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## Standing For Something Not Present: Contested Representations in Contemporary Art

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Art and Visual Culture

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STANDING FOR SOMETHING NOT PRESENT: CONTESTED  
REPRESENTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Thesis format: Monograph

by

Trista Elizabeth Mallory

Graduate Program in Visual Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

This dissertation looks at the limits and possibilities for the representation of political conflicts in the Middle East through the work of three contemporary artists: Emily Jacir, Eric Baudelaire, and Jafar Panahi. Situated within a moment of increasing uncertainty and global unrest evidenced by the continuing involvement of the United States in various wars in the Middle East, the rise of new terrorist formations like ISIS, and the ongoing geopolitical struggle between Israel and Palestine, to name but a few examples, three interrelated questions are taken up in this study: Given the increasing pressure placed upon truth claims and the documentary image, how can we reassess modes of signification and representation to redeploy them within our contemporary moment? What is necessary to make intelligible political positions that are traditionally kept outside of the political and representational realm, as is the history and demands of terrorist groups? How might we think through the relationship between specific material histories and the politics of representation?

With these questions in mind, chapter one looks at Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film* (2005-ongoing) and *Material for a Film (Performance)* (2006) which represents the history of Wael Zuaiter, a Palestinian assassinated in 1972. I argue that Jacir's works engage with the propagandistic modes of representing the Palestinian struggle utilized in the 1970s by producing a material and narrative challenge to these modes. I contend that she accomplishes this by producing a 'filmic installation' that upsets the linear narrative of historical writing and the closed narrative arc of traditional documentary film.

Chapter two further investigates the linearity of historical narrative, documentary representation, and fragmented archival accounts through Eric Baudelaire's installation and film *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without*

*images* (2011), a project which struggles over how to represent the history of the Japanese Red Army's participation with the Palestinian Liberation Organization in a series of terrorist attacks. Rather than settling on one historical account, which could be read as sympathetic support or damning condemnation, I argue that Baudelaire instead produces three modes of historical explanation in order to shift his viewer's focus toward the register of representational possibilities.

Chapter three pursues the question of censorship through Jafar Panahi's *This is not a Film* (2011). Made in Iran while Panahi was confined to house arrest and smuggled out in a USB drive hidden in a cake, I contend that Panahi puts his own oeuvre at the crux of his negotiation of film by creating an argument in *This is Not a Film* through appropriated footage from, and commentary on, his previous work.

The three chapters of my dissertation elaborate on my theoretical questions through a close engagement with the work. As each artist struggles over the terms of representing fraught political and material histories, I analyze the social and political stakes of their engagement with new narrative and representational modes.

## Keywords

Emily Jacir, Eric Baudelaire, Jafar Panahi, Ariella Azoulay, Realism, Representation, Film, Photography



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## Introduction

Since the events of September 11 2001, the subsequent US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the emergence of information regarding US prisons and torture, the bombings in Madrid and London, the popular uprising of the Arab Spring, the ongoing military conflicts in Syria, and the emergence of ISIS, there have been attempts to map the space of conflict through documentary means.<sup>1</sup> However, along with the emergence of such attempts, recent digital transformations have facilitated the manipulation of photographs and digital videos, some of which already often require experts to read: for example the kind of aerial views that are produced by heat-sensing and drone cameras. Hence, the notion of “truth” has been placed into crisis in the realm of images and narrative, raising concerns that the images presented to us as evidence might have been manipulated either materially or discursively, a claim which generates uncertainties about how they are being mobilized discursively within such a fraught geopolitical landscape.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I do not want to claim that this is the only period of crisis historically, nor that its use of images is wholly unique – photography and documentary have developed historically alongside political crises. Instead I want to stress that our contemporary moment is one that seems to engage in documentary on a different scale. Along with the archival turn which has led to institutional support for documentary practices in an unprecedented way, there have also been shifts in technology, which have allowed citizens to become ‘witnesses’ and ‘filmmakers’ with their mobile devices, and have their media snippets circulate through the internet to a world wide audience within moments of their capture. For more on the attacks in London and Madrid, see ft. nt. 165 below.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed Stephen Colbert coined the phrase “truthiness” during the pilot episode for political satire television show, *The Colbert Report*, on 17 October 2005. Truthiness is a “truth” that a person claims to

The political use-value of the documentary image has surged. Despite the destabilization of the truth claims of documentary practices, artists and curators have continued to experiment with documentary. As Michael Renov observes, “If there is a consensus emerging among the newest generation of documentary scholars, it may just be that representations of the real have *more* rather than *less* power to shape our world.”<sup>3</sup> The sites for viewing documentary images have also expanded to include 24-hour cable TV news, various news outlets and social media interfaces on the Internet that the proliferation of hand-held devices has made more ‘mobile’, subway posters and billboards in urban centers, as well as exhibitions within museums and galleries.

In the last year alone, major museums in New York and Bologna mounted exhibitions on the intersections between art and politics in the Middle East. The titles of these exhibitions, *Here and Elsewhere*<sup>4</sup> and *Trop tôt/ Trop Tard. Middle East and Modernity*<sup>5</sup>, pay homage to French avant-garde films that interrogate the politics and

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know intuitively "from the gut" in that it "feels right" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts. (See <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/12/opinion/meyer/main2250923.shtml> and <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/24039/october-17-2005/the-word---truthiness>. (both accessed 18 November 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Renov, “Documentary Horizons: An Afterward,” in *Collective Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 324.

<sup>4</sup> At the New Museum in New York from 16 July until the 28 of September 2014, it exhibited the works of 45 contemporary artists from the Arab world.

<sup>5</sup> At the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna from 22 January until the 12 April 2015. The exhibition is located in the contemporary exhibitions section of Arte Fiera 2015 – International Art Fair of Modern and Contemporary Art. Last year’s version of this exhibition – also including works from Italian private collections – focused on Eastern Europe. See: <http://www.artefiera.bolognafierra.it/en/events/in-town/too-early-too-latebr-middle-east-and-modernity/2051.html> accessed 24 January 2015).

political limitations of representation.<sup>6</sup> The issues raised by these exhibitions dovetail with three interrelated questions: given the increasing pressure placed upon truth claims and the documentary image, how can we reassess modes of signification and representation to redeploy them within our contemporary moment? What is necessary to make intelligible political positions that are traditionally kept outside of the political and representational realm, as is the history and demands of terrorist groups? How might we think through the relationship between specific material histories and the politics of representation?

The exhibitions are also engaged specifically with the return to theories and modes of representation developed in the 1960s and 1970s in contemporary art.<sup>7</sup> Between the two films, and by extension between the two exhibitions that refer to them, there is an attempt to map the spatial (*Here and Elsewhere*) and temporal (*Too early, Too late*) coordinates of representation with regard to the writing of historical narratives.<sup>8</sup> What are

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<sup>6</sup> *Ici et Ailleurs* (1976) by Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, and Anne-Marie Miéville, and *Trop tôt/Trop Tard* (1982) by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.

<sup>7</sup> The theories I have in mind are specifically those of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies developed throughout the 60s and 70s. This group brought together theories of feminism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and Marxism. The work of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams has been particularly useful for me. Other influences include the back and forth in the pages of the British film journal *Screen Magazine* and its French counterpart *Cahiers du cinéma*.

<sup>8</sup> How you make the East and West representationally available has been a growing area of inquiry by artists and scholars, it encompasses discussions about who has the right to speak on behalf of another culture and questions around blockages of language and vision (translation and opacity). See, for instance, Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271-313, Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) and *Power, Politics, and Culture*, ed. with an intro by Gauri Viswanathan, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity" in *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, eds., Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher, (New York and London: New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 2004), 252-257, Emily Apter *Against World Literature. On The Politics of Untranslatability*, (London and New York: Verso, 2013), *The Translation*



the narrative structures available to us for the retelling and representing of contested histories? If we forego a linear historical narrative, how do we make sense of a scrambling of temporalities within history?<sup>9</sup> This dissertation focuses on projects by three artists who work through these questions using photographs, installation and film to address the politics of representation in the Middle East: Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film* (2005-ongoing) and *Material for a Film (Performance)* (2006), Eric Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images* (2008-2012), and Jafar Panahi's *This is Not a Film* (2011). Each of the works under consideration explore the political crisis they aim to represent through material and formal experiments — in other words, the form is crucial to their political content.<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on the material and formal quality of the work is not simply descriptive. My overarching argument here is that without looking closely at the form and material that comprise these works, we miss out on the heart of their political and representational intervention. This dissertation then, is an investigation into the way the contextual, material and formal qualities of a work fundamentally structure what it is that is represented and how this representation can be understood.<sup>11</sup> Before moving on to a longer discussion of the works and theories I take up, I first want to look at the examples

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*Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), as well as Walid Raad's ongoing project *The Atlas Group*.

<sup>9</sup> Laura Mulvey takes this question up slightly differently in her book *Death 24x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film" and "The Two Avant-gardes" in *Readings and Writings*, (New Left Books, 1982), 189-207, 92-104.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, "The rediscovery of 'ideology': return of the repressed in media studies" in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran and Janet Woollacott, (1983), 56-90.

of the exhibitions of *Here and Elsewhere* and *Trop tôt/Trop Tard* in order to better understand why this question of representation has become important again in art history.

## **Certain Resemblances: Here and Elsewhere and Trop tôt/Trop tard**

*Here and Elsewhere* and *Trop tôt/Trop tard* are not the only recent exhibitions on contemporary art in the Middle East — there have been numerous examples of these in the past decade.<sup>12</sup> And certainly these two exhibitions only represent a handful of artists who are working in this context.<sup>13</sup> However, they draw attention to a series of questions about representation and historical narrative that I take up in this dissertation and they perform a political maneuver that is also at work in the artist's projects I consider, namely the exhibitions look at contemporary politics of representation using historical theories of representation developed in the 1970s.

*Here and Elsewhere*, curated by Natalie Bell and Massimiliano Gioni, does this through reference to the Dziga Vertov Group's 1976 film *Ici et Ailleurs (Here and Elsewhere)*, a film which had two moments of making. First, in 1970, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin were commissioned by the Information Service Bureau of Fatah to

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<sup>12</sup> Other exhibitions include: *Contemporary Arab Representations. Beirut/London*, (2002-2003) at Witte de With, Rotterdam, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona and BildMuseum, Umeå, *DisORIENTATION: Contemporary Arab Art Production from the Near East, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq*, (2003) at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, (2006) Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Tarjama/Translation: Contemporary Art from the Middle East, Central Asia, and Their Diasporas*, (2009) Queens Museum, New York, *Light from the Middle East: New Photography*, (2012-2013) Victoria and Albert Museum, London, *Safar/ Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian, and Turkish Artists*, (2013) Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed there are a number of artists who are represented in both exhibitions: Kader Attia, Khaled Jarrar, Ahmed Mater, Hrair Sarkissian, Hassan Sharif and Wael Shawky.

make a film about the group's dedication to the liberation of Palestine through armed struggle.<sup>14</sup> Godard and Gorin went to Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria over the summer of 1970 and filmed Palestinian *fedayeen* as they trained for guerrilla warfare.<sup>15</sup> The film they were making was to be called, *Jusqu'à la victoire: Méthodes de pensée et de travail de la révolution palestinienne* (*Until Victory: Thinking and Working Methods of the Palestinian Revolution*). In September of 1970 hopes for Palestinian victory were swept away in the wave of raids and attacks on Palestinian refugee camps authorized by King Hussein of Jordan.<sup>16</sup> Since the footage Godard and Gorin shot in the autumn depicted the bodies of those killed in these attacks, the film could no longer be about Palestinian victory.

The second moment for this film came three years later in 1973, when Godard took it up again in collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville. The devastation of September 1970, followed by other catastrophes for the Palestinians, called for a different kind of film: *Ici et Allieurs* incorporates the original footage from Syria, Lebanon and Jordan with new footage filmed in Grenoble in 1974. The film shifts back and forth — here, France, elsewhere, the Arab world — and through the use of intertitles, news footage, and a deeply reflexive narrative voiceover, it investigates what these spaces are

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<sup>14</sup> Fatah - formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement - founded as a political movement in 1959, as a party in 1965 and led by Yassir Arafat until his death in 2004.

<sup>15</sup> For other attempts to represent this moment see Masao Adachi's film *Sekigun-P.F.L.P: Sekai senso sengen* (*Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War*, 1971), which I discuss in chapter 2 and also Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, translated by Barbara Bray, introduction by Ahdaf Soueif, (New York: New York Book Review, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> For an account of this shift in politics see Edward Said, "The Question of Palestine" and "Toward Palestinian Self-Determination" in *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1992) 3-55 and 115-181.

and how they are formed politically, discursively, representationally. But the footage's temporal lag — shot for one film, used in another — is equally important in the conception of what this film does for the history of documentary. No longer able to support the historical narrative of Palestinian victory, Godard and Miéville ruminate throughout *Ici et Allieurs* on how the earlier footage is now marshaled to tell a different story. In other words, at the heart of the film is an investigation into the representational capacities of film for a historically fraught reality.

*Here and Elsewhere* at the New Museum takes its title from Godard and Miéville's temporal and spatial collage created in the wake of Jordan's expulsion of the Palestinians.<sup>17</sup> Bell and Gioni state that they aim to exhibit the work of artists who “share roots in the Arab world and a critical sensibility with regard to images and image-making...”<sup>18</sup> The works included in the exhibition are engaged with contemporary practices of film and photography.<sup>19</sup> The curators use this title to allude to unfolding geographical struggles in the region while also signalling the temporality at the crux of the film *Ici et Allieurs*: that an image taken at one moment cannot be read in the same way at another. And yet, as evidenced in these exhibitionary undertakings and others like them, there is an urgency to return to these images of struggle in the past in order to make sense of them in our present moment. How can we narrate images of past events? Does

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<sup>17</sup> In his review for *Art and America*, David Markus discusses other possible framing titles of the show indicating that to hold together works from the Middle East under an encompassing frame is at best difficult, “Here and Elsewhere,” *Art and America*, 3 November 2014. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/here-and-elsewhere/> (accessed 12 January 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Natalie Bell and Massimiliano Gioni, “Here and Elsewhere” in *Here and Elsewhere*, Exhibition Catalogue, (New York: New Museum, 2014), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed Bell and Gioni exhibited over twelve hours of video making the exhibition a demanding viewing experience.

the discursive frame of the image usurp the original intent of the photographer?<sup>20</sup> How can we ask images to witness, and what kinds of historical narratives can we ask them to support?

Pushing these questions in a different direction *Too Early, Too Late. Middle East and Modernity*, like *Here and Elsewhere*, takes its title from a film. Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's footage for *Trop tôt/Trop tard* is divided geographically between the rural landscapes of Brittany and the urban settings of Egypt, and temporally between the peasant revolts in France in 1789 during the French Revolution and the unrest in Egypt in 1952. Straub and Huillet, like Godard, Gorin and Miéville, re-write the images they capture with a voiceover and, in doing so, they point out how meaning can be made or disrupted through filmic language. The film opens with a continuous shot from a car window in Paris, circling around a center we never see — the Bastille square. This is a metaphor; we can circle around a moment in history, we can look out and try to see its effects, but its core, the essence of the event, is lost to the flow of time. Tracking shots continue to pan back and forth over the landscape in France, while the film's clipped audio track delivers statistical information about rates of starvation and disenfranchisement among peasants in the regions and towns of France leading up to the French Revolution in 1889, or information about Egypt in the 1950s. Indeed Straub and Huillet underscore the difficulty of picturing an historical event.

*Trop tôt/Trop tard* unfolds between very different historical times and spaces. In this respect, the film is about knowing how and when to look, or as Celine Condorelli recently put it in an interview with Straub, “knowing how to wait to be able to see what

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<sup>20</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 1977).

one sees, in terms of what is too early or too late.”<sup>21</sup> But it is also a film about the position of those looking, the point of view geography and history provides and what these access points do to understandings of the thing looked at or filmed. These ideas about looking, about moving back and forth in time to register a moment in history, or in circling around the effects of an event we can no longer access, are examined in each of the case studies I consider in this dissertation.

*Too Early, Too Late* at the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna ambitiously charts the historical relationships between East and West. Beginning with the foundations of Orientalism in the Christian west by the Council of Vienne in 1312 and moving forward to cold-war nationalist and socio-economic conflicts between the West and the Soviet Bloc,<sup>22</sup> *Too Early, Too Late* concludes its history with the still unfolding divide between the East and West, which it argues is no longer framed through national and economic divides of the Cold War, but rather through competing notions of ‘civilization’ conceptualized through religion and the historically loaded idea of modernity. The exhibition, like the film it takes its title from, is concerned not only with presenting a history, but also with placing the moment of these historical shifts in language, in learning, in representation. Questions about overarching historical narratives and their disruptions also run through the chapters in this study.

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<sup>21</sup> Celine Condorelli and Jean-Marie Straub, “Speaking of revolutions: Too Early, Too Late,” <http://lux.org.uk/blog/speaking-revolutions-too-early-too-late> (accessed 1 March 2015). The interview and film were recently part of a larger project, *Il n’y a plus rien*. 9 Mar 2011.

<sup>22</sup> The council was most famous for disbanding the Knights Templar, although it also elected chairs of Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac, in Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Avignon and Salamanca. However, as Robert Irwin points out in his book *For lust of knowing*, (New York: Penguin, 2007), 47-8, the chairs of Arabic were not actually established. Irwin’s text is written as a critical response to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

These exhibitions draw on films which were created during a particular moment in the theory of representation and politics, specifically a moment when filmmakers were grappling with how to make representations in the wake of the deterioration of colonial power, the student strikes in Japan against ANPO in the early 1960s, the 1967 disaster in Palestine and the subsequent breakup of the Arab alliance, the student revolts and general strike of May and June 1968 and the Vietnam War protests. At the heart of these filmic investigations is a re-interrogation of the truth claims of documentary film and photography.<sup>23</sup> Experiments with voiceover, the incorporation of newsreel and other mass media forms, interviews, and guerrilla filmmaking, were pursued not simply as formal investigations, but rather as issues of political urgency. As Sylvia Harvey notes in her book *May '68 and Film Culture*, “political debates were often the motive force behind the emergence of different conceptions of film-making and...of film criticism.”<sup>24</sup> In a similar vein, this dissertation is concerned with work that seeks to represent fraught historical moments by emphasizing and experimenting with material histories.

## Theoretical Framework

The experimental works examined in this dissertation unfold on two levels: first on the level of historical narrative, where Jacir, Baudelaire and Panahi scramble, retrace, and otherwise upset the dominant understanding of a historical event, and second on the level of the image, where each artist also works with the accrued histories of film and

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<sup>23</sup> Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1980), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

photography in particular national contexts to either undermine or support the narratives they put forward. In order to understand the narrative operations at work in these projects, I return to theories of meta-history from the mid-to-late 1970s and to different understandings of realism that draw on fields as diverse as the philosophy of science, sociology, cultural studies and Marxism. Working through these theories sheds light on the debates surrounding realism and representation and helps us understand where these artists' practices can best be located.<sup>25</sup>

In 1978 Hayden White collected a series of essays that spanned his writing from the mid-sixties to mid-seventies and published them under the title, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Beginning with a piece from 1966 "The Burden of History," the essays collected in the volume attempted to make sense of the relationship between reality and the narrative structures which organize its representation, or as White says in the opening pages of his introductory essay,

Our discourse always tends to slip away from our data towards the structures of consciousness with which we are trying to grasp them; or what amounts to the same thing, the data always resist the coherency of the image which we are trying to fashion of them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> These debates have spiraled in a number of directions in our contemporary moment and it can be confusing to comprehend the stakes of a particular project without understanding the implications of the realism it addresses. I'm thinking for instance of the burgeoning field of Object Oriented Ontology, which is quite different from the epistemological realism I have settled on here. See for instance the recent *Texte Zur Kunst* issue on *Speculation* 93 (March, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Hayden White, Introduction: "Tropology, Discourse, and the Modes of Human Consciousness" in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press),



White puts forward two important concerns in this text: first, as I've already mentioned, he is preoccupied with the gaps and excesses between events and our attempts to make sense of them through narrative discourses or structures of meaning, and second, White lays out a theory of the *tropic*, which he explains is “the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively.”<sup>27</sup> Discourse, for White is not just a system of mimetic description — a form of representation — but is constitutive of the very ground upon which we decide what will count as fact and what modes of comprehension and communication are best suited to conveying those facts.<sup>28</sup> The tropic in White's theorization is a double plane; it is both the figure and the ground.

Hayden White joined the newly formed History of Consciousness program at University of California, Santa Barbara in 1978 and helped to shape the future directions of that program throughout the 1980s. He and his fellow faculty members (like James Clifford, Fredric Jameson, and Donna Haraway, among others) were not alone in their attempts to locate the epistemological and ontological status of discourse, narrative and fiction. In a related field, Thomas Pavel, a literary theorist and novelist at the University of California, Santa Cruz, published a book *Fictional Worlds* (1986) in which he traced how the field of literary studies systematically imported theories from analytical

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1-25, 1. See also White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> White, *Tropics*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

philosophy and speech-act theory in order to explain the semantics of fiction.<sup>29</sup> These studies were generally limited to modal logic (i.e. if, then statements) where theorists were less interested in fiction itself than in the implications of fictional statements for representational language.<sup>30</sup> While the further development of fictional worlds and possible worlds theory is outside the purview of this dissertation, it's important to note that theorists like Pavel, Ruth Ronen and Marie-Laure Ryan were working through narrative structures and the formation of 'worlds' as "a way for describing epistemic accessibility and even as a metaphor in the philosophy of science denoting relationships between mutually exclusive paradigms."<sup>31</sup> In other words, these studies were likewise concerned with how to structure the relationship between narrative and the realities or 'worlds' they sought to describe.

But how does this relationship between the figure and the ground, or between the world of representation and the world of reality map onto investigations in the field of contemporary art? The figure and the ground — the epistemology and the ontology in this model — is a theme that is explored, for instance, in Eric Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May*, which I focus on in my second chapter. Baudelaire works through this relationship in his film and exhibition by looking at the Japanese theory of Landscape

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> See both Ruth Ronen, *Possible worlds in literary theory*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1994), and Pavel for their analysis of this shift fiction makes from philosophy to literary studies. For key texts in the further development of fictional worlds, or possible worlds theory see: Marie-Laure Ryan's three books, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and *Avatars of Story* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and Michael T. Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Ronen, 5.

film or *fûkeiron* that Masao Adachi develops in his films from the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> Adachi was interested in seeing if the landscape could offer up a more encompassing understanding of the structures of power than focusing on the narrative of singular subjectivities. Baudelaire explores this question again, but in his work the figure and the ground shift — the figure is the field of representation, the ground is the hegemony and the historical context that allow these representations to be read. For Baudelaire, unlike White, the figure and the ground are on resolutely different planes. Baudelaire’s work is also interested in world construction and in how these different conceptions of worlds are taken up — what does a revolutionary ideal consist of if not imagining an altogether different world? How can we understand these revolutionary aims without stepping into the logic that underpins them? In the case of Baudelaire’s work, this is the terrorist logic of the Japanese Red Army. As Pierre Zaoui summarizes from Hegel’s thoughts on Revolutionary Terror, “their liberation and revolution[ary] ideal was nothing but an ideal devoid of content...a confusion between images and reality...”<sup>33</sup>

British sociologist Terry Lovell takes up these ideas of reality and fiction in her book *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (1980).<sup>34</sup> Lovell is specifically interested in the changes that Louis Althusser’s theories of Marxism wrought on the field of cultural studies. She engages with Marxist categories to more fully theorize a Marxist theory of mass culture in order to find, as she claims, “meaningful and causal

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<sup>32</sup> *Ryakushô renzoku shasatsuma* (A.K.A. *Serial Killer*, 1969) and *Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War* (1971).

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Zaoui, “Anabasis of Terror: Trying (Not) to Understand” in the *Libretto* for Eric Baudelaire’s *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images*, 2011, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1980).

relationships between art, mass culture and society.”<sup>35</sup> Interested in the way art and mass culture function as social phenomena, Lovell attempts to account for them within a sociological study, but before doing so, she provides an overview of three accounts of realism: empiricism, conventionalism and historical realism and discusses how these theories of realism have affected our ability to understand art and mass culture.<sup>36</sup> The accounts she discusses differ in both their approaches and in their effects, but each grapples with the issue of how to relate our experience of the world to the representations we make of it, or put differently, how to negotiate the registers of epistemology and ontology. Lovell’s discussions of these different theories of realism have been important for my analysis of what realism is and how it relates to the terms epistemology and ontology. Each of the chapters in my dissertation are ultimately concerned with this question in material and artistic representations.

Empiricism, according to Lovell, is an ontology which posits a world independent of theories of consciousness (so empiricism is in this way different from the dual structures of figure and ground that White posits in his theory) and it relies on *sense* experience to verify reality.<sup>37</sup> We can say something is true about the world only when we can observe it directly, but because observation can very quickly become subjective, empiricists are stringent regarding experimental controls. This is all well and good, according to Lovell, except that empiricism collapses an understanding between what is

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<sup>35</sup> Lovell, 7.

<sup>36</sup> See also the impressive collections of essays assembled in the anthologies, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited and with an introduction by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) and David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1966).

<sup>37</sup> Lovell, 10-11.

known and what can be known (through verifiable sense experience). Ontology, as she says, rather than remaining a separate category, is instead reduced to epistemology, what can be observed is reduced to what is.<sup>38</sup> The problem with this model is twofold: the subject which observes is unproblematized in the theory of empiricism (it is universal, and ahistorical), and the theories themselves become slippery — they are simply shared constructs for thinking about the world, but their relationship to that world exists only through observation and an agreement on the conventions of the model for thinking these observations through (shared concepts of language, space and time).

Conventionalism, according to Lovell, seizes upon the problem empiricism grappled with — that there is no universal, a-historical observer and no neutral language through which one can communicate their observations. Lovell points to Thomas Kuhn's conventionalist idea that "all languages of observation and experience are theory-impregnated."<sup>39</sup> Here, then, we see the bind in Hayden White's theory of the *tropic* in historical narrative played out in theories of scientific observation — the theory argues that we can attempt to make claims about the world, but these claims are themselves structured through systems of language and therefore already presuppose certain structures of knowledge. For Kuhn different theories, different modes of explaining the world are incommensurable because they do not operate within the same terms and there

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lovell, 15. Thomas Kuhn is perhaps best known for his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

is no neutral language to arbitrate between them. Therefore all systems of knowledge constitute their own worlds and relativism is the result.<sup>40</sup>

For the humanities, of course, epistemological relativism reigned in the period of postmodernism — the problem of establishing criteria to determine which claims should be privileged over others is impossible within this model.<sup>41</sup> The problem with epistemological relativism within the sciences perhaps reveals the danger of this more immediately — if the world is constructed by theory, how can we account for the consistency through which the material reality of the world operates? In other words, in a really practical sense, how do we get technology to work? Don't our theories have to reliably relate back to a world that is outside our theoretical construct?<sup>42</sup>

The third category Lovell lays out in her text is 'epistemological realism'. She notes that this model acknowledges that much knowledge is socially constructed and historically contingent. But it also insists that "the world cannot be reduced to language or to theory but *is independent of both, and yet knowable.*"<sup>43</sup> In other words, epistemological realism is a system of knowledge that relies on a deeper structure of ontology. Lovell goes on to explain, realism in this sense, with a depth model of ontology requires its theorists to take into account the fact that reality is not reducible to what is

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<sup>40</sup> There is a fascinating connection here between experimental scientific worlds and the fictional worlds taken up in possible worlds theory. It's very difficult to imagine what conventionalism looks like spatially, there is no center from which to map, there is no criteria for judging which of the possible worlds is more "real" than the others.

<sup>41</sup> Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 1-54.

<sup>42</sup> Frederic Jameson takes this up in a discussion of Saussure's theories in his book *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> Lovell, 17, my emphasis.

observed (empiricism) so we must develop theories about how the world works, but these theories cannot be an end in and of themselves (conventionalism) they must return back to the world to be tested.<sup>44</sup> There must be a correspondence between theories and what is observed and experienced in the world.<sup>45</sup>

I have used the distinctions Lovell makes across the areas of empiricism, conventionalism and epistemological realism to navigate the slippages between fact and fiction in contemporary art and the debates that have been ongoing since the advent of post-modernism around ‘truth’ claims. How to make sense of these when thinking through work? How to place them within the larger field of knowledge production? This has seemed increasingly important as artists have begun to use history as the content for their artworks.<sup>46</sup> What counts as truth claims and for whom? Who gets to circulate these claims and how can art intervene in these kinds of representations? How does our organization of the epistemological and ontological planes impact our ability to understand historical representations? While I do not claim to answer these questions fully in my dissertation, part of my project is to look at these questions through my case studies. Judith Butler has recently and helpfully pointed out that this project, “is hardly new but bears repeating ... whether and how we respond to the suffering of others, how we formulate moral criticisms, how we articulate political analyses, depends upon a

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<sup>44</sup> Lovell, 18-22.

<sup>45</sup> Here Lovell goes much further into the philosophy of science than is useful for me here. See her bibliography for “Recent Debates in Philosophy of Science,” 102-104. Eventually Lovell brings her discussion to ‘Marxism as a realism’ and indeed there is a correspondence between her notion of realism and Marx’s formulation of appearance vs. reality — both insist upon a depth model of ontology.

<sup>46</sup> Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse” *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004), 3-22.

certain field of perceptible reality having already been established.”<sup>47</sup> Attempting to understand theories of realism and representation through the categories of epistemology and ontology has helped me to think through the complexities of truth claims and the struggles over meaning in photographic and filmic representation of contested histories.

## Arresting Images

In her recent book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag asserts that “The photographer’s intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it.”<sup>48</sup> Her assertion comes at the end of the second chapter, following a discussion of photography’s role in waging war and preceding the third chapter which takes up photography as a galvanizing tool for protest. Though both of these chapters explore the affective role a photograph can play in political struggle, Sontag insists that it is the discursive space that surrounds the photograph that pushes its claims in one direction or another. The photograph stands in as evidence for a narrative produced elsewhere; the photographer is relegated to engaging the shutter.

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler catches this narrative deferral in Sontag’s writing and pushes it elsewhere, calling attention to the ways the framing of the photograph helps to narrate its content, “The question for war photography thus concerns not only what it shows, but also how it shows what it shows. The “how” not only organizes the image, but

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<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), 64.

<sup>48</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (New York: Picador, 2003), 39.



works to organize our perception and thinking as well.”<sup>49</sup> Between Butler and Sontag there is a push and pull over what the image is and can do — does the image narrate events in the world? Is it subjected and inserted into discourses which subsume it? And of course depending on which images and when, the answers to these questions are different. But the questions themselves are crucial and are differently inflected in each of the chapters I take up in this dissertation. Sontag and Butler’s conception of the image comes up explicitly in my chapter on Jacir’s *Material for a Film*, where I use their theories to help read Ariella Azoulay’s idea that we should watch the photograph in order to produce a more ethical reading. But these questions about how photographs can represent and what their relationship is to time and narration moves through my second and third chapters as well.<sup>50</sup> In addition to thinking through how the photograph enters into a structure of meaning, is the question of the photograph’s *material* relationship to the world.

Photographic discourses have been concerned with notions of realism from their inception, using the notion of the index to secure the relationship between representation and reality in the photograph. The notion of what *has been there* in Roland Barthes’ theorization sears the photographic substrate, imprinting it with light that has touched the object or person represented. It is a material guarantee. The photograph operates on a second register, that of the image. Here the photograph is a guarantee in that it *resembles* the objects or persons captured. Furthermore, the photographic representation has been

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<sup>49</sup> Butler, 71.

<sup>50</sup> In preparing this introduction I came across a recent article that brings together Sontag and Azoulay’s ideas about photography, Joscelyn Jurich, “You Could Get Used to It: Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay, and Photography’s *Sensus Communis*” in *Afterimage*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 2015: 10-15.

theorized as an impartial one — it is a mechanical capture. Whereas in a painting the eye and the hand of the artist would necessitate choices, hierarchies and biases, in a photograph no such subjective intervening appears. Of course we know the story is more complicated than this because photographs can be altered, doctored, cropped. They can be cut and rearranged. They can be destroyed. This promise of impartial representation that the photograph offers through its mechanical capture and dual function as index and image is frustrated throughout Jacir's, Baudelaire's and Panahi's work. In each of these chapters I investigate how the artists complicate the ostensible neutrality of the photographic record. Jacir does this by setting up a narrative and then allowing for its reversal and re-reading within the space of the exhibition. She points to the instance of the photographic capture and the impossibility of returning to any historical moment. Baudelaire unsettles the indexical quality of the photograph in two ways. First, by juxtaposing photographs and film, and, second, by experimenting with historical narratives that depend on the highly unstable discursive placement of photographs for their meaning, Baudelaire stresses that photographic images are only ever partial captures. Panahi likewise strains the relationship between index and image through his use of documentary and fictional modes of filmmaking.

The central question in my dissertation is how the contextual, material, and formal qualities of a work fundamentally structure what it is that is represented and how this representation can be understood. This question arose during my research into Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film*. While working through the floor plan, checklist, and installation photographs for the exhibition, I realized that the whole exhibition was created from photographs Jacir had taken — both her own photographs of the places she

traveled to while researching Wael Zuaiter's life and photographs she created of archival material she found. This material aspect of the exhibition had been largely ignored in reviews that emphasized the conceptual and political aspects of her work, but it became central to my argument — namely that Jacir creates a filmic installation purposefully to invoke the specific language of 1970s Palestinian film while refusing to suture it into a film of this kind with a set duration and a closed narrative arc. I argue that to read Jacir's work only at the conceptual and political level is to ignore how the work *works*, that is how it represents and disrupts the narrative of Wael Zuaiter's life and the struggle for Palestinian Liberation. This kind of careful looking at both the content and material components of work is also present in my reading of Eric Baudelaire's *Anabasis of May* and Jafar Panahi's *This is Not a Film*. In each chapter the central question arose through an investigation into the artist's source materials and conceptual framework. Most of my research therefore took place in curatorial files, through floor plans, checklists and installation shots, in interviews with the artists and curators, and in the careful watching of films.

## Chapter Summaries

The chapters of my dissertation are organized around three case studies: Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film*, Eric Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May*, *Fusako Shigenobu Masao Adachi and 27 years without images*, and Jafar Panahi's *This is Not a Film*. Each chapter focuses on one case study in order to provide an in depth reading of the materiality of the work and to thoroughly unpack its historical and political context. The chapters progress over these case studies in two trajectories: first they move thematically

from the still to the moving image while engaging in questions of duration, documentary realism and historical narration, but, at the same time, they also move from gestures of potentiality in Jacir's *Material for a Film* through a journey (narratively and representationally) in Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May* to finally end with negation in Panahi's *This is Not a Film*. This organization not only foregrounds the way that each work deals with questions of representation differently, but also stresses their similar insistence on working through representation as both material history as well as on the conceptual level.

This selection of case studies also contemplates historical narration and representation across a range of moments and locations while staying primarily within the historical and political context of the Middle East. Chapters one and two look at works that focus on the contested space of Palestine in the late 1960s and early 1970s by trying to make sense of struggles over its territory and conception in our contemporary moment. Emily Jacir's work is specifically focused on Wael Zuaiter, a Palestinian writer and translator who was assassinated in Rome in 1972, and her project is an investigation into his life and the circumstances of his death. Chapter two examines Eric Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May*, a film and installation that attempts to account for the years that Fusako Shigenobu, the leader of the Japanese Red Army, went underground in Lebanon and linked up with the Palestinian Liberation Organization's struggle for a Palestinian state and world revolution. Chapter three moves beyond the Arab world to take up the more recent past of the aftermath of 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution and the Islamic government's censorship of artists, which continues even after the recent 2009 Green Revolution. Each work spans the historical and contemporary moments by employing

archival film clips, interviews, and anecdotal evidence in order to think through different modes of representation.

Chapter one looks closely at two of Emily Jacir's works, *Material for a Film* and *Material for a Film (Performance)* installed together at the Guggenheim, New York, when she won the Hugo Boss Prize in 2009. One part of this chapter traces the way Jacir's construction of a filmic installation necessarily informs how we read *Material for a Film*, and indeed her spatialization of Wael Zuaiter's life is an answer to previous Palestinian propaganda films from the 1970s. I argue that Jacir deliberately avoided making a film about Zuaiter's assassination, in order create a representation that is more complex. Unlike earlier Palestinian films, her work includes a multitude of narrative temporalities, spatial reversals, and an open narrative arc. Building on this, the second part of this chapter looks at Emily Jacir's 'filmic installation' through the lens of Ariella Azoulay's idea of 'watching photographs' in order to further investigate what duration does to our reading of the still image. In essence, I ask what these two kinds of looking produce *narratively* in relation to the material they address.

Chapter two focuses on Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May* and its exploration of narrative and representation. Like Jacir's work, Baudelaire takes up a moment in the history of Palestine — for him however it is the story of the Japanese Red Army leader Fusako Shigenobu linking up with the Palestinian Liberation Organization as told from the view point of Fusako Shigenobu's daughter May and Japanese filmmaker Masao Adachi. To date, accounts of Baudelaire's work, like those of Jacir's, have concentrated on its conceptual framework, but instead my chapter focuses on the way the film, the installation, and the accompanying *Libretto* that comprise *The Anabasis of May*

complicate each other's narrative structures. In this case, while the film itself is a complex series of interviews and archival excerpts, the exhibition and *Libretto* present further versions of how this story can be assembled and told. Using three different modes of historical narration in the same space allows Baudelaire to investigate their limits, and looking at these limits sheds further light on potential relationships between still and moving imagery that are taken up in my first chapter. In essence, Baudelaire produces a kind of wandering research that struggles over the epistemological ground of the events he recounts, and in the process, forces us to question how we understand the narratives his work puts forward. As revolutionary struggle? As accounts made by terrorists? Who gets to determine these labels and when they are used? Whereas my investigation of Jacir's work in chapter one is concerned with the way *material* histories inflect how historical events are communicated, my discussion of Baudelaire's work focuses on how the structures of narration shape the histories we receive in the film, installation, and libretto.

I also consider how Baudelaire's work investigates the temporality of the 'event' and its capture. Arguing that Baudelaire portrays events as a 'breaks' or 'ruptures' in the Benjaminian or Badiouian sense, I show how these function in disruptive ways: by forcing us to look again at the nature of reality and representation, or by asking us to account for events and think about our relationship to the past. His work asks whether we can recognize events as they unfold or only once they have taken place? Or if the images we create of events are merely the results of their effects? Or, further, how the images we make of events produce our notions of reality?

My final chapter looks at Jafar Panahi's *This is Not a Film*. Like Jacir and Baudelaire's work, Panahi's film has been read as a political film, but much of its reception has not taken into account how the film itself is constructed formally. I contend that Panahi puts his own oeuvre at the crux of the negation in *This is Not a Film* by fabricating it from excerpts from and commentary on his earlier works in order to reconsider their status as "films" as well as the stakes in the politics of representation within the context of stringent government censorship in Iran.

*This is Not a Film* unfolds in the wake of the 2009 Presidential election in Iran and the resulting Green Revolution. The film undoes itself by proposing different documentary modes of representation and then undermining them, before moving on to fictional modes of narration and undermining those as well. It centers on the stakes of representation in a context that conspires against it, all of which returns me, at the end of the dissertation, to the urgent questions I asked at the beginning. How can we represent a contested history? Who can represent it, how and to whom? How do the material histories alter and nuance our understanding of what is represented? Such questions are not new, because as I noted earlier, they preoccupied activists, artists, writers, theorists and filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s, but they are resurfacing once again in contemporary art of our own period with a renewed urgency.

## Chapter 1

### Watching Photographs: *Material for a Film*

Form is something more than the random, casually selected clothing draped across the body of a political ‘context’.<sup>51</sup>

It is as if one saw a screen with scattered colour-patches, and said: the way they are here, they are unintelligible; they only make sense when one completes them into a shape. -- Whereas I want to say: Here is the whole. (If you complete it, you falsify it.)<sup>52</sup>

“I went back to Rome in 2005 to continue collecting material for a film.”<sup>53</sup>

In 2009 at the Guggenheim Museum, New York two works by Palestinian artist Emily Jacir were on display: *Material for a Film* (2004-ongoing) and *Material for a Film (Performance)* (2006).<sup>54</sup> In these works Jacir makes, collects and assembles documents including photographs, film and audio pertaining to Palestinian poet and writer Wael

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<sup>51</sup> Harvey, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Oxford, 1980), vol. 1, Remark 257. Cf., Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 7.

<sup>53</sup> Emily Jacir, *Emily Jacir*, (Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, 2009), 72.

<sup>54</sup> *Material for a Film* was exhibited in the 2007 Venice Biennial and *Material for a Film (Performance)* was commissioned for the 2006 Biennial of Sydney. The works are shown together for the first at the Guggenheim in 2009. As of spring 2015 it is also the last time they are exhibited together. In a discussion with Jacir she stated her ambivalence about the result of their combined installation, indicating that *Material for a Film (Performance)* might be seen to disrupt the unfolding narrative of *Material for a Film*.



Zuaiter's life. At first glance her research appears to be compiled to redress a historical wrong — to bring to light the murky circumstances surrounding Zuaiter's death and the reason for his assassination in 1972, to put the historical record straight. However it quickly becomes clear that Jacir's projects are as much about the construction of an archive of a life, as they are a commentary on the materials available for inclusion within this archive, and an investigation into narrative and filmic representation.

Arranged within a gallery space divided into four small rooms, *Material for a Film* contained letters and postcards, photographs Jacir made of the covers of books from Zuaiter's personal library, and photos of Zuaiter as a young man. Jacir incorporated sound and video into this installation as well - Mahler's Ninth Symphony played intermittently at the entrance to the main gallery space, a recording of Janet Venn-Brown's telephone conversations tapped by the Italian police played at a low volume in one corner, and a series of short clips from the movie *The Pink Panther* in which Zuaiter played an extra looped on a flat screen.<sup>55</sup> The installation presented an archive of materials that had been sought out and meticulously researched by Jacir. The second component of the show, *Material for a Film (Performance)*, was created by Jacir at a shooting range, and was present in its effects only — one thousand pristine, white books arranged in funereal rows on narrow shelves at the far end of the gallery, each book

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<sup>55</sup> Jacir was in fact the first to spot Wael Zuaiter's participation in this film and she strung together this series of clips. Zuaiter enters and leaves the screen repeatedly; the clips are looped so there is no end to his appearance and disappearance.

bearing the trace of a single uniform bullet, shot by Jacir with a .22 caliber pistol.<sup>56</sup> These books were shown along with sixty-seven photographs from Zuaiteer's copy of *A Thousand and One Nights*, the book he was carrying in his pocket when he was assassinated in 1972, a stray .22 caliber bullet later found lodged in its spine. Jacir's scans begin with this errant bullet's point of entry and trace its path through the pages of the text.

While the overall archival structure of Jacir's installation has been noted in the limited reviews of this work, little critical attention has been paid to the peculiarity of the archival material itself, namely the fact that nearly everything in the exhibition, excluding a few original documents, is photography.<sup>57</sup> In other words, in Jacir's archival installation we lack the material specificity of each of the objects, the thickness and

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<sup>56</sup> There is one other record of this performance, a photograph of Jacir at a firing range that appears in the catalogue which accompanies the show.

<sup>57</sup> T.J. Demos, for instance, writing on Jacir's installation in the catalogue for the 2008 Hugo Boss Prize, surmises, "*Material for a Film* exemplifies Jacir's ambition to express her relation to the recent travails of Palestinians living under occupation and diaspora, which she does via conceptualist strategies presented in a variety of mediums." He then includes a characterization of her other works (like *Crossing Sudra* (2002), *Ramallah/New York* (2004-2005), *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948* (2000) and *Where We Come From* (2001-2003)), going on to say, "Roving over photography and video, painting and sculpture, Jacir's heterogeneous practice parallels the dispersion of Palestinian Life." *The Hugo Boss Prize*, 2008 (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2008), 59. His examination of Jacir's work does not unpack the effects of this materiality on the reading of her work. Neither do other reviewers: See for instance, Ken Johnson, "Material for a Palestinian's Life and Death," *The New York Times, Art and Design*, 12 February 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/arts/design/13jaci.html> (accessed 26 February 2011) and "Bones' Beat: Emily Jacir at the Guggenheim," *The Village Voice*, 19 March 2009, [http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2009/03/emily\\_jacir\\_is.php?\\_r=1&scp=4&sq=jacir&st=cse](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2009/03/emily_jacir_is.php?_r=1&scp=4&sq=jacir&st=cse) (accessed 26 February 2011). For an interview discussion of the work which provides more details of Jacir's thinking, but also doesn't unpack the materiality of the work I want to signal here see Murtaza Vali, "All that Remains" *ArtAsiaPacifica* (Jul/Aug 2007) <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/54/AllThatRemainsEmilyJacir> (accessed 3 March 2011).

texture of the original paper or the scent of the old books. Instead, we encounter photographic representations of these objects. The flattening and sequencing that results from this mediation has a very particular aesthetic effect. Indeed, as her title suggests, the archive is the raw material for the kind of film equivalent or filmic installation that Jacir creates.<sup>58</sup>

*Material for a Film*, as an installation presenting artistic research, departs from the works proceeding it in Jacir's oeuvre. T.J. Demos, in his recent book *The Migrant Image*, enumerates the different strategies Jacir has used to respond to and critically engage with the geopolitical conflict between Israel and Palestine.<sup>59</sup>

She has experimented, for instance, with the photo-text presentation (*Change/Exchange* [1998]), the task-based system (*My America (I am Still Here)* [2000]), the statistical survey of responses (*From Texas with Love* [2002]), the use of the newspaper advertisements (*Sexy Semite* [2000-2002]),

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<sup>58</sup> In the catalogue that accompanied Jacir's exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (25 August – 25 November 2007) and Villa Merkel, Galerien der Stadt Esslingen am Neckar, Germany (16 December 2007 – 10 February 2008) she explains her title in connection to a book published by Janet Venn-Brown, Wael Zuaiter's companion of eight years. "One chapter, titled "Material for a Film" by Elio Petri and Ugo Pirro is comprised of a series of interviews conducted with the people who were part of Wael's life in Italy, including Janet herself. They were going to make a film, but Elio Petri died shortly afterwards and the film was never realized. I went back to Rome in 2005 to continue collecting material for a film." *Emily Jacir*, (Germany: Nürnberg, 2008) 72. When asked if this is her last piece using this material she further states in her interview with Murtaza Vali, "I don't know, I can't think past this piece right now. My secret fantasy is that a filmmaker will enter the installation and write a script and make a film based on this material." *ArtAsiaPacifica* (Jul/Aug 2007).

<sup>59</sup> See T.J. Demos, "The Art of Emily Jacir: Dislocation and Politicization," *The Migrant Image* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 103-123. This chapter mentions *Material for a Film*, but does not address it at length.

the role of the artist as service-provider (*Where We Come From*), and the mixed-media installation (*Material for a Film* [2005-present]).<sup>60</sup>

Demos astutely claims that the significance of these various conceptualist artistic strategies in Jacir's practice are related to two factors: the first is linked to a moment within conceptual art (for him exemplified in the work of Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler) when "political engagement was seen as sanctioning a "tactical" use of mediums, a "by any means necessary" approach to materials and conventions".<sup>61</sup> Demos reminds us that this approach within conceptual art is positioned against a consideration of medium specificity as the most important criterion for the assessment of art. Second, and importantly for Jacir, Demos notes that "conceptualism proved to be the most effective means of pursuing a politics of representation capable of addressing oppressive systems and institutions" and he cites the work of Fred Wilson, Adrian Piper and Felix Gonzalez-Torres among others as paralleling and informing Jacir's work.<sup>62</sup> Demos posits that these shifting modes of artistic engagement opened up various formal possibilities for representing the contested geo-political terrain of Israel and Palestine. "...the Israeli negation of Palestinian claims to a homeland and the consequent experience of the forced Palestinian exile motivated Jacir's peripatetic use of various mediums and strategies."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Demos, 106.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

For Demos then, Jacir's engagement with different modes of artistic representation can be mapped on to her own exilic experience.

In this chapter I want to push Demos' claims further to argue that Jacir's creation of a 'filmic installation' for *Material for a Film* is related directly to the history of Palestinian film. My aim in this chapter is therefore to read Jacir's installation as a radical engagement with the narrative and representational strategies that have been central to Palestinian histories and liberation struggles — documentary film. By doing so I want to argue that *Material for a Film* is not only a continuation of Elio Petri and Ugo Pirro's project of making a film about Wael Zuaiter's life and assassination, as others have pointed out, but it takes up the materiality of film to signal the way the representation of Palestinian struggles have been formulated in the past and Jacir's work experiments with new ways of narrating this history now. Without making a film, Jacir employs the language of film both in its performative aspects and in its materiality, but to what end? How does the space of the installation call to mind earlier moments of Palestinian documentary filmmaking and move to affect our understanding of the history she presents? And what does viewing an archival installation of photographs vis-à-vis the idea of film do to our understanding of narrative within her work?

## **Watching Photographs**

This last question regarding the practice of reading photographs *as though* we might be able to set them in motion again, as though they are indeed material for a film, has been

taken up by Ariella Azoulay, an eminent Israeli scholar and curator whose body of work focuses on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In her recent book *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Azoulay insists that we need “to stop looking at the photograph and instead start watching it.”<sup>64</sup> For Azoulay, the shift from ‘looking’ at a photograph to ‘watching’ it allows the viewer to move away from aesthetic or formal readings that leave aside historical and political contexts in order to focus on the capture of what ‘has been there’.<sup>65</sup> For Azoulay, watching the photograph necessitates that this larger context effects our interpretations, emphasizing that to understand the photograph we must try to recover its circumstances, its temporal and spatial setting. Or, put differently, that still images are animated through their encounters with the different histories, politics, and cultures we bring to bear on our interpretations of them. What Azoulay is calling for, in effect, is a kind of watching that sets the still photograph in motion in order to arrive at a more ethical reading.

A secondary set of concerns in this chapter, then, is to bring together Azoulay’s notion of ‘watching’ with Jacir’s ‘filmic installation’ in a kind of thought experiment: what are the stakes of these two kinds of looking? What do they offer up to the complex history of representation for the Palestinian struggle, and what do the differences in their approaches to duration do to a reading of the photographic record? Given the rapid movement and shifting terrain of the geo-politics in the Middle East, what do these two kinds of looking offer for articulating partial or working theoretical accounts?

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<sup>64</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 20.

<sup>65</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

## ‘To Watch’

Azoulay's call ‘to watch’ the photograph is as much a theoretical operation as an embodied visual duration and it relies on a few ideas: First that there is a civil contract of photography and this governs both what kinds of photographs can be taken (from which locations, from whose perspective) as well as what kinds of community these photographs can produce. Second, and relatedly, Azoulay makes a distinction between *the photographic event* and *the event photographed*. A reversal of terms that for her captures the difference between the structures of power that allow certain kinds of social and civic formations to be visible while rendering others invisible, neutral, or undefinable. And *the event photographed* is what is actually captured, the document that might appear in the archive. Before moving on, I want to unpack what these two components of her theory are and how they shape her notion of “watching”.

Azoulay expands on her formulation of ‘the civil contract of photography’ in her book project and photo-history, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950*.<sup>66</sup> She uses a legal theoretical framework of ‘citizenship’, understood through Giorgio Agamban’s *State of Exception* and Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology*, to discuss the practice of photography, its technological apparatus, the roles of creating a photograph (as subject and object), and the reception of

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<sup>66</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

photography.<sup>67</sup> Carl Schmitt was a philosopher and political theorist working in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. He first theorized a ‘state of exception’ when attempting to describe how a representative government could mobilize in moments of crisis — the exception to the representative government was an extraordinary suspension of the rights of its citizens in order to act swiftly on their behalf.<sup>68</sup> Schmitt’s theory of a ‘state of exception’ was of course taken up by the Nazis and used to devastating effect, but it has also more recently been investigated by political theorists on the left in order to account for the role of the state in crisis.<sup>69</sup> For instance Giorgio Agamban, an Italian political philosopher, has developed Schmitt’s theorization of the ‘state of exception’ negatively within the context of Italy. Where Schmitt championed this state as one of the ways the Nazi government could implement its aggressive aspirations, Agamban argues that the ‘state of exception’ erases the rights of people within a parliamentary process. Under this state they become subjects within a totalitarian government rather than citizens. Azoulay pulls these two political theorists into her own notion of ‘watching’ in the context of the

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<sup>67</sup> Giorgio Agamban, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. trans. George Schwab, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>69</sup> Chantal Mouffe has taken up other aspects of Schmitt’s political theory. For example in her recent book, *On the Political*, she has transformed his friend/enemy relationship into one characterized by agonism and antagonism. See Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).





**Figure 1** Alex Levac, Hebron, 2000.

Palestinian struggle against Israel’s narration of historical events by arguing that if we bring ideas about what legally constitutes or counts as citizenship to bear on photography, we will arrive at a more ethical reading of what photography is, and what kind of civic community it can produce.<sup>70</sup>

Central to her theory of photography as a civil contract is an argument about what goes into the making of a photograph itself. For Azoulay it is a dual question, “we have

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<sup>70</sup> There is an increasing concern with the status of the legal framework of the citizen and the notion of citizenship. There has been a recent surge in the study of how the photograph operates in law through witness accounts as well: See Blocker, *Seeing Witness*. Eyal Weizman’s work in this area has pushed these studies into the realm of forensics and law, see: Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, *Mengele’s Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press/ Portikus, 2012). Also see Lawrence Abu Hamdan, “Aural Contract: Forensic Listening and the Reorganization of the Speaking Subject” in *Forensis - The Architecture of Public Truth*, edited by Forensic Architecture, introduction by Eyal Weizman, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014) 65-82.

photographs from particular places but not from others...what is the significance of the fact that we possess no photographs from places where we know there were cameras, and what could have been in the photographs that we don't possess."<sup>71</sup> In other words, it is not simply a question about the content within a particular photograph, or about photographs that were purposefully *absented* from the archive, but rather she insists on the role hegemony plays in the forming of photographic records. What, for instance, is it possible to say or to photograph at a given time, and what kinds of knowledge and power structures govern these enunciations, these visibilities? Indeed, this question is at the heart of both Jacir's and Azoulay's experiments with the photographic archive. They put pressure on the seeming naturalness of archival contents asking why the archive contains what it does, why it has omitted information, and who gets to make these decisions. But importantly these questions are not only about the 'institution' of the archive and its selective practice, though they do reference the long history of the archival turn within the humanities over the last forty years, they also attempt to make visible circumstances of power in the world that appear *in the photographic event*.

Azoulay's theory continues one step further, she also argues that something happens when we look at photography as citizens: Photography interpellates us as a kind of citizen audience. The theory of interpellation developed by Louis Althusser in his well known article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" is part of a sequence of arguments: 'ideology subjects, its function is to subject, to unfold the process of

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<sup>71</sup> Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 7.

subjectivation.”<sup>72</sup> According to Althusser we are called into place as ideological subjects through language. He uses the example of a police officer calling from behind “Hey, you there!” The subject, hearing this call, recognizes themselves as the “you” being hailed and turns around.<sup>73</sup> Frantz Fanon develops interpellation slightly differently in his book written twenty years earlier, *Black Skins, White Masks*.<sup>74</sup> Rather being hailed through language and from behind, interpellation occurs in Fanon’s theorization in the realm of the visual and face-to-face.<sup>75</sup> For Fanon, it is the gaze of the other which places us. He describes the look of a little boy on the street and his comment to his mother, “Look, a nigger!”<sup>76</sup> But for both Althusser and Fanon there is a duality in the exchange, the other places us either in language or through vision.<sup>77</sup> For Azoulay, interpellation occurs through looking at the photograph, or rather, watching it.

While Azoulay’s investigation of citizenship in relation to photography raises many engaging questions about subject formation, legal rights, the interpellation of an audience, and the discourse of photography, her call to begin ‘watching photographs’ is somewhat troubling in its application. Though Azoulay insists that photographs should be read ethically, by which she means that their formal qualities and historical and political

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<sup>72</sup> Pierre Macherey, “Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon” *Journal of Radical Philosophy*, 173:9 (2012): 9-20, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

<sup>74</sup> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans., Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, c.2008), 38.

<sup>75</sup> Macherey, 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

context should be taken into account, what this amounts to in practice is a great deal of research that allows her to try “to read the photograph by narrating the photographic event in writing”.<sup>78</sup> Azoulay argues that in this way the context of the photograph can be pulled out by *looking at the photograph itself*. ‘Watching’, it seems, is not a metaphor for close looking; for Azoulay, watching the photograph is reading its history back into the scene the photograph depicts. Her theory of ‘watching’ a photograph and her practice in this way seem a bit at odds. For example, while describing a photograph taken by Alex Levac in Hebron in 2000 (fig.1), she begins at the level of denotation, but her account quickly shifts into a narrative of events that cannot actually be seen in the photo:

A Palestinian man is lying in the middle of the road with his face down. A puddle of blood spreads under his left knee. No one is allowed to approach him to give medical care. The only one who can come close takes his time, holding his rifle - which might have served him a few minutes ago to shoot the Palestinian - commanding, threatening, abolishing the urgency with his display of naked power. The Palestinian lying on the road understands that no one can recognize his urgent condition - the critical wound in his leg, loss of blood, the ideal conditions for infection, evidenced by his hands, completely blackened from touching the road. All he can attempt is to overcome the urgency of his physical state and renew the civil skills and gestures he was forced to repress in order to protect himself. With difficulty, he pulls his head and shoulders off of the road to address the soldier, trying to negotiate with the soldier, to convince him with only his mouth and hands that he should stop hurting him, that he is not armed, that his body is

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<sup>78</sup> Azoulay, 11.

wounded, that it was probably an error that he was shot, that he has been mistaken, that he ought to be treated as a citizen.”<sup>79</sup>

Azoulay tells us an Israeli soldier has shot a Palestinian who has done nothing wrong.

The photo frames only two figures, but her reading seems to see outside the edges of the photograph when she writes that no one else can approach the wounded man. She returns

the photographic instant to duration when she asserts that the man with the gun is

approaching *slowly*. The inner thoughts of the Palestinian himself are also expressed in

her account, as is his apparent understanding of the situation and his physical sensations.

She concludes by explaining the meaning of his frozen pose; his demand to be recognized as a citizen. Simply put, her account of the photograph exceeds its ability to

communicate. Rather than reading it, she reads into it.<sup>80</sup>

What is most intriguing about Azoulay’s reading of the photograph is the peculiar gap between her assertion of what she claims to do - frame the photograph within its historical and political context in order to more thoroughly understand how it constructs an ethical exchange and a contract of citizenship - and what I understand her to do, which is to frame the photograph within her own discursive account. But this contradiction, rather than simply indicating an oversight by Azoulay, must be seen as part of the larger problematic she is struggling with - one which is at the center of representing contested histories, namely, how can we represent traumatic or contested historical moments which so often result in an archival lack? How can we give citizens who have historically been

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<sup>79</sup> Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 72.

<sup>80</sup> See Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital” in *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 443-52.

deprived of a voice, and citizenship, a place to speak? How can we represent histories which are purposefully treated within dominant hegemonies as if they don't exist?

Of course, Azoulay is not alone in thinking through these ideas and struggling over the terms of photography for representation. In her recent book *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag asks similar questions of the photographic record: What does it mean to look at images as an audience? What happens when we look at images of others suffering far away? What kind of subjectivity does this sort of looking produce? What can these images tell us? Sontag concludes that the photograph, in its momentary capture, cannot hold us in a narrative that would produce an ethical pathos. In other words, for her regarding the pain of others through the photographic record only serves to haunt us, while a narrative of events produces the ethical component we need to take action.<sup>81</sup>

Judith Butler, on the other hand, takes up these questions as well as Sontag's conclusions in her book *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* For Butler, unlike Sontag, the photograph can be read at an ethical level. Its capture can hold us or arrest us as viewers. She insists that thinking through the framing of the photograph might provide a challenge to Sontag, stating "the photograph is not merely a visual image awaiting interpretation; it is itself actively interpreting, sometimes forcibly so."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 122. "Eventually the specificity of the photographs' accusations will fade; the denunciation of a particular conflict and attribution of specific crimes will become a denunciation of human cruelty, human savagery as such. The photographer's intentions are irrelevant to this larger process....A narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, to feel." 121-22.

<sup>82</sup> Judith Butler, "Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag" in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, 71.

So Azoulay's claims that the photograph subjects us as citizens and that we should 'watch it' — a process of reading which she claims inserts it back into its temporal and material moment, but which in practice seems only encourage narrative speculation, is struggling along the same lines of questioning as Sontag and Butler. All three theorists are grappling with the difficulty of how to understand photography within an ethical framework: How then should we understand Azoulay's use of the verb 'watching' if it seems to trouble the theoretical tasks she sets for it? And if Sontag and Butler each also come to opposite conclusions about whether or not the photograph can produce an ethical reading? What does 'watching' actually mean for Azoulay? What are the stakes of 'watching' a still photograph? What does this framework allow for or produce in relationship to Emily Jacir's use of the filmic installation?

To be sure this verb plays a supporting role in the larger context of Azoulay's book, but its slipperiness, its promise and refusal to deliver is also compelling because it seems to lend itself to a much older theoretical history surrounding materialism; materialism in the sense of the material substrate, the physical fact of a photograph, but also a materialism concerned with the significance of what is represented, and this representation's location in the material world and history.<sup>83</sup> These two notions of materialism seem to shift uncomfortably in Azoulay's formulation of 'watching' - her theory is an exciting attempt to grapple with these difficult terms. So while Azoulay's theoretical account may be contentious to some, I am interested in the way her work and Jacir's work puts pressure on photographic representation. Each wants to return to the

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<sup>83</sup> See Wollen, 189-207.

struggle over the representation of reality in a moment when these struggles seem particularly urgent again. What happens if we read Jacir's work, which I see not only as an artistic practice but as a praxis that takes up and challenges existing modes of representations, as struggling with the same terms as Azoulay's? If we think of artistic practices as praxis, as developing theories about the world, then it seems particularly useful to see the ways in which each is contributing to, putting pressure on, and experimenting with new ways to challenge existing modes of address, new struggles over political accounts, and developing new ways of making the world mean.<sup>84</sup>

In what follows I perform a detailed description of Jacir's *Material for a Film* as it was exhibited at the Guggenheim, New York in 2009, after Jacir won the Hugo Boss Prize. I want to closely examine the layout and content of the exhibition in order to show how the items included and their staging enact what I term above a 'filmic' archive. I am curious about the ways Jacir's presentation of photographs within this installation opens up or puts pressure on the theory of 'watching' put forward by Azoulay. Because the work takes the form of an installation and is not presented as a film, Jacir plays with narrative flow disrupting the traditional unidirectional narrative of a documentary. Jacir frustrates the terms 'filmic' and 'installation' throughout this work, and I argue she does this to both signal and challenge existing understandings of the Palestinian struggle for liberation, and the visual language of its representation.

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<sup>84</sup> As Bertolt Brecht aptly remarks, "For time flows on, and if it did not, it would be a bad prospect for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new." *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 82.



## A Filmic Installation

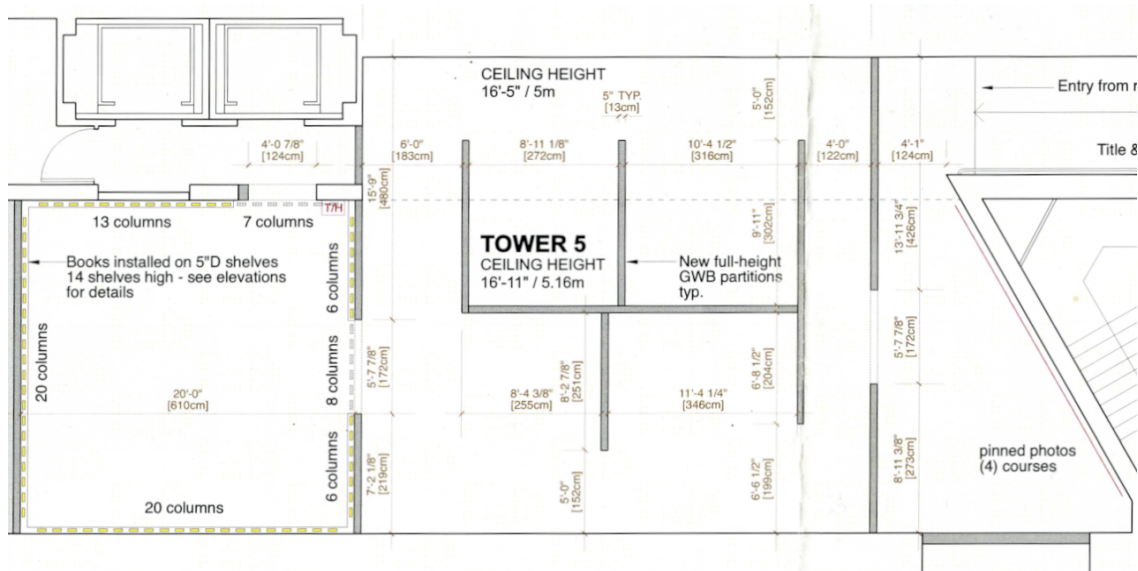


Figure 2 Floor plan for Emily Jacir's exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2009.

*Material for a Film* opens with the moment of Wael Zuaiter's death, a beginning that establishes a double meaning of "the shot". The 'opening sequence' frames sixty-seven photographs from *A Thousand and One Nights*, the book he was carrying in his pocket the night he was assassinated, a .22 caliber bullet later found lodged in its spine. Unbound and spatially drawn out each page bears the puncture of the bullet serving as a peculiar metric for the material density required to stop it. The evidence of its destruction is filmically multiplied in the 'frames' of the photographs. To follow the bullet's path the viewer must move, zooming in to pan slowly across each page, its trajectory becoming animated like a proto-cinematic flip book from one page to the next. This reading, enacted through movement, allows the directionality of the text itself to become apparent – to follow the bullet's impact, the widening and fading of its trace, it's necessary to begin on the upper right and move across the pages right to left as though reading the Arabic text of the story. The registration of the pages on the wall point to the text's directionality as well – the last four pictures hang in a truncated row like an uneven

sentence at the end of a paragraph, they are aligned to the right.



**Figure 3** Emily Jacir, *Material for a Film (Performance)*, installation detail, 2009. Photo: Greg Weight. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

After this ‘opening’, which sets a violent and somber tone, Jacir’s ‘title sequence’ appears in black letters, framed in the space between two walls separating this first room from the others in the installation. While there are no didactic instructions supplementing the ‘correct’ viewing sequence for Jacir’s work, there are subtly suggestive spatial, audio, and visual cues that prompt a specific directional flow. For instance, here, with a choice to go right or left down a short hall, to the right there only are white walls, while to the left a black speaker embedded in the wall playing Mahler’s Ninth Symphony beckons. Jacir’s filmic installation pulls to the left. The music within the installation, acting as a

soundtrack might within a film, sets the tone and drives the narrative forward.



Figure 4 *Material for a Film*, installation detail, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

The first two galleries in the core exhibition space contain objects which act as placeholders for important moments of Zuaiter's life; they produce a sort of narrative flashback and establish the *mise-en-scene*. Movement toward the speakers and into the first of four small rooms within the core space of the exhibition causes a crescendo and subsequent fade of the symphony, though it continues on softly in the background as eighty-one photographs of the book covers from Zuaiter's library come centrally into view. Like the page scans from *A Thousand and One Nights*, these book covers recall segments of a filmstrip, or the reading of photographic proofs. They are also hung in equal rows save the last – which, echoing the directionality of the Western titles of the books and acting as a counter shot to the Arabic script of the bullet pierced pages from



the opening shot - is aligned left. This shot and counter shot seem to underline Zuaiter's desire to intellectually bridge the Middle East and the West. To the right of the book covers is a photograph of a coin Jacir took from his apartment building in Rome, to the left an image of Zuaiter as a young man hangs next to photographs of his personal correspondence. As Paul Ricoeur notes, "if history is a true narrative, documents constitute its ultimate means of proof. They nourish its claim to be based on facts," here we see the facts of Zuaiter's life.<sup>85</sup> Directly across from these books are thirteen photographs from a photo diary Jacir kept of her research in Rome on Zuaiter's life. These photographs depict the area surrounding his apartment in Italy. The introduction of Jacir's own photographs into this exhibition of primarily archival material emphasizes her role in creating the archive of material we see. In this sense, the exhibition nods both to the mediation of the archival material, and to the subjectivity of the author.



**Figure 5** *Material for a Film*, installation view, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Archives, Documents, Traces," in *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art* ed. Charles Mereweather, (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006), 67.

Jacir has purposefully created a space in which the archival material surrounds us so that unlike other installations, which emphasize the ‘narrativization of space,’<sup>86</sup> this filmic installation forces ‘glimpses’ into future moments of the story and returns us to images we have already seen as we make our way around a room. These glimpses and returns act like jump cuts or glitches in the projector, they fracture our spatial and temporal experience. Even here in the first small room of Jacir’s exhibition a filmic reading of her installation must acknowledge the spatiality of the exhibition itself.

A flat screen TV hangs to the left of the entrance into the second small room of the exhibition. It plays three clips of Wael Zuaiter working as an extra in the film *The Pink Panther*. Jacir found Zuaiter in this film and sutured these clips together.<sup>87</sup> The loop is tightly cut, obscuring the context of the film it is taken from. Intercut into the filmic flow of Jacir’s installation of still photographs Zuaiter enters the screen repeatedly, focusing attention on his fleeting appearance and endless reappearance. Zuaiter is full of life and movement here in an installation that speaks to the circumstances of his death. The video hauntingly calls to mind the tension between ‘hallucinatory vivacity’ and ‘illusion’ that Barthes uses to describe photographic and filmic images. “The photograph, he says, represents ‘an anthropologically new object’, in that it constitutes ‘a new form of hallucination: false at the level of perception, true at the level of time’. The film, on the

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<sup>86</sup> One might think here of work like Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* where the sequences of images is set up quite literally like the strip of a film. Also see Raymond Bellour’s discussion of the narrativization of space in installation art, “Challenging Cinema,” *Screen Based Art*, Annette Balkema and Henk Slager eds., (Lier en Boog, 2000), 35-43.

<sup>87</sup> Conversation with the artist, 27 February 2014.

other hand, is ‘always the precise opposite of an hallucination; it is simply an illusion...’<sup>88</sup> But here the illusion seems like a hallucination as well — this film loops are cut so tightly that we almost do not see the illusion of time unfolding, but at the same time these brief gestures make Zuaiter appear more real and alive than his frozen image in the other photographs.

Further, here he is acting, but Jacir calls upon this footage to depict his reality. Indeed, Ken Johnson claims that Jacir “‘forges a portrait’ of Zuaiter’s life,” a claim that I understand in two different senses of the word “forged.”<sup>89</sup> Jacir, working thirty years after Zuaiter’s death, makes and gives shape to a specific legacy of Zuaiter’s life. But she also forges his life by producing a copy or re-presentation. Zuaiter becomes what, for want of a better term, I would call “character-like”, and here this filmic loop allows us access to a semblance of his life only as an extra in a film. The reading of Jacir’s installation again complicates this in a few ways. In film, documentary or fiction, there are actors. In Jacir’s ‘film’ there are no actors - Zuaiter plays himself, and is unaware that he is performing. Reversing Godard’s idea that actors should let their “reality support his [fiction],”<sup>90</sup> Zuaiter’s fiction, his role as an extra in the *The Pink Panther*, is instead called upon by Jacir to support his reality.

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<sup>88</sup> Burgin, 37. Here he references Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire*, (Paris, 1980), 177.

<sup>89</sup> Ken Johnson, “Material for a Palestinian’s Life and Death,” *The New York Times, Art and Design*. 12 February 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/arts/design/13jaci.html>. (Accessed 26 February 2011).

<sup>90</sup> Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, *Speaking About Godard*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3.

The terms of fiction Jacir is playing with here are further complicated within the history of Palestinian struggle, indeed Godard in his film *Notre Musique* (2004) observes, “the Jewish people become fiction, the Palestinian people become documentary.” They *must* make a truthful and direct claim to history — they can’t afford to have their testimony mis-read. It is this blurring of accounts, the ‘fabricating of the true’ that we might recall of Azoulay’s readings of photographs that Jacir is also playing with here. Her exhibition challenges the boundaries of what constitutes ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ in the positivist sense. It asserts a realistic account of Zuaiter’s life that does not depend on strict adherence to the formal language of realism.

Partially because of this excerpted and looped scene, the texture of Jacir’s installation shifts in this second room: The ‘opening scene’, the ‘title sequence’, and the first room have introduced the ‘filmic language’ of Jacir’s exhibition, and here its grammar is being played with. For instance, whereas in the previous room Jacir’s own photographs and scans of archival material are situated at roughly eye level, here a print of Zuaiter with two women hangs significantly higher. Another print in the same room is at the same height — it is an image of his childhood home. These two images were taken from very old and brittle photographs and they are reworked here to appear quite sculptural.<sup>91</sup> Shifts in point of view aren’t limited solely to a departure from this perspective. In another material shift, a vitrine in the corner of the room holds pages from *The Divine Comedy* that Zuaiter carried in his pocket when he was studying Dante, along with an envelope addressed by the hand of his longterm partner, Janet Venn-Brown.

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<sup>91</sup> Conversation with the artist, 27 February 2014.

These disrupt the substrate of the filmic installation in their very materiality, while calling attention to the precise treatment of the other photographs within the installation. The sculptural prints and vitrine in their radical difference foreground the technical devices of photographic installation which seem, in Jacir's work, almost semantic, though we are not given the code for this language. Some materials like Zuaiter's books, or the page scans from *A Thousand and One Nights* are pinned directly to the wall, others like these two sculptural prints are hung without frames, and yet other photographs are framed and hung - the preciousness of display seems to indicate the closeness of personal and political relationships.



**Figure 6** *Material for a Film* and *Material for a Film (Performance)*, installation view, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

A glimpse of the stark whiteness of the next room is intercut in a pan across the space. Four other framed photographs that capture the front and back of postcards from Wael Zuaiter to Janet Venn-Brown hang in the second room, in addition to



correspondence from Alberto Moravia to Jean-Paul Sartre, included as a framed photograph of a letter and its envelope. The photographs establish Zuaiteir's connection with other left-wing intellectuals and artists — they attest to his interests and depict his personal relationships. These first two galleries form a sort of narrative backstory for Zuaiteir's personal life and with this more intimate knowledge we enter the next room.<sup>92</sup>



**Figure 7** *Material for a Film (Performance)*, installation detail, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

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<sup>92</sup> In my discussion with Jacir on 27 February 2014, she indicated that the narrative flow of the exhibition should move into the next room of the main section of the gallery (which I go on to discuss below), but spatially it actually makes more sense to at least glimpse into the room of blank books next (see figure 1.1). This illustrates in part the ambivalence Jacir feels about incorporating these two works into the same space - the worry that *Material for a Film (Performance)* disrupts the flow of *Material for a Film*.

One thousand blank white books are installed in the furthest room of Jacir's installation, spatially bookending the 67 photographic scans in the 'opening sequence' When commissioned for the 2006 Sydney Biennale these two components of Jacir's *Material for a Film (Performance)* were installed along with a group of texts and photo reproductions. In the catalogue for the exhibition at the Guggenheim there are two images of Jacir at the firing range, but these were not included in either installation. However, they do work to belatedly establish a connection between the thousand bullet-pierced books and her repetitive movements of loading and shooting. Leaving images from the shooting range out of the exhibition occludes a relationship that remains important to the reading of the work.

In his catalogue essay for the Guggenheim exhibition, T.J. Demos reads these shots as a "traumatic repetition" and certainly everything about them elicits Jacir's own agency; the controlled and sterile atmosphere of the firing range, the blank books as targets, the intent of the hand repeatedly pulling the trigger. Her actions are an investigation of the details of Zuaiteir's death - both in terms of the evidence of the shots themselves and in her embodied role as shooter. They are also, as Demos notes, a memorial to Zuaiteir's life and to the texts he could have written. However, Jacir's compulsion to document and repeat the "shot" can be alternatively understood within the context of film as the reverse shot to the opening 'shot' of the exhibition; Jacir's scans of the punctured pages of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Read this way, filmically, as shot

and reverse shot, we see the two as a repetition of the same.<sup>93</sup> This is the second ‘counter shot’ to the opening sequence, and it’s important to note the difference in temporality of the two. The first acts as a flashback to the books Zuaiter read while he was alive. The second brings us to the legacy of his life and up to the ‘present’ moment, with all of the history that has unfolded from Zuaiter’s assassination until now. It shouldn’t be lost upon us that ‘shooting’ within the language of the exhibition has also become an analogue for the work of the camera, both moving and still. And this mirroring of one action through another was particularly emphasized at the moment Zuaiter was assassinated within Third Cinema, which I will discuss further below. But we might also read the trajectory of the bullet as a pathway through time - its movement a timeline of Zuaiter’s life and death that the exhibition slides along.

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<sup>93</sup> Godard references this technique in *Notre Musique* (2004) - “Shot and reverse are well known terms in moviemaking...you’ll see that they’re really a repetition of the same thing.”



**Figure 8** *Material for a Film*, installation view, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

Upon leaving this room of books Jacir maintains the temporality of the present with three more sets of images from her photo diary in groups of seven, twelve, and ten. Each of these are accompanied by a short text explaining her own unfolding research into the life of Wael Zuaiter along with notes about her daily life in the contemporary situation she was experiencing as a Palestinian. At the end of this short hallway we once again encounter explicitly archival material and the past; an image of Zuaiter in his youth, standing on a bridge. Next to this, but separated by a large empty space, Jacir has hung a framed photograph of the cover of Zuaiter's copy of *A Thousand and One Nights*. This is the third time we encounter a direct reference to both the text and the impact of the "shot," although this encounter is slightly different because we see it after the thousand blank books in the previous room, and just before we encounter the final two rooms of the installation which contain material related to the aftermath of Zuaiter's death. If Jacir has included one thousand blank white books, the photographic remnants

of the copy of Zuaiter's *Thousand and One Nights* seem to complete the thousand and one of Scheherazade's stories. Jacir again complicates the easy distinction between fiction and documentary within her installation.

Across the room from the cover of *A Thousand and One Nights* phone numbers found in Zuaiter's pocket the night he was murdered hang next to speakers, painted white to blend inconspicuously into the wall, quietly playing a recording of telephone calls from Venn-Brown's phone, which had been tapped. The wall text informs us that though Zuaiter was never explicitly investigated for engagement in illegal activity, in the weeks preceding his murder his phones and those of people close to him were being monitored by the Italian Police, purportedly because of his involvement in Palestinian liberation struggles. In order to hear the recordings, viewers must lean in against the speakers enacting an intimacy with the soundtrack that forces ambivalence between personal curiosity and the position of the police who were monitoring Zuaiter through these tapes. This room also contains an image of Venn-Brown at the cemetery in Syria where Zuaiter is buried.



Figure 9 *Material for a Film*, installation view, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.



Figure 10 *Material for a Film*, installation view, 2009. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin and the artist.

The last room of the installation holds the remaining material from one of Zuaiter's major projects, an Italian translation and edition of the official newspaper of the Palestinian liberation movement, founded as "Rivoluzione Palestinese" in 1969 but changed to the less politically-charged, "Palestina" after 1970. These newspapers are the artifacts from Zuaiter's political career, which was sparked in the wake of the 1967 war. His experience of the resulting devastation prompted him to work with al-Fatah from Rome organizing an 'Italian Committee in Support of the Palestinian People.' The translated newspapers appear in vitrines, and are not photographically reproduced. Again, this shift from photographic reproduction to the objects themselves alters the pacing of viewing, this time in a way characteristic of a final cinematic sequence.

Indeed, in this last scene of Jacir's installation we encounter what can be the only possible reason for Zuaiter's death - his political activism. On the final wall of the exhibition a quote by the English poet Francis Thompson appears like the credits of a film, "Thou canst not stir a flower without the troubling of a star." The same line is written as a hopeful conclusion in the last essay published by Zuaiter before his assassination. At the Guggenheim Jacir writes the line three times: first in English, then in Arabic, then in Italian, its repetition seems to give it a warning tone, the rippling of Zuaiter's death reaches through history to trouble us now. Placed here at the end of her exhibition, Zuaiter's words can also be seen to enact a beginning - His work has reached forward to the present, and Jacir's work, politically powerful and situated within a world

class art museum may itself have long lasting effects. It is as Jacir observes, “the one bullet hole of Wael’s story [that] serves as an entrance into all the other stories.”<sup>94</sup>

While Jacir herself claims this point as an “entrance,” it is placed in her closing credit sequence, ultimately upsetting our understanding of the order of viewing that she has so carefully constructed. And, while it’s evident that Jacir has taken pains in the organization of the exhibition, and that this ordering has also been allowed to continuously interrupt and disrupt itself *within* the intended path through the exhibition, it should also be made clear that there are two entrances into the gallery, and, including the choice to proceed right or left in to the main gallery, at least four different spatial encounters. Therefore it seems important to emphasize the likelihood of alternate encounters because, while Jacir does include spatial cues as to how to proceed, they remain subtle and are not enforced. Each room full of material seems to be an episode - a coherent project within the film, a digression from the overarching story, a story within a story (perhaps another reference to *A Thousand and One Nights*). These are interrupted by glimpses into the next room. The material and sound bleeds across space in this way, enacting a complicated disruption of viewing time. Parts of the story that happen later on in the installation jump forward as we see them in the distance, or in our periphery. We may not understand them fully in these glimpses, but these unordered appearances which disrupt the idea of narrative flow and an ordered spatial and temporal understanding of the installation work both as predictive elements and enact narrative flashbacks. Which is

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<sup>94</sup> Emily Jacir, “All That Remains,” 98-103.



to say, there may be an order to the exhibition, but experiencing it out of order does not necessarily alter the meaning of the work.

The installation enacts an ongoing tension between the two terms I use to describe it - filmic and installation - eliciting both a cinematic reading that relies on an experience of duration and spatial juxtaposition while also inviting repetition, re-reading, and reversal. Whereas Constance Penley in her introduction to Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki's *Speaking of Godard* writes, "and then there's the problem of how to write in such a way as to freeze the image in the reader's mind and then make it move again," here we encounter the opposite problem. The images are very much frozen, save the film clip from *The Pink Panther*, they do not move. Their placement reads like a story board for a film – a film shown clinically with the bright light of objective reality and against stark white walls. Jacir refuses the seduction of the darkness of the theatre, the identification with what is seen on screen. Though the narrative voiceover of Jacir's photo diary adds a provisional authority, and though the images are fixed in their photographic presentation, the viewing sequence is not quite so fixed. They are still very much material for a film in the exciting way that Walter Benjamin discusses the project of writing — here the material exists in all of its radical potentiality. Jacir has kept multiple versions, accounts, and aspects of Zuaiter's life accessible. It is precisely *not* the Benjaminian death mask of the final work, the finished film. How then to understand Jacir's installation when its very spatial containment proposes, and then *relies* on a disruption of an ordered reading? The problem in coming to terms with the work is itself illuminating. Its refusal to fit neatly into either category - film or installation - necessarily troubles its project. The meaning of Jacir's work seems to be inextricable from its form.

I have enacted a detailed overview of the organization and material of the exhibition itself in order to make it clear that although Jacir's installation is carefully hung and ordered, its disruption of a fixed narrative makes it emphatically not, as narratives surrounding Palestine often are, simply didactic, tragic, or heroic.<sup>95</sup> Writing for *The New York Times* in 2009 Ken Johnson states,

Ms. Jacir's work...[is]...less affecting and less informative than any number of newspaper and magazine articles about the Palestinian situation you might have read over the last 40 years...[Her] exhibition does not bring [Zuaiter] to life sufficiently enough to elicit a strong emotional response.<sup>96</sup>

In fact, this reading, phrased disparagingly throughout Johnson's review, precisely describes the kind of narrative structure and affect that Jacir seems to have set out to achieve. Explaining this in an interview in 2007 about *Material for a Film (Performance)* she states, "In *A Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade is constantly telling stories to survive. My reaction to that was in some ways a refusal of this compulsion to narrate."<sup>97</sup> While some might read Jacir's refusal to narrate as also a refusal of fiction, it seems clear throughout the exhibition that she's playing with the terms of fiction - fascinatingly, Scheherazade draws upon fiction in order to survive, while Palestinians have had to draw

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<sup>95</sup> In "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle," Joseph Massad, professor of modern Arab politics and intellectual history at Columbia University, writes, "The films of the 1970s were characterized by their purpose of inciting politics and critiquing it simultaneously, which is the reason why all of them - with one exception - were documentary films." See this essay in *Dreams of a Nation*, ed. with intro by Hamid Dabashi, preface by Edward Said, (London: Verso Books, 2006), 32-44, 37.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, "Material for a Palestinian's Life and Death" *The New York Times*.

<sup>97</sup> Jacir, "All that Remains," 98-103.

upon documentary. Here I want to argue that Jacir is reversing the terms. Her refusal to narrate is a refusal of the strictly heroic documentary account. And, as Demos aptly observes, “That Jacir refuses to narrate also means that visitors must become their own storytellers in relation to the presented material...”<sup>98</sup> Jacir has created an installation where Palestinians are no longer solely responsible for their history, within this exhibition all viewers must actively participate to understand the history she puts forth. She is making Palestinian history a more pressing concern. To push this further then, it’s important to read the form of Jacir’s exhibition as related to her apparent reservations surrounding didactic or heroic historical narration. In other words, while her approach seems linked to these types of historical narratives, her refusal to ‘suture’ the film, to borrow a term from Victor Burgin, signals both an investigation into when and how these kinds of representation fail *and* an attempt to create new representational possibilities.<sup>99</sup>

### **For a Palestinian: A Memorial to Wael Zuaiter**

In order to better understand the kind of disruption Jacir performs, we should consider the narrative of Zuaiter’s death that she encountered when formulating this project. On the 16th of October 1972 two Israeli secret service agents assassinated Zuaiter outside of his apartment in Rome. Various eyewitnesses saw two men fleeing his building, but the motive for his murder remained unclear. Excessive misinformation surrounding the case

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<sup>98</sup> Demos, “Emily Jacir: Poetry’s Beyond,” 60.

<sup>99</sup> Burgin, 37.

bombarded and slowed the police investigation, while rumors circulated that Zuaiter had been killed by Israelis, by his fellow Palestinians, and even, outlandishly, that his death was a scorned lover's revenge. On the 29th of May 1976, four years after Zuaiter's assassination, Rome's Public Prosecutor instructed that "eight persons, all members of...Mossad [Israeli secret service] be committed for trial...[for having] participated in an organization designed to carry out a specific criminal plan to kill resident European representatives of movements of the Palestinian Resistance." Zuaiter was one of several Palestinian loyalists assassinated, purportedly in retribution for the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics by Black September, a Palestinian militant group.<sup>100</sup>

Jacir, having spent time in Rome while going to high school, was familiar with this story but came across it again in 1998 when she picked up the anthology, *For a Palestinian: A Memorial to Wael Zuaiter*. This text, published in 1979 by Zuaiter's long term partner Janet Venn-Brown, was written in reaction to the murky details surrounding Zuaiter's death and the pro-Israeli glorification of the retribution killings, and at the same time was a memorial to Zuaiter's life. Jacir's installation gains depth when looked at in conjunction with Venn-Brown's publication, which, on first reading, appears as though it could be the catalogue for the objects Jacir includes in *Material for a Film*. While Venn-Brown's book is not present within Jacir's exhibition, it is evoked throughout. Various friends recount anecdotes from Zuaiter's life that help to contextualize some of the

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<sup>100</sup> Strangely, this link is picked up in much of the critical work surrounding the exhibition and interpreted as though Zuaiter was *personally* involved in the events in Munich. There is no reason to believe that he, or any of the others assassinated, were involved directly, but rather, these assassinations were likely part of another kind of retribution, an assault through culture.

photographs Jacir has hung, and the opening chapter gives a history of Zuaiter's family and of his journey into exile. The text is emotional and absorbing. It is also cuttingly political.<sup>101</sup> Venn-Brown's book includes an introduction by Yassar Arafat, the longtime leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, essays by various politically engaged poets, court transcripts from the trial in absentia of Zuaiter's killers, and reprints Zuaiter's last essay. An excerpt from Edward Said's book *The Question of Palestine* first published in 1980 appears here in Venn-Brown's anthology in Italian in 1979.

Most strikingly, the title of Jacir's work, *Material for a Film*, comes from the eponymous tenth chapter in Venn-Brown's book in which two of Zuaiter's friends, film director Elio Petri and novelist and script writer Ugo Pirro interview the central figures in his life for an ultimately unrealized film about Zuaiter and the Palestinian cause he championed. In fact, the initial idea for a film came from Zuaiter himself. While living in Rome he had tried unsuccessfully to interest filmmakers in the Palestinian struggle believing that film was the best medium through which to capture a European audience and to clarify the issues surrounding Palestine.<sup>102</sup> He was killed before he could convince anyone to take up this project, thus in this chapter we see the attempt and failure of two of his friends to realize this film after his death. The spectre of these two films seems to

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<sup>101</sup> Jacir has a similar reliance on an absent text in another of her recent works, *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages which were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948*. Additionally, the history of Zuaiter's family is particularly important to include – each Palestinian has a different narrative of exile which fundamentally shapes their relationship to Palestine. For a discussion of the importance of this contextualization in relation to representation see Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi's *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 37-53.

<sup>102</sup> Elio Petri and Ugo Pirro, "Material for a film" in *For a Palestinian: A Memorial to Wael Zuaiter*, ed. Janet Venn-Brown (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 75-116.

be the provocation for Jacir's work, both because of the difficulty in making them, and because the material remained in a state of potentiality. Zuaiter's ideas regarding film seem to be as much about educating the west about the Palestinian struggle as striving for a representation of Palestinians with agency - the fighter to replace the refugee.<sup>103</sup>

## **The 1967 'disaster' and ruptured histories**

I want to emphasize that Zuaiter's death, Venn-Brown's subsequent book, and these two unmade film projects were all situated within a moment of heightened counter hegemonic struggle over what Palestine meant both in terms of land and people. This struggle worked in two directions simultaneously — it was both an internal struggle over how to form a national identity (and more broadly an identity as one among many other Arab states) but it was also a struggle for international recognition — a struggle to be seen as people living in occupied territory.

The first component of this struggle has even older roots within the Arab World. In her recent book *Contemporary Arab Thought: Critical Critique in Comparative Perspective* Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab traces a similar search for identity within Arab countries through the first cultural renaissance or Nahda in the mid-nineteenth century during the last moments and fall of the Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century. Her

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<sup>103</sup> Gertz and Khleifi, 23.

study uses this history to contextualize the second Nahda,<sup>104</sup> or cultural questioning, in the wake of the pan-Arab defeat by Israel in the June 1967 war, a defeat characterized as the Nakba or ‘disaster’.

This defeat was for many Arabs a turning point politically and culturally.<sup>105</sup> Questions of central importance in the first Nahda surrounding enlightenment and liberation were again examined, but this time the first Nahda and its legacy were also under investigation. Theorists asked why similar questions about culture, politics, science and religion were being raised again decades later, without much progress. These inquiries were related to how to understand and formulate authentic and modern Arab identities in a context of increased conflict, imperialism, and economic interest in the region, and a deep examination of what went wrong in the war with Israel.<sup>106</sup> Of course, this is a complicated history, but for my purposes here I want to draw attention to a few

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<sup>104</sup> Meaning ‘rise’ in Arabic, the first Nahda or Arab cultural renaissance took place throughout the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, and examined questions surrounding cultural malaise, cultural decline and cultural renewal. These questions were linked to an unfolding understanding of colonialism and economic interests in the Arab world. During Ottoman decline, when the empire was making an effort towards modernization, Egypt was under the rule of Muhammad Ali Pasha from 1805-1849. He sent groups of students to study abroad, generally to Paris, and these students returned to stimulate intellectual and cultural debates. These debates, which continued in Egypt and spread throughout the Arab world during the Ottoman empire’s attempts at modernization, through the political struggles in the wake of its disintegration, and during British and French colonialism in the region, became known as the Nahda debates. They centered on five main areas of inquiry: the rise and fall of civilizations, political justice, science, religion, and gender. In each of these areas Nahda thinkers were concerned with ideas of progress and modernization as well as with notions of identity (perceptions of self and the other). See Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Especially her introduction, “Cultural Malaise and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century Western, Postcolonial and Arab Debates,” 1-15.

<sup>105</sup> The journal *Art Margins* recently published a special section on “The Longevity of 1967 in Art and Its Histories” see vol. 2, no. 2 (June 2013).

<sup>106</sup> Kassab, 47.

points. First, after the 1967 defeat, an emphasis on honest self-examination took hold more firmly in politics, but also in culture. These spheres were seen to be connected. Second, as one Nahda thinker, Qustantin Zurayq, argued even before 1967, the battle for culture, “is not about a battle *between* cultures, but about a battle *for* culture—not a culture given for consumption or glorification, but a culture to be earned and created by human effort.”<sup>107</sup> This is a concern that parallels that unfolding in other parts of the world struggling with the legacies of colonialism. For instance in Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino’s call to destroy the image that neocolonialism has created of itself and of us,” in order to actively construct a “living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions,” which I will discuss further below.<sup>108</sup> For many of the Nahda thinkers this destruction and construction was also an important part of redressing any lingering myths about what a pan-Arab alliance could be, myths that were largely shown to be such with their defeat by Israel. In this way it was a call for an engagement with the terms of their culture and politics post defeat, and a reexamination of what it could be authentically, by critically thinking through what they wanted to adopt from the West. This struggle was taken up by eminent scholars like Edward Said, who were contesting the ideas, ideologies and history produced by Israel as dominant hegemonic force.<sup>109</sup> But it’s also important to note that these examinations were difficult to undertake at a moment when to say Palestine and Palestinians was to assert that Israel was settling on land that already had a

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<sup>107</sup> Kassab, 67. See 65-74 for a discussion of Qustantin Zurayq’s works.

<sup>108</sup> Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino, “Towards a Third Cinema” *New Latin American Cinema Volume One: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael T. Martin (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 33-58. See also their cinema manifesto, *La Hora de Los Hornos* (The hour of the Furnaces) (1968).

<sup>109</sup> Said, *The Question of Palestine*.



name and occupants, and that those displaced or in exile existed and could not be erased. It was to drive a wedge into the linkage of Zionism and Jewishness, terms that had been firmly connected since at least 1948, and to assert that to be pro-Palestine and anti-Zionist was not at all to be anti-semitic, an idea which, in the geo-political west in the 1980s, was at best supported by radical leftist groups, but certainly not widely embraced.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the last essay Zauiter wrote is precisely about this discursive foil.<sup>111</sup> He insists that to support the Palestinian cause is necessarily also to engage with the Jewish right to a homeland. This struggle, up until the 1967 war and throughout the 1970s was in many ways, literally unspeakable.

## **A Palestinian National Cinema?**

So the narrative of Wael Zauiter's life that Jacir takes up from Elio Petri's chapter in Venn-Brown's account is steeped in the context of a longer representational problematic surrounding Palestine. To complicate things further, the publication of Venn-Brown's book roughly coincides with a shift within Palestinian filmmaking itself. While I can't recount the larger history of Palestinian cinema here, it's important to highlight a few aspects of its history and the way this history links up with other revolutionary struggles that employed film. While in many other countries the industry of cinema was by the 1950s and 60s very highly developed, in Palestine, the context and infrastructure for

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<sup>110</sup> For more on this, see Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>111</sup> See Wael Zauiter, "Appendix 2: Testimony of a Palestinian Activist" in *For a Palestinian*, 213-217.

producing and distributing films was quite different. Because Palestinians did not have a national body or national funding as most other countries did for their cinema industries, Palestinian cinema necessarily follows a different historical trajectory. While Palestinians, like many other Arab countries were introduced to cinema in the 1920s, Palestinian film history really begins in 1935 when Ibrahim Hassan Sirhan documented the visit of Prince Saud to Jerusalem and Jaffa. From this beginning the history of Palestinian cinema is divided into four periods which roughly follow the stages of historical struggle in Palestine.<sup>112</sup>

The beginning of a “nationally sponsored” cinema therefore did not begin until the late 1960s, and was unlike many other national cinemas, both underfunded and decentralized. This cinema of the ‘third period’ (from 1968-1982) was produced within Palestine, by Palestinians, or by pro-Palestinian foreigners about Palestine, and was heavily influenced by French New Wave and other revolutionary cinemas.<sup>113</sup> Indeed it was partially exchanges with other revolutionary cinemas that pushed Palestinians to consider further the essence of their own cinema. Jean-Luc Godard’s *Ici et Ailleurs* (1970), Johan van der Keuken’s *The Palestinians*, Vanessa Redgrave’s *The Palestinian* (1975), Mario Offenbergs *The Fight for Land or Palestine within Israel* (1977), and Costa Gavras’s *Hanna K.* (1983), *The Red Army/ PFLP: Declaration of World War* (1971 - see

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<sup>112</sup> For an overview of Palestinian cinema see, “A Chronicle of Palestinian Cinema” in Gertz and Khleifi, 11-58, 11 & 15.

<sup>113</sup> This connection between Palestinian revolutionary cinema and other cinemas is outlined in Gertz and Khleifi, 22-23. Jean Luc Godard’s *Ici et Ailleurs*, (1974) is cited as one example. Zwaiter had met many of these filmmakers and writers in Rome -- Jean Genet, Alberto Moravia, Petri and Pirro (see Petri and Pirro “Material for a Film,” in Janet Venn-brown, 90-91.)

chapter two for a discussion of this film) are only some of the films that were made about the Palestinian struggle by those sympathetic to it. Third Period Cinema was largely heroic in its representation and unified around a nationalistic cause that brought together Palestinians with widely different experiences — those living in exile, in refugee camps, and within occupied territories. It was generally formalistic documentary — its revolutionary message was in the scenes it depicted, not in the investigation of the specificity of the medium itself.

Third Period Cinema did not call attention to itself as film, to the fact of its representation, or to the cinematic language it was employing. It was often mono-perspectival, its main purpose was to witness, to depict, to serve as a rallying point. It was also largely crafted to enunciate a unified Palestinian identity. In this way ‘third period’ cinema seemed crucial at a moment when representations of Palestine were so discursively fraught, but it also necessarily reduced difference thereby enacting its own flattening of understandings of Palestine. Tellingly, in the third period of Palestinian cinema, over sixty documentary films were created while only one dramatic fiction was produced.<sup>114</sup> The Palestinian revolutionary leadership was most interested in film, not as an industry or as an artistic endeavor, but as an “explanatory facet” to get the message of its struggle out to the rest of the world, particularly the West. As Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi explain,

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<sup>114</sup> See Gertz and Khleifi, 22. The fiction was *The Return to Haifa* produced by Iraqi director Kassem Hawal at the very end of third period cinema in 1982.

The people's war is what granted the revolutionary Palestinian cinema its characteristics and its mode of operation...the light weapon is the primary weapon of the people's war, and similarly, the light 16-mm camera is the most appropriate weapon for the cinema of the people. A film's success is measured by the same criteria used to measure the success of a military operation. [The film and the military operation] both aspire to realize a political cause...the desire to fight is the most important element in the people's war, and thus it is also the most important component of the cinematic effort...the revolutionary film is dedicated to tactical objectives of the revolution and to its strategic objectives as well. A militant film, therefore, must become an essential commodity for the masses, just like a loaf of bread.<sup>115</sup>

Film was considered by Palestinians in this third period to be a “weapon and act of culture,” its explanatory aim was working towards a shift in cultural hegemony.<sup>116</sup> Indeed the notion that making a film as an ‘act of resistance’ and ‘a weapon and an act of culture’ in Palestine is linked in the third period to other cinema-manifestos emerging from anti-colonial struggles in Latin America such as Glauber Rocha’s “An Esthetic of Hunger” (1964), Julio García Espinosa’s “For an Imperfect Cinema” (1969), Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino’s “Towards a Third Cinema” (1969), and Jorge Sanjinés’ “Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema” (1978).<sup>117</sup> These manifestos

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 23, 24.

<sup>116</sup> Massad, 32-44.

<sup>117</sup> These essays have been collected in *New Latin American Cinema Volume One: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael T. Martin (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1997). Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino’s “Towards a Third Cinema” 33-58, Glauber Rocha, “An

were also deeply influenced by ongoing colonial struggles elsewhere in the world, chronicled by theorist-activists like Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral. Indeed, in his essay “National Liberation and Culture” Cabral insists upon the interconnectedness of politics and culture, “If Imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.”<sup>118</sup>

The terms employed to describe activist cinematic practices varied according to context. For example, Espinosa’s use of “Imperfect Cinema” refers to the limited resources of production, and the partial, working, or incomplete nature of work within an emerging political movement.<sup>119</sup> “Third Cinema,” in Solanas and Gettino’s formulation, is a militant cinema defined in terms of funding, distribution, circulation, and political content, differ from the practices of First and Second Cinema. First Cinema is aligned with Hollywood productions, which are seen as perpetuating the cultural hegemony of the United States, a concern for many cultural workers struggling against colonialism, but also for European national cinemas. Second Cinema, is defined as national or auteur cinema, a cinema which stresses the individual artistic vision of the director. Within the French New Wave, for example, auteur theory was aligned with the journal *Cahiers du Cinema* and the work of Jean Renoir and François Truffaut, among others. By linking ideological struggles in film with actual war combat in their formulation of Third

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Eesthetic of Hunger,” 59-61, Jorge Sanjinés, “Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema,” 62-70. Julio García Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema,” 71-82.

<sup>118</sup> Amílcar Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture,” *Unity and Struggle, Speeches and Writings* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 143.

<sup>119</sup> Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema” 71-82, and Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 10.

Cinema, Solanas and Gettino also proposed a shift in the intellectual goals of the filmmaker:

Measured in terms of risks as well as words and ideas; what he does to further the cause of liberation is what counts.

The worker who goes on strike and thus risks losing his job or even his life, the student who jeopardizes his career, the militant who keeps silent under torture: each by his or her action commits us to something much more important than a vague gesture of solidarity.”<sup>120</sup>

What Solanas and Gettino called for, in effect, was a resistance focusing on common goals across different cultural and political sectors in which the filmmaker’s role becomes as important as the combatant’s role.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Solanas and Gettino, “Towards a Third Cinema” *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols, 1985, 44-64, 50.

<sup>121</sup> Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino’s fêted 1968 film-manifesto *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* is perhaps best known for conceiving of film as a weapon. Broken down into 13 sections with intertitles including, “Daily Violence,” “The Oligarchy”, and “The Models,” this film examines the complicated effects of neo-colonialism and economic imperialism in Argentina, and is a call to action against these forces. In both *The Hour of the Furnaces* and Solanas and Gettino’s manifesto-essay, “Towards a Third Cinema,” the apparatus of film, the camera and the projector, are mapped onto the terminology of guerrilla warfare and armed resistance. They state, “In this long war, with the camera as our rifle, we do in fact move into a guerrilla activity.” The rapid capture of the camera and subsequent projection shooting back 24 frames per second, is likened to the shooting of a semi-automatic weapon. A scene towards the end of the film depicts a quick succession of images on screen of Western advertising, protests, etc. punctuated by the sounds of rapid gunfire. Solanas and Gettino, “Towards a Third Cinema” *Movies and Methods*, 57. This quote also appears in their film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968). Further on in the essay they state, “The camera is the inexhaustible *expropriator of image-weapons*; the projector, *a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second.*” 58, italics in original. For a discussion of the uses of ‘film as weapon’ see Thomas Waugh, “Beyond Vérité: Emile de Antonio and the Documentary of the 1970s” in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 233-258.

Third Cinema is a threefold call to action: first it rejects a conception of art as timeless and ahistorical by insisting that culture is historically contingent and can be changed. Second, it conceives of revolutionary cinema as “at the same time...*destruction and construction*: destruction of the image that neocolonialism has created of itself and of us, and construction of a throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions.”<sup>122</sup> And third, this dual recognition of the historical contingency of culture and the productive reconstruction of a new culture through cinema, provides “the starting point for the disappearance of fantasy and phantom...to make way for living human beings.”<sup>123</sup> Or put differently, the basis for formulating a post/colonial<sup>124</sup> culture and identity, one formed outside colonial structures in neither a relationship of mimesis nor of

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<sup>122</sup> Solonas and Gettino, “Towards a Third Cinema,” *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> I borrow this formulation of post/colonial with a slash (‘/’) from Hamid Dabashi. He points out that while Iran was never colonized by the British and French like much of Asia, Africa and Latin America, it was located amidst colonial hegemony within the region and was part of a struggle throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between the economic interests of the British, the French and the Russians (and now also the United States). He states that the post-Second World War neo-liberal economic policies of Western countries have not “successfully disguised the relation of economic and political power between the advanced capitalist economies and the rest of the world. Colonialism salvaged its dominant characteristics by turning the earliest forms of commercial colonialism into active capitalist colonialism, and now the same logic is equally present in the rapid globalization of capital.” The slash therefore signals both the continued colonial and economic relationships of power and the ongoing struggles against it. Rather than the usual formulation post-colonial, in which the pre-fix ‘post’ signals ‘after’ colonialism, Dabashi insists upon the slash (‘/’) as a way of maintaining linguistically “the vigilance we need to keep between our actual condition and our potential emancipation.” See Dabashi, “Dead Certainties: The Early Makhmalbaf,” in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2008 [2002]), 117-153, 152. For an elaboration on the many connotations of the term ‘post-colonial’ see, Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-colonial,’” *Social Text*, Nos. 31-32 (1992): 99-113.

negation.<sup>125</sup> It is a task for both the makers of the films and their audiences to recognize that culture (and thus systems of politics and economics) can be changed, and to participate fully in their transformation. They are using cinema here, generally conceived as a passive activity for viewer, to incite action, but also it seems, as itself an activity for producing a new cultural hegemony.

Jacir's reencounter with Zuaiter's story is through its heroic recounting in Janet Venn-Brown's memorial text, the tone of which demonstrates the kinds of narratives that third period revolutionary cinema encouraged. There is a reclamation of the narrative of Zuaiter's murder from the one authorized by the Israelis, as he is presented as utterly human and specific while also, in some ways, symbolic of a larger narrative about Palestinian experience. He is a heroic figure, and though a poet and not a revolutionary, he is cast as a martyr for Palestinian cause. Though Jacir's installation expands upon the framework of "material" for these first two unrealized films and in Venn-Brown's book, she purposely represents this history differently. *Material for a Film* is not, as Ken Johnson reviewing for the NY Times might have wished, a straight forward, and thus necessarily reductive, rendering of Palestine or the history of Wael Zuaiter's life.

Jacir's negotiation of multiple historical perspectives and multiple temporalities is evident in her installation. The number of voices, conflicting accounts, and personal anecdotes is part of what makes Venn-Brown's book so powerful. In Jacir's installation

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<sup>125</sup> Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, especially her introduction, "Cultural Malaise and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century Western, Postcolonial and Arab Debates," 1-15, and first chapter, "The First Modern Arab Cultural Renaissance, or Nahda: From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Mid-Twentieth Century" 17-47.



we see many of these perspectives echoed in the chosen material, sometimes fractured and compartmentalized spatially within the rooms of her exhibition. The notion of Zuaiteir's "character" is thus layered within Jacir's installation. While the photos installed read like a storyboard or a map of his life - the movements, pans, and zooms spatially and materially indicated - the archival material Jacir begins with seems resolutely complex. There are too many details, asides, stories within stories, chance happenings and complicated historical moments encompassed within her exhibition for any of the material to settle nicely into a narrative trajectory. While Jacir has maintained the potentiality of the *material* allowing us to see a map for a future film, the characters and their movements are already recorded — we know what has happened, its already been acted — what remains is the struggle over articulation, the struggle for historical representation. The struggle over the discourse that frames the photographs and this history.

Though Jacir seems to acknowledge the discursive voice of third period revolutionary cinema within the installation space, she also imagines other representational strategies, ones that emerged almost a decade after Zuaiteir's death with the birth of 'fourth period' cinema. This period began loosely in 1980 during a gradual national awakening that resulted with the first Intifada in 1987.<sup>126</sup> No longer structured through funding as a national cinema, (largely due to the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon in 1982 following their defeat by Israel, and the added crisis of the negotiated peace

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<sup>126</sup> Intifada can be translated as "shaking off".

between Egypt and Israel)<sup>127</sup> fourth period is more independent in its representations, though it still shoulders significant pressure by Palestinian audiences to enact a heroism and unification of the Palestinian cause that third period cinema was known for.<sup>128</sup> While it does often use documentary forms, these forms are often less didactic, less celebratory, and more critically nuanced. So while offering up a more diverse approach to filming Palestine, or to Palestinians who want to make films on various other topics, it also enabled some Palestinians to present multiple perspectives within the films themselves. Additionally, while films of the third period were circulated within the Arab world, films of the fourth period are often screened internationally so their audiences are not always as sympathetic to their representations. These linkages between the form of Palestinian cinema and the ongoing political struggle for statehood are important to consider further when taking account of Emily Jacir's work. Indeed Jacir's installation, though closely linked to the chapters contained in Venn-Brown's book, and while maintaining a sympathy towards Zuaiter, enacts a more complicated relationship to this history and its representational modes. Though Jacir's voice is present throughout the exhibition, hers is not the only one. The narrative is fractured and multi-perspectival, many different voices contribute to the telling, with occasionally contradictory accounts. The narratives included also span very different moments in Palestinian history - the moment of Zuaiter's exile and political work, the years following his assassination and publication of Venn-Brown's anthology, and Jacir's return decades later to the material, which was

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<sup>127</sup> Massad, 32-44.

<sup>128</sup> Gertz and Khleifi, see especially the introduction and first chapter, 1 - 33.

itself related to her own lived experience in exile.<sup>129</sup> Jacir sustains different levels of historical reality *in the same space*. It is for this reason that the narrative structure of Jacir's installation that I have been emphasizing throughout this paper is fundamentally important: it is linked to a complicated past of political struggle and visual representation that is specific to Palestine.

To read Jacir's archival installation *Material for a Film* as a filmic installation, as I propose at the beginning of this chapter, means that this larger history of Palestinian cinema should be taken into account alongside histories of disappeared archives, contested histories and counter hegemonic discourses. And though we might read Jacir's work as the third term in a series of unfinished films, in addition to serving as a memorial to Zuaiteer's life, as Massad suggests about Palestinian film in general, its work is also part of a struggle around the visual representations of Palestine, an intervention into discourses of documentary and fiction. Jacir's has created an archival and filmic installation that complicates rather than reduces the representation of this history by disconnecting the temporality of our viewing from the predetermined duration of a film, thereby allowing re-viewing, and re-visiting in addition to reading against the organized flow, and by refusing to didactically narrate Zuaiteer's life by playing with the terms of fiction. We shouldn't overlook the fact that though her project was sparked by an encounter with Venn-Brown's book in 1998, it dates from 2004, the year Yassar Arafat died, and the year after Edward Said's death. Jacir's voice is one in a new generation of

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<sup>129</sup> Conversation with the artist, 27 February 2014.

exiled Palestinians engaged in the struggle for the state of Palestine.<sup>130</sup> So then we might productively read Jacir's project as future oriented - it is *material* for a film, not perhaps, an unfinished film, but maybe a film yet to be made, or one made anew within each viewer -- it productively struggles with the legacies of the past and looks toward what may be representationally possible in the future.

To return to the questions I set out in the beginning of this chapter: what are the stakes of these two kinds of looking — Ariella Azoulay's 'watching photographs' and Emily Jacir's 'filmic installation'? What do the differences in their approaches to duration do to a reading of the photographic record? Azoulay's 'watching' calls for a placement of the photograph back into a temporal flow — to revert the 'instant' to its duration. She calls for this kind of 'watching' and the attentiveness it entails as a way of more thoroughly examining the photographic record and for thinking through its formation, what it includes and why, what it might leave out. But her notion of 'watching' is problematic because the photograph cannot be inserted back into its temporal flow. Jacir on the other hand disrupts the illusion of the filmic narrative by breaking up its flow into static images that can be re-viewed, and re-visited. If Azoulay wants to watch the photograph to return to duration, Jacir asks us to think about how our experience of duration can be constructed along different narrative accounts.

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<sup>130</sup> This struggle within art institutions is still ongoing, indeed one need only think of Larissa Sansour's recent ejection from the Lacoste Art Prize and the resulting fall out. See Artinfo, 21 December 2011, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/754484/artist-larissa-sansour-speaks-out-about-her-ejection-from-the-lacoste-art-prize-for-being-too-palestinian> (Accessed 23 January 2012).

## Chapter 2

### Grounds and Landscapes: The Anabasis of a Film

Silence cannot do away with things that language cannot state. Violence is as stubbornly there just as much as death, and if language cheats to conceal universal annihilation, the placid work of time, language alone suffers, language is the poorer, not time and not violence.<sup>131</sup>

Eric Baudelaire's recent exhibition *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images* at Gasworks, London in 2012, featured his experimental film of the same title along with pieces from his recent body of work *Anabases* (2008-2012)—a three chapter meditation on form, absence and the question of historical representation.<sup>132</sup> In both the exhibition and film, Baudelaire examines the history of the Japanese Red Army (JRA) through the lives of Fusako Shigenobu, one of its leaders, her daughter May Shigenobu, and the Japanese filmmaker, theorist, and activist Masao Adachi. One of the four works that makes up the first chapter of *Anabases*, *Chanson d' Automne* (2008), a collage assembled from newspaper clippings, hangs near the entryway in the first room of the gallery; *Fusako Shigenobu Family*

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<sup>131</sup> Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1962), 187.

<sup>132</sup> The exhibition ran from 10 May - 22 July 2012.

*Album, 27 photographs* (2012), which displays a temporally fragmented selection of group shots and posed portraits, is positioned at the far end of the space. In the main room a monitor tilted up from the floor plays a clip from Adachi's film *Raykusho Renzoku Shasatsuma* (A.K.A. *Serial Killer*, 1969)<sup>133</sup>, nine silkscreened prints depicting an assemblage of images are displayed down one wall and a projector positioned on the wall opposite the prints moves through a slide show of drawings that Adachi completed while he was in prison between 1997 and 2000. The film *The Anabasis of May* (2011) plays in an adjacent room, and on a bench near the door of the gallery are stacks of Baudelaire's *Libretto*; an exhibition take-away that includes a combined chronology of Adachi, May and Fusako Shigenobu's lives, scans of archival images, newspaper clippings relating to the history of the JRA, an essay by French philosopher Pierre Zaoui and an excerpt from Alain Badiou's chapter "Anabasis" taken from his recent book *The Century*.<sup>134</sup>

This chapter looks at Baudelaire's exploration of narrative and representation within this work. Specifically, my interpretation suggests that his approach is not simply a 'recounting', 'retelling' or 're-tracing' of the personal and political history of the JRA as others have observed, but that it is also an investigation into how we understand or recognize this history now.<sup>135</sup> The first part of this chapter describes the works in this

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<sup>133</sup> Japanese names are traditionally written family name first. Throughout this dissertation I will be writing them in the anglicized version: given name, family name. I do this in part because Baudelaire uses this formation in his work, and because I want to underscore that my own relation to this material is limited to English translations, I do not have a working knowledge of Japanese. All film titles will appear first in Japanese with English translations and dates following, and then thereafter only by their English titles.

<sup>134</sup> The *Libretto* is available on Eric Baudelaire's website. See: <http://baudelaire.net/anabases3/libretto/>.

<sup>135</sup> These are the terms used by Nicholas Warner, Nicole Yip in their descriptions of the work. See Warner "Eric Baudelaire: The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu Masao Adachi and 27 Years Without

installation in detail, looking closely at Baudelaire's use of the temporal and spatial journey of anabasis, to both construct the works, and our experience of them. While critics have read Baudelaire's use of the term as an allegory for the political journey of Shigenobu and Adachi, I suggest that it should also be read as an investigation into the temporality of the 'event' and its capture.<sup>136</sup> The second section explores a series of related questions: How do these two contexts of viewing—the installation and the theater—alter the way we understand the film *The Anabasis of May* and the history it depicts? In other words, what does the film gain or lose when contextualized within a larger installation (a broader historical context, a focused audience)? And further, what might making a film that moves across the gallery/theatre divide do for artistic method, for rethinking modes of address, and for opening up the possibilities of historical narrative? Finally, to ask a question Baudelaire seems to self-reflexively raise in many of his works, how might the ways we image the world around us subject us to certain notions of reality, and how can we struggle to produce other realities? Each part of *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images* is an attempt to answer this last question, and I argue that it is through this investigation into the framing and consumption of reality that we can best understand *The Anabasis of May*—as a meditation on the experience and capture of the 'event,' which, after Badiou I

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Images" Art Monthly, no. 357 (June 2012), 30, and Yip, "Eric Baudelaire" Frieze Magazine, <http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/eric-baudelaire/>. (Accessed 26 July, 2012).

<sup>136</sup> For the use of anabasis as an allegory in Baudelaire's work see Warner, Yip and also Adam Kleinman's recent review "Eric Baudelaire's The Anabasis & The Ugly One," Art Agenda, <http://art-agenda.com/reviews/eric-baudelaire%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cthe-anabasis-the-ugly-one%E2%80%9D/> (Accessed 28 March 2014).

define as something that happens, an instant that breaks with the one before it, and which cannot be understood within the current framework of knowledge.<sup>137</sup>

My reading of Baudelaire's work diverges from much of the critical reception addressing it, which tends to focus on his investigation of the JRA's history, by suggesting that we also look at the way his works deal with reality and its capture and, on the meta-historical level, our available structures for communicating historical events. I argue that we can open new questions about Baudelaire's work by looking at it as more deeply invested in the nature of reality, representation, presentation and the theory of the 'event'. Indeed, looking at his earlier projects shows that these investigations have been central to his work for nearly a decade.

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<sup>137</sup> See Alain Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze" trans. Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia*, no. 2 (2007) 37-44, 39, and Rosalyn Deutsche, "Not Forgetting: Mary Kelly's Love Songs" *Grey Room* 24, (Summer 2006), 26-37, 29.



### Three studies into the nature of time, the event and its capture



Figure 11 Eric Baudelaire, *The Dreadful Details* (2006), installation view courtesy the artist.

Eric Baudelaire's *The Dreadful Details* (2006) is a photographic diptych of a war scene. Each frame depicts one side of a bombed out square in which the bodies of the dead lay on the ground, already partially shrouded, and the victorious soldiers appear mid-stride, holding rifles. Contrary to our initial expectation that the photograph captures a fleeting moment in an ongoing struggle, *layers* of time have actually been deposited here. If the explosion has just occurred, as the lingering smoke in the background of the image seems to suggest, then who has had the time to cover the bodies? When have the onlookers come out to their balconies to look?<sup>138</sup> Viewers are positioned to read photos as reportage, as images with an indexical relationship to reality, and indeed, here at least, they are. Baudelaire has not digitally altered these photographs to construct the temporal

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<sup>138</sup> Guillaume Désanges, "Eric Baudelaire, tele-reality" *ArchiSTORM*, no. 29 (2007). Pierre Zaoui, "The fresco of icons: on *The Dreadful Details* by Eric Baudelaire" *Vacarme* 37 (automne 2006) <http://www.vacarme.org/article1215.html> (accessed 26 July 2012).

layers. However, he does upset the idea that reality itself is unmediated.<sup>139</sup> The subject of Baudelaire's photo is in fact a tableau of war staged in a Hollywood studio using actors and drawing upon a montage of tropes often used in the Western media's images of conflict. Ultimately, *The Dreadful Details* draws attention to itself as representation through such temporal incongruities as the recent explosion, sheet-covered casualty, curious onlookers and celebrating soldiers. In so doing, it signals some of the ways in which we are trained to read images, and the ways in which we produce understandings of the world through them.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Of course this tradition of 'constructing' photographs of war go as far back as Roger Fenton's famous photograph "Valley of the Shadow of Death" of the Crimean War (1855). What is different here is that Baudelaire constructs a scene from a war that never actually happened (but that recalls many wars, especially the prolonged US military involvement in the Middle East).

<sup>140</sup> Both Désanges and Tan Lin discuss this work in terms of cubism, showing multiple perspectives at once, see Lin, "Eric Baudelaire's Sugar Water, the Deleuzean Event and the Dispersion of Spectatorial Labour," *Reading Room: Transcendental Pop* 2.08, 9-27. But it's also helpful to think of the work in relation to tradition of history painting to developments in historiography. For example Zaoui suggests an affinity with the paintings of Goya in his essay on the work "The fresco of icons". For a more thorough history of developments in historiography and their relations to history painting and photography see Stephen Bann's, *The Clothing of Clio: A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), especially his introduction, chapters 3, 6 and the postscript.



Figure 12 Eric Baudelaire, *Sugar Water* (2007), installation view courtesy the artist.

*Sugar Water* (2007), a single shot 72 minute film, is set in an empty Paris metro station.<sup>141</sup> A bill poster equipped with a ladder, a bucket of paste, a large brush, and a satchel full of posters enters and begins to paste bills on a chroma key blue advertising board in the foreground of the film's frame. An image of a car lined street, comprised of eight of these posters, is slowly assembled as he moves across the board; commuters enter and leave the station throughout the film oblivious to the labourer and images he is

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<sup>141</sup> Rather than taking place in an actual metro station, Baudelaire filmed on a Paris set with sixteen actors as "commuters" in addition to the professional bill paster. Multiple reviewers of this work have pointed out the station's name, Pte. d'Erehwon, visible in tile letters on either side of the advertising board, is an anagram for 'nowhere' in English and a dual reference to Samuel Butler's 19th century novel *Erewhon* and to Deleuze's mention of the novel in his *Difference and Repetition*. See Paul Foss, "Eric Baudelaire," *Art US* no. 29 (2010), 10, and David Velesco, "Eric Baudelaire," *Artforum*, (September 2007), 472.

pastings. The work is repetitive. After completing the first image the bill poster begins again, working from the top left corner to the bottom right revealing the same scene with a difference; one of the cars is in mid-explosion.<sup>142</sup>

This process is repeated over the eight sections three more times (each round takes about 14 minutes), the third image that is pasted on the wall depicts the car in flames, and the fourth its charred remains. The fifth round returns the advertising board to the chroma key blue of the beginning and the film loops.<sup>143</sup> As the bill poster works, and the image sequence unfolds, the same commuters pass through the station in different combinations, entering twice when they have never left, for instance, and otherwise confusing the temporal linearity that the bill poster's images have established. Though *Sugar Water* makes reference to French philosopher Henri Bergson's notion of duration, using the metaphor of a sugar cube dissolving in water,<sup>144</sup> Baudelaire's use of still images assembled toward the slow reveal of an event that occurs within an instant frustrates his theory of temporality and movement. Baudelaire does this by upsetting Bergson's thesis that we can understand a change in the whole by experiencing the unfolding of the

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<sup>142</sup> The images of the exploding car were made digitally, but might well call to mind the 2005 Paris riots for certain of his viewers. The painstakingly slow reveal and oblivion of the commuters in the film to the presence of the unfolding event could signal the media saturation of our visual fields, these images no longer read as an event to viewers commuters present. See Velasco, "Eric Baudelaire", 472.

<sup>143</sup> The film is available for online viewing through ubuweb:  
[http://www.ubu.com/film/ baudelaire\\_sugar.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/ baudelaire_sugar.html). (accessed 10 August 2013).

<sup>144</sup> Deleuze cites Bergson's example from his book *Creative Evolution in Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 9. For a more detailed reading of Baudelaire's *Sugar Water* see Lin, "Eric Baudelaire's Sugar Water," 8-27.

moment.<sup>145</sup> While the path the commuters take seems to interrupt the *cinéma vérité* of the single shot, indicating that it was somehow edited, it was not. This scene is constructed on a Paris set and Baudelaire filmed with sixteen actors as “commuters”. Their actions, entering, exiting and boarding the train are scripted. Their movements do not follow the usual patterns of an actual metro station. As in *The Dreadful Details* the idea that film captures an unmediated reality is being played with here.



Figure 13 Eric Baudelaire, *Circumambulation* (2007), installation view courtesy the artist.

A two-channel video and text work, *Circumambulation* (2007) investigates Ground Zero in New York City

. Its title suggests both time and movement. To circumambulate is “to walk all the way

<sup>145</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, “Theses on Movement” 1-11, esp. pp. 8-11. See also, Foss, “Eric Baudelaire,” 10, and T.J. Carlin, “A Vernacular of Violence” in *TimeOut New York*, June 17-23, 2010, 67.

around (something),” the geography and duration of the walk is determined by the object walked around. In the case of Baudelaire’s video, circumambulation may be read first in terms of the work’s formal qualities. The two channels of the video are not synched, the first runs for 19 minutes and 42 seconds and the second runs for 19 minutes and 43 seconds. The second channel, played on a loop, slowly circles around the first to synch again. Baudelaire toys with expectation and presentation in the subject matter of this work as well, the ‘something’ being circled here, Ground Zero, is the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center buildings, an event which cannot exist as an object but only as a series of effects.

What does it mean to circumambulate around an absence, ‘something’ that is no longer in the present? To walk around a negative space in order to understand an event that exists within the flow of time? Pierre Zaoui suggests that this walking around produces “an art of contours, a form of artistic practice that focuses on the areas surrounding, rather than the thing itself, an art that reveals our impotence at actually seeing.”<sup>146</sup> I want to suggest that *Circumambulation* is as much about seeing the event of 9/11 in the remains at Ground Zero, only ever partially, but from all sides, as it is about the duration of walking all the way around these effects. The emphasis, then, is on the temporality of seeing in relation to the circular path, not on the possibility of seeing, an idea that Baudelaire returns to in *The Anabasis of May*.

Baudelaire’s *The Dreadful Details* and *Sugar Water* seem to be one thing but are in fact another. They challenge the viewer by drawing our attention to the relationship

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<sup>146</sup> Zaoui, “On the Communication of Events,” Exhibition essay for the Elizabeth Dee Gallery, June 2007.

between “the mediator, medium and mediating activity”—a relationship that is usually collapsed, ignored or considered transparent—and by demanding a self-consciousness in reading, an awareness of our own learned methods of decoding visual images.<sup>147</sup> They upset assumptions that reality is available for unmediated consumption. Or put differently, Baudelaire’s artistic practice investigates both the ontological capacity of images to represent, and our grounds for understanding them.

These works are not simply philosophical puzzles in duration, capture and the nature of reality. They grapple with important questions about how, given the mediated nature of both the production of reality and its representation, we can recognize and give an account of an event. The *event* is the key concept here, one that encompasses “four entangled motifs: that, in politics, of Revolution; in love, of erotic liberation; in the arts, of performance; and in the sciences, of the epistemological break.”<sup>148</sup> For Zaoui, following Deleuze, the temporality of the event, its capture, and its loss are linked. Indeed the event represents an unbroken synthesis of past and future, there is no break.<sup>149</sup> In his text on *Circumambulation* Zaoui states, “There are no longer two times in our society of globalized imagery, the time of the instant (photography) and the time of movement (video), but a single time, the time of the event, which contracts and expands and must be reflected upon in the hope of escaping its haunting.”<sup>150</sup> Each of the works described above provoke questions about the temporality of the event and how we see it. For

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<sup>147</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Documentary Is/Not a Name” *October*, Vol. 52 (Spring 1990), 84.

<sup>148</sup> Alain Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” *Parrhesia*, No. 2 (2007), 37-44, 37.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>150</sup> Zaoui, *ibid.*

example, in *The Dreadful Details* we see an image of war but the photographic capture tells us very little about the event of war that we do not know. Indeed, the sedimented temporality accrued in the tableau seems to have occurred after the ‘event’. Here we could further ask, is the ‘event of war’ the moment held in each life-changing explosion or is it the geo-politics that allow fighting to erupt in the first place? And, how can we picture these contingent and enduring events as they unfold? Can we only recognize an event once it has taken place? Are the only images we can make of an event in fact merely effects as in Baudelaire’s *Circumambulation*? Or, to ask a question that seems to underpin all three of the above works, how do the images we make of events go on to produce our realities?

### **An ascent to literature, anabasis as journey and method**

The title of the film and exhibition, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images*, references the long literary history of the term anabasis.<sup>151</sup> From the Greek *ana* ‘up’ and *bainein* ‘to go’ (literally a going up, or an ascent), *Anabasis* is also the title of Xenophon’s tale of Cyrus the younger and his Greek mercenaries, who marched from Sardis to Cunaxa in Babylonia (401-399 B.C). Loosely referencing this history, “anabasis” denotes any military expedition, especially one from the coast to the interior.<sup>152</sup> Baudelaire includes a selected chronology of the literary usage of the term anabasis in his *Libretto*, beginning with the battle that inspired Xenophon’s

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<sup>151</sup> Gasworks Press Release, <http://www.gasworks.org.uk/exhibitions/detail.php?id=748> (Accessed 19 September 2012).

<sup>152</sup> Its opposite, *katabasis*, means literally ‘to go down’, a march from the interior to the coast, or a retreat, especially a military retreat. The OED lists *anabasis* coming into usage C17 and *Katabasis* in C18.



writing and concluding with Badiou's recent proposal that anabasis "may serve as a possible support for a meditation on our century...that ceaselessly asks itself whether it is an end or a beginning."<sup>153</sup> Between these quotations Baudelaire inserts two entries—one from a poem by Saint John Perse written in the 1920s and one from Paul Celan's 1963 poem—both titled *Anabasis*. These two poets are also used by Badiou in his chapter "Anabasis" as he attempts to show how the twentieth-century has understood its own movement, or as he says, "its precarious belief that it represented a re-ascent towards a properly human home, the anabasis of a lofty signification."<sup>154</sup>

Badiou outlines three characteristics of anabasis in his account. The first is revealed by the narrative trajectory of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, an epic not unlike Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Xenophon recounts the journey of ten thousand Greek soldiers who marched to Persia to aid Cyrus as he made a bid for the throne of his brother Artaxerxes II. Cyrus was killed in battle and his mercenary army forced to make a wandering return to Greece, no longer directed by the logic of a clear mission.<sup>155</sup> From this story Badiou

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<sup>153</sup> In *Source Documents*, the accompanying text for his exhibition at Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels, in 2009, Baudelaire includes scans from the introduction to Xenophon's *Anabasis* as well as a timeline of the term and both French and English translations of the excerpt from Badiou's chapter. The map, timeline, and the English translation of the excerpt from Badiou's *The Century* appear again in Baudelaire's *Libretto*. See Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 81-97. The excerpted pages are 81-83 of the English translation, pages 119-121 of the French edition of the book.

<sup>154</sup> See Baudelaire's timeline and Badiou, 83. Badiou's discussion of these two poets are not included in the section Baudelaire excerpts for either *Source Documents* or his *Libretto*. For his discussion of these poems see Badiou, *The Century*, 83-97.

<sup>155</sup> For an account of the role anabasis plays in the first two chapters of Baudelaire's *Anabases* see Hoday King, "Anabasis" *October* 142 (Fall, 2012), 121-143, 121-122. King suggests that, "Xenophon's writing has more in common with the nineteenth-century realist novel than the classical epic poem: thickly studded with evocative details, the text seems almost to anticipate photography and film in its all-inclusive attitude toward visual minutiae." 121.

concludes, “At the root of anabasis lies something like the principle of lostness.” Second, he observes that the Greek army was brought to Persia for an explicit purpose and under direct leadership, thus after Cyrus is killed, “the Greeks only have themselves, their own will and discipline to rely on...they suddenly find themselves...forced, as it were, to invent their own destiny.” Anabasis in this context can be understood as being related to the agency of invention. Third, Badiou emphasizes that the return path is one that is invented as it is travelled; “Anabasis is thus the free invention of wandering *that will have been* a return, a return that did not exist as a return route prior to the wandering.”<sup>156</sup> Importantly, as a journey that exists in the temporality of the future anterior, the return can only be *recognized* as a journey when it is complete, much like the event can only be recognized in its effects.

The timeline of the term anabasis that Baudelaire includes in his *Libretto* reveals two things: First, and most obviously, that throughout history its definition has consistently meant a journey out and back. Second, however, as Badiou points out in his chapter, the framing, understanding, and effects anabasis connotes are radically different in each author’s use.<sup>157</sup> A facile reading suggests that by including this chronology of the term anabasis and excerpts from Badiou’s text in his *Libretto*, Baudelaire has, perhaps implicitly, foregrounded Badiou’s reading as the legitimate one in relation to his work.

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<sup>156</sup> Badiou, *The Century*, 82.

<sup>157</sup> For Perse, Badiou argues, “the quest is for a place where the signs of space and time have been abolished, a ‘great land of grass without memory’, on the one hand, ‘the unconfined unreckoned year’, on the other....the subject represents itself as a kind of wandering, and represents this wandering as valid in itself.” Badiou, 92. However, he reads Celan’s anabasis as “an anabasis that requires the other, the voice of the other. Assuming the call - its enigma - Clean breaks with the theme of an empty and self-sufficient wandering. Something must be encountered.” Badiou, 95.

Or that the titles of his exhibition and film and the clear deference to Badiou in the chronology indicate an agreement about what this term denotes and signal a development toward a more refined definition. I would argue, however, following Badiou's discussion of the usage of "anabasis" in Perse and Celan's poems, that the chronology of the term is not secured by Baudelaire's work, but disrupted. Indeed, it is important to reflect on the correspondence between the chronology, the specific excerpts Baudelaire appropriates, and his own use of the term, in order to ask questions that have been glossed in most readings of this project: Specifically, what kind of work is *Baudelaire* asking the term anabasis to perform within his exhibition and film? How is the term connected to the idea of 'the event'? And what does his usage of the term produce?

## **Chanson d'Autome and the days and years that make up History**

Baudelaire's works under the title *Anabases* began in 2008 at a residency at the Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto, during the collapse of the U.S. economy. *Chanson d'Automne* (2008) is the first in the series. To produce this work he first selected articles mostly from September 2008 issues of *The Wall Street Journal* and, with a red grease pencil, circled individual words to make lines from Paul Verlaine's poem also titled *Chanson d'Automne* (1866) appear; "When a sighing begins/ In the violins/ Of the Autumn-song/ My heart is drowned/ In the slow sound/ Languorous and long."<sup>158</sup> Significantly, the lines

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<sup>158</sup> See Baudelaire, *Source Documents*, (Chirat Press, 2009), 27. <http://baudelaire.net/anabases/source-documents/>.

from this poem were also used in France during the Second World War as codes for the French resistance.<sup>159</sup>

The work thus references two moments. The first is the broadcast of Verlaine's poem over BBC radio in June of 1944 in preparation for the Battle of Normandy or 'Operation Overlord'. As Michael S. Neiberg explains, the broadcast of the first verse "When a sighing begins/ In the violins/ Of the Autumn-song" let the French resistance fighters know the operation was imminent and the broadcast of the second verse, "My heart is drowned/ In the slow sound/ Languorous and long," indicated that the invasion would occur within twenty-four hours.<sup>160</sup> Baudelaire visually reproduced this division of the poem's verses in his work when he separated *The Wall Street Journal* articles in two large frames. In the first he arranged articles that refer to the 2008 US presidential election with headlines like, "The First Debate Could be Decisive," and "A Hope for America".<sup>161</sup> In the second frame he included articles with headlines referring to the US Banking crisis, "Bad Accounting Rules Helped Sink AIG," "Worst Crisis Since 1930s, With No End Yet in Sight," and "High on the Hog".<sup>162</sup> While the articles are carefully

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<sup>159</sup> Baudelaire gives an account of this history in his artist statement for this piece: <http://baudelaire.net/anabases1/texts/#chanson>.

<sup>160</sup> Michael S. Neiberg, *Warfare and Society in Europe: 1898 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 143. Baudelaire includes an explanation of this history in *Source Documents*, but not in his *Libretto* for *The Anabasis of May*.

<sup>161</sup> Karl Rove, "The First Debate Could be Decisive" *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 September 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122230655620873931>, Peggy Noonan, "A Hope for America" *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 September 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122247160757880877>. (accessed 10 November 2013).

<sup>162</sup> Zachary Karabell, "Bad Accounting Rules Helped Sink AIG," *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 September 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122169320421449849>, Jon Hilsenrath, Serena Ng and Damian

selected for their headlines, there is an element of chance in their content as Baudelaire searched for the words in the poem within the paper on a given day—‘Violin’ and ‘sighing’ for instance may not appear in many articles. The practicality of finding the words to make Verlaine’s poem played a role in Baudelaire’s selection of headlines.<sup>163</sup>



Figure 14 Eric Baudelaire, *Chanson D'Automne*, detail, courtesy the artist.

Though critics have followed Baudelaire’s lead in suggesting that this work questions “what forms of resistance, either covert or overt, remain in play at a time when capitalism is in crisis and triumphant theories about ‘the end of history’ are being

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Paletta, “Worse Crisis Since 1930s, With No End Yet in Sight,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 September 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB122169431617549947>, Raymond Sokolov, “High on the Hog” *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 June 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB121460185679911843>. (accessed 10 November 2013).

<sup>163</sup> Actually, Baudelaire set out to find the poem first in the pages of *The New York Times*, but failing to find “languorous” switched to *The Wall Street Journal*. Skype conversation with the artist, 8 May 2014.

replaced by the utter uncertainty of chapters to come,”<sup>164</sup> it may also be useful to think about other possible linkages between Verlaine’s poem and *The Wall Street Journal* articles. Put differently, we might ask why Baudelaire chose to ‘find’ Verlaine’s poem within these articles in the first place. As in Baudelaire’s earlier works, the key is in the temporality of his juxtapositions rather than in their doomsday content. For instance, one article, “High on the Hog” delighting in the recent U.S. legalization of the importation of bellota, a particularly expensive cured ham from Spain, concludes with the line “Only a handful of hedge-fund managers are likely to manage a steady enough diet of bellota for it to be a health worry.”<sup>165</sup> To maintain steady enough diets of bellota, plainly refers to exorbitant incomes. The article is dated the 28 June 2008, a few short months before the U.S. banking crisis was in full swing, when the finances of the same hedge-fund managers were under intense scrutiny. The narrative of this crisis had, only a year later, already begun to calcify into a story of chance taking, mortgage backed securities, ‘toxic assets’ and regulatory problems. Yet Baudelaire only skirts this narrative, focusing instead on a relatively inconsequential article on ham. By utilizing news articles in this way, Baudelaire emphasizes the contingency of the everyday. In other words, through the process of searching for Verlaine’s poem in the lines of *The Wall Street Journal* Baudelaire brings into contact two metrics of historical narration: that of the everyday depicted in *The Wall Street Journal* articles and that of the major historical event of

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<sup>164</sup> Tim Saltarelli, “Firing upon the clocks: observations on the work of Eric Baudelaire” exhibition essay for *Unfinished Business* at Gallery TPW, Toronto. 6 May to 5 June 2010, and see Warner, “Eric Baudelaire,” 30.

<sup>165</sup> Sokolov, “High on the Hog” *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 June 2008. Baudelaire’s use of *The Wall Street Journal*, a generally conservative newspaper, though in some ways serendipitous adds a layer of humor to his exhibition dealing with a radical leftist history.

‘Operation Overlord’ signified by Verlaine’s poem. Within this work he presents the small-scale and the large, the multiple and contested daily narratives and the way these are largely worn down, forgotten and subsumed into a dominant history. In this way, although *Chanson d’Automne* is the only work in Baudelaire’s exhibition that does not explicitly refer to the history of the JRA, it provides one example of the multiple ways Baudelaire attempts to account for the relationship between a historical event and how we subsequently imagine or represent it.



Figure 15 Eric Baudelaire, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images*, installation view at Gasworks, London, courtesy the artist.

## An anabasis in images

After *Chanson D’Automne*, visitors to Baudelaire’s exhibition encounter *Fusako Shigenobu Family Album, 27 photographs* (2012). Twenty-seven photographs, mostly snapshots and posed portraits are arranged together neatly on a white background in the

top half of an oversized frame. Though Baudelaire's title explicitly designates these photos as a family album, the album, circa 1900 to 1973, as the subtitle tells us, abruptly ends when Fusako Shigenobu gave birth to May and went underground with the Japanese Red Army.<sup>166</sup> The number of photographs included corresponds exactly to the '27 years without images' in the title of the exhibition, and while we can read them as standing in for each subsequent year without an image, they also signal an attempt to look to the past to create a context for an event unfolding—an 'event' in this case referring to a revolutionary event, one that seems to have no representation in this family album. Additionally, as images designated part of a family album, these pictures also feel personal in a way that the other works in the exhibition do not. Positioned following *Chanson D'Automne's* newspaper clippings, they read as another kind of memory trigger, another way of framing the historical record.

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<sup>166</sup> See Baudelaire's account of this in the *Libretto*. See also, Michiya Shimbori, T. Ban, K. Kono, et. al., "Japanese Student Activism in the 1970s," *Higher Education*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Mar., 1980), 139-154, and Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Hijackers, Bombers, and Bank Robbers: Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Nov., 1989), 724-740. Steinhoff's article contains a very handy diagram of the trajectory of Japanese post-war Leftist groups and their splinter groups.





**Figure 16** Eric Baudelaire, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images*, installation view at Gasworks, London, courtesy the artist.

A clip from Masao Adachi's film *A.K.A. Serial Killer* plays at the entrance into the next gallery. As I will discuss at some length below, it is a film that struggles with how to present the narrative of Norio Nagayama's life in a way that will reveal his motives for murdering four people in Japan in 1968. Baudelaire's inclusion of Adachi's work within his exhibition points in two directions: to the history of Japanese avant-garde filmmaking and to Adachi's productive and ongoing collaboration in Baudelaire's work.

A collection of nine prints hangs down the wall following the clip from *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, collectively entitled *Pictures of Documents* (2011). From the entrance of the gallery these pictures look like nine opaque black rectangles. When walking through the space, however, the luster of the varnish used to print the images reflects light in such a way that the images become visible only from certain angles. Their content is twice

removed from indexical reality: first, they are pulled from preexisting media, from Adachi's films and from personal and news photographs; and second, they are digitally adjusted and then printed. They are thus images of images that formally point back to the film negative in that they need light to be seen and they are stationed down the wall like a filmstrip.

Within their frames, some of these prints reproduce the structure of the film negative again, as stills divide the space of the black paper, some in an offset grid, some horizontally across, while other images take up almost the whole frame. Though they all share the same title, *Pictures of Documents*, each one also has a descriptive subtitle identifying the image shown: stills from Adachi's films *Jogakusei Guerilla (Female Student Guerrilla, 1969)*, *Sekigun-P.F.L.P: Sekai senso sengen (Red Army/ PFLP: Declaration of World War, 1971)* and *Tenshi No Kôkotsu (Ecstasy of the Angels, 1972)* make up three of the prints. An image of the aftermath of the 30 May 1972 Lod Airport massacre in Tel Aviv,<sup>167</sup> a snapshot of pregnant Fusako Shigenobu in 1973, and one with

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<sup>167</sup> The attack, in which three gunmen opened fire into a crowd killing 27 and injuring 78, was purportedly in support of Palestinian Revolution and World Revolution. In addition to this attack, the Japanese Red Army was known for its plane hijackings. A scene depicting a Red Army hijacking is at the opening of Adachi's *Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War*, and this clip appears in Baudelaire's film. Hijackings were used to gain media attention and negotiate prisoner releases until 1977 when Germany and then other countries refused to negotiate with terrorists after the October 13-18 hijacking and hostage crisis of Lufthansa Flight 181 - hijacked by the Red Army Faction to negotiate prisoner releases. There is a large body of work on the usefulness of negotiating with 'terrorists' that uses game theory to consider both monetary expenditure by governments, and also terrorists' use of hijackings as a way to gain media attention for their cause, among other things. See for example, Harvey E. Lapan and Todd Sandler, "To Bargain or Not to Bargain: That is the Question" *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 78, No.2 (in Papers and Proceedings of the One Hundredth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association), (May 1998), 16-21, refutes the earlier hardline taken by governments against negotiation, also see Deputy Secretary of State Whitehead's address to the Brookings Institution Conference on Terrorism on 10 December 1986, excerpted in, "Terrorism: The Challenge and Response" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring 1987), 215-221. Despite this research, the international rhetoric regarding terrorism has

her and May in 1976 make up three more. News images of Fusako Shigenobu's arrest and transfer to Tokyo on 8 November 2000, stills from Adachi's film *Yuheisha – terorisuto* (*Prisoner/ Terrorist*, 2006), and a picture of a wanted poster taken by Baudelaire in Tokyo in 2010 make up the final three. The prints signal the structure of the film that plays in the room across from them.



**Figure 17** Eric Baudelaire, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images*, installation view at Gasworks, London, courtesy the artist.

grown increasingly conservative, and in the wake of the 11 September 2001 hijackings and World Trade Center attack, the 11 March 2004 train bombings in Madrid and the 5 July 2005 tube and bus bombings in London, US President Bush returned to a rhetoric of “no bargaining” See George W. Bush, “An Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People.” 20 September 2001.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>. (Accessed 28 March 2014). The 1972 events at Lod Airport were seen by some members of the JRA (Fusako Shigenobu included) as shifting the revolution away from the group's internal purges of the winter of 1972 in Japan. During these internal self-critiques, members of the revolutionary party abandoned a group of their own deemed not ‘self-critical enough,’ in the mountains of Japan. These members were tied up and left to die. Baudelaire includes a short account of this purge in the timeline in his *Libretto*, but also see Steinhoff, “Hijackers, Bombers and Bank Robbers,” 724-740. For another artist's account of the use of hijackings and the Japanese Red Army's 1972 purge see Naeem Mohaiemen's, *The Young Man Was (Part 1: United Red Army)*, Film, 70 min., 2011-2012.

Moving through the space of the gallery, Baudelaire presents us with a roughly chronological account of Masao Adachi, May and Fusako Shigenobu's lives. *Chanson D'Automne*, would be the notable exception, but its presence acts almost like a synecdoche for the rest of the exhibition. Here the viewer's movements create a sequential reading in relation to the art objects, their pauses and reversals affecting how Baudelaire's work is read. However in Baudelaire's film which plays in the adjacent room the narrative is pre-determined, crafted by Baudelaire's editing and given shape by the camera's movement.

### **The anabasis of a film**

Following the first two rooms is a third, dark room, where Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi, and 27 Years Without Images*, a 66 minute film shot primarily in Tokyo and Lebanon on Super 8 stock, plays. The film has been termed by critics "experimental" and certainly it challenges any categorization by genre. It is an investigation into the problematics of imaging reality, putting into tension the personal memories of Shigenobu and Adachi with the history they recount (a history largely recognized as one of a terrorist organization). It is a focused exploration of filmmaking as an act of memory itself.

To look closely at the work of this film I will break my discussion into two sections. The first examines the opening scenes in order to unpack the way that Baudelaire sets the pace for our viewing, our expectations regarding the narrative, and immediately complicates the film's capture of reality. I will then examine the

collaborative nature of the film as an exchange between Baudelaire, Adachi and May Shigenobu. This second section encompasses four smaller discussions on Adachi's film *AKA Serial Killer* and its connection to Baudelaire's film, on the excerpts from Adachi's oeuvre that Baudelaire includes within his film on May's memories and their connection to images, and finally on Baudelaire's return of Adachi's favour by filming footage for him in Lebanon, a place Adachi can no longer return. My discussion of the film is by no means exhaustive. Instead, my argument will focus specifically on how we can understand the histories represented here in relation to the term Baudelaire chooses to describe them, *anabasis*, and on teasing out the ways that this film is at once a capture of history, an 'event', and a struggle with the terms of producing it.

The film opens with the flickering of leader and images that have the grainy and washed out quality of colour photos from the 1960s and 70s. A tight shot of a blue and white striped piece of cloth wrapped around the corner of a building pans to trees just beyond the building's edge as May Shigenobu's voice enters the audio track. Shigenobu recalls sitting on a porch and asking one of her mother's male comrades, Adachi, what the sun is. Beginning the film with this memory introduces Masao Adachi, even though his name is not explicitly used, and it establishes an intimate familial relationship between him and May Shigenobu.<sup>168</sup> Shigenobu's inquisitive and repetitive questioning of Adachi regarding the nature of the sun is familiar to us as an act typical of children developing understandings of the world, but it is also about the struggle of an adult—read

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<sup>168</sup> "He was eventually a person I would call papa, because he was so much like a father." Near the end of the film, Adachi explicitly states that he helped to raise May Shigenobu until she was 10, after which it became too dangerous for them to be seen together. These are the only two references within the film to their relationship.

authority—to give an adequate account, and the possibility of his own recognition, in the face of this questioning, that he himself may not have a complete understanding of what he is attempting to explain. We can read this recollection of Shigenobu's as parallel to Baudelaire's investigation into, and questioning of, history. Each work in the exhibition is an attempt to frame the intertwined histories of Adachi, Shigenobu, and the JRA while still signaling, in different ways, the nature of the media and the necessarily mediated nature of these histories, like the film itself. Baudelaire begins with *May's memories*, with all the personal investments, precisely because of the factual failures and omissions memories imply.

Adachi's voice enters the soundtrack with a memory that calls attention to the labour involved in making a film and the constructedness of cinematic language.<sup>169</sup> His narrative begins nearly two decades before May Shigenobu's birth, with a recollection of a moment when he overstepped his meager authority as an assistant director by advising the set design team and lighting crew, and by making suggestions to the director about how to film the actors. Baudelaire's footage does not illustrate Adachi's recollection, just as it remains distinct from Shigenobu's memories. Panning shots of an interior, the sink and shower stall of a bathroom, a bed, a kitchen window cut to another long shot of a cityscape. Questions of location are further complicated by time, not only do we wonder 'where' we are seeing, the location of the landscape that is either Beirut or Japan, but we wonder *when* are we seeing. This tension remains, as Adachi recalls suggesting to the director he film the actors from behind rather than having them always face the camera—

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<sup>169</sup> Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, (Indiana University Press, 1991), 3-75.

in Baudelaire's footage a man walks away from the camera and another plays a trumpet in profile. While Adachi recalls moments in the development of cinematic language in Japan,<sup>170</sup> the near alignment of image and audio allows his recollection to be read as metaphor for the constructed language of Baudelaire's own film. However, this momentary and tentative convergence between audio and image maintains a temporal ambiguity.

Another near-convergence between image and narrative happens later in the film when Adachi explains his participation in student protests against the renewal of the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and the images on screen are of a protest.<sup>171</sup> Looking

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<sup>170</sup> David Desser dates the beginning of the Japanese New Wave with Nagisa Oshima's film *Ai to kibo no machi* (*A Town of Love and Hope*, 1959) See *Eros plus Massacre*, (Indiana University Press, 1988), 1-12, 4. Desser also points out that Japanese New Wave, unlike the New Wave movements of France, Britain, or Poland, was inaugurated within a mainstream context, i.e. within major commercial studios. It is only after this beginning that it moved toward independent production. According to him, part of the reason for the New Wave beginning here was an attempt by the cinema to counter the tide of falling attendance rates likely due to the increase of television viewing. One solution was to try showing in wide screen, another was to promote assistants to the rank of director in the hopes that their fresh perspective would bring in larger audiences. Neither worked. Adachi's path to becoming a director was largely through the student movements, but he would have also been aware of the context within commercial cinema. For an overview of student political movements (and their linked cinema movements) See Harry Harootunian and Sabu Kohso, "Messages in a Bottle: An Interview with Filmmaker Masao Adachi," *boundary 2* vol. 35, no. 3 (2008), 63-97, 66. For an overview of Adachi's filmmaking career see also, Yuriko Furuhata, "Refiguring Actuality: Japan's Film Theory and Avant-Garde Documentary Movement 1950s and 1960s" PhD Dissertation, Brown University, 2009, 200-203.

<sup>171</sup> The U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty was signed in San Francisco, California in 1951 and renewable in ten years. It was renewed and revised in 1960 as the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, and granted the U.S. the right to military bases in Japan in exchange for committing to protect Japan from military aggression. It was met with widespread protests in Japan upon its renewal. Students rose against this treaty, which they saw as effectively allowing Japan to submit to U.S. imperialism, their protests eventually caused a break within the Japanese Communist Party, forming a New Left made predominantly of students. But it was not only this domestic situation that spurred protests on the Left. The Korean war and then the Vietnam War also incited protests and these events were seen not as separate incidents on the world stage, but as connected elements of a power play, which many sectors of the Japanese public experienced ambivalently. Although many felt this cast Japan as a U.S. pawn in the cold war, Japan's

closely however, it becomes clear that this is not archival footage of the specific protest Adachi references—marchers wave Lebanese flags and hold up cell phones to record the event. In one instance a young man sits with a sign that reads “‘like’ this on Facebook”. As a whole, the film is structured around a temporal contradiction. Baudelaire’s use of grainy footage makes the images look like archival documents, but their contemporary content indicates otherwise. As such, they become an almost cheeky play on Walter Benjamin’s assertion that we can only attempt to understand the past through our present moment.<sup>172</sup> By refusing to name their content, and by pairing them with Shigenobu and Adachi’s recollections, Baudelaire’s visual sequence makes us question the relationship between the political moments Shigenobu and Adachi recall and the one captured on screen. But this question isn’t fully resolved and is instead investigated in different permutations throughout the film, not only in relation to the history being recounted, but also in relation to way we represent histories and memories of events.

## **Collaborative filmmaking, Adachi helps Baudelaire**

These investigations become clearer when we learn that Shigenobu and Adachi’s histories are only one aspect of the film’s narrative and that Baudelaire’s own investigation into this history and his collaboration with Masao Adachi also frame the

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economy was also reaping the benefits of American military efforts as Japan supplied much of the equipment. See the council on foreign relations: <http://www.cfr.org/japan/us-japan-security-alliance/p31437> (Accessed 12 December 2013). See also Harootunian, “Messages in a Bottle,” 65, 71.

<sup>172</sup> Walter Benjamin, “N [On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress” *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 456-488.



project of making this film. An email from Adachi to Baudelaire depicted early on in the film indicates that some of the footage is the product of an exchange between Baudelaire and Adachi. Adachi agreed to help Baudelaire with this project on the condition that Baudelaire in turn agreed to film locations in Lebanon for him. Further emails regarding this exchange appear again at the end of the film, and I will return to the significance of these below. First, however, I will examine the type of the help Adachi provides Baudelaire.

Adachi contributes to Baudelaire's film in three ways. First, by letting Baudelaire use Adachi's recollections, and indeed a large part of the film's narrative, weaves Adachi's memories together with those of Shigenobu. These memories are in fact the responses to interviews with Baudelaire, but the questions prompting their answers are absent from the soundtrack, just as their images are mostly absent from the film. Second, Adachi provides a voice-over context for the excerpts Baudelaire takes from his filmic oeuvre. Within the *Anabasis of May* excerpts from Adachi's work are formally identified as not belonging to Baudelaire. Whereas Baudelaire's footage runs to the edge of the screen, Adachi's films are surrounded by an even black border. Third, Adachi speaks at length about his film *A.K.A. Serial Killer* (1969), made with Masao Matsuda and Mamoru Sasaki, a work that is not visually referenced within Baudelaire's film. The absence of an excerpt from this film may be because *The Anabasis of May*, with its extended takes and meandering footage of interiors and landscapes, already pays homage formally to *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the theory of *fûkeiron* (or landscape film) that it helped to develop in its own aesthetic structure. In what follows, I examine Baudelaire's use of Adachi's previous films in the structuring of his own, beginning with *A.K.A. Serial*

*Killer*, since it most directly influences the form of Baudelaire's film, and continuing through the excerpts he includes from the rest of Adachi's oeuvre.

The link between Baudelaire's film and Adachi's *A.K.A. Serial Killer* is prefaced in the space of the gallery, where, as I mention above, a clip from Adachi's film plays on a monitor. For viewers already familiar with Adachi's work, the connection is immediately visible in the first tracking shots of Baudelaire's film, and for those who are not, the second monitor makes this obvious. This relationship is made even more explicit about eight minutes into *The Anabasis of May* when a long take of a city during the day, filmed out the window of a car, unfolds silently for almost a minute before Adachi begins speaking about *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. As Adachi describes the process of making the film and Baudelaire's footage continues panning over cityscapes, it is clear that the shots we are seeing illustrate the theory Adachi discusses on the audio track, despite the fact that they do not depict the precise space and time he describes.

Adachi explains that the impetus for making *A.K.A. Serial Killer* was to respond to the media, where he first read the headlines about Norio Nagayama (1949-1997), then a nineteen year old man, who had murdered four people.<sup>173</sup> Adachi and his collaborators

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<sup>173</sup> For a more detailed account of Nagayama's life and role in the media landscape of post-war Japan see Yuriko Furuhashi, *Refiguring Actuality*, 195-229. For example, neither the timeline in Baudelaire's *Libretto*, nor Adachi's account in *The Anabasis of May* indicates that while in prison Nagayama continued his education which, because of his constant moves to find work, had been interrupted. Nor do they mention that he subsequently published an autobiography, *Muchi no namida* (Tears of Ignorance, 1971). According to Furuhashi when this book came out Nagayama became an icon of the left, and his writing reinforced his political position. As a result, the media, writers and filmmakers "turned to Nagayama in order to speak for and about him, as if he were the symbolic nodal point of the political, economic cultural strata of postwar Japan." Adachi's 1969 film is in some ways an exceptional conclusion about Nagayama's feelings of alienation from society. Furuhashi also notes that another film by *Shindô Kaneto*, *hadaka no jûkyûsai* (Live

wanted to make a film that would explore Nagayama's life from birth to his arrest in 1969 in order to understand what made him commit such exceptional crimes.<sup>174</sup> The problem, as Adachi states it, was to create a film which expressed Nagayama's understanding of the world, but one that didn't fall into the conventions of documentary or drama—they especially wanted to avoid the sensationalism of the media in representing the murders and Nagayama's capture. While location hunting in the towns Nagayama had lived, Adachi recalls that he, Matsuda and Sasaki were struck by the rapidly changing Japanese landscape. Each town they visited bore evidence of the rapid industrialization that was taking place. As postwar Japan poured money into manufacturing and commercial businesses, little towns became more and more alike. “And even in the landscape of pre-harvest fields there hovered a suffocating air of efficiency and mass production.”<sup>175</sup> Adachi remarks that it was perhaps this change that made Nagayama feel enclosed, claustrophobic, and eventually drove him to commit his crime.<sup>176</sup> By filming the banality of the landscape itself from the uniform point of view of the camera, Adachi and his collaborators thought they could make visible a politics of

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Today, Die Tomorrow!) 1970, dramatically narrates Nagayama's life in contrast to the refusal of narrative in Adachi's film.

<sup>174</sup> In 1968 Norio Nagayama stole a pistol and killed four people — two security guards at a U.S. Navy base in Yokosuka and two taxi drivers. The description Adachi gives of his own film within Baudelaire's work makes it seem as though Norio committed these murders over a single day and then was apprehended, but the account provided in *A.K.A. Serial Killer* describes this story unfolding over months. For further historical contextualization of this film see: Furuhata, *Refiguring Actuality*, 207-208. A rough copy of the film is available on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swRSsBmUVKQ> (accessed 12 January 2014). This film is also available through various file sharing websites like Karagarga.net.

<sup>175</sup> Harootunian, “Message in a Bottle,” 73.

<sup>176</sup> In an interview with Harootunian, Adachi explains, “So we were convinced that Nagayama, with gun in hand, kept firing at this landscape itself, and that this is how he became embroiled in the serial killing incident.” *Ibid.*

space. *Fûkeiron* arose from this idea that the landscape reflects the image of power in society. The theory signals a shift from making a film about a specific character and his or her actions within a landscape to the landscape itself as the subject producing various actions and power relations.<sup>177</sup>

In light of Adachi's explanation, *The Anabasis of May* has been read as paying homage to Adachi in form. Indeed, Baudelaire's film is also a kind of landscape film. More specifically, *The Anabasis of May* has been characterized as representing an "application of the theory, turned back on none other than its theorist".<sup>178</sup> As with his use of the term anabasis, I argue that Baudelaire ultimately references the history of this theory in order to investigate its tenants. Although there are moments in his film that explicitly draw upon Adachi's theory, the film also includes voiceovers, excerpts from other films and the news, as well as images of interiors. It not only looks to the landscape for a theory of power, but also to the heterogeneous elements that comprise a version of reality and toward the structures of power that allow certain versions of history to be recognizable while others are not.

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<sup>177</sup> Furuhashi, notes that the designation "landscape film" originally only referred to this collaborative film *A.K.A Serial Killer*, and a film by Oshima Nagisa, *Tokyo sensô sengo hiwa: eiga de isho o nokoshiteitta otoko no monogatari* (*The Secret Story of Post-Tokyo War: The Story of a Man Who Left His Will on Film*, 1970), 200.

<sup>178</sup> Yip.

## Excerpts from Adachi's film

Following the discussion of *A.K.A. Serial Killer Baudelaire* includes four other excerpts from Adachi's oeuvre. Through these clips he is able to trace the history of Adachi's radical student background, engagement in the JRA, and his arrest and return to Japan. The films stand in for images of Adachi's past that are otherwise absent. Although Baudelaire introduces the segments chronologically, the temporal flow is interrupted by Adachi's narration of them. In other words, we encounter the history from two perspectives—Adachi's footage from the late 60s and early 70s on screen and his perspective in the present.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, these excerpts once again frustrate the kind of straightforward connection between images, history and reality that we might expect to encounter in documentary film. By having Adachi recount his history through the representations of his own filmic oeuvre, viewers of Baudelaire's film are repeatedly being made aware of the constructedness and contingency of the narrative of Adachi's

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<sup>179</sup> The work of Masao Adachi has not, until more recently, been considered widely in Japanese Film History, but his work is gaining more recognition. This recent exposure has partly to do with his return to Japan in 2000 and the recent release of his new film, but is also due to burgeoning scholarship, exhibitions and film screenings focusing on Japanese avant-garde film. See for example: Steven Ridgely, *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment art of Terayama Shuji*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Isolode Standish, *Politics, Porn and Protest: Japanese Avant-Garde Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s*, (New York: Continuum, 2011); Miryam B. Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2011). MoMA's recent Landscape film symposium and screenings, and The Harvard Film Archive, "Film = Activism. The Revolutionary Underground Cinema of Masao Adachi" March 1-March 4, 2013. In 2011 there were also at least two major retrospectives of Japanese films of the 1960s and 70s focusing on the work of the Art Theatre Guild Program (ATG), an organization that fostered avant-garde filmmaking and other arts in Japan, first at The New York Film Festival and also an Art and Theatre Guild Program which traveled between London, Paris and Montreal. More recently a series of ATG films were screened at the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in 2013: <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/filmseries/ATG>.

past, of the Leftist student movements in Japan and of the Red Army and PFLP's revolutionary movements.

*Female Student Guerrilla* (1969), is the first of Adachi's films cut into *Anabasis of May*. The segment runs for a only few seconds before Adachi's voiceover explains its history. Five Japanese students confront their teachers from atop a hill. The female students wear only underwear and have AK 47s, the iconic gun of guerrilla fighters, slung across their chests. The heated verbal exchange between the students and their teachers ends with the students shouting now clichéd slogans in the form of dialogue, "Through individual violence we will shake up the dominant classes and win in a decisive struggle!" Adachi's recollections about the revolutionary message he was attempting to convey is toned down in relation to these heated assertions. He recalls wanting to make a film that pictured students who were making mistakes, but who were also struggling through what it meant to change the world.

The excerpt from *Sex Jack* (1971), the next of Adachi's films included in Baudelaire's, depicts a protest scene in which marchers link together and form a snake like shape through the streets of Tokyo as they shout slogans. Over their voices we hear sounds of shots and screaming as a large contingent of riot police confront the protestors.<sup>180</sup> This is followed by a sex scene which is presided over by an earnest young

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<sup>180</sup> Through his work with the Student film groups Adachi subsequently began working with Kôji Wakamatsu's production group in the genre of "pink films". Wakamatsu used the structure of this genre - the low production budgets (approximately 3 million yen or around 9,000 CAD in the late 1960s) and quick turnover of projects (entire films would often be finished within a week) to create films that were also political experiments. Alberto Toscano and Go Hirasawa, "Walls of Flesh: The Films of Kôji Wakamatsu (1956-1972)" *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4, 2013: 41-49.

woman reading a revolutionary tract.<sup>181</sup> Again, this clip runs for a few seconds before Adachi speaks about it. We learn that the film illustrates a moment in Adachi's career when he was working with Kôji Wakamatsu, a prolific director of pink films, to make films that had a dual audience—male workers who could screen them in the time allotted to them as a lunch break and a student and avant-garde public interested in themes of revolution and Wakamatsu's artistic direction.<sup>182</sup> *Sex Jack* is also important because it shows the way political guerrilla films adapted the structural framework of the pink film genre to their benefit: meager budgets led to extremely short production schedules and these constraints affected the film's form. Footage shot of protests could be almost immediately spliced into films like *Sex Jack*, amplifying the immediacy of events for their audiences.<sup>183</sup> Here we can see a close connection between the experience of reality, its capture, its representation within a film and its consumption by an audience, which re-frames and re-conceptualizes the experience of reality. This cycle is precisely the one Baudelaire seems to focus on in his own self-reflexive presentation and production of history in *The Anabasis of May*.

Baudelaire moves from this excerpted clip to Adachi's recollection of visiting Palestine with Oshima, Wakamatsu and Yoshida Kijû while the trio was on their way

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<sup>181</sup> For a discussion of the linkage between identity (what it means to be Japanese in Post-war Japan), sexuality and violence see, "Ruined Maps" in Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre*, 76-107.

<sup>182</sup> Working with Adachi as a scriptwriter, Wakamatsu productions shifted more towards activism. See Toscano and Hirasawa, "Walls of Flesh," 42, Harootunian, 66, and Furuhata, 200-203.

<sup>183</sup> This is the case for the footage of the protestors moving snake-like down the street in Tokyo with riot police lined up to meet them. According to Toscano and Hirasawa, the title of this film, *Sex Jack*, is itself a reference to "the Japanese Red Army's successful hijacking of a Japanese airliner, diverting it to North Korea," 46.

back from the 1971 Cannes Film Festival.<sup>184</sup> In Palestine, the Japanese embassy put them in touch with Fusako Shigenobu who was to be their interpreter. It is at this moment in *The Anabasis of May* that we learn when and where Adachi and Shigenobu's timelines intersect. Adachi goes on to describe the project he and Wakamatsu worked on in Palestine, *Red Army/ PFLP: Declaration of World War*, a film he made while interested in the differences in structure between the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which mobilized an intergenerational group of Palestinians toward revolution, and the mostly student led Japanese Red Army.

Baudelaire's excerpt from this film shows Palestinian Liberation fighters engaging in guerrilla combat—crouching in fields with large weapons, preparing and lobbing hand grenades, and shooting missiles at an unseen enemy—while the audio track encourages men, women, children and the elderly to join the revolution. More footage from Adachi's film appears again a minute later as a segment on the French news channel INA. This time it's framed within the contours of a television screen and the audio track provides a very different narrative. The confident and matter of fact voice of reporter Jean-Pierre Ferey presents the daily news, one item of which is the JRA's takeover of the French Embassy in The Hague. This event is contextualized in the framework of the broadcast by an overview of the organization's beliefs and previous actions, coupled with a montage of images taken from the bombing at Lod Airport and other short clips taken

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<sup>184</sup> The description of this “stop-over” is strikingly similar in each account of it attesting to the repetition with which this story is told. See, Toscano and Hirasawa, 45, Harootunian, 72, Furuhata, 200-208.



from past news segments.<sup>185</sup> The use of two different audio tracks over Adachi's image track signals the role of discourse in the shaping of our perception of images.<sup>186</sup>

Replaying the image track here, Baudelaire also foregrounds the fact that there were multiple audiences for the original footage — those that were the intended audience of *Red Army/PFLP*—JRA and PFLP members the middle east and in Japan, and INA's audience. Indeed it was in an attempt to emphasize the importance of the context of the film's circulation that Adachi formed the Red Bus Screening Troupe (Aka basu jōeitai), asserting that the forum of the screening was itself part of the activist movement.<sup>187</sup> The film was not meant to be shown within the context of a commercial theatre, but traveled around in Adachi's screening bus to different towns in Japan. In each new location he set up screenings followed by discussions of this and other films.

The final clip from Adachi's oeuvre in *Anabasis of May* is excerpted from *Ecstasy of the Angels* (1972). The camera follows a young man walking quickly through a crowd, setting off explosives. A rapid series of cuts shows the effects: explosion after explosion, like fireworks. Narrating the footage, Adachi explains that, at this point in his career, he realized that isolated acts of violence were not going to ignite the world revolution, he

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<sup>185</sup> This INA "factual" appropriates Adachi's footage and uses it to characterize the JRA as a terrorist group. The reporting doesn't fully distinguish between the Japanese Red Army functioning in Beirut and the Red Army within Japan and collapses their actions making them appear more organized and united than they perhaps were. These groups, though linked in their commitment for world revolution, were actually quite different. See: Michiya Shimbōri, T. Ban, K. Kono, et. al., "Japanese Student Activism in the 1970s," 139-154, David Kowalewski, "Political Protest in Postwar Japan: A Diachronic View," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), 1-15, and especially, Steinhoff, 724-740.

<sup>186</sup> We might think here of Chris Marker's *Letter From Siberia* (1957) or Jean Luc Godard's *2 or 3 Things I know about Her* (1967).

<sup>187</sup> Harootunian, 67. This is particularly interesting because Palestinian and other revolutionary filmmakers were also using this mode of distribution for their propaganda films, see Chapter 1.

recalls that he wrote this screenplay as a portrait of a self-destructive youth and speaks of a failed attempt to make a sequel to *Red Army/PFLP*, perhaps imagining that if he could work out a more advanced way of communicating through film he could then find a way to change the world. But it is at this moment, in 1973, that Adachi instead decides to stay in Beirut and become the spokesman for the Japanese Red Army.<sup>188</sup> During this time he recorded over two-hundred hours of footage, but this recording did not result in a film.

### ***27 years without images and the framing of reality***

While Adachi recounts his experience of the political upheavals in post-war Japan through his student activism, early films, and work for the JRA, May Shigenobu describes her childhood in hiding. The production stoppage for Adachi after the 1972 Lod airport operation, and his subsequent work for the JRA, is followed in Baudelaire's film by Shigenobu's account of destroying pictures. She explains that each time she and her mother had to change hiding places, they would also go through their pictures, only keeping photos that didn't indicate anything, images that wouldn't reveal or endanger anyone if they were to be found. These decontextualized images are the only photos that remain of May and Fusako Shigenobu's lives in Lebanon.

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<sup>188</sup> When he was listed as this organization's spokesman in 1974 he had to go underground to escape arrest and threats on his life. Adachi's accounts for his life in three periods, see Harootunian, 82 and 83.



**Figure 18** Eric Baudelaire, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images* (2012) video still.



**Figure 19** Eric Baudelaire, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images* (2012) video still.



**Figure 20** Eric Baudelaire, *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 years without images* (2012) video still.

The series of cuts that comprise the next sequence could be described as producing an array of associations and meanings through “soft-montage”—a series of juxtaposed images that are generally related, but do not necessarily oppose one another or create equivalencies.<sup>189</sup> As May Shigenobu discusses the careful editing of images from her past, on screen Baudelaire pans over a book of postcards still joined together along their perforated edges and hanging vertically in a line down a wall. These are also images that we keep, but other than location, they tend to be images that don’t reveal anything. The last image in the series is of two enormous rock formations rising out of the sea. Baudelaire’s film cuts to the sea, to a location that appears to be the ‘reality’ from which this postcard photo was taken. A tracking shot follows a boat as it makes its way through the water around the jutting rock formations. The footage of the sea feels more immediate than the post card’s image of it, but it is in fact only a different kind of representation.

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<sup>189</sup> Nora Alter, “Translating the Essay into Film and Installation” *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 6, No. 44 (2007), 44-57, 53.

This rich sequence is followed by Adachi's remarks on his time with the PFLP, which largely consisted of following the fighters around and waiting for something to happen, while thinking through the reality he was experiencing and framing it as though it were a film. This sequence is complicated because it addresses two ways of thinking about the relationship between photographs and 'reality': 1) the photograph as evidence that could implicate; and 2) the photograph that refers, but does not damage that can be a souvenir. Baudelaire's cut between the postcard and the boat on the water, the image and 'reality', is inverted in Adachi's account of imagining reality as a film.

This imagining is in turn complicated by the fact that the nearly two-hundred hours of footage Adachi did record during his time with the Palestinians was destroyed in the 1982 bombing of Beirut. Adachi recalls two moments lost with this footage: the first is a series of reels that capture a *fedayeen*, a Palestinian guerrilla fighter, as he grows up in the camps. The second is a memory of filming with another young fighter and capturing the event of his death on film. Of this Adachi says, "I can only think that the lost footage never existed". However, these recollections, which follow May's memories of destroying photographs, signal again a deeply complicated relationship between film, memory and the experience of reality.

The concept of film here becomes not only a cipher for the many ways in which we frame reality (and the structures of power inherent in these framings) but also the ways in which our experience of lived-reality is always already framed by discourses of power. So while here we can see examples of moments when May and Adachi's memories of events could be supplemented by their representations, just as Adachi's recollections of his own films are throughout *The Anabasis of May*, ultimately

Baudelaire's film underscores not only the difficulty of representing reality, but also the fact that representation itself *produces* reality. Here, the event could be the Lod Airport bombings, the JRA and PFLP's guerrilla warfare, the entire time Adachi, Fusako and May Shigenobu spent in Lebanon. Or, it could be the events Adachi was able to capture on tape, or the event of the destruction of these tapes. In any event, the production of reality is the narrative of the JRA in relation to the political uprisings of the late 1960s and the legacies of those leftist histories now.

### **A Return to Images, Baudelaire Helps Adachi**

We might imagine the role of representation in *The Anabasis of May* would shift as its protagonists return to Japan: no longer in hiding, they return to images. But the return in their entwined recollections does not produce a parallel convergence between audio and image tracks in Baudelaire's film, again making it clear that Baudelaire's decision not to illustrate the past they describe arises from more than simply an archival lack. As May Shigenobu recounts receiving word of her mother's capture through a friend, and being able to confirm the news by catching sight of her mother in the grainy images of NHK, a Japanese National broadcast station, Baudelaire's footage reproduces news segments of Fusako Shigenobu's return, one of which shows her being led in handcuffs through a crush of journalists and flashing cameras. However, as Shigenobu's recollections about the practicalities of her return to Japan continue, Baudelaire's footage cuts to a steady shot of pedestrians walking back and forth across a bridge in Japan, once again returning to the landscape.

Adachi's account of his arrest in Lebanon and subsequent prison sentence is interspersed within May Shigenobu's own account of her return.<sup>190</sup> Adachi explains that his return to Japan also means never leaving again because he is no longer granted exit visas.<sup>191</sup> But his is also an account of a return to a home that is no longer completely recognizable as the place he left. In the final ten minutes of the film this disjuncture between memory, imagination, reality, and the excesses and limits of representation are explored again. Adachi concludes his memories with a comparison between planning the production of a film and that of a guerrilla operation. The resulting 'event', he explains, is always different than the way it was imagined. In activism as in film, reality always exceeds the expectation and detail of the plan.<sup>192</sup>

These final minutes contain the longest sequence in which Baudelaire's film exists in two semiotic systems simultaneously—text and image—and where Baudelaire's footage is illustrative, though as I will show, even here the correspondence between image and text is unsettled. The remaining sections of the email exchange between Adachi and Baudelaire appear as discontinuous and fragmented white text over static

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<sup>190</sup> Adachi served three years in a prison in Lebanon (1997-2000) before being extradited to Japan where he underwent another trial for passport forgery and was sentenced to further jail time.

<sup>191</sup> Harrotunian and Kahso importantly contextualize Adachi's return to Japan by noting that it "constitutes an event of complex historical significance that has managed to alter the meaning of one of the most enduring tropes in the modern Japanese rhetorical arsenal...With Adachi's physical return to Japan, we have not the recalling of an exhausted, reified spiritual essence but rather one that fully embodies the promise and fresh spiritual energy of an earlier generation and its time and commitment to transforming the political and cultural landscape on a global scale, ironically bringing Japan into that world which the prewar world had tried to hold at arm's length." "Message in a Bottle" 64-65. *Yuheisha - Terorisuto* (alternately translated as *Prisoner/Terrorist* and *The Prisoner*, 2006) is the first feature film Adachi made upon his release.

<sup>192</sup> Here we can think back to Baudelaire's *The Dreadful Details* and *Sugar Water* and the way these works foreground an interplay between simulation, staging, actual events.

shots and pans. A cut to an interior of a home with people smoking and looking at photographs. If their identities are not clear, the assault rifles slung across their chests are. Adachi's text appears, "Thanks for your agreement on the subject of shooting in Lebanon. I have some proposal [sic] of the places (situations) for your shooting." A cut to an aged gravestone, "Today's situation of the Sabra & Shatilla refugee camp. especially in the memorial park and cemetery. some sights of some family housings (inside/outside)." A wider shot of the cemetery, "The Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp in Sida (Sidon). especially sight [sic] from the hill top around it." The footage continuing behind these words is shot from the vantage point of a hill looking down into one building in the camp, until the camera slowly pans up to reveal a very crowded group of buildings. In the distance a sliver of the sea and cloudless blue sky meet at the horizon. Cut to the dark interior of a home with a TV flickering in the corner, to a woman washing the windows of a Ferrari car-dealership, and once more to traffic on a busy street as white words fade in over the cars moving. "Today's sight of Beirut (any crowded street) the sight of newly built downtown, the beautiful sight of sea side Beirut in some places. if you can, find the ruin of street-fighting of the past." The words fade out as we cut to images of a stormy sea crashing over breaker walls, the footage Baudelaire captures unsettling the description Adachi provides.

A sun soaked valley pictured from above with a road winding through, cuts to a perspective from the side of the road. Adachi's words fade in again, "The general sight of Bekaa valley. the beautiful fields & mountains. And finally the Baalbeck Ruins. General shots & some detail of stones. Depending on what is possible during your trip, I would like to count on you. Thanks. Masao Adachi." A few more shots of the road, cars



approach and go by, and then the film cuts to men climbing down ruins, framing shots with their camera. Baudelaire cuts to a long shot and we can see the ruins' expanse, columns extending into the blue sky, sections from carvings that are missing. The next cut away from the ruins brings us back to a downtown road and Adachi's voice begins again in the background.

The directives Adachi gives Baudelaire for filming are vague, and yet it is obvious that these locations spring from clear memories. Adachi wonders, "And if I ask Eric to film these places, the landscapes I remember with his camera, who knows what the result will be." Behind this email we see the images filmed by Baudelaire and thus experience one kind of result, but what Adachi will do with the resulting footage is unclear. In other words, these images will probably have a double life, first as part of Baudelaire's film, and perhaps again in a work by Adachi.<sup>193</sup> If we construe Adachi's question more broadly, to refer to the results not only of how Baudelaire will capture the images, but the form these results will take within Baudelaire's film, Adachi also seems to ask how Baudelaire will look back at this history. What does it mean for Baudelaire to collaborate in its representation?

In its most basic form, one could say the narrative of *Anabasis of May* describes the anabasis of Masao Adachi's and Fusako Shigenobu's geographic and political journeys from Japan to participate in the Palestinian struggle in Lebanon and their work developing an international base for the Japanese Red Army. The return it suggests

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<sup>193</sup> Baudelaire's next project, *The Ugly One* (2013), is a continuation of his collaboration with Masao Adachi. Adachi wrote the script and Baudelaire directed.

describes their lives in hiding, subsequent arrests, and arrival back in Japan. Entwining May Shigenobu and Masao Adachi's perspectives throughout the film, Baudelaire also makes anabasis describe the structure of his own historical investigation into this history, his journey into the historical record and back. However, his is a narrative not sutured to the history it recounts, but one that investigates the way this history *can* be represented.

This investigation into the narrative structure of this history is again emphasized in the final minutes of Baudelaire's film. As May describes the radical shift from a life in hiding to a very public life in Japan, Baudelaire inserts a clip from a trailer for *9/11-8/15 Japan Suicide Pact* (2006) directed by Nobuyuki Oura.<sup>194</sup> Shigenobu recounts her experience taking part in the filming of the footage we see, noting that the director expected her to both give an account of her personal history, and to appear as image, essentially becoming a character in his retelling of it. The inclusion of this trailer within Baudelaire's film can be read as an acknowledgement of the other ways May and Fusako Shigenobu's lives have been recounted, at the same time that it recalls the shading of reality in his earlier works *The Dreadful Details* and *Sugar Water*.<sup>195</sup> We may see the mode of capture as being edited and mediated within Baudelaire and Oura's films, and certainly it is, but Baudelaire also stresses May Shigenobu and Adachi's recounting of this history is similarly motivated, and that the 'reality' he is capturing is itself scripted.

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<sup>194</sup> Director. Nobuyuki Oura. The official trailer for this film is available on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3289mryxkU&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3289mryxkU&feature=player_embedded) (Accessed 21 February 2014). It has not as of March 2014 had an English release.

<sup>195</sup> Two other films, Shane O'Sullivan's *Children of the Revolution* and Philippe Grandrieux's *Il se peut que la beauté ait renforcé notre résolution* (It May be Beauty that has Strengthened our Resolve) were also released in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

The history is already shaped before his ‘capture’ of it, through their own remembrances, and the multiple re-tellings that touch upon some details and leave out others.

## The Libretto

The temporal complexities at play within the exhibition and the experimentation with different tropes of representation in the *Anabasis of May* are reformulated in Baudelaire’s *Libretto*. While Baudelaire begins his film with May Shigenobu’s memories, most of the first half of the film is taken up by Adachi recounting his activities in filmmaking before Shigenobu was born. Like the looping videos in Baudelaire’s earlier work *Circumambulation*, Adachi’s and Shigenobu’s narratives catch up to each other in *The Anabasis of May* when we learn about Adachi’s involvement in the JRA. However, in the *Libretto* the “facts are laid out on a time-line...and treated as a “series” which is permitted to ‘*impress...the mind with the idea of an actual passage.*’”<sup>196</sup> In other words, Baudelaire presents the history of the JRA linearly, an alternate form of presentation which not only foregrounds the complexities of the film and installation, but also organizes them into a narrative structure more legible to most of his audience.

Intriguingly Baudelaire includes a text by Pierre Zaoui in the final pages of his take-away *Libretto* that unpacks *The Anabasis of May*. Entitled “Anabasis of Terror: Trying (Not) to Understand,” Zaoui’s text begins with an epigraph taken from Hegel’s

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<sup>196</sup> Hayden White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 121-134, 132-133. The second quote is cited from Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, italics in original.

*Phenomenology of Spirit* to characterize the actions of the JRA attack on the 30 May 1972 at Lod airport in Tel Aviv.

The sole and only work and deed accomplished by universal freedom is therefore death—a death that achieves nothing embraces nothing within its grasp; for what is negated is the unachieved, unfulfilled punctual entity of the absolutely free self. It is thus the most cold-blooded and meaningless death of all, with no more significance than cleaving a head of cabbage or swallowing a draught of water.<sup>197</sup>

Zaoui further follows Hegel's thoughts on Terror, "their liberation and revolutionary ideal was nothing but an ideal devoid of content...a confusion between images and reality, feelings and reason, deprived of all feeling and dialectical thought..." a damning summary of the efforts of the JRA revolutionaries, but one which, included in the last pages of Baudelaire's *Libretto*, summarily forecloses the idea that his work is a sympathetic retelling, a call to arms for further violent revolutionary struggles, or a nostalgic romanticization of those efforts. While Zaoui addresses the ideas that Baudelaire takes up in relation to the political actions of the JRA, Baudelaire's work is in his words, "not a political analysis, it is an art exhibition."<sup>198</sup> Indeed, for Zaoui Baudelaire's work does not strive to find an ultimate truth, but rather "aims to understand and not understand at the same time" the actions of the JRA.<sup>199</sup> This is a formulation

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<sup>197</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, cited in Pierre Zaoui, "Anabasis of Terror: Trying (Not) to Understand" included in Baudelaire's *Libretto*.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, 43.

Zaoui reaches through a dual acknowledgement that terrorism has horrific effects, many of which are felt by innocent bystanders, and that its underlying causes are the effects of another kind of violence, “oppression, inequality, poverty and exploitation.”<sup>200</sup> For Zaoui, Baudelaire’s anabasis is one that acknowledges neither a romantic view of a revolutionary past, nor a less complicated, murky, or politically hopeful vision of the future.

Ultimately, Zaoui asks a question similar to my own: What does anabasis mean in Baudelaire’s work? For him it is an anabasis that “circles around absent images of a crime, gropes among its traces...” Baudelaire “follows the sequence of Xenophon’s text,” in his narration of Masao Adachi, Fusako and May Shigenobu’s story, and traces the failure of their revolutionary politics from Japan to Beirut and back again. It is, for Zaoui, “the desire (not) to understand, in its threefold sense — to see, to hear, to share.”<sup>201</sup> An attempt to “convey everything that has happened, with all of the nebulosity and the nagging questions the past entails.” He concludes his essay by stating, “Baudelaire’s work...is an art of peace, of questions, and a call for more sharing, instead of more judgement and conflict.”<sup>202</sup>

While I think that Zaoui is right to point out that the aim of Baudelaire’s work is not to present a nostalgic view of the past, nor an uncomplicated formulation of revolutionary politics in the present and future, I argue that it is not only a circling around

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<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*, 43

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*, 47.

the absent content of the past, nor is it simply an exhibition that tries to “convey everything that has happened”, nor even just a “call for more sharing, instead of judgement and conflict,” nor a threefold aim “to hear, to see, to share”. Instead, returning to the themes I stressed in Baudelaire’s earlier works, *The Dreadful Details*, *Sugar Water* and *Circumambulation*, I want to read *The Anabasis of May* as having a reflexive relationship to its medium of representation, an awareness of the production of reality effects, in its attempt to understand an ‘event’ and its capture.

### **“Not Forgetting” the event**

Zaoui is correct to point out that Baudelaire’s work is not nostalgic, but not for the reason he suggests. In effect, Zaoui argues that the work avoids nostalgia because it does not champion the history it presents and instead conveys an often ambiguous multiplicity of perspectives. In contrast, I argue that the work cannot be described as nostalgic because it labours to produce another kind of reality. In her article, “Not-Forgetting: Mary Kelly’s *Love Songs*,” Rosalyn Deutsche remarks that, “the age of protected democracy in which we live...has had a serious impact on art that wants to play a role in deepening and extending the public sphere,” or in other words, our age has had a serious impact on the possibility of making socially engaged art.<sup>203</sup> One consequence of greater policing within the sphere of culture has been a tendency among those on the left to fall into “left melancholy,” a conservative stance in which they return to upholding anachronistic

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<sup>203</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, “Not-Forgetting: Mary Kelly’s *Love Songs*,” *Grey Room* 24 (Summer 2006), 26-37, 26.

beliefs about politics and systems of power rather than actively seeking out possible moments, spaces or stances for intervention within the present.<sup>204</sup> As philosopher Wendy Brown explains, Walter Benjamin coined the term ‘left melancholy’ to characterize leftists he saw as doubly blind. First, they are blinded by their refusal to engage with the world as it actually exists in the ‘now’ and, second, perhaps because of this refusal, they fail to see how lost ideals or past failures can be overcome by breaking free from the past.<sup>205</sup> The past, including the feelings and actions that happened within it, becomes frozen for those affected by left melancholy. Indeed, knowledge itself becomes imbued with a thing-like quality; it becomes rehearsed and static. In this stasis, knowledge becomes isolated in a kind of fetishistic logic, removed from human systems of action and exchange.<sup>206</sup>

While left melancholy grants “its adherents a clear and certain path toward the good, the right, the true” we might think of Baudelaire’s use of the term *anabasis* as offering another path through history and toward the future, one that is not direct, but that emphasizes wandering.<sup>207</sup> While ‘the left melancholic’s insistence on a pre-given ground

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<sup>204</sup> Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy” *boundary 2*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), 19-27, 20-21. This article was written before the more recent uprisings and protests of 2011, but many of the debates that came out of Occupy, at least, were precisely about how to move forward and what of the past movements to retain. See for instance the conversations that unfold within the first three issues of *Tidal*, one of the journals of the Occupy movement: <http://tidalmag.org/issues/>.

<sup>205</sup> Brown, 20-21.

<sup>206</sup> Deutsche, 27.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, 28.

of society and of political struggle restricts the growth of democratic spheres,”<sup>208</sup> the person engaged in an anabasis is not on such steady ground, indeed where the left-melancholic insists upon the ground, the requisite for an anabasis is the withdrawal of the ground (metaphorically speaking) and the subsequent and active making of the ground through a return. This remaking of the ground can also be seen as a struggle over the terms of historical narrative, a hegemonic struggle. By producing work that is not only an examination of the JRA’s history, but also a meta-history, one that examines structures through which this history gets told, Baudelaire’s film and installation is, in the most positive sense, a space where “theoretical categories, like all classificatory schemes, keep on being voided, rather than appropriated, reiterated, safeguarded.”<sup>209</sup>

## **The event as break or rupture**

But perhaps most important for my argument here is the relationship between the presentation of the past and the theorization of the ‘event’. Deutsche’s reading of Mary Kelly’s *Love Songs* is situated against those who hold to left-melancholy. The event she refers to is Badiou’s. Unlike Deleuze’s concept of the event that Zaoui employs in his discussion of Baudelaire’s *Circumambulation*, where there is a “a single time, the time of the event, which contracts and expands and must be reflected upon...”<sup>210</sup> Badiou’s

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<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Minh-ha, 78.

<sup>210</sup> Zaoui, “On the Communication of Events,” 2007.



theorization of the event insists that it is a break or a rupture, an interval or interstice between two times, the one before the event and the one after.<sup>211</sup> And in this way his theory of the event is more akin to Walter Benjamin's theorization of history as a dialectical image, a flash, which allows the whole to be momentarily recognizable.<sup>212</sup> The event as a rupture "presents itself, exhibits the inconsistency underlying all situations, and in a flash throws into a panic, their constituted classifications."<sup>213</sup> This distinction of the event as continuation that Deleuze theorizes and the event as rupture that Badiou theorizes may seem small, but I argue these theorizations of time are fundamentally different and they alter the conclusions we can come to about Baudelaire's work. It is the difference between Zaoui's reading as one which sees Baudelaire's work as a history forming along a continuity of time, to circle around the event's effects in an attempt to see that which cannot be seen, but perhaps to agree that its effects are unfolding in the same temporal and spatial dimensions. My reading of Baudelaire's work insists on the breaks and fissures, the ruptures and disagreements in his narrative — on the removal and restructuring of the epistemological ground in the accounts he presents.

Indeed Badiou defines a generative relationship to the past as a 'fidelity to the event'.<sup>214</sup> It is a relationship that Badiou distinguishes from nostalgia, describing it instead as one of "not forgetting". The fidelity to the event encourages not a calcification

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<sup>211</sup> Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze," 39.

<sup>212</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Walter Benjamin, (first published Tuesday 18 January 2011) [plato.stanford.edu/entries/benjamin](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/benjamin). (accessed 21 November 2013).

<sup>213</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, trans. Thomas Nail, "History and Event in Alain Badiou" *Parrhesia*, no. 12, (2011), 1-11, 2.

<sup>214</sup> Deutsche, 27.

of understanding that nostalgia represents, but rather an uncertain search that “compels the subject to decide a new way of being.” It is not a consensus, but rather interrupts, disrupts, or shatters dominant narratives. What does Baudelaire’s investigation into the event produce? By way of an answer we might think of Nora Alter’s characterization of Kluge and Syberberg’s films, “the formal means of representation...are as theoretical as anything advanced by the narratives of their films...”<sup>215</sup> Or put differently, Baudelaire’s *The Anabasis of May*, is a film that engages in both a theory of historical representation through the event and a practice of film making through the idea of anabasis. His work is an unfolding praxis.

## Installing Histories

I have been discussing Baudelaire’s exhibition *The Anabasis of May* and its eponymous filmic component as it was installed at Gasworks in London in 2012. However, I want to state again that this is not the only way the work circulates, the film has also been screened at numerous film festivals without reference to the other works in the exhibition or to the *Libretto*. Because this aspect of *The Anabasis of May* has received very little critical attention, in what follows I will consider what these different viewing situations, film within a gallery installation and film in the theatre, do to the narrative history Baudelaire is presenting. This question about the installation parameters of Baudelaire’s installation and film impacts the argument I make about the work, namely that Baudelaire

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<sup>215</sup> Alter, 52.

situates different historical narratives together in order to signal their constructedness. What is lost when the film changes context? What is gained? I should make clear at the outset that while the film is exhibited with these works and presented on its own, the works have, until now, only been shown along with the film. (The one exception to this is *Chanson D'Automne*, which has been exhibited with other chapters of Baudelaire's *Anabases* series.) This means that while the film has two viewing contexts, one within the art world and the other within the film world, the exhibition, treated as a complete installation, does not.<sup>216</sup>

The film is also screened in festivals more often than the work is installed within galleries. Because of this, it is difficult to characterize the relationship within Baudelaire's installation between the film and the works accompanying it. In his recent review of the exhibition at Galerie Greta Meert, where *The Anabasis of May* was shown as installation and film in combination with another of Baudelaire's collaborations with Adachi, *The Ugly One*, Adam Kleinmann remarks that we should fold "the theory of landscape back into the space of exhibition," noting that "it is important not to privilege Baudelaire's feature film at the center of this installation, but to pan the entire gallery that

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<sup>216</sup> I first encountered Baudelaire's film at the Migrating Forms festival at Film Forum in New York City (Spring 2012). After the screening Baudelaire was available via Skype to answer the audience's questions, stating a commitment to having the film start a dialogue about history and representation rather than be the last word on it. This technique of screening and Q & A is one Baudelaire engages in regularly, and sees as an important part of the screening process (Skype conversation with the artist 8 May 2014). It was part of the public programming of the exhibition at Gasworks in 2012 as well as his screenings at the Lincoln Center in New York in April 2014: <http://www.filmlinc.com/films/series/art-of-the-real> (Accessed 29 March 2014).

surrounds it.”<sup>217</sup> However his characterization of the works ends at the art market. It is for him, the way for Baudelaire to continue working, and this is, of course absolutely necessary. But if we imagine that Baudelaire is able to make works that serve both the market and a larger narrative function, we are still left with the problem of how these works all function together. For instance the works do not seem to act as preludes to the film’s narrative or to extract important moments from the film in order to isolate them on the wall of the gallery. Nor does Baudelaire seem to conceive the relationship as one of translating the filmic narrative into the medium of a spatialized installation. Rather their relationship is more complementary. By putting such different modes of representing aspects of a similar history in close proximity, their content blurs in a rather ambiguous and ambivalent manner. And, although I have been looking only at this specific installation, I would argue that my reading holds even when the components of the installation are the same, but its configuration is different. For instance, in addition to its most recent installation at the Galerie Greta Meert, in its first installation at the Centre d’Art Contemporain La Synagogue de Delme in 2011, the prints were hung differently. Though they still call to mind negatives, they don’t spatially confront the film. Also in this exhibition at the Centre d’Art Contemporain, Adachi’s film was installed in a theatre-like room within the gallery instead of being screened on a television monitor angled up from a shallow ground plinth as it was at Gasworks. So we might ask, given the different contexts why might Baudelaire be interested in making a film that moves between gallery

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<sup>217</sup> See Kleinmann, “Eric Baudelaire’s *The Anabasis & The Ugly One*.” The exhibition was up from November 15, 2013–January 25, 2014.

and theatre? And why Baudelaire decides to install the film within a gallery at all, since the work most often circulates only as a film?

I have already mentioned the thickness of temporalities within the unfolding of the exhibition in space, and have suggested that, while it is hung following a loosely linear arc because it exists spatially, this temporality can be re-mixed by a viewer's perusal of the space. Each visitor to the exhibition can "pause" and "re-wind" through the works, and they can re-view the film as often as they desire. While the film cannot be paused, it can be slipped in and out of, and its narrative can be augmented by both the works within the exhibition and by the information provided within the *Libretto*. This opportunity for repetition in viewing, re-viewing and re-reading alters the history provided within the film—different information is included in the installation, the film and the *Libretto* and multiple viewings blurs not only the installation's sections (which historical detail was in the film? in the installation's works? in the *Libretto*?), but also the knowledge and experiences viewers may have had before entering the exhibition space about the history of post-war Japan, Japanese avant-garde film, student movements of the late 1960s and events like the 1972 Lod airport massacre. But its important to remember that these shifts in historical perspective, in different modes of viewing can be read as part of Baudelaire's project to trouble who gets to write the historical record. How do we understand the history he has recounted for us here? As a history of Revolutionaries? As a history of Terrorists? Rather than settling on one historical account, which could be read as sympathetic support or damning condemnation, I argue that Baudelaire has instead produced a narratively complicated film and installation which relies upon three

modes of historical explanation in order to shift his viewer's focus toward the register of representational possibilities.

## Chapter 3

### A Film is no Substitute for Anything

Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi's *This is Not a Film* (2011) has been described as a filmic diary, a documentary, and a "masterpiece in a form that does not yet exist."<sup>218</sup> Many have called it a "political film" to describe its position in the struggle against censorship mounted by the artistic community in Iran.<sup>219</sup> *This is Not a Film* premiered in May 2011 at the Cannes Film Festival after being smuggled out of Iran on a flash drive hidden in a cake.<sup>220</sup> It was shortlisted for the category of Best Documentary Feature at the American Academy Awards in 2012.<sup>221</sup> Despite the claim of its title—*This is Not a Film*—which negates its status as a film, Panahi's work has primarily been received, circulated and discussed as a film, within the categories of film, and in the language of film criticism.

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<sup>218</sup> A.O. Scott. "A Video From Tehran: It's Not What It Isn't, but What It Is: He's Jafar Panahi, but "This Is Not A Film" *The New York Times*, 28 February 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/29/movies/hes-jafar-panahi-but-this-is-not-a-film.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/29/movies/hes-jafar-panahi-but-this-is-not-a-film.html?_r=0) (Accessed 14 March 2014).

<sup>219</sup> For example, Ruth Franklin, "This is Not a Film by Jafar Panahi/ A Separation by Asghar Farhadi" *Salmagundi* 177 (Winter 2013): 40-47, and Shiva Rahbaran, "An Interview with Jafar Panahi," *Wasafiri*, Vo. 27, No. 3 (September 2012).

<sup>220</sup> Ian J. Griffiths, "Cannes Film Festival 2011: Jafar Panahi wins Carrosse d'Or" *The Guardian*, 20 April 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/apr/20/jafar-panahi-cannes-film-festival> (Accessed 20 February 2015).

<sup>221</sup> *This is Not a Film* did not make it into the final round of nominees. (Those films were: "Searching for Sugar Man," "The Gatekeepers," "5 Broken Cameras," "How to Survive a Plague," and "The Invisible War"). See Catherine Shoard, "Bully and Jafar Make Oscar Best Documentary Short List" in *The Guardian*, 4 December 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/dec/04/oscar-best-documentary-bully-jafar-panahi> (Accessed 17 March 2014).

Yet, the refusal of Panahi's title is imperative to the politics of representation at stake in this project—politics that Panahi risked his freedom to express. *This is Not a Film* reflects, at the legally imposed end of Panahi's career, on a larger question about how film, as an artistic pursuit, can be made at all under Iran's strict conditions of censorship.<sup>222</sup> Missing from the critical accounts of his film is an analysis of *how* Panahi takes up this question, not only on the level of content but also formally. My argument in this chapter is twofold: first I show how Panahi puts his own oeuvre at the crux of his negation of film by creating an argument in *This is Not a Film* through appropriated footage from, and commentary on, his previous work. Whereas other critics have seen the use of his previous feature length fiction films within *This is Not a Film* as illustrative, I contend that Panahi's inclusion of these excerpts implicates each of these other films in the conflict *This is Not a Film* represents. In other words, I argue that he incorporates his own works in order to also reconsider their status as 'film'. Taking up this structural maneuver within *This is Not a Film*, this chapter further examines what the stakes are for the politics of representation he has adopted within the context of stringent government censorship in Iran.

René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928-1929) is a precursor to the type of representational negation at work in *This is Not a Film*: The painting depicts a photo-realistic smoking pipe floating in the center of a canvas with the phrase, "ceci n'pas une pipe" (this is not a pipe) scrawled in black script beneath it. Magritte's play on the relationship between image and text is deconstructive. As Michel Foucault notes, in this

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<sup>222</sup> Jafar Panahi has made two films since *This is Not a Film*: *Closed Curtain* (2013) and *Taxi* (2015).



*painting* of a pipe with a sentence that “is not a pipe,” neither words nor images “can be reduced to the other’s terms.”<sup>223</sup> *The Treachery of Images* foregrounds the mutability of representations and the failure of any representational system to transparently present a coherent or definitive meaning. Magritte’s painting catches his viewer in the structures and processes of meaning making within language and through images. Critics have observed a similar play at work within Panahi’s *This is Not a Film* and the circumstance of its making.<sup>224</sup> *This is Not a Film* is literally not a film, in the material sense that it was shot on digital video with some clips from Panahi’s iPhone camera.<sup>225</sup> Submitted covertly to the Cannes Film Festival as an Iranian Film without the Iranian Government’s consent, it is also not a *recognized* film in Iran, where state-controlled censorship bodies determine which productions are and are not legitimate within the national film industry. Finally, it is not the film Panahi set out to make, a screenplay based on Chekhov’s “A Girl’s Notes” which was rejected by the censorship board for not conforming to its rules. This other film would have told the story of an Iranian girl who is accepted to an art school but is prohibited by her father from attending. Like the representation of a pipe and its linguistic refusal in Magritte’s work, Panahi’s title holds in tension the film he

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<sup>223</sup> Michel Foucault, *This is Not A Pipe*, with illustrations and letters by René Magritte, trans. James Harkness, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 49.

<sup>224</sup> See Scott, and Karina Longworth, “This is not a Film: The Filmmaker Who Isn’t” *The Village Voice* 29 February 2012, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2012-02-29/film/this-is-not-a-film-the-filmmaker-who-isn-t/> (accessed 27 July 2012).

<sup>225</sup> Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, “Cannes Q and A: The Loneliness of the Banned Filmmaker.” *The New York Times Arts Beat*, 21 May 2011. [http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/21/cannes-q-and-a-the-loneliness-of-the-banned-filmmaker/?ref=cannesinternationalfilmfestival&\\_r=0](http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/21/cannes-q-and-a-the-loneliness-of-the-banned-filmmaker/?ref=cannesinternationalfilmfestival&_r=0). (accessed 9 March 2013). It is also ‘not a film’ in that its budget was only 3,200 euros—paltry compared to most film production budgets. For an account of a recent “no budget” Iranian film see, Manuel Halpern, “A No Budget Film” *FIPRESCI*, 9th Eurasia International Film Festival, <http://www.fipresci.org/festivals/archive/2013/almaty/mhalpern.htm> (accessed 6 May 2014).

puts forward and the discursive space that would allow it to function as a film in all of these different senses. Like *The Treachery of Images*, which shows us the fallibility of representations, *This is Not a Film* stands for the possibility of making film in a context that conspires against it.

*This is Not a Film* follows Panahi, from morning until evening, appearing to document a single day of his life under house arrest while he awaits the verdict of his sentencing appeal. Yet the film does not fit neatly into a documentary form. Reviews of *This is Not a Film* have dealt with its experimental narrative and structure using descriptions like *The New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott's characterization that it is "a masterpiece in a form that does not yet exist."<sup>226</sup> It has been variously characterized as a "film diary" and a "political film," genres which historically have little in common.<sup>227</sup> The difficulty of classifying this film begins at the narrative level. *This is Not a Film* is not only a document of Panahi's house arrest and the appeals process he is undergoing at the time of its making. Nor is it a straightforward account of his many conflicts with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Governance that oversee censorship laws in Iran. Nor is

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<sup>226</sup> Scott.

<sup>227</sup> As its shortlisting for the Best Documentary at the Academy Awards in 2012 illustrates, *This is Not a Film* is entered into festivals under the category of documentary film, but the characterizations in its reviews fumble when trying to describe it more precisely. See too the numerous reviews which cite Panahi's film as an act of defiance: Phillip French, "This is Not a Film - review" *The Observer*, 24 March 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/mar/25/this-not-film-panahi-review>, Jenny McCartney, "With This is Not A Film, Jafar Panahi shows he is the Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn of Iran," *The Telegraph*, 23 March 2012, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/jennymccartney/100146471/with-this-is-not-a-film-jafar-panahi-shows-he-is-the-aleksandr-solzhenitsyn-of-iran/>, Dana Stevens, "This is Not a Film" *Slate*, 2 March 2012, [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2012/03/this\\_is\\_not\\_a\\_film\\_jafar\\_panahi\\_s\\_non\\_movie\\_review\\_d\\_.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2012/03/this_is_not_a_film_jafar_panahi_s_non_movie_review_d_.html). (all accessed 27 July 2012).

it simply a review of Panahi's filmic career in an appeal to justify why he should still be allowed to work. It weaves together all of these narrative threads.

The film breaks down into roughly three sections: the first appears to be an observational documentary following Panahi through his morning routine while he makes calls to his lawyer and prepares his breakfast. The second section follows him as he attempts to construct aspects of his banned screenplay, and as he self-reflexively discusses different modes of filmic construction. The third section returns to a kind of observational documentary style, but this time Panahi takes up the camera and acts as both the director and the subject filmed.

While *This is Not a Film's* narrative content moves across these topics, it also calls attention to its formal construction by utilizing different documentary modes and excerpts from Panahi's oeuvre of fiction films. The various narrative and formal threads are not seamlessly sutured together here: the differing qualities of image that result from different recording devices and levels of reproduction visually signal their diverse origins, temporalities, and directions. This draws attention to the artificial (i.e. constructed) nature of the filmic narrative by foregrounding its formal qualities.<sup>228</sup> As we know, the meaning of a representation is constructed within the context of a representational system. Just as Magritte's painting problematizes representational

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<sup>228</sup> My thoughts about this are informed by Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse*, and *The Content of the Form* and Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*. Roland Barthes takes up a different but related notion of the "reality effect" as a kind of narrative excess in historical writing. See Barthes, "The Discourse of History," "The Reality Effect" and "Writing the Event" collected in *The Rustle of Language*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 127-140, 141-148 and 149-154, respectively. These essays were originally published between 1967 and 1968.

systems by placing the visual in conflict with the linguistic, Panahi does the same in film by drawing attention to the problem of indexicality in relation to the representational apparatus.

## Representing reality

The exact relationship between filmic or photographic capture and reality has been a subject of investigation since the emergence of photosensitive technologies. The assurance that what is registered on the material substrate *has been there*, to borrow a formulation from Barthes, has been the guarantee of an accurate capture. The correspondence between the object and its representation takes place at two levels. The photograph or film becomes the physical index or imprint of the object. The light that has touched the object sears the substrate leaving its impression behind. On another level the photograph or film *resembles* the object. It is not only an index but an image. It is this second level of capture that increasingly concerned early documentary filmmakers.

Whereas, the Lumière brothers' actualities produced films from static points of view which recorded reality as it unfolded in front of the camera, the founders of documentary film as a genre, like John Grierson and Robert Flaherty, created films with cuts, shifts in points of view, and footage that was subjected to an explanatory voiceover, in an attempt to capture events in a way that did not alter or falsify the reality pictured.<sup>229</sup> In other words, they were aware of the development of filmic languages. Panahi plays with these two levels of capture, the index and the image, as well as the anxiety over the

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<sup>229</sup> John Grierson in his essay of 1932, "First Principles of Documentary" sets forth the notion that filming "actualities" is more "real" than fictional filming. See Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary" in *Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Richard Barsam (New York: Dutton, 1976), 19-30.

‘falsification’ inherent in the development of filmic languages throughout *This is Not a Film*. Indeed, I argue that his use of documentary modes in the narrative of *This is Not a Film* seems to deliberately trouble any notion of an accurate capture — a point to which I will return below.

In his book, *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols defines modes of representation as “basic ways of organizing texts (films) in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions,” and identifies four main modes of representation within the genre of documentary: “expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive.”<sup>230</sup> These categories, he explains, arise partially through the work of the critic, and partially through the development of filmic conventions by filmmakers. Each mode has developed at a specific historical moment and has advanced with innovations in technology.<sup>231</sup> Rather than consider these modes part of a historical linear progression to be abandoned with the advent of a new form, Nichols explains that filmmakers use all of these modes today, in an expanding vocabulary of filmic practice.

He attributes Expository documentary to filmmakers John Grierson and Robert Flaherty. Observational documentary, which arises with the innovation of synchronous recording equipment, is attributed to filmmakers like Leacock-Pennebaker and Fredrick

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<sup>230</sup> Bill Nichols, “Documentary Modes of Representation” in *Representing Reality*, 32.

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*, “New forms arise from the limitations and constraints of previous forms and in which the credibility of the impression of documentary reality changes historically... Gradually, the conventional nature of this mode of representation becomes increasingly apparent: an awareness of norms and conventions to which a given text adheres begins to frost the window onto reality. The time for a new mode is then at hand,” 32.

Wiseman.<sup>232</sup> Observational filmmakers, according to Nichols, were able to follow their subjects more nimbly and record less obtrusively, as a result of technological advancements in camera construction. Nichols attributes Interactive documentary modes to filmmakers like Jean Rouch, who capitalized on further advances in technology along with a desire to make the hand of the filmmaker more visible in the final product. For instance, rather than remaining behind the camera the filmmaker may play an active role within the film. Finally, Nichols describes reflexive documentary through the work of the Dziga Vertov group (comprised of filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin), specifically in relation to films like *Letter to Jane* (1972) or even *Ici et Allieurs* which I mentioned in my introduction and chapter one. Nichols characterizes this mode of documentary as “a desire to make the conventions of representation themselves more apparent and to challenge the impression of reality which the other three modes normally conveyed unproblematically.”<sup>233</sup> This is accomplished by discussing the representational form itself within the film, as in *Letter to Jane*, which is a protracted back and forth between Godard and Gorin deconstructing a photograph of Jane Fonda in Vietnam.

The shift to a reflexive documentary mode is historically rooted. As Sylvia Harvey notes in her excellent account, *May '68 and Film Culture*, the political debates around ‘reform’ or ‘revolution’ that raged in France in the wake of the student revolts in May 1968 not only had important implications for theories of cultural production and film theory, but “the political debates were often the motive force behind the emergence

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<sup>232</sup> *ibid*, 33.

<sup>233</sup> *ibid*.

of different conceptions of film-making and...of film criticism.”<sup>234</sup> Certainly these debates, beginning around the same time as the anti-colonial struggles of Third Cinema, also inform the development of new documentary modes of filmmaking.<sup>235</sup> More specifically, in the case of Panahi’s *This is Not a Film*, we might read his shifts between these documentary modes along with the negation in his title to be closely tied to the tense political climate in Iran following the 2009 Presidential elections and subsequent popular uprising known as the Green Movement. While the connection between Panahi’s filmmaking and the political context Harvey speaks cannot be reduced to each other, Harvey’s observation that filmmakers put pressure on modes of representation out of political necessity seems to be the case in Panahi’s work — in his making a film that is not a film in a moment of extreme censorship.

While these categories of documentary modes are by no means as rigid in actual film practice as Nichols delineates them, the typology he sets out is a useful one for thinking through some of the representational shifts that occur within *This is Not a Film*. As I mentioned at the outset, Panahi constructs his narrative by recycling parts of his earlier feature length fiction films. There are five of these in all: *The White Balloon* (1995), *Mirror* (1997), *The Circle* (2000), *Crimson Gold* (2003), and *Offside* (2006). But, here we encounter one of the main problems of discussing a film which insists upon its own negation. To say that he constructs *This is Not a Film* from these earlier moments in his career is once again to ignore the negation in Panahi’s title. And I want to argue that

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<sup>234</sup> Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, 13.

<sup>235</sup> See my discussion of Third Cinema and its development and impact in chapter 1.

this negation is something we should take seriously: This is not a failed film, nor a film that simply looks back on Panahi's legacy as a filmmaker; it is not a film. Instead Panahi sets out to unpack of what it is that holds together the representational category of film, both in terms of its substrate, and in terms of its ability to represent or create an image. By jumping between these documentary modes and different footage from his fictional films he is able to examine the way genres of documentary and fiction are constructed as concepts and practices. Shifting between various modes and genres, Panahi emphasizes their fabrication depend on aesthetic and intellectual decisions that do not transparently or disinterestedly represent any thing or event. And rather than simply leave his analysis here, at the level of the constructedness of representation, he continuously draws our attention back to the negation of the title: We seem to be watching a very complex film, which is not a film.

## **Observational Illusions**

*This is Not a Film* begins with a title card, white text on a black field, which provides some background information about Panahi's arrest and outlines the state of his legal affairs at the moment of filming: "Panahi was arrested at his home on December 20th in 2010 along with a group of friends and family members. He was convicted to a six year jail sentence and a twenty year ban on writing screenplays, making movies, giving interviews or leaving the country." The first section of *This is Not a Film*, mostly shot in an observational style, begins directly after this: Panahi is sitting at the breakfast table in his home. In what follows I will explore how Panahi sets up an observational style in



order to undermine it by both referring to his earlier films and making apparently serendipitous phone calls.

The camera follows Panahi as he moves through his morning routine. Long shots are infrequently cut, and Panahi's absent minded swiping through his iPhone or sipping of his tea establish a rhythm of the quotidian, which elides a distinction between the footage and what it captures. There is something unnerving about the normalcy of Panahi's actions unfolding before the camera, especially as we learn both how precarious his legal status is and more about the oppression within Iran. The everyday images are jarring when set against this larger legal and political context. With the *mise-en-scene* established — Panahi is under house arrest and we are visually arrested in his flat with him — the narrative is propelled forward through phone calls.

The first is to Panahi's collaborator, Iranian documentary filmmaker Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, and it confirms that the scene we are watching takes place while Panahi is under house arrest. The discussion between the two men is also purportedly the 'origin' for the film project we are currently seeing. Panahi asks Mirtahmasb to come over to work through some ideas that he doesn't want to talk about over the telephone. A second phone call from Panahi's son and wife is picked up by the answering machine as Panahi gets ready for the day. The message they leave indicates that it is Fireworks Wednesday in Iran thus explaining the explosions that are heard intermittently outside and their absence for the day as they are out delivering New Year's presents to various friends and

family members. It also draws attention to the presence of the camera.<sup>236</sup> In the message his son says, “Dad, listen. I turned the camera on and placed it on the chair. I just think there isn’t much charge left in it. The battery might run out.” As his son mentions the camera, Panahi looks directly into the lens as though seeing it for the first time, for a moment briefly breaking the observational mode before the film cuts to a steady shot of him preparing tea in the kitchen that seems like “real time”. In this first section we begin to see the temporal compression at play in *This is Not a Film*. Although it appears to follow Panahi over the course of a single day, the film was actually shot over several days. Panahi’s telephone conversation with Mirtahmasb may have occurred at a moment when he was able to be both the filmmaker and the filmed, but his labor of setting up the camera, establishing the shot, adjusting the sound and lighting — in other words the work that goes in to constructing the scene — is cut out of the film after his brief acknowledgment of the camera. It is unclear where this labour is his, and where the footage has been filmed by Mirtahmasb on another day.

A third phone call that Panahi makes to his lawyer on speakerphone summarizes his current legal situation and indicates that he is in a process of mounting appeals — information that seems at first to reiterate and bring the legal overview from the title card into the narrative arc of the film. But the questions Panahi directs to his lawyer, including various points of clarification, emphasize that the charges brought against him appear to be politically motivated, though why this is the case is not explicitly revealed by either

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<sup>236</sup> A celebration before the Persian New Year, Fireworks Wednesday follows a Persian Zoroastrian tradition that predates Islam (There has been an effort to suppress this celebration by the current regime in Iran).

Panahi or his lawyer. Instead they make general allusions to contemporary political climate without mentioning that it was Panahi's outspoken role in the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009 that led to his arrest. Presumably, however, most viewers with a basic knowledge of recent world events would already know this.<sup>237</sup>

*This is Not a Film* is thus immediately established as not only a violation of the terms of Panahi's house arrest, but also as an attempt to garner support from an international community of filmmakers and human rights supporters for his appeal case. (And, indeed, the international community has already at the time of filming responded to his arrest).<sup>238</sup> However, there is a subtle discrepancy in this first section of the film, between the observational mode of filming, which fosters the assumption that Panahi is simply carrying on with his day while the camera documents his moves, and the carefully structured narrative of his successive phone calls. The effect here is similar to Baudelaire's maneuver in *Sugar Water* (2007) (see my discussion of this video in chapter 2), the viewer presumes that the film has been edited to account for the lapses and skips in pro-filmic time, whereas in fact the actors have been given scripted moves. When this

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<sup>237</sup> For an account of how external events can impact the reading of a film see Burgin's, *The Remembered Film*.

<sup>238</sup> This petitioning is mentioned in the Panahi's film as well as in its reviews, see Liam Lacey, "Film Former Jury President of Montreal World Film Festival Jailed in Iran: A call to Release Iranian Filmmakers" *The Globe and Mail*, 16 March 2010: R3. A website run by the film's distributor, Palisades Tartan, was periodically providing updates with news about Panahi's case as well as collecting reviews of *This is not a Film*: <http://www.thisisnotafilm.net/index.html>. (accessed 26 July 2012). See also the development of "White Meadows" an app developed so people could post short videos about the arrest of Panahi and Rasoulof and other human rights issues. (The app is named after a haunting film by Mohammad Rasoulof that Panahi edited) See: Jesse Richards, "Video App Honors Imprisoned Filmmakers, Offers New Way for World to Support Human Rights" 20 January 2011, <http://www.payvand.com/news/11/jan/1198.html>. (accessed 27 February 2014).

first episode in *This is Not a Film* is examined carefully, it becomes clear that Panahi is generating the narrative through these seemingly spontaneous phone calls.

The intermittent explosions of fireworks in the background further complicate the observational mode of address within Panahi's film. The temporal setting of *This is Not a Film*, beginning in the morning on New Year's Eve and ending with the celebration of the New Year in the evening, recalls the timeline of his first feature length fiction film, *The White Balloon* (1995), which follows Razieh, a tenacious seven-year-old girl,<sup>239</sup> who wants to buy a goldfish on New Year's day.<sup>240</sup> Razieh encounters numerous difficulties while trying to secure her fish, but at last achieves success in the final moments before the New Year begins. By setting *This is Not a Film* on the same day, Panahi recalls the struggle and the hopefulness that is the subject of his first feature film. But unlike his incorporation of his other films further on in *This is Not a Film* his reference to *The White Balloon* here is oblique: rather than include a straightforward narrative flashback as Panahi will do for his films *The Mirror*, *The Circle* and *Crimson Gold*, *The White Balloon* intersects with *This is Not a Film* only through its similar representation of time.

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<sup>239</sup> There is a long tradition of casting children in Iranian film, partially because the depiction of women is so closely censored, and children exhibiting love or strong will are seen to be less threatening. See, Hamid Reza Sadr, "Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children" in *The New Iranian Cinema*, ed. Richard Tapper, 227-237.

<sup>240</sup> Lisa Bear and Jafar Panahi, "Jafar Panahi," *BOMB*, No. 55 (Spring, 1996), 10, 12-13. Bear points out in her interview with Panahi that the use of the goldfish in the New Year's ceremony is part of the Zoroastrian tradition.

As Panahi discusses the end of his film career, the fireworks outside are reminiscent of his beginnings.<sup>241</sup>

As the third phone call to his lawyer concludes, Panahi looks directly into the camera lens breaking the observational mode for a second time, “I think I should remove this cast and throw it away.” The comment is addressed to his collaborator, Mirtahmasb who has apparently been in the room with Panahi and filming the whole time. Panahi’s gaze moves between Mirtahmasb and the camera lens, allowing us to also ‘see’ his presence, which further undermines the observational style of *This is Not a Film*’s beginning. Such a self-reflexive gesture is explicitly connected to Panahi’s second film *The Mirror* (1997), and its young protagonist, Mina, whose arm is in a cast. Panahi makes this connection for the viewer, briefly outlining *The Mirror*’s narrative, “It was about a little girl whose mother hasn’t shown up to pick her up from school, and she tries to go home on her own...” *This is Not a Film* cuts to a scene near the middle of *The Mirror*: The camera frames the little girl in question, Mina, as she stands at the front of a bus, her injured arm encased in a cast and resting in a sling across her shoulder. Panahi continues his narration over the footage of *The Mirror*, whose audio track is silenced: “She gets on the bus, and as the bus goes, she realizes that she’s going the wrong way. Eventually the girl can’t take it anymore. She takes off the cast and throws it away. She says that she wants to be herself.”

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<sup>241</sup> *The White Balloon* was a spectacular debut for Panahi as a film director. The screenplay was written by his mentor Abbas Kiarostami and the film won the Camera d’Or at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, as well as numerous other prizes.

The footage from *The Mirror* continues, but now it is accompanied by its original audio track where Panahi says, “Don’t look at the camera Mina.” With this line and the self-reflexive action that Panahi just performed to echo Mina looking into the camera, the fictional narrative in *The Mirror* begins to break down. Mina pulls off her sling, cast, and costume and demands that the bus pull over. When it does and she exits quickly, Panahi’s voice enters the audio track again, “I’m not sure about the outcome, but...” and on screen we see Panahi directing the film in 1996, along with the sound crew. A second camera captures Panahi looking through the viewfinder of a film camera, the crew, and Mina outside the bus sitting on the sidewalk. Panahi asks for the camera to be brought closer and answers the camera man’s question, “Ready to shoot?” with “Let’s go then, check the sound, recording...” The image pauses and the camera pulls away from Panahi directing the film in the late 1990s to Panahi in 2011 watching this clip, remote control in hand. The narrative of *This is Not a Film* has shifted away from an observational mode apparently documenting Panahi at home under house arrest to a discussion of the nature of reality and the ontological capacity of film.

The original six minute scene from *The Mirror* is edited down to two, and viewers familiar with Panahi’s work will realize that the scene that Panahi recycles in *This is Not a Film* is the hinge between two narrative frameworks in *The Mirror*: the first half sets up a fictional narrative and the second half documents the breakdown of this narrative in a documentary mode.<sup>242</sup> This allows Panahi to frame Mina’s refusal to act within *This is*

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<sup>242</sup> This distinction, however, is further troubled within the film — Panahi doesn’t script the action entirely in *The Mirror* and the actors are not professional — this effects the ‘fictionality’ of the first half. It’s also

*Not a Film* as a rebellion against the use of fiction as a kind of pro-filmic ‘lie’ (the camera in this sense is neutral while the actors ‘perform’ an untruth in front of it), while simultaneously drawing attention to the post-production labour necessary to create a seamless experience of filmic time and space, which underlines the already constructed nature of *any* film. Indeed *The Mirror* is a film preoccupied with ideas of representation and mimesis and between differing notions of realism: the realism championed by filmmakers like Grierson and Flaherty where to observe with a camera is to capture reality, and a more critical notion of documentary filmmaking termed “self-reflexive” by Bill Nichols, which acknowledges that any attempt to frame and capture reality is itself a representation.

At the heart of *The Mirror*, and this first section of *This is Not a Film* is an investigation of the different notions of realism in documentary practice. Part of the difficulty with the term resides in the relationship between the filmed image and reality — the image’s indexical quality — as I noted above. The indexical relationship between ‘what has been there’ and the photograph or film is one that has been altered significantly in video and digital media. While the object is no longer seared into a material substrate, the promise of indexicality that characterized the early moments of film and photography, still colours our understanding of video and digital. And, as I mentioned earlier, the more realistic or detailed the representations seem, the more powerful its promise of indexicality. Here the visual realism of the representation leads us to believe that the medium can describe real events — can show things as they actually exist. But realism

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unclear if the second half is also governed by such suggestions by Panahi and if it only appears to be a documentary because the actress has declared that she refuses to act.

and representation are fraught within the history of documentary film, which strives for a neutral accounting of events in part because there is no guarantee that what is captured is an accurate representation of reality.<sup>243</sup> But Panahi's use of *The Mirror* in *This is Not a Film* is also related to the kind of politics *The Mirror* enacts in its structure and naming: Panahi claims not to be a political filmmaker, but rather to hold up a mirror to reality.<sup>244</sup> In *This is Not a Film* precisely what kind of reflection one can create is at issue: fiction or documentary, the filmic capture is never a wholly adequate representation of reality.

Panahi deploys these first two films from his oeuvre very differently in *This is Not a Film*, using *The White Balloon* to set up a temporal link from the beginning of his filmmaking career to its end, and marshaling *The Mirror* to destabilize his documentary form. But it is also important to note that these two films are the only two of his five feature length films to be screened in Iran. *Crimson Gold*, *The Circle* and *Offsides*, were all banned. When the discussion of these two films ends, the second episode begins with Panahi explaining the plot of the screenplay he is not allowed to make. If the first section outlined the conditions of his house arrest and legal situation while taking on the possibilities of filmic representation, this section of the film confronts the problem of artistic censorship head on.

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<sup>243</sup> See Raymond Williams entry on "Realism" in his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983 (1976)), 257.

<sup>244</sup> Jafar Panahi, in Shiva Rahbaran, 7. Relatedly, Brooks Barnes of the *New York Times* quotes Ali Samadi Ahadi, the director of *The Green Wave* (2011) on Panahi's imprisonment, "I am certain Iran's leaders are very aware of the price they are paying for this," Mr. Ahadi said. "I'm hopeful that the protests — as long as they keep getting louder — will have an impact. Artists like Jafar are the mirror of society, and that mirror is right now broken into pieces." See Barnes, "Sundance Gets a Taste of Iranian Politics" *The Carpetbagger* (The Award's season blog of *The New York Times*) 21 January 2011, [http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/sundance-gets-a-taste-of-iranian-politics/?\\_r=0](http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/sundance-gets-a-taste-of-iranian-politics/?_r=0) (accessed 12 March 2014).



## Making films in Iran

The second section of *This is Not a Film* examines the legal background of Panahi's banned screenplay, its writing, and the censorship approval process. Panahi tells us that his screenplay was returned to him by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) which asked him to make further editorial changes, which he attempted to address before resubmitting it, only to receive a second rejection. Panahi's experience with the MCIG is by no means exceptional. Part of the project of *This is Not a Film*, as other critics have pointed out, is to draw attention to the oppression of artists and filmmakers in Iran, to signal the political aspect of this long history, and to call for a loosening of censorship regulations.<sup>245</sup> But, again, these critics don't investigate *how* Panahi goes about this critique, especially since nowhere in *This is Not a Film* does Panahi openly discuss the legal structures or specific mechanisms of censorship. Instead he focuses on the effects of censorship by showing how it works in his own oeuvre. For example, he enumerates the kinds of themes he has taken up that have been censored (women attempting to support themselves in a religious and patriarchal society as seen in *The Circle*), and discusses the way the censorship regulations end up determining the narrative shape of his films. For instance, Panahi's films unfold exclusively in the space of the city in order to avoid the artificial device of showing women veiled at home (where they normally wouldn't be) since censorship regulations require *all* women shown on

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<sup>245</sup> Peter Bradshaw, "This is Not a Film - Review" *The Guardian*, 29 March 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/mar/29/this-is-not-a-film-review> (accessed 12 March 2014).

film to be veiled. Or, by enumerating the films he began but could not finish because they were halted at various points in the censorship process, Panahi implicitly addresses the waste of time and resources. At this stage, before continuing the discussion of the political stakes in Panahi's film it is necessary to look more closely at the history of censorship in Iran.

The histories of Iranian national cinema are linked, like most national cinemas, to transformations in global and domestic politics. In Iran the national cinema was formed in the wake of World War II by the imperialist interests of the former USSR, the United States and the United Kingdom. It has been a site for the contestation of power first between these imperialist interests and then internally between Iran's secular and religious populations and, even further, between religious factions.<sup>246</sup>

Two main film movements emerged in Iran after World War II: first film farsi and then an Iranian New Wave. Film farsi is a popular genre of Iranian film that imitates Egyptian, Indian, and other foreign films and tends to foreground comedy, action, and flirtation.<sup>247</sup> The Iranian New Wave, however, promoted narratives about life in Iran that

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<sup>246</sup> The Pahlavis reigned in Iran as a constitutional monarchy from 1925 until the Iranian Revolution in 1979. R. Sheikholeslami, "ADMINISTRATION vii. Pahlavi period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1982, Vol. I, Fasc. 5, pp. 466-470. For an overview of Iran's administration prior to this monarchy see, S. Bakhash, "ADMINISTRATION vi. Safavid, Zand, and Qajar periods," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1982, Vol. I, Fasc. 5, pp. 462-466.

<sup>247</sup> For a discussion of the themes of these films and their influences see Naficy, "Males, Masculinity and Power: The Tough-Guy Movie Genre and Its Evolution," in *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 2*, 261-324. Film farsi has been the subject of much critique, especially because it further complicated the depiction of women on screen—previously only allowed within the Islamicised version of wife or mother, film farsi depicts a more promiscuous and devious woman. Neither censored dramas nor film farsi plots make an attempt to represent actual women's lives. See Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Negotiating the Politics of Gender in Iran: An Ethnography of a Documentary," 167-199, Shahla Lahiji, "Chaste Dolls and Unchaste

were engaged with themes of national culture, religion and politics. Its emergence is usually connected to the production of Daryush Mehrju'i's *The Cow* and Massoud Kimia'i's *Qeyсар*, both from 1969. By the early 1970s, when the Shah was in control of the government, the genre had secured international recognition.

Before the 1978-1979 Revolution, the anti-Shah movement saw cinema as both a destructive Western hegemonic force, and also as a decadent symbol of the Pahlavi monarchy. The metaphors used to characterize it varied, but as Hamid Naficy notes in his essay "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update," one of the favourite metaphors of the anti-Shah movement cast cinema as an injection of disease into the body of Islamic culture. The formulation of culture and power echoed Althusser's discussion of the Ideological State Apparatus — ideology was considered to be negative and totalizing. Influence was conceived as immediate and unidirectional.<sup>248</sup> There was little consideration in this context of how foreign cultural influence might be taken up and subverted, repurposed, or productively misunderstood.<sup>249</sup> Perhaps because of this, movie theaters became one of the most contested sites of the 1979 Revolution, when anti-Shah militants sought to purge the 'sickness' of Western influence by arson. The burning of the

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Dolls: Women in Iranian Cinema," 215-226, and "Marking Gender and Difference in the Myth of the Nation," 238-253, all in *The New Iranian Cinema*.

<sup>248</sup> Hamid Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update" in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 26-65. See Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," 127-186.

<sup>249</sup> Theories of cultural appropriation were beginning at this moment and more nuanced understandings of culture and media's operations would only later be more thoroughly formulated by theorists associated with the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson) See Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, third edition (London: Routledge, 1990), or in a very different way in Canada through the work of Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: London: Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967).

Rex Theatre in Abadan in the summer of 1978 is one particularly horrifying example in which 300 movie-goers perished. Indeed this fire was one of the events that pushed forward the Revolution of 1978-1979.<sup>250</sup> Of the 525 theaters in Iran in the years prior to the Revolution, 195 theaters were burned or destroyed. As Ali Reza Haghghi notes, “Hardly any other cultural institution of the regime was subject to such hostility. Perhaps for this reason, while revolutionary Muslims had succeeded in producing works in other fields of culture and art, they left cinema alone.”<sup>251</sup> And indeed, the first few, mostly propagandistic, films made in the wake of the Revolution attempted to depict an Iran outside of Western influence.<sup>252</sup>

New rules of censorship were instituted along with the new Islamic Republic. Imported films were subject to re-editing, cutting, dubbing or outright banning.<sup>253</sup> Until 1989, each new film made within Iran had to be reviewed in a five-step process, which is

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<sup>250</sup> Hamid Dabashi, “There was something exhilarating, transgressive, even dangerous, about cinema. In the heat of the Islamic revolution of 1979, the Cinema Rex in the city of Abadan was set on fire and hundreds of people were burned alive...before and after that tragic incident, many movie theaters were bombed in symbolic protest against the Pahlavi corruption. There was something palpably political about the cinema, even in its most innocent and entertaining moments.” *Close Up: Iranian Cinema Past, Present and Future*, (London & New York: Verso, 2001), 6. Hamid Naficy, “Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update” in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 26-65. See also Hamid Naficy, “Transition from “Cinema of Idolatry” to an Islamicate Cinema” in *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Islamicate Period, 1978-1984, Vol 3*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-47.

<sup>251</sup> Ali Reza Haghghi, “Politics and Cinema in Post-revolutionary Iran: An Uneasy Relationship” in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 110.

<sup>252</sup> See Agnès Devictor “Classic Tools, Original Goals: Cinema and Public Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-97),” Hamid Naficy, “Islamizing Film Culture in Iran” 30-35 in *The New Iranian Cinema*. See also Naficy, “Documenting the Uprising, the Revolution, and the Emerging Opposition” 47-113, and “Consolidating a New “Islamicate” Cinema and Film Culture” 115-188, in *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Vol 3*.

<sup>253</sup> Azadeh Farahmand, “Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for Iranian Cinema)” in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 86-108, 89.

much like the current process today.<sup>254</sup> First, the synopsis would be proposed and approved, and then the screenplay. After this the MCIG would issue a production permit, which would list each member of the crew and cast by name. If there were changes during production, these would also have to be approved. If a filmmaker encountered problems during the approval process they could turn to another government agency, the Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF), established in 1983, which continues to offer counselling services to script writers in order to help them make a script that will meet the Ministry's standards.<sup>255</sup> Completed films were also subjected to review, and, if deemed to adhere to the stipulations of Islamic film, would then be given an exhibition permit.<sup>256</sup> Such permits generally stipulated the specific theaters in which a film could be shown (theaters were rated on the basis of location with the most desirable being more strictly regulated) and specified the length of its run. The MCIG also reviewed all marketing and promotional material for films, making sure that these complied to censorship standards.<sup>257</sup>

Poets and artists have historically resorted to the use of symbolism and allegory in their representations when operating under repressive regimes. In Iran, there was an uncertainty on the part of filmmakers about how cultural signifiers and symbolism could be effectively deployed within film to be both legible to their audiences and still

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<sup>254</sup> Houshang Golmakani, "New Times, Same Problems," *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 3 (1992), 19-22, 19.

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> Hamid Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran," 39.

<sup>257</sup> Golmakani, 21.

successfully progress through the stages of the Ministry's censorship.<sup>258</sup> And on the part of the Ministry, there was an uncertainty when viewing the films if some kind of covert symbolism was sneaking through. Thus, censorship regulations, however strict, were unevenly applied depending on *who* was tasked with reviewing the films.<sup>259</sup> As Hojjatoleslam Golmohammadi has remarked,

In cinema, issues are not as clear-cut as they are in jurisprudence. As a cleric called to pass judgement on films, I have no resource on which to base my evaluation. I might consider a film as a propaganda for a certain ideology, while to another person the opposite may seem to be the case.<sup>260</sup>

Golmohammadi's comments explain the widespread uncertainty among filmmakers about how a screenplay or film could be perceived by the MCIG. Even those who attempted to make films that would align with this Islamic conception of cinema could run into censorship snags. The result has been general self-censorship among filmmakers, a problem many scholars have noted.<sup>261</sup> Calling topics liable to be censored 'circles of perturbation', Seyed Mohammad Beheshti, the first managing director of the FCF, observes "In the circles of perturbation, the film-maker has to begin with a political

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<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> For an example of the harrowing journey through the Iranian censorship process, and the effects of a shift in who holds powerful seats in the MCIG and FCF see, "Negotiating the Politics of Gender in Iran: An Ethnography of a Documentary" *The New Iranian Cinema*, 167-199.

<sup>260</sup> Cited in Golmakani, 21.

<sup>261</sup> See Golmakani and the essays compiled in *The New Iranian Cinema*.

choice,” that choice, he goes on to explain is about whether or not the filmmaker goes along with the censorship guidelines — the filmmaker has to choose a side.

In response to cultural producers who complained of excessive Ministry censorship during one of the sessions arranged by the FCF in 1988 to screen films and discuss the reasons for banning them, Beheshti further stated, “Forbidding people to express their ideas is not the only form of censorship. The distortion or misrepresentation of reality by the filmmaker is the real censorship, not the intervention of the one who keeps it off the public screen.”<sup>262</sup> In this characterization, Beheshti appears as protector of religious law. Beheshti’s position is further exemplified by his exasperated question, “Why is it that everybody thinks good and valuable films have always to be critical?” At issue here, of course, is the long and complicated relationship within Iran between the Islamic government and the secular population. But Beheshti’s comments were also made at the end of the long and bloody Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) that further exacerbated the debates about censorship by forcing a false alliance of the religious and secular in a kind of united front against Iraq. Political turbulence allowed the government to claim what Giorgio Agamben has theorized as a “state of exception”: a suspension of rights and legal procedures in moments of uprising, war or unrest.<sup>263</sup> Any attempt at cultural criticism was viewed negatively, any challenge to the official state policy was viewed as “weakening the home front and the Revolution.”<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Golmakani, 21, 22.

<sup>263</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. See my discussion of this in Chapter 1.

<sup>264</sup> Golmakani, 21.

Few films, relative to those currently made, are screened in Iran because of the Government's guidelines.<sup>265</sup> Films that are screened tend to have nationalistic and morally aggressive narratives that are not very popular with Iranian audiences.<sup>266</sup> The possibility that cinema might produce a challenge to dominant hegemonies still troubles the MCIG, so in order to secure funding for films with less propagandistic narratives, many Iranian filmmakers look abroad, while knowing that their films will not be distributed in Iran because of the censorship stipulations. These filmmakers are sometimes accused of making "films for foreigners" because they apply for and accept Western funding.<sup>267</sup>

The banning of films, while certainly a problem for Iranian filmmakers who want to garner an audience within their country, has sometimes had the effect of encouraging a more interested international response. As Boris Trbic noted in his review of Panahi's banned film *Offsides* "A film that has gone through controversy, red stamp and cuts may

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<sup>265</sup> Hossein Ghazian, "The Crisis in the Iranian Film Industry and the Role of Government" in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 77-85.

<sup>266</sup> See Farahmand, 92-93 and Ghazian, 77-85.

<sup>267</sup> Farahmand, 103. Laura Mulvey convincingly nuances Farahmand's concerns that this is happening in her "Afterward" to *The New Iranian Cinema*, 254-261. Mulvey states, "These criticisms reflect and articulate important intellectual and political questions that should not be avoided in the particular context of the international distribution and reception of Iranian cinema. But they also raise general issues about the critical appropriation of new cinemas in, as it were, a cultural vacuum, without adequate understanding of the circumstances under which they have been produced and then circulated abroad. This position seems to assume either that all current Iranian cinema is tarred irrevocably with a totalitarian brush or that the ignorance and enthusiasm of the European cinephile audience disqualifies these films from foreign distribution." 255.



well, once released, draw more of the curious public to the theaters.”<sup>268</sup> However bringing attention to the banning of certain films and the plight of censored filmmakers has also fuelled the criticism that certain film festivals seek films with “high art and restrained politics” — not actually caring for or supporting filmmakers who are struggling with very real threats to their safety and freedom.<sup>269</sup> Of course, there is something to both sides of the argument, but given that censorship is so strict within Iran at the moment, perhaps “making films for foreigners” is actually a productive tool for transforming the internal culture of Iran. In the case of *This is Not a Film*, for instance Panahi was able to raise awareness about his own political and legal struggle with the Iranian government and used this awareness to help guarantee his safety.<sup>270</sup>

As I mentioned above, although Panahi takes on censorship in this section of his film, he does not unpack the history of censorship in Iran, nor does he specify where his screenplay was caught in the censorship process nor what would have made it acceptable to the censors. Rather, he focuses on the effects of censorship on his career. Though critics have read Panahi's presentation of his banned screenplay as the *raison d'être* for *This is Not a Film*, I argue that this reading reduces his argument. Instead I want to look closely at his presentation of this banned screenplay to examine how he also draws in

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<sup>268</sup> Boris Trbic, “Stranded ‘Offside’: The Compulsive and Passionate gender discourse of Jafar Panahi” *Metro Magazine*, No. 150, 2006: 96-100, 102.

<sup>269</sup> *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>270</sup> In this way Panahi’s film, which is both a pointed political critique and a call to action, operates differently than Jacir and Baudelaire’s work. Where Panahi is making a film that he also hopes will affect the legal outcome of his appeals, Jacir and Baudelaire are operating less in the realm of activism and more in the realm of an international art context. The works of theirs I take up in this dissertation have shown at major Biennials and Triennials. They are therefore works that experiment with representation and its effects first and foremost within the art world.

other films from his oeuvre to show how he has succeeded or failed to deal with the process of censorship in the past. These films are mobilized in two directions: they illustrate aspects of his banned screenplay, while simultaneously destabilizing the filmic coherence of *This is Not a Film*.

## **This is Not a Film**

Panahi's screenplay may have been banned for a number of reasons that he doesn't address in *This is Not a Film*. However, he does stage this unmade film within *This is Not a Film*, beginning with the plot summary: A young girl wants to go to art school abroad, but her father forbids her. In order to be certain she will not disobey his wishes, he locks her inside the house while the family is away on vacation. Rather than simply read the script aloud within the film, Panahi attempts to lay out the scene he is describing. He approximates the floor plan of the girl's home in tape on a large rug within his apartment, describing the mise-en-scène. He outlines the opening shot through the 'window' of the girl's home which is given shape by the back of a chair. To supplement his descriptions, he shows footage on his iPhone of the alleyway he has just described. This in turn cuts to shaky footage from his location scouting which pushes against the fourth wall: we emerge for a moment into the filmic environment of the unmade screenplay. Material for the film is presented through fragments, we see it simultaneously as a potential film and as a film that cannot be made.

Certainly one can read parallels between this script and Panahi's current situation — substituting his own unmade film for his protagonist's dreams of art school, the

controlling state for her domineering father, and the parallel house arrests. The structure of *This is Not a Film* turns around these converging stories and the difficulties of their respective representations: Panahi's unmade and unmakeable film, and his own house arrest and legal situation.

This attempt to mark out the space for a film that cannot be made within *This is Not a Film* stands in as an example of the many films that Panahi has been denied approval to make. Other halted projects mentioned in this section include "Return," a screenplay about the last day of the Iran-Iraq war, and "Sea," a screenplay unfolding at a holiday home by the water. The third of these films was a collaboration with Mohammad Rasoulof that was to have been filmed inside Panahi's house. This is the film he was in the process of shooting when he was arrested. He talks about other films that were already in production before his political problems began. It is in this section, when he becomes frustrated with recounting his filmic narratives that he utters one of the film's most quoted lines, "If one could tell a film, then why make a film?"

This last comment is often taken up in the critical reception of *This is Not a Film* and the two ideas are linked in the film's reception: the title's negation and the impossibility of representing in spoken words the complexity of a filmic language.<sup>271</sup> This question "why make a film?" forecloses on the possibility this episode began with: "Perhaps the viewer will see the film that wasn't made." It also shifts the focus of the film away from the other narrative threads which have until this point, I want to argue, played as important a role as the rejected screenplay: his arrest, ideas about representation

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<sup>271</sup> It is written across the cover of the DVD version, for example.

and reality in documentary film, and of course, censorship. So, while Panahi's frustration with telling a screenplay may be genuine, by foregrounding his frustrations with the medium of language he creates a context in which he can begin to move the narrative of *This is Not a Film* further by using other examples from his oeuvre.

## **A Narrative is no Substitute for a Film**

Momentarily abandoning the project of constructing his unmade screenplay, Panahi returns to two of his earlier films to illustrate *why* the viewer cannot 'see the film that was not made', *Crimson Gold* (2003) and *The Circle* (2000). The first, *Crimson Gold*, is used to illustrate one reason why Panahi cannot "tell a film", specifically that an actor's actions and reactions cannot be fully scripted. *Crimson Gold* is generally considered Panahi's most scathing political critique of Iranian society.<sup>272</sup> It is a crime thriller, but one that scrambles the usual narrative arc of this genre. Rather than the climactic events occurring toward the end of the film with a narrative resolve, Panahi chooses to present them in the first three minutes of the film — a jewelry heist goes horribly wrong, the owner of the store is shot before the thief (our protagonist), Hussein, kills himself.<sup>273</sup> The rest of the film pieces together the events leading up to this murder/suicide through a flashback. The shift in narrative emphasis moves the focus of the film away from the crime itself and toward the way the space of the city, coupled with social and economic

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<sup>272</sup> Boris Trbic, 98.

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*

realities, shapes the lives of its inhabitants. Hussein feels the limitations of his class position as he moves throughout the city. His character is revealed through a series of interactions with a cross section of Iranian society as he attempts to carry out his job delivering pizza: He encounters a lonely rich man who invites him in to eat pizza and talk (here we see that wealth can not bring happiness), parties that are being shut down by the police (social relations are strictly governed by religious law), and even surprisingly, a man with whom he served in the Iran-Iraq war. We learn through this exchange that his current economic hardships are in part due to an injury he received on the front. The man treats Hussein with a respect that has been markedly absent from his other encounters and offers to help him, but Hussein refuses. It becomes apparent through the course of the narrative that the jewelry heist and murder/suicide at the beginning *Crimson Gold* are acts of retribution for all of the daily embarrassments Hussein suffers.<sup>274</sup>

In *This is Not a Film*, we see Panahi advancing through *Crimson Gold* to get to the scene he wants, providing a rough narrative overview but leaving out the details. He starts the film at Hussein's second embarrassment in the Jeweler's shop. While browsing for a gift for his fiancée, the store owner recommends Hussein purchase less expensive wares from another shop. Hussein exits the shop and then leans against its outer wall, clearly humiliated, his eyes rolling back in his head, his face a waxy pallor. Here Panahi pauses the film. He concludes his description by explaining that he could never have imagined the gestures Hussein makes to communicate his discomfort. The actor takes the

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<sup>274</sup> Xan Brooks, writing for *The Guardian*, gives a convincing read of this film, but many others have pointed to the narrative shift as well. See, "Jafar Panahi: Public Enemy" in *The Guardian* <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2003/sep/02/1> and J. Hoberman, "The Invisible Man," *The Village Voice* [New York] 14 January 2004, C74.

screenplay and makes it something else. The scene from *Crimson Gold* that Panahi includes in *This is Not a Film* resonates more than merely his illustration of unscripted emotion. We might ask, for instance, why Panahi chooses this particular scene to make his point? Surely there are other moments of unscripted emotion in the film he could have drawn on?

If *Crimson Gold* has been read as being less about the crime committed in its opening scenes and more about the social, economic and historical conditions in Iran that have conspired to make this sort of crime possible, I would argue we can read its social critique as also inflecting Panahi's argument in *This is Not a Film*. Panahi excerpts the scene which pictures Hussein's final and complete embarrassment. His eyes roll back in his head, he puts his coat on and pulls his hat down over his eyes to cover himself. In this emotional moment we see the motivation for his retribution that has already been narratively fulfilled in the murder/suicide at the beginning of the film. It is tempting to draw parallels with this structure of humiliation and revenge onto Panahi's own film, though certainly there are flaws in making too exact a comparison. We might see Panahi's own scene of embarrassment in his explanation of his unmade script — a scene that also unfolds in the middle of the film. The murder in *This is Not a Film* could be read as the shaming of the Iranian State for continuing to silence its artists, and the suicide is Panahi's film/negation of a film entered into Cannes via a USB drive. It is an act that directly disobeys the court rulings and therefore guarantees he will face continued legal persecution. At the heart of *Crimson Gold* is an urgent question — given these conditions of living, how are we to feel about Hussein's murder of the shop keeper? And, in *This is*

*Not a Film*, -- given the conditions of censorship in Iran, how can Panahi *not* attempt to find other ways of working?

“If one could tell a film, then why make a film?” Panahi’s second answer to this question is provided by a clip from his third film *The Circle* which illustrates the way a setting can function in a screenplay. Banned from Tehran’s 18th Fajr International Film Festival in the spring of 2000 and only screened internationally, the film represents a shift in Panahi’s oeuvre away from narratives focusing on children.<sup>275</sup> Instead, it portrays the struggles of five women. And like the narrative in *Crimson Gold* it focuses on how the urban space of Tehran, and the religious laws in Iran more particularly, shape the options open to women in Iranian society.<sup>276</sup> The interlocking narratives that make up *The Circle* are strung together like links on a chain; moving from the disappointing birth of a girl in the maternity ward, to a group of three woman who have escaped from jail, one of whom is seeking an abortion after her husband has been executed, to a woman who has been arrested for prostitution, the women’s paths converge anonymously on the streets of the city. Only at the end of the film does the circle close as all of the women end up together in a jail cell.

As with *Crimson Gold*, Panahi advances through this film providing a similar kind of accelerated narrative overview. The scene he settles on depicts a woman running

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<sup>275</sup> Maria Garcia, “Inside the Circle: Jafar Panahi Depicts Struggle of Iranian Women” *Film Journal International* (March 2001) Vol. 104, No. 3: 34, 36. Focusing on children is one of the ways filmmakers can raise social issues in Iran, but make them more palpable to the censors. See also Hamid Reza Sadr, “Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children,” in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 227-237.

<sup>276</sup> William Johnson, “The Circle” *Film Quarterly* (Spring 2001), 53-56, 56.

down the long curved hall of a bus terminal, its outer wall made of glass with vertical steel supports spaced at regular intervals. Stopping to look out the window, this woman, who escaped from jail early on in the film, sees a police officer checking IDs and tickets for the bus she is supposed to board. This scene forecloses the possibility of her escape. Panahi pauses the film here, with the young woman leaning against the window looking down and to the right towards the buses. He explains that the vertical lines of the building support the anxiety of the scene, and indeed his point is precisely that the location accentuates her mental state in a way the screenplay could not have predicted. The camera lingers on the TV screen depicting this paused scene; the woman leans against one of the window supports, the colours are mostly black and grey, the vertical lines appear like the bars of a jail. Panahi crosses in front of the screen to stand on the same side as the woman and in this movement produces a peculiar affinity between this scene from *The Circle* and the scene he is creating of his own house arrest in *This is Not a Film*.

Importantly, as with the other films in his oeuvre, Panahi's inclusion of *The Circle* resonates beyond his explanation of it in *This is Not a Film*. For instance, *The Circle*'s narrative purportedly unfolds over a single day, but the girl born at the beginning of the film appears to be about four years old when her mother attempts to abandon her at its end. Like his echoing of the temporal setting of *The White Balloon* on New Year's Eve, here Panahi also incorporates the compression of time he employed in *The Circle*. In *This is Not a Film* the several days of apparently observational documentary are compressed to appear as one seamless day of Panahi's life under house arrest.

Panahi's inclusion of these scenes from his earlier films help us read *This is Not a Film*, but the project Panahi is undertaking in *This is Not a Film* also demystifies these



earlier films. It is, as I mentioned at the outset, a film that undoes itself, but that also sets Panahi's oeuvre at the crux of the struggle he is undertaking. *This is Not a Film* not only asserts its own negation, but forces us to consider the status of his previous films as well. Panahi not only sets out to deconstruct the illusion of film with the inclusion of *The White Balloon*, *The Mirror*, *The Circle* and *Crimson Gold*, but also their status as films within the context of stringent censorship in Iran.

Separating these two excerpts from *Crimson Gold* and *The Circle*, which Panahi uses to elucidate the role of the amateur actor and the setting in the collaborative filmmaking process, Panahi and Mirtahmasb briefly discuss the status of film they are presently making, shifting *This is Not a Film* toward the 'reflexive' documentary type Nichols describes. His incorporation of *The White Balloon*, *Mirror*, *Crimson Gold* and *The Circle* operate within *This is Not a Film* in three ways: first, and perhaps most obviously, they illustrate Panahi's explanation of why a screenplay cannot simply be told, evoking the adage "a picture is worth a thousand words". They also emphasize that the collaborative aspect of every film, even at the level of the actors' unconscious facial expressions, is worked out during production; Second, they provide narrative density by referencing the kinds of oppression that have interested Panahi in the past and provide a more extensive account of his struggle with Iranian censorship. For instance, Hussein's frustration with being treated disrespectfully by the jeweler can be seen as a metaphor for Panahi's treatment by the government; the young woman's impending arrest after her previous escape from jail functions as a chilling parallel to the failure of Panahi's appeal; and Mina's frustrated desire to be herself as opposed to performing Panahi's fictive storyline can be likened to the way censorship prevents Panahi from communicating

social and political realities in Iran. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the scenes he includes are a kind of “greatest hits” of Panahi’s engagement with filmmaking that pushes the relationship between content and form: calling attention to his use of symbolism in *The White Balloon*, his play with the conventions of fiction and documentary narrative and representation in *The Mirror*, as well as his narrative reversals and temporal compression in *Crimson Gold* and *The Circle*. Panahi creates his argument about the specific narrative quality of film through these excerpts and commentary on his previous films.

## **The Green Movement**

The pace of the second section of *This is Not a Film* with its excerpts, explanations and acting out of the unmade screenplay gives way to long takes and infrequent cuts in a third section that re-establishes the feeling that events are unfolding in real time. Although Panahi’s actions, like surfing the internet while watching TV, seem mundane, they are not arbitrary for the film’s narrative thrust: Panahi’s encounter with stringent censorship and mis-information on the internet is the discursive foil against which alternatives for the distribution and circulation of information through USB drives and cellphone data plays out in *This is Not a Film*.

The complications and questions that new technologies create for censorship are underscored as Panahi points his iPhone out toward the view from his balcony and presses ‘record.’ He pans across the construction taking place outside and swings to the interior of his apartment, finally resting on Mirtahmasb, who is filming Panahi with an HD video camera. We see the men through the lens of their two cameras, shot, reverse

shot. If one image is clear and the other degraded due to the inferior quality of the cellphone's lens, the exchange recalls immediately the use of cellphone footage and social media by protestors during the Green Movement in Iran.<sup>277</sup>

The Green Movement was at the forefront of what would become a series of revolutions in which social media would play a central role — it is the immediate precursor to the Arab Spring and Occupy movements. Cellphone footage was crucial for documenting these political protests: its capture was quick, accessible, harder to stop and censor and easily circulated. Anyone with an Internet connection could upload footage seconds after it was taken. Cellphone footage gave the protestors a way to see themselves as a group, but it also allowed an international audience to witness the unfolding government crackdown against protestors in almost real time. And footage that was taken down or blocked from websites could be reposted, or recirculated on others.

There is no explicit mention in *This is Not a Film* of Panahi's outspoken support of the opposition candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, in the 2009 Iranian presidential election nor of his subsequent involvement in the Green Movement protests when President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed power. However, Panahi's political support

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<sup>277</sup> "...the Green Movement remains the first major world event broadcast worldwide almost entirely via social media." Jared Keller, "Evaluating Iran's Twitter Revolution," *The Atlantic*, 18 June 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/06/evaluating-irans-twitter-revolution/58337/> (accessed 24 February 2015). There has been extensive commentary on the role of social media during the Green Movement in Iran and slightly later during the Arab Spring. Activists and others have contributed to extensive wikipages, see especially "Internet activism during the 2009 Iranian election protests" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet\\_activism\\_during\\_the\\_2009\\_Iranian\\_election\\_protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_activism_during_the_2009_Iranian_election_protests). Academic work on this topic is just now beginning to emerge. See Chris Featherman's forthcoming book, *Discourses of Ideology and Identity: Social Media and the Iranian Election Protests*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2015) and Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain's *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

for the opposition and plans to make a film about the Green Movement is the likely reason he was arrested.<sup>278</sup> While Panahi obliquely refers to his involvement in the Green Movement and the government's response to protesters through the use of iPhone footage shot from his apartment, he does not include footage from these protests, talk directly about them, or explicitly bring these mass protests into the larger political context for his own arrest and the subsequent making of his film. Why does he keep the project of *This is Not a Film* so tightly self-referential? In order to provide one answer for this question I want to briefly discuss two other films that take up the use of the cell phone and government censorship after the Green Movement to highlight the way Panahi's film functions differently.

First, *Letters from Iran* (2011), a film directed by Manon Loizeau and produced with help from Arte France and Aljazeera, documents the Green Movement from the presidential elections to the social and political upheaval after the election results were released.<sup>279</sup> Like *This is Not a Film*, *Letters to Iran* opens with title cards: white text on a black background. Through these we learn that the documentary is filmed by opposition activists and was made without the knowledge or involvement of Iranian authorities. We are also told that the footage we are about to see was recorded on mobile devices, cellphones and hidden cameras in the wake of the Green Wave between 2009 and 2011. *Letters from Iran* continues using documentary interviews as one of its main modes,

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<sup>278</sup> Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran jails director Jafar Panahi and stops him making films for 20 years," *The Guardian* 20 December 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/20/iran-jails-jafar-panahi-films>, (accessed 24 February 2015).

<sup>279</sup> The entirety of the film is available on Youtube through the channel GREENUNITY4IRAN. See this and other protest videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/GREENUNITY4IRAN/videos>.

intercut with segments of activist footage. While some interviewees like Parvin Fahimi (the mother of Sohrab Arabi who was one of the first students fatally shot by the police on 15 June 2009 during the protests) face the camera openly to give their account, others have their faces blurred, are filmed from behind, or are shown in silhouette to protect their identity. Video footage of Sohrab Arabi's death is shown within the film — his final moments were captured on cellphone videos that went viral and became rallying points for those opposing the Iranian Government. Other Youtube protest videos and student speeches excerpted and inserted throughout *Letters to Iran* give the film a collaborative feel. This is underscored within the narrative of the film itself: "Iranians have become the journalists, the filmmakers of their own history."<sup>280</sup> *Letters to Iran* is dedicated to Sohrab Arabi and his mother, all of the students who have been disappeared or put in prison, and to Jafar Panahi.<sup>281</sup>

*The Green Wave* (2010) directed by Ali Samadi Ahadi is a documentary that takes up the contested Presidential elections in Iran, the resulting protest movement, and government response. Combining cellphone footage, animation and interviews, *The Green Wave*, like *Letters to Iran*, attempts to account for the Green Movement from the point of view of the protestors. The factual details are enumerated slightly differently in these two films. For instance, in *Letters to Iran* we hear accounts of student protests and

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<sup>280</sup> This line occurs nearly half way through the film as the documentary captures the shutout of Western media. But it also points to a slippage occurring between the documentary and the artistic registers.

<sup>281</sup> This is a direct reference to Panahi's role in the protests as a cultural producer — and to the time he already spent in jail before he was released to house arrest. The torture Panahi underwent and his popularized hunger strike is also not discussed in *This is Not a Film*. For Panahi's message from prison see Bernard-Henri Lévy, "The Message from Jafar Panahi" 18 May 2010, *La Règle du Jeu*, <http://laregledujeu.org/2010/05/18/1564/the-message-from-jafar-panahi/> (accessed 24 February 2014).

deaths through the present, although sometimes disguised, witness accounts. In *The Green Wave* animation is used to give an image to accounts that are without one. The Iranian government, for instance, systematically denied torture when it responded to the protestors. Although there are many victims' accounts of it, there are few existent images.<sup>282</sup> One section of *The Green Wave* illustrates an account of sleep deprivation, torture and death within Iranian jails. While *The Green Wave* zeros in on human rights abuses and torture of arrested students in the prison, and *Letters to Iran* focuses primarily on the student protests, the effect of both films is one of emotional outrage.

Of course there are other films documenting the 2009 presidential election and the Green Movement that followed, *Iran's Young Rebels* and *Fragments of a Revolution* (both 2011) to name a few. Like *Letters to Iran* and *The Green Wave*, the use of activist cellphone footage in both of these films is key to their documentary nature, especially after Iran forced all Western media outlets out of the country on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June in 2009.<sup>283</sup> While watching these films, it's striking to see how much of this footage is *the same*. This, in part, has to do with the limited footage that went viral through social networking sites, YouTube, and was reposted by activist bloggers. This footage, because

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<sup>282</sup> *Letters to Iran* takes this up explicitly and traces the case of E. Mahtari who was arrested on the 26 August 2009 and was tortured and left for dead on the side of the road. See also the U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Iran" <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2011/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dliid=186425#wrapper> (accessed 27 February 2015). For more on representations of torture in the context of the United States' wars in the Middle East, see Susan Sontag's "Regarding the Torture of Others," *New York Times*, May 23, 2004, and also Judith Butler's *Frames of War*, especially the chapter "Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag," 63-100.

<sup>283</sup> Victor H. Sundquist, "Iranian Democratization Part I: A Historical Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement" *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 1 (2013): 19-34, 19.

of its wide circulation, has accrued layers of affective meaning and serves in these films not only as a document, but also as an activist rallying point around these deaths.<sup>284</sup>

The shot, reverse shot exchange between Mirtahmasb's HD video camera and Panahi's iPhone in *This is Not a Film* implies a comparison and begs a question: if these are the kind of documentaries that are being made and circulated about the Green Movement and its effects outside of Iran, why does Panahi choose to make a film that only references the student protests, mass arrests (including his own) and his political activism implicitly? One answer might reside in the formal qualities I've addressed. Everything in *This is Not a Film* is mediated or presented through allusion.

To depict the Iranian realities for filmmakers, cultural workers, and other members of society disenfranchised by Islamic law is, for Jafar Panahi, an engagement in an ongoing counter-hegemonic struggle against the Islamic Republic's laws of censorship. Or as he claims, "I only recorded the realities. If they are dark, it's not my problem. The people who have created the problems are responsible...I just want to show the realities without distorting them."<sup>285</sup> But what constitutes "reality" throughout *This is Not a Film* has been made a site of struggle. And Panahi himself seems to emphasize that there isn't a singular 'reality' to represent but instead focuses on the struggle over how we define or interpret reality. In this way, in order to understand the representations

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<sup>284</sup> This footage includes the horrifying deaths of Neda Agha-Soltan and Sohrab Aarabi - two student protestors who were shot in the days following the presidential election.

<sup>285</sup> See Panahi's interview with Jamsheed Akrami in the documentary "A Cinema of Discontent, Film Censorship in Iran."

Panahi puts forward, we need to understand the history of censorship in Iran and the stakes for making films which contest the rulings of the Iranian courts.

But it is also important to remember that unlike Panahi's earlier films, *This is Not a Film* is made in the context of an *unfolding* legal struggle. It narrates the unfinished story of his appeal process and there is hope the international reception of the film itself can have an effect on this story's ending. On the one hand, because *This is Not a Film* is a meditation on the difficulty of communicating events as they unfold and an attempt to use cinema to offer an account of the realities as they are perceived to evolve, it is a political film. On the other hand, in *This is Not a Film* as well as in the rest of his oeuvre, Panahi resists the term "political", claiming instead to be a socially committed filmmaker. This distinction is important because Panahi's work has been so often characterized as political by a Western audience. For some, the term political "concerns itself with analyzing the contradictions of a particular historical situation,"<sup>286</sup> however, for Panahi the political artist is only interested in showing "what is wrong or right from the point of view of their political party or ideology."<sup>287</sup> In contrast, his previous films, though often banned, are stories about justice, honesty and equality, "the omnipresent narratives in Iranian culture, oral tradition, poetry and cinema,"<sup>288</sup> and, largely because of this, he has

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<sup>286</sup> Dana Polan, "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards A Politics of Self-Reflexive Film" in *Movies and Methods*, Vol. II. 664-665.

<sup>287</sup> Jafar Panahi, in Shiva Rahbaran, "An Interview with Jafar Panahi" *Wasafiri* September 2012, Vol. 27, No. 3., 7.

<sup>288</sup> Hoberman, "Chatting With Jafar Panahi," 62.



been characterized as a “paradoxical populist”—a filmmaker who makes deeply complicated and beautiful films for mass audiences.<sup>289</sup> As Panahi himself observes,

As socially committed filmmakers...the reason we distance ourselves from political filmmakers is first and foremost the short lifespan of political films and their very short-lived effect on viewers. They have a use-by date, which expires as soon as the ideology of the political filmmaker ceases to exist. So, a political film can only be enjoyed as long as the political ideology that infuses it is *en vogue*. I do not believe that any political film can endure. It ‘dies’ or, at least, the value of this work drops considerably as soon as its maker’s ideology dies. But when I say that I am a social filmmaker, I mean that I ‘express’ society in the way that I have felt it by living in it. I do not give any opinions about what is good or bad. I do not make any political statements or give any moral lessons.... What we want to achieve is to make the viewer find out where the roots of the symptoms lie — the point where they can see that religion, politics, economics, culture and even geography are all interrelated and are both the cause and the remedy of social problems....So, in short, through my films I do two things simultaneously: firstly, I nudge my society, so that it starts thinking about itself; and secondly, I provide history with a report.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Jafar Panahi, in Shiva Rahbaran, “An Interview with Jafar Panahi”, 7.

In other words, for Panahi, to be a political filmmaker is to make films that are subject to party ideology, a notion of the political that has been shaped by the history of Iranian filmmaking, both within a structure of censorship that promotes Islamic films, and in the wake of the Iran-Iraq war, revolutionary films that hold up the state of Iran above all else. To be a political filmmaker for Panahi is essentially to work within the confines of propaganda. Perhaps when thinking through this distinction it becomes more obvious why, despite the fact he was an active participant within the Green Movement, he did not make its history and politics the explicit narrative arc of *This is Not a Film*.

To illustrate this argument more fully, I want to look closely at the back and forth between HD video and iPhone, and between Mirtahmasb and Panahi, in the concluding moments of this third part of the film. As they sit filming each other Mirtahmasb says, “If you want to turn it into a film, I doubt it, but...if you’re documenting the days then go ahead”. Articulating this doubt over the outcomes of the material they have recorded (and perhaps over what kind of content can be recognized as constituting a film) Panahi continues to document Mirtahmasb leaving for the day. When the brother of the building’s superintendant comes by to collect the trash, Panahi switches from cellphone camera to HD video to document him removing the trash from his own apartment and then rides the elevator down with him, filming as he knocks on doors and collects the garbage from each apartment. *This is Not a Film*, then, ends with Panahi explicitly “making a film,” an action that clearly violates the terms of his house arrest.

To return to my earlier question, why does Panahi choose to make a film that only references the student protests, mass arrests (including his own) and his political activism implicitly? Another answer might be that in creating *This is Not a Film*, Panahi is also

making a film that troubles the very conception of what the cinema is, and what cinema can be, especially in relation to its systems of distribution, and its possible audiences. In other words, Panahi isn't making a film only about the Green Movement, but rather a film about the possible effects of that movement, or about what it might mean to move forward as a filmmaker under the continued censorship of the Islamic Ministry of Culture. *This is Not a Film* is also a provocation.<sup>291</sup>

Furthermore, one cannot help wondering about the difference between Panahi filming on his cellphone and a conventional camera. While the camera footage seems more “official” and the cellphone footage seems “personal” and “activist”, the latter can still circulate and, because it is not generally used to make feature length film, it lies outside the jurisdiction of the MCIG. Such juxtapositions pose new questions for those producing cultural artifacts in 2009, when the iPhone was beginning to release versions with video recording technology. Should such technological innovations be recognized in the field of professional filmmaking? Equally important, this sequence poses questions for the MCIG as well — should cellphone footage be regulated as national cultural production?

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<sup>291</sup> An ongoing struggle over the terms of ‘culture’ has an intensely complex history within Iran and is deeply linked to colonialism, imperialism and its legacies: struggles over the terms of nationalism between secularists and religious groups in addition to tensions with pan-Arab politics, and ongoing Western economic interests in the region. For an overview of these struggles in the Arab world see: Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*. For a broad contemporary history of the Middle East from the perspective of a Middle East correspondent see Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). For a history of the Iranian revolution see: Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985) and Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For an excellent social history of Iranian Cinema see: Hamid Naficy’s four-volume work, *A Social of Iranian Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011& 2012).

## Endeavoring to Represent

In some respects then, in my view, *This is Not a Film* is accurately read by critics as a film that shows Panahi thumbing his nose at the authorities, not simply by making a film when they have sought to prohibit his artistic expression, but also by using it to demonstrate the difficulty censors will have carrying out their work in an era of new media, when anyone can make a film for almost nothing and circulate it outside the national theatres that they regulate. That said, it is also important to take into account that Panahi chooses to do this *through* an examination of his entire feature length career that is woven through *This is Not a Film*. Why do it this way? Surely he could have made a film about his house arrest and censored film project without incorporating his entire oeuvre. What does this move facilitate? Perhaps, after his arrest, torture, hunger strike, not to mention his ongoing appeal process, making a film that destabilizes the legacy of his celebrated film career is one way that Panahi can trouble whole the terrain of film, not just for the Iranian government, but more broadly for the international film community.

When the credits of *This is Not a Film* roll, the work the audience has just seen is classified as “*an effort* by Jafar Panahi and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb,” a description that maintains the ambiguity about whether or not it is a film. The identities of colleagues who have helped in its production are withheld, white dots, “.....” on the screen stand in for their names, presumably to protect them from the Iranian government. The “effort” is dedicated to Iranian Filmmakers. Following these “credits”, on the DVD version of the film (released by Palisades Tartan in 2012), an update regarding the participants is

provided. On a title card, much like the one that gives information regarding Panahi's arrest at the beginning of the film, with white text on a black background three further occurrences are listed: (1) Mirtahmasb was arrested in September of 2011 along with five other filmmakers on charges of "Collaborating with the BBC." He was released three months later. (2) In December of 2011 Panahi's last appeal was rejected by the Iranian courts. (3) In October 2012 Panahi and Iranian Human Rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh were awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament. Panahi, unable to travel to accept the award, prepared the following statement, read at the ceremony by Costa-Gavras, "Why do the governments, the almighty and powerful, become more intolerant every day? History is the narrative of the few, making the lives of the many miserable, while using the most unacceptable excuses: differences of sex, language, religion, or political ideas."<sup>292</sup> Indeed *This is not a Film* in all of its critical power is also a document of Panahi's crisis in Iran for people outside it.

But *This is Not a Film* is importantly also about a crisis of representation *within* the film. It is not just a film in a genre yet to be recognized, or a film diary, or a political documentary. It is a film that is deeply concerned with the development of narrative structures, and with the ways its framing, uneven production, and excerpts all merge together to make a film, but one that insists again and again on its own demystification. It is a film that defies the promise its medium seems to guarantee.

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<sup>292</sup> This is Not a Film, DVD.

## Conclusion

In the opening pages of his book *Prisoner of Love* Jean Genet writes, “The white of the paper is an artifice that’s replaced the translucency of parchment and the ochre surface of clay tablets; but the ochre and the translucency and the whiteness may all possess more reality than the signs that mar them.”<sup>293</sup> This sentence has remained in the back of my mind through the writing of this dissertation. Genet not only uses the word *artifice* for the paper, the parchment and the clay tablets, but also for the signs that mar them, which may be less ‘real’ than the material surfaces they mark. In other words, Genet foregrounds the history of the material substrates upon which representations are recorded, for him, this materiality is reality. Over the course of this study, I found myself returning to this opening passage having always mis-remembered it — in my mind it was always the inky words that Genet focused on, and the space between them where we could try to read other meanings. However, his emphasis is first on the material ground, the historical, the intellectual, the ‘episteme’ in which our signs, symbols and images are formed.<sup>294</sup> This back and forth in my memory and re-reading of this passage between the signification of words and images and the materiality of the substrate is one that plays through the chapters of my dissertation.

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<sup>293</sup> Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, 5.

<sup>294</sup> Michel Foucault, “Preface” to *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1994).

This dissertation has set out to trace contemporary engagements with the politics of representation through the work of Emily Jacir, Eric Baudelaire and Jafar Panahi. I have been writing in a moment of increasing global conflict. Hardly a day goes by when there is not a news report on an attack, a bombing, a negotiation for peace beginning or unraveling. It has been written over the last three years, but the concerns I take up here on representation and new engagements with documentary practices have been building in relation to the Middle East for more than a decade.<sup>295</sup> How this history is reported on, is represented within media or within major cultural institutions, by artists in major exhibitions and their attendant public programming, has been properly the site of much debate.<sup>296</sup> It's worth noting that in the *New York Times* special issue marking the centennial of WWI, hardly an article mentioned the Balfour Declaration negotiated between Britain and France in 1917 that divided the Middle East and established Israel as a Jewish homeland. This editorial silence occurred in the wake of bombings on Israel by Hamas and Israel's fierce retaliation on the Gaza Strip over the summer. When do we read something as a revolutionary struggle? When do we read it as a terrorist attack?

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<sup>295</sup> Again I want to emphasize that this has not been the only period of crisis Globally or in the Middle East historically, nor that its use of images is wholly unique – photography and documentary have developed along with political crises. But I do want to stress that the scale of our engagement with documentary practices is greatly expanded. Along with the archival turn which has led to institutional support for documentary practices in an unprecedented way, shifts in technology have restructured how we receive and disseminate this documentary information.

<sup>296</sup> These debates have occurred within the numerous art journals addressing contemporary art in the Middle East that have been founded in this period (*Bidoun* (founded in 2004), *ARTMargins* (founded in 2012) to name just two). Journals like *Art Journal* have run special issues or special sections on contemporary Middle Eastern art (See Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer 2007)). The scholarship contained in these pages enters into an art world context in which there is expanding interest within Western art museums, and international art fairs in exhibiting Middle Eastern art.

Who decides and with what criteria? These questions are central to my dissertation even if the work I take up is more firmly sited within the international art world than within activist or political spheres.<sup>297</sup> I find Chantal Mouffe's formulation of politics and art a useful one for my work,

I want to clarify that I do not see the relation between art and politics in terms of two separately constituted fields, art on one side and politics on the other, between which a relation need be established...From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order, or in its challenging, and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension.<sup>298</sup>

I have attempted to indicate across these three chapters how the contextual, material and formal qualities of these works fundamentally structure their conceptual representations and how these representations are made intelligible. Each chapter has engaged in a close reading of a single work or installation in order to unpack its historical and political context. Beginning with Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film* and *Material for a Film (Performance)* my chapters have moved thematically from the still image toward

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<sup>297</sup> Chantal Mouffe has addressed these on in her work. Her most recent book also attempts to map these questions on to artistic practices. See "Agonistic Politics and Artistic Practices" in *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 85-105.

<sup>298</sup> Mouffe, 91.



the moving image in order to investigate temporality and duration in these historical accounts. My examination has dealt with theories of realism in relation to photography and film and has tried to relate these back to broader theories of epistemology and ontology.

Throughout my chapters I have been interested in the artists' re-presentation of a political event or crisis. Each chapter has engaged with theories and modes of representation developed in the 1960s and 1970s, and each of the works under consideration intervene in the political crisis they aim to represent through material and formal experiments. In other words, the form of these works is crucial to their political content. Chapter one examined the role of the photograph in Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film*. Reading the work closely, I argued that Jacir has created a filmic installation and that this mode of representation is closely tied to the history of Palestinian film. Reading the formal decisions in Jacir's work along with the conceptual project of recuperating Wael Zuaiter's life for the Palestinian struggle, my chapter discusses how the use of space in *Material for a Film* is important for the kind of history Jacir presents: one that relies on conflicting accounts, reversals and re-readings within the space, and that moves away from the contained temporal and narrative arc of film. I argue that she draws the film out spatially within the installation rather than make a film because she is engaging with the specific legacy of film within a Palestinian context. Propaganda films of the 1970s, contemporaneous with Wael Zuaiter assassination, tended to flatten the Palestinian struggle in an attempt to communicate a unified account to the rest of the world. Jacir's filmic installation, I argue, is not simply a deconstruction of previous modes of representation and historical narrative within the Palestinian context, it is also an active

experimentation to construct new modes of meaning making that are useful in a contemporary context. In this chapter I set Jacir's filmic installation in conversation with Ariella Azoulay's notion of 'watching' photographs in order to think through the duration each kind of looking proposes. Azoulay argues that we need to start watching the photograph in order to arrive at a more ethical reading. In many ways, this is the opposite of the looking Jacir takes up. Whereas Jacir accumulates and constructs an archive *around* Wael Zuaiter, Azoulay proposes that we find the archive and the discursive space *within* the image. Both, however, are interested in what the duration and attention of looking can produce. For Jacir this is a complicated and nuanced representation of history. For Azoulay it is a civic community. This thread comes back in chapter three where I discuss the kind of international support and community of resistance Jafar Panahi aims to garner through the production and circulation of *This is Not a Film*.

Chapter two reads Eric Baudelaire's *The Anabasis of May* as a meditation on historical narrative and the formal qualities of film and installation. It expands upon the ideas of looking and duration I take up in chapter one by further asking what narrative structures are available to us for retelling and representing contested histories. Looking at Baudelaire's work I ask how we can make sense of, or make intelligible political positions that are traditionally outside of the representational realm, as is the history and demands of terrorist groups? What are the narrative structures available to us for these accounts and what do they require of their viewers? Can we understand the demands of revolutionaries/ terrorists without joining them on their epistemological ground? And, if we forego a linear historical narrative, how do we make sense of scrambled temporalities within history? My argument is that Baudelaire holds three different registers of historical

narration together in his work: a film, an installation and a libretto. Each of these registers constructs the historical moment he takes up differently. Baudelaire's project is not a postmodern one. In other words, he does not argue that we should adopt a relativist perspective on the historical events themselves. Rather, his various narrative forms show the limitations of representation and experiments with new modes of narrating a historical event. Baudelaire's work, I argue, asks questions about how we marshal photographs to witness events, and what kinds of historical narratives can we ask them to support. His work meditates on when an event becomes visible to us as such, and when we can begin the process of attempting to see it, and to represent it to others.

Chapter three performs a close reading of Jafar Panahi's *This is Not a Film*. I argued that although Panahi's film has been read as a political film, and this reading is a valid one, the critical reception of the film has neglected to examine *how* Panahi constructs his film through excerpts from and commentary on each of his earlier feature length films. Chapter three reads Panahi's film as a form of self-negation: it not only negates its status as film within the Iranian film industry, but it also negates all of his earlier works by implicating them in the production of *This Not a Film*. I look at what this means for the possibility of producing a film in a context of stringent censorship that conspires against certain kinds of artistic production. The chapter ends by reading the film back through Panahi's involvement with the Green Revolution, a political context that is only implicitly addressed in his narrative because of his own assertion that he is not a political but rather a social filmmaker.

The works included here construct their arguments by playing out their frustrations with the possibilities of their mediums and with representation itself. They

are as much about formal and conceptual deconstruction as they are about experimenting with new ways to represent and organize the sensible. This dissertation is decidedly not a history of media in a strictly formal sense. I do not take up a general history of photography or film, nor do I push my research into new media theory or its effects on spectatorship or evasions of censorship. Certainly these areas of inquiry could inflect my argument here differently. Instead my undertaking has been primarily structural and material — I have attempted to think through the formal and material qualities of these works to show how they underpin their larger conceptual frameworks. Further, I contribute an account of works that have not yet been discussed rigorously within art history.<sup>299</sup> This dissertation seeks not only to contribute to the scholarship on each artist, but also to analyze the works in relation to one another in order to focus on representation itself as a site of political and social contestation. In short, the three artists studied here move beyond deconstruction in an active search to find new modes of representation, and new ways of making the world and its contested political events and histories intelligible.

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<sup>299</sup> During the final stages of this dissertation, Baudelaire released a book which looks at the entirety of his *Anabases* series, but the contribution on *The Anabases of May* does not examine the structural aspect of historical narrative in his work.

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