹³ The *untitled* installation follows upon this but inverts the relationship of initial form and content. It is similarly not modeled on the viewing of art (i.e. a painting exhibition) but on a subjective approach to research/reading an active archives, or sets of walk-in expanding systems of files, CDs, or hypertexted DVD-ROMs. The inversion is the ostensible simplicity of the presentation/framing of '*untitled*'.

[see p. 11]



Kan ya ma kan (installation detail), the dossier on bottom right hand corner of the desk

A dossier arrives

Several months later a dossier arrives from Paris. Mireille had sent a substantial book of documents that was being used to solicit international support for the release of Soha and the other detainees of Khiam. I add it to the central desk element of *Kan Ya Ma Kan...*

The first version

1998.. I am invited to participate in an exhibition that will take place at our national Museum of Civilization¹⁴. The theme is something to do with *immigration*. It seems a dry concept with an arbitrariness that has an opportunistic ring to it in the Canadian political climate and its history of turning back asylum seekers, an escalation of closed borders (to people, not goods), and a less than repressed racism. There is also a renewed orientalism at play, or a *neo-orientalism*. It is increasingly more fashionable to have a token show with an Arab or Middle-Eastern theme, one that avoids the complexities of subjectivity and identity outside of an indexical vein. I initially reject participation in the exhibition. A short time passes then with continued requests from the curator I contemplate it more and see the opportunity to engage with a public outside of the normative gallery or art museum mold, and the potential for an experiment in community association. From the proposed theme of *immigration* I decide to do a project dealing with concepts of *movement* (where it is permitted/restricted, desired or forced) in terms of specific histories, looking at something that is common to all of our lives and at the base of this entity called globalization. Subsequently I moved into considerations of *transition*, however we have devalued this term/position as if it is going nowhere. The ends in and out of sight, or what it is we are coming to, are usually given utmost importance but not the *inbetweenness*. This led me to focus on the notion of *interstitiality*, the interstitial subject and site, and the beginning of *untitled*.

part 2

March 24, 1999, the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) begins. I have been thinking a lot about *interstitiality*. Towards the end of summer I foresee that I will have a break between exhibitions in Vienna and Brussels. I decide to take a trip from the top of the FRY to the bottom with enough time to visit the capital cities of each soon to be, once more, *new* republic. I start planning, emailing all individuals and lists¹⁵ I know with any connection to the region. My searching through taping begins at home, for what I do not exactly know; conversations with a friend's mother Zenona Sava describing her survival of WW2, and Carmen Aguirre, a Chilean-Canadian actor about her struggles during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and her current cultural battles in Canada. I intend to look at/record sites of emigration,

¹⁴ *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* (Oct. 19, 2001 to March 9, 2003) featured "The immigrant experience and métissage, or cultural intermixing explored.." My video installation *untitled* was at the heart of the controversy over the show's attempted cancellation. After viewing the videotapes the directors of the museum "*indefinitely postponed*" the complete exhibition. With a large international email campaign and public outcry the issue received national and international press and exposure on CNN etc. The Prime Minister, pressured by his caucus and the opposition, spoke out in Parliament in support of the exhibition continuing. The Museum was forced to open and present it as originally planned. Following the closing of the exhibition the Museum eliminated the Mid-East/South-West Asian department in its entirety (due to the director's proclamation that he was not interested in dealing with "conflictual histories") and reneged on it's commitment for an international tour.

¹⁵ The former Syndicate (before it morphed into Spectre and the *new* Syndicate) and Nettime lists figured most prominently in making connections and providing many initial correspondents. They can all be located at www.nettime.org.

places that people had left or were currently leaving from¹⁶ or immigrating to, and meet people that were living and/or theorizing these threads of movement and change in trans/cross/intra-cultural settings. On my way to Vienna I stop off in New York and meet up and tape an architect, from Belgrade, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, Ammiel Alcalay who discusses the Balkan region he knows so well, and Ella Shohat who speaks about the colonization of the Americas, neo-colonial politics of the Middle East and the limits of an identity based politics. In Vienna, I tape exiles from the FRY, activists, artists, and writer/theoretician Boris Buden, and finally I am on the train heading to Ljubljana, Slovenia, with subsequent stops in Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Skopje. I offer to tape in any language but generally the preferred language of address is English. The conversations open a space for the contemplation of the present, the recent and further past, and implications for the future. We circulate around life during Tito, after Tito, what is far and still remains close, and the current reign of Milosevic and what will.. what may be coming. The subjects speak through the camera, through me, to some imaginary audience.. western.. somewhere else.. or speak to formulate and send off missives, inquiries, and speculations on what has happened. I have space to pause in the evenings and the between times finding routes and transportation from person to city to new encounters. I tape these moments as well, the foggy indeterminate landscapes¹⁷, the jotting of notes while the bus bounces up and down, the passing through check points of new, old, and reformulated borders, time and space stretch out for moments, clarity is fleeting, elusive but not impossible [see DVD clip #7]. The juxtaposition of speakers stimulates patterns of thought, utterances of something that this might become. Points of focus start to emerge through the cycles and repetition¹⁸.

¹⁶ In post-war zones I found temporary spaces open to seemingly countless possibilities, where there's a disarray reigning before the imposition of endless laws and regulations which inevitably come into place. Before it closes, this window, when everyone is scrambling for survival, is often a time where some type of sense is found/made of the recent past.

¹⁷ These become the predominant footage in the installation tape; *appendix i: lands*, a silent projection of images shot from bus/train rides shown next to the *part 2* projection screen to alternatively collide and run parallel to the literal and metaphorical references of the speakers. From very close croppings of detailed edges and shapes, to distant views revealing patterns of colour and form, these shots provide associative imagery: cityscapes and landscapes, ribbons of rivers, disheveled fields, arrays of forests, and rolling hills and valleys blanketed in heavy fog where only occasional glimpses of ephemeral objects and abstract homes/houses pierce through.

¹⁸ Eventually the conversations recorded, starting in Vancouver and ending in Skopje were made into *untitled part 2: beauty and the east*. This videotape addresses issues of nationalism & the nation state, alienation, the refusal & construction of political identities, ethno-fascism, the body as object & metaphor, agents, monsters and abjectness, subjective affinities and objective trusts. The subjects conversing come from a range of constituencies; im/migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, community groups, 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 these particular places and times. The speakers are framed closely, creating a complicity with and acknowledgement of the constant 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 are featured. Moving landscapes and cityscapes are used to materialize the verbal and localize the discourse through levels of physicality, materiality and immateriality.

When finished in the Southern reaches, Skopje, Macedonia, which is closer to the Middle East in feel and look than I imagined, I make my way to the airport which is filled with NATO troops, and fly¹⁹ to Germany followed by a couple of trains to Karlsruhe. The lecture I give there is on my yet unbuilt website (rrrr.net) that could link up issues of representation, resistance, revolution, and the discursive realities that enable or prevent such processes.

part 1

Brussels a few days later, Mireille phones, she tells me there is an exhibition in Paris of artworks from Khiam detainees and other Israeli detention centres, objects that were smuggled out for 10 years and later brought out when the Red Cross was eventually permitted to visit in 1995; delicate carvings of soap, prayer beads and chess sets out of olive pits, embroideries from threads pulled from their clothes, fragile sculptures assembled from all kinds of scrounged materials, and drawings made with burnt wood.. These are tentative objects, clandestine cravings imbued with hope and faith signifying more strength than holds them together. Mireille asks me to come and screen *Up to the South..*²⁰ at the gallery, she says Soha has been released months earlier and that after the screening Rabab (one of the former detainees in the tape) and Soha could speak about the ongoing detentions in Khiam and Israel. It's a great surprise to find that Soha was released, I had no prior knowledge that this was even close to being achieved. I make a deal with Mireille that if she comes to my opening we'll discuss what can be done.. it could be the rare closing of a circle that started in 1992 with the work in the south. Mireille arrives, she pulls me aside at the opening to discretely mention that after the 1995 IMA screening of *Up to the South..* she instigated the forming of a committee to free Soha and had worked to solicit world wide support, newspaper ads in the major journals in Paris, and help from activists and human rights lawyers in Europe, the Middle East and N. Africa. Somehow the tape was complicit, adding to the momentum of the movement, as a catalyst for what was undoubtedly already emerging.

A couple of days later we're in Paris. After the screening Rabab speaks about the ongoing torture and interrogation that is inflicted upon the detainees, her present freedom, and life after Khiam. Soha discusses the continued need to fight for the release of those left behind, the resistance to the occupation, and the struggles that are still going on. When the discussion ends I head out with her to get away and we talk over a Lebanese feast. At the end I am reluctant, I ponder whether to ask her to be taped, I am so ambivalent.. she is being interviewed to death by the European and Arab press over the details of her captivity, the minutiae of her surviving it, the conditions in Khiam, and the resistance. I can imagine her fatigue from all of this after the ordeal

¹⁹ I add to the *clouds* archive of footage taped from airplane windows, mostly after take offs and before landings when you pass through the layer of clouds into the sunlight or descend into what waits below. That intermediary stage the suspends you for a moment, distant shots and close views, disintegrating forms and substantive yet fleeting shapes floating on grounds and/or space(s). These are used in the installation tape, *untitled appendix ii: clouds*, silent, monitor hung at the entrance to the space at a height simulating airport arrival and departure monitors.

²⁰ See op. cit. n.3.

of Khiam, and the pressures of a 'living martyr'. We get along well for the first time meeting so I succumb and ask, she thinks it's no big deal and invites me for breakfast the next day.

I go to her small dorm room on the edge of Paris (she was studying international law at the Sorbonne), not much bigger than her cell except for one large window. She sits on her bed, I ask her about the distance lived between Khiam and Paris, and Beirut and Paris, what she left in Khiam and what she brought with her, a story about flowers and how she never puts them in water [see DVD clip #2], how it felt for her to be under such demand now, who she was [see DVD clip #5], and a few other things.. I didn't ask her specifically about the torture she underwent or the trauma of detention. I was more interested in *herself*, her subjectivity and agency, her will to survive or as she 'corrects' me, to live, how she enunciates her history and position, accounts for all that has happened, and her philosophy of resistance then and what it means now on a daily basis [see DVD clip #4]. I tape her before breakfast, Kishk (a Lebanese yogurt and bulghar soup, something I grew up on and loved on special Sunday mornings.) In the end I didn't know what was there but I felt that there was something. It wasn't until six months to a year later when Soha's text was translated that I could read what had transpired. I didn't know if it could be anything, until then. I knew that a trust had developed in those short hours, at least enough for her to accept my mediation. This material that I recorded of the time spent with her is not precious, just time, a conversation, and intense intimacy at a close and unbreachable distance.



from *untitled part 1: everything and nothing*

One principal element the videotaping of Soha, and in the weeks immediately before that the taping in the former Yugoslavia clarified was the specificity of theme. The comprehension that the underlying thread of *interstitiality* could form the definite article or object of this indefinite study. Each part of the project addressing this in its own appropriate manner.

figuring resistance

untitled part 1: everything and nothing upon first glance appears unremarkable, shot and apparently edited out of one continuous take: a person on a bed speaks directly to the camera, the filmmaker (played by myself) behind the camera converses with her. The tape becomes

disarming only gradually, once the viewer commits to several minutes of the conversation and an intimate connection is fashioned between politics and subjectivity. The engagement is latent but is carried relentlessly. This countenance is one instance of the subtle forms of *resistance* of the tape, a denial to give into the gratification of immediacy. More explicit references to various modes of resistance are made as the tape unfolds. With Soha it is necessary to look at her image as a *figure* of resistance and a figure of *the* resistance, an image that was occupied by a history which was still being played out. This history grew into a near mythology and was used by contradictory forces to justify their aims. Her imagistic strength is superceded only by her actual life making it even more problematic to try to do a piece with her and a critical reading of her representational 'over exposure'. Her unwavering identification with the resistance (she expressed no critical relationship to it) helped her persevere, she claims a history, one of her own that is part and parcel of the secular resistance [see DVD clip #4]. Soha is acutely aware of her role, her image and the mission she has laid out. Part of her mission is *the talking about it*, a responsibility to speak. She speaks to a viewer yet to be named but anticipated in the process. The (surviving) martyr's narrative is also ever-present, an overexposed and overshadowing structure. I try to permeate these layers by interruptions in the cadence with our in-between moments of banter, the immediacy of the medium, a specificity of language, technical denotations, structural breaks, time signified, and a malleability of the image.[see DVD clips #2-4]

approaching distance

There is a certain distance between the geographies encountered; Khiam²¹, Beirut, Paris²², and the distance I traveled to eventually meet Soha. She discusses whether she is closer to the detainees now, thousand of kilometers away or when she was in the cell next door, and what distance taught [see DVD clip #1]. The paradox of distance is also enacted linguistically, used as a trope and a means of approach. I pose the questions in a broken third language, French. Fractured not only by my minimal fluency but more importantly by the intricate interior formulation needed to piece together the precise question, after her response in Arabic (being practically unintelligible to me). She replies in French when the dialogue is less formal during the in-between moments such as the discussion around a possible title for a project that wasn't yet a project, a tape that wasn't yet conceived [see DVD clip #6]. She waits while I piece my language together, she is the speaking subject, I am the listener, except for these instances and for the tape where the subjects are other. This *distance* could also be seen as a form of productive alienation, perception (recognition of gaps, or the impossibility of *understanding* without which there would be no *other*), constructive disjunction and as a provisional or analogous response to difference.

²¹ *Khiam* (in conversation and for purposes of this text) refers to El Khiam (or Al Khyam) detention center [see op. cit. n. 4 and pp. 2 & 7], it is also the name of the village in S. Lebanon where the centre is located.

²² I asked Soha what she left behind and what she brought from Khiam to Beirut and Paris, she answered: "*..I left everything, and I left nothing, at the same time... 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....*" [see DVD clip #3]

The lifetimes of detention, the epoch of occupation, the period of shooting, editing time, the 'real-time' videotape recorded, time spent with the footage, and the factor of translations, distance is rooted in temporality. The two interchangeable at times. On it's most primary level these relationships and what is valued here are the inverse of the dominant media's relationship to distance and time. Temporal displacement is always needed (and is not the exception) as time is imperative to an intelligent response. In the finite pointing of distance, temporality provides a space for a visceral closeness throughout the tape connecting the viewer to the subject to self.

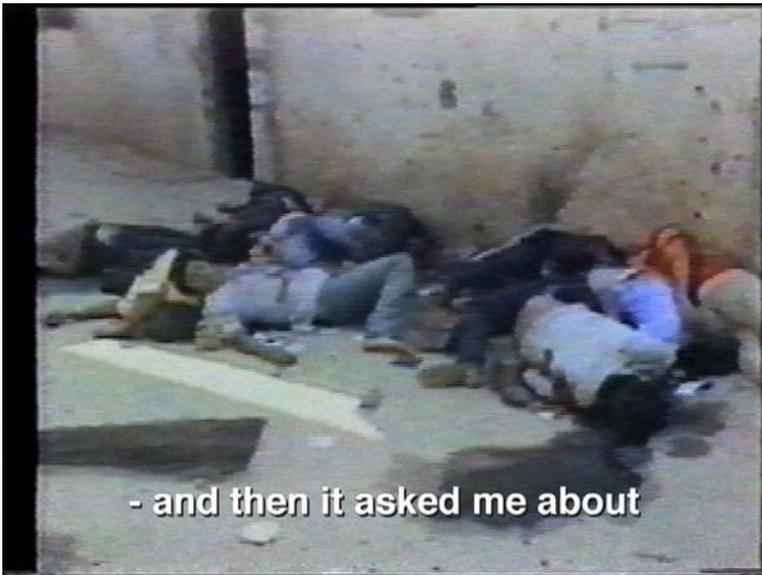
the challenge of intimacy

Soha speaks quietly and directly into the camera (to a *listener*), this is juxtaposed against her silent self listening (and her image which is never silent). Some are unsettled²³ in the intimacy of the encounter between subject and listener(s), others find an empathy, or empathetic response. Both reactions are engaged and complicit, however only the later can lead to a type of awareness or consciousness. Video enhances pixel by pixel the emotive quality of the image and the nearness of the voice, lavalier mic at throat level, neck to ear through the encapsulated space, channeled into the privacy of headphones or loudspeakers - breathing mixed into breathing of gallery/theatre (single channel) viewers, their expressions and silences entwined. Intimacy is a determining cause in the possible impossibilities of representing the subject of resistance.

part 3

Late in 2000 while rough editing the first two installation tapes I recognize that if I am going to have the current focus of the project be *articulating the condition of interstitiality as a subjective, political, or geographical state*, it was necessary to include a component on the Palestinians in Lebanon, those residing in refugee camps of one form or another for close to 60 years. Most Palestinians in Lebanon exist in a realm of interstitiality, unable to return to *Palestine* (whether they chose to or not) or to their villages (if they exist still or not) inside or outside the green line of Israel's borders. They are barred from working legally in over 70 professions in Lebanon and unable to obtain resident rights nor citizenship (even if it was desired). Not being able to return and unable to move forward under the restrictions imposed upon them, and their personal experiences of dispossession, several generations live in a state of *permanent temporariness*.

²³ See Allan (2002)



- and then it asked me about

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

September 2000, I videotape in six refugee camps from the North to the South of Lebanon. Predominantly conversations with Palestinian refugees from 1948 and some with subsequent generations. The formal tendencies are similar to *..part 2..* though the location and ambient imagery consist of more close-up and medium range shots in the tight exterior and interior confines of the camps, as well as abstractions of flags, bodies during demonstrations, and parades of martyrs. The conversations range from accounts of loss and displacement, to memories of place, perceptions of absence, and the violence of representation. In the first installment²⁴ of *untitled* for *part 3a* I took excerpts from two conversations, one with Nameh Hussein Suleiman (in Baddawi camp, near Tripoli), and the other with Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan (in Bourg al Barajinah Camp, near Beirut), elder Palestinians that had been living in refugee camps in Lebanon since 1948. Nameh recounts her fleeing to exile (a monumental moment lasting years), leading her siblings by foot to Lebanon and their present situation in a local and global context. Abdel Majid discusses absence and presence through the recounting of an eloquent poem told by the ruins of his house in Palestine where he was permitted to visit after his first 30 years of dispossession. During March-April 2002 when the Jenin Refugee Camp massacre occurred (yet another in the series of atrocities where Ariel Sharon was liable), my overwhelming urge to say something, to make something in reaction to this would not subside. I took the central part of Abdel Majid's audio where he locates the trees on the property and what ensues to form the audio/text for the single channel tape *part 3b*²⁵ [see DVD clip #9]. This material will ultimately be edited into the feature length *part 3*, a personalized confrontation of the Palestinian dispersion,

²⁴ See op. cit. n. 14.

²⁵ *untitled part 3b: (as if) beauty never ends..* (2004). With ambient videotape of many things, including orchids blooming, plants growing, raw footage of the 1982 massacre at Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Lebanon, Times Square, Hubbell space imagery, the Visible Body crosscuts, and abstract shots of slow motion water, this is a reflection on the past, its present context and forbearance. Abdel Majid Fadl Ali Hassan recounts a story told by the rubble of his home in Palestine. Along with ambient audio clips the tape permeates into an intense essay on dystopia in contemporary times. Working directly, viscerally, and metaphorically it provides an elegiac response to the Palestinian dispossession [see DVD clip #9].

the predicament of refugees (the representational equivalence of the interstitial state), and the ethnic cleansing on a daily basis which is successively neglected. This *part of untitled* continues the attempt to come to terms with the problem of representing the unrepresentable, unrepresentable due to over exposure (made banal or sensational due to facile coverage), lack of exposure, misrepresentation (to the point of absurdity), effacement, omission, or repression (self and external).

inside

All four current parts of *untitled* (1, 2, 3a, & 3b), and the three appendices (i, ii, & iii) come together in the installation, extending the issues of the individual parts, building further relationships between the tapes, and constructing an environment where the spheres of histories are situated in a web of connectivity. It is a sculptural space that presents the effect of walking into the videotape itself, a stillness, a silence of moving images juxtaposed, flowing and colliding, waves of scan lines, an active meditateness picturing the interstitial. A choice is made to sit or stand, and to place the headphones on closing off the preponderance of exterior sound, linking to the audio feed, the voice speaking from the image before you. It fixes the space, frames it, the act of witnessing becomes confessional, no fancy audio or video tricks, the simplest, most direct feed. The tapes take time, the installation takes more time, it is demanding. Each part is projected onto it's own screen area or emanating from a monitor. It is an atmosphere of visual collusion, collaboration, contextualization, critical interference and mutual existence. The illuminations play off of each other creating an imagistic and aural experience of the physical/visceral and of the underlying subjectivities 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.

telling

Narrative is mobile, telling at home and away, traveling like well worn suitcases, used often or now stored and opened only occasionally to reveal cherished contents. Telling and retelling, writing and rewriting, narrative has hooks to latch onto and go for a ride, it is appealing to use but not to rely upon as a convention, potentially formulaic and unprovocative. I use different forms of narrative but am cautious about giving in to its authority. The narratives I'm interested in are either open or broken. Soha's conversation is broken, much more so than the English subtitles would suggest. She is cyclical in her dialogue yet very clear.²⁶ She speaks elliptically (in the original Arabic), how can she speak otherwise, to express her position there has to be a certain amount of circling around the subject, herself, within the confines of how 'resistance' situates her. Cycles by their definition are joining and overlapping, revolving and returning, allowing us to come closer to knowing.. but only so close. The way she remembers is the way memory works, filling in gaps at each turn, writing in the spaces, reading the past from the context of the present, rewriting and speaking. With the hours of videotape from other conversations, outtakes that I've never used, I've often thought about combining and rewriting

²⁶ Five translators provided me with fairly different interpretations of her account which I drew upon in the writing of the English subtitles.

the most absorbing ones into a script to have a dense voice/textual overlay, intermittently reverting back to a speaking subject on camera. I will incorporate this approach in the long format of *part 3*.

The viewer must anchor narrative. A story exists at the moment of telling and a little longer, relating to other stories that will ensure the survival of this one, or those that have a completeness about them and strength in their dispersion. Through fragmentation you are only allowed to be seduced for so long. Within the parameters set up paradigms soon break down or are shown to be malleable, synthetic films of realism shifting to other fields of the real. Fragments are important, as are the appendages, but equally so is a body or state of being, with some direction of completeness and taste of potential closure sprinkled amongst the openings leading to elsewhere. The immediate, local, and translocal can spiral to wider elements and associations. Attention to detail, and a larger picture comes together. Something that is more tactile, able to be seen and heard.



untitled (installation detail), Museum of Civilization, 2002-03

a living archive

To amass an archive is a leap of faith, not in preservation but in the belief that there will be someone to use it, that the accumulation of these histories will continue to live, that they will have listeners. *Subjective affinities* render a relationship and engagement with the viewer, linking information or *documents* and more ephemeral matter, common struggles across various states. *Objective trusts* in that relationship develop a system of delineating and promise, a commitment that the bank of meanings being produced will recognize its presence and undermine its authority. The taping of subjects is a collaborative process, we are both aware of the medium, the dialogical aspects of the work, of transferring meaning, and the act of translating, and editing that is at the core of their expressions and my mediation. The material itself has a sense of 'living', a presentness, a relevance, excerpts of life resting in their context of extraction. Enunciation carries traces of speaking before, the details of verse in an itinerant manner being part of the archive. A collaboration also exists with the viewer of the archive, unknowingly

perhaps, taking on a responsibility for the representations that are consumed. The viewer becomes part of the extended archive, collecting, preserving, sharing stories that could possibly disappear, and neglecting others that are disappearing.

The archive is untitled, as memory is, as the accounts of the subjects who refuse to be reducible are. The individual parts follow this practise in content, construction, and packaging in their refusal of commodification. In the archive (*and* outside of it) all viewing is incomplete in the sense of having seen all, but also in the sense that this is a living entity, it rumbles along indefinitely, growing in stops and starts, mutating.. You can walk into the vaults, there are files, stacks, and shelves of material. The records are static but movement is written all over them.

back to interstitiality

untitled seeks to articulate the conditions of living and moving, subjectivity strewn between or through borders, nationalisms, ideologies, polarities of culture, geography, or histories. The visible act of *concretizing* and valuing this interstitiality occurs while re-constituting and representing the ephemeral and transitory demarcations in which it resides. These demarcations or better yet, *zones of being* are situated in the contested and conflicted notions of homeland, nation, diaspora, exile, travel, assimilation, refuge, native, and *other*. Confronted as standard or anomaly, the subject may choose to intersect, suture, or overlay, ameliorate, reshape, redefine, morph, hybridize, separate, erase, augment, or rupture these constructions in a form of resistance or liberation from antagonizing forces. Fixing the temporal, space and time become conflated. A sense of the momentary (living between or during events) stretches from a point of being into permanency, temporally or spatially bounded, which, as interstitial subjects know, can occupy significant moments or portions of our lives, and in some cases our complete lives.

Interstitial space can be seen as productive and tactical, not merely resting in the traumatic, or devalued in the dysfunctional, transitional, rendered as anxiety, tentativeness or lack. *untitled* subjectively theorizes interstitiality beyond a peripatetic field, as a concrete entity (where one can react or act upon it), a place of living, or a space/time of resistance or change, exploding this notion, this site into discursive areas where it can be seen as a constructive space with increasingly important relevance to our public and private lives. Living the ephemeralization of the fiction known as the concrete and concretizing the ephemeral are two interrelated positions of these sometimes fragile, sometimes more than real polarities that the interstitial subject or state exists between, that state which we all occupy more or less.

What I have seen of your work fascinates me especially because it insinuates a prelude to a much more complex politics, a preparation for something to come. The works that engage me, sometimes with a healthy degree of trepidation, create a space somewhere between a failure of politics and the agonized resolve to persist. And not just the persistence of a

person or people but of an idea also; in other words, ideas too have their own biography..
Jawad Ali

ongoing/going on

My methodological focus is one of constant research, rethinking and augmentation. This is intrinsic to all stages of production, reworking and learning from the material gathered leads the project instead of vice versa. I test out multiple forms and structures, metonymical chains, and formulate a detailed layout accounting for every frame of the piece. The editing stage is utilized as an equal forum of mediation and construction, where unanticipated and meaningful juxtapositions can be formed and the structure of the piece can be tweaked to its final intact shape. None of this is arbitrary (though occasionally affected by chance). The process becomes the product leading to the end result.

The 'syntax' structure developed is evident. The dialectical relationship of the speaker and the spoken is highlighted, the speech laid bare and layered between the story, the field of images, the suggested frames and the butted fictive and documentary process. Difference is articulated in and around the literal and metaphorical spaces of displacement and dwelling, the constitution of this being viewed as crucial social meanings rather than only as an extension of (an)other locale/space or subjective relationship. It is a dialectics of experience engaging a viscosity of substance.

These collaborations speak for themselves, these works.. the subjects in them speaking for both of us, me trying to prevent speaking for others, at times a paradox and a solution, problematic and potentially full of possibilities in questioning and investigating each of our positions.. juxtaposing myself & the ostensible subjects (in front of the lens), the actual subject being both of us.. investing in each others subjectivities, and *intersubjectivity*, speaking in collaboration/conjunction, speaking *through* our articulations and mediations.

untitled has concerns common to all its parts, addressed at different times in diverse manners. Each part has its own themes which are brought to the forefront, like a juggler who drops some of the objects circling to focus on the ones in hand. These include, the disintegrating nation/body, body as nation, nation as metaphor, dysfunction and crisis, abject geographies, agents and monsters, ethno-fascism, displacement and dispossession, the self in interstitial space, refusal as a claim of the subject, and the perseverance of will. A key focus of the project is *borders*, physical and metaphorical, imaginary and ontological, how they are constructed and defined and how they inscribe, control, restrict, shield, and screen us. Borders are seen as barriers, margins and occasionally zones of autonomy. Their emplacement reflecting apparent necessity or uselessness belies their histories and permanence/impermanence, porousness (with the movement of goods and capital) and impermeability (with peoples' movement). When meaning slips around and through borders, frontiers are crossed and new associations are made, when they can't, the body public disintegrates.

Inherent and critical references to conventional documentary (and ethnographic representations) are woven into the tapes as a subtext. Some of these are made visible through the structure, elements, techniques, and aesthetics utilized²⁷. Only available light is used, interior location shots, public settings, and abstracted direct imagery are layered underneath and around the textual elements. There is no detached authoritative voice-over dictating what to see or think. Asynchronous voices are edited from the material recorded. This audio component carries its own content (and form) which parallels the video component, forming relationships of the oblique, directional, and expansional, delineating and speculative. Working outside an essentializing gaze (which reduces and conforms the complexities of subjectivity) the audio/text/image configurations selectively release levels and layers of information from shifting *positions* for specific purposes, and at times for specific publics with more vernacular or fluent 'readings' dependent on *language* and affiliation. Entry points are multiple as are means of access. No *monikers* are used, i.e. restrictive forms of identification of the subjects or overdetermined representation of the sites, no artifice of 'objectivity' or naturalizing discourse of seamless *realism*, nor a 'grand' summarizing narrative or imposition of closure resolving all. With no beginning or end texts to package and objectify the tapes, each is part of one continuous endless whole, confused at times and semi-raw, the project incorporates this even as the end product is less raw and more finished. The tape/installation's unwieldiness is analogical to the provisionality of the process.

A relationship to reality can only be arrived at through the subjective. The basis of *objectivity*, is where subjectivity is placed and how it is revealed in the issues at stake and the circumstances of the lives lived. *untitled* is situated firmly between genres on the margins of the margins in an unstable and unsettling placement, establishing this in-between state as a critical position to elucidate a context or many contexts, look at historic and present day realities, and engage in the transference of lived experiences.

This project renders different forms of resistance, the figure of the resistance fighter struggling for self-determination and liberation, resistance in a broader sense as part of one's daily life struggling against a predetermining hegemony, the act of staying on the ground or in a more domestic means working within, and, where survival is an act of resistance. I attempt to have my work function as a form of resistance which affects social, political, or personal change. Work that points to agency as the first step, and recognizing, challenging and altering our perceptions plays a decisive role. The pivotal relationship is that of *an individual to community*. This is an intrinsic part to *all* forms of resistance (and identity). The acts of taking apart, building and dismantling to build again is more than an exercise in laying bare the elements, process, and motivations of power and regulating bodies, it is an attempt to articulate the conditions that exist for a subject's individual life, and the forces that confront our individual and common realities. These explode and careen from the *person* to the political, to the banal, the intimately exigent construction of nationalism(s), other ideologies, and their conjunctive subjective relationships..

opening a fissure/filling a void

²⁷ For other examples see p. 9.

In the triangulation of histories and positions between countries, cultures and subjectivities *untitled* continues building on previous (production and curatorial²⁸) projects of mine aiming to implode existing barriers, chipping away at the structure until it dissipates, skeletal then ephemeral, identifying a space to locate difference in forms of articulating, of filling these (intentional and unintentional) gaps in representation, intervening in these spaces between spaces, messing them up with deliberated contentions then leaving for others to clean them up, refine, and reflect upon. Filling spaces with massive amounts of material and a density of meaning is imperative. There is an exigency of excess required in a demand to be heard/listened to, in the opening of spaces for other silenced or negated voices to emerge. These are politicized spaces where one is challenged to respond (or challenging responses), and one's perceptions and *understandings* are confronted. These openings are productive interstices where possibilities exist to engage, encounter, reflect and act upon the forces that act upon us at work or play in the days of our lives.

Is it enough to provoke sometimes and other times provide a meditative space claiming a calmness in the midst of anxious spaces or vice versa; a brief moment of anxiety, left floating, unresolved but intense in its suggestions and potential. It is a set-up in a way, the polarities contesting each other to create an active space that the viewer can be placed in, a space that is questioning, unresolved, at times lucid, always open, but open with anxiety and angst, pleasure, contemplation, anger, frustration, or sadness. These projects often fall between the cracks, of genre, and of attention. There is a price paid in not heeding cautionary tales, breaking rules, pushing the conservatism and limits of institutions, providing layers of realities, tactile, juxtaposed in correlation and contradiction with dominant motifs, a price of denial and censure.



from *untitled part 2:beauty and the east*

²⁸ See Salloum (1998, 2001a; 2001b)

histories of the self

Who are we allowed to be, who allows us to be who we are or what we identify with, and where is this power usurped from? What constructs us as human beings, what informs our psyche, what shapes how we perceive each other and the world around us? This is not a question of identity but of subjectivity and agency, where we are placed, where we choose to position ourselves, and how the world acts upon us and how we act upon the world. Place is defined by the people who live it (or have lived it) daily, without this, there is no place, no sense of place and no geographic local(e) existing in the real and the imaginary.

Many of us want to claim a space for fluidity of self, an identity that is determined contextually, a subjectivity that is unimpeded. Others seek to hold onto or regain a land, a nation, and the ensuing dilemmas that follow. The right to be self-inscribed spans a flexible local identity and the trans-local, the particularities of each, the movement between the two, the split and interconnectedness, and the usurpation of either. One searches for sense, to make sense out of things, to have something static to grab onto, a set of images, of beliefs, some way of perceiving grounded in their real [see DVD clip #8]. This project's fragments of narrative have a coherency and a positioning to question the grand narrative(s) that put/set things in order, it aims to deeply disrupt/interrupt unified notions of nationalism, empire, and identity. These that are experienced through the body [see DVD clip #7]. We are all transnational subjects, entwined globally, in assault, complicit with, directly or indirectly affecting all, at risk of being affected by each other, at anytime, by those we choose to identify with and those we ignore. As viewers and consumers of culture(s) we need to challenge our existing assumptions and preconceptions. We are implicated within these constructions, our histories are present there and here, our projections firmly entrenched.

Re-presenting the accounting of experience over a range of locations and contexts the act of videotaping is used as a direct way of tracing lives, revelations of the self, and the realities around us, as well as a tool for looking at issues of representation, governing paradigms, and the construction of meaning. The subjective enunciatory experience is central to this. From very local positions, lived history, and working with representations from the ground up that respect the individual subject and is immersed in the complexities of culture(s), models can be developed that confront and theorize the representation of politics and the politics of representation as part of the mandate and mode of production. This critique of all hierarchic forms of information, corporatism, and systems of overarching authority is part of a larger analysis of political and economic strategies and the effects of corporate globalism and the military industrial complex. This project provides a heterogeneous engagement with facilitating a means of contemplation that can counter the imposition of consent.

untitled brings together the intensely personal space of the dialogue moment with the context of the intrinsic social and political site, different with each subject but with overlapping and overarching points of contention, correspondence, senses of place, notions of community, domains of discursivity, legacies of conflict and capital, disenfranchisement and the ties of transnational concurrences. This project is not about *difference* per se but about separateness and a connective web. Sometimes I wonder how I carry a presentness of *home* with me, making work where others found and lost theirs, of what is left behind and what remains. How one can go on, building in the political discrepancies of the present, to move forward without ignoring the traces

of the past. There is a associated agency, one of praxis or activism of sorts that emerges to engage or enrage.. with whatever means of resistance, *survival*, and will necessary.

"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."
Soha Bechara²⁹

Jayce Salloum © 2004

²⁹ [see DVD clip #4]