

The Image of Loss: Jalal Toufic's Filmic Beirut

Elliot Colla

Jalal Toufic's cinematic and literary pieces form a unique corpus within contemporary Arab filmmaking. His esthetic vision—built around a sublime understanding of image as loss—not only connects with the current ruins of the Lebanon he films, but also resonates with the classical tradition of the *nasib* in Arabic poetry.

"A percentage, however small, of the guerrilla operations directed against Israel should be directed against the studios that make Arabic and especially Egyptian soap operas."

Jalal Toufic

At first glance, it would be a mistake to lump the works of the Lebanese filmmaker Jalal Toufic into any category of Arab cinema.¹ Not only does he rarely engage with contemporary Arab cinema in his work, but when he does he most often takes an antagonistic position, dismissing much of it as vulgar mass culture, irredeemable in terms of esthetic vision.² As a filmmaker, he prefers to find inspiration in the works of Godard, Blanchot and others who have had little influence on Arab cinema in general and on *Mashriqi* cinema in particular. So, how to show his relation to the cultures or cinemas of the Arab world?

One could introduce Toufic's works by way of the late Egyptian filmmaker Shadi 'Abd al-Salam whose *al-Mumiya* ['Abd al-Salam 1975 (1969)] Toufic considers to be a uniquely successful formal experiment in Arab cinema.³ 'Abd al-Salam's film focuses on the distance between the Sa'idi (Upper Egyptian) village and an occluded Pharaonic tradition that, in an uncanny way, possesses the characters while never being wholly visible. This sense of distance—between a forgotten past and the present historical moment—is conveyed in the lingering shots and silences: it becomes an aura both melancholic and sublime. This reading of the film turns on the fact that it was produced immediately after the 1967 defeat: the motif of "distance" in *al-Mumiya* serves to allegorize the cultural death that followed this accumulation of disasters in Arab society. For Toufic, it is the film's critical recognition of that distance that sets it off from other Arab films that act as if nothing had changed, that nothing had died with those disasters.

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With some further unpacking of these concepts, I hope to show the relevance of Toufic's work to Arab cinema and contemporary history. I have included the above quote about Arab soap operas and studios in order to show why this relationship will not be an easy one. To make sense of his work, I will need to bracket that cluster of "taste" issues embedded in his rejection of popular mass culture in the Arab world. Similarly, I will postpone discussion of audience in order to set into motion the syntax of his work. Lastly, in a move that mirrors Toufic's, I will need to disconnect his work from the specificity of contemporary Arab cinema long enough to show that its possible relevance lies in that very disconnection.⁴

ASHOURA: REPETITION AND TRADITION

Jalal Toufic's latest piece, a short video on two monitors entitled *Ashoura: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, is a work of disparate images held in unhinging juxtaposition. On one screen, we watch a pair of hands photocopying an image, then copying the copy and so on until our memory of the original disappears under the pile of distorted, gradually whitened facsimiles. On the other screen, we witness a Shi'ite cleric's sermon about Husayn's martyrdom, followed by quasi-ethnographic footage taken during an 'Ashoura commemoration in Nabatieh, Lebanon. As the blood flows, as the repetitious movements of the mass ritual fall into a hypnotic rhythm, the commentary of the first screen upon the second screen becomes more explicit—this history of Shi'ite ritual and popular practice shares an affinity with the process of image-loss that occurs in photography. And, since the two images are balanced allegorically against each other, the relationship is potentially reversible: the embodied, public ritual of 'Ashoura becomes a commentary on the most rote and unconscious of academic rituals—photocopying and the anxiety about representing original texts without distortion. If our assumptions about image-loss might encourage us to think that the video depicts the accrued, distorted practice of 'Ashoura as negative—the voice-over (read by the Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha) tells us otherwise:

The yearly commemoration is less to remember the historical event of Husayn's slaughter in Karbala than to slowly, along the years, decades and centuries, imbue in Shi'ites the feeling that that even cannot be reduced to the linear and historical, but belongs also in part to *'alam al-mithal* (the Imaginal World), where it is in no need of preservation, but preserves itself.... The repetitions, with the inevitable distortions, signal to us that it is not preserved as it happened historically. We repeat so that gradually, along the repetitions, as the event gets more and more distorted, it comes to approximate how it is preserved.

Thus this distortion is actually the preservation of the event in a more real sense. First, because the ritual's representation of Husayn's martyrdom is a symbolic practice, and therefore *already* a distortion in that the practice of 'Ashoura could not be confused with the historical event of Karbala. Second because in its historical variations and repetitions, it manages to preserve—or as Toufic says elsewhere, resurrect—the material experience more faithfully by including within the ritual its failure to represent the event adequately. This juxtaposition of ritual and photodegeneration becomes an emblem for Toufic's esthetic position: degeneration is the material of representation, its precondition; therefore the most truthful

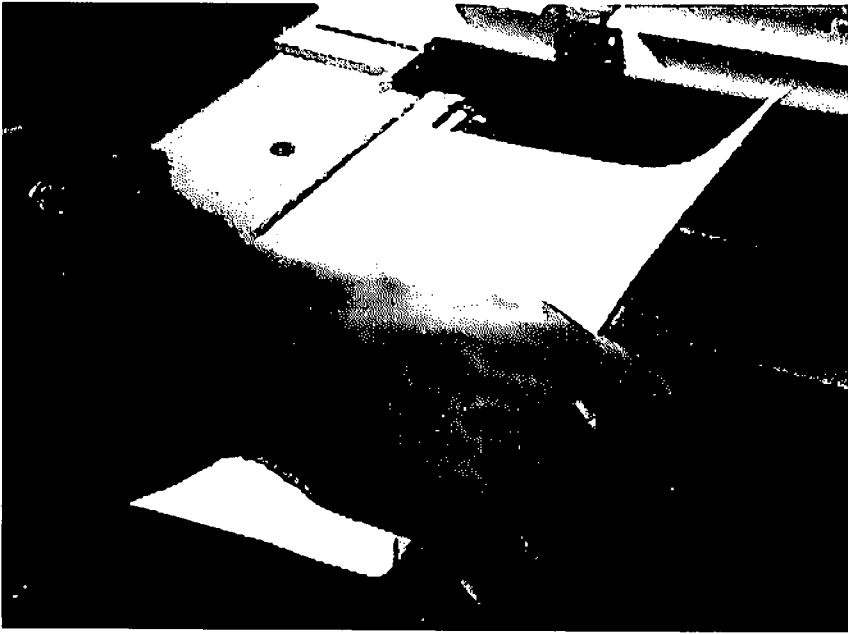


Figure 1 Photodegeneration.



Figure 2 'Ashoura.

representation is the one where degeneration becomes legible in its own right. His images of degeneration and distortion exaggerate the constitutive quality of regimes of representation and, in the sense that they include within the frame the problem of misrepresentation in the act of copying—of *taqlid*⁵—they begin to open up on what truth there is to be had in such representations: loss.

The film's implicit attacks on naive "realist" understandings of representation and authenticity begin to make sense when one looks at Toufic's writings, much of which he considers to be multimedia components to his films. Central to his constellation of poetical, philosophical and cinematic pieces is the notion of the *surpassing disaster*.⁶ The examples brought into sharpest relief are the catastrophes of Arab societies following the 1967 War: the Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli invasions of Lebanon, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the Gulf War, the *infitalh* in Egypt, etc. Arguing that communities are defined in part by the disasters they have survived—the Jews (the destruction of the temple and the Holocaust), the Japanese (Hiroshima and Nagasaki), the Armenians (the 1915–17 Genocide), the Shi'ites (the Martyrdom of Husayn), the Lebanese (the Civil War)⁷—Toufic suggests paradoxically that the heart of community and culture is a recognition of loss. But rather than being solely composed of historical event and material conditions, Toufic insists on explaining this loss as a mindset, one that is simultaneously individual-psychological and communal-cultural.

Certain disasters, certainly those that have as one of their effects the placement of the victims under quarantine, the rest of the world seeming no longer to exist, deserting them... sever their victims from history and hence from tradition. A filmmaker who in relation to such a disaster still thinks that tradition has continued, never has the impression that he has to resurrect even what *survived* the carnage; who can still ask, "why I and this building survived while so much else was destroyed?" and therefore does not suspect that all was destroyed... is hypocritical... [Toufic 1996: 71–72]

Toufic's writing pushes forward a number of questions. He suggests that at a certain degree the collateral damage of such catastrophes becomes a moot point. Toufic argues that what is left standing after a disaster is not what was standing before it; which is to say perhaps that even if material losses were to be recompensed, the cultural effects of such a trauma are not—nor should be—so easily erasable. In Toufic's system, it may appear that some people and objects actually survive a catastrophe. The fact is they do not, because what survives the catastrophe is no longer what was before the event.⁸

The task then, since the community has been separated from its tradition and history,⁹ is to resurrect the practices and texts of that tradition, a tradition which has become occluded, withdrawn.¹⁰ Paradoxically, the revival of tradition can only take place when the artist acknowledges that such tradition is somehow withdrawn, that it has effectively disappeared even in cases where it seems to have survived. As Toufic says, "I have to do my best to physically preserve tradition (the books, the films, the architectural monuments, etc.) while knowing that what I will save from the disaster survived it and therefore, no less than what has been destroyed, has to be resurrected—one of the limitations of history as a discipline is that the persistence of the document blinds it to the exigency of resurrection" [Toufic 1996: 74]. In other words, there is a blindness that accompanies

cultural survival—a blindness embodied in the assumption that the disaster did not affect everything. Perhaps worse than the collateral damage of the catastrophe is the damage caused by such blindness. Recognition that those things that survived are not alive as they once were becomes critical: to suggest otherwise is to participate in a false relation to tradition. Toufic's critique shares an affinity with complaints I have heard from (secular) intellectuals about the state of cultural production in Egypt: there is a crisis, not because of censorship, nor because there is any dearth of institutions to cultivate an active intellectual and esthetic scene that interacts with the legacies of Arab and Islamic cultures; rather, it is because of the very presence and activity of so many artists and critics that this crisis has come into being. It is not that works such as *1001 Nights* are unavailable to (elite) intellectuals, but that, in their availability, the urgency of reviving them as meaningful, cultural texts for the present is not obvious. Thus their continued existence on one level (in archives, museums, libraries, classrooms) is precisely what kills them on another.¹¹

Returning to the juxtaposition of images in *Ashoura*—repetition and tradition—Toufic's esthetics begin to show themselves as an idiosyncratic, radical notion of historicity: that for a tradition to have meaning in a given present, one has to recognize that its originary moment is irretrievably past and therefore has no *a priori* bearing on its futures. Hence the artist's relation to tradition shifts: his/her task is not to preserve a sense of authenticity, but rather to situate it in the realm of practices—practices that are not transfixed by images of the original; practices of repetition that are not paralyzed but rather enabled by a critical recognition of distortion and loss.¹² And thus the trance of 'Ashoura participants becomes a metaphor for critical insight.

CREDITS INCLUDED: THE POST-DISASTER AS MAD AND SUBLIME

Although Toufic's first video work, *Credits Included: A Video in Green and Red*, remains always allegorical, encoded in this private grammar of catastrophe and loss, its relationship to the Lebanese Civil War is quite clear. Perhaps the most striking moments are those towards the end, where we enter an insane asylum and the camera begins to stare unbearably at the patients: some smoking, others staring back, mumbling, or eating while patriotic songs murmur in the background. What follows these slow interior shots is a completely riveting monologue by what appears to be a schizophrenic patient, 'Abd 'Ali. The contrast of this scene—shot in the lush olive grove garden of the hospital—to the film's earlier scenes (inside the asylum, inside a café, or inside a car staring at the pockmarked walls of damaged buildings) begins to answer the enigmatic title: green reappears throughout the film as an image of the uncanny—in conversations about the unconscious attention paid to scenery in films, in the shot of a green thumb, in the madman's garden, in the bits of Fayruz' song *Lebanon the Green* or in the footage of ruined buildings near Beirut's Green Line at the beginning of the work.

The scene in the garden lingers with its subject through a variety of personality shifts, allowing 'Abd 'Ali to speak in an uninterrupted, apparently unedited, interview. And, immediately following this scene, the film places us in another institution, a French language school, where cloyingly innocent images of smiling

children's faces fill the screen. The sound is low, broken only by the voices of French-speaking teachers ringing off the concrete walls.

While *Credits Included*, like *Ashoura*, avoids narrative, the film has a certain order given to it by the titles or epigrams which frame the sections. For instance, the section on the insane asylum follows an elliptical quote about color ("[C]olors that work well together in writing are not necessarily the same ones that work together in painting"). Similarly, the scene with the school-children follows a passage from Gibran's *The Prophet* ("Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself") which Toufic then disfigures ("He should have said when talking about the sly Lebanese, 'Let us kill life so that the children would become orphaned, for then we can adopt them.'"). The logic is precise and horrifying: the Lebanese are alone in recognizing that life has stolen their children, and alone in taking the appropriate action: killing life in order to repossess their children. Thus the sweet school-children we see are, in a certain sense, already dead.

By ending the film with a juxtaposition of images from these two institutions—the asylum and the school—the work addresses the process of the Civil War's subjectification, its creation of madmen and amnesiacs—fragmented subjects both. By no means are these novel themes in contemporary Lebanese esthetic culture. What is so unnerving about the monologue in this video is that the person of 'Abd 'Ali almost contains the sum of Lebanon's sectarian differences. In other words, he seems symptomatic of a fragmentation that is strangely *inclusive*, rather than *divided*, in nature. He claims to be the messenger of the Prophet Muhammad, and Jesus, the Son of God. When he claims that they are all Israelis,

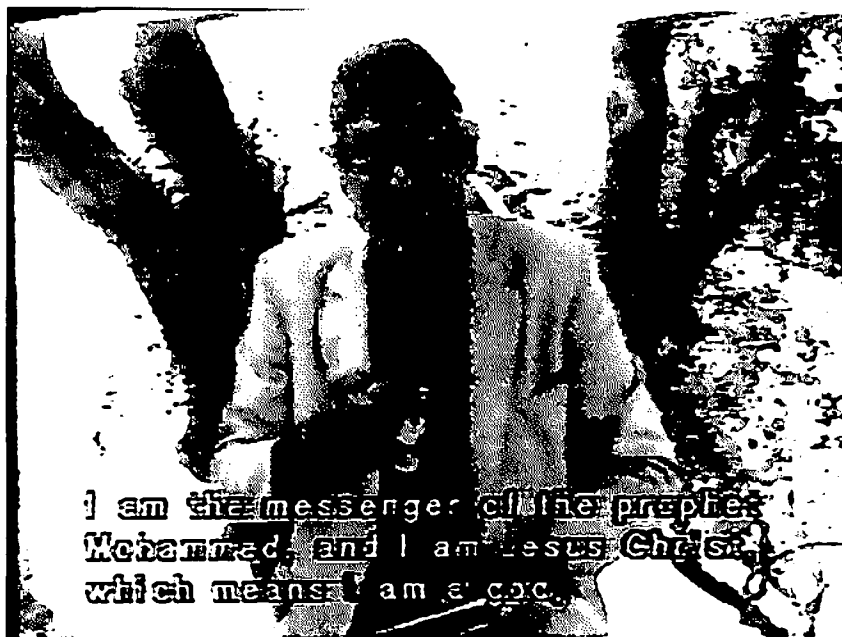


Figure 3 'Abd 'Ali.

or that the Israelis revere him as a god, we begin to get a glimpse of what the history of the Civil War would look like if it were incorporated in one body.

Here, rather than seeing 'Abd 'Ali as a once-unified individual now broken into parts, it is as if he were the embodied, impossible emblem for the integration of Lebanon's contradictions. The narrative of his discourse is in fact the history of the Civil War: but it is a narrative where the various historical players (Abu Ammar, Hafez al-Assad and Jumblatt) become confused with the names of the nurses who work at the hospital. In the process of the narrative, we are told that 'Abd 'Ali was institutionalized by his brother following the Israeli invasion—and that he dreams of the Lebanese army, along with his brother, coming to save him. The strangest thing about the sequence is the respect it shows its subject: the camera does not frame 'Abd 'Ali as an irrational character but rather more warmly, as a human, though allochthonous, one; the interviewer (Toufic) takes everything that 'Abd 'Ali has to say at face value, as credible in itself. What emerges is an access to absolute alterity of consciousness, something that is seldom presented so uncontained in films.

The images of the children become another face of post-War Lebanon. As opposed to the impossible unity of 'Abd 'Ali, one begins to feel that the school is a space for creating amnesia. The institution represents subjectification as fragmentation not only by virtue of the fact that the language of instruction is French, but because in this scene it is as if the war has never happened.¹³ This begins to echo his critiques elsewhere about how merely surviving a disaster does not mean that one has escaped its effects: if the survival produces amnesia, it manages to separate the survivor from tradition and history which, for Toufic, is tantamount to death. It is the disaster that follows on the heels of the material one.

The most graphic expression of the post-disaster in *Credits Included* is the first part of the film where the camera drives through potholed roads in the former Asmaq section of Beirut. It is raining, the windshield wipers sweep across the screen periodically. The car cannot drive straight for all the holes in the road. These scenes are transformed into longer shots of pockmarked walls of apartments, banks and other more unrecognizable structures. The sound is a rather abrasive composition by John Zorn (a *taqsim* sequence of Munir Bashir is mixed into the track, but not the *maqam kurdi* listed in the credits...). The dense shots begin to resemble disconnected snapshots taken of urban ruin, of recent ruins partially rebuilt and still, impossibly, in use. Concrete walls with gaping shell holes. Other holes bricked over. The focus turns to building signs—to illegible Latinate words and to Arabic words whose letters, normally written in a cursive, appear unstrung, broken. A strange vocabulary of lost letters. Gradually, the rain falls on the windshield with increasing intensity and the wipers stop their rhythmic moving. The last image gradually disappears under thickening sheets of water.

The sequence, with its layering of erasures, suggests that the object of its gaze is somehow the war. But the war is structured as both visible (in its effects) and invisible (there is no actual footage of the war)—and thus our reading of the architectural ruins is that of a palimpsest. This is no accident, for in his writings Toufic returns to the scene in Duras' *Hiroshima mon amour* in which the Japanese man reminds the French woman that she has, in fact, seen nothing of the nuclear holocaust she wants to commemorate and mourn.¹⁴ The war becomes the single



Figure 4 Wall under erasure 1.

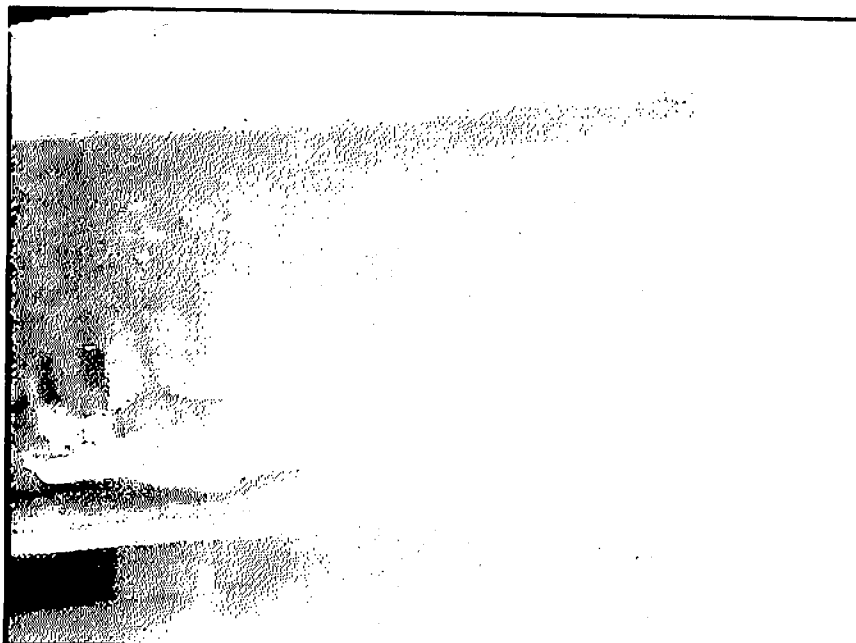


Figure 5 Wall under erasure 2.

event of this film even though it is not represented directly; moreover, it becomes an esthetic principle for Toufic. The disaster is such that representation will fail it, is such that in this failed gesture of representation a glimpse of it will become visible.¹⁵

The structure of Toufic's model of impossible representation is remarkably similar to Western philosophical writing on the sublime. That sublime is also structured as a *violence*—although a redeeming one in that the momentary damage inflicted on the viewing subject is one that creates the conditions in which the subject begins to transcend the limits of its cognitive self.¹⁶ While an insistence on something like such a "sublime inexpressiveness" for the magnitude of violence and destruction has been common in Lebanese war fiction, these "sublime" works do seem to differ from Western notions of the sublime in that they are not accompanied by such a promise of transcendence.¹⁷ This is especially true in Toufic's case, where this sublime representation of the disaster is concurrent with a withdrawal into the self: in fine, *Credits Included* is a melancholic text.

This notion of a "melancholic sublime" compels us to embed it within the filmic theory that stands as the title of Toufic's latest book, *Over-Sensitivity*. The title refers to the cultivation of an esthetic sensibility, a "sensitivity" to things "over": voice-over, overlooking, overturn, overexposure—all of which are moments that are inexplicable, unrepresentable in some way, and yet figure into the scene of representation. It is much like the sublime (that which stands just *under* the threshold, and thus *over* everything else). The idea of voice-over is perhaps the clearest example of an element which may shape a scene although it has no source within the diegetic world of the image. This effect, as Toufic would have it, is not particular to film: it is a condition in which some, such as survivors of catastrophes, live. In his writing, there is an explicit connection to the uncanny nature of sur-vival (*over*-living as being somehow "undeath"), and also to the idea of the civil war being finally surpassed, or passed-over: somehow the war too hangs *over* the scene silently forgotten, lending an aura to representation, but never being within the visual frame itself.

"THIS IS NOT BEIRUT"

"We define the aura ... as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" [Benjamin 1968: 222].

"You are not you and the homes are not the homes" Abu Tammam.

In June 1995, Toufic's video *Credits Included* was shown at a Beirut film festival with other films, including one entitled *This is not Beirut* by the Canadian-Lebanese filmmaker Jayce Salloum. The prominent novelist and journalist Ilyas Khouri reviewed the festival's films in his regular Sunday column [Khouri 1995]. Entitling his review "This is not Beirut," he said that the films had little to do with Beirut, that true to the title of Salloum's film, they were in fact *not* Beirut. One would suppose that Khouri would know better. Missing the explicit reference to Magritte's painting "Ceçi n'est pas une pipe," Khouri approached the works as if they should be judged by conventional, realist ideals of representation.

It is not clear if Khouri's comments were meant to apply to Toufic's film as well, since his statements were intended as a blanket comment on the works by Lebanese filmmakers in exile. But such a judgment, if leveled at Toufic's work, would miss more than one point. The film depicts Beirut according to a coherent (if admittedly idiosyncratic) esthetic system founded upon the generative notion of loss in representation: if it appears to misrepresent Beirut, if its distance from the buildings and people is jarring, this distance is also that which paradoxically allows for the possibility that an impossible representation of post-disaster Beirut might begin to show itself within the work. An uncanny image which says, "You are not yourself and Beirut is not Beirut." An image which, even if it fails to represent the object itself, is at least haunted by a sense of distance, by the aura of that object.

The counter-intuitive logic is compatible to that in Benjamin's essay. We should recall that the mechanical reproduction of a work of art is to be feared precisely because it appears to unveil the object in itself, to rid it of any sense of distance. Yet this representation may succeed in preserving this aura precisely because the effort to gain a sense of final proximity to the object will ultimately fail. This struggle seems to enact one central drama of esthetic representation, a drama which is at the heart of Toufic's work, I have tried to argue.

But to approach the significance of this drama to Arabic cultural production, one need not stay within the discourse of Western philosophy, as Toufic generally does and as I have done here. In fact, this dynamic contains an insight quite familiar to works of classical Arabic poetry. It is at least as old as Abu Tammam whose line of poetry I have included here, and indeed much older. It bears a strong resemblance to common themes of classical poetry, to the conventional reflection on loss and the abandoned encampments in the *nasib* (introduction to a type of classical Arabic poem). It dovetails nicely with the notion that *qasa'id* (classical Arabic poems) enact this generative notion of loss in representation. In this roundabout way, the outlines of Toufic's strange relevance to the esthetic and cultural debates of the Arab world should begin to seem clear. And in this sense he seems to be much closer to the *traditional* esthetic debates of Arab culture than many of his contemporaries. The problems addressed in his writing resonate with those that have been central to so many artists within the traditions of Arabic literature, especially poets: poets, whose lamentation of loss recognized the fragility of imaginative resurrections; and poets who, in recognizing the failure of those resurrections—the impossibility of union with a beloved or God—also allowed for loss itself to be registered as an image. For them, as for Toufic, the impetus of cultural production was this loss. Likewise the task of poetry for them was to make present that which is absent, a task which, even in the failing, somehow succeeds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Sibel Zandi-Sayek, Jalal Toufic, Ted Swedenburg, Steve Shaviro and Evan Haffner for their critical feedback and technical support while writing this piece.

NOTES

1. Jalal Toufic lives in the United States. He has taught film at San Francisco State University, and most recently at the University of California, Berkeley, and California School of the Arts. He has published three poetical-theoretical works on cinema—*Over-Sensitivity* [1996], *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* [1993], and *Distracted* [1991]—all of which are implicated in and by his video pieces, *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green* [1995], and *Ashoura: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* [1996]. His works form an occluded, singular universe of citation: references to *Vampires* appear in Toufic's *Credits Included*; while *Over-Sensitivity* is a multimedia component of his video *Credits Included* that also criticizes moments in *Ashoura*. The above quote is from *Distracted* [1991: 145].
2. In contrast, he views Iranian cinema—particularly certain post-Revolution art films in which the making of the film is embedded within the frame itself—very favorably.
3. Jalal Toufic, personal correspondence.
4. Admittedly these moves to bracket, postpone and disconnect share in the avant-garde logic of Toufic's works, a logic I am not entirely comfortable with. But, given his relative obscurity as a filmmaker and theorist, it seemed best for now to introduce his works on their own terms, in their own logic.
5. As with so much of Toufic's vocabulary, these terms need partial translation for their resonances to become manifest. His binarism of repetition and ritual seems to be a commentary on the Arabic word *taqlid* which contains notions of imitation, copying, faith, custom, habit and, perhaps most important to later parts of Toufic's argument, tradition.
As Toufic points out, he has insisted upon writing in English precisely because in English the distance between him and the subjects he discusses is explicit and critical. In other words, to write in Arabic risks the blindnesses created by the repetition of Arabic discourses on the subject, risks falling into the same thought-ruts. Similarly, in the terms of his argument, he is able to depict his subjects more faithfully since he starts from the premise that what he says will fail, will always mistranslate them. He acknowledges—and takes pleasure in—the problems this might create for those attempting to translate his works into Arabic: his choice of language was a deliberate act of alienating his expression from Arabic, making one doubt whether this critical move could ever be registered in translation.
6. This seems to nod at the Arabic words *karitha* and *nakba* which imply both the historical event of the 1967 Arab defeat and the cultural critiques that were generated by Arab intellectuals following that event. Toufic distinguishes between local disasters and more totalizing ones. The latter he refers to as surpassing disasters, local disasters which have accumulated to such a degree that their quantitative differences have become qualitative.
7. Toufic most often refers to specific *representations* of the above events (films such as Lanzmann's *Shoah* [1986], Kurosawa's *Dreams* [1990] and Duras' *Hiroshima mon amour* [Resnais 1987], and practices like 'Ashoura) since these disasters, utterly real in their materiality and undeniably corporeal in their experience, are nevertheless incomprehensible in their scope and hence resist human imagination, i.e., one can only approach them through representations which inevitably fail.
8. He uses the metaphor of vampires—the undead—to talk about such a condition. In fact, he would insist that he is not using a metaphor in describing the experience in that way since what has happened is an actual change in experience: a different state of mind has come into place, one which is not unlike how vampires would be if they existed or as (for Toufic) they do exist in the survivors of the Civil War or other disasters.

9. While one might wish that Toufic would address the recent corpus of work addressing the constructed nature of "tradition," situated as it is within various modernities, he does not. His writing on history is most often a philosophical gesture and rarely intersects with more conventional historical research.
10. The word "withdrawal" in his work reads as if it were the translation of the idea of *ghayb*, that which is occluded, hidden, supernatural, and more specifically, in Twelver Shi'ism, suggests the hoped-for reappearance of the hidden Mahdi.
11. What Toufic opposes is the impulse to turn lived practice into folklore studies and works of art into museum pieces. Though these institutions do create new meanings for pre-existing texts, these meanings, generated by this particular mode of preservation or "freezing the moment," are false in that the method itself is what kills their aura.
12. "Resurrection does not have to look like the earlier work, it may look like an adaptation of it. In rare cases, we feel that a film is not trying to adapt a book to another medium with its own specific parameters and/or to another historical period and hence another temporality, but to resurrect it..." [Toufic 1996: 78].
13. Elsewhere, he discusses a similar state of forgetfulness: "[M]any years into the civil war, like many other Lebanese, I too went to the beach despite the eventuality of artillery bombardments, leaving an hour before the time at which the bombs would customarily start to fall..." [1996: 90-1].
14. "[T]he Japanese man asserts to the French woman that she has seen nothing in Hiroshima despite what she has witnessed in the newsreels and in the museum in Hiroshima..." [Toufic 1996: 264].
15. Toufic remarks, "To the one attempting it, resurrection often fails. Nonetheless, in many cases his or her failure indirectly resurrects what was withdrawn by the disaster" [Toufic 1996: 86].
16. Kant seems quite clear about the traumatic nature of the sublime on the esthetic subject: "... that which excites in us, without any reasoning about it, but in the mere apprehension of it, the feeling of the sublime may appear ... to be unsuited to our presentative faculty, and as it were to do violence to the imagination; and yet it is judged to be only the more sublime" [Kant 1951: 83; emphasis mine]. Elsewhere, he refers to the pleasure taken in the judging of the sublime as a negative pleasure. Nevertheless, the effects are positive, transcendent: "[T]he sublime is that, the mere ability to think, which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense" [*ibid.*: 89].
17. Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose* [1982] comes to mind, as do Ilyas Khouri's *al-Wujuh al-bayda'* ("White Faces" [1981]) and Huda Barakat's *Hajar al-dahk* ("stone of Laughter" [1990]).

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