

Activist Passion: Art, Philosophy, and the Political

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ABSTRACT

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In my dissertation, I explore interdisciplinary forms of artistic practice through the lens of what I call “activist passion.” Activist passion, as a concept, contributes to a rich field of research on how art practice creates new modes of engagement that alters the relation between subject and object. My use of the term “passion” draws inspiration from Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s “joyful passions,” as “the power to affect and be affected.” Activist passion arises out of an ethical concern that engages with artistic, curatorial, cinematic and writing interventions where there is an attempt to cohabitate and costruggle with others. I examine how these transversal practices not only engage the political, but create spaces for deeply ethical collaborations between artists, writers, filmmakers, curators and the agents of social struggle with whom they engage. From this form of interdisciplinary cohabitation emerges a positive, affective condition that I name “activist passion.” Unlike relational aesthetics or participatory art, activist passion is not a category of art practice, but rather an affective force that inspires new modes of engagement. The process of cohabitation emerges from the relations between cross-disciplinary and cultural practices that move beyond the narrow realm of art discourse. The projects in *Activist Passion* demonstrate the kinds of outcomes that are possible when art gives up on Art and enters wholeheartedly into social and political practices.

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For my brothers, nephew and niece, you are my lifeline,
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For my friends, love abound.

For my ancestors,
Palestine lives here,
in the I that is me that is you, steadfast and healing

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Prologue: Point of Entry

Inlet

- 1. a: a narrow area, bay or recess of the sea, a lake, or a river
b: an opening through which air, gas, or liquid can enter something (such as a machine)**
- 2. a place or means of entry; a way of entering; especially: an opening for intake**

The origin of inlet is letting water in, from Middle English *inleten*, “to let in,” from *in* + *let*.
Let in. Inlet.¹

In an interview, the fierce poet Eileen Myles, is asked by Michael Silverblatt, the host of the radio show *Bookworm*, what poetry tradition enters her work or is she influenced by. She replies, “It might be the tradition that decides to dedicate your life to poetry, it’s kind of like jumping off a cliff, and that’s a good thing.” Myles speaks of the moment where she had turned her back on academia, and decided to dedicate her life to writing. She committed to the struggle of survival, living her life as a poet. Myles’ reply to Silverblatt is indicative of the kind of risk that for some, like Myles, is necessary in order to do the work that is required to fulfill a calling, a passion. Myles opens up Silverblatt’s question, in a way offers her version of what tradition can entail, she gifts her definition as a way out of Silverblatt’s seemingly limited question. Tradition is no longer rooted in a discourse but is of risk. The tradition of taking a risk, to commit to being an artist or a poet, is the foundation of survival for a poet like Myles. Artists—in whatever form they practice—take risks and turn their backs on whatever distracts them from their calling. Assuming Silverblatt was expecting a different answer, Myles veers the conversation to an honest place, and one that underlines the effect of self-production,

¹ “Inlet.” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Web. 17 November 2014.

a tradition that is rooted in personal experience—“learning how to be yourself on a page.” Myles offers a more piercing portrait of what it means to live life as an artist, or better yet, how to live life as a work of art. As she tells Silverblatt, “Let’s all put a light on our own existence, understand that that’s liberation itself, and that’s the thing to write from, is the capacity to see oneself as while you’re standing in the light. I really feel that the performance of existence is the bedrock of poetry not the history of literature.” The “performance of existence,” she continues, is like “Standing there in all the riches, realizing this is it, and I can’t get all this down, I am not a movie camera. I am actually something more subtle. I can take a thought, I can take a phrase, I can take a shade of the wall, I can take a body heat. I can take a look in your eye, and form a structure out of that. If I wasn’t here in the deepest sense I couldn’t do that. The primary step is to be.”

Myles’ response pushed me to ask: How do I think about this as a proposition? I am not interested in performing existence, or subjectivity on a stage. I am not interested in engaging with subjective experience per se. But I am interested in what Chris Kraus, another fierce literary figure, suggests, and that is to turn the “I” that is not personal, outward to the world—turning the “I” to an eye, “to form a structure” out of what I see, feel, or experience. The practice of being a writer is learning how to hear your self. Dodie Bellamy, an experimental writer, and one of the main figures of the New Narrative Movement, expresses a similar sentiment: “The only way we know the world is through the imperfect fucked-up lenses of our personality and body” (70). And in another section, in her brilliant book, *The Buddhist*, she writes, “The connection between writing and life can be so magical, and once that process takes over, the writing always wins” (56). I am far away from winning. But what I tried to do in this project is to get to a place where life

and writing, writing and curating, curating and activism find a place of cohabitation, where something happens, or where I think something did happen. The material I chose inspired me. The material moved me, and I was able to engage with it in an open, experimental way that pushed me to think about new modes of composition—how can writing express, in process and structure, the political, what remains at stake. I learned that my writing is often generated by what images can do to thinking, to thought. For me, images should not tell us what to think, but they should “trap us into new ways of thinking” (Bellamy, 61).

I offer, as an epilogue, a point of entry to my thought process. I developed this project around the concept of activist passion. Activist passion stems from ingathering of what I have learned through experience. It is a concept that gives precedence to the work that happens across different registers of time and space, of inhabited roles and positions, of contradicting thoughts and actions, of ones that find affinity and connects to an emerging thought. An activist passion is a way to engage the world as if jumping off a cliff, of letting go of expectations, pressures, and fears.

Activist passion is to engage with the poetics of risk and to walk away from what in the end will capture my thought rather than enliven it. This project is an “inlet” that opens up onto soft subversions, meant to invite the reader into a thought process that is seemingly personal, but that attempts to tackle (what does feel too intimate) as something that also feels true to analysis, in the sense of movement or rhythm, in the sense of affect and tone, in the sense of intuition and experimentation.

Chapter 1

Activist Passion As the Pursuit of Magic

To think means to be embedded in the present-time stratum that serves as a limit: what can I see and what can I say today?
Gilles Deleuze

The violence of globalized capital—the effect of which takes on the form of neoliberal policies and procedures—conditions the present-time stratum. What we can see and what I can say today is ultimately affected by our capacity to undermine the banal agony that conditions the insidious nature of complicity with this violence. This violence is simultaneously formed by and forms the conditions of perpetual warfare, ecological disasters, state divestment from social welfare, sanctioned police violence, prison expansion, and neocolonial urban planning procedures. Our capacity to comprehend the actual effects of the violence of capitalism as it manifests in neoliberal procedures and policies is limited. I can only go so far with my own research and writing to try to open up a gateway of thought that allows me to grasp at something that is, in its immediate effect, hard to fully comprehend. As a way out of this conundrum, an overwhelming conundrum, accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness that overpowers thought, in the midst of feeling too much, I propose to think of responsibility as a method of forming a practice: to create work that “has us thinking for the world and not against it” (Stengers, 188). Responsibility is where I begin and it colours every approach to the question of violence throughout this writing: I am, in various and divergent ways, complicit in this violence and because of this I feel responsible. Drawing on Isabelle Stengers’ term, I refer to “responsibility” in the way she describes it, “as a matter of concern.” She writes, “Responsibility is not a matter of

who is being ‘truly’ responsible, it is a matter of concern, and, as such, open to technical advice” (188). I read this to mean that work—as in, how I work, what my practice is defined by i.e. writing, researching, teaching—is conditioned by how I want to express responsibility. I approach responsibility as a practice that enhances my capacity to push back against the limit of thought, to see what my work can do, what is its potential. I engage with work as a matter of concern that disrupts complicity, if only momentarily, conditioning the potential for new possibilities of thought to emerge. For me, this is a process that thinks and does the political, and it is this process, which, thus far in my work, has allowed me to formulate the concept “activist passion.” This chapter introduces that concept.

One definition of activist passion might be: to be moved by something so much that it inspires action, the effect of which manifests in an act. This definition will be expanded upon throughout this work. This preliminary definition, while not incorrect, does little to help us understand the relay between affect, inspiration, and action. But I aim to touch on the possibility of its existence because I feel that this relation between affect, inspiration, and action is fundamental to how my interdisciplinary practice unfolds. My approach to this writing is not definitive or predetermined; instead, it is an attempt to open up the potential of curiosity through a focused analysis of the image of cinema, architecture and language. In this chapter, I focus on activist passion as a concept that encompasses the effects of curatorial practice on writing—as in how the various sites of interest presented in this project touch on the potential of staging, what possibilities arise when placing heterogeneous elements next to each other, and how, when in relation, they come to inspire a thought, motivate an action, invent a concept. I explore the question: what happens when

the relay between affect, inspiration, and action creates new forms of knowledge? In this way, activist passion develops through the pre-personal *and* the personal therefore this project interweaves the autobiographical and the general-theoretical. This requires that I—the writer, researcher, teacher, curator and activist—construct a space, build a platform, outline a pathway that leads the reader to interact with unconventional forms of narration, scholarly intervention, and experimental analysis.

Here, I would like to focus on how the concept of activist passion has come to exist. The conditions were set for activist passion to emerge because of my interdisciplinary practice; I am a writer, curator, teacher, and activist. I am inspired by the ways in which language can be used to produce theory that evokes a poetics of resistance—how language can undo meanings imposed on a body. In particular, how meaning has been imposed on a Palestinian body and I need a concept that opens up the problematic of the self, of identity.

My approach to writing through and with, around and in relation to activist passion is rhizomatic. I approach the rhizomatic in this context as anti-methodology, which, for me, highlights the weaving of divergent interdisciplinary forms of thinking and doing. Here, the writing does not follow a pre-given model of cultural analysis or a methodology that follows specific pre-determined disciplinary structures. What I hope to create is a non-disciplinary writing practice, in the sense that it crosscuts between experience, theory, and practice, specifically engaging in a philosophy of invention that foregrounds the rhizomatic approach of beginning from the middle, which means from an encounter between two things (or more), from the staging of heterogeneous elements alongside each other, to see what that staging offers, what it does to thought, and how this encounter forms new possibilities of thought. As Deleuze and Guattari write,

A rhizome has no beginning nor end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance, the tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and...and...and...” This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be.” (1987, 25)

To begin from the middle produces a process that is similar to my approach to film curatorial practice. When I curate film programs I hope to amplify the rhythm at play between the films I choose to screen alongside each other, in alliance. This is in opposition to entering a cinematic space where the program is prescribed, or where a formula is clearly identified—where the programmer has an agenda. My intension as a curator is to allow the conjunction “and...and...and...” to exist in a way that lets the audience engage with the rhythmic sensibility that is unfolding, that is creating the atmosphere of the cinematic space. A rhizomatic approach that begins from the middle is a mode of engagement that is about what builds as rhythm, what in effect affects, “where things pick up speed.” This mode of engagement focuses on how to detect what is singular about an experience—as in being attuned to something that feels necessary or urgent that is already unfolding within a field of perception—it is how an encounter has you, gets your attention. In this way, an encounter can have an effect that enhances a body’s capacity to act or think differently.

This is where the concept activist passion comes in. It is a concept that is inspired by Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s joyful passion, which I read here as a way to describe how an encounter can move a body to think in unexpected ways, to surprise us, move us, shock

us, to shift perception and therefore thought. Deleuze, reading Spinoza, writes, “[...] when we encounter a body that agrees with our nature, one whose relation compounds with ours, we may say that its power is added to ours; the passions that affect us are those of joy, and our power of acting is increased or enhanced” (1988a, 27–28). Activist passion follows this line of thought and specifically engages with the following questions: How do changes, shifts, and transformations take effect—causing fissures—in an already emerging relation with the encounter? How does that encounter manifest and increase the potential to act, think, or feel differently? How is the encounter that is composed out of the “and...and...and...” conjunction—what occurs in between things—is of the middle? How does the rhizomatic approach express a singular experience? How does it shake and uproot a firm position? How does it engage politics?

This project is an experiment in writing—writing as a mode of transduction. Drawing on Gilbert Simondon’s concept of transduction, writing here is similar to how Erin Manning describes it in her *Politics of Touch* where, following Simondon, she writes, “Transduction is individuation in progress: invention. If we think identity, we have returned to a stable body. A moving body—a sensing body—cannot be *identified*. It individuates always in excess of its previous identifications, remaining open to qualitative reiteration” (2007, xvii). Writing from the middle means writing transductively—in a non-linear formation across, through, and around heterogeneous elements. It is an exercise in invention—this experiment attempts to foreground the concept of activist passion as one that remains open to qualitative reiteration. At the same time that activist passion enhances our power to act, it is also an exercise in articulation as an affirmative practice. Activist passion is a concept that puts articulation to practice: how to articulate the affects of an

encounter on a body—how it enhances the capacity to act—and how do those articulations become thoughts in the making—how affects become effects, and how effects become affects. As much as activist passion is about *doing something*, it also evokes what Brian Massumi calls a “something happening.” Drawing on the philosopher of art, Susanne Langer, Massumi writes, “Langer reminds us that we see things we don’t actually see. We all know it, but we tend to brush it off by calling it an illusion, as if something is happening that isn’t real and doesn’t have anything important to say about experience. But isn’t ‘something happening’ the very definition of the real” (2011, 41)?

Here I try to show that there is a “something happening” from within the exercise of writing—that there is a dynamic movement to it. I try to write with what moves me, and with the movement that stirs an encounter—in this project the encounter is with images (of cinema, architecture, and language). To write through encounters is also to write about what comes before them, their context, and what occurs after, how they live in flux, through words, in writing. Writing is the matter of concern here, how I practice responsibility. Writing from the middle pushes the limit of that “something happening,” so that the ineffable momentarily becomes sayable, transferable in effect, and, as I will argue, political.

Beginning from the middle means beginning from the place where something has uprooted an entrenched position, where there has been a shift in perspective, where that “something happening” has undone thought: “[T]o be grabbed by the throat by a set of impossibilities” (Deleuze 1995, 133). This feeling, of being drawn to something, to be grabbed by a force of movement, instigates a different way of perceiving, thinking, and articulating the political: it opens up potential to think and feel differently with an

encounter. Beginning from the middle enlivens experience. In this way, activist passion is what pushes me to put into words what is feeling most at stake, what feels unquestionably urgent. It is what makes me trip up and fumble, where I initially lose words only to find them again.

Massumi writes on the encounter with art,

We never register what's actually in front of our eyes. With every sight we see imperceptible qualities, we abstractly see potential, we implicitly see a life dynamic, we virtually live relation. It's just kind of shorthand to call it an object. It's an *event*. An object's appearance is an event, full of all sorts of virtual movement. This is real movement because something has happened: the body has been capacitated. It's been relationally activated. It is alive in the world, poised for what may come. (2011, 43)

As a body encounters an event, an object's appearance, something breaks open, allowing precision to constitute a fact in perception. Something *has* happened; it *is* real. A relation is constituted—forming the coming-together of the event. Something is envisioned. What is envisioned is the singularity of the event as it comes to existence; this encounter, as it is relationally activated, is thick with potential. Breaking things open means “[m]aking visible things that would otherwise remain hidden” (Deleuze 1995,127). Art breaks perception open, allowing one to experience the possibility of “something happening” coming to existence. Articulating the effect of “something happening” is how writing activates activist passion. Something pulls through, it appears in whatever form, and as if under a spell it takes hold of us. Thinking of what encapsulates new forms of

coexistence obliges me to be present. This being-with-what-is-present—the nonknowledge of perceptual experience—is what forces me to think about what I see from where I stand, it shocks thought, and the shock to thought activates activist passions.

It is time to bring in an example of an encounter that has inspired the concept of activist passion. Well, there are several. But one such encounter I had is with images associated with Palestinian suffering. The ones that stand out most for me are the ones that depict elderly veiled women who are crying, wailing, in pain. Their hands on their heads, in disbelief, they cry and wail. The cry, to watch that on a television during news coverage of another Israeli attack, is unbearable. The effect of the image, while powerful, I feel has become spectacle. One can trace a genealogy of these images that show Palestinians as either victims or perpetrators. They are familiar as images that compress meaning into a representational effect: too quickly these images reduce and deflect the violence of occupation, and strip the Palestinian experience of an oppositional position; resistance is not present in these images. They are two-dimensional representations, forgotten as soon as they are seen. My reaction to these images stem from frustration, exacerbated by the simplicity of what comes to represent knowledge about the occupation in Palestine: “Enough with the wailing veiled elderly women who are in pain, and the background full of rubble.” “No more images of children bloodied and mutilated, dead.” The horror of life lived through a slow death is made into a spectacle. This is the news. Images bear witness to violence, made to shock the viewer, but the shock wears out and, soon enough, those images disappear and the horror is forgotten about. My encounter with these images inspired the concept of activist passion. As a writer and curator, I wanted to engage with them differently, to stage them in a new setting that put to task their initial use—as they

stand in for a prescribed narrative that is bound to spectacle—in order to challenge the face-as-image as if it did not belong to a body in pain, a body that suffers. The face-as-image inspired the entry of activist passion into the world.

I ask, are these images simply for consumption? What are these images supposed to represent? What are they trying to do? For me, there is a “something happening” with these images. The something happening of the image has a cultural context. The wail or the cry is a form of mourning—what we see on the news after a bomb has dropped on a Palestinian village, on a Palestinian home, or when a loved one has been killed. The problem is not with the image but how it is taken up as a tool to mobilize a position. I think the framing of the image in this way, through the lens of a politics of representation, constitutes the limit of thought and perception. Something is activated for me in these images, and that is their power to affect. Their shock, the shock of witnessing violence through an image, with an image, produces knowledge, and yet presents a limit of what it is that can be known. The elderly women who cry, who wail, who raise their arms up in disbelief, who place their hands on their heads overwhelmed by the experience of violence—a loved one’s death, the trauma of war—the elderly women’s cry is haunting, moving, and shocking. Within the limit of all that is seen—from where I stand, in front of a screen—the affective pull of the image is calling forth a thought in the making. And it is with this co-composing relation of body-screen-image-body that I feel a “something happening” takes place. To affectively engage with the cry on screen, to articulate its effect by attuning to its affects, the feelings felt that are on the edge of “expressibility,” is in alliance with what Manning calls prearticulation. In *Always More Than One*, Manning writes,

It is the feltness of language in the moving, before the saying, between the words. It can be gesture, rhythm, movement. It can be laughter, stuttering. It can be silence. From sensation to experience, from relation to perception, from feeling to writing, prearticulation makes felt how the more-than of expression—expressibility—accompanies language in the making. Prearticulation does not express some *thing*, or some *body* it expresses-with. The proposition: there is no language that does not carry its share of prearticulation. (2013, 158–59)

The cry, as expressed through the face-as-image, is a “more-than expression” of the violence experienced, the death that is witnessed, or the trauma that is felt. At the same time, the cry that is image is also the more-than expression of the relation that is co-composing the experience of being-with the image. Here, prearticulation is the cry that composes the *expressibility* of the image. But what then has a chance to emerge as expression, or as thought? What is being perceived/thought? How is activist passion articulating the image’s affect? What is bringing thought closer to thinking here? And how does that relay into forms of making, of inventing? This is the politics of activist passion: to invent and activate articulations that emerge out of engaging with the edge of expressibility.

The matter of concern here is distance: how to co-compose a relation with what takes place in Palestine living where I do, at a distance? I cannot help but think of the term becoming-Palestinian because it gets at the incommensurability of this struggle: the becoming-Palestinian that is between here and there, the cry I see as image on the

television and the real-time encounter with violence that is taking place far away. I am neither there nor here, from neither here nor there. Becoming-Palestinian is a thought thought from the middle. It begins from an already confusing, indiscernible, and irresolvable tension, where what is configured is already hard to express, a lump in the throat. I know something exists there, I know I have to say it, and in order for me to do that, I have to write it first. I have to write the difference that constitutes my experience, write through what is becoming-Palestinian, not what *is* Palestinian. Audre Lorde so powerfully put it in “Poetry is not a Luxury,” describing how ideas emerge through the process and are then made visible: “The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic, and make it realized” (1984, 36). Activist passion pursues magic, wherein the quality of a “something happening” appears.

Becoming-Palestinian breaks through a spatial configuration of belonging, constituting the prearticulation of a position, neither victim nor terrorist. Becoming-Palestinian challenges the imposition of a subject. In this way, the relations of power are challenged when confronted with the tiresome narrative of what the occupation of Palestine represents. Becoming-Palestinian is still alive in the cry—the cry that is ineffable, un-representable, non-negotiable. Becoming-Palestinian is a matter of beginning from the middle in order to get at what is constituted from in between the composing relation—that is how to bridge what happens there (in Palestine) to how I articulate the effect of occupation as it translates to here (on Turtle Island). Activist passion here is activating an articulation that breaks out of the spell of an exhausted dialectic that binds the Palestinian subject to an already pre-

composed narrative bound to the category “Israel-Palestine” conflict. Palestinians are not merely victims here; they are resisters. As Lorde writes of resistance: “[T]ransform the silence into language and action that is self-revealing and fraught with danger” (1984, 42). Pushing up against the safe barrier of language’s use-value and entering a mode of articulation activates the ineffable in affect, thereby, experience highlights resistance in writing, the activist passion of writing. As a political practice, the writing here aims to push up against the occupier’s language, the one that houses the politics of Palestine within a whitewashed term such as “conflict.” Palestine is occupied, and the struggle against occupation continues. *Becoming-Palestine* is a term that at once celebrates the practice of struggle that is ongoing and ever changing, and that evokes the steadfastness of the Palestinian people who refuse to die.

In alliance with Lorde’s emphasis on language and action, I feel that Deleuze writes of “getting into something” as a potential activator of thought, of what I also think is a mode of resistance. He writes, “the key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to ‘get into something’ instead of being the origin of an effort (1988b, 23). To “get into something” by engaging from the middle sets in motion the wave of feeling that activates thought. This process is of time: writing as duration adheres to a *presentness* that is past and yet to come: the present is of a middle “without boundaries, edges or shape” (Berlant 2011, 200); it is thick with the becoming-thought of expression. Here, writing is a process that crafts new modes of “co-existence, ordering, [and] transformation” (Deleuze 1995, 123) that engages encounters, one that begins with the images of becoming-Palestinian.

My getting into something has to do with thinking and feeling Palestine as a life forming encounter: getting into it as an idea and as an image, making this encounter with Palestine a life's work. I learn from experience. The co-composition of sensations of experience into materialist production is a life's work. It is living with racism, whether directly or indirectly that has formed this persistent encounter. To render the effect of racism—that is affective, felt bone-deep—into a conceptual framework is difficult and uncomfortable. The staging of images of Palestine and the effects of racism as affects has also inspired the concepts of activist passion and becoming-Palestine. This pushed me to give precedence to experience, to let the affective tonality of life come through in the concept or prose. I believe that “expressibility” of thought, the “putting-into-orbit” of thought, what constitutes prearticulation, what is in effect felt and on the verge of being uttered, stems from thinking of life as a work of art, as Deleuze puts it, or what Manning refers to as “artfulness.” Here, I would like to refer to the writing process as life forming, as a work of art in itself, writing as artfulness. As Manning writes,

The artful is not about a form, or content – it is the capacity to make felt, in the event-time of a work's composition, how an object is already a field of relation, a differential variability. The artful, alive with minor gestures, is therefore always already collective in the sense that the how of its process cannot be limited to an individual subject. The artful is not generated by the individual, but by the making felt of how an ecology becomes expressive, tuning that making-expressive toward the generation of an aesthetic opening on experience, aesthetic in its original

definition of making sensible, making felt. (n.pag.)

The difficulty in process is tangled in language: the question is how to use it. The key is to avoid entrapment. To pay close attention to the enforcing power of language, its ability to assert meaning, to change the desired effect, to reduce what was felt to something that can easily be demarcated. Writing is a struggle. Written language has the ability to reconstitute the meaning of the attempt to articulate what at first seems inarticulable. The challenge: how to put into words what is becoming perceptible—what is of that moment when it offers itself to the world. To attempt to articulate an event's effect speaks to the felt urgency of the present, the potential of affect to enliven a singular expression. Activist passion makes felt the process whereby an articulation is coming to terms with thought.

Tension is produced from pushing up against a thought or question; something forces me to think, so I write. When I am obliged to think—with the force of writing something is set astir—this feels like an encounter is staged, another encounter is taking place, and that is with the work of art. Massumi writes, “Art is about constructing *artifacts*—crafted *facts* of experience. The fact of the matter is that experiential potentials are brought to evolutionary expression” (2011, 57). When I write I am moved by something that attaches itself to me. I believe that this something is a problem that is being constituted, where a struggle in thought is felt. I feel that writing crafts facts of experience. In this writing project, there is struggle to articulate personal experience as it relates with art practice and scholarly work. It is born of the relations that are not separate from what constitutes the experience of vexation and inspiration. Struggle is what is at the limit of one's experience, the constraints that condition thoughts, feelings, and actions. This limit experience, expressed in writing, is born of urgency; the need to feel what is possible in the world in

the face of what feels impossible. If anything, what is to be done for the world is what constitutes my becoming-Palestinian, and this is determined by how I come to know what I know and what I do not yet know. Here, writing produces “artifacts” of experience; it “crafts facts of experience.” Writing opens up a way for me to think with, in alliance with, and in solidarity with the work that is staged here, produced by different scholars, poets, filmmakers, and artists. As a practice, writing pushes me to the edge of what I can do. Activist passion is an artifact of this experience; so is becoming-Palestinian.

This work on activist passion thrives on urgency, the urgency to feel what is possible in thought—inducing the power to act—without forgetting about the powers that limit the body’s capacity to act. It is important to articulate the tension between possibility and impossibility—what enhances our power to act and what limits our ability to act—in writing. For me, this means navigating between what feels intolerable in the world and what must be pursued in struggle—what feels inevitable and hopeless, and what feels possible and transferrable. I am learning to write through this experience—living within conditions induced by the limits enforced from outside structures of oppression, and knowing what potential that holds, given the opportunity to work from amidst but in spite of those conditions, in order to feel the possibility of transformation and change, of becoming-Palestinian: to allow “oneself to be contaminated by the mysterious power of regeneration of the vital force, wherever it is” (Deleuze qtd. in Rolnik 2011, 3).

Writing through experience is pre-personal. By pre-personal I mean how experience is conditioned by an event, by the “something happening” that constitutes an event. How an event is constituted is that precise movement that tends toward what is coming into appearance, what is made to appear, what is not yet known but that is coming to fruition,

“what transpires into an already-there that is at the same time not-yet here” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 262). The generative quality of the event traverses into the compositional force of desire. Desire conditions how the political manifests in the world—the present that is past and not yet here.

Schizoanalyst Suely Rolnik re-conceptualizes desire, frees it from Freud’s grasp. Rolnik writes of desire by evoking Deleuze and Guattari’s work in *Anti-Oedipus*. She writes that desire consists of three different processes:

First: the impulse of attraction, which draws us towards certain universes, and the impulse of repulsion, which pushes us away from others without us knowing exactly why, blindly guided by the affects that each of these encounters generates in our body. Second: the forms of expression that we create in order to bring into the visible and utterable the sensible states that such connections and disconnections progressively produce in our subjectivity. Third: the metamorphoses of ourselves and of our territories of existence, which are fabricated in this process. (2011, 3)

Rolnik touches on three key aspects of desire as a process of production: encounters generate affect, forms of expression are articulations of affect, and once articulated the process sets up a transformative experience initiating a new kind of relation or event. In this case, there is always a subject-in-the-making emerging out of the conditions set by the experience, informed by the affects felt as the composing event. Affect is information of a different dimension. A becoming-subject of experience (how desire constitutes an event) is the process of production (how a position is constituted). If desire activates forms of

expression, and these forms of expression are of the encounter, which initially conditions desire, then at what point do I detect the emergence of a position? And where do I locate this position in the active present, in the political?

Before being there is politics (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 17). Politics is pre-personal; it is composed of a field of relation, relations of forces that cross paths constituting different and divergent events. Here, in the field of relations, a politics is in the making, moving thinking closer to thought. This conditions the capacity to act—to “pick-up” on something. In this way, politics is the activator of a thought on the edge of expressibility. Politics is the activator of *the pick-up*, to pick-up from the middle again. The “[p]ick up is a stammering” (18): “it happens between ideas” (18). Before I can articulate and coherently draw on language to form expression, I feel the effects of the prearticulation of thought as a politics to come. It is affective—a becoming-thought in movement, what constitutes desire.

Here, I am drawn to the practice of pedagogy as a mode of engagement that has potential to draw on the pick up as a tool for thinking and doing together. If we take pedagogy to mean how one manifests the practice of thinking and doing in relation to enhancing our capacity to think and feel differently. This means we are then thinking and doing from a non-institutionalized context, from a rhizomatic approach. The intention here is to transform what is affective and experiential, what is transversal, into forms of knowledge that activate activist passions. This stems from my need to practice love, care, openness, and sincerity in teaching and learning—to “give time time” (Tupitsyn n.pag.). To give time time is duration—to mobilize a process of exchange from experience, collaboration, and relation: a *pedagogy from the middle is the politics of activist passion*.

Instead of determining action according to a pre-configured set of relations, activist passion is a pedagogy of passions, coming at the politics of struggle from the inside out, from the middle, from what sets thinking astir. Activist passion is power that constitutes the magical forces at play that enhance our capacity to think at the edge of thought; this can alter, shift, and transform politics. Deleuze writes: “The kind of knowledge [affects] constitute is hardly a knowledge, but rather an experience in which one randomly encounters confused ideas of bodily mixtures, brute imperatives to avoid this mixture and seek another, and more or less delirious interpretations of these situations” (1997, 144). The confused ideas of bodily mixtures that are felt inspire me to feel the urgency that is present in the world, affect induces a feeling that cannot be reduced to specific emotion or cognitively recognizable category or characteristic. And that is not all: only certain affects act as springboards for concepts ... “There is thus a selection of the passionate affects, and of the ideas on which they depend, which must liberate joys, vectorial signs of the augmentation of power, and ward off sadness, signs of diminution” (144). As Nietzsche writes in *Human All Too Human*, “No life without pleasure; the struggle for pleasure is the struggle for life” (77). A feeling of the possible is at the heart of the term activist passion. To believe in the world is to believe in the struggle for life. To believe in life as a work of art: to extend potential, to increase the capacity to act, becoming as the constitution of an event. Massumi writes, “The straight run encounters turbulence: process as becoming is not just creative activity, it turns out. It is *self-creation*. More than that, the self-creation is ‘enjoyed.’ The principle of unrest eddies into something we would be forgiven for suspecting is not unlike an aesthetic appreciation: an enjoyment of creativity” (2011, 2). “Self-creation,” as Massumi further explains, is the event’s unfolding. This “self” is not

reduced to a subject, it references a process, process as becoming. Massumi continues, “The duplicity is in fact an artifact of the immediacy. It is simply that each occasion of experience comes into itself finding itself amid activities not its own already going on” (3). Massumi’s discussion on the event is integral to the development of the concept of activist passion as one that is invested in the event’s self-creative potential to radicalize modes of activity, composing new encounters.

An encounter has you. The encounter could be a relentless thought, an image that returns, a posture that inspires a shift in movement, a scene from a film, a conversation with a friend, a gesture. All these carry with them the potential to pursue magic; it is what happens when something gets a hold on us; a power added to ours. What we select is what we feel to be of powerful effect, what brings unexpected changes, what cultivates activist passions, what moves us by way of action—here desire is not understood as a lack, but is understood in terms of potentialities that emerge from encounters between bodies or relations that agree with one another, that has pushed these relations toward a new composition—a power added to the relation, expanding a body’s potential to act not constricting its efforts at becoming.

The magical attractor that is the encounter is pushed to its limit and is taken up as a challenge in order “to get at something.” Its form of expression is yet to be realized. Deleuze writes that forms of expression are “the discourse of a concept,” that which constitutes knowledge (1997, 144). This “getting at something” produces effects, and when it comes to art, cinema and writing is what has opened up my capacity to think differently, to shift posture, to pay attention to images. The force of the work’s expression has added power to the relation that is becoming-event. And it is up to me now to try and put into

words the compositional effect of such a relation; this process manifests in a concept: activist passion. Its expressibility is in a concept. In order to relay the experience of having felt affect, I need to compose the effects of that experience into something that is of its own accord. Here, I turn to images. The power that images have had and still do have on the discourse of Palestine is relevant to the concept of activist passion. Engaging with images on Palestine, in writing and curation, helped me transform my silence into language and action. For me, Palestine lives in the multitude of images, in how these images are constructed, arranged, and read. Images of Palestine have created an excess of representation. This excess needs to be probed, discussed, interrogated in order to restore to the discourse on Palestine a new way of engaging with images of Palestine, to restore the belief in a Palestine to come.

In *The Time-Image: Cinema 2*, Deleuze writes, “The questions is no longer: does cinema give us the illusion of the world? But: how does cinema restore our belief in the world” (1989,182). Deleuze refers to the ways in which the time-image as a cinematic effect provides new forms of seeing when it comes to image reception, and accounts for the immediacy in affect as it manifests in the spiritual automaton, which is “the psychic situation of the seer” (170). Here, however, I am inclined to situate “the belief in the world” as a mode of becoming. How do cinematic encounters restore our belief in the world? I want to consider the “belief in the world” as a matter of concern that also stands alongside a belief in a Palestine to come. In this way, becoming-Palestinian is a “worlding” amidst occupation. In Deleuze, the belief in the world can be read as a declarative statement, and can be misconstrued as a positivist sentiment. Rather, as a statement, sentiment, and concept, “the belief in the world” gestures toward a renewed sense of joy–

as in order to enhance the capacity to feel what is possible in the world. To feel the possibility of something shifting in how one worlds-in-context can expand the potential to feel life's force—as it is lived collectively. A belief in the world is engaged throughout as a cinematic qualifier, where the potential to shock thought can be made palpable during an affective cinematic experience. The shock to thought feels like something has disrupted the banal routing of everyday life as it is experienced, where there is constant struggle to think differently, and perceive differently. It feels easy to turn my back on the world, but what would it mean to actually confront it, to learn about what is possible at the limit of what feels impossible? Or to not give up? The shock to thought brings me closer to the present condition and enables me to formulate new political articulations that are pre-personal. This means to believe in the world and in how that might exercise the urgency felt.

I engage the belief in the world here as a concept that tends toward the possibilities that emerge while living with struggle. At the limit of thinking and feeling this possibility something always shifts and moves posture. It is when bodies encounter a limit that the force of the struggle is felt. “It is this force that provides the impulse that the coming experience takes into its occurrence and appropriates as its own tendency” (Massumi 5). I argue here that this tendency is one that tends toward activist passions, that is, when “our power of acting is increased or enhanced” (Deleuze 1988a, 28). We live in a world that is increasingly becoming intolerable. Feeling the possibility of living differently within the intolerable might lessen the effect of the power of sad passions—“what poisons life is hatred.” As Deleuze writes, “[...] when we encounter an external body that does not agree with our own (i.e. whose relation does not enter into composition with ours), it is as if the power of that body opposed our power, bringing about a subtraction or a fixation; when

this occurs, it may be said that our power of acting is diminished or blocked, and that the corresponding passions are those of *sadness*” (1988a, 27). I want to make it clear here that joyful and sad passions are not directed toward a subject, but are affects that activate relations in the making, or becoming-bodies in movement. Passion here lives in the realm of the ineffable, not yet directed toward a subject. As much as sad passions is about the power of being acted upon, joyful passions counter this movement; joyful passions enhances the power *to act*.

Sad passions are ones “that block the efforts for the event to energize” (Massumi 2011, 6), for the act to take place, the act of autonomous co-composition, collaborations that condition spaces of possibility. Sadness turned to hatred, aversion, mockery, fear, despair, pity, indignation, envy, humility, repentance, self-abasement, shame, regret, anger, vengeance, cruelty: “the dreadful concatenation of sad passions” (Deleuze 1988a, 26). Sad passions are the elements of force that diminish our collective power to act, restricting our ability to break free of the subdued notions that condition our subjectivity in the making—our potential becoming. The individual is “a degree of power,” with a capacity to affect and be affected. We are constantly co-composing, conditioned by the event, by the act. Deleuze writes,

There are no fewer things in the mind that exceed our consciousness than there are things in the body that exceed our knowledge. So it is by one and the same movement that we shall manage, if possible, to capture the power of the body beyond the given conditions of our knowledge, and to capture the power of the

mind beyond the given conditions of our consciousness (1988a, 18).

Experience, as it manifests in process of production, is not subjective. The “I” does not determine the subject. Experience is not of the personal—what is already deemed a pre-determined subject reflecting back on what *they* perceive. Experience is about tending toward what inspires a “something-doing; practice becomes perception” (Massumi 2011, 11). Experience is emerging out of living with what inspires an encounter, and how an encounter inspires thought. To engage with encounters, to articulate the potential they inspire is a pragmatist concern. This stems from what Stengers has expressed as “the care of the possible.” In other words: “We don’t know how these things can matter. But we can learn to examine situations from the point of view of their possibilities, from that which they communicate with and that which they poison. Pragmatism is the care of the possible” (Stengers and Bordeleau 2011, 2). The care of the possible is a pedagogical concern—to care for the possible is to engage with what is not yet known, to activate activist passions—to begin again from the middle.

This is a question of urgency. To pose an urgent question, or to be compelled by the urgency that is of a problem-in-construction is of a pragmatist concern. The belief in the world is to feel that a different world is possible: This is just the beginning of what is possible. The feeling of urgency that calls forth a determined “something else is possible” activates activist passion. In this way, I believe that activist passion—as a concept—is fundamentally based on the relay between personal experience and the pre-personal, the autobiographical and theoretical. I have been able to pursue magic this way—through writing, in writing the tension that exists when it comes to thinking, feeling, and acting on

impulse, intuition, and abstraction. I draw on the work of Pignarre and Stengers' work on sorcery. They write, "The word 'magic' is one of those words. As the neo-pagan witch Starhawk writes, to utter the word 'magic' is already an act of magic: the word puts to the test, compromises, exposes to sniggering. It forces us to feel what it is in us that balks and which is, perhaps, precisely what renders us vulnerable to capture" (2011, 102). Here, the pursuit of magic engages with techniques of protection in writing as a curator. My approach to praxis constructs a composition of thought that engages with images (as thought, in relation to the cinematic, of architecture, and of language). For me, engaging with images sets up the conditions for a thought to emerge. Hence, the practice of writing tends toward the possible, from the position of a pragmatics of care, inquiry, curiosity and interest—to take up responsibility as a matter of concern. I think of writing as a matter of curatorial exploration through knowledge, narration, and analysis. This way I hope to show that activist passion is not only a concept that is merely presented, as the issue in question, but that the project itself, how it is articulated in writing, how it is unfolding, is activist passion in practice.

Chapter 2

Images of Activist Passion: On Palestinian Revolutionary Cinema

The reality we live in consists of the wreckage of images.
Hito Steyerl

In a short piece entitled “Having an Idea in Cinema” Gilles Deleuze poses a simple yet provocative question, “What does it mean to have an idea in cinema?” This inquiry is motivated by Deleuze’s own philosophical practice that engages cinema as an avenue through which new concepts can emerge. Cinema is perceived as an inspirational companion to modes of philosophical engagement—a field of possibility that engenders this process of invention in thought, enabling different formations of ideas, either as questions, problems, or concepts. Engaging the cinematic inspires a process of contemplation that, as Deleuze puts it, “tells stories with concepts.” The function of cinema is to tell stories with movement and duration, with light, rhythm, and speed; and the function of philosophy is not merely to reflect on those stories, but to put them to work. In this way, the function of philosophy is to invent concepts that amplify the effect of the cinematic encounter, articulating *that something* that is spoken of under what we are made to see (Deleuze 1998, 16). This might mean that we turn to cinema as an artful² process, one that employs a mechanism of language that is charged with wordless effects, enunciations that propagate new forms of desire, and utterances that constitute the force of what remains unknown: these are the components of a cinema that forces us to think.

I think of images as autonomous forces that require curatorial interventions: I think of them as holding up “ideas” that are about to manifest in different affects and knowledge

²Erin Manning refers to the idea of the minor gesture in art as *artfulness*. She writes, “Against the major tendency of mastery, the minor gesture is the carefully crafted technique which pulls the potential at the heart of a process into a mobile field replete of force-imbued-material that is capable of making felt not only what the process can do but how the ecology of which it is part resonates through and across it. Always alive with a certain quality of transduction, the process clinched by a minor gesture is one that makes the threshold between process and object/effect felt.” See further, Manning, “Weather Patterns, or How Minor Gestures Entertain the Environment.”

formations. Curatorial work opens up possibilities that require images to rub up against each other, be seen one after the other, be close in contact. How does curatorial practice produce an affect that is non-representational in effect? I want to argue that images are not simply organized in order to “show” something, rather, they are *doing* something. Images do something together. It is through what occurs in and in between them that non-representational modes of articulation emerge; these could be affects or forces that move us or render us speechless, in awe of what we have just experienced. If this occurs—a cinema that opens up our potential to think and feel differently—then I would like to call this possibility within the cinematic field political. I’m drawn to this type of affective engagement with images through a curatorial practice, where new forms of expression emerge, and where I am able to construct a playground for rhythm-building. What thoughts, ideas, problems, inquiries emerge from the rhythm felt in the programming of a cinematic event? How does rhythm constitute a thought-in-the-making, in turn giving rise to a new image?

The rhythm of cinematic images constructs a site, a minor composition,³ like an architectural tectonic that encapsulates the details of textures, of movements of shadows and light, of a saturated or neutral colour, elements that come together to hold up an idea, like scaffolds that keep a structure in place. Rhythm constructs the scaffold for holding up an idea, a becoming thought: a feeling that stirs the heart, where suddenly we are upright, our body moves forward, our eyes focused more intently on the screen. A site for rhythmic play forms in movement, there is nothing but movement—we feel the direct presentations of time as spatial matter. As Deleuze explains in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, the cinematographic image “makes

³I am drawing from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literature” where “Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits” (1986 82). Extending on this concept of the minor, Manning writes, “The minor and the major are not opposed. They are variabilities in differential co-composition.” See “Weather Patterns, or How Minor Gestures Entertain the Environment.”

movement the immediate given of the image” (156); the potency of the image is movement moving. In this regard, cinema is unlike any other art form, because it is in cinema that the image moves in itself (156). This reminder—that cinema gives us an immediate experience of movement, of feeling the images *do something*—inspires a curatorial inquiry: how does movement in images arouse the thinker in us? How does it activate what Deleuze calls “the shock to thought?” How can curatorial practice, as a practice of rhythm-building, compose a movement-of-images-moving that produce “[...] *a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly*” (Deleuze 1989, 156)?

Cinema’s movement arouses the thinker in us, but this is not merely a cerebral experience of “getting the mind going.” The “shock to thought” that Deleuze refers to is felt in the body. This body is a body-in-the-making, an event unfolding.⁴ The body is not reduced to a formed subject, a predisposed viewer. It is a becoming body in movement, a body that becomes with the image-event. Rhythm is about creating an event of perception that affects the body’s potential to feel thought in its becoming, how “duration becomes experiential space-time” (Manning 2009, 6). It is here that the political has the potential to be felt—through the body, a “something happening” is a stir. Erin Manning’s work in *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* puts particular emphasis on movement’s relation to the body and, in particular, how thought *moves* a body. Taking a step beyond Deleuze, Manning writes on movement’s relation to thought as preacceleration,

The dynamic form of movement is its incipient potential. Bodies
are dynamic expressions of movement in its incipency. They have

⁴ I use the term event as a conduit for expressing singular durational experiences that are of space-time contingencies. I particularly draw on Manning’s use of the concept in her book, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. She writes, “The event is the composition of space-time that qualitatively alters the topological dimensions of our sensing bodies in movement” (2009 18).

not converged into final form...I refer to bodies as pure plastic rhythm...These bodies-in-the-making are propositions for thought in motion. Thought here is not strictly of the mind but of the body-becoming. Thought is never opposed to movement: thought moves a body. (2009, 6)

For Manning, “preacceleration is the expression for movement’s capacity for invention” (19). The politics of representation resides within the image-as-form—its production, distribution and reception. What I want to argue is that the image always *does* something else, that it *is* its effect. This something happening, as Brian Massumi might put it, can be called the affect of the image, its non-representational force, a force felt at the edge of what is about to emerge as image (or thought), the preacceleration of movement taking effect. The potential for the political to appear in a curatorial event is enhanced in the preacceleration of rhythm-building. It is precisely cinema’s capacity to invent movement and conjure thought through an affective pull that I find promising. The cinematic event can shift perception and make room for the political. The openness inherent in preacceleration’s expression enhances the body’s capacity to invent new propositions for thought. In this way, preacceleration does not represent movement, it does not stand in for thought; rather, it creates movement (Manning 2009,16). The curatorial event creates movement emphasizing the movement’s image and its capacity for inventing thought. Preacceleration is active in the curatorial event; it creates an interstitial rhythm—the movement that moves in-between the images that are staged. It is a curatorial event that involves setting the conditions for preacceleration to enable a movement’s expressiveness. As Manning writes, “When space-time is no longer *entered* but instead *created*, it becomes possible to think the body-world as that which is generated by the potential inherent in the preacceleration of

movement. Movement takes time. But movement also makes time” (Manning 2009, 17). Hence, to curate is to take time and to make time felt in the body—this is political.

Working with images of Palestine—thinking, reading, and writing about their place in the world, and how they construct meanings, forms of articulation, and language through affect, rhythm, and movement—is not limited to the discourse on Palestine as it is told through the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” In my curatorial practice, I am not simply interested in how images support or stand in solidarity with the anti-occupation movement, or its narrative arch. Rather, my focus on Palestine—or the aura that surrounds it, as a place and as a concept, literally and conceptually—has to do with how its images offer new philosophical engagements with regards to image-making as constitutive of a new political expression. Working with, and writing alongside a multitude of images of Palestine, or what constitute “Palestinian images,” is a conduit for how encounters with images can restore our belief in the world.⁵ More precisely, I am interested in charting how an engagement with Palestinian films can inspire new forms of expression that amplify the relation between images and thought. For many generations of people who have never set foot in Palestine, but have grown up and lived with images of Palestine, this is how Palestine has existed in their minds and bodies. Palestine dwells in the image. We have created—“we” meaning we Palestinians—images of Palestine that are made to resist the Israeli occupation. This chapter presents the problem of breaking up images, shattering the tendency to use images as instruments to call for action, to question this legacy of the image that constitutes the Palestine that is not of the present, but of a future past.

⁵ “Belief in the world” is a term borrowed from Deleuze’s work on the time-image. Borrowed from his cinematic oeuvre, I refer to the belief in the world as a force that exceeds who experiences it, constituting a durational effect that outlives the subject. See chapter one.

Images of Sad Passion

Images of Palestine, the Palestinian resistance, and “pedagogical” images that have become predominantly representative of the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” constitute a series of sad passion images. The images are often of faces that lament, cry, scream—that bear witness to trauma, memory, and violence. They are often of a landscape: arid land, derelict buildings, bombed out shelters, razed olive groves, tin rooftops, sprawling refugee camps. The camera is continuously moving through a terrain, in the process of memorializing a disappearing Palestinian space, or a trauma-ridden face. It is searching for new testimonies, accumulating first-hand accounts of abuse, torture, violence. The camera is scavenging for evidence, reaching out to us (the viewers), communicating in images of what it would be like to live under a military occupation. *Feel with the images*—they demand empathy, they demand a moralizing subject.

The images I refer to here agitate a discomfort, a sadness, a numbness—they block the potential to feel and think differently, often looping back to what is gone, what would have been, and what will never come. Deleuze writes, “The nature of the passions...is to fill our capacity for being affected while separating us from our power of acting, keeping us separated from that power...bringing about a subtraction or fixation; when this occurs, it may be said that our power of acting is diminished or blocked, and that the corresponding passions are those of sadness” (1988a, 27). The images re-introduce an exhausted narrative and position that further affirm the chasm between viewers and the subjects on screen—separating us from our power to act. To bear witness to a trauma onscreen further creates a distance that is incommensurable. The relation is already set between the subject and object. Positions are in place—to receive what is given, but then what? I call these images “images of sad passions.” But these images have a history. They

have developed from a mechanism of resistance used long ago in a very specific context.⁶ Deleuze writes, “[...] when we encounter a body that agrees with our nature, one whose relation compounds with ours, we may say that its power is added to ours; the passions that affect us are those of joy, and our power of acting is increased or enhanced” (1988a, 28). Spinoza’s concept of joyful passions—how encounters can enhance our capacity to act, and I would add, enhance our capacity to think—is opposed to sad passions, diminishing elements of consciousness that poison life.⁷ According to Spinoza, these elements of consciousness separate us further from our own power to act; they curtail our capacity for autonomous modes of thought. I turn to these concepts, joyful and sad passions, as tools to describe certain images that present the “plight of Palestinians,” which have become, in my view, exhausted and detrimental to the Palestinian struggle, the Palestinian people’s steadfast life-force.

Images of sad passions block the potential to engage with the discourse of the anti-occupation movement in a different or inspiring way. I am speaking of the images that represent Palestinians speaking either from a state of victimhood or state of defiance—where what is established for the viewer is a kind of short-cut to empathy. Rather, the cinematic encounter with the ideas that these images hold up, re-affirms a ready-made narrative or ideology that only works to (re)establish trauma, guilt, sadness, and a regimented political position. Often these images are part of a cinematic experience that is closed to difference, where what drives the filmic narrative is a preeminent agenda, which is to showcase the visible evidence of the on-going occupation on the ground. These films are usually the ones referred to as “political films.”

⁶ In the 1960s and 70s, The Palestine Film Unit was founded by Palestinian filmmakers living in Lebanon. It was an umbrella organization that rallied filmmakers and photographers in Lebanon and Jordan to document the Palestinian uprisings in the refugee camps. It functioned as an archive, a depot and a workspace for militant artists who documented the revolution. This will be discussed later on in this chapter.

⁷ Besides sadness, what poisons life according to Spinoza are the “dreadful concatenation of sad passions; first sadness itself, then hatred, aversion, mockery, fear, despair, ...pity, indignation, envy, humility, repentance, self-abasement, shame, regret, anger vengeance, cruelty...” (Deleuze 1988a, 26). In other words, what could be referred to as capitalist affectations.

Ones that up the ante when it comes to amplifying a pre-conceived ideological position. When it comes to Palestinian cinema, or just what are considered “Palestinian images,” the discourse around the dissemination process feels plagued by an ossified politics, and re-affirms the relation between occupier and occupied, between Israel and Palestine, as a conflict between two, a dual entity, always one in relation to the other.⁸ These images become instruments of a didactic politics that re-appropriates an all too simple relation between who Palestinians are and how they resist.

As painter and philosopher Etel Adnan writes, “Images are immaterial. An event in perceiving. A speed that you catch. Images are not still. They come, they go, they disappear, they approach, they recede, and they are not visual—ultimately they are feeling. They are something that calls you through a fog or a cloud” (Robertson n.pag.). Images make ideas visible, through the scaffold of rhythm-building they appear: we can think with them. Seeing is not a passive activity. What I want to argue here is that the images of Palestine that enforce sad passions, and in particular those images that are created in order to cull collective action against the occupation, are catalysts for events in the making. These events are organized to procure a desire to mobilize against the occupation; they are conditioned by an already configured agenda. But, for me, having grown up with them, they have come to litter my reality. My reality consists of

⁸ In writing the editorial for “Palestine-Palestine,” an issue of FUSE Magazine that was part of the series of ~~Post~~-Coloniality, I had made a typo in an email to my co-editors. So habituated was I when referring to Palestine in writing, I was about to type “Palestine-Israel,” which I only do when I am making a mistake. Usually I refer to Palestine as Palestine without the hyphenated addition of Israel. In this case, I was about to make a mistake, but then proceeded to make a much more interesting one that turned out to be quite the gift in breaking open my habituated thinking practice. Instead, I had typed, “Palestine-Palestine.” At this time, we were searching for a provocative, and ambiguous title, and this was it! Palestine-Palestine opened my mind up to so many possibilities, for when has Palestine ever been detached, in this way, from Israel in a major publication in Canada. Without that burden, of the occupier attached to the occupied in all manners of thought and action (syntax), here Palestine existed only between itself, which made it so that there were many Palestines in between, a plethora of Palestines that exist as autonomous places and concepts. In the editorial, we explained the title as the following, “ Our title refuses the liberal discourse of equating Palestine and Israel as two equally functioning entities. It also refuses to frame Palestine as the counter to Israel, as its eternal Other. *Palestine-Palestine* liberates ‘Palestine’ from its colonial perpetrator, releasing it from the false dichotomy that masks the violence of settler colonialism with the language of ‘conflict’ or ‘war’” (2). See further Himada and Katz 2013.

their wreckage. I do not want them as they come—having watched too many documentaries, seen too many newsreels that depict Palestinians as either victims of the occupation (or as terrorists). But the feeling of resistance that they induce has made another idea appear. They have called to me through the fog and cloud: as much as I wanted to refuse what they offered, I listened, I watched. I am not the one who needs to be convinced of “the plight of Palestinians.” A proposition: No more “the plight of!” How about activating resistance by making images *do something* rather than *show something*? The Palestinian resistance movement is fierce, persistent, and steadfast. Representing the victim narrative represses the activist passions that reside in the everyday, that reveal to what extent resistance, strength, resilience, love, joy, music and food constitute the life-force of Palestinian survival under occupation, on the ground, when we are not watching, when we are not able to see. Film, used as a tool that bears witness to the atrocities committed by the Israeli state, has pushed up against its limit: the potential of an image to hold up an adequate idea.⁹ How do images inspire an affective force that affirms the possibility of thinking and feeling anew again? What would Palestine look like or feel like then? What Palestines would appear after the fog and cloud has dissipated? What can a curatorial intervention do in support?

Images of the Palestinian Revolution

Many of the images that we recognize today as representative of Palestinian struggle under occupation stem from the history of documentary filmmaking that was established in the 1960s, at the height of the revolution led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. The films produced in that period focused heavily on the post-1948

⁹ “How joyful passions can bring us near to action, or the bliss of action, to bring us closer to creating adequate ideas, which are the source of active feelings” (Deleuze 1988a, 28).

Palestinians who had been living in refugee camps, scattered across various neighboring state borders. These films are black and white, made on 16mm, and were produced, distributed, and filmed by members of the Palestine Film Unit (PFU), co-founded by Palestinian filmmakers, Mustafa Abu Ali and Hani Jawhariah. These films were significant in getting information out not only to the surrounding nations in the Middle East, but to Europe as well. The living conditions of Palestinian refugees within the internal border of the accepting Arab nations were dire and the hardships that were documented showed the effects of forced exile.

The PFU was made up of Palestinian artists, archivists, photographers, and filmmakers who focused on establishing a tightly-knit collective that would document the conditions experienced by many Palestinian refugees who had fled their homes, or were forced out of them soon after '48. Many were interviewed in the infamous United Nations tents—those already set up when many began to arrive, having just crossed the borders to neighboring countries shortly after the first bombs fell on Palestine.¹⁰ During this time many images of Palestinians living in refugee camps existed, mostly filmed by European news networks, like the Colonial Film Unit, and other news agencies that specifically reported on the 1948 occupation, but that focused heavily on the mass exodus of Palestinians. By contrast, the PFU organized around documenting the Palestinian experience from a Palestinian point of view, in regards to how they fled, where they ended up, and the culmination of their forced exodus. The PFU provided a necessary perspective at the time that was largely missing from the discourse; these images were specifically emerging from a narrative constructed and controlled by Palestinians, and that was directly confronting the new refugee experience from the refugee's point of view.

¹⁰ There are stories told of Palestinians arriving into Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon after the bombs had been dropped, after the razing of villages, and forced exile, many were surprised to see that the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) had already set up the white refugee tents. Hundreds of them already lined up across an arid landscape at the borders, prepared to be filled with people. They had arrived to a fully functional refugee camp. This information is gleaned from personal interviews conducted with several members of my family who migrated on foot across northern Palestine into the south of Lebanon (Himada, *Personal Interview*, n.pag.).

Film scholars George Khleifi and Nurith Gertz, authors of *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory* write, that “[a]fter 1948, when the Palestinian community ceased to exist as a social and political entity, utter silence fell” (2008, 19). The first ones to speak out against the Nakba¹¹ were prominent Arab and Palestinian intellectuals, who were either living abroad, in exile, or who remained in Palestine. Shortly after the Nakba, many Palestinians were preoccupied with issues concerning their new status as exiles: “this being both a personal and a national tragedy, would overshadow everything else in the eyes of the generation living through this disaster” (19). Soon after Fatah was formed in 1958, many Palestinians started to speak out against the living conditions of refugees.¹² Fatah was prominent in mobilizing these discussions that inspired different forms of dissent. As Khleifi and Gertz write, “[t]he members of the group belonged to the new generation that turned its back on those who were in power up to the year of the Nakba. Although Fatah members had great personal respect for the old leaders, they felt no commitment to their legacy, since they held the leaders of the previous generation responsible, to a great extent, for the national disaster” (2008,19). Fatah was exceptionally focused on documenting this turn of power, and focused its efforts on mobilizing the masses by developing a strong cultural discourse. By 1968, after gaining much support from various Palestinian communities, in exile and those who stayed in Palestine, Fatah, headed by Yasser Arafat, took control of the PLO. The PLO consisted of various Palestinian entities that also included cultural institutions like the Palestine Research Centre, and a Department of Photography. At this time, Arafat had established a strong military and cultural infrastructure in Jordan and Lebanon. The Arab regimes were stagnating and quickly losing the

¹¹ 15 May 1948 marks *The Nakba* for Palestinians, the Arabic term for “the catastrophe,” the day the Israeli state celebrates the creation of its statehood.

¹² Fatah is a faction of the PLO that gained a strong presence during the revolution in 1967. Fatah is a reverse acronym in Arabic that stands for “Palestinian National Liberation Movement.” Fatah in Arabic means “victory, or “an opening.” At the time of its creation, it was considered a more leftist and militant oriented movement. They still exist to this day, and have recently signed a peace agreement with Hamas in Palestine.

support of their populations. The Palestinian revolutionary forces were perceived as the only hope in the eyes of the Arab population in general, and the Palestinian masses in particular (Khleifi and Gertz 2008, 20). It is during this period, and in the context of documenting this transformation that the PFU was formed. Before 1968, there were a couple of films made that specifically depicted or referenced the Nakba, one was lost, and another screened once in Amman, Jordan. But during the period when the PFU was in production—1968-1982—over one thousand hours of film reels were shot and archived.

The PFU documentaries showcased the everyday lives of refugees: displaced and homeless in increasingly impoverished situations. But they also filmed these same Palestinians as resisters, militants, freedom fighters, community organizers, and activists who were struggling to mobilize a dispersed people, who were struggling to return to the homes and lives they were forced to leave behind. The PFU had two main objectives. The first was to document various events, like demonstrations, public gatherings, and other cultural and political activities that justify the Palestinian cause; and the second was to supply services to the international press (Khleifi and Gertz 25).

The PFU worked to document, produce, and disseminate images of the struggle for liberation and decolonization. They filmed many Palestinians who spoke out against the occupation, as representatives of the resistance and uprising that was composed of a wider network of anti-colonial opposition. Palestine, as seen on the screen in these documentaries, is composed of images of an organized, empowered, strong, and militant people. These Palestinians were not simply seen as victims who were pining for their homeland, but were positioned as figures of resistance, who expressed that this loss was part of a bigger struggle—one that was in solidarity with anti-imperialist, and anti-colonialist movements across the Third World. As

Khleifi and Gertz write, “The Palestinian struggle was perceived as a ‘popular war’ and was inspired by models of popular revolutions prevalent at the time in Vietnam, Cuba, Angola Mozambique, and elsewhere. In accordance with the Marxist-Leninist outlook, great importance was attached to cinema as a revolutionary device, and the Palestinian movement claimed to share this point of view” (2008, 22).

The PFU invented a cinematic practice that is particular to the struggle Palestinians faced. The camera itself became a revolutionary tool, “a militant weapon” that was able to bear witness to and record these events as they kept unfolding after the Nakba. The PFU produced and circulated images of the revolution, and referred to this practice as “The Cinematic Movement.” A statement submitted by the Palestinian delegation to the Round Table of the Afro-Asian Film Conference, held at the Tashkent Film Festival¹³ in 1973, stated:

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 16mm camera is the most appropriative 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.

¹³ Tashkent Film Festival in Uzbekistan programs films from Third World countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle-East. It is still being held to this day.

A militant film, therefore, must become an essential commodity for the masses, just like a loaf of bread. (Farid qtd. in Khleifi and Gertz 2008, 23)

Abu Ali's *They Do Not Exist* (1974) is a poignant example of the militant "Cinematic Movement." It was shot on 16mm in black and white, during the Israeli bombing of Nabatia refugee camp in Lebanon. A scene of a Palestinian woman who is interviewed about the bombing stands out. The segment begins with an inter title: "Statements by some harmed people from Nabatia camp." The documentary, up until this segment, depicted life in Nabatia camp before the destruction caused by Israeli bombs. Someone is watering their garden, children are riding around on tricycles, ice cream is handed out to them, and watermelons are being sold. We see vignettes of people and children. They are laughing, smiling, chit-chatting, smoking cigarettes, making coffee—the camera is focused on close-ups of the everyday, showcasing daily living as resistance—there are chores to attend to, events to organize, children to care for, gardens to be tended. Next segment: the filmmakers capture the destruction that leaves the camp in ruins, and work to accumulate testimonies from civilians who were directly harmed by the attack. A cameraman approaches this woman, who is a mother, holding her toddler in one arm, and in the other a framed photograph of her eldest son, who she says has just become a martyr for the Palestinian cause. She is talking slowly and directly to the camera. She is sitting cross-legged on the ground, in front of a century-old doorway, in a narrow alleyway in the camp. This is twenty minutes into the film, after the documentary has established the context: how people live in refugee camps, showing the warplanes that started to fly above the camp, and life in the camp after the bombing. The woman who is being interviewed starts to describe what happened to her. She explains that she had run back to the camp when she heard the bombing to rescue her

five children but only found four. The camera stays a few feet away from her. As spectators, we only see the interviewer who is crouched down, with a microphone pointed toward her face: she is the focus of the frame, but we can barely make out the details in her face. The camera stands back, and forces us to listen. After a few minutes, the camera cuts to focus on a close-up of her face. She is still talking, telling the story of what happened, explains how she feels now but without lament. She is strong and focused, she speaks loudly, and defiantly, she is not crying or tearing up. She explains that her son is not the only one who died or who has sacrificed his life for Palestine. “We all have, and his death is a reminder that we need to continue to fight,” she declares.

Palestine in the Eye (1979) is also a striking example of the Cinema Movement. It marks an important period in the Palestinian cinematic canon because it subverts the rhetorical representation of “freedom fighters” and what that image has stood for in recent history—as hijackers or terrorists.¹⁴ In the opening sequence of *Palestine in the Eye* we hear church bells ringing and the scene begins. The camera focuses on the bells of the church that continue to ring, and moves downward to reveal a procession of army tanks moving slowly passed where the camera stands. The inter title appears: “Hani Jawharia: Martyr of Revolutionary Cinema,” and then we hear a voice, “Hani Jawhariah chose to live in the heart of the revolution. He chose to be an observer.” The voice belongs to Yahya Rabah, a Palestinian writer who narrates the opening of the film by describing who Jawhariah was, and why he is considered a martyr of revolutionary cinema. The sequence cuts from a close-up of Rabah as he imparts his impressions on Jawhariah

¹⁴ There was an effort on the part of the PFU to make sure these films circulated outside of the respective countries they were produced in, mostly Lebanon and Jordan. As Khleifi and Gertz write, “These films were screened at different festivals, including the Leipzig festival in East Germany, the Baghdad festival for Palestinian Movies, and the Carthage Festival in Tunisia. There were also presented at dozens of special events for Palestinian Cinema in the West and were shown regularly by the diplomatic delegations of the PLO, and by friendship or solidarity societies with Palestinians around the world” (2008, 26).

to the tanks and wreath-covered vehicle procession that the camera captures on the street. At this point, the audience realizes that Jawhariah has died and that this is his funeral procession.

The film encapsulates the life and times of Jawhariah by focusing on his contributions as an artist, photographer, and militant filmmaker. The narrative is non-linear and establishes Jawhariah's life story by interweaving scenarios and images of Jawhariah with the Fidae'en who were preparing for the Ain-Tourra battle in Lebanon, against the Israeli army. Images of him playing with his children are cross-cut with scenes of an exhibit of photographs of freedom fighters, where the guest of honor, Yasser Arafat, signs an acknowledgement letter addressed to Jawhariah, thanking him for his contributions to the revolution. This particular scene is also mesmerizing because, for a western audience who has only seen images of Yasser Arafat in western news media depicted him as a terrorist, it is jolting to see him from the perspective of the Fidae'en. Arafat is filmed in a context of revolutionary struggle, among comrades and freedom fighters, in a leadership role. Watching these films feels like I am establishing solidarity with the images before me, rather than cringing at what I see, and looking away. I feel moved by what I see, not angry or disappointed with what the representations at hand are prescribing as meaning or thought. Rather, it feels that the images are initiating an offensive position that is struggling to live the revolution, to connect this life-force of the revolution to what is unfolding on the screen, putting that incommensurable distance that positions the viewer as passive into question.

The film's strength lies in Abu Ali's ability to highlight Jawhariah as a historical figure in the revolution at the same time that he is documenting what the revolution looked like, felt like, and what it aimed to do. At the beginning of the film, following the funeral procession, we see Jawhariah's wife seated with a friend who is holding her hand while speaking about her husband. Her story is one of hardship: she laments that Jawhariah struggled financially, and that her

brother-in-law offered to help him set up a photo shop. Jawhariah then worked as a photographer at birthday and wedding parties. Soon after he expresses his frustration with how mundane his life has become amidst one of the most exciting times in history for Palestinians: “I was born to serve my country,” he tells his wife, “and with that,” she says, “he decided to leave to join the freedom fighters on their mission to Ain Tourra.” In the next scene, we see the camera slowly pan across a landscape. We find out it is of Lebanon when the voice-over of Abu Ali explains that in 1979, Jawhariah left Amman, Jordan, to go to Beirut, Lebanon. Once he arrived in the city, he accompanied a delegation made up of the leaders of Fatah to the mountains of Ain Tourra, where the Fidae’en controlled a militant army base. Jawhariah decided to stay at the base. Here, the camera is circling around young men, introducing us to the faces of the liberation movement. The camera, as it circles around them, also cuts to show the landscape of Lebanon. The voice-over explains: “He was charmed by the scene: the fighters, the spirit of the revolution, the snow, the mountain, and the challenge.” A musical interlude showcases the Fidae’en as they are talking together, sitting around in a circle on the ground, listening to each other, looking at maps, reading books, strategizing, or at times, merely looking over the landscape in anticipation, or boredom, or lost in a daydream.

Abu Ali captures the scene with his 16mm camera of what is to come—pre-battle—as might have been seen through Jawhariah’s eyes or own camera. Abu Ali interviews the leader of the army base at Ain Tourra, and here we see images of the base and we hear Abu Mohammad, the leader of the base, talk about having warned Jawhariah to stop filming and take cover. Because there was a heavy bombardment we see the Fidae’en in position but as an audience we cannot tell if they are practicing their aim or if they are in a heavy battle. As Abu Mohammed speaks, we hear gunfire: “Hani refused to take cover, and said, ‘I want to be able to film

everything.’ I warned him that it was very dangerous and that the bombing and gunfire was going to get more intense. But he decided to stay and film all of it.” Abu Ali’s camera is zooming in and out of focus as it captures the Fidae’en in what seems like a gun battle, and the camera, once again, pans slowly across the landscape, in the direction from where the gunfire or bombs might be coming from. The scene cuts to an image of a photograph of AK47s that are propped up in a pile in the foreground of the frame. In the middle of the pile we see a 16mm camera, implicating its power amidst the firearms as if to say that without it there would not be a revolution. The camera is hoisted up with the rest of the rifles, in the image it is meant to blend in, to look like a weapon, to look like another AK47. As scholar Joseph Massad writes, “It was in this context that instrumentalism, wherein film is seen as a pedagogical tool to incite people to politics, became prominent, as did audience tastes and desires” (2006, 34).

In *They Do Not Exist* and *Palestine in the Eye* Abu Ali reveals the intricate connections between filmmaking and activism, fashioning solidarity through the rhythm of the image. He underlines cinema’s capacity to build with the movement’s political fervor, to be with the Fidae’en, think along side them, stand in solidarity with them. Massad explains, “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” (2006, 35). In a montage mid-way through *Palestine in the Eye*, Abu Ali edits together various shots of the Fidae’en as they are running, exercising, training in a boot camp. Abu Ali’s voice is heard over these images: “Revolutionary cinema is one that portrays the struggle of the people and conveys their experience.”

Jenin Jenin (2003), by the Palestinian filmmaker Mohammad Bakri, is a film that utilizes genre conventions of victim reportage—“intended both to expose the truth of the traumatic

suffering that results from Israel's political and military policies, and to elicit the audience's emotional sympathy as a way of mobilizing support for Palestinians" (Demos 2009, 114-115). In an op-ed piece written for *The Electronic Intifada*, Bakri states, "my crime was to tell the truth." It is precisely this sentiment, or position, of "speaking truth to power," that has become the instigative force behind how stories are told when it comes to representing "the Palestinian side." Bakri explains that his intention was to produce a documentary film that portrays the "truth" about the "Battle of Jenin," referring to the bombing of the refugee camp by the Israeli Defense Forces in April of 2002, which Palestinians deemed a massacre (Demos 2009, 116). *Jenin Jenin* is comprised of footage of buildings reduced to rubble, and of firsthand, talking-head accounts of the Israeli bombardment. The documentary presents evidence of catastrophic destruction alongside emotional testimony from its survivors. In this way *Jenin, Jenin* "perpetuates the longstanding Palestinian strategy of producing documentaries about the horror of Israel's military incursions in order to raise international public consciousness and encourage condemnation" (Demos 2009, 116). This has been a long-standing strategy for documenting experiences of the occupation, to produce films and videos that highlight the power of Israel's military incursions in order to "show the world" the effects of these operations, and to further incite criticism from the international community.

In a certain way, what we see as spectators in *They Do Not Exist* and *Palestine in the Eye* can be construed as the prototype of this cinematic strategy. As Abu Ali's voiceover tells us: "Revolutionary cinema is one that portrays the struggle of the people and conveys their experience." But the way the Palestinian experience is conveyed in cinema changed after the 1970s, particularly, after the PLO got expelled from Lebanon shortly after Israel occupied the country in 1982, and the revolution died out. As Massad explains, "While many of the recent

films are still involved in documenting Palestinian lives, their role is less pedagogical and aims less at an incitement to politics than at a commentary on it. One could posit that Palestinian cultural production, including films, in recent years, is constitutive of the simultaneous despair and hope that Palestinians are experiencing” (2006, 36). The images in films like *They Do Not Exist* and *Palestine in the Eye* are specific to their context, filmed at the height of the revolutionary uprisings. Read in association with the images that we see in films like *Jenin Jenin*, they reveal differences in time associated with a politics of representation that have come to dominate the imaging of Palestine. Massad further explains, “The 1970s were characterized by diaspora filmmakers, but today, Palestinians from Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, as well as the diaspora, are engaging in this cultural form of expression. Their new films are deployed in an important battle of images with the Zionist-friendly international media covering the Israeli occupation” (2006, 36).

The films of the Cinematic Movement made during this period (1968-1982) stood out within the ever-growing and nuanced Palestinian cinema canon. These images, specifically of refugees and of the Fidae'en, are rarely seen, and many of these archival films have disappeared. Upon viewing, the images themselves inspire a renewed sense of political fervor—challenging the representative model that has determined much of the debate surrounding, and often affirmed the circuitous narrative structure of the “Palestine-Israeli conflict.” With these films I felt that I was finally able to encounter images of Palestinians that illustrated, in various forms and expressions, their affective force—as they embark on a revolutionary venture, portraying action as opposed to representing the victim. A mode of imperceptible force is at play here—our relationship with images is so profound precisely because they are carriers of formed, composite thoughts that re-affirm certain power structures, prejudices, and stereotypes. Reading the images

of the Fidae'en today, alongside the ones I am already too familiar with—the images of Palestinians struggling—breaks them open, and allows me to re-adjust their capacity to carry within them another form of expression, another thought that is in the making once they are included in a curatorial program. Breaking open images means they are breaking open thoughts, what Deleuze calls the unthought of thought: “To think is to reach the non-stratified. Seeing is thinking, and speaking is thinking, but thinking occurs in the interstice, or the disjunction between seeing and speaking...Thinking does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would reunite the visible and the articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of an outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal” (1988b, 87). Seeing the images of the Fidae'en during the revolution activated the activist passion of my curatorial practice, inspiring me to think with the force of the image as I see it today. These images are counter to the ones that have become cliché, a spectacle, driven by concerns associated with *telling-as-evidence*, and that are consistently captured within an ideological refrain.

Between Two Things: The Activist Passion of Curatorial Practice

In July 2011, I co-curated a film program with independent filmmaker and curator Victoria Moufawad-Paul. We called the program “Between Two Things.”¹⁵ We held the event at 16 Beaver Group in New York City.¹⁶ Focusing on establishing an affective rhythm in a film

¹⁵ Inspired by Deleuze's reference to Godard's film *Ici et ailleurs* (1979) as the cinema of the incommensurable (between two things), he writes, “The fissure has become primary, and as such grows larger. It is not a matter of following a chain of images each one the slave of the next, and whose slave we are (*Ici et ailleurs*). It is the method of BETWEEN, ‘between two images,’ which does away with all cinema of the One. It is the method of AND, ‘this and that,’ which does away with all cinema of Being=is. Between two actions, between two affections, between two perceptions, between two visual images, between two sound images, between the sound and the visual: make the indiscernible, that is the frontier, visible (Six fois deux). The whole undergoes a mutation, because it has ceased to be the One-Being, in order to become the constitutive between-two of images” (1989,180).

¹⁶16 Beaver Group is both a space—that is located in the financial district in Manhattan—and a collective. Members of the group organize events, performances, workshops, readings groups, and platforms whereby activists, scholars, and artists can come together to initiate conversations, presentations, productions, and events that address the political issues of present time.

program might induce a different type of response or reaction to images that in some way already stand in for something else, a ready-made idea or image—here I think of the image of the veiled woman weeping, sobbing, pleading or screaming at a camera, or the image of a bloodied child, or images of dead bodies in coffins being carried off in a procession, wrapped in Palestinian flags. In some way, the images that we curated alongside each other might already be legible to an audience, but the purpose of staging them in this program is to try and interrupt how meaning forecloses on what these images might otherwise do. We were hoping to “shock thought” in order to unravel the formula of how meaning is established, or how it is contained within the image—what the image comes to represent. This program presents images that create different space-time durations of a Palestine, a space-time that foreground what Manning calls life-living. Manning writes, “A life: a force that dephases this life into the more than human where what lives is a tendency for life across its complex relational modalities” (2013,147). Drawing on Manning’s concept, “life-living” enables the formulation of a connection between image and life as an expression of politics, “that which ‘contains in itself a power of amplification’” (Simondon qtd. in Manning 2013, 148). The film program becomes a force field of nuanced expressions that has the potential to implicate a new image in its becoming, where the image’s power is amplified. Deleuze writes, “The intolerable is no longer a serious injustice, but the permanent state of a daily banality” (1989, 170). The intolerable lives in different forms of expression. It can live in images that have become part of the “daily banality.” The challenge is to push up against this limitation, and break through the deadening effect of excessive representation, and ask: how do these various images affect the way one thinks and feels about Palestinian resistance?

The images that often represent the agony of victimhood, of a collective Palestinian

identity that is always in suffering and often experiencing pain, compose a narrative of Palestinian life that lacks a position of power, autonomy or force. Some scholars, artists and filmmakers refer to this type of documentary filmmaking as “Pallywood.” This term, and how it has been used in recent controversies surrounding specific types of films or video documentations specifically emerging from or about Palestine, has led me to ask: how could present depictions, documentations and image testimonies of violence and trauma become a form of spectacle, so much so that a genre is invented?

Irmgard Emmelhainz, an art historian based in Mexico City, interviewed two members of The Otolith Group, an artist collective based in the UK. Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun, who founded the group in 2002, on their trip to Jenin in the West Bank in 2008, where they produced a film essay called *Nervus Rerum*, which is based on the images they filmed of the refugee camp. (We screened this film in our program but more on that below). Their intention was to shoot a film in Jenin without reverting to Bakri’s techniques—documenting the hardships of everyday life. Emmelhainz frames the interview by commenting on the ways in which their film stands in opposition to the images of Pallywood, focusing on how the Otolith Group is directly responding to documentaries like Bakri’s *Jenin Jenin*.

The term Pallywood was coined after the controversy surrounding the video recording of the death of Mohammad al Durra, a twelve-year-old Gazan boy caught in cross-fire and shot by the Israeli Defense Forces in 2000. The incident was caught on tape and disseminated quickly through various media outlets. Some right-wing Zionist politicians claimed the shooting was staged.¹⁷ Richard Landes, a professor at Boston University, first used “Pallywood” to highlight

¹⁷ I am reminded of the last scene of *Waltz with Bashir*. The perpetrator/Israeli soldier stationed outside the Sabra and Shatila camps in Lebanon—this is during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982—is all of a sudden struck with the reality at hand when he sees the crowd of women and children leaving the Sabra and Shatila camps after the massacre had ended. It is at this point that the animated film suddenly cuts to scenes of documentary footage of this

the sensationalized effect associated with the death of Al-Durra at the time the video recording had gone viral. He claimed that the technical conventions of propaganda films used in the video defined a formulaic aesthetic that is made to manipulate spectators. Pallywood references images disseminated from freelance photographers and filmmakers who are usually at the scene of irrupting violence. These images are later edited to produce “propagandistic” type films—they are used to “lure” their audience in order to elicit sympathy with the subject. Landes describes these films as ones that specifically utilize melodramatic techniques and special effects normally associated with Bollywood films (Demos 2009, 115). The image of Al-Durra dying was caught on camera as an Israeli bullet hit him point blank. It was a candid shot that sparked outrage precisely because the image so clearly revealed the boy’s murder as he crouched beside his father, their backs to a wall. Many viewers, including Landes, as is often the case in this type of neocolonial narrative, claimed the event was staged, that the effects of the shooting were enhanced and fabricated in order to gain support and empathy from spectators for the Palestinian cause.

The image of the shooting is, in Landes reading, relegated to its ontological form—the death scene was fabricated. What is foregrounded here is the question of truth: is the image a true depiction of a death? Al-Durra the undead Palestinian boy still haunts the Israeli state. After “an official investigation” the Israeli government declared the boy neither dead nor alive, but

particular moment. Through the protagonist’s eyes is when Palestinian suffering is shown. Suddenly, we, the viewers, see the effects of the massacre. At this point in the film, once the soldier realizes how he is complicit, is when we get to see Palestinian suffering. This footage has been used before in many Palestinian documentaries on the massacre in these two refugee camps. But it is only in this Israeli film that all of sudden it has impact. Pallywood is a problematic term. Because qualifying documentary images made by and for Palestinians as such strips them of their intention, power, and urgency. When Palestinians call on empathy to do the work in documentary filmmaking, is when Palestinians are often questioned or dismissed, or the narrative is challenged. There is an instant refusal of the image that starts to orient the viewing process, that’s why so many western and European film scholars dismissed *Jenin Jenin*. These images are crucial, because they do facilitate a process that is urgent when recovering from trauma, whether it is representational or not. This attitude toward dismissing them out right could be construed as racist because, upon dismissal, there is an assumption that “this other” is not allowed to speak for themselves if they are going to represent themselves as victims.

according to their papers he is just not dead (Miéville n.pag.). They claim “there was another boy at the hospital, with no injuries: it was a trick.” His father, Jamal Al-Durrah, tried to dig up his grave to show the Israeli authorities his bones: ““is that enough? [...] ‘To prove that this thing we saw happen happened, that the boy we saw die died’”(Miéville n.pag.)? But the Israeli Defense Force was called in, and a checkpoint was erected at the cemetery. Al-Durra, the un/dead child, cannot pass without papers. Israel does not want to see the body that proves the boy died. To this day, Al-Durra officially remains not dead according to Israeli records (Miéville n.pag.). Miéville poignantly explains, “Undesirable life is ended, and unauthorized death is banned. Where is M[u]hammad to go now, the victim of this necroicide, this murder of the killed” (Miéville n.pag.)? Al Durra’s death is erased when the image of him dying instigates a term that downplays the effect of violence in such a context—the Israeli occupation. Pallywood strips the image of its life-living effect. In my curatorial work, when I think of images as movement moving, I want to stage them in a way that inspire a life-living politics so that the image’s effect activates activist passion—enhancing our power to think and feel differently about what we see and how we see it, in a way that will never erase a child’s death or even come to question it.

Emmelhainz, Eshun and Sagar re-frame the use of the term Pallywood in order to suggest a much broader interpretation (without any critique of its initial use by Landes). Emmelhainz describes The Otolith Group’s film-essay, *Nervus Rerum*, as one that specifically confronts “the conundrum of ‘representing’ Palestine that is predicated upon territorial absence” (2009a 129). And, according to Eshun, the film¹⁸ “does not offer an ethnographic short cut to empathy” (129). Furthermore, Sagar explains, “[t]he idea is to explore the condition of non-empathy. There is a wariness of the idea of the Other speaking for themselves either from a state of victimhood or state of defiance” (129). But it is this wariness that Sagar speaks of that I find troubling. What is

¹⁸ “Nervus Rerum” in Latin translates to “the nerve of things.”

the connection here between the position from where Sagar, a non-Palestinian filmmaker based in the UK, speaks and what is being communicated as “wariness of the idea of the Other speaking for themselves?” Who are they referring to here? Who exactly is wary? It seems to me that the position of the western spectator is being privileged over the event itself that the images try to capture as evidence. I do not agree with the Otolith Group’s position here, because they do not acknowledge how images do play an important role in this particular discourse, when Palestinians are constantly having to question images of made of themselves that are made by others, especially images that more often than not represent Palestinians in a negative light, like the image that resulted in proclaiming Al Durra undead. These images preempt the truth of a situation that results in re-situating the violence of the occupation within the paradigm of a conflict—that which is between two. Whether “we” like to watch these images or not is a different kind of question: and rather than dismissing these images—where “the Other speaks for themselves either from a state of victimhood or state of defiance”—they need to be probed, talked to, confronted, and that is what Vicky and I hoped to do with our program. We put forward this question: to what extent can we intervene and push these images up against their own limit, and what new images might arise out of that process? We did not want to dismiss them out right, or refuse what they offer.

In Emmelhainz’s interview, Eshun, in response to Bakri’s documentary, *Jenin Jenin*, poses an interesting question: “What if the saturation of the spatial and psychic space by the pressure of the occupation relieved us of the necessity of addressing the visible evidence of occupation” (2009a, 130). The Otolith Group takes this question to task as they embark on a *détournement* of the Jenin refugee camp. Refusing to use any mechanism that would explain or describe the images, they instead “turn their back on power,” (as if they were the ones who were

facing it) as a way to dissociate the image from what it could potentially represent. They experiment with what Demos calls “cinematic opacity” rather than transparency, as Bakri did in his documentary. The commentary provided by Sagar in the film comes from literary texts—*The Book of Disquiet* by Pessoa and *Prisoner of Love* by Genet—that walk the blurry line between reality and fiction. The film is an experiment in perceptual disorientation and, as Demos suggests, “[g]iven fictionalization’s denial of a transparent reality, it is imperative to cross-examine cinematic imagery for its potential manipulations, for its false leads and dead ends—a course of action that is duplicated in the Otolith Group’s film’s visual exploration of the camp” (2009, 122).

We screened *Nervus Rerum* in “Between Two Things.” As curators, our intention was to begin a conversation on the use of fiction or experimental techniques as a mode of disruption, as they sit alongside images that are didactic in structure and form. Demos writes, “[...]such visual obfuscation also reveals, for Genet, the ‘prison’ that is our habituated image-world, one capable of binding viewers to a political instrumentalization that bars creative interpretation, collapses temporal multiplicity, and abridges individual agency and creative thinking (2009, 123). Genet’s *Prisoner of Love* underlines the binding effect of images as prison of thought—the wreckage that is subsumed. *Nervus Rerum* attempts to break through this notion by forsaking transparency for opacity. Eshun states: “the film constructs ‘an opacity that seeks to prevent the viewer from producing knowledge from images’ which Sagar adds, ‘complicates normative modes of address,’ thereby declaring a rupture from longstanding documentary conventions of witness-bearing (qtd. in Demos 2009, 123). However, when we screened their film in our program it was the film that was heavily criticized for being disingenuous and lazy, a total failure in terms of attempting to do something new when it came to filming Palestine. The strategy to remain

opaque in some way ruptures the association between image and imitation of life. The film attempts to move away from the discussion of whether the film is representative of “reality under occupation.” The film centers its ambition to go beyond the normalizing effect of instrumentalization, but in the end it was empty of thought.

The PFU’s films stand out precisely because they do not speak from the position of victimhood or defiance. Their films speak from a position of joy—to enhance the power to act. *Palestine in the Eye* or *They Do Not Exist* constructed a narrative of the post-1948 disaster. We wanted to synthesize the nuanced and extremely complex politics of that time associated with the violence of expulsion, and bring those images, those initial first-time encounters with images of Palestinians living in refugee camps, to an audience who were also familiar with the excess of representation. We acknowledged the fact that as curators, we are aware of the already recognizable images of Palestine, the ones that are over-used, excessive, and at times have come to be ineffective. We thought about whether something like *Nervus Rerum* would actually challenge and force us to ask new questions, or to think anew with the new techniques of image making that they described. Having read Emmelhainz’s interview and Demo’s article on the film, we were curious to see whether it would live up to its propositions. We deliberately screened *Palestine in the Eye* and *Nervus Rerum* together. We wondered what kind of an effect these diverse films would have on an audience. We hoped the films would build on a rhythm, and therefore would condition an effect. We had specific questions in mind: How does curatorial practice create an image? And what does that image do?

This is what defines the curatorial process as rhythm building. We focused on how each image holds within it a complex web of sensation, and decided, based on the precept that arose, whether its effect would transfer well along side other images. My aim as a curator is for the

audience to feel the tension between forces inherent in each image, as well as to detect the tension that comes between them. I aim to highlight through rhythm *building* how the affective force of the program, as a whole, exceeds a subject and is not necessarily of the subject, of the audience. What I mean by this is that the program creates an event—a singular experience conditioned by a something happening—that forms the movement moving. The curatorial program creates an image-event. For me, this is in alliance with what Massumi refers to as “aesthetic politics.” He writes, “Aesthetic politics is ‘autonomous’ in the sense that it has its own momentum, it isn’t beholden to external finalities. It bootstraps itself on its own in-built tendencies. It creates its own motive force in the dynamic form in which it appears” (2011, 54). I hope that in this way the image-event stirs something in the audience. I hope the images then feel different, and are read differently precisely because the rhythm forces an opening—I am not interested in analyzing images as objects that stand in for something else. I am interested in how images can be placed alongside each other, by association in a curated order, formula, or a series; I am interested in whether something happening then arises and speaks for itself? In this way, I am referencing the Godardian mode of production, one that underlines the technique of association—AND...AND...AND—which is “the incommensurable of Godard (between two things)” (Deleuze 1989, 182).

The images we chose invited the viewer to put the images to task in confronting the conundrum of representing Palestine. Our aim was to go beyond or around the excess of images that make up “Palestine,” those images that have diminished its force as a political concept and as a mode of desire. Many of those images have objectified Palestinians, made murderers or victims out of them, not worthy of nuance or complexity, not worthy of autonomy, for what is Palestine without Israel? The complex reality lies in their entanglement. And when the only roles

available are that of victim or perpetrator then Palestine remains bound to an age-old narrative that only confirms the force of the powers that be—the occupier. “[T]he ideal of truth must crumble”, as Deleuze writes, and in this way “the relations of appearance will no longer be sufficient to maintain the possibility of judgment (1989, 139).

The images that I chose to write about here document the acts of violence faced by Palestinians when confronted by the Israeli occupying forces. There are many videos and images that are explicit in regards to showcasing the atrocities committed by the Israeli Defense Force. But the issue here is not to compare them all to each other or to the ones mentioned above: this is not an issue of how images bear witness to specific acts. Images are not valued here for their ability to represent an ideological framework. They are not valued for their potential to be judged as evidence in a historical event that is potentially mired in a battle to reveal the truth. They are valued for their ability to affectively re-charge a composition that transforms our own thinking habits. An encounter with an image unfolds in a new space-time continuum, and in this making of time and space, a transformation of thought can occur—inciting a nuance of feeling. My intention in my curatorial practice is to show how images, new and old, give rise to new ideas because of newfound associations. I read them next to each other. And it is here that they become of value as a constructed historiography that trails the genealogy of present sensations of images becoming-Palestine. It is here that the images are re-politicized, re-charged in order to shed light on the potential of cinematic images, and how they carry within them the spectre of the undead: lest we forget.

The significance of films that bear witness to the act as it is being committed, is that they are open to the potential of being co-opted and re-framed as propaganda-inducing tools, or as technologies of power used to “manipulate” the viewer, to stir them toward a particular “side.”

The conditions that Palestinians are forced to live in, from within the occupied territories, for example, stem from the effects of Israeli state sanctioned violence. These effects have largely been made visible to a wider international community through the production and dissemination of photographs, videos, and films. In effect, it is presented as “visible evidence.” Cinema has often been an affective tool in this regard, and these images do retain, within what they frame, a historical context that is bound to this cause. Within each frame a story is told that is directing the viewer toward a ready-made narrative. These images should not be easily dismissed, for if they are, we risk doing the same thing as the Israeli state did, that is, reduce their substance to pure fiction. *Images nothing but images*. These images say so much, and do so much—they are modes of representation that stand to fight against complete erasure of a people’s struggle.

What Images Can do

“Between Two Things” engaged the problematic of representing Palestine—how can one visually communicate what has become excessively represented. The two-part screening investigated the Palestinian Film Archive that was lost in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The Palestinian Film Archive contained over 100 films that documented the daily life and political struggle of the Palestinian people during the heightened revolution beginning in the 1960s in Lebanon and Jordan. Several of the films presented here illustrate the (recently misunderstood) connection of Palestinian political endeavors to Marxism and the third world internationalist struggle. These films and video—*Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War*, *Palestine in the Eye*, and *Nervus Rerum*—are culled from the archive and from contemporary image-makers’ mediations on the bits of archive available, as well as on the rumors of the images the archives contained. The works, dating from the 70s to the present,

interrogate and often turn their backs on the pitfalls of representation, while questioning the kinds of representations that are possible.

We felt at the time that we needed to return to the initial images of the Fidae'en, those well-known images of the freedom fighters with their black, white, or red kiffeyah's wrapped around their heads, huddled in a circle, discussing a strategy, or reading Marx, while keeping their rifles in hand. As programmers we were interested in showcasing a history of image-making that was revolutionary in form and style, as much as in content. We aimed to foreground a specific moment in history wherein in the Middle East and elsewhere in the third world new documentary images that challenged conventional and bourgeois cinematic techniques were being produced. Palestinians filmed their own experiences, and documented their own struggles—these images consist of the Fidae'en training camps and impoverished territorial landscapes that have become familiar to us. The planning of the program was inspired by the questions we proposed as a guiding tool: how do we contextualize the ways in which these images of the revolution were of a necessary politics that emerged out of the conditions of a particular historical moment? How do they stand alongside contemporary reified, sympathetic, and exhausted documentary images made by Palestinians and others? How do we think about the images of Palestine that challenge and resist the implementation of representation, and that take to task the failure of representation?

Our objective in framing the program in this way—to reclaim historical modes of representation at the same time that we wanted to challenge them—had to do with an urgency that called for the initiation of a conversation that would bring these two types of images together. We wanted to reintroduce the images of the Fidae'en, filmed during the 1970s revolutionary uprisings, but we also wanted to confront the ways in which these images offer

novel representations of Palestinians. The importance of the program lay in the fact that most of us in the room had rarely had the opportunity to view Palestinian films, let alone ones that documented the Palestinian side of having organized alongside the Third World Internationalist movement. These images and stories are rarely ever seen, let alone seen together, in one program—a program that asked to what extent these images challenge what we already know or hear about when it comes to Palestine and its cinematic history. In the face of all that destruction—the Israeli military’s operations to extinguish Palestinian cultural production¹⁹—Palestinians, and Palestinian allies, persist in developing and participating in the evolution of Palestinian cultural production, and in preserving films like the ones from the PFU. As Jacir writes, “This is a testament, no doubt, not only to the persistence of Palestinian culture but also to the fact that many people in the U.S. and in other parts of the world *want* to see these film to increase their understanding of the Palestinian culture, or simply to enjoy them as works of art” (29). But I would reiterate, here, that it is important to continuously incite an open critique of the

¹⁹ In April 2002, during an Israeli invasion in Ramallah, the Israeli army conducted an attack on the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, which is a non-profit and non-partisan community organization. The center serves as a frequent location for art exhibits, concerts, literary events, film screenings, lectures and children’s activities. It is also known to be a Palestinian heritages site, as the building has been praised as an architectural masterpiece. The four offices of the center were broken into—including one belonging to the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Irreparable damage was caused to the artwork in the building and to the antique original iron door. In addition to ransacking the offices and destroying equipment, the hard drive of the main computer was stolen and the telephone switchboard and alarm system destroyed. Similar tactics were used to ransack and destroy material in the Kasaba Theater and the Cinematheque, also in Ramallah (Jacir 26). With films *They Do Not Exist*, it is important to consider the context in which they were made, and why they are significant to the history of Palestinian cinema, and to the history of Palestinian cultural production in general. For Palestinians growing up under occupation there have been extensive efforts on the part of the Israeli state to halt activities, infrastructures, or programs that focus on the development and preservation of Palestinian cultural artifacts or activities. As Jacir writes, “I remember when we were in Bethlehem in the 1970s and 1980s and it was illegal to show red, white, black, and green together because they represented the Palestinian flag. Israeli soldiers were ordered to shoot at, if not kill, those who exhibited these colors” (23). Furthermore, in 1967, an Israeli Military Order was issued, which banned gatherings of people, as well as pictures, maps, and drawings of a political nature, and flags. In 1981, the Military Order was amended and made it illegal to listen to certain songs. And once again, in 1983, other “illegal” activities were added to the amendment, such as recordings (including records and voices) and the broadcasting of films. As Jacir writes, “Through our daily lives, we found out that colors, symbols, and images were invested with dangerous or emancipatory powers. But we also found how sensitive our adversaries were to these symbols—wherever we were in the world, we felt limitations, sometimes even internalized ones, on the quality, quantity, and variety of representations available to us—and rarely if ever, did we see representations of Palestinians *by Palestinians*” (emphasis in original 23).

phenomena of victim reportage and how in so many ways it has dominated the Palestinian narrative. And discussing these two sets of images together is what brought us to 16 Beaver in the first place. We began with a question, and ended with many more.

When it comes to Palestine and when it comes to the politics of occupation, and its violence, the events on the ground are always already changing. So, in effect, we can never be entirely in the know of it. The image-as-representation in some way deters us from actually engaging in what we do not yet know. The title of the program “Between two Things” is inspired by this position, where what I want to question is that instant association that is made between image and thought. “Between Two Things” is about how to break apart what already makes sense to us in order to link with the unknown, and therefore undo the politics of representation. When an image refuses to stand in for a thought (what is already understood) then what does it communicate? How do we read it? What does it do? Robert Bresson, in *Notes on Cinematography*, writes, “An image must be transformed by contact with other images, as is color by contact with other colors. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation” (5). What images have we not even encountered yet? And how would they bring this effect? How can images surprise us? The disruption of the conventional mode of delivering the story of violence and victimization gestures toward a new militant cinema, one that is of our time.

A documentary film like *Jenin Jenin* can easily be identified as one of those stereotypical documentaries of testimony and witness accounts. But *Jenin Jenin* is not excluded from entering the category of new militant cinema. I am not suggesting, by showcasing this curatorial program that a present dichotomy exists between two sets of images—one exemplified by *Jenin Jenin*, and the other by *Nervus Rerum*. The program highlights the complex process of image

production, of the impossibility of representing Palestine, of the relation between violence and images (as Genet suggests), and new militant cinema. The program also foregrounds the possibility of image making *through curation*, the image as program. Our proposition: enticing the works to work can lead to new political articulations, gestures, and encounters. Finally, again, our initial question: To what extent can we break out of this excess of representing Palestine? We want to offer images that generate new encounters or experiences that gesture toward a “life-living” politics.

Chapter 3

Activist Passion is in How The Image Peoples

Surely all art is the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, where no one can go any further. The further one goes, the more private, the more personal, the more singular an experience becomes, and the thing one is making is finally, the necessary, irrepressible, and, as nearly as possible, definitive utterance of this singularity . . . Therein lies the enormous aid the work of art brings to the life of the one who must make it . . . So we are most definitely called upon to test and try ourselves against the utmost, but probably we are also bound to keep silence regarding this utmost, to beware of sharing it, of parting with it in communication so long as we have not entered the work of art: for the utmost represents nothing other than that singularity in us which no one would or even should understand, and which must enter into the work as such . . .

Rilke to Cezanne

In an interview with poet, translator, and performance artist, Ariana Reines, Michael Silverblatt, host of the radio program *Bookworm*, asks: “When did American poetry lose its ‘I?’” This “I” Silverblatt refers to is the “I” traditionally dismissed or refused in American poetry as the position from which one’s expression is made visible. In response to his question Reines explains,

It seems almost like an aristocratic put-on, that these educated, liberal white people could get over their ‘I’s, whereas you would have these slam poets who are just “I,” “I,” “I,” all the time . . . There is always an ‘I’ when it has something to do with someone who is oppressed, when somebody is forced to speak, moved beyond their own control, there is an ‘I.’ If you imagine yourself in some kind of desperation where the world is bearing down on you, or your physical person, as well as your ontological difficulties, it becomes necessary to speak, to make an account of yourself.²⁰

This statement stirred something in me, struck a chord in relation to my struggle using “I”

²⁰ For a more elaborate discussion on Reines’ position, see “Ariana Reines.”

to articulate my position as singular, but not necessarily personal. As a Palestinian, writing on Palestinian cinema, or on Palestinian images, I often negotiate with my “I.” What does it mean to speak from where I stand, from how I see, acknowledging that I can hold a position of power, but that at times this position of power can either be questioned, challenged, or repressed? As a Palestinian growing up in the west, as a Palestinian becoming a settler here, in Canada, on Indigenous land, what can this “I” express as struggle? Or how does this “I” struggle? What does it mean to speak as a Palestinian immigrant, who assimilated but who often feels isolated? But even this question is skewed, or wrong. Rather than asking, “what does it mean...?”, instead I ask, “what can this ‘I’ do or what can this ‘I’ create in struggle?” My experience, however I may want my “I” to stand out, wherever it may arise from, is always in transformation. This “I” is nuanced and thick with expression. How do I speak from an “I” that escapes essentialist models of identity politics? This “I” is intensely personal, or stems from personal experience. But how do “I” express these thoughts-in-the-making as non-personal revelations, sentiments, or articulations?

Break Open the “I”

I want “to use the ‘I’ in order to break down the ‘I’” (Weil qtd. in Kraus, 2000 27). As essayist and novelist Chris Kraus writes on Simone Weil, “She wants to lose herself in order to be larger than herself” (Kraus 2000, 27). I want the way I see and how I see to move through me, beyond me, to break out of the “I” at the same time that *a something happening* traverses through this “I”. The connections that come to fruition here through expression of thought are not personal but political; they are conditioned by my becoming-Palestinian. I want to account for myself because I have felt the weight of the world bear down on me—the *me* that is a people—I

am part of a collective and I stand up for them, for us. Yes, *I* felt struggle bear down on *me*, but this *me* is never a one but a many. “I” becomes an expression of thought, a standing-in for the one in the many and the many in the one, an expression arising from struggle. It is an expression of thought and not an expression of identity. Here, I am indebted to Brian Massumi’s concept of “bare activity.” An expression of thought is what is conditioned by an event taking form, what potential it carries in its coming to, in the way that Massumi describes. He writes,

There is an inaugural moment of indecision between the already going-on-around and the taking-in-to-new-effect, before the culmination of this occurrence has sorted out just what occasion it will have been...*Bare activity*: the just-beginning-to-stir of the event into its newness out of the soon to be prior background activity it will have left creatively behind. The just beginning is on the cusp of the “more” of the general activity of the world-ongoing turning into the singularity of the coming event. Every event is singular. (2011, 3)

Becoming-Palestine emerges as an expression of thought that takes over the “me” carrying the “I,” that moves beyond my person, breaking through the self as container of experience. This expression of thought is not unique to me *because* I am Palestinian, but my being-Palestinian does make a difference in how the expression is transmitted, expressed. It makes a difference because I am Palestinian; this formulates a difference that has marked my existence from the very beginning. I am also an immigrant, and in the relaying of memory passed on by family, in my being-identifiable as Palestinian, a difference is conditioned by an inherent solidarity with Palestine. I take responsibility as a Palestinian to always defend my people, stand

along side my people, in solidarity.²¹ The point is to write this out: the art of responsibility as a practice in solidarity. Write the “I” out of the conundrum of being with self—use the “I” to slowly break down the “I.” Decreate the personal in order to co-create the political: “My best writing seems to have to be forced from me by some other force but that force has to be one whose power I agree to serve” (Reines n.pag.).

I agree to serve this “I” that is conditioned by the force of expression that is becoming-Palestine. This expression is at times cut-throat, but also at times tender as it materializes and makes felt the specter of Palestine that exists in the multiplicity of becoming-self, as it manifests in a politics of writing that tries to execute a form of thought, a concept, an idea through affect.²² In the chapter that follows, I want to transfer felt experience into a formation of thought—not as a personal translation of emotion—but as a force that manifests life into a work of art. I want to move the “I” into the expression of thought that is the many, and claim solidarity with the many in deference not to identity, but to difference. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze speaks up for Foucault against what has been announced, in some scholarly circles, as his return to the subject in his later work on subjectification. Deleuze argues for Foucault’s gesture toward subjectification as “inventing new possibilities of life” that is not bound to the personal: “A process of

²¹ As philosopher Isabelle Stengers points out, “Responsibility is not a matter of who is being ‘truly’ responsible, it is a matter of concern, and, as such, open to technical advice. When you are about to act, do not rely on any general principle that would give you the right to act. But do take the time to open your imagination and consider this particular occasion. You are not responsible for what will follow, as you are not responsible for the limitations of your imagination. Your responsibility is to be played in the minor key, as a matter of pragmatic ethos, a demanding one nevertheless—what you are responsible for is paying attention as best you can, to be as discerning, as discriminating as you can about the particular situation. That is, you need to decide in this particular case and not to obey the power of some more general reason” (2005,188). For a more sustained discussion on ethics, activism, and ecology of practices see Stengers 2005.

²² In an article I wrote for *FUSE* Magazine, I discuss further the relation between affect, activism, art and political organizing. This piece of writing inspired the term “activist passion” because after I talked with artist and activist Jackie Sumell, on her artwork with Herman Wallace—one of the Angola 3, who was imprisoned in solitary confinement for 43 years—I decided to take seriously my belief in prison abolition, and started organizing with prisoner advocacy collectives here in Montreal. My encounter with this art project that took to heart a political situation inspired me to write, and through this writing I came up with a concept that engages theory/philosophy with activist concerns. See further Himada 2012.

subjectification, that is, the production of a way of existing, can't be equated with a subject, unless we divest the subject of any interiority and even any identity. Subjectification isn't even anything to do with a 'person:' it's a specific or collective individuation relating to an event (a time of day, a river, a wind, a life...). It's a mode of intensity, not a personal subject" (Deleuze 1995, 98–99). To read subjectification as a mode of intensity—"the just-beginning-to-stir of the event"—reconfigures the traditional dichotomy held between the subject/object continuum as representative of self/other, specifically in relation to what an "I" can do or how an "I" can speak. If a subject does not anchor subjectification then what becomes of the subject/self? How is subjectification a mode of intensity that conditions an event? Where is the "I" located? How does it manifest?

In "Toward a Leaky Sense of Self," Erin Manning proposes a different way of thinking the "self," questioning pre-determined notions of identity, being, and selfhood. Manning asks, "What if a skin were not a container? What if the skin were not a limit at which self begins and ends? What if the skin were a porous, topological surfacing of myriad potential strata that field the relation between different milieus, each of them a multiplicity of insides and outsides" (2013, 2)? Challenging the notion of skin as container of self, Manning posits relation as key to emergent experience that constitutes a becoming-self: "Relation folds experience into it such that what emerges is always more than the sum of its parts" (2). Rather than beginning with the notion of being as what constitutes a unifying self, Manning suggests to begin with relation as what composes different variations of movement that tend toward transformative formations or articulations of different self(s): "What is real and what appears exist in a complex network of movement-moving. How movement moves is relational. When we move a relation we never begin with a gesture. We move into gesture. What a body can do is characterized by its capacity

to make sense beyond a vocabulary of the already-there” (2009, 76). In her oeuvres, Manning establishes a line of thought that foregrounds relation as that which constitutes the *expressibility* of a becoming-self in movement. A self is not pre-contained in a body that represents an already-composed being, which might evoke a finitude to a body’s capacity for becoming. A body affects and is affected, constituted by a relation of forces; senses of self are always already in emergence. Manning challenges the notion that a being simply exists *in a* body, a subject distinct from direct experience.²³ She writes,

There is no stable pre-and postverbal state. There is no stable identity that emerges once and for all. Becoming-human is expressed singularly and repeatedly in the multiphasing passage from the feeling of content to the content of feeling, a shift from the force of divergent flows to a systematic integration. This is not a containment toward a stable self. It is a momentary cohesiveness, as sense of self that always remains colored by the interweaving of forces that both direct and destabilize the ‘self’s’ proto-unification into an ‘I’. (2013, 4–5)

The “I” is a fielding of potential for emergent subjectivities, for emerging expressions of thought: here multiple forms of self(s) arise. Affect is central to Manning’s proposition of how senses of self co-compose with one another, by building onto and through one another in an ultimate relation with one another: a co-composition, co-creation. Manning writes, “Affect in

²³ Drawing from Daniel Stern’s account of infancy, Manning defines direct experience as that which “takes place not in the subject or in the object, but in the relation itself. The associated milieu is active with tendencies, tunings, incipient agitations, each of which are felt before they are known as such, contributing to a sense of the how of the event in its unfolding” (*Always More Than One* 3). For Manning, “direct experience is a form of immanent fielding through which events becomes experienced” (3). See further Manning 2013.

this context can be understood as the preacceleration²⁴ of experience as it acts on the becoming-body (4)...Affect moves, constituting the event that, in many cases, becomes-body” (5). The becoming-body of the event is what affectively orients the expressibility of self toward the “more than one.” The becoming-body is always in formation, and it opens onto an experience in the making: it is thick with intensity. As Deleuze points out, subjectification is not about returning to the *subject*, but rather to modes of intensity that condition *emerging* subjectifications. Manning, in affinity with Deleuze, gives this mode of intensity a different name: relation. Relation as a mode of intensity breaks down the “I” as it stands in for a subject/being/self. The “I” is no longer solitary, not an individual, but individuating.²⁵ It is an “I” that is a “you,” a “we,” an “us,” a “this,” and “that,” a “more than human.” The “I” is a force conditioned by encounters, affecting and affective, always in relation, in transformation. The “I” emerges through the forces that condition its expression. An “I” speaks, writes, dances, moves, thinks *with*. This “I” is complex and difficult because it dwells on the edge of expression that is “always more than one.” The “I” that is expressed constitutes the event.

I like using the “I.” I like attaching what I experience to it as singular thought-event. I want to take account of whatever has a hold on me through the “I.” Palestine has a hold on me. The “I” that is Palestinian is always in formation. And this pushes me to ask: how does the “I” function as more than the sum of its parts here? How does an “I” account for itself when it is forced to speak, when this “I” cannot help but speak as an “I”? If we take the individual out of

²⁴ The concept of preacceleration is previously discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. For a sustained discussion of the concept “preacceleration” see Manning 2009.

²⁵ Individuating stems from philosopher, Gilbert Simondon’s concept “individuation,” which Manning explicates in her book, *Always More Than One* (2013). He writes: “We would like to show that the principle of individuation is not an isolated reality turned in on itself, preexisting the individual as an already individualized germ of the individual. The principle of individuation, in the strict sense of the term, is the complete system in which the genesis of the individual takes effect. And that, in addition, this system prolongs itself in the living individual, in the form of an associated milieu of the individual, in which individualization continues to evolve; that life is thus a perpetual individuation, a continuing individuation across time that prolongs a singularity” (qtd. in Manning, 224).

the “I” what does it become? What does its expression apprehend? From what position? To what end?

The “I” that is Desire

For Deleuze and Guattari, desire amplifies the potential intensification of an effect, and as such, it is productive.²⁶ They write in *Anti-Oedipus*,

If desire is productive, it can be productive in the real world and can produce only reality. Desire is the set of *passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production. ... Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. (1983, 26)

Desire’s production affects the “I.” It creates an excess, a more-than. This excess underlines the fact that the “I” was never bounded, that the “I” was always subject to transformation, to metamorphosis. “I” is relation. There is no “I” as such. “I” is but an expression of a stance that realizes a position—that upholds life in its current iteration to its becoming-force. This position is always changing, as each relation is pushed to its limit. Desire changes, and so the effect of the process of production introduces a new inquiry—pushing us to think anew again positions our “I” differently. The modes of intensity re-compose; new forces of relations arise.

²⁶ “The objective being of desire is the Real in and of itself...Desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire: they are counterproducts within the real that desire produces” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 27). The real here is referring to the intensification of experience by way of production—to desire is to produce, to produce is to desire, and that is a production of both the real and desire. The re-definition of the meaning of desire (which is in opposition to the Lacanian notion of desire as in the abject fear of lacking) in *Anti-Oedipus* is closely aligned with Spinoza’s concept of joyful passions. For a more elaborate discussion of joyful passions, please refer to chapter one and two in this dissertation.

These define our becoming-body, reinventing the “I” at every turn. The “I” attached-detached, is subject/less tending toward (an)other.

When the “I” is forced to speak it is because the conditions call for it, something is a stir. This happens when conditions are such that there is a coalescing into a problem, a question, curiosity: tension. The limit of the “I” is put to the test.²⁷ What occurs here, in the best of cases, is that new forms of expression emerge and the “I” shifts from the solid place of identity to stand for something else, something in movement, something as yet inexpressible. If this happens, “I” pushes up against the forces of “life-living:”²⁸ for a people, from a people, and with a people to come. If it doesn’t happen, “I” is solidified and the field hardens with pre-positionings: me-you, Israel-Palestine.

One way to think beyond identity toward the more-than of the subject is through art, an art that is interested in the currency of life, of “life-living.” Reminding us of Foucault’s intentions, Deleuze writes, “And Foucault, true to his method, isn’t [sic] interested in returning to the Greeks, but in *us today*: what are our ways of existing, our possibilities of life or our processes of subjectification; are there ways for us to constitute ourselves as a ‘self,’ and (as Nietzsche would put it) in sufficiently ‘artistic’ ways, beyond knowledge and power? And are we up to it, because in a way it’s a matter of life and death” (emphasis in original 1995, 99).

²⁷ Here, I draw from Deleuze’s book *Bergsonism*, where he outlines Bergson’s concept of intuition as a methodological practice. He writes, “Bergson distinguishes essentially three distinct sorts of acts that in turn determine the rules of the method: The first concerns the stating and creating of problems; the second, the discovery of genuine differences in kind; the third, the apprehension of real time. It is by showing how we move from one meaning to another what the ‘fundamental meaning’ is, that we are able to rediscover the simplicity of intuition as lived act, and thus answer the general methodological question” (14).

²⁸ For a sustained discussion of Manning’s concept “life-living” see Manning, *Always More Than One*. It is also discussed in chapters one and two of this dissertation.

This is my proposition: the art of life, or life as work of art, is what constitutes modes of resistance, the counter force to power (*pouvoir*).²⁹ The mode of intensity that is art opens the way to forces of relation that condition resistance; ones that attempt to evade capture by the neoliberal tendencies that re-stratify the individual on the figure of identity.³⁰ Extending on Deleuze's questions that push up against modes of subjectification, I argue that life as a work of art is what constitutes a becoming-self in "artistic ways" that challenges modes of capitalist capture. Capitalist capture is a dimension of subjectification—it orchestrates existence in terms of insides and outsides already pre-composed. My question here is: To what extent can the process of becoming-other—a process that tends toward life as a work of art—evade capture? Through what means can the "I" becoming collective express thought and interfere with the forces of capture? Furthermore, how do these modes of resistance manifest as image (for Palestine's life force is mobilized by the image)?³¹ As Pignarre and Stengers explain, "...it is not enough to denounce a capture the way one might denounce an ideology. Whilst ideology screens out, capture gets a hold over something that matters, that makes whoever is captured live and

²⁹ Brian Massumi, in "Notes on Translation" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, comments on the difference between Deleuze and Guattari's use of "puissance" and "pouvoir," for both terms are translated into English as "power." Massumi explains, "*Puissance* refers to a range of potential. It has been defined by Deleuze as a 'capacity for existence,' 'a capacity to affect and be affected,' a capacity to multiply connections that may be realized by a given 'body' to varying degrees in different situations...Here, *puissance* pertains to the virtual (the plane of consistency), *pouvoir* to the actual (the plane of organization). The authors use *pouvoir* in a sense very close to Foucault's, as an instituted and reproducible relation of force, a selective concretization of potential" (Massumi qtd. in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, xvii).

³⁰ I am indebted to Pignarre and Stengers' book, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell* for their use of the term "capitalist capture." I am inspired by its capacity to express to what extent, to what degree and measure, are we complicit and how when it comes to living with and for capitalism.

³¹ In his book, *The Time-Image*, Deleuze refers to the image of thought as a mode of perceptibility that renders affect as a representational effect. The image of thought is a pragmatic concept that explores the manifestation of thought as image—how image stands in for thought. Later on in this chapter, I discuss the potential of an image interfering with the image of thought. The image that interrupts this formation or effect registers as the political that trembles alongside expression troubling what we already know to be as such. In this regard, the image of resistance arises, and constitutes an image of *unthought*—thinking in the flesh; it is a preverbal effect. These images, as social and political forces, account for life-making endeavors. These images of resistance, or images of the unthought, inspire the "life-living" of a work of art.

think...to affirm that there is capture instead implies, for its part, a double movement: a suspension and exposing to risk” (2011, 43).

In *Capitalist Sorcery*, Pignarre and Stengers write of capture as a capitalist force that appropriates processes of subjectification. Capture, they write, conditions desire—our social, political, cultural and economical life-making pursuits: “We’re vulnerable to being captured, to being under the spell of capitalism. So, it’s not about ideological warfare, or assumptions built on having to battle a system that is obvious. Capitalism, it works, because while some things we can identify as being obvious and of it, there are many aspects of it that remain imperceptible or invisible” (2011, 43). One aspect that remains imperceptible or invisible in capitalism is how our capacity to think and feel in autonomous ways is debilitated or put under stress. The destruction of the capacity to think and feel differently, radically, *for the love of the collective, for the love of autonomy*, is hindered under the pressure to think *for/with* capitalism—the effects of which involve depression, paranoia, fear, competition and hate of self and others. As Pignarre and Stengers remind us, it is necessary “[t]o attribute to capitalism the ensemble of operations of capture from which it profits, and to be seized by the powerlessness to resist it” (2011, 49). For the authors, what is important to consider, since we are at risk of capture, are modes of subjectification that offer strategies for protection against it.³²

Pignarre and Stengers begin the book with the cry from Seattle:

“Another world is possible” is a cry. Its power is not that of a thesis or a program, whose value would be judged by its plausibility. It doesn’t authorize any kind of triumphant putting into perspective

³² Pignarre and Stengers acknowledge that “protection” is something they are thinking through in the book, as they explain “We don’t know a great deal about the question of protection, because we belong to a world that scorns it...but we think we have to learn to protect ourselves from that to which we know ourselves to be vulnerable. This is demonstrated by the imprudent self-assurance of ideology critique, of demystification, of all those who make an enterprise out of the deconstruction of the appearances by which ‘others’ are had” (45).

or offer any kind of guarantee. In any case, that is why the singular “another world” is appropriate: it is not a matter of an illusion to a particular world that we would be able to define, nor is it of any matter what other world it is (any other world than this). It is a matter of appealing to the possible against the inexorable allure of the process that has set in and, of course, continues today more than ever. It is a matter of breaking something of a spellbinding order, a stunned impotence of which even those who were still struggling could sense the proximity. (2011, 4)

This cry creates suspension and pronounces risk; it was a collective cry, one of a pragmatist affiliation.³³ The cry is affective, it is felt bodily, in the flesh, as a way to get to what is urgent to protect—the ontogenetic potential of the body to feel, think, and act *in solidarity* against capture. The cry that Pignarre and Stengers refer to occurred in 1999, at the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests. The authors begin with the cry as a form of enunciation that opens up potential for what is possible, what is thinkable. It is not so often that a discussion on movement building begins by considering a bodily gesture—a collective body in movement that is becoming an expression of thought (these protests sparked what is now referred to as the anti-globalization movement). In this way, Pignarre and Stengers move beyond institutional politics to describe the intricate and insidious movement of capitalist capture through processes of production that come to face it, that talk back to it: “Another world is possible.” The cry, as a collective bodily act, momentarily breaks the spell of capitalist capture, and opens up a mode of

³³The use of the concept of pragmatism here is borrowed from Isabelle Stengers: “We don’t know how these things can matter. But we can learn to examine situations from the point of view of their possibilities, from that which they communicate with and that which they poison. Pragmatism is the care of the possible.” See further Stengers and Bordeleau 2011.

intensity that is euphoric, transitive, deterritorializing. The becoming-body in movement, expressed here in the cry, inspires thought, a “thought in the act,”³⁴ an act in thought. “Another world is possible” dynamically extends the cry’s power (puissance) from the one to the many as it manifests in “a politics of touch.” Manning writes, “A politics of touch implies a spiraling politics in-creation, an eternal return of the unknowable. A politics of touch is the affirmation that we must make space and time for politics, where this space and time can exceed the current state (of affairs). Politics of touch are tactical discursive tactics of the unknowable” (2007, 15).

Immanent Vulnerability: Becoming-Collective

Pignarre and Stengers formulate a critique of capitalism through the question of vulnerability. Vulnerability, for Pignarre and Stengers, is key to understanding how we are positioned within the matrix of capitalist forces. It is important to draw vulnerability out here as a mode of subjectification, intensity, or desire. To extend on vulnerability as a process of production, and to put it forth as a potentiality, as a mode of activation against capitalist capture. It is not just that we are vulnerable to capitalist capture; I argue that vulnerability, as a state of becoming is protection against the forces of capital. It is soft armature. Vulnerability is felt bone-deep and is simultaneously in excess of and simultaneously exceeds what is assumed to be a boundary. It conditions spatiality; it is open to collectivity à la Fred Moten; “... all that we have and we are is what we hold in our outstretched hands.”³⁵ Vulnerability is a state of becoming that

³⁴ See Manning and Massumi 2014.

³⁵ This line of thought extends on Moten’s concept of “blackness,” that stems from black radicalism: “Blackness, which is to say black radicalism, is not the property of black people. All that we have and are is what we hold in our outstretched hands. This open collective being is blackness. Racial difference mobilized against the racist determination it calls into existence in every moment of the ongoing endangerment of actual being, of subjects who are suppose to know and own. It makes a claim upon us even as it is that upon which we all can make a claim, precisely because it and its origins are not originary.” For a much more elaborate and sustained discussion (which is beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation) on this insightful and radical concept of “blackness” see Moten 2011, and Harney and Moten 2013.

simultaneously confers porousness and struggle. That is why Pignarre and Stengers issue a warning, “[...] the operations of capture directly associated with capitalism cannot be dissociated from the question of our vulnerability, that is to say, from the other operations of capture from which capitalism profits, that it stabilizes, and on which it confers new meanings” (2011, 46). But it is also from this state of becoming, of becoming-vulnerable that openings pour forth, that we can “cultivate sensitivities” and “[accept] the well-foundedness of an already existing reading of the world...engag[e] in an open process, a process that doesn’t put you by the side of those who have understood, but which activates the present, making the force for experimenting with its possibilities for becoming exist, here and now” (49). Vulnerability: an apposition to the unknowable.

Opening up to risk (the collective cry) puts the processes of capture in suspension, what is possible is rendered unknowable yet persistent in making the present felt, in activating the “thinking-feeling” of what is to come.³⁶ Feeling the possible extends the force of the present as it manifests in the real that composes our becoming-body of event. In this instance vulnerability is power (puissance)—a force that activates the body’s potential to act: outstretched hands. Vulnerability dwells on the edge of a trembling now, and when called forth is pushed to create time so that life’s force is felt in the present. To this end, I call on the “I” as the affirmation of lived experience that dares to vulnerably inhabit what remains possible. I call on the outstretched hands of this “I” to create the conditions for a collective fragility. Vulnerability can be a source of power that breaks the spellbinding effect of capitalist capture. I call on this “I” to radicalize

³⁶ In Massumi’s book, *Semblance and Event*, he writes of his concept “thinking-feeling” as “The action of vision, the kind of event it is, the virtual dimension it always has, is highlighted. It’s a kind of perception *of* event of perception *in* the perception. We experience a vitality affect of vision itself. This is like the doubleness of perception I was talking about becoming aware of itself. A kind of direct and immediate self-referentiality of perception. I don’t mean self-reflexivity, which would be thinking about a perception as from a distance or as mediated by language. This is a thinking of perception in perception, in the immediacy of its occurrence, as it is felt—a *thinking-feeling*, in visual form” (44).

the politics of apposition (Harney and Moten 2013, 111), to co-create in proximity to what is becoming life. The force of the “I” is a matter of collective existence: “I” as an open collective, always becoming more than one.³⁷

Critique as a Form of Protection

Affective resistance is felt bodily. It is felt bodily as lived experience. The affective tonality of the body is conditioned by an event: to think-feel with-body as that which produces new thought, to think-feel with-body in order to *force the unthought to become thinkable*. This cry has the potential to break open perception; the force of resistance that arises is transversal, constituting a field of relation that is becoming-body, becoming an expression of thought. In *The Time-Image*, Deleuze writes:

The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself [sic] that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures. (1989, 89)

The event that conditioned the cry of resistance is a category of life that is inseparable

³⁷ While I think of vulnerability in the sense of potentiality, I am also aware that vulnerability can mean being vulnerable *to* a situation, i.e. war, or other forms of violence, destruction or repression. For me, vulnerability in the way that I present it here is speaking back to Pignarre and Stengers’ concept, which, for me, implies passivity. At the same time, I do understand that vulnerability can mean fragility in the face of unexpected violence that is acted upon populations, individuals, or collectives. But I do want to give this concept power here, because, as an activist, I often act from a position of vulnerability. In this sense, it is active, not passive. It activates activist passion.

from “the attitude of the body.” “Another world is possible” *is* what we hear in the cry; it is a bodily act, a posture of resistance making felt the *nowness* of the present, a present in which we are forced to think, “to reach the unthought that is life.” Here, what is felt is *presentness*. Unthought is not the antithesis of thought but its comprising effect, where what is felt is thought in the immediacy of its emergence, constituting a belief in the world where possibilities of difference about to arise give off a trembling. This trembling interrupts, suspends and deterritorializes what we think we already know. We become unmoored—this is the shock to thought.

Presentness is the decision’s cut. As Manning writes, “Moving through cue is landing decision. This is not a decision-from-without...decision’s cut is the more than human force that repositions the field in the event of an occasion taking form: decision is how experience singles itself out as *this* or *that*. In the cut of decision, we know not the cue as such but only the nextness of its result: movement aligning” (2013, 105). The making of the cut, the decision that conditions the event in the making is an affective surge that sets into motion a *nextness*, which is in the now of the present. I want to suggest that the taking of a decision, the making felt of presentness that is a *now*, inspires articulations of lived experience that take the “I” out of expression, that form practices of “immanent critique.” According to Massumi “immanent critique” means that

[the] critique is not an opinion or a judgment but a dynamic “evaluation” that is lived out in situation. It concerns the tendencies that the introduction of that factor actively brings into the situation. It is the actual, eventful consequences of how that factor plays out, relationally with any number of other factors that also activate tendentially, and in a way that is utterly singular, specific to those

situated co-expressions. That is why Deleuze speaks of critique as a “clinical” practice: it is the diagnostic art of following the dynamic signs of these unfoldings, which can then be actively modulated from within the situation, immanent to it. (2010, 338)

I would like to center a collective practice of immanent critique in how we build protection against the apparatus of capture. Here, thought is in the relation, it is not bound to a fixed “I.” When articulations of lived experience—such as that of the cry—take place in a collective and public context they allow for an openness of the present to be shifted, re-tuned, and questioned. To consider lived experience as the capacity to think and feel differently is at the heart of immanent critique. To engage with practices of immanent critique is to engage with a collaborative and collectivized vision of lived experience. This puts emphasis on difference. Difference emerges in this process, and what I want to emphasize here is that the struggle to allow difference to emerge, as that which unifies collective envisioning, is confluent with the struggle to create articulations that are inclusive of difference. Lived experience does not constitute the “I” but the many, a many continuously redefined by the cry. To create an artful life from here, the key is not to create an analytic of the subject as position, but to open the very question of subjectivity to immanent critique. What kind of political positions emerge from this process of immanent critique? What political renderings of the struggle emerge from acknowledging that lived experience is in itself a struggle for collectivity? As Pignarre and Stengers write, “The nuptials of becoming and critique: knowing that one doesn’t critique in the name of whatever it may be, but in the very movement by which one becomes capable of thinking and feeling differently” (2011, 50).

Immanent Critique in Kamal Aljafari's *Port of Memory*

Kamal Aljafari's film, *Port of Memory*, is situated in Jaffa, Palestine. It is a quiet film with very little dialogue, and only utilizes diegetic sound. It is an experimental portrait of life in Jaffa as seen from the perspective of the filmmaker, who is the camera's eye, an absent observer. The camera takes the viewer on a tour of the landscape of Jaffa, as it is physically transforming because of occupation, annexation and gentrification. Jaffa is a small Palestinian town that is situated next to the bigger ever-growing Israeli city of Tel Aviv. Jaffa is in the midst of slowly being annexed by the municipality of Tel Aviv. Aljafari's portrait of Jaffa focuses on images of the mundane, everyday, seemingly banal routines of its inhabitants, juxtaposed with the disappearing landscape of what once was a robust port, a fully functioning Palestinian town. The film is a great example of how images can express the artfulness of life. It is composed of close-ups that zoom in on the micro-movements of the body—as that body sleeps, eats, walks, screams, washes, dances, sings or dreams. I refer to these images as images of life-acts. The film brings to life the micro-movement of the body as this body lives and struggles under occupation.

In *Port of Memory*, images of life-acts construct what I name filmic architecture. Filmic architecture is what binds these images to one another or not, it is these images that shape the arch of the film—the composed vignettes create a series that amplifies the film's effect, this stands out as architectural because of the use of space and spatial structures in the image. The movement of the camera becomes perceptible between each shot and it results in this effect. The interstice of movement moving is heightened. The way the film is edited allows the viewer to feel the cut as the scene moves onto the next image, the next space; this technique lets us feel *with* the rhythm of the film. Furthermore, this element is filmic architecture because there is a strong emphasis on close-ups that amplify the relation between spaces and bodies. The film

presents images of spaces that are transforming or disappearing like derelict buildings, crumbling tombstones, abandoned construction sites, cranes working the rubble juxtaposed with images that showcase bodies in direct relation with these spaces. For example, there are close-up shots of hands as they are being washed repeatedly in a bathroom sink, in the shot the sink is as much of a part of the frame as the hands that are being washed. In another montage, the camera is focused on an elderly woman who is watching television in the living room, and the television set is at the centre of the image as it is in the centre of the living room, the shot emphasizing the space as a whole, tying character and space to its composition. Another image exemplary of this technique is of a young man tending burning coals in a portside café. The image is a wide, medium shot that establishes the spatial framing of the café, the young man is in the background tending to the coals, but as much as the establishing shot includes the framing of the space, it also emphasizes the figure of the young man, the camera is focused on him. The shot creates a diagonal angle that connects what is seen in the foreground of the image, coffee tables, patrons, life at a café, with the figure standing across the way in the back tending the burning coals. These images emphasize the body as it conditions a space, and the space as it conditions an event. These close-ups of bodies in movement—the images are edited together in a way where the film jumps from one vignette to the next—condition the spatial effect of the image. The filmic architecture—as the structural arch of the film—is composed through this relation between bodies, space, and time (duration). The relation between these elements prevalent in each image, composed in each vignette, and the rhythm developed by the movement that is established between each vignette, constitutes the filmic architecture, magnifying the film's effect as spatial. These images are not ordinary images, ones that represent an idea of what Palestine looks like, or feels like—what Palestine *is* like. Rather, the images explore the formation of space-time in

movement that quietly and subtly expresses the effects of annexation on a body, the effects of annexation on a space, and how that is ultimately just another method of occupation.

In this section, I would like to suggest that *Port of Memory* engages in immanent critique through its filmic architecture. Filmic architecture is the cinematic experience of a space-time compression that accounts for *presentness*. A presentness that is thick with substance, that is affectively transforming thought—making the hair stand up. I see immanent critique engaging cinema in images that create time, rather than mark time, or represent it. Life as it is lived is imaged through gestures, elaborated on through duration; they are images of life-acts. Through the filming of life-acts, *Port of Memory* is an example of how the “I” no longer qualifies an individual, but a collective that is becoming-Palestinian. This becoming-Palestinian is of the body; its movements, gestures, and actions create life that is immanent to its spatial condition.

Port of Memory is almost a silent film. It is slow moving, made up of tableaux, some of which become refrains, one quiet, still scene after the next. The camera is often steady, firmly fixed; it rarely moves, and it is hardly detected. The film begins in a car. The camera is inside the car, the lens points to the front. It is a wide, close-up shot of the interior. We can see droplets of rain on the windshield. We hear the click click click of the car signal. The car turns to the left. We see the back of the driver’s head. As he drives we watch. We see and hear the squeak of the sound of the wipers moving back and forth, back and forth. The camera is set up so we see part of the driver’s right shoulder and arm, and we see his hands on the wheels. It is obvious the driver knows the streets well, like he has been to where he is headed before. There is no hesitation in his driving. The drive is smooth, familiar. The image is somber; a gray darkness overshadows the inside of the car. We are wind and turn with the car. The camera is still, focused, steady but this highlights the movement of the turning car, because of the close-up we

feel as if we are in an intimate space, constricted and intimate. There is only diegetic sound, which makes for an intense scene: wipers back and forth, on the glass—squeak, squeak—the signal of the car, turn left, turn right—click, click, click. We, as viewers, do not yet know who this driver is or where he is going, and the mood is almost dreary. Also, the scene is intensely quiet. We only hear: the rain, the windshield wipers, the turning of the steering wheel once in awhile, the smooth maneuver of breaking at a stoplight, the turning signal going on and then clicked off. The duration of the scene seems long, time seems to pass for a while, or we feel time passing. It is because the camera is so still and focused.

The camera continues to be still, and yet we continue to feel the movement of the car, and that affects how the duration of the scene is felt. It is slow-feeling, and static—as if someone is filming in secret, watching, unbeknownst to the character in the film. The driver turns his head to the right, slightly, while he slows down the car. He's looking for something or he's seen something. We don't know yet. The camera continues to point to the front of the car. The driver drives on. A bit faster now. We hear him accelerate a bit. His head is slightly turning to the left and then the right. He's still looking for something. He signals and turns left. Parks the car in front of a small white building with a brown door. The scene cuts. We see him, inside the building, he's walking up a flight of stairs. The interior is all white, white walls, and beams. Another cut, inside a small cubic-like room. There are four other people inside. Two of them are standing; one of them is a woman wearing a black and red sweater. She holds papers in her hands. The other, a young man, is reading the paper. The two others, are elderly men, they are just sitting down waiting, also holding papers in their hands. The driver leans against the wall, also waiting. This is a waiting room. The driver is in the foreground of the image. We see him stand there and he waits with one hand in his pant pocket. The other hand is out of frame. He lifts

up his arm to look at the envelope he is holding. He takes his other hand out of his pocket and holds the brown envelope horizontally to see it better; he continues to stare at it. The lighting in the waiting room is fluorescent white, a stark contrast from the dark gray interior of the car. The scene cuts to a close up of a different wall, with tanned brown wallpaper and a framed black and white photograph of a village. Next to the framed photograph, we see there is an entrance to another room, instead of the door there is a white curtain that closes off the entryway. We hear someone say, "Don't worry, I'll take care of it. But don't forget the money next week. I don't want to keep reminding you." We see a man walk out of the room. He turns to nod at the person who was speaking to him, and then walks out of frame. The driver enters the frame and walks into the room. He pulls the curtain behind him to conceal the doorway. The scene cuts. The driver is now sitting in a chair, what looks like an office, with bookshelves behind him. He is facing the camera. We see his face clearly. His jacket is off and he is trying to see what is happening across from him. We hear the same voice as the one in the previous scene, he asks the driver, "What's the matter?" The driver says, "The court sent us a summons about the house." The voice says, "Remind me, I don't remember." The driver responds, "Ten years ago, the court claimed that we had taken one room of the house. Now they say that we have taken the whole house. That we are not the owner and, but are just squatting. My father bought this house forty years ago. Now they want us to leave the house, and pay a fine of 112, 000 shekels." The voice asks, "Sadika is your mother?" The driver responds, "yes." The voice continues, "And Fatimeh is your sister? And they say you just took the house?" We hear the ruffle of papers. The voice continues. "And you say you bought the house?" "Of course. I gave you the documents ten years ago," the driver replies. "Ten years...I probably lost them, Salim." The driver's name is Salim. Salim says, "How could you lose them? They are very important." "I don't keep documents for

that long. I'll look around. Maybe I still have them. Well, anyway, with or without the documents, I will take your case. \$4000 if I can get a settlement from the Amidar Housing Company. \$7000 if I can't because then we'll have to go to court. Okay?" The driver is expressionless as he listens. He says, "Okay." The voice is the voice of the lawyer. The lawyer's tone is indifferent, almost dismissive. The driver leaves, expressionless. The scene ends.

The quiet lingers, which allows for the mood of the film to set in. The driver, turns out, is one of the main characters. He was on his way to see his lawyer about a court order that ruled he had to leave his home because he had not provided the municipality with a land deed.³⁸ When the driver arrives at his lawyer's office it is a quick exchange. *Port of Memory* does not follow a traditional narrative form; there is no backstory provided. The information that was just given sets the tone for the rest of the film—it is inflected by hardship and struggle, but this is experienced almost in silence. There is a mystery to the image, an imperceptible, silent effect that leaves the viewer in wonderment. What kind of information will this image reveal? Or will the image just forfeit to the unknown? There is no resolve when life is lived under occupation. In this regard, these images will not find a resting place from within the confines of representation; instead they agitate.

Port of Memory strays away from a moral imposition or judgment. There is no message. That is why the power of the silence is so affective. While the driver's personal dilemma over the lost land deed is a major narrative thread that runs through the entirety of the film, other scenes stand out that exemplify the way in which the hardship and struggle of living under occupation

³⁸ In Palestine, this often occurs. It is hard for Palestinians to prove that they own the home they live in because the home has been in the family for generations, or the deed that proves they are indeed the rightful owners of the property has been lost. The Israeli government issues these court orders as a tactic, knowing full well it is hard for many Palestinians to prove on paper that they own the house they live in. This is a way for the Israeli government to usurp their property and claim it for their own.

manifest in the everyday. Aljafari sets up vignettes that act as refrains in the film so that we might see the same person in a different place, doing exactly what we last saw them do but in a slightly modified way. The repetition of the vignettes, as refrains, sets into motion a filmic rhythm that ties the multiple stories together—on the one hand, the film is about the driver and his family and, on the other, the film puts this family and their plight in relation to the other people of the village, who live in proximity, who are part of the landscape that is slowly disappearing.

One example of a refrain in the film is that of the moped rider, who rides through scenes. The landscape changes for each vignette that features him and his haunting scream. He is either seen riding through a park, a hilly barren landscape, or a desolate street. The first time we see him he is riding on a paved road in an unidentified part of town. The scene opens onto a medium shot of the road that is directly in front of a white mosque; a yellow car is parked at the curb. We hear a sound of a motor approaching. The moped rider rides into the frame. He stops in the front of the mosque, takes off his helmet, throws it onto the street, it bounces off the pavement and rolls. As he does this, he suddenly, starts to scream...one, two, three times. The rider's scream comes to us as a surprise. It leaves us in wonderment, questioning its strangeness; it is haunting, moving, and shocking. He begins to ride away. The scene cuts to show the elongated roadway that runs through an area under construction. We see the moped driver ride into the frame again, and rides away down the road past a couple of pedestrians. As he drives out of frame we hear him scream again. The scene cuts, we see him again. He rides up, the sound getting louder and louder; the scene cuts to where he stopped in the middle of the street at no-entry sign. His back is to the camera. We see the side of his face as he turns and screams again, and again. The montage ends.

The scream is so precise that it is hard to describe. It does not qualify anything, like a cry for help or a cry of pain. It is wrenching, hard, and seemingly displaced. A scream without reason is a horrifying scream. It is not violent or aggressive. It is non-emotional, yet gestural. There is no setup. He rides off leaving the shock of it to dissipate. This happens twice more in the film in different settings, at different places in Jaffa. But again, there is no backstory to the character, we are not sure where he came from, what he is doing or where he is going. So, when he screams it is out of context, but then his scream acts as a re-occurring event in the story of survival here in Jaffa: the scream troubles the quiet that has already set the film's tone.

As we sit in question and wonder, the film moves on, leaving us haunted by a new awakening of what is taking place on screen, the montage feels alive again, letting us know that subtlety and silence are only elements of a trembling to come. The scream is not representative of something, does not stand in for an occurrence or event. Again, there are no clear answers here. The film builds on affect, rhythm and movement through the micro-gestural, the movement of bodies in space. In this way, the emphasis on the banality of the everyday creates an atmosphere of disquiet. The film leads the audience to bear witness to a disappearing village, where hardship and struggle are experienced in the everyday, but without spelling it out for us, without preaching to us what occupation feels like, or how it is experienced. The film's troubling yet poetic quiet, juxtaposed with the wrenching scream shows us that something is amiss here, nothing feels right or resolved. This is its power: it is a tectonic diagram, one that builds on its rhythmic play between sound and silence, movement and stillness, close-ups and long shots.

The filmic architecture of the image opens up to the categories of life that emerge, for example, as they form into a scream. We are pushed to seek a thought that has not consolidated into representation. The moped rider's scream reminds us that at times there is really nothing left

to say, or that what is present, the *nextness* that comes with the editor's cut, is what remains unsayable, unutterable. This breaks open the image to show us life itself: life as a work of art registers in the micro-movements of the body as forms of expression. The scream is a life-act that amplifies the unknown remainder. It is not of the subject, but of the event—the film's effect on the whole. The film attempts to take the subject out of the gesture, focusing on the duration of the gesture as the mode of composition of the filmic rhythm. Aljafari amplifies the haunting of the unknown under occupation—as it gestates in silence, gesture, rhythm, and movement.

Another example of a refrain in *Port of Memory* involves a scene in a portside café. This refrain repeats twice more in the film. Again, it is set up as part of the movement of vignettes that takes us from one scene to the next establishing how life is lived in Jaffa—from one scene to the next we are introduced to the inhabitants, to their daily activities, movements, gestures and acts. This particular vignette appears at first in the beginning of the film, and then once again mid-way through. The first time we see this image it begins with a close-up shot of a damaged grill (looks like it has been used so many times that it bent) with burning coals inside it. A loud, very large fan is next to the grill, blowing air in its direction, we can see the flames coming off the coals flutter. There is a cut, and now the shot is a medium-close up of the interior. Inside the café are three men; in the foreground of the image we see an elderly man holding a cane in one hand. His coffee is on the table; we see the steam rise from the cup. Directly in front of this man, in the background of the image, is a younger man walking toward the back corner of the café smoking a cigarette. To his right, we see another elderly man sitting at one of the tables. As the young man is walking toward the windows that are visible in the background of the image, we hear gunshots. No one inside the café reacts to the sound.

The café looks bleak, broken window panes, sparse, and quiet, not much going on in

there, seems empty of life. The mid-shot establishes the space: We see the young man walk back and forth. He is in the corner now with the functioning fan nearby, on a table, next to it is the small charcoal grill, filled with the bright red-orange burning coals. He turns off the fan. The shot cuts to a close-up of the man as he continues to stand, be entranced by the coals burning under his nose. The man picks up a coal with a pair of metallic tongs and blows on it, once, then twice, then three times, and slowly brings it very close to his neck. A cut to a close-up of the neck and coal as it gets closer and close to his skin. This is done in slow movement. As if he is testing his limit, he continues and brings the hot red coal very close to his Adam's apple. We feel that heat up close to the skin, almost going to burn, maybe singe. Like the screaming moped rider, we are not sure who this is and why he is doing this; is something wrong? Is he just bored? What is going on? The gesture seems intentional, which again might leave the viewer to cringe, wishing he would pull back. The audience is left to question its purpose, the vignette's time in the film, the space it creates, full of silence, unease, confusion—that quiet again in the image hints at something troubling, something that is unsettling. There are many vignettes, many refrains, cuts that are made that seem displaced, or radical, but this creates continuity in the film that establishes the existence of a heterogeneous collective that makes up the landscape of Jaffa. The effect of the cut points to what remains unsayable, unutterable in the presentness of the now, of the life-act that emerges under a form of duress and hardship expressed through a daily banality that is the occupation, as this is experienced in multiplicity.

These cuts condition the haunting filmic rhythm and they push us to ask: what is it that a film can do and how can it amplify the political without directly engaging with content or context. Aljafari cuts in such a way that we get a direct experience of time (not occupation). As Deleuze writes, “[...] the cut has become the interstice, it is irrational and does not form part of

either set, one of which has no more an end than the other has a beginning: false continuity has such an irrational cut...the interaction of two images engenders or traces a frontier which belongs to neither one nor the other” (1989, 181). The movement in the gesture—picking up the hot coal, bringing it close to the neck—is amplified by the close-up shot, and how it is held there, in a steady and intimate way, for what seems like a very long time. The movement in this scene is highlighted through duration and the accompanying silence. When it abruptly cuts, and moves on to the next vignette, it creates an effect which is haunting and disturbing but also beautiful and poetic—this disjunction forces us to think about what we are seeing, how we are seeing it, “[...] the power of thought gave way...to an unthought of thought, to an irrational proper to thought...” (Deleuze 1988b, 181). The filmic architecture—that is the arch of the film that composes the affective tonality of the image—is built on this disjunction where “the interaction of two images engenders or traces a frontier which belongs to neither one nor the other.” This frontier or trace, the image’s effect, the filmic arch, is what gives way to new thought, to a different way of thinking and feeling solidarity with Palestine.

Another example of a scene that stands out involves the driver’s wife, whose vignette is seen twice. The scene is a close-up shot of her hands as she washes them in the bathroom sink. Her hands are right above the base of the pink porcelain sink. In the foreground, we see the metallic faucet as it drips down into the pink sink, water running. Her hands are immediately below the running water, soap in hand. She begins to scrub her hands quite harshly. She washes them in what seems like a choreographed manner, going over her hands with soap, washing one hand with the other, and switching, and switching again, one hand, then the other, paying attention to the crevices, the palm, inside and out. There is determination in her action; she is rigorously making sure she did not miss a spot. The scene lasts a long time but remains

hypnotizing. In its simplicity, and in its strangeness, this scene is mesmerizing. The repetition of the movement—washing one hand and then the next, over and over again, pausing to wash the soap off before replacing it in the dish—creates a durational effect. The movement of the gesture, and the duration of the movement, has a hold on time. The movement of the washing constitutes a durational effect that is felt strongly in the image; time is made present—as in that is what has a hold over us in the now or what constitutes our direct-time experience with the image.

In *Port of Memory*, the duration of the gesture, along with the dominating silence, exposes the constraints or limits of language. It seems as if duration here has to do with how time is expressed under occupation: how time moves, how it is experienced, how it lives in gestures, in rhythms. In my reading of the film, *Port of Memory* implies that time is what conditions modes of intensity or subjectifications. The body expresses time in these life-acts, not a self. The body expresses movement and duration as co-composites of the filmic rhythm. In this way, the body does not stand in for a “Palestinian” but for a becoming-Palestine of the event, of the image. The images’ becoming-Palestine of the “I” is conditioned by time. This is the political at work. It is the image of Palestine that is conditioned by the space-time of the becoming event, which culminates in the duration of the gesture, the life-act. It also culminates in the disappearing landscape of Jaffa. The film archives remnants of what continues to crumble, disintegrate, and disappear, so what remains is the image of what it used to be, the image of its expression.

Aljafari juxtaposes images not just of gestures but also of architecture and landscape: the façade of a decaying building, a disappearing cemetery, a newly paved boardwalk for the new Israeli inhabitants, the crumbling sea wall, the quiet port, the stained glass of an old seaside café.

Port of Memory foregrounds disappearance as much as it images the unsayable. The film is heavy with silence, a silence that shadows the scream, a silence that shadows the building that is slowly crumbling. Silence carries violence, a violence without a subject, a silence that marks history, a history felt in the now. The violence of the occupation is implied but not directly represented. It is felt in images through the lived experience of gestures and architecture. Violence's immanence is felt in the life-acts that condition a hand's movement, the hot coal close to the neck, the brick that is missing, the debris of gentrification, the shadow of the tree on an ancient Palestinian wall that is crumbling. The presentness of violence in its silence composes the image of the film in its gesturing toward the hardship that remains unsaid. Violence is felt here.

Port of Memory relieves us of the kind of sensationalist imagery that has become commonplace vis-à-vis Palestine. Here we have no pre-composed image, and I think this is what allows us to feel the effects of violence. The pain of violence is archived in silence and without blood. Lived experience shown through life-acts—the banality of the everyday composes a poetics of time that amplifies the movement of duration, which is violence both as brutal act and as potential for metamorphosis. Its pull is affective. Violence becomes a rhythmic force that alters the tonality of the banal, setting up the politics of the occupation differently. We are no longer confronted by images of violence, but encounter the effects of a violence that lives as becoming-image. Aljafari's film makes us think and feel differently about what we already know about the occupation. The images he crafts help us imagine another world coming into existence and allow us to experience that moment when we break out of the spell of capture. This experience of bringing the unthought to the fore, I want to argue, is fundamentally of the present—through the images of *Port of Memory* we feel the time-space compression of the

present that is *the now* in the coming *nextness*—from thought to unthought to thought again. The film sets up the conditions for the emergence of life—what consolidates in the event that is to come.

Port of Memory is an experimental film that builds upon the imperceptible through what can be made perceptible. In the previous chapter, I discussed how revolutionary films of the 1970s show or illustrate the steadfastness of a people, to make the invisible visible, to acknowledge a history through film, as that which bears witness to trauma and revolution. In this chapter, *Port of Memory* shows us what is invisible, not what remains invisible, but *what is* invisible: the unsayable, the imperceptible that which we cannot say or see. As Foucault writes, “[...] fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible” (2006, 24). In *Port of Memory* the invisibility of the visible is invisible through silence. The film leaves the door wide open to a series of images that address the affective pull of silence: even in one scene when the cat meows, what is felt is the silence. The diegetic sound—often faint, low, and quiet—in the film and the silence that is felt in each image compose an effect. They create a juxtaposition that gives silence a sound. The sound of silence appears as the sound of bulldozers working in the background, tearing Palestinian homes apart, razing them, and turning them to debris. Silence also lives in the aftermath of an action, the pile of debris is the residual effect, what has disappeared but still exists in the memory of a thing past. We see the debris of this one thing, and then the scene cuts to paved sidewalks and parks, what looks like a new architectural development, a gentrified seaside park. The debris in the previous scene now exists as a memory housed in the architecture of the landscape of the occupier we see before us. In another scene, we hear gunshots in the background in the café, right before this man goes back to pick up the coal. The sound is not relevant to the scene, and

yet it holds sway. This is a clever way of reminding the viewer that there is a kind of politics being hinted at but left implicit. Sound is used here to make us feel the effect of day-to-day violence, to feel that politics can never be elided in Palestine, whether it is dealing with demolitions of Palestinian homes, or of people getting shot. What I find important about this audio-image technique is that it avoids falling into the trap of narrative capture that situates the viewer in an already pre-known setting.

With *Port of Memory* we encounter a film that refuses to let us think between two poles of thought, instead it reaches out to “minoritarian propositions, for the resources of thought that survive on the margins...” (Pignarre and Stengers 2011, 5). What does this film oblige us to think about? What does it do? The force of the silence obliges us to feel the violence but not be oppressed by it. It obliges us to think beyond the “I” that holds experience. Silence is felt collectively, de-subjectively. The silence that imbues the film unifies our struggle to think with it, to feel with it, not separate from it. It keeps a hold over us opening up the potential to think and feel differently. “I” in the film does not exist. I disappears to become collective—I in motion. The intimacy of the gestures, how time is felt in duration, in movement, expunges with the subject, and lets the struggle for a Palestine to come live in the gestures of the here and now.

Aljafari challenges any kind of framed national agenda in cinema through experimentation with form and rigor in technique—while still making political films. His specific technique is very striking—especially when it comes to the use of sound. Aljafari treats sound similarly to how he treats the image. He collects and records the sounds of daily life, what exists in his immediate environment, places as well as people. He has said of his use of sound that “everything is there...for me, for instance, the sound coming from the TV is a great source of music. Sound is a mode of composition. I’m searching for what resembles my lost country,

which has become a search for a cinema. Adorno says that for a man who no longer has a country, to write becomes a place to live. I would say for a Palestinian, the cinema is a country” (Himada n.pag.). In talking about his work with him, what is noteworthy is that with each answer he begins by explaining how it was important to him to film how he sees and feels, and how that type of constraint allowed for a desubjective expression that amplified the affect of a becoming-collective of Palestine. Aljafari’s film challenges modes of representation. In this sense he does begin with an “I” that stands firmly in relation to a nationality. And yet his work does more than simply resettle the nationalist I. It troubles this I by asking the question of life itself. How else might life be thought? Or expressed? He turns life into a work of art using his “I” (eye) in order to make it disappear.

Another example of a striking montage: the scene takes place in a house owned by an elderly woman and her daughter. In the first scene, in a medium close-up shot, we see a man and a woman removing furniture from a room. They move the coffee table, and take Christian paraphernalia off the walls, along with a black and white photograph of a newly wed couple. We see the elderly lady and her daughter through a doorway to the bedroom. They are asked to sit in this room of their house while an Israeli film crew is shooting some kind of documentary film inside. This scene is quite moving: the Israeli film crew is showcasing a house that was built by Palestinians and now being passed off as an Israeli original design. The two women are asked to sit in another room while they film the house, a crew member closes the door on them, shutting them out of the scene, making sure they are out of sight. As viewers, we also do not see them anymore. We are outside the bedroom door. They disappear.

The scene cuts to a camera panning down from ceiling to floor showcasing in slow motion the intricate handmade stained glass windows. The home is an historic seaside structure

with rare stained glass windows. As the camera is panning downward we see a film crew, shooting an actor in a scene as he walks through the doorway, he looks upwards at the opulent stained glass windows. The Israeli film crew is shooting a scene with an Israeli actor who claims that he made the windows with his own bare hands. The actor points to the windows: “All these windows, I made with my bare hands.” The director of this crew wants the actor to put emphasis on “*I made.*” The director cuts multiple times and repeats his line: “All these windows, I made with my bare hands.” The actor is not getting it right. He asks the actor to repeat the line once more, and to really put emphasis on “*I made these windows.*” The shooting resumes, and once again the director calls cut, and goes over to the actor, exasperated at this point, and repeats his direction, “*I made these windows.*” The scene is important because it is subtle; these moments of political commentary are not necessarily explicit in the film. They are imaged rather than spelled out, and once again, without much backstory. What the audience comes to understand is simple—an Israeli film crew is in a Palestinian home, borrowing their historic home to film a documentary on Israeli architecture. The making of the film, the fictionalization of fact, here speaks to how history is told and written—literally constructed through an image—and how another mode of occupation is under way here, and along with that the erasure of the Indigenous population, wherein the scene shows how they are literally put away in a room, out of sight. The politics of occupation is not made explicit in the film, but is (infused with a bit of humour) implied. Aljafari comments on this scene:

What you see is a re-enactment, but not what really happened. This stems from an idea I had, which is very much related to reclamation of places and things. A couple of years ago, I was filming a short miniature in my father’s hometown Ramleh. I was

filming raw unfinished balconies when suddenly a young Israeli guy appeared and stood just behind my back. He waited and waited until he became impatient. He asked me: what are you filming? I said, the balconies. He reacted by saying: ‘you see all these balconies, they are mine.’ Obviously, the balconies were much older than him. Dozens of films were shot throughout the 60s and 70s and 80s in Jaffa—in most of them you would never see a Palestinian. And even if you see Arabs in films like *The Delta Force* [which was filmed in Jaffa], starring Chuck Norris, they’re not Palestinians, they’re Israeli Mizrahi Jews acting as Arabs. We were completely excluded from the image and therefore uprooted twice in reality and in fiction. These Israeli films were claiming the city. As if saying, “this is our city, these are our stones, these are our houses, and this is our sea.” For me, that’s the biggest and the strongest witness that they are not theirs. It may sound surreal but at times these films were even stealing the narrative of the remaining Palestinians of Jaffa—like in the film *Kasablan* from 1973, in which all the inhabitants of Jaffa are Jews who are struggling against the demolition of their houses by the Tel Aviv municipality. I would like to know why these films weren’t shot in Tel-Aviv. There is a difference between shooting a film where the background is white, of white walls—and shooting a film where

the background is an old wall. Cinema needs history – to create emotions you need history. (Himada 2010, n.pag.)

Aljafari expresses the pain and the struggle felt in realizing the ways in which occupation has an insidious effect on how the construction of reality *and* fiction, as they form a narrative or story, become usurped by the dominant forces of occupier/settler. He also points to the ways in which, in particular, architecture plays a role in determining the existence of a people—the relation that building practices and design have to the history of place, the making of a space. Those balconies belong to the maker, the designer, the builder who is Palestinian, and yet the stories of this historic architecture, and how they came to exist are bent and twisted in order to construct the history of settler/occupier as one that is attached to a territory/land. The scene in the home of the elderly woman and her daughter subtly draws on the politics of space, and points to how these histories are re-told, literally constructed through the making of a fictionalized image that stands in for a “documentary” version of who belongs there and why. *Port of Memory* avoids a representative form of expression: the images do not stand in for thought, but push us to think for ourselves. The viewer’s expectation of what is to come or what is to be in the story of *Port of Memory* is challenged because the images are in themselves challenging. In this way, Aljafari does not develop a seamless narrative or structure that holds together images representative of an already-formed politics. Rather, In *Port of Memory*, the images refuse to engage with a pre-arranged dialogue that sets up a dichotomy between what Palestine is and how Israel is positioned in relation to it. The images become witness to life in Jaffa. The camera observes and tells the story of Palestine’s life as it lives in bodies, spaces, buildings, as it lives in a scream, or in hands as they wash. Aljafari points to the *Palestinianess* that qualifies a politics of

time, duration as movement. The camera, the tool that makes images, is the storyteller of time reclaimed, archived, and expressed, as it becomes Palestine. As Aljafari expresses:

As I'm not fulfilling any desires on the side of the viewer, or fulfilling any desired narrative. I do what I find works best when I am composing the image. Some people are clever enough to see and to appreciate this kind of cinema. But I would say that I made this film for myself. What is the value in watching somebody wash his or her hands? This is what I see. She is my aunt, and I find the way she washes her hands to be beautiful and elegant. Although, every time I screen it somewhere, there is somebody who says, "my sister is the same way," or "I know somebody who is doing the same thing." And it has nothing to do with being Palestinian. I don't want to explain how the washing of hands is significant, or representative of something. I find the image in itself valuable and I am happy when people share with me this affinity. People who appreciate it and who can relate to it, connect with what I feel. These elements are very much of a private inclination. And, in this specific project what I wanted to do is give these rituals or elements of daily life of my characters, if you want, a cinematic meaning. For me, making a film is very much a search into the life of these people, and obviously, the place where these people have lived, which is my place, which is where I come from, and which is

part of how and where I search for a cinematic language. (Himada 2010, n.pag.)

The cinematic language of *Port of Memory* does not rely on an “I” in the image, the “I” that stand in for a Palestinian. For example, in the scene with the woman who is washing her hands in the bathroom sink, she is not the image of the Palestinian. She is both a woman washing her hands and a Palestinian, but the emphasis is not on representing her plight as a Palestinian woman living under occupation. The film refuses to position the viewer as someone who is witness to a subject in distress, but rather as someone who bears witness to a collective, a multiplicity of a people who cannot be represented in a homogenous way. The gestures, movements, and silence that are prevalent in the film showcase a *peopling* not *a people*. Through the vignettes, and the immediate cuts, the many cuts that are disjointed but that create a continuous movement, establish a filmic rhythm that sets in motion a peopling—life is showcased here in the non-personal that is gestural, that is bodying, not subjective, not of a being, but becoming. I feel that Aljafari’s film suggests it is impossible to represent a generalized notion of who Palestinians are as a people who live under occupation. This film is not ethnographic, and does not play on empathy to gain support from an audience.

In Aljafari’s previous film, *The Roof*, his trademark camera movement and style were already noticeable. For instance, his curious way of panning slowly across, in close-up, onto buildings and walls, debris and rubble as if the camera is archiving the landscape, is already present: it feels as if the camera wants the buildings to move with it. The camera gives expression, texture and quality to the architecture of the landscape. Aljafari explains:

I love these old walls, old stones. And I want to capture them. I know now that there were many films shot in my hometown, using

my hometown as something else and excluding me from it, erasing my history from these images and from these films. I have a good reason to film this place the way I see it. And cinema can do it: with framing, and by shooting something for a long time, you can claim it, giving it a special importance, be it a stone or a human face. What I am trying to do in *The Roof* and in *Port of Memory* is to give attention to these places, reclaim them, to *personally* reclaim them. I see this as my project. These old buildings that you see in my films, are vanishing. They are being destroyed. And for me they are a witness to a city that existed. Jaffa is not a city anymore, it is just a couple of streets in the south of Tel Aviv, and my desire to capture its disappearance is obviously very strong, because I know that tomorrow it will not exist. So this becomes part of my role as a filmmaker, to capture something and to keep it. It becomes, in that sense, a document. The building stands there in the middle of the street. It's a witness to all this destruction. An expression of what we have gone through since 1948, or for the last 100 years in fact. I treat this specific place exactly as I am treating my characters, and there is a cinematic attraction between them, these objects, and the characters. And the film is very much about place, being excluded from it, about being there and not being there at the same time. I know these buildings will vanish from reality, so at least I have

them in my film. And these images are very much of the streets of my childhood. These are my memories of this place. (Himada 2010, n.pag.)

In one extraordinary scene in *Port of Memory*, Aljafari uses Israeli film footage from 1973 showing an Israeli singer singing a sad song and walking on the beaches of Jaffa. This scene is juxtaposed with the scenes of his uncle walking through a landscape that has deteriorated and disappeared. Through the magic of cinema, we see Salim again, the driver of the car we saw at the beginning of the film. He is walking through the streets of Jaffa, his face expressionless. The way he is walking seems ghostly, as if he is an apparition. Aljafari further describes:

When I shot the scene with my uncle I had brought him to Germany, and we shot it with a green screen. I made him walk in a certain way so that I can insert him into the image instead of the Israeli actor. And when I showed him the scene—where he is walking on the port of Jaffa, walking in the streets of Jaffa—he was so touched, he could hardly believe it. So it's not only a film – in the sense of a cinematic object—it's more than that. It affects. I made my uncle go back and walk in the streets of his childhood, to the places that don't exist anymore. I may have created pleasure for him, or more sadness, I'm not sure. Maybe both, I don't know. But I made it possible for him to go back and be in these places for a moment. The images were from *Kasablan* an Israeli film about Mizrahi, or “Oriental” Jews living in Jaffa, and their struggles with

the Ashkenazi, European-born representatives of government. The narrative completely elides not only Jaffa's Palestinian history, but also its remaining Palestinians, enacting a virtual, cinematic emptying of the city. In the film, the Israeli actor, Yoram Gaon playing a downtrodden Mizrahi, sings while walking through empty and ruined streets, along abandoned houses, open windows and doors: "[...] It's a place which is still far away, Narrow alleys near a huge sea, And empty houses crying silently, My heart's still there behind the sea, I hear a prayer from an empty house, There is a place that's still far away. Anywhere I run, there is a place I can't forget, I'll always have it in my heart. There's a place, I'll always love." This is my song (Himada 2010, n.pag.).

Cinema's magic lies in how it has the capacity to resurrect space, to invent it. It creates a space-time that inspires a politics in the making. Aljafari creates a Palestine that comes to life through a peopling, how bodies in motion condition spaces. Palestine lives in the image of a people to come, a space to be resurrected once more. *Port of Memory* is the song that peoples, inciting a collective cry that is always becoming-Palestine. The silence that is affective in tonality and that is beyond words sets the conditions up for a collective expression. The conditions of occupation are made visible through gesture, duration, and movement creating a filmic architecture that works to compose modes of intensity, not subjects. Life as a work of art comes to expression through the life-acts that compose filmic architecture. This forces us to think differently and feel differently about how we understand the textures, sounds, and landscape of occupation. This film creates images of Palestine that have never been seen before.

When Aljafari says “this is my song” he means that filming what he knows to be around him, the perceptions and thoughts that come to appear from his experience, what torments him as the colonized is used in order to reverse the effect of power being acted upon him, he shows us how art making—making a film, using cinema as a weapon—can enhance our power to act, in this way activating activist passion. The immanent critique of identity here pushes up against the occupation in order to engage with its overwhelming effects, from the standpoint of activist passion. To create effects through image that activate activist passion, enhancing the power to act, to question, to create anew expressions that let us think differently, collectively—this lets us feel what is possible again, what possibility arises when we think Palestine anew again through image making, like the cry from Seattle, *Port of Memory* inspires new expressions of thought. A becoming-Palestine is the more than individual, it is a collective, a peopling. The filmic architecture of *Port of Memory* showcases the multiplicity of a people; it is created from a singular vision or experience—Aljafari, the filmmaker—but builds on a collectivized form of envisioning Palestine. This is politics that is of the event, “the just-beginning-to-stir of the event into its newness out of the soon to be prior background activity it will have left creatively behind” (Massumi 2011, 3). Not one that is moored in representational effect, but builds on new formations of a “life-living” politics. As Manning writes, “Politics: a tentative attentiveness to the conditions through which an event expresses itself, a tentative constructing toward a holding in place of a distributed relational movement, an attending, in the event, to the how of its deformation” (2013, 148).

Filmic architecture generates a new mode of expression that renders space-time in movement. In rendering space-time in movement, *Port of Memory* evades a narrative that situates the viewer in an already pre-known setting. Aljafari’s film deposes of the narrative that

is already at work in the image of Palestine—that in-between victim and perpetrator, occupied and occupier—in order to release the effect of the image from its representational context. He experiments with form: the filmic architecture that builds on the rhythm of each tableau/vignette as they affect the interstice, the in-between movement of each image. He illustrates a rigor in technique that is constituent of a cinematic space that refuses to adhere to any pre-positional setup. The film is made-up of close-ups, soft pans, slow movement and a steady, fixed camera that mostly highlights the relation between bodies and buildings, creating an image that is distinct in time and space, focusing in on different body parts, their gestures, movement, actions; and details of land, territory, and landscape that has been annexed, exploited, or ruined. We are situated in the in-between of space: the already there of the ruin, the disappeared landscape, the demolitions of homes, the development of new ones, and the complete erasure of the old Palestinian homes and cemeteries, to make way for the new developed condos and parks. Aljafari's film invites us to dwell in the most fragile of spaces: disappearance-in-progress. How does one engage with what has already disappeared and is disappearing? *Port of Memory* draws on a different type of political inquiry that manifests in the non-representational form of the image through the architecture of the image that brings a *peopling* to life.

Chapter 4

The Spatial Violence of Activist Passion

*There is a point after which there is nothing to say.
We reach this point more or less quickly, but definitively,
if we've reached it, we are no longer able
to allow ourselves to be caught up in the game.*
—George Bataille

I am reluctant to identify this chapter as the final one in this project partly because the conversations, collaborations, and the activist orientations of thought that inspired it in the first place—as they manifest in this format—are ongoing, endless, and still considered a work-in-progress. The process that I engage here does not end with the last page. This project is part of an ongoing commitment to thought that lives and exists, in practice and in action, outside these pages. However, for the sake of the completion of a study³⁹ that is rooted in a concept inspired by activist practice, identifying this chapter as the last one in this series of concept production will keep us thinking *in the middle*, and will concretely connect the concept that I began with in the first section of the dissertation, which is activist passion, to activism. By continuing to think in and by the middle, I hope to keep getting at a concept of activist passions that inspires questions that keep taking us to the next stage in this process of thought, to “what is next,” to “what else,” when it comes to thinking and doing activism.

I hope that what the project has done thus far is introduce activist passion as a concept in practice by way of a philosophical and political exploration of cinematic images, ending this stage in the process by looking at activist passion from a different angle, as a concept in action. Here, I am indebted to James Baldwin, Jean Genet, and Malcolm X. Throughout this project, the aim was not to impose theoretical concerns onto images, but to explore how the cinematic lends

³⁹ I use the term “study” here as it is drawn out in Fred Moten’s and Stefano Harney’s book, *The Undercommons: “Studying is not limited to the university. It’s not held or contained within the university”* (2013, 445). See further Harney and Moten 2013.

itself to theoretical inquiry. This project engages at once with cinematic *and* theoretical nuances, bringing the theory and philosophy out of the examples themselves.

This final chapter aims to do the same but relinquishes any distinction between theory and practice. Activist passion is here regarded as fundamentally connected to modes of activist practice, by way of exploring the spatial violence of architecture, language, and the opposing forces that arise from the conditions that limit forms of life.⁴⁰ The intention here is to conceptualize violence as a spatiality of thought that reinvigorates activist passions as a concept that registers the spatiality of an effect, and that conditions thought. I situate the spatiality of violence as that which conditions a spatiality of thought: activist passion is a concept that takes into consideration matters of space. Activist passion I here define as the moment when the present reveals itself to us like “a middle without boundaries, edges, or a shape” (Berlant 2011, 200); the present is an affective political surge, where the practices of politics might be invented but do not yet exist (229). This present that is “without boundaries, edges, or a shape” activates the making of a space, another, alternate mode of experiencing the politics of place.

Spatiality of Violence

In *Architecture and Disjunction*, architect and cultural theorist Bernard Tschumi points to architecture’s inherent violence. Tschumi questions the assumption that architecture is simply a practice that can produce physical forms or that pre-determines their uses. Architecture does not

⁴⁰ Forms-of-life, as Tiquun write, is when “a body leans toward whatever leans its way” (18). This term is in alliance with Spinoza’s reading of ethics, as a mode of composition: “The nature of the passions [...] is to fill our capacity for being affected while separating us from our power of acting, keeping us separated from that power. But when we encounter an external body that does not agree with our own (i.e., whose relation does not enter into composition with ours), it is as if the power of that body opposed our power, bringing about a subtraction or a fixation; when this occurs, it may be said that our power of acting is diminished or blocked, and that the corresponding passions are those of *sadness*. In the contrary case, when we encounter a body that agrees with our nature, one whose relation compounds with ours, we may say that its power is added to ours; the passions that affect us are those of *joy*, and our power of acting is increased or enhanced” (Deleuze 1988b, 28).

simply provide the space for socio-economic utility—i.e. infrastructures (Tschumi 2006, 122). For Tschumi, “any relationship between a building and its users is one of violence, for any use means the intrusion of a human body into a given space, the intrusion of one order into another” (122). Violence is necessarily a concept that builds on “the intensity of a relationship between individuals and their surrounding space” (122). This intensity is related to an architectural event—the composition of forces that condition the spatiality of bodies in movement. For Tschumi, violence is implicit (and explicit) in how architectural decisions and their manifestations in design affect space and movement, and how that in turn affects the body and its relations.⁴¹

How does space affect the movement of bodies? Tschumi writes, “A torturer wants you, the victim, to regress, because he wants to demean his prey, to make you lose your identity as a subject. Suddenly, you have no choice; running away is impossible. The rooms are too small or too big; the ceilings are too low or too high. Violence exercised by and through space is spatial torture” (Tschumi 2006, 124). The image of solitary confinement cannot help but appear here. Soha Bechara, a Lebanese militant activist, spent six years in solitary confinement. In one of her many interviews, she talks about the ways in which she countered this logic of “spatial torture” by re-appropriating the space in relation to her own exercise routine. She made sure she walked for at least three kilometers everyday in order to keep her strength up by taking two or three small steps forward and two or three steps back estimating the distance by feet. She lived in a cell that was eighty by eighty centimeters in width and height.⁴² Of course, there are many more examples of solitary confinement cases and confining spaces that are relevant to the ways in

⁴¹ I am not at all suggesting that all forms of architecture are violent, but what will be discussed in this chapter are examples of institutional forms of architecture that produce effects of violence.

⁴² In 1988, Souha Bechara was imprisoned and tortured at the age of 21 for six years, for trying to assassinate a Lebanese Phalangist Army general, who sided with the Israeli military during the 1982 occupation of Southern Lebanon. See Salloum 2000.

which the spatial architecture of violence takes form—not merely through prison architecture but institutional infrastructures that are designed to control and manage populations.⁴³ Another particular example that stands out here is the story of Herman Wallace,⁴⁴ who spent 43 years in solitary confinement. The length of time that Wallace served in solitary confinement is considered to be the longest time any inmate has ever served in America. In 1972, while incarcerated at Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP), Wallace, Albert Woodfox, and Robert King, were moved to solitary confinement due to their organizing as members of the Black Panther Party (BPP). Since then they have been referred to as the “Angola 3.” The BPP chapter inside the prison functioned as a resource for inmates to organize against the dehumanizing and unlivable conditions experienced at LSP. King was released in 2001, Wallace in 2013, but Woodfox remains imprisoned at Angola, in solitary confinement.⁴⁵ The spatial construction of penal architecture is made to re-affirm control, counter resistance, and to institute “preemptive” and “preventative” measures of unwarranted bodily movement, and the collective management and control of certain populations. Architecture and the body are inherently connected because movement is pre-spatial and affects the manifestation of space.

According to Tschumi, discomfiting spatial devices can take any form: “the white anechoic chambers of sensory deprivation, the formless space leading to psychological destructuring. Step and dangerous staircases, those corridors consciously made too narrow for crowds, introduce a radical shift from architecture as an object of contemplation to architecture as a perverse instrument of use” (2006, 124). Aside from the cell motif, other forms of penal architecture exist to control and preempt how bodies move. Besides the explicit example of the

⁴³ On the relation between institutionalization and incarceration see further Liat Ben-Moshe 2014.

⁴⁴ Herman Wallace was an African-American prisoner who served the longest sentence in solitary confinement in the history of incarceration in the United States. See further Himada 2013.

⁴⁵ In 2013, Wallace was diagnosed with cancer. After living in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell for 43 years, Wallace was exonerated just three days prior to his death.

apartheid wall in Palestine, I want to suggest here that the checkpoint is precisely the structure that renders architectural violence imperceptible. Eyal Weizman, in his study of Israel's architecture of occupation, reveals the intricacies of decision-taking and construction that hinder and abuse Palestinian bodies. In his seminal work, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, Weizman quotes Palestinian writer and activist Azmi Bishara: "The checkpoint takes all that man [and woman] has, all his [her] efforts, all his [her] time, all his [her] nerves...the checkpoint is the chaos and the order, it is within the law and outside it, operating by rationality and idiosyncrasy through both order and disorder" (qtd. in Weizman 2007, 148). At the checkpoint, Palestinians are literally caught between the matrix of metal bars and confines, in the non-space of orderly disorder.

In 2004, the checkpoints were regularized in an effort to "humanize" the passageway between Palestinian territories and Israeli borders. Turnstiles were introduced. This was a way to implement order at the congested line-ups at the checkpoints, and to organize the crowds of people waiting to pass through. In some checkpoints, two turnstiles were installed creating a small passageway between them. Only one person at a time is allowed to pass through. An electrical device manned by Israeli soldiers from a faraway bulletproof booth, tens of meters away from the crowd, operates the turnstiles. The soldiers' job is to press the button only once every few seconds. This means that Palestinians, who are being funneled through, get stuck in the mid-movement of the turnstiles, while they wait for the next turn.

The turnstile arms at these checkpoints were designed according to a different standard than the Israeli one that is used in such spaces as universities or hospitals. The turnstiles at checkpoints funneling in Palestinians were reduced to 55 cm in order to ensure that the arms of the turnstile presses against their bodies (Weizman 2007, 151). This was all under the guise of

security measures, as a preemptive strategy, in order to detect whether someone is carrying weapons. The shortened metal bars of the turnstiles squeeze the body against the metal. As one *Machsom Watch* member recalls, “People got stuck, parcels got crushed, dragged along and burst open on the ground. Heavier people got trapped in the narrow space, as were older women and mothers with small children” (qtd. in Weizman 2007, 151).

The violence of architecture, as is exemplified above in an explicit way—through the mechanization and composition of space as it conditions movement of bodies—is not always visible, or visceral. The reduction of the size of the arm of the turnstile creates the conditions for harmful effects, and with it arise experiences of humiliation and subordination. As was illustrated by the witness above, these are not just physically harmful, but strategically violent in the way that architectures constitute the relation that space has to a body. Here, architecture has the power to coerce bodies, humans and their belongings. Parcels get crushed that may have contained the weekly groceries for a family, or a gift for a lover’s birthday. Men, women, and children get trapped in-between the turnstile arms, further heightening the oppressive aspect of the checkpoint experience. While at first sight the architectural detail may seem minor or banal, in actuality it is the ensuing repetition that is cruel and abusive. Changing the size of the turnstile arm affects people’s lives, and how they experience the spatiality of a body-event. For Palestinians crossing at the checkpoints, trying to get home, to school, to a hospital, is already an arduous event, and in addition to this they know that this journey may also result in pain, discomfort, damage to personal property, which in turn, results in augmented forms of violence. Now, this does not only occur in regions under military occupation, where techniques of occupation are continually being developed. The point here is to acknowledge that architectural decisions can be seen as seemingly banal, having little effect. But in reality, the bodies of those

who are put in direct contact with the architecture structure are affected by it in various ways, often resulting in violence. Take Paris for example.

Theodore Dalrymple in “The Barbarians at the Gates of Paris” writes about the *cités*, the housing projects for predominantly non-white Parisians that congregate outside the city borders. Dalrymple points to very significant architectural decisions that provoked the on-going uprisings in the *banlieues*. The buildings—structure, frame, and material—are built to isolate who lives inside them from who lives outside them. The *cités* institute class and racial boundaries. He notes that architecturally, the housing projects sprang from the ideas of Le Corbusier, who advocated for the concrete, hard-edged building that would provide a “House at Moderate Rent” (HMR). These housing structures were built for immigrants in the 1950s in France during the industrial expansion when cheap labour was sought after. Dalrymple writes,

An apartment in this publicly owned housing is also known as a *logement*, a lodging, which aptly conveys the social status and degree of political influence of those expected to rent them. The *cités* are thus social marginalization made concrete: bureaucratically planned from their windows to their roofs, with no history of their own or organic connection to anything that previously existed on their sites, they convey the impression that, in the event of serious trouble, they could be cut off from the rest of the world by switching off the trains and by blockading with a tank or two the highways that pass through them, (usually with a concrete wall on either side), from the rest of France to the better parts of Paris. (2002, n.pag.)

The architecture of the *cités*, as dwelling and site, emerges as a concrete structure that constitutes and institutes forms of racial violence. The alienation and isolation has had a huge impact on the young population that resides there, the majority of whom are of North African decent. They are cut off from the main city's *arrondissements*, most are unemployed, and the reality of unemployment is dire as they are constantly under the threat of racial profiling mechanisms and surveillance systems. Having seen firsthand what the dwellings look like inside, Dalrymple recounts how all the furniture in the room was made out of concrete, including the bed and the wash basin, and they were all attached to the wall or floor. The room in the apartment of one such housing project, he remarks, resembled a prison cell. Dalrymple asks, "Why is everything made of concrete?"

Concrete does more than just provide an affordable and efficient material choice for architects. It does more than its implied *objectness*. Drawing on Massumi's notion of "occurrent art," I posit that concrete, as a material force, gives out "occurrent" affects. Meaning that the forces at play—between bodies, space, and time—expose the spatial and temporal dynamics of space beyond its physical scope. Architecture affects and is affected by movement. Concrete as a material force conditions how a space is felt and experienced. Dalrymple's question, "why is everything made of concrete?" engages the affective forces of building materials, as they activate in imperceptible ways how space is felt, how it is experienced as an architectural event—protruding, intruding, tuning-in on a body. As Massumi writes, "Neither potential nor activity is object-like. They are more energetic than object-like (provided that no presuppositions are made as to the physicality of 'energy' or the modes of causality involved in the energizing of events). For the basic category they suggest is just that: occurrence" (2011, 6). The occurrent force of

concrete is about exposure—the forces at play condition an event’s happening. As a material force, concrete exposes the conditions of a space—how it is felt and experienced.

The effects of architectural design of confinement accentuate their material’s force. The space of the housing project is already pre-disposed to certain socio-political conditions that create an atmosphere of discomfort, alienation, and violence. Structures of incarceration are designed to produce a space that extends beyond its means of control and management—to confine an already targeted population in a specific place means that the state programs and executes racial violence, and this in turn becomes a mechanism for spatial violence. The spatiality of violence is literally concretized. In this light, concrete is both a major and minor material force in its affective powers, its ability to transform a space, its spatial effects, manifest in the becoming of an event. A minor material emerges from the architectural event as an occurrent force co-composing with what is imminently present, which in the case of the cité resulted in an unprecedented uprising.⁴⁶

Massumi writes, referring to activist philosophy, “It concerns coincident differences in manner of activity between which things happen. The coming-together of the differences *as such*—with no equalization of erasure of their differential—constitutes a formative force. It is this force that provides the impulse that the coming experience takes into its occurrence and appropriates as its own tendency” (2011, 5). Drawing on Massumi’s concept of activist philosophy, I posit that the spatiality of violence follows this line of thought: the coming-together of habituated space, the material form in which this space is constructed, and the lived experience of bodies (the becoming-body of event) in relation to space, come to “constitute a formative force.” The activist philosophy of the spatiality of violence produces lines and dimensions that encompass “intension” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 245). This means that

⁴⁶ For a sustained conversation on the recent uprisings in the *banlieu* of Paris see further Will Orr 2014.

spatiality of violence informs the experience of space and is informed by the construction of space. Take for example the use of concrete to build the banlieu. The spatiality of violence in that context produces an environment that is consistently in transformation because it binds the relation between how space is experienced, how experience becomes spatial, and how that orients movement and thought. Violence here is not only something that is enacted upon the body, but is felt bodily in result of spatiality—its construction, manipulation, and formation. The spatiality of violence is more than the violent act that ensues; it is environmental, felt as the relation between the body and what comes to constitute its surround. The spatiality of violence is the coming-together of material-space-body co-composing an event; this event is occurrent, precise but anexact.⁴⁷ That is its intention.

The architecture of segregation, confinement and control is constructed, and the architecture of politics is revealed. Tschumi writes, “Architecture and events constantly transgress each other’s rules, whether explicitly or implicitly. These rules, these organized compositions, may be questioned, but they always remain points of reference. A building is a point of reference for the activities set to negate it. A theory of architecture is a theory of order threatened by the very use it permits. And vice versa” (2006, 132). The uprisings explicitly express how housing projects are deemed unlivable. There is mass resistance to the violence of their architecture. The mass uprisings have inspired films and music videos, and have gained a lot of media attention internationally; the resistance to this architecture—designed to preempt order—has taken hold of multiple communities. These housing projects have been subsidized by the state, in order to subdue, pacify, and keep out the population that the French state deems

⁴⁷ Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “anexact” Erin Manning writes on the “anexact yet rigorous” as a proposition: “To find movement is to work with preacceleration. This just-before is also a way to think duration rather than succumbing to linear time. It is not that I will know the movement in a potential future, but that I will invent the now in a time-slip I will come to know as the just-before. This just-before will never be about an individual movement, but about the relation between preacceleration and motion, between an infinity of intervals apprehended in the not-yet of our quantitative displacement” (2009, 20).

undesirable on the streets of Paris. This is no longer the case. While residents of these *banlieues* are kept out of Paris, the younger population, the ones who are born in Paris, and have witnessed and experienced the hardships brought on by the state against their grandparents, parents and communities, are not keeping quiet. They are mobilized and organized, and have been consistently active. The resisters, the fighters, the protesters challenge the spatiality of violence at hand, shed light on its effects. As Dalrymple writes, “There are burned-out and eviscerated carcasses of cars everywhere. Fire is now fashionable in the *cités*: in Les Tarterets, residents had torched and looted every store—with the exceptions of one government-subsidized supermarket and a pharmacy. The underground parking lot, charred and blackened by smoke like a vault in an urban hell, is permanently closed” (2002, n.pag.). The politics of the history of the socio-economic site, that is the *cités*, begin with the purpose of its development, and the cheapest, most cost-efficient way to build is by using concrete as the primary material.

Penal architecture is a structure that is delineated by the boundaries, confines, walls, and borders it draws, reveals, and that emerges on the ground, that conditions bodies in movement. The lived experience of the inhabitant, what culminates in the daily interaction with these architectural façades reveals the design’s biopolitical effects. The mechanisms of brutality, or “spatial torture” that condition how a space is lived, perceived, experienced, or felt constitute the becoming-event of architecture. In effect, they determine how life ought to be lived, so that what is at stake is life itself. The becoming-event of architecture makes visible the consolidating effect of the political as what manifests in the present context. The present reveals itself as a spatiality of violence; it is felt as an immediate sensation—it is felt as a material force that is shrinking or expanding our sense of what is possible.

On Violence: A Contested Term

The connection between architecture and violence is thought of here as a consolidating force that conditions forms of life. The effects of violence manifest in lived experience. The relation between architecture and violence reveals the mechanisms of the political at work, as it makes itself visible through the biopolitical procedures of management, control, segregation and confinement. The affect of architectural practice is rendered as the spatiality of the body-event: the conditions of violence are made palpable; they break open the present, and that is where a “boldness [is] lying idle and hankering for danger” (Genet 2004a, 8).

In Jean Genet’s essay “Violence and Brutality,” he writes, “All the spontaneous violence of life that is carried further by the violence of revolutionaries will be just enough to thwart organized brutality” (2004b, 172). Drawing inspiration from this quote, the following section will establish a series of thoughts on violence, and how this concept has developed in the work of Genet, Walter Benjamin and Malcolm X. I chose to focus on their respective texts because they make specific distinctions between violence as a revolutionary act in thought and practice, and that of state-sanctioned violence, or what Genet terms brutality. Furthermore, their work inspired me to make links between violence and the present (as a space-time event), which tells us something about what it means to think of the present as a force of eruption that constitutes new forms of “life-living”—what erupts into spontaneous life—rather than as a constituent of linear time.

The present is when our own potential reveals itself to us, where we hold the present open to attention and unpredicted exchange (Berlant 2011, 196). In this section, the concept of activist passion will stand in for violence. As pedagogy in the middle, activist passion enhances our power to act that is initiated by the presentness of *something happening*. Perhaps violence as

a term is vague, at times general, and insufficient when it comes to thinking about what inspires new life forces to emerge as they spontaneously erupt in the face of brutality. Violence is too polemical a term, at times too limited. I want to suggest that activist passion as a term that stands in for the creativity, the cut, the opening-out of violence, takes on a more Spinozist approach or tone, which is inspired by the concept of joy—the power to affect and be affected—and which I feel is closely aligned with the concept of violence that Genet, Benjamin and Malcolm X mobilize in order to affirm a position that is revolutionary in thought and action.⁴⁸

From Spatiality of Violence to Activist Passion

A few years ago, I happened upon a rare audio recording while conducting research on Malcolm X and The Black Panther Party. It was a live recording of a debate between James Baldwin and Malcolm X that was broadcast on KPFK Pacifica radio in 1964. They were discussing the various issues plaguing the civil rights movement at the time, and the divisions occurring within it between the Nation of Islam and the followers of Martin Luther King Jr. What struck me while listening to the debate is the way in which both Baldwin and Malcolm X opened up the debate structure in order to have a nuanced discussion on their respective positions. A forum of exchange between the two prominent men ensued. They discussed the misunderstood interpretation of the politics of violence that the Nation of Islam preached, and its relation to the politics of non-violence and civil disobedience that the Civil Rights Movement largely supported. This historic recording emphasized the affinities between each faction, and each opposition, as they presented their own concerns and reflections on the sit-in tactics, on

⁴⁸ In alliance with this thought, the Montreal-based collective *Épopée*'s approach to the question of violence is open to the vitality of an immediate present. As they explain, "Violence is the horizon of degradation of politics into police. Some people are just not able to acknowledge the magnitude of this reduction. They are anesthetized by the domestic or economic regime of governance and its fetishization of consensus (Himada 2013b, 58). For a more sustained discussion on violence, militancy and the image by way of filming the 2012 Québec Student Strike, see further Himada, *Épopée*.

self-defense as a mode of resistance, and the fight to legislate integration. I was particularly struck by Baldwin's response to Malcolm X's opposition to the various methods employed by the followers of Martin Luther King Jr.—particularly the movement's emphasis on non-violence, and the motivation to keep peace during sit-ins. Malcolm X deemed these non-violent responses and tactics as self-repressive and ineffective. Baldwin, in turn, discussed their significance to transforming the present political structure. He explains that non-violent tactics and the tactics employed by the Nation of Islam simultaneously function to re-adjust the scaffolding of the political, as they—from opposing sides and through different mechanisms—work to reveal the conditions on the ground that came to be because of a racist and classist state brutality. Baldwin specifically notes the power of oration when it comes to dissemination and mobilization, using a language for the masses, one that affects and is effective. During the debate, Baldwin eloquently states,

[...]The reason this issue is important, the reason this whole ferment is of such importance, is not that I want anybody's cup of coffee, or even go to anybody's particular school; it is because the country cannot afford to have, as it has at this moment, millions of black boys and girls, in various ghettos all over the country, either perishing literally, or perishing with the kind of demoralization, bitterness and hatred, which can after all blow this country wide apart. The importance, in my mind, of the Muslim movement, is that, it is the first time in the history of this country that a [Black] audience, a [Black] labourer, a [Black] school boy, has heard his own condition described without anybody trying to flinch from it.

In a speech by Roy Wilkins, in which one is told, that in one way or another tomorrow will be better. I think this has a tremendous effect. This is one of the reasons why the Muslim speaker has so much power over his audience; it comes out of the failure of the white man. The republic of this country has lied about the [Black] situation for 100 years, and now what has happened is that the lies are no longer viable; [they] can no longer be accepted even when they're told. (n.pag.)

Baldwin puts emphasis on the effects of segregation on the younger generation of Black Americans and how detrimental they are to the country at large. Baldwin's concern lies in the effects of segregation, how segregation has done harm to the younger populations who are living through it now, and how that in turn will be what further tears this country apart: the widening schism between blacks and whites as it is reinforced through state sanctioned brutality, and how this will destroy forms of life. Baldwin is pointing out that the issue has a lot to do with the effects of segregation, not the cause. And he poignantly explains that this is made visible, palpable, and tangible to the Black American communities through the power of speech that the Black Muslim Movement employs to affect, not just the younger population, but all those who want to hear their story told in a direct way that inspires the immediacy of response and action. The passage outlined above functions in this narrative on violence as an example of how the present is felt, articulated, and opens up the question of violence and resistance in relation to the potential for new life formations to emerge. Baldwin and Malcolm X articulate the urgency of this movement toward a present that is life-making and one that is life-changing.

The experience of violence (segregation) is discussed, made explicit in the above passage, and is articulated through the felt urgency of the present, in the context of a rare recording of a debate in the history of the civil rights movement. Baldwin makes it clear that the experience of violence of segregation has become more visible in the form of language, and is made specific to the harsh realities and lived experiences of Black American life via the speeches of the Black Muslim Movement. The violence of the present is felt through language, through how it stirs urgency and movement. For example, in the speech *Twenty Million Black People in Prison*, Malcolm X, full of passion, explains his position to the community in Harlem,

So when I come here to speak to you, I am not coming in here speaking as a Baptist or a Methodist or a Democrat or a Republican or a Christian or a Jew—not even as an American. Because if I stand up here—if I could stand up here and speak to you as an American we wouldn't have anything to talk about. The problem would be solved. So we don't even profess to speak as an American. We are speaking as—I am speaking as a Black man. And I am letting you know how a Black man thinks, how a Black man feels, and how dissatisfied Black men should have been 400 years ago. So, and if I raise my voice you'll forgive me or excuse me, I am not doing it out of disrespect. I am speaking from my heart, and you get it exactly as the feeling brings it. (qtd in Perry 1990, 27)

Or, another example, from *What They Mean by Violence*:

You're out of your mind if you don't think that there's a racist element in the State Department. I am not saying that everybody in the State Department is a racist, but I am saying they've sure got some in there—a whole lot of them in there. This is the element that became worried about the changing Negro mood and the changing Negro behavior, especially if that mood and that behavior became one of what they call violence. By violence they only mean when a black man protects himself against the attacks of a white man. This is what they mean by violence. They don't mean what you mean. Because they don't even use the word violence until someone gives the impression that *you're* about to explode. When it comes time for a black man to explode they call it violence. But white people can be exploding against black people all day long, and it's never called violence. I even have some of you come to me and ask me, am I for violence? I'm the victim of violence, and you're the victim of violence. But you've been so victimized by it that you can't recognize it for what it is today. (Malcolm X 2002, 199)⁴⁹

The power of speech becomes a tool to build forms of solidarity, and Baldwin connects this force to presentness by clarifying what is at stake: the possibility for life-forming events to

⁴⁹ Malcolm X's speeches are extraordinary and more so when listened to on audio. Malcolm X was a powerful orator, and so much can be written on his work in relation to sound, the voice, language and power. But this goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. The point here is to provide examples of his artful oratory technique of "speak it plain," as he put it, in order to feel the revolutionary fervor of the tone, rhythm and form of his words that propel language to action, where at once the urgency of the present is felt and the future to come is activated.

emerge by way of integration. Here, the power of speech is not, strictly speaking, an example of a “how.” Rather, activist passion is activated by it. It creates time, conditioning its effect, enhancing the power *to* act. Malcolm X would like to divest the state of its power over the communities who are affected by its brutality. Baldwin cares about the state of the state—its power (*pouvoir*) to offer power (*puissance*), to instigate transformation on the ground by way of desegregation procedures. Baldwin, in this debate at least, seems to believe in the state’s capacity to implement, enforce and engage a new political position—that of integration and desegregation—via pressure from the protests, sit-ins and marches led by civil rights leaders. He and Malcolm X differ on the topic of tactics, political strategy, and what revolutionary struggle means when it comes to making change happen.

This debate reveals the ways in which Baldwin and Malcolm X articulate the stakes involved if the situation at hand—systemic racism against African-Americans in the United States—does not change. The premonition evoked by Baldwin’s statement, that the state can no longer afford to turn its back on racist and brutally violent segregationist practices, echoes now more than ever. In a way, Baldwin was right to hold the state accountable. But the current state merely changed administrations; its policies and practices changed so it could further afford to become what it is today—“Prison America.”⁵⁰ The current state sustains an imperceptible type of systemic racist procedure that further perpetuates segregation. The spatiality of violence that constituted the fabric of the South’s segregationist policies is now formed by the prison system. Jim Crow may have been revoked, but the racial caste system of America was re-designed to form a more punitive and segregationist institution: prisons. In this current context, racism constitutes the affective fabric of relations between people, environments, and movements. Racism, as its effects continue to reveal segregation and brutality in various ways, is now

⁵⁰ See further Himada, appendix III, “*Prison America*.”

migratory and diffuse. Prison America is the reality: “The New Jim Crow.”⁵¹ Baldwin may have had a premonition and therefore put out a warning, but it is Malcolm X who spoke clearly about the need for autonomy, which for him meant full divestment from the state apparatus, to create (and protect) non-state sanctioned spaces. Because it is from within the state apparatus, from within its mechanisms of capture, that violence, defined as self-defense, appears as event: when it challenges the position of the state, its de-regularized forms of power, its racism, its brutality and the effects of all that consolidates into the making of its space—what makes a space a place of confinement. As Genet wrote, in the preface for the book *Soledad Brothers* by George Jackson, a former prisoner and activist in San Quentin,

This racism is scattered, diffused throughout the whole of America, grim, underhanded, hypocritical, arrogant. There is one place where we might think it would cease, but on the contrary, it is in this place that it reaches its cruelest pitch, intensifying every second, preying upon body and soul; it is in this place that racism becomes a kind of concentration of racism: in the American prisons [...]. (Jackson 1994, 334)

This final chapter is not about prison, or the prison system in the US. It is about a position or stance that is passionately active and activist (in act) that emerges out of a steadfastness directed toward the unknown, toward space-times not yet delimited (concretized), this can produce modes of radical resistance that foreground the effects of racism, remind us that racism has a spatial composition. I want to say: the spatiality of violence is absolutely entwined with activist passion. Malcolm X knew this. He knew that what Black Americans were up against had to do with the composition of space, the spatiality of violence—through architecture a function

⁵¹ See further Michelle Alexander 2010.

constitutes a spatial event that culminates in the making of places, and of lives—it culminates in an effect on bodies, on how those bodies are defined, and how they are subjectified/identified. As explained above there is no separation between the effects that material forces have on bodies and their environment (material-space-body). What I want to think through activist passions is how spatiality is affective, has an effect, how spatial structures are becoming-movement in the best and worst possible ways. How does activist passion open up the potential of spatiality to redesign our worlds?

When I read Harney and Moten, I feel the force of activist passion in the way I want to define it here. Their concept of surround touches on the affective force of space in the making:

In Michael Parenti's classic anti-imperial analysis of Hollywood movies, he points to the 'upside down' way that the 'make-believe media' portrays colonial settlement. In films like *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) or *Shaka Zulu* (1987), the settler is portrayed as surrounded by 'natives,' inverting, in Parenti's view, the role of aggressor so that colonialism is made to look like self-defense. Indeed, aggression and self-defense are reversed in these movies, but the image of a surrounded fort is not false. Instead, the false image is what emerges when a critique of militarised life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it. The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath – before and before – enclosure. The surround antagonizes the laager in its midst while disturbing that facts on the ground with some outlaw planning. (2013, 17)

For Harney and Moten, the surround “is what lives below and around the forts, the police stations, the patrolled highways and prison towers” (2013, 17). The surround creates the conditions for mechanisms of self-defense to accrue. The spatiality of violence is endemic to our worlds, but is counter-activated by the surround (precisely because activist passion does not deny its existence). Activist passion is the power to act (against the self, from the perspective of what conditions a becoming-body in movement)—that is to dispel the power of being enacted upon, to break its spell. Activist passion mobilizes the spontaneity of the presentness, as presence; breaks something open, sets into motion a movement that has been dwelling on the edge of disquiet. Activist passion that erupts in the event considers Malcolm X’s concept of self-defense not as a return to the individual or the personal, but as a mode of collectivizing action that is transindividual; it activates an urgency that calls forth collaboration—inciting change in posture, position and thought through conquest. According to Deleuze, joy has to do with the pleasure in conquest, “but the conquest does not consist of enslaving people; conquest is, for example, for a painter to conquer color...when one conquers a power of action.”⁵² Joy is the realization of the power of action; activist passion is the power to enact mechanisms of collectivized defense, of the event’s capacity for self-actualization—as in the power to act, to conquer a power of action that extends to include mechanisms of self-defense. Activist passion draws its force from this line of thought: enhancing the power to act as a mode of collectivized defense, the power to affect and be affected opens experience to transversal effects. Activist passion amplifies the surround that protects from the spatiality of violence, from the effect of capitalist capture. Mechanisms of collectivized defense enhances the power of the spatiality of the surround so

⁵² This is quoted from the DVD set of *Gilles Deleuze From A To Z* that Semiotext(e) released in 2012. In this series Deleuze is interviewed by Clair Parnet who asks him to respond to a concept that starts with each letter of the alphabet. For “J” Parnet asked Deleuze to talk about “joy,” and that is where he refers to joy as conquest.

what reverberates is the cry of resistance that bellows from around, from below, and from the middle—the sound of the surround resounds in the echo of “another world is possible.”

Activist Passion as Collectivized Defense: Walter Benjamin and Jean Genet

What is common between Benjamin, Genet, and Malcolm X’s writings on violence is how they invert its meaning so that it stands against that violence that is done onto others by the state apparatus—the forts, military, patrol highways, police, detention, security, prisons etc. Here, activist passion stands in for their term, violence that is used to counter state-sanctioned violence. But first, I would like to pay homage to their work that has inspired how activist passion is used in this chapter.

Benjamin’s violence is justice without law: “the existence of violence outside the law as pure immediate violence” (1978, 300). Genet’s violence is that “uninterrupted dynamic that is life itself (2004a, 172): the constitution of forms-of-life. Malcolm X talks about violence in the context of self-defense, as an inherent right, but not simply in defense of a position, but in defense of the right to divest of any form of state brutality. He inverts the given distinctions between violence and non-violence that underlie thought’s capacity to moor one in an unwitting moral affiliation. As he says: “Revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way” (n.pag.). For Malcolm X, if the conditions call for it—as they did for Black Americans at the time when his speeches were most influential, then the use of arms as the means for self-defense is necessary.⁵³ This is not simply in defense of one’s own body or community but in defense of an autonomous Black American life divested of white American society. Similarly, Benjamin wrote of violence

⁵³ The Black Panthers extended on Malcolm X’s “by any means necessary” strategy, by basing their movement on the right to self-defense, and the right to bear arms.

as the process by which total divestment from the state would take place—unalloyed violence that is law-destroying, an action without an assumed disposition. This violence is of a “pure means” that “is always subject to a condition” (Benjamin qtd in Agamben 2005, 61). Benjamin and Genet seem to posit that violence is a force that is of life, in action has the potential to inspire revolutionary processes of production. And, while they never renounced physical violence as a necessary condition for determining action, it was never as vehement in articulation as it was for Malcolm X. However, Benjamin and Genet hint at the potential of its undertaking by challenging the moralizing response to its effects. In “Critique of Violence,” Benjamin distinguishes between two systems of evaluation, “criterion of judgment” and “guidelines for the actions of persons or communities,” in order to re-define the application of moral attributes. He suggests that moral attributes are not pre-given and applied, but are created and negotiated, according to each case and to the specific event. He explains,

Those who base a condemnation of all violent killing of one person by another on the commandment⁵⁴ are therefore mistaken. It exists not as criterion of judgment, but as a guideline for the actions of persons or communities who have to wrestle with it in solitude and, in exceptional cases, to take on themselves the responsibility of ignoring it. Thus it was understood by Judaism, which expressly rejected the condemnation of killing in self-defense. (1978, 298)

Genet’s reading of violence in relation to the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany takes on a similar outlook. When he defends the RAF’s use of violence against state brutality he persists in making a strong distinction between what violence is and how brutality manifests. In

⁵⁴ Benjamin is referring to the “Thou shalt not kill” commandment. “This commandment” he writes “precedes the deed, just as God was ‘preventing’ the deed” (1978, 298).

“Violence and Brutality,” he puts emphasis on the relationship between violence and life as one that is of emergence and persistence. He writes:

If we reflect on any vital phenomena, even in its narrowest, biological sense, we understand that violence and life are virtually synonymous [...] the brutality of a volcanic eruption of a storm, or in a more everyday form, that of an animal, calls for no judgment. The violence of a bud bursting forth—against all expectation and against every impediment—always moves us. (2004a, 171–72)

Genet puts into effect the force of violence as one that is of “life-living.” Violence, for the RAF, is necessary if life is to persist. It is necessary if these processes are to will their form. Violence is what is consistently at work and what is negotiable—intangible as much as it is tangible, perceptible as much as it is imperceptible—depending on the conditions. For Genet, “that violence that will bring an end to brutality” is of its own accord, at whatever moment it needs to emerge, and in whatever form.⁵⁵

The concept of violence, for Benjamin, Genet and Malcolm X puts life at stake—life that is not moored in position that is in affinity with the foundation of law—activating new forms-of-life that break through state structures in order intensify the movement of the surround. The concept of violence is relevant to the radical politics at issue here. Through their different modes of articulation when it comes to the concept of violence, a new political mode of inquiry arises,

⁵⁵ Genet was also careful to add that this type of violence can turn to brutality. He writes, “[...] never, in all that we know of them, have the members of the RAF allowed their violence to become pure brutality, for they know that they would immediately be transformed into the enemy they are fighting” (173). Genet is very attentive to the RAF as a group, who even though had and were still engaging in numerous acts of violence that were deemed “terrorist,” continued to proceed with their operations in a way that never let their violence turn to brutality. This means that state brutality, which halts or suppresses the act of life, is violent in ways unmatched to that of the RAF. The state is of a brutal force that must be stopped and the RAF were justified to use whatever methods available to them as a means to disrupt and challenge this brutality, by any means necessary. Their violence was used to force into position the priority of life over death, brutality, poverty, hunger, and fascist-capitalist manifestation.

whereby the usurpation of the effects of activist actions by the state is taken into custody by legalized forms of conduct. I want to be attentive to how the politics of security manifest in a time that is of the future anterior, the *will have been* of crime—it is preemptive politics, the *will have been* as the presentness of time. How will we “blast open the continuum of history” when we are always already in the future anterior of time, the “what will have been a criminal act?” How will the violence of the activist passion, the violence that puts life at stake, take form in the context of preemptive politics? What is at stake in such a discussion of violence, in defense of it, that is not reduced merely to physical destruction, but that implies a forceful initiation of active thought, activist passion, of self-defense?⁵⁶ How do we take back thought so that it is not appropriated into the highly distractive debate of what comes to be qualified as violent action, and that positions some in defense of nonviolent action?

Benjamin’s violence-without-law engages Genet’s concept of violence that is the “uninterrupted dynamic of life itself.” This position corresponds to Malcolm X’s articulation of violence as an affective mode of self-defense. As a mode of composition, the spatiality of violence conditions the emergence of forms of life. Spatiality of violence is immanent to the experience of the surround; it puts into effect thought’s active potential. To activate modes of self-defense means to refuse to be subjectified, identified, to refuse the predetermined position that registers one a potential criminal, an outlaw, a radical. This is a form of protection that divests from a political formulation. Violence creates time—as in presentness is felt, activating urgency. We always already have the potential to activate a violence that disrupts the latency of the wait, and that will depose the progression of time in order to let life live. Violence is “what has been taken from us” (Tiqqun 2010, 34). Violence, in its productive sense, creates new forms

⁵⁶ Forms of life for Tiqqun imply a taste or an inclination that a body tends toward. “This taste” they write, “this clinamen, can either be warded off or embraced. To take on a form-of-life is not simply to know a penchant: it means to *think* it. I call *thought* that which converts form-of-life into a *force*, into a sensible effectivity” (20).

of collectivity by engaging autonomous practices of protection: what inspired the cry in Seattle, that event also conditioned forms of collectivized defense, i.e. the linking of arms that make a barrier against the police line, in unison they cry out: “another world is possible.” Violence ruptures the latent period that positions us in waiting for future condemnation. It is here in the now of its ascendance: a “civil war” that is already at work on the ground. As Tiqqun write, “Civil war simply means the world is practice, and life in its smallest details, heroic” (181). And Malcolm X reminds his audience, “You don't know what a revolution is. If you did, you wouldn't use that word” (2010a, n.pag.). The process of production of activist passion—that is, of activating mechanisms of defense—incites a fervor for a revolution-to-come that is already here, that is of us, that makes felt an urgent eruption of life. It transforms position, and shifts action and perception as the surround is amplified, and the fleeting *nowness* of the present is felt as an active propagation.

Law-Making Violence

For Benjamin, it is crucial to think of law-making endeavors as that which puts into crisis the present: “The critique of violence is the philosophy of its history, the philosophy of this history, because only the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating, and decisive approach to its temporal data” (1978, 299–300). The irreducible relationship between violence and law determines the future anterior of preemptive politics that usurps the momentum of present action into legalized procedure. In opposition to this notion of linear time, history ought to be used as an interrogative tool that never lets us forget the process by which law sanctions violence. Lawmaking violence is “that of inauguration, of the law’s original setting-into-force [...] it is the violence that *will have been* just” (Abbott 2008, 83). Law-preserving

violence, writes Benjamin, “is a threatening violence” (285) because it is “a violence crowned by fate,” suspending the mythical origin of law. And by negating its mythical founding law reaffirms itself by exercising violence over both life and death, in a continuous lawmaking pursuit where violence “finds legitimation in a not-yet-realized legal order” (Abbott 2008, 82). Benjamin writes,

For if violence, violence crowned by fate, is the origin of law, then it may be readily supposed that where the highest violence, that over life and death, occurs in the legal system, the origins of law jut manifestly and fearsomely into existence [...]. For in the exercise of violence over life and death more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself. (1978, 286)

This is exemplified well in Benjamin’s passage on police conduct. As an autonomous faction they exercise legal violence as a means, which also decides the ends. They exercise the power to both posit and preserve the law. Benjamin writes, “The ignominy of such an authority which is felt by few simply because its ordinances suffice only seldom for the crudest acts but are therefore allowed to rampage all the more blindly in the most vulnerable areas and against thinkers from whom the state is not protected by law” (287). He continues, “[...] the police intervene ‘for security reasons’ in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists, when they are not merely, without the slightest relation to legal ends, accompanying the citizen as a brutal encumbrance through a life regulated by ordinances or simply supervising him” (287).

Police power is formless,⁵⁷ “[a] nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states” (Benjamin 1978, 287), creating a process of surveying where law’s

⁵⁷ For an in-depth historical investigation of the police see Foucault’s lectures on “29 March 1978” and “5 April 1978” in *Security, Territory, Population*. He writes, “[...] with simple negative functions, there will be the

violence is at its most “degenerative.” The police force is able to exercise this violence by consistently sustaining the legal ends of the state at the same time that “they can decide these ends within wide limits” in the right of decree.⁵⁸ For Benjamin, this marks a significant turn in modern law. This is key to understanding Benjamin’s concept of pure violence that does not simply oppose, disrupt, break or suspend law but disposes of it all together. How can this inform a position where the urgency to act, by putting the present into crisis, is actually rendered possible? How can mechanisms of self-defense divest themselves of the state apparatus?

The immediate disturbance and eruptive affect of the present is demonstrative of the pure violence that Benjamin attributes to justice without law. This is exemplified in the revolutionary potential of pure violence, which Benjamin describes as the effect of the general strike. In this example, he describes how the force of the strike does not take place “in readiness to resume work following external concessions and this or that modification to working conditions, but in the determinacy to resume only a wholly transformed work, no longer enforced by the state, an upheaval that this kind of strike not so much causes as consummates” (1978, 292). For Benjamin, the disruption implemented by the general strike is considered violence with pure means that leads to no end. Its effects are not yet determined. It is without legal precedent and does not form itself under the jurisdiction of what is ascribed by the legal faculties of the state. Its intension is to declare a suspension in the machination of the state apparatus. The general strike is total disruption that evades usurpation whose motive is to deflect the return to a

institution of police in the modern sense of the term, which will simply be the instrument by which one prevents the occurrence of disorder. Growth within order and all positive functions will be assured by a whole series of institutions, apparatuses, mechanisms, and so on, and then the elimination of disorder with the function of the police. As a result, the notion of police is entirely overturned, marginalized, and stakes on pure negative meaning familiar to us” (354).

⁵⁸ For Benjamin the only other violence that suspends the separation between lawmaking and law-preserving is in the death penalty, where “law reaffirms itself.” In the case of the police, “If the first is [lawmaking] is required to prove its worth in victory, the second [lawpreserving] is subject to the restriction that it may not set itself new ends. Police violence is emancipated from both conditions” (286).

“business as usual” state of affairs—justice without law. Power, as law, is no longer localizable.⁵⁹

Similarly, Genet’s work on the difference between violence and brutality stems from this very idea that power against state sanctioned violence is diffuse. Writing in 1977, in response to the trial against Red Army Faction members and in defense of their actions, he uses the concept of violence to mark a distinction between violence as the “uninterrupted dynamic that is life itself” and brutality that is a specific, localizable form of violence that is of the state apparatus. Genet writes, “The brutal gesture is one that halts and suppresses a free act” (2004a, 171). Violence, for Genet, is a necessary and crucial qualifier for the RAF’s actions in order to mark the distinction between them and state brutality that is manifest in everyday circumstance. State brutality and the brutality of the middle-class create the conditions for violence to emerge. Genet writes, “It is a matter of rectifying an everyday judgment and of not allowing the powers that be to make use of words as they please, as they have done and still do in relation to the word brutality, which here, in France, they replace with ‘unfortunate mistakes’ or ‘setbacks’” (2004a, 172). Genet’s focus on this prevalent distinction marks the “taking back” of the term violence at a time when violence against the state was ultimately condoned by the RAF, and other militant movements in Europe, North America and elsewhere, as implementing mechanisms for self-defense—violence here is marked by the conditions that allow for new forms of life to emerge against the apparatus of capture as it perpetuates state sanctioned violence.

⁵⁹ See further Deleuze, in *Foucault*: “[...] The origin of the person does not lie in the ‘juridico-political structure of a society’; it is wrong to make it depend on the evolution of law, even penal law. In so far as it administers punishment, prison also possesses a necessary autonomy and in turn reveals a ‘disciplinary supplement’ which goes beyond the machinery of State, even when used by it...Foucault’s functionalism throws up a new topology which no longer locates the origin of power in a privileged space, and no longer accept a limited localization [...] Here we can see that ‘local’ has two very different meanings: power is local because it is never global, but it is not local or localized because it is diffuse” (26).

Genet refused to comply with what was accorded to the meaning applied to the ensuing actions that positioned RAF as terrorists. A position that manifests in the state's logic of order: "What is still called order, but is really physical and spiritual exhaustion, comes into existence of its own accord when what is rightly called mediocrity is in the ascendant" (Genet 2003, 32). The logic of the order of the state manifests "when mediocrity ascends." RAF wanted to halt the ascendance of mediocrity as that which creates the conditions for state sanctioned violence, an exercise in pacification.

The state has a particular stake in language. In state language, terms often function preemptively to create bounded law-abiding communities. Action for protection is criminalized; action can be named terror. The challenge and potential of activist passion is that it can reclaim language. Self-defense can be more than a neoliberal justification for war; violence can be more than terror. Using language to revile terror, when it comes to "insurgency," the state criminalizes activist action. It preempts how action is to be perceived on the ground, and how it ought to be understood. A city block can become a battle zone. It is a crime to challenge the police/soldier. Here, language sanctions violence from the state perspective—when it comes to security concerns, law's violence is digestible, acceptable, and transferrable. This is why self-defense is troublesome for the state because it gets characterized as terror. This is why activist passion is a challenging term, because it gives power (*puissance*) or force to an action that has not taken place yet, but has potential to shake the state out of joint. Activist passion puts emphasis on the capacity to enhance our power *to act*, for the prospect of defense to take place. This is more threatening to the state when the action of defense is collectivized: for how else is language used, how else do concepts function in the act?

The RAF's violent actions were part of an infinite movement that does not cease but that persists in a becoming-war. A becoming-war that has "as its object not war but the drawing of a creative line of flight, the composition of a smooth space and of the movement of people in that space" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 422). As Genet writes, "The RAF was organized both with the hardness of a well-tightened bottle cap and with an impermeable structure, with a violent action that ceases neither in prison nor out, and that with great precision leads each of its members to the limits of death, to the approach of a death undergone while opposing—still violently—the brutalities of courtrooms and cells, and this even unto death itself" (2004a, 174). The RAF challenged forms of brutality that seek to apprehend, re-order, and reduce the effect of the violence of acts of life to its logic of (state) order. Brutality reinstates forms of life that remain in accordance with the law. We are in a position that is already always guilty. We will have been guilty. This is an accompanied disposition—a haunting. We have to prove that we are always at the ready, law-abiding citizens—peaceful compatriots, free of association. Guilt, as a sad passion—a power that is acted upon us—is a gesticulation of brutal affirmations where the law negotiates an order-word according to the logic of the state apparatus, one that is infused with brutality and is of brutal force: treason, terrorist, threat to security, violent. This sets the conditions for "[...] a despair that could not help but breed a liberating violence" (Genet 2004a, 173).

The violence of activist passion is the call for self-defense in the way I am defining it here as a defense of the event's capacity to create new forms of experience.⁶⁰ It is what calls for the body to constitute itself as autonomous by right: to act on the urgency of the present, to open up the possibility for forms of life to emerge. It is to stand up against the apparatus of capture

⁶⁰"Death is everyday, it is the continuous diminution of our presence that occurs when we no longer have the strength to abandon ourselves to our inclinations" (Tiqqun 2010, 187).

that pacifies that which is fundamental to life's work—the artfulness of life-living. To stand up against the mediocrity of statehood as it expresses itself in the citizen of Empire:⁶¹ abiding, obeying, and complying with the “*j'accuse*” of the logic of state order. The Osloization of thought: “Let's negotiate.” It becomes of desire: “We are peaceful protesters.”⁶² Activist passion is what renders life's limitless force active against these odds. Otherwise, pacify the impulse and adhere to controlled systems of application: the image of thought is what is often at work; it moors our thinking-practice in an offense position. The violence of activist passion—as it expresses itself in mechanisms of collectivized defense—is that point in which a thought never completes itself, the shock, that interrupts what is already in-form as image, the violence of a defense opposition. Action cannot be separated from thought. The force of action engages with the force of thought—the potential of a complete breakdown of position in order to manifest as new. We are not moored in a position. As practitioners, how we engage the concept of violence transforms this position in relation to what the conditions call for: “As with all the forms of wild abandon on which medieval knighthood was founded, violence was slowly domesticated, that is, isolated as such, deprived of its ritual form, rendered illogical, and in the end cut down through mockery, through ‘ridicule,’ through the shame of fear, and the fear of shame. Through the

⁶¹ Borrowed from Tiqqun, empire here is in reference to what they call the turning inside out of the liberal state. They write, “Unlike the modern state, which pretended to be an order of Law and of Institutions, Empire is the guarantor of a reticular proliferation of norms and apparatuses. Under normal circumstances, Empire is these apparatuses” (134). It is necessary for Empire to maintain “permanent confusion around enforced rules, rights, and the various authorities and their competencies. It is this confusion that enables Empire to deploy, when the times comes, *any means necessary*” (153). And it is important to consider here, that Empire “does not confront us like a subject, facing us, but like an *environment* that is hostile to us” (171).

⁶² Desire defined here is specifically in reference to Deleuze and Guattari's work: “Only microfascism provides an answer to the global question: Why does desire desire its own repression, how can it desire its own repression? The masses certainly do not passively submit to power; nor do they ‘want’ to be repressed, in a kind of masochistic hysteria; nor are they tricked by an ideological lure. Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination. Leftist organizations will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 215).

dissemination of this self-restraint, this *dread of getting carried away*, the State succeeded in creating the economic subject, in containing each being with its Self, that is, *within his body*, in *extracting bare life from each form-of-life*” (emphasis in original, Tiqqun 86). And much like the prisoner that Genet describes: “Locked in a vacuum, he eventually discovers in his body the sound of pulsating blood, the sound of his lungs, that is, the sound of his organism, and thus he comes to know that thought is produced by the body” (2004a 177).

Law’s violence conditions us to accept with great comfort and agility an acquired form of living-dead—a neutral position. As Tiqqun write, “This is our real death, and its chief cause is our lack of strength, the isolation that prevents us from trading blows with power, which forbids us from letting go of ourselves without the assurance we will have to pay for it” (2010, 187). Activist passion contests this neutrality. It allies us to Genet’s concept of violence, which is associated with the act of making a decision that may have consequences but that can never pre-determine its application. Violence is when the act frees us, becoming partisans. To act means to activate potential that informs and that further perpetuates forms of life. We must activate the inclinations that produce the “creative lines of flight.” We must take flight and flee by way of violent refusal, to refuse to accept what is given to be a communicative order. And in this regard, “the possibility of violence can never be discounted.” But always in relation to that which hinders on the edge of a future collaboration that is felt as the present’s presence: to activate activist passion is to activate the body’s potential in relation to its environment, to enhance a body’s transformative force so that the spatial politics of a place is shaken up, re-routed. As Deleuze writes,

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into

composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body (1988a, 257).

The violence of activist passion expresses itself as the right to collectivize defense, to amplify the surround and protect it, to infuse it with power (*puissance*) in order for the uninterrupted act of life to emerge—a necessary act that perpetuates the practice of “life-living.” Violence is a mode of composition, unbeknownst expression. As Genet writes, “Symbols refer to an action that has taken place, not to one that will take place, since every action that is accomplished (I am speaking of revolutionary actions) cannot make any serious use of already known examples. That is why all revolutionary acts have about them a freshness that is like the beginning of the world” (2004a, 37). The beginning of the world erupts from the middle as a cut.⁶³ As Foucault reminds us, “History becomes ‘effective’ to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself [...] It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (1984, 88). To act is to cut, to disrupt business as usual. Whether it is through the expression of a cry, or through a debate on a radio program, when something is made explicit through thought and action that makes visible the possibility of another world coming to existence, then something different happens, something appears, the power of dissent is made

⁶³Beginning from the middle in this context is drawn from Deleuze’s notion of “the pick-up.” He writes, “Pick-up is a stammering. It is only valid in opposition to Burroughs’s cut-up: there is no cutting and folding and turning down, but multiplications according to the growing dimensions. The pick-up or the double theft, the a-parallel evolution, does not happen between persons, it happens between ideas, each one being deterritorialized in the other, following a line or lines which are neither in one nor the other, and which carry off a ‘bloc’” (2007, 18).

real. It is a cut that re-arranges the spatiality of the political. The political is felt, experienced, and articulated differently; the political then hinges on the possibility of a revolution to come.

To Begin From The Middle: Malcolm X and James Baldwin

Genet writes:

[...] A symbolic gesture or set of gestures is idealistic in the sense that it satisfies those who make it or who adopt the symbol and prevents them from carrying out real acts that have an irreversible power...It is much better to carry out real acts on a seemingly small scale than to indulge in vain and theatrical manifestations. We should never forget this when we know that the Black Panther Party seeks to be armed, and armed with real weapons...To speak to its members of pacifism and nonviolence would be criminal. (2004a, 37)

What are real acts? If, for the Black Panther Party, it was to be armed in order to defend their communities against police violence, then what is it for us, for those of us who are in solidarity and in support of these real acts? How do we avoid symbolic gestures, or go beyond them, or problematize them, how do we differentiate between these gestures and a real act? In order to approach these question, I want to return to the debate in 1961, when Baldwin and Malcolm X discuss the sit-ins and the civil rights movement and the ensuing action taken by the different factions of the Black liberation movement that mark their position as either violent or nonviolent. Malcolm X challenges the nonviolent position of the civil rights activists as one of passive maneuvering. Baldwin, on the other hand, calls the sit-in action, and the anti-segregation

movement, necessary in order to interrupt state procedure. Malcolm X did not believe that integration would give Black people in America complete freedom, justice, or autonomy. The civil rights proposition of total integration, for Malcolm X, “nullified [the Black people’s] ability to stand up for themselves *for something that is theirs by right*” (n.pag.). Malcolm X was critical of integration as a goal in itself. Integration as a goal will not bring on total transformation of racist American society or bring total freedom for the Black American. For Malcolm X, this suspends the Black movement that waits, as he puts it, for “the white man to change their mind and to accept them as a human being” (n.pag.). They must, on the other hand, be willing to “lay down their life *tonight, or in the morning*, in order that we can have what is ours by right, tonight or in the morning” (n.pag.).

The immediate sense of urgency in action that Malcolm X expresses above is necessary to implement change, and to begin implementing transformative justice tactics. Malcolm X is adamant about total transformation, for immediate change to take place, and by any means necessary. For him, Black Americans need to work together to achieve full autonomous freedom, and this type of freedom cannot be sought after through integration. He refuses to accept this approach as that which would motivate a rigorous change in thought and application when it comes to the state apparatus:

We don’t call two students going to a school in Georgia de-segregation, nor do we call four Black children going to school in New Orleans integration, nor do we call a handful of Black students going to school in Little Rock integration. If every Black man in the state of Arkansas can’t go to any school he wants then it’s not integration. And if every Black child in the state of

Louisiana cannot go to any school that they're qualified for, in the morning, then it's not integration. And likewise in Georgia and any other state in America. It's no integration with us until the entire thing is laid out on the table not from a hundred years from now but in the morning and at this rate the NAACP core and the urban league is willing to accept the change of attitude in the white man's mind, we who are Muslims feel that we'll be sitting around here in America for another thousand years not waiting for civil rights, but to be granted the rights of a human being. (n.pag.)

Malcolm X renders the urgency of time active, the presentness of the now is felt; it is the call of defense that ushers in the crowd. The process of refusal will push for absolute change. Not in the context of how the political is already perceived—the right to civil participation within the law's jurisdiction. To condone violence in the way it is described above by Genet, Benjamin and Malcolm X challenges thought: violence as in by right, and if necessary to be used for self-defense. For Malcolm X it is necessary to take a position that is distinct from non-violent conformity. He disagrees with civil rights tactics that call for integration and participation (with the law) that is already of brutal force, to participate in the context of a society that already exists as such further perpetuates repressive regimes that confine and restrict movement and autonomy. Rather, Malcolm X argues for total transformation of society as a whole, for *what is there* by right. He advocates for the total removal from what is already situated as political affirmation: non-violence as key to struggle. The politics of Malcolm X maintains an unwavering relation to violence as immediacy; violence calls forth and urgency that acts on the present's potential. He uses the history of struggle of Black people to actively engage with a politics of urgency, in order

to pay homage to history in the process, to remind us of it, and to remind us of a future that is still to come. For Malcolm X, history is what is of the present—what is in operation must change in order for the people to change—that has potential to eliminate mechanisms of brutality that confine the body to spatial coloniality:

As long as the white man sent you to Korea, you bled. He sent you to Germany, you bled. He sent you to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, you bled. You bleed for white people, but when it comes to seeing your own churches being bombed and little black girls murdered, you haven't got any blood. You bleed when the white man says bleed; you bite when the white man says bite; and you bark when the white man says bark. I hate to say this about us, but it's true. How are you going to be nonviolent in Mississippi, as violent as you were in Korea? (“Oxford Union Debate” n.pag.)

Malcolm X’s politics always begin with the refusal to accept, on any grounds, attribution that connects Black struggles with white struggles in terms of how rights are to be attained: never in relation to, but in *total divestment from* procedures that strive for “equality.” The act of refusing to acknowledge his former name on a Chicago NBC talk show, “City Desk,” is very telling of this politics. Malcolm X sits at one end of a curved, crescent-shaped wooden desk. The three white talk show hosts fill up the space next to him. One host by the name of O’Connor asks Malcolm X, “what is your real name?” Malcolm X responds, “My name is Malcolm X.” Another talk show host, Hurlbut asks, “Is that your legal name?” Malcolm X says, “As far as I am concerned it is my legal name.” O’Connor persists, “Have you been to court to change it?” Malcolm X, calmly replies, “I didn’t have to go to court to be called Murphy, or Jones, or Smith-

excuse me for brandishing you this way – “ O’Connor says, “It’s alright.” Malcolm X continues, “If a Chinese person were to say his name is Patrick Murphy, you’ll look at him like he’s insane because Murphy is an Irish name, a European name, or the name that has a Caucasian or white background. The Chinese is a yellow man, and he has nothing to do with the name Murphy. And if it doesn’t look proper to a person who is yellow, or Chinese to be walking around named Murphy or Jones, or Johnston, I think it would be just as improper for a Black person, or the so-called ‘negro’ in this country...The same slave master who owned us put his last name on us to denote that we were his property. So when you see a ‘negro’ today whose name is Johnston, if you go back in his history you’ll find out that his grandfather or his fore fathers was owned by a white man named Johnston.” O’Connor interrupts Malcolm X and persists in his interrogation: “I get the point but do you mind telling me what your father’s last name was?” Malcolm X continues, “My father didn’t know his last name. My father got his last name from his father, and his father got his name from his father who got it from the slave master. The real names of our people were destroyed during slavery.” O’Connor continues, “At any point, in the genealogy of your family did you have to use the last name and if so what was it?” Malcolm X replies, “[t]he last name of my forefathers was taken from them when they were brought to America and made slaves, and then the name of the slave master was given, which we refuse, we reject that name today-” O’Connor interrupts once again, “You mean you won’t even tell me what your father’s supposed last name was, or gifted last name was?” Malcolm X, with a smile, replies, “I don’t acknowledge it whatsoever.” The act of refusal—to refuse, not only a name, but to refuse the acknowledgement of that name on a talk show during a public television broadcast—is not only about forming a new political affirmation. This segment also reveals the intricacies of a micro-fascism at play—first, the insistence on the part of the talk show host to have Malcolm X reveal

his former name is disparaging, and dismissive of Malcolm's wishes. The host undermines Malcolm X by insisting that he give up his former name, in this way he does not acknowledge "Malcolm X" as an official name, which is demeaning and derisive. Second, once Malcolm X explains why he will not acknowledge the slave owner's name because it signifies the making of Black bodies into property, the host persists, even at some points interrupting Malcolm X as he is explaining to him his reasons, which is disrespectful, and a sign that he refuses to listen to the story being told, he refuses to acknowledge Malcolm X's un-naming, refuses to acknowledge how agency is activated in the act of re-naming. The persistence on the part of the host—to have Malcolm X acknowledge a name that he refuses to give, to make visible—is emblematic of a brutality that lives between the exchange that appears in words, that makes visible the relations of power at play, not just between Malcolm X and a prejudice white TV talk show host, but in how the history of slavery is undermined, ignored, or made invisible when that host decides not to listen, to dismiss the story told so eloquently by Malcolm X. Malcolm X's smile as he says, "I don't acknowledge it whatsoever" speaks to a logics of refusal, to refuse to be subjugated not just by name, but by the TV host's insistence that the name exists. To refuse to administer to the power that is clearly at play in this discussion Malcolm X continues to challenge this interrogation until he gets the last word. Malcolm X is steadfast and strong in his refusal to comply, therefore the act of refusal becomes an act of resistance.

In this example, the act of refusal activates activist passion. To refuse to be subjected, or subjugated by name, is to remove oneself from the coercive reprimand of language that integrates and implicates the subject-in-form. But language is also used as a mechanism to disrupt that capture, to question the authority of signification. As in the case of the word "extremism" when it is used to qualify acts of self-defense: "Any time, any one is enslaved or in

any way deprived of his liberty as a human being, as far as I am concerned he is justified to resort to whatever methods necessary to bring about his liberty again. But usually when people think of extremism they think of it as something relative, related to someone they know, or something that they've heard of. They don't look at extremism by itself, or all alone, they apply it to something" (n.pag.). Malcolm X's activist passion is connected to his power to reign in language, to harness its potential, to fight back with words by building on affect to effect—to "speak it plain" is affective; it is a real act. It translates life's force—the passion in activist passion—into a work of art, a work of resistance that communicates to the people the power they embody, the force *they* already possess. Malcolm X's oratory method of speak it plain inspired people to mobilize, to organize, to acknowledge their own steadfast power, to acknowledge the ability to stand up for their communities, to build autonomy against the racist state apparatus, and to do it by any means necessary.

A Return: Language in the Act

On reading Malcolm X's speeches, on hearing them, I can see that language is not only used as a communicative apparatus, but as a tactic that puts forth the articulation of the impulse present in the act, to stand up against the brutalities of the state, in whatever form that may take. Language (and in extension thought) and action are interconnected modes of expression that inspire the formation of radical dissent, at whatever scale. The aim is to take back what has been dismissed by the state apparatus as violence by way of language: "[...] thought as such begins to exhibit snarls, squeals, stammers; it talks in tongues and screams, which leads it to create, or to try to" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 55). Language can be used to disrupt the normalization of pacification. After all, the state apparatus is war-with-law, and violence—as discussed above—is

connected to the surround that dispels it: dissent by way of putting into effect the historical cut that helps spin articulation into a different dimension of (un)thought. The violence of activist passion initiates modes of dissent that consolidate in new enunciations of collective solidarity: “what violence of an infinite movement that, at the same time, takes from us our power to say ‘I’” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 55)?

The violence of activist passion—that is collectivized defense—as a mode of expression is how language is able to communicate in an immediate effect the urgency of the present, what is felt as presentness. This is a moment in articulation that does not speak back to power but against forms of brutality using language as method of refusal, to refuse the position given—the apparatus of capture aims to pacify thought. To end with an example, I draw from James Baldwin. His use of the word “nigger” in this instance activates language’s potential in the act; it is revealing of the brutality inherent in a word, and the violence that is activated in response to that brutality. “Nigger” is thrown back, given back, and simultaneously re-claimed as a tool that will give thought its shock and the act its violence:

Now here in this country you’ve got something called a nigger [...] You invented it, so it has to be something you were afraid of, and you invested me with it. I’ve always known that I am not a nigger. But if I am not the nigger, and if it’s true that your invention reveals you, then who is the nigger? [...] You still think, I gather, that the nigger is necessary. Well it’s unnecessary to me, so he must be necessary to you. I give you your problem back. You’re the nigger baby. It isn’t me. (*Take This Hammer* n.pag.)

Epilogue

Never to Conclude: For The Undisciplined

This project is personal to me. I had a personal stake in the questions and concerns that appear in this work. A major issue that I wanted to investigate was how art, philosophy, and the political can connect in a way that could have a transformative effect on how I practice. I am an interdisciplinary scholar, activist and curator, this means that I not only work across different sites of production, but that I never think of these sites as distinct entities, or I just plainly do not believe in their own constructed rules and methodologies that bind thought's trajectory to a predetermined way of study. I am not an expert in each field, but I like to dwell momentarily, if these sites inspire me, I linger. Activist passion is a concept that I feel is useful in bridging the gap between theory, activism, and art. It gives the activation of passion a name, as it manifests in thought and practice. But not only that, I think activist passion is a concept that touches on a specific type of practice that produces new forms of knowledge by way of interdisciplinary exploration. This approach is not restricted to a field's concern or issue; activist passion is not a concept that is conditioned by the limit of the discipline, but by the limitation that discipline has on thought and practice. For me, activist passion inspires forms of outlaw practice, renegade thought that produce *undisciplined* work. Undisciplined because it is based on intuition (as a *modus operandi*) that establishes a curatorial approach to research and writing, whereby staging heterogeneous elements together creates randomness, where what is selected, what selects me, how they are placed and then analyzed, create their own argument rather than one I set out to make. This approach, this practice of activist passion, creates possibility, and feeling that something is possible amidst struggle might expand our threshold for joy, intensify passion, and activate autonomous (de-institutionalized) forms of power. In this way, this work is political—

because it diverges from what is expected—but it is also fundamentally intuitive (of the heart)—this work comes from a place of ideas, analysis, and formal experimentation that stem from lived experience. It is based on a hunch that in the end resulted in the production of both the curatorial programs I organize, and this writing. The hunch: when inspired something moves and I am moved by it. I am moved to ask: what does affect do for thought, for action? How does it create possibility for renewed vitality in experimentation, impulsive movement for thought, radical forms of organizing? To be moved by something that enhances the power to act, what then manifests in an act, what is born of action, what takes form, is the work of activist passion. It produces an inclination toward *that something* that implements a form of practice. This project dug deep into the pragmatics and politics of curation and writing. For me: they are forms of practice that emerged from activist passion, the care for the possible, and from the event that an act produced: *to begin from the middle*.

As part of this project, included in the appendix, are selected interviews and additional texts that I want to highlight here. Collaboration was key to the formation of this project. But not just in the sense of having “worked together” with others, but of having thought together, of having been engaged in free-form dialogue, and initiating an exchange that put emphasis on asking questions that allow us to express a “thoughtful antagonism” (Simpson n.pag.), or critical inquiry that put to task the “how” and “why” of work: why do we do what we do, how do we make that happen, why do we think it is important, and how does it create solidarity against the exploitation of suffering. The interview process helped me initiate conversations that began from sheer curiosity and interest in searching for diverse responses when it came to the inundated question of what art can do for politics, for activism, how can art be in solidarity with the people we love and with people we do not know. More specifically, I was after different interpretations

of approach to the question of how can we as artists, teachers, activists, organizers and scholars grapple with the contradictions that arise between practice and politics, art and activism. Here, I am aligned with what Dont Rhine (from the sound art collective, Ultra Red) articulated so clearly,

For me an experience of activism is the origin story, if you will, for Ultra Red and for this art collective, and a constant wrestling or constant contending with the demands and the contradictions between art and politics. We hear much frequently that the contradictions between art and politics is generally resolved in one of two ways: One has to do with a kind of philosophical notion of politics: a discussion of politics where there is no actual lived experience in the room. The other way that the contradiction between art and politics is resolved is when the artist is seen as a political protagonist, the one who delivers the analysis. One of the things that will be with me forever as a result of my work with Needle Exchange, before that Act Up (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power), was a coming to terms with what it means to actually hold into place very profound contradictory positions between “Silence=Death,” and as Paulo Freire once said, “silence as the condition for listening.” Not to resolve those contradictions but to inhabit them, to live with them and to see them as the birthplace of solidarity (Rhine n.pag.).

Rhine puts it right: why wrestle with how we can resolve the contradictions inherent in holding such divergent practices and positions between art and politics when we can inhabit them, as he expresses, and see them as the gateway to inventing new modes of practice, ones that aspire to creating new forms of solidarity. Activist passion as a concept in development is but one approach to this conundrum. The term was not yet alive in my academic parlance. I had not invented it yet, but it was surely gestating when I conducted one of my favourite interviews in March of 2011. I was inspired by my conversation with artist and activist, Jackie Sumell. Sumell had worked with Herman Wallace on a project called *The House That Herman Built* (2002-), which is composed of a touring exhibition, an educational campaign, and a feature length documentary that focus on the abolition of solitary confinement, and that brings attention to Wallace's four decades of imprisonment in isolation at the infamous Angola prison in Louisiana. The project began when Sumell wrote to Wallace and asked, "What kind of a house does a man who has lived in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?" Prior to this correspondence, Wallace and Sumell had been in contact for a few years, writing back and forth. Sumell had initially written to him after she heard a lecture about his situation that was presented by Robert King, a political prisoner who was imprisoned in solitary confinement at Angola, and had been released twenty-nine years later. Wallace was a political prisoner, a Black Panther Party member who had spent all of his time in prison in solitary confinement. I had asked Sumell how her activism and art practice collide, and she responded straightforwardly "they just do, without question."⁶⁴ She further explains, "I don't make very many distinctions in my life...there are so many different things that make it impossible to not be as active as I am. And so many things that make it impossible to not be as creative as I am" (Sumell qtd. in Himada 2012, 19).

⁶⁴ See further appendix 1 for an elaborate conversation on Sumell and Wallace's project, as well as Sumell's approach to both her activist work and her art practice.

Sumell's approach to life is indistinguishable from her approach to work. As in Rhine's words, she lives in the contradictions and "sees them as the birthplace of solidarity." The ways in which her art and activism constitute the political is in how her approach to art production and community organizing conditions her lived experience, and vice versa. This reminds me of Isabelle Stengers' term, "an ecology of practice," which, for me, sets up new modes of valuation where unlike capitalism invest in life as a source of power (Himada 2012, 19).

Working on Herman's House, in trying to get his dream home built, Sumell found herself settling in the 7th Ward in New Orleans (where Wallace is from). She is invested in the neighborhood, so much so that even her own home functions as an unofficial community space for the kids and youth who reside there. Spending time with youth in her neighborhood inspired a new outlook on her approach to life and work, which, for me, has affinities with Stengers' concept of "ecology of practice," where the concept of value, and how power is constituted are based on autonomous forms of survival against the exploitation of suffering. As Sumell expresses:

My intention is to create a sustainable, healthy way of life, and the kids were really the directional force in that decision-making process. I didn't become an artist because I wanted to be a famous artist. It's not a sustainable lifestyle in this community, and this community is more important to me than an art career. It doesn't mean that art is any less meaningful, it just means in today's economic climate there's not a chance in hell that I can survive as an artist and still maintain my commitment to this community, and to the kids in this neighborhood. I am completely fine with that. I

actually feel blessed that I found myself in the 7th Ward. The acceptance process here for me was expedited by the fact that I moved in two days before Hurricane Gustav, and had the experience of doing relief work after Katrina, so I was able to work with the community pretty quickly and I think it was simply like, “she’s alright.” I was careful about how I came into the neighborhood. I didn’t want a colonial attitude, telling people what to do, and why they should accept me. It was a process. I had to earn that welcome (Sumell qtd. in Himada 2012, 23).

Sumell’s activist passion resounds in how I hoped to approach this research and writing project on activist passion. That life as a work of art resounds in my intention to build an ecology of practice as one that emphasizes interdisciplinary practice and curatorial, intuitive methodologies that grapple with the tensions inherent between art and what constitutes the political. These tensions that exist and arise challenge the assumption that an effect is pre-determinable, perceptible or foreseeable. In this way, I agree with Rhine when he says, “the limits of representation-based politics are the limits of activism” (n.pag.). I hope that activist passion in some way illustrates the ways in which the political can appear in works of writing, but writing alongside and *with* encounters, with the material that inspired me to think, to organize, to curate, and *to write*. Activism, in this way is not limited to political gatherings, organizing or protests, but is invested in thought as potential—to generate practice. Activist passion for me is grounded in how thought can activate perception, and in turn action. This opens up the possibility for difference to enter exclusionary spaces—such as universities, art galleries, or community/activist organizations.

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Appendices

I:

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Living in a Place with No Prisons

Prison Abolition and the collaborative artwork of Jackie Sumell and Herman Wallace

NASRIN HIMADA

“Whether I live in that house or not, it makes no difference. It is the symbol of what this house is all about.”

—Herman Wallace

As a prison abolitionist, and as an interdisciplinary scholar, whose research focuses on the relation between art and activism, I was taken with Jackie Sumell’s and Herman Wallace’s project, *The House That Herman Built*, which is composed of a feature length documentary [1], a touring exhibition and an educational campaign. It immediately stood out because of its ability to overturn this image of the prison façade as something that cannot be surpassed. Through the re-imagining of the borders between inside and outside prison, Sumell’s and Wallace’s project has sparked an expansive visual landscape that calls on the reimagining of grassroots activism: one that is connected to local issues, as it reconnects to global ones. But that is not all. At the heart of this project is the rigorous development of a new economy of practice that sets up new modes of valuation that, unlike a capitalist one, invests in life as a source of power.

In March 2011, I visited New Orleans for the first time, presenting the work of Palestinian filmmaker Kamal Aljafari as part of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference (SCMS) [2]. Knowing I was going to be in New Orleans, I took this opportunity to meet with Sumell, who is based in New Orleans, to talk about her project with Wallace [3]. Meeting Sumell, talking to her about community organizing work, prison abolition, art and architecture, was transformative. *The House That Herman Built* can’t simply be read as political art. Rather, it is an example of how to confuse the purpose or opportunistic tone of the rhetorical question “How is art political?” A question, no doubt, that sounds gimmicky in some academic circles, and when interviewing Sumell it was hard for me not to go there myself. When asked how her activism and art practice collide, she responded by saying that they just do, without question: “I don’t make very many distinctions in my life... there are so many different things that make it impossible to not be as active as I am. And so many things that make it impossible to not be as creative as I am.”

In theorizing or writing about the relationship between art and politics, or how art constitutes the political, what moves me and what I find most radical is work that demands different kinds of questions or propositions, work that does not necessarily require an envisioned answer. *The House That Herman Built* is driven by a fervor to free Wallace from prison and, by extension, the project instigates a conversation around prison abolition activism [4]. Art, in this sense, is utilized as a pragmatic approach to organizing, not as an aesthetic representation of a political

situation. The art production and process of *The House That Herman Built* create platforms for mobilizing, and function as instigative forms of communication that ensure the continued efforts to mobilize against the prison industrial complex. Inspired by Sumell's and Wallace's appeal to challenge the ever-expanding prison industrial complex through art practice, I decided that I need to better articulate the significance of this relationship between art and politics as it emerges out of prison abolition organizing. In order to do so, I needed to, first, articulate, in a clear way, my own position on prison abolition.

Though I can't pinpoint when I became a prison abolitionist, I have always been angered by the criminal justice system and its antiquated procedures regarding incarceration and penal infrastructure. I am often left in disbelief when it is assumed that legalized penal procedures are the solution to managing, controlling, and reacting to what is deemed criminal behaviour and motives. Punishment in all form is abuse. But it's recent that I started to refer to myself as a prison abolitionist. As I wrote to one friend in an email months after I started to go inside prisons:

I've never fully identified with an ideological and political structure or belief. I've never been seduced in that regard. I've never said I am an anarchist, or a Marxist. I've never said anything like that before in my life. But I do say now, and I want to say, without a doubt, that I am a prison abolitionist. And I'll stand behind that because it's a crucial position to take at this time. [Bill c-110 was about to be passed and, as of March 2012, it did [5]]. I've often thought that this major aspect of our social context would have to change dramatically if society as a whole was going to shift into a different direction and into the one we can collectively imagine, whatever we keep fighting for, or thinking about. If we really want to live in a place that we feel would be better for all of us, then we would have to think of living in a place with no prisons, or thinking more concretely about decarceration and what that would look like.

I have often thought that if we're going to take seriously how we imagine a better world, as we organize and make our presence felt on the streets [6] prisons shouldn't be a part of the picture. I feel this strongly today, as I continue to see excessive police presence surround protests the world over, and as the effects of increased incarceration procedures—prompted by neoliberal policies—continue to criminalize people of colour and that criminalize poverty, are having detrimental impacts on marginalized communities.

Prison abolition activism is an extension of the scholarly work I did on the occupation of Palestine and the creative and radical responses to that via art and cinema. But I could feel that this interest was waning, and I was beginning to choose a different path to take, one that lead me closer to home. I shifted the focus of the site of my research-activism from Palestine to prison abolition because it felt less dampening; I chose to care about it and it connected to local issues from the place where I live. Mobilizing around the occupation of Palestine was something I felt I had to do. As a Palestinian, it hurt. Emotionally, the process of organizing, writing, thinking and reading about what has been going on in Palestine via the Israeli military occupation, felt exhausting. For one, it felt like I suffered from a kind of inherited trauma that was handed down to me from my courageous ancestors. Second, Palestine wasn't local enough for me. I've never been there, and I definitely don't plan on going there—until every Palestinian refugee has the right of return to their own lands. Furthermore, I don't want to interact with Israeli soldiers and

witness, firsthand, the hardships Palestinians face every day. Third, there is a kind of sensitivity associated with inherited trauma, and I started to feel too vulnerable. I reached my limit with my openness to dialogue. I didn't have it in me to be generous at times when I had to respond to ignorant and racist bigoted remarks about Palestine or Palestinians. I started to feel dampened by my posture that felt loud and defensive. I turned my research focus onto the relation between art and activism, in the context of prison abolition, as a way to feel more joyful about work. Not in the sense of joy as producing happiness or pleasure, but in the Spinozist sense—joy as the empowering of oneself through action, affected by the power of acting rather than feeling the power of being acted upon [7]. Sumell's and Wallace's project feels like that to me; it's made up of composite forces that are affectively contagious.

Sumell is building a house with Wallace, who along with Robert King and Albert Woodfox, comprise the *Angola 3* [8]. While King was released in 2001, Woodfox and Wallace remain imprisoned at Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP) in solitary confinement [9]. Upon his release, King set out to inform and educate the public about Wallace and Woodfox's situation. In order to help the release of his comrades, King would tour the US and give moving lectures on the deteriorating situation of Woodfox and Wallace in solitary confinement. Sumell attended one of these lectures: "King came to Stanford [University] one day and he spoke to about twelve people, and at the end of his lecture we were all stunned—how is this possible, this can't be real. And nobody said anything. We were all made speechless by this experience, and then I found enough courage to raise my hand and ask what can we do. He said, 'write my comrades.' And that's basically how it started. I started writing both Herman and Albert, and I still write to both Herman and Albert. But I asked Herman that question."

The question that Sumell is referring to initiated *The House That Herman Built*. "People always ask how come I chose Herman. I think it's less that I chose him, and more that his circumstances chose him. Because he went from being in solitary confinement to being in even deeper isolation in something called 'The Dungeon' in Angola." "The dungeon" is an officially recognized category by the administration at LSP. The dungeon, as Sumell explains, "is indicative of the conditions that Angola is happy to keep their prisoners in. I was watching Herman's condition dilapidate through his handwriting because of these conditions he was exposed to. We had only been writing at this point and his handwriting started to deteriorate and then his thoughts were less and less coherent. I thought, this is just really fucked up and I felt like I needed to do something."

Sumell was not only writing letters to Woodfox and Wallace then, but also organizing on behalf of their release from prison. At this time, Sumell was pursuing a Fine Arts degree at Stanford University and there she was assigned to speak to a professor of her choice about spatial relations and dream homes. Instead, she consulted with Wallace's personal advocates and lawyers, and with their support asked Wallace: "What kind of a house does a man who has lived in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?" At first thought, I wondered about whether Sumell struggled with how appropriate of a question this is to ask someone in worse conditions than solitary confinement, to dream about a home, or imagine one they'll potentially never be able to live in. I asked her what her initial thoughts were before approaching Wallace. She explained, "I am not a lawyer and I am not wealthy, but what I am is creative and what I have is my imagination. I thought I would share that with him... [And] one of the things about Herman and

Albert is that you can actually ask them anything. Their relationship to the world despite being confined to horrendous conditions is so expansive and just really vast, which is why the prison keeps them in solitary confinement—they are marvels. They're a miracle against this punitive system. And nobody expected them to A) live this long, and B) to survive these conditions without losing their mind. Not only have they triumphed both of those challenges but they also did it through their ability to maintain an open mind and continue to organize inside the prison. They're amazing."

I wondered next what Wallace's reaction was to the question once she sent it to him in a letter. Sumell: "He said something like, 'A house! I don't dream about no house. I am a revolutionary. I dream about the jungles, being in the jungles of Mexico, and fighting revolutionary battles.' And then I said, 'Herman you're 60'. And then he was like, 'Yeah, I guess you're right. I guess I can dream about a house now.' So, at first, he said no. And then he said yes. And then I started asking more and more questions. We started off with one drawing. And then I sent him a bunch of images from contemporary architectural magazines. His response to that was, 'What the fuck are those?' He was not into contemporary architecture at all. It was by writing hundreds of letters that we started to develop the house itself, and the advocacy campaign around the house."

The advocacy campaign around building the house is inspiring. Sumell tours with an exhibition that features the CAD (computer-aided design) video of the house narrated by King; it functions as a virtual tour of the house based on information from Wallace's letters describing what his dream home looks like. The exhibit also features the house plans as they appear in the letter correspondence, as well as in blueprint format. It also includes an eerie wooden replica of Wallace's 6X9' cell, based on his original drawings that also appear in the letters, a maquette of the house, and other intricate detail in poster format, like the different types of flowers Wallace wants to grow in his garden. Sumell has toured with this exhibition over twenty-seven times including guest speaking at each one, trying to raise awareness about the Angola 3 and Wallace's situation. I asked Sumell what the exhibit did for her and the project, how was it useful and what did it provide. She said: "It helped me develop a vocabulary for exhibitions that is effective. It was the first time that I personally had ever gone to an exhibition and people have cried, so that's showing me that it's meaningful and powerful visually. But more than anything it had provided a safe platform to talk about the prison industrial complex, torture in America, and the reality of Herman Wallace. Before I would exhibit, and before the project, I could talk about it until I was blue in the face. People's response would be something to the effect of, "that's fucked up", but there are 20 000 kids who starved to death today, there was a tsunami in Japan and a giant earthquake, and an apache helicopter bombed the shit out of Gaza yesterday. At that point, the capacity to absorb the immense tragedy of it all is limited. But when I start to talk about Herman's house, as a project, it provides a little bit of distance from the tragedy and gives you a moment to reflect on what's being said, and often you can actually accept the tragedy, and connect to it. The tragedy of Wallace's situation doesn't just become part of this barrage of sad; it provides hope, in a lot of ways, as simple as that. And so, people, by nature, prefer to connect to hope than tragedy."

Sumell refers to the barrage of sad as a kind of sensory overload or an emotional bombardment on the body, and her goal is to really interrupt the numbness that is felt when faced with a world that is full of tragic stories. This numbness creates a powerlessness that Sumell wants to amend:

“To interrupt that, you have to provide people with some sort of hope so that they can engage through a different channel. *Herman’s House* is close to the public intervention art work I did prior to this, which [also] had the intention of interrupting this kind of numbness.”

Sumell spins Wallace’s story in a way that interrupts this numbness and inactivity by inspiring a shift in thought when it comes to dealing with tragedy. Influenced heavily by her community in the 7th ward, she calls this kind of approach, *magidy*, “equal part magic and tragedy. They co-exist in that way where there’s no distinction and no border.” Fruitful situations do arise from within tragic circumstances. *Herman’s House* is remarkable for how it has been able to progress into a movement and in what it has been able to do for Sumell and the community of the 7th ward, which is otherwise known as the most violent ward in New Orleans. Searching for property in the 7th ward—where Wallace is from—to build the actual house, landed Sumell there. She bought her own house intended to be the project’s headquarters but has now turned it into an unofficial community centre for the kids and youth living in the ward. As an extension of *The House That Herman Built*, the 7th ward community has become the other major focus of Sumell’s life, more specifically the kids of the 7th ward. Talking with Sumell I could see that her position as an artist extends beyond the art context itself and is part of a process of figuring out a healthy and vital lifestyle that is an extension of autonomous community development and sustainability.

Sumell recalls feeling pretty attached to the idea of staying in New Orleans and specifically in the 7th ward. *Herman’s House* brought her to the neighborhood, and the kids confirmed her decision to stay. She says: “My intention is to create a sustainable healthy way of life and the kids were really the directional force in that decision-making process. I didn’t become an artist because I wanted to be a famous artist. It’s not a sustainable life style in this community, and this community is more important to me than an art career. It doesn’t mean that art is any less meaningful, it just means in today’s economic climate there’s not a chance in hell that I can survive as an artist and still maintain my commitment to this community, and to the kids in this neighborhood. I am completely fine with that. I actually feel really blessed that I found myself in the 7th ward. The acceptance process here for me was expedited by the fact that I moved in two days before Hurricane Gustav, and had the experience of doing relief work after Katrina, so I was able to work with the community pretty quickly and I think it was simply like ‘she’s alright.’ I was careful about how I came into the neighborhood. I didn’t want to come off as an outsider with a colonial attitude, telling people what to do, and why they should accept me. It was a process. I had to earn that welcome.”

She’s a rare artist in this way, using her artist skills to affectively engage with community based organizing. They become a tool to enliven a process. And this, again, is where her art challenges current modes of political art making. *The House That Herman Built* does not stand in for a message, or a simplified political position. The project challenges rhetorical modes of composite representation. It creates an indeterminable process without resolve. For example, the objects produced, for the exhibit on Wallace’s house, are organized in a way that connect to the movement of prison abolition, and of getting Wallace out of prison [10]. They don’t represent the trauma; they enliven the urgency of the present, and are part of an ecology of practice [11] where as an audience you feel the magic of the prospect of freeing Wallace, as much as you’re feeling the tragedy that results from racialized incarceration, and the violence of neoslavery

penal systems [12]. As philosopher and scientist, Isabelle Stengers argues, ecology of practices can be understood as “the possibilities of transforming this ‘economy of modern worth,’ of making those practices present that are likely to be of interest and which justify themselves on the basis of other criteria” [13]. These criteria are constructed by and through one’s own capacity to act, to reduce that effect of being acted upon. In this case, Sumell’s description of magidy resembles the Spinozist position on joy that I find useful when taking up the question, again, of what art can do for the political without the excessive focus on representation. Sumell’s work exemplifies the process whereby the construction of one’s own desires—how we connect to our life in the present so as to disrupt what leaves us numb—provides a gateway to a renewed “belief in the world [14].” In the context of present-day tragedy that is brought on by neocolonial foreign policies and austerity, art production, as an ecology of practice, helps produce new modes of valuation, that give new or different meanings to how relations are organized on the ground, and how through those relations work and process is evaluated.

Moved by the project, Sumell’s articulation of it, and how it plays out in the context of our political present—increased incarceration as economic potential—*The House That Herman Built* pushed me to ask how, as teacher, writer and researcher do I include prison abolition activism into my own creative milieu. In the interview, I remarked: “I’ve been searching for this kind of project for a long time. Not that I knew what I was searching for but knowing that I needed to know something like this existed, because it’s just so hard to think about how you can connect, and feel hopeful in the midst of this ‘barrage of sad’ as you mentioned. Herman’s situation is a really hard one, one that has lasted for a long period of time. And he’s only one out of many whose stories resemble his. Others have contacted you about helping out with this as well, I mean Herman and Albert have asked you to stop telling people to write them because they can’t keep up with all the letters they’re getting! It’s incredible how affective this exhibit and your organizing efforts have been. How are you feeling about all that?” Sumell: “I think it’s amazing. I am at the head of a ship that is really stirred by Herman’s decisions, his relationship to the public, and his visibility. It’s all well and good, but the ultimate goal of this project is to create a grassroots campaign that is international and that is engaged in changing the prison system. That’s a big one. So, we’re just a little stone in the ocean and hopefully, as Robert King says, we’ll make some ripples and we don’t know where those ripples are going to go. They could fizzle out or they could be the tsunami over the next super max prison, which would be rad.”

Over-moved and stimulated by Sumell’s energy and thoughtfulness, I had to ask her: “How do we do what you do from where we are? How do we take whatever is inspiring us with this project, and as you mention, make it expansive, to make the politics around it sound off somewhere else?” Her response: “In order to make that experience genuine, you really just have to ask what your super power is in this lifetime? You might not even know the answer, as a word, but there might be a sense or a feeling. Once you can trust that answer then just go forward with it, you know. I felt compelled to do something. It just so happens that I am an artist. I have not much more than my imagination, which is a lot, a big gift. But that’s what I have to share and so I am really happy to do it. And in some ways it has to be collaborative, and it’s about sharing, and it’s about empowering yourself, through your own imagination. A lot of art making happens, here, in this house, with the kids, on a really small level, but that doesn’t make it any more or any less artistic because it’s not in a gallery. In a lot of ways, it’s more meaningful.”

What makes an ecology of practice a meaningful approach to life, is its ability to shift our posture to one that is molded by joy not distress or defense. As Deleuze, reading Spinoza suggests, “[...] when we encounter a body that agrees with our nature, one whose relation compounds with ours, we may say that its powers is added to ours; that passions that affect us are those of *joy*, and our power of acting is increased or enhanced” [15]. Sumell, at the end of our interview, echoes this statement by explaining how she is “[...] responsible, not only to Herman, but to people like yourself who are moved by the story and think they can do something like this. There was no logic to this being my path in life. I was open and accepting of the fact that I might not need to go in the direction that I was going, and so this kind of work is accessible to everyone under those same guises, or same circumstances [16].”

BIO:

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[1] See “Review of Angad Singh Bhalla’s *Herman’s House*” in this issue of Fuse magazine. For more information please visit: www.hermanshousethefilm.com.

[2] Al Jafari’s *Port of Memory* is an experimental film about Al Jafari’s family living in Jafaa, a Palestinian coastal town next to the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. The film explores the gentrification and annexation of Jafaa via Israeli military urban planning procedures.

[3] Herman Wallace has been imprisoned in solitary confinement in Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola for 40 years. See “Review of Angad Singh Bhalla’s *Herman’s House*” by Mansour and Kilibarda in this issue of Fuse.

[4] Prison abolition calls for the complete overhaul of the prison industrial complex and focuses on building lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. Prison abolition is about foreseeing the gradual elimination of prisons as alternative models are put into place that do not conform to—or that try to amend—the current state of legal penal structure and procedure. However, prison abolition is not simply about the banishment and complete destruction of all prisons. Prison abolition activism offers an alternate imagination for community creation and development. It challenges the most radical forms of being in the context of the communities we work at creating and sustaining that grow from anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and anti-racist sentiments. Prison abolition activism imagines much more complex forms of life that divest from capitalist state controlled economies invested in penal infrastructure and procedures. Prison abolition not only foresees the elimination of imprisonment, policing and surveillance, it also offers new modes of organizing that take into consideration the complex problems of present-day capitalist society that lead to the antiquated solutions of incarceration and punishment.

[5] Bill C-110 is the omnibus crime bill passed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Conservative party government that initiates mandatory minimum sentencing laws.

[6] This piece is dedicated to all student strikers in Montreal who, as I am writing this now, have been on the streets for the 38th consecutive demonstration and the 110th since the strike started in March of 2012, against the university funding plan proposed by the Charest government in Quebec. This plan aims to gradually privatize education by cutting government spending, increasing tuition by 75%, and calling for an increase in corporate and private donations. The student strike has gained much popularity and support since the passing of a draconian emergency law, bill 78 that went into effect on May 19 2012, aimed to suppress the daily and nightly demonstrations. Since it’s passing over 1500 protestors have been arrested and fined.

[7] Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights. 1988.

[8] Targeted for their activism as members of the Black Panther Party (BPP) while incarcerated at Louisiana State

Penitentiary (LSP) in Angola, Wallace, Woodfox and King were moved to solitary confinement in 1972. Since then they have been referred to as the *Angola 3*. The BPP chapter inside prison functioned as resource for inmates to organize against the dehumanizing and unlivable conditions experienced at LSP.

[9] The Louisiana State Penitentiary is in Angola, USA. As Jackie described it in our interview: “Angola is an 18,000 acre former slave plantation. It is named after the country in Africa where the most profitable slaves came from. When you enter the grounds of Angola that history is really present and in your face. Once you enter Angola, you see the 18 000 acres being farmed mostly by people of color and you see most of the guards are white and on horseback. Statistics confirm this; it’s not only the experiential. Angola consists of 88% black inmates and a 100% white upper administration; it really accentuates the history of slavery in the present. Every physically abled-bodied prisoner is forced to work in Angola for 2-20 cents an hour under egregious conditions.”

[10] See “Review of Angad Singh Bhalla’s *Herman’s House*” in this issue of Fuse magazine.

[11] Isabelle Stengers. *Cosmopolitics I*. Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

[12] The present-day prison system stems from an historical and structural model that dates back to the abolition of slavery. As Angela Davis has written, “[...] There was no reference to imprisonment in the US Constitution until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment declared chattel slavery unconstitutional: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” See: Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003.

[13] Stengers, *ibid*.

[14] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1989.

[15] Deleuze, *ibid*.

[16] Much thanks to Lucas Freeman and cheyanne turriens for their rigorous edits and constructive comments on this article.

II:

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“Nous la forêt”

A Conversation with Épopée on the Québec Student Uprising

Insurgence is a film made by the Montréal-based collective Épopée. It was filmed during the Québec student uprising that began in February 2012. (1) By March, most student unions across the province of Québec, both undergraduate and graduate, had voted to go on unlimited general strike. This initiated an unprecedented student uprising—the longest one in the long history of student movements in Québec. (2)

It feels like an impossible task to summarize the Québec student strike in a few words. Indeed, the strike should not be remembered this way, as an all-encompassing event representative of everyone who experienced it. It is impossible to sum up something that feels endless. General descriptions reduce the impact of its moment to something ordinary. It is in this way that *Insurgence* succeeds where other descriptions have failed. The film induces—once again—the sensation of another world coming to existence.

Insurgence feels like a film that was made specifically for those of us who participated—who blocked classroom doors, (3) who attended the three-to-four-hour general assemblies every week, who spoke out and confronted university officials, who walked the nightly demonstrations, (4) who spent time making red felt squares. (5) The film is especially for those who spent a night in jail, and consistently faced police violence. (6) For those who weren't there, who don't know, the film might read as confusing, or simply boring.

Insurgence is not positioned to tell the story of what happened and how, but to accelerate the impulse that conditions such a collective gathering. The camera was consistently at the frontlines. Its power is in how it moves. For those of us who were there, the camera's movement—its specific rhythm, speed, and force—is a translation of what inspired us to be involved in the strike. For others, its movement is slow; this might just mean giving it time, sitting with discomfort, letting it push against questions. The film requires patience and openness to receive what is not immediately understood.

Insurgence does not try to document the development of the uprising in a linear fashion, from its source, through a middle, to an end. Rather, it makes us feel, again, what we had felt before—the acute urgency of what is at stake, folded into what must go on. *Insurgence* is of a pragmatist affiliation. (7) The film relays the present to those who felt it; it is a gift to us who endured. (8)

Scapegoat Says What is Épopée?

Épopée The word means “epic.” It's a long poem where reality and fiction are intertwined, meant to celebrate a person or an event. Épopée is an open collective. Our first film project was with sex workers and drug users living in Montréal's Centre-Sud neighbourhood, east of

downtown, an area we refer to as the “exclusionary zone.” Because the lives of the people living on the streets are heroic, *Épopée* seemed like a fitting name.

The collective was formed during the making of the documentary *Hommes à louer (Men for Sale)* directed by Rodrigue Jean, which was made between 2005 and 2007. At the time, some of the film’s participants, male sex workers, said they’d had enough with being documented. They wanted to move on to fiction and create films themselves. We then set up the *Épopée projet*, which took two years to put together. The project’s first initiative was to organize writing workshops which involved 30 participants who were made up of sex workers and drug users, and took place at a sex worker’s drop-in centre set up by RÉZO, a Montreal-based men’s sexual health non-profit organization. *Épopée* then developed a website (epopee.me), where three hours of short films, written and interpreted by sex workers and drug users, can be seen. Two feature films—*L’État du moment* and *l’État du monde*—were also created at that time.

SS How did you decide to start filming the Québec student strike? What was the precise date or event?

É Every year in Montréal, on 15 March, there is a demonstration against police violence, which we’d been going to for a few years. Usually a few hundred people gather, and the event is heavily repressed by the police. The 2012 demo was particularly hyped-up because the police had, a few months prior, murdered Mario Hamel, a homeless man. He was shot in the back. Another victim, Patrick Limoges, got hit by one of the stray bullets and died. He was a nurse who had just finished his shift at the nearby hospital. We also knew that the demo would be bigger than usual this year because the police had wounded a student protestor the week before, and the largest student union coalition, La Coalition large de l’association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE), had issued a call to attend the demo. Five thousand people showed up. From then on, it made sense to be in the streets.

SS How did you decide on the title of the film? Why *Insurgence*?

É The term came up to us intuitively, although in French, the word “insurgence” is not in common use. Etymologically, it comes from the Latin *insurgere*, “to stand up, or to attack,” deriving from *surgere*, to arise, to emerge. This definition suited our purpose quite well. The film aims to stay as close as possible to the collective and bodily process of political verticalization, as experienced by protesters swarming the streets. We describe the discrete phenomenality of this political passage to the outside, or coming-out, in our manifesto, “Nous la forêt.” Also, we didn’t want to preclude or domesticate in any way the incipient violence animating the movement, as so many moralist approaches do. In this regard, the word “insurgence” highlights the intermediate or metastable state between the potentialities of collective emergence and the full-fledged explosiveness of insurrection.

SS What does “Nous la forêt” mean? Why a manifesto? How is this manifesto complimentary to the film?

É “Nous la forêt” means “We the forest.” It evokes the power of anonymity we found at the heart of the Québec student strike. At first, we had the idea of writing a text that would have

been read in a voice-over. But after we did the first montage, we all felt that there was no place for commentary in the film. The images could and should speak for themselves. Thus emerged the idea that the film could work as some sort of installation, in conjunction with an independent text (the manifesto), as well as a website compiling a series of texts, films, and images that accompanied us through the film's conception.

The manifesto envisages the protests in the political present tense, so to speak; it is an infinitive account of the politicization process that withdraws from the temptation of retrospective interpretation and any form of elucidation from a privileged standpoint. As for the film, the manifesto celebrates the immediate bodily presence, our capacity to collectively tune into the frequency of the negative, to produce zones of offensive opacity, and uncover the political frontline of our times all the way down to the most intimate dimensions of our existence. It also features an important sentence from Jean Genet, which we chose to put at the end of the film: "All the spontaneous violence of life that is carried further by the violence of revolutionaries will be just enough to thwart organized brutality." (9)

SS You mentioned in an earlier conversation we had that the principle of filming *Insurgence* was based on abstraction or immanence—can you elaborate on what that means? How did abstraction/immanence, in technical terms, become the principle of filming? Why was this important to you as an aesthetic position, and how did that encapsulate the politicization of the film?

É We like to think of *Épopée* as some sort of "dark precursor," an expression we find evocative for various reasons. First, it suggests for us an open-ended and non-voluntaristic proximity with the political potentialities of the strike, a way of staying close to its undetermined aesthetic dimension. It also connects with our intention to make a film that bears witness to and cares for the fragile ambivalence vibrating at the heart of every nascent, anonymous gathering.

One of our main concerns has been to produce a film that would insert itself as seamlessly as possible in the process of affective propulsion and resonance that moved Montréal in such unexpected ways during all these months. How could *Insurgence* increase the political power and impetus of the viewers, be they involved or not in the actual student movement that transfigured Québec society?

We didn't want to make a movie that would try to represent the event, or speak in its name; and we also wanted to avoid the kind of climax-oriented epic narratives that are so common when dealing with mass mobilizations. We wanted the film to stay as close as possible to the subtle process of creative involution triggered by the spontaneous coming-together of people on the streets for months and months. This film works by way of a subtraction that articulates, in a sober way (i.e. avoiding riot porn), the bodies and gestures in time, producing some sort of filmic trance that keeps clear from any form of climax. The film thus can be envisaged as a plateau, following Gregory Bateson and Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term: a continuous region of intensity that resists external interruption, just like the student movement did.

Insurgence works as a claustrophobic assault on the senses. It's a forced immersion into the inorganic body of the walking crowd shouting, chanting, fighting. It's a harsh and long movie, too long according to many viewers. It is repetitive and doesn't necessarily bring new

information at every shot. It abrades the spectator on the thread of chronological time, making them go through a process of temporal exfoliation. It's thus a film that must be endured, just like the endless night protests that were carried on every night for over three months (the strike itself lasted about eight months). In the film, time is the activator of *le politique*.

Ultimately, we hope that, as Brian Massumi suggests—commenting on the mode of existence of plateaus—that the heightening of energies produced by the film “is sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities.” (10)

SS As you mention, *Insurgence* challenges modes of representation. It refuses to adhere to a moralist position, in the sense that the film does not narrate a story. And you deliberately chose not to explain, describe, or through commentary position the image within a representational framework. Why did you decide to do this?

É *Insurgence* is an offensive film, although it is quite abstract. It operates at the immediate level of duration and sensation, as we said earlier. It also seeks to connect with and perpetuate, by means of the moving image, the zones of offensive opacity produced by the student strike. In other words, the deliberate suspension of (linguistic) signification is aimed at fostering an *art of immanent attention*. We did try at certain points to introduce more information about what is on the screen: the location of the protests, the time and date, etc. But it didn't work. We felt like something was lost in the process. The fact that we are often slightly confused and lost about what is happening on the screen allows for a different way of experiencing the events. One starts to pay more attention to the textures, the light, the movements, the gestures; one might even start thinking about what is not shown, what is missing from the screen. In this sense, the film really works by means of subtraction. Slowly, it empties out the clichés and preconceptions about what is “true” political combat. The relative suspension of signification allows the viewer to break free from a linear understanding of the event and let more space for perceptual ambiguities. And then, perhaps, from this concerted attempt at producing a favourable context for filmic desubjectivation, there might emerge a meaning so unexpected, so thoroughly personal that it becomes anonymous. The anonymity of the void is to be conquered through the first person singular, not to be confounded with the plain, anaesthetized anonymity of the “full,” which coincides with the impersonality of the “they.”

This might seem nihilistic (in the literal sense of emptying out), and this deceptive gesture could come across as an aestheticization of the movement. It is not. It echoes deeply with one essential feature of the student strike: its capacity to create a temporality of its own, irreducible to the manipulative modes of storytelling as concocted by the state through the mass media. The marching, the-people-in-the-making, progressively moved away from any belief in or desire for media representation, assuming their relative opacity or closeness as a necessary condition to sustain and nurture collective action. As more and more people resisted the imagist temptation, the autonomous plane of consistency of the strikers became ever stronger. This process of political conversion by means of lived proximity and joyful refusal is deeply moving. It informs *Insurgence's* filmic gesture, which modestly tries to bear witness to this heterogenetic process that escapes all possibilities of representation.

SS The film was specific in its initial portrayal of a certain time, where you were present, where one's presence, or *present-ness*, was felt by the severity of police aggression. It's obviously not trying to encapsulate the strike as a whole event, and it was obvious to me that it wasn't going to be about the peaceful protests or the family-friendly demos. There was another aspect of the strike that had to do with police violence that many protestors witnessed or experienced.

In a previous conversation you said: "We have to reintegrate this notion of violence—the violence of transnational capitalism—into the equation instead of remaining in a mode of perpetual political correctness. We could discuss the strike in these terms—*strike as lived abstraction*, by giving it a dark, speculative dimension." How do we then begin to talk about violence in the sense of (re)integration? How does the film inspire a dark speculative dimension?

É There is something profoundly unsettling, and utterly fascinating about the *unlimited* general strike. On the one hand, it opens up a cyclonic vortex that devours all economic rationality and produces a sort of animated suspension, a temporality of its own. And on the other, it appears as the culminating point of life, its pure and glorious expenditure. Some friends in Montréal like to talk about a "human strike." They want to emphasize the transformative power of the strike's unboundedness. During the strike, they opened up a space called "La maison de la grève" to intensify it, and they are also working on a book about it. (11) In a way, they are trying to live up to Bataille's political and mystical understanding of intimacy: "Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite between those who *consume intensely*," as he puts it in *The Accursed Share*. (12)

The vertiginous irreversibility and exuberance that characterized the strike as a radical political act needs to be accounted for at a cosmological level, so to speak, or else its constitutive relation to a living infinity is lost. During the making of the film and up to now, we have been caught up in a discussion about the question of active nihilism, and more precisely about what Nick Land, Reza Negarestani, Mark Fischer, and others think of as the question of *accelerationism*. Basically, against what they identify as the left's defeatist and moralistic stance (what Land calls its "transcendental miserabilism"), they affirm that the anti-capitalist forces must reconnect with the resources of negativity: the "No" of hatred, anger, and frustration.

We wanted *Insurgence* to channel, or at least not preclude, this kind of energy, to open up the question of violence on a fully vitalist and cosmic scale that breaks with pacifying and moralist accounts of the strike. It's a problem of scale, I guess. Violence is the horizon of degradation of politics into police. Some people are just unable to acknowledge the magnitude of this reduction. They are anaesthetized by the domestic or economic regime of governance and its fetishization of consensus. We wanted *Insurgence* to stay faithful to all the people who have experienced the possibility of a greater life through the strike. In a way, we could say that we wanted to stand up to Edmund Burke's sad political advice: "Unless you can produce an appearance of infinity by your disorder, you will have disorder only without magnificence."

Accelerationism as a speculative political horizon is concerned with the problem of communicating this kind of burning grandeur and intensity. Its orgiastic understanding of the body without organs and incendiary effect is an important ingredient in the actual composition of forces that might oppose transnational capital. But dark speculation, with its grandiose ideas about "non-trivial universalism" and post-capital hegemony, tends to dismiss the heterogeneous

composition and irreducible located-ness of the forces involved in actual uprisings. As filmmakers, we were bound to pay close attention to the affective ecology of practices and their living interstices composing the movement. We call this “care”—for the actual process of communization of experience, a *cosmopolitical* concern. It slows down for a moment and considers the complex assemblage of forces in all its ambiguities—which is a turn away from the usual “call for mobilization.”

There has been a productive tension between an accelerationist inflexion and a more cosmopolitical one among the collective. This tension informs the realization process. We could say that *Insurgence* is both about the “acceleration” or intensification of political anger, and a radical slowing down in relation to the perception of duration and the modes of involvement in the student strike movement.

SS You’ve screened *Insurgence* a few times now. Does any particular event stand out, or were you inspired by a particular discussion that you’ve had with the audience?

É In Montréal, our position was very simple. We wanted to give something to a movement that inspired us, and in no way did we want to speak in its place, in its name. Outside of Québec, it’s been very different. We are not only bringing a film, but a vision of the movement to people who, for a large part, are very well informed about what has been going on in Québec, but want to know “what it’s been like from the inside.” And we have been lucky enough to have Québécois in the audience, often coming from very different positions, who include their voices in the conversation, making the film a vector rather than a representation of the movement.

NOTES

(1) Jean Charest, the head of the Liberal Party and the premier of Québec at the time of the 2012 strike, had proposed an 82 per cent tuition increase per student over seven years. Student unions across the province opposed the decision calling for an unlimited general strike. The students demanded that Charest redact his decision and called on the government to freeze tuition hikes. A previous general strike had taken place in 2005. Led by L’Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ)—a grassroots student organization—this historic, seven-week strike managed to halt Charest’s decision to cut \$103 million in student bursary funding in Québec.

(2) Student unions in Québec have often gone on strike since 1968, continually demanding a freeze on tuition fees and improvements to the loans and bursaries program. Because of the consistent student uprisings—that are more militant than moderate—Quebec students have been able to secure the lowest post-secondary tuition in Canada.

(3) This was a tactic used by many students at Concordia University in Montréal. Students used their own bodies to block classroom doors in order to prevent students and professors from entering. Many professors and students refused to forcefully enter the classroom. But many others tried, and in some instances private security guards (hired by the university administration during the strike) were called to intervene.

(4) Once classes were cancelled and the winter term ended, striking students organized nightly marches in order to keep the momentum going. The first one took place on 24 April 2012. They were organized for

8pm every evening at Place Émilie-Gamelin, a public square located outside a major subway stop in downtown Montréal. 1 August 2012 marked the hundredth consecutive nightly protest, and they lasted throughout the rest of the summer and well into early fall.

(5) *Le carré rouge*, or red square, symbolizing the student uprising was adorned by many across Québec, pinned to jackets and backpacks. It is inspired by the French phrase, *carrément dans le rouge*, meaning “squarely in the red,” in reference to growing student debt. See Stefan Christoff, *Le fond de l’air est rouge* (Montreal: Howl Arts Collective, 2013).

(6) Over 2,500 people were arrested and ticketed during the eight-month strike. Francis Grenier, a striking student, suffered a serious eye injury after police fired a stun grenade into a crowd of protestors. The municipal police force, riot police, and the Sûreté du Québec (provincial police) were employed during the strike. There was excessive use of flashbang grenades and CS gas. Riot police beat up students on a consistent basis, and protestors were often kettled.

(7) The use of the concept of pragmatism here is borrowed from Isabelle Stengers: “We don’t know how these things can matter. But we can learn to examine situations from the point of view of their possibilities, from that which they communicate with and that which they poison. Pragmatism is the care of the possible.” See “The Care of the Possible: Isabelle Stengers interviewed by Erik Bordeleau,” in *Scapegoat: Architecture | Landscape | Political Economy* 01-Service (Summer 2011): 12.

(8) Interview and introduction by Nasrin Himada for *Scapegoat*. She participated in the eight-month-long student strike, as both a part-time professor and as a member of the graduate student union.

(9) Jean Genet, “Violence and Brutality”, in *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Albert Dichy, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004): 172.

(10) Brian Massumi, “Translator’s Foreword”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987): iv.

(11) Le collectif de débrayage, *On s’en câlisse: Une histoire profane de la grève* (Montreal: Sabotart, Genève: Entremonde, 2013).

(12) Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Vol. 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 58.

III:

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“Prison America”

A Conversation with Chris Kraus on *Summer of Hate*

Chris Kraus is a writer, art critic, curator and filmmaker. She teaches writing at the European Graduate School and is based in Los Angeles, California. Her critically acclaimed first novel, *I love Dick*, came out in 1997, followed by *Aliens and Anorexia*, 2000, and *Torpor* in 2006. Kraus has published two prominent collections on art criticism, *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness* (2004), and *Where Art Belongs* (2011). She is the co-editor of the powerful anthology, *Hatred of Capitalism* (2001). Kraus is also the co-director of the independent press, Semiotext(e), where she launched the imprint, Native Agents, in 1990. The new series introduced radical forms of writing that combine elements of theory, fiction and autobiography. The imprint published the work of such influential writers as Kathy Acker, Fanny Howe, Ann Rower and Eileen Myles. Scapegoat had the pleasure of corresponding with Kraus on her recent book *Summer of Hate* (2012). The interview was conducted on 27 January 2013 and includes excerpts from the novel.

It occurred to Catt that the epistemological groundwork for the war in Iraq had been laid by Paris Hilton’s anal sex video. (27)

Scapegoat Says I find this statement devastating because it gives this precise feel to what American politics were then, and still are today—excessively dangerous and ludicrous. While it’s so provocative, it’s also slightly perplexing. I would love to know more about what you meant by this statement? How did it come to you?

Chris Kraus The passage goes on to explain that they were similar cynical scripts – the “leaking” of soon-to-be-famous Paris Hilton’s “secret” sex video, and the Easter egg hunt for WMDs leading up to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Years later, George W. Bush would mime the “search” for WMD’s under tables in a skit performed for a journalist’s dinner. Throughout the process, he knew what the outcome would be. And this became the new normal. The “Search For WMD’s” completely deflected debate of the prudence and implications of the invasion in media outlets from the New York *Times* to Fox News.

While Homeland Security made preemptive arrests, any attempt at addressing the present, right down to this statement itself, now felt sadly preemptive. (77)

[...] Catt sensed that all cultural dialogue was really a cipher...for something else...a means of obscuring the thick toxic cloud under which we were all living. Everyone acting, for professional reasons, as if these things matter. But even now, two and a half years since the Iraq invasion, you can’t raise your eyes without seeing American flags and lapel pins,

even in cities. The endless debate about ‘prisoner abuse’ (only the hardcore leftist blogs called it torture) halted, to everyone’s great relief, by the Abu Ghraib show trials. This is what Catt wants to talk about with Tobias. Pregnant with Charles Graner’s baby, Lynndie England lost her plea bargain when she naively remarked that she *didn’t know her actions were wrong*. She’d gotten off-script. (149)

Yesterday while they were juicing carrots and complaining about their respective careers, Terry had stopped and looked at her obliquely. *Isn’t it weird, how nothing coming out now even mentions what’s going on?* And Catt *knew*. It was like they’d had to leave the country in order to say it.

At least ten times a day for the past two or three years, Catt’s thoughts hit the same wall as Terry’s. To speak them out loud was completely uncool, because where would you start? God Bless Our Troops, hanging chads, *Saw 2*, Janet Jackson’s wardrobe malfunction? Do not expect truth. *Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms, and sentence structures which were imposed on them in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously*, wrote Victor Klemperer, the Jew who’d remained in hiding in Berlin throughout the Holocaust. In the summer of 2006, six thousand National Guardsmen were presidentially dispatched to patrol the Arizona/Sonora border. Guantanamo Bay had been closed to journalists, human rights monitors, and the Red Cross after two prisoner suicides that vice President Cheney described as “acts of asymmetrical warfare.” Deprived of even the right to define their own deaths, hundreds of prisoners languished there, chargeless. (194-195)

SS How does the book construct an image of the political economy of war, which is the landscape of America in *Summer of Hate*? Can you speak more directly to how that conditioned a certain type of censorship for cultural workers and artists?

CK My memory of that period is the utter hopelessness of any resistance, not that “resistance” as exercised by a Los Angeles writer would be particularly meaningful. The polarization in the US at that moment was complete, between the “losers” – vegans with cars covered in bumperstickers – opposing the war, and everyone else. The “everyone else” included not just the activist right, but the “creatives,” the art world, people who just wanted to live their own lives in the spaces outside the corporate mainstream and be left in peace. The Occupy movement, if nothing else, changed this culture of silence.

SS In the novel, you make critical associations between events that contextualize the politics of 9/11 during the Bush era. Moving beyond the mania of the “war on terror,” the narrative of war-making accentuates the growth of the prison-industrial-complex, and the sentiment of a new-found nationalist fervor increasingly colouring the landscape. *Summer of Hate* reveals the severe crack down, initiated by the Bush administration, in detaining “illegal” immigrants, intensified by police procedures that criminalize people of colour and the poor. What you directly deal with

in the book, as Catt travels from LA to New Mexico, from Baja, Mexico to Arizona—a state under the reign of Arpaio, the Arizona chief of police infamous for the “tent city” outdoor prison extension where he forced inmates to live in 140 degree weather—is how the excess of American overzealousness is conjured through the contradictions present in the ecology of the American penal system.

The effects of systemic punishment leave their mark on Paul, the former prisoner that Catt meets and hires to look after her buildings in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The contradictions inherent in the US prison system that Paul faces as an ex-prisoner create a situation where life chances are made impossible to resurrect. At the beginning of *Summer of Hate*, we get a glimpse of Paul’s situation while he and Catt are shopping for “fiestaware.” Catt asks if they should get turquoise or orange-coloured dishes. “Not orange,” Paul says.

“I’ve got some pretty bad memories of that particular color.”
And then he tells her everything—the drunken binge, the fuel credit card, the public defender, prison—or almost. He can’t tell her *everything*. Bad enough he’s a convicted felon.

Catt steps into a cloud of compassion. So this is what she heard in his voice, that first time they talked on the phone when she was in Flagstaff. She cannot imagine spending even one day in prison. She’s never done anything she couldn’t talk her way out of. Paul spent sixteen months in state prison for defrauding *Halliburton*? Of less than one thousand dollars?

Meanwhile, she’s amassed tens of thousands by working within the tax code’s gray zones. Unaware of his former employer’s massive war crimes, Paul seems ashamed of stealing less than an art gallery spends on an after-party. (133)

SS Paul is doomed, trapped in a cycle of poverty. As you write, “*If you punish the poor by making them poorer the cycle is endless*” (160). Paul is trying to pay off his debts, his prison and parole fees; and at the same time he’s trying to find housing and a job, which are hard to come by because he’s forever labeled a felon. The book suggests there’s no real way out for Paul; if he wants to make a better life for himself someone like Catt is necessary. Catt has money. She helps him pay off what he owes that keeps him from getting a loan to start school; she offers him a job and housing.

The absurdity and extremity of American penal culture is visualized so precisely in the book, not letting us forget, for instance, Arapaio’s chosen penal aesthetics—pink handcuffs and pink underwear that inmates are made to wear. Inmates and ex-prisoners are bound up in a cycle of humiliation, degradation, and endless forms of punishment, however literal or symbolic.

CK Yes, that’s true. And sadly, not much has changed even now in 2013: Arpaio won re-election last November, and there isn’t an activist group whose members dare put their names on the group’s Facebook page. Arapaio’s impunity for retaliation against his opponents is legendary. Mary Rose Wilcox, a Democratic County Supervisor who dared to oppose him, was indicted by a grand jury on dozens of charges. Eventually she prevailed, but at what cost?

What you say about Paul's situation is crucial. One of the things I was trying to do with the novel was to show in this case study, with some specificity, *exactly* what a person who's been through the system is facing when he or she is released. People have remarked that *Summer of Hate* is clumsily focused on numbers: how much did the lawyers cost, how much interest on the restitution, how much for the urinalysis, etc? But that is the point! Adding it up, in Paul's case, it took about \$85,000 for him to erase the disadvantages of two decades of poverty and begin a new life. And clearly that's not going to happen most of the time.

Similarly, the social service agencies serving the homeless in various programs in downtown LA spend tens of thousands of dollars to stabilize a handful of clients. The neglect and punitive treatment of these people is so severe, remediation is almost impossible.

SS These issues—related to poverty, mass incarceration, deportations, and perpetual war—are still with us today and are getting worse under the presidency of Obama. In an interview I read, you said, “I think that if we don't try and process, both for ourselves and publically, what's happening in the present, it's a very great loss.” How does *Summer of Hate* try to process the present? Perhaps the context of Paul and Catt, their present, resounds so well in our present even though you're referring to past events—2005/06—and because of this affinity, between the past and the present, *Summer of Hate* feels devastating in the sense that we are still living in the residue of it all. We're living in Catt and Paul's future political climate. How do you think things have changed? Or, how are they different now?

CK I didn't exactly set out to publish a book about events in 2006 in 2012. I would have liked for the process to be faster. But it takes me a long time to write a book, and then there is the lead time involved in publication. So it is a weird gap, a half-decade or so. Katherine Bigelow's film *Zero Dark Thirty* deals with events at a similar proximity and people seem to find this very disturbing. But, I think it is way more interesting to deal with the present and recent past than fetishize revolutionary moments of the past.

Many of the draconian measures taken during the Bush era have become the new normal, despite a less toxic rhetoric. The Patriot Act is still law, one in a hundred Americans are incarcerated, and we have accepted surveillance in all areas of our lives.

At the end of Joe's first week on the job, thinking he'd keep him on the crew, Paul asked Joe if he had any references. And Joe said no. Then he confessed that he'd just gotten out of prison. Unfazed, Paul replied, “Oh. Which one?” and Joe said, “Las Cruces.” Paul didn't ask what the charge was. Instead, he told Joe that he'd spent time himself in Las Lunas. Joe knew right away that Las Lunas was Level III, and he knew then that Paul knew Las Cruces was Level V, maximum security. So he told Paul: “after getting divorced, I was sharing a place here in town with my mom and my sister. One night, my sister's ex-boyfriend showed up there drunk, wanting to talk to her. He had a gun he was waving around. My sister and mom were both there in the room, and I didn't think twice. I

had a knife and I went for it. I did fourteen years. The public defender pled it to Manslaughter.”

Looking over the table, Catt realizes that everyone here except for herself and Tommy has been incarcerated, homeless or both. When Titus and Sharon moved down from Sonoma, they lived in their van for two months, both working full-time until they could save up enough for an apartment. Cops in his small Texas town showed up at Evan’s mom’s house on his eighteenth birthday to arrest him for assault. At 16, he’d gotten into a fight with a classmate, but they’d deferred the charges two years so he’d go to jail, instead of receiving probation as a juvenile.

“Yeah man ... happy *birthday!* I’d just finished high school, and the guys they locked me up with were really scary.” Evan, his mom, and his 3-year old son moved to Albuquerque just to get out of Texas. His son’s mom stayed behind. She was, like Brett’s ex, a meth addict. Brett—who still hasn’t decided whether to turn himself in on the warrant—lived alone on the beach in his van when he was 16, with an eight-month old infant. The Victorville painter, Jason’s son Matt, spent part of his teens in San Bernadino County Juvenile Hall for spray-painting graffiti. Even the vendors she’s hired have records! Zack, the artisan hippie who built a straw bale wall for them at Tulane, remembered Paul from the Farm. Zack had served 18 months for Possession With Intent To Sell—a few marijuana plants in his back yard. Was this Prison America?

Catt never set out to do social work, but apparently everyone outside the art world has either lived in a van or been incarcerated. None of these people see any connection between their sad, shitty stories. Instead, they’re ashamed. Except for Paul, who blames The Disease Known as Alcoholism, they put it down to bad luck and misfortune” (143-144).

SS What is Prison America?

CK Prison America is where we are living in now, where relatively few people know what goes on, on the other side of the mirror.

SS Did you do research in order to write the characters introduced in your book, like the ones mentioned above? How did you initially come up with idea for the book? What drove you to write it?

CK You know, like Catt in the book, I’m not very good at making shit up. All of the people named in that passage and their stories are real, with the names changed around. Like Catt, I lived through this experience. Unlike Catt, I decided to turn it into a book. As these things were happening, many of them painful, I was aware that this important knowledge ... that through these events, I was being offered a glimpse of the web that enmeshes us, outside of the bubble.

And it seemed very important to be able to write about this, that I would be able to do this as a novel and convey the interior lives of the characters.

As each new case, is called, Catt observes that the leg unshackling-and-reshackling procedure takes only slightly less time than the hearings. While a bailiff reads out the charges—possession of crack cocaine, grand theft auto, receipt of stolen property, criminal mischief, dishonored checks—each prisoner stands in front of the judge, eyes looking down toward cuffed hands. Why are the prisoners cuffed? Catt remembers a *TV Guide* cover she'd seen as a child, a court drawing of Black Panther Bobby Seale shackled and chained to a chair in front of Judge Julius Hoffman. At the time, this was widely deemed *shocking*. Of course Seale was on *trial* in front of a jury, and these are just hearings. None of the inmates in Judge Sherry's court will ever be going to trial ... Instead, imprisoned but not yet convicted, they'll receive continuance after continuance until the DA finally arrives at a plea.

Paul doesn't look at the guys in the dock. He has to *stay positive*. Their sorry-ass plight reminds him how much he owes Catt. Blinking back tears she wonders, *can anyone locate the point where this present begins?* Before Abu Ghraib, before Guantanamo Bay... Was it the soft bans on public assembly? The laws against second-hand smoke, the DUI limit lowered to one glass of wine? Parks allowed to degrade until everyone wanted them closed, the defunding of public transportation, bottles of water that cost more than half the hourly minimum wage? *For quality and training purposes, this call is being recorded and monitored ... the first clause now mostly eliminated because it is no longer necessary.* (239-240).

SS Do you think the American class structure is changing drastically? Is Prison America creating an underclass? Are the differences becoming extreme because of the prison industrial complex? If America is Prison America then I feel that the landscape you point to in *Summer of Hate* is one that is conditioned by prison culture as it conditions poverty. Paul suffers from this; the fear and anxiety he feels is made very real in the novel, it drives the noir element of the narrative. The anxiety that haunts Catt is associated with being a famous writer, managing her finances and investing in property, and running away from her killer who she met through an online S/M site. Later she leaps into this world of mayhem that is associated with fear and violence on this real other level. She becomes this character that really steps up, offering support in a direct and personal way. Would Catt have done this if Paul wasn't her lover? How would you describe what the ethical concerns are for Catt? Was Paul simply lucky to have met someone like her? Is survival reduced to luck in the novel? If Catt didn't exist how would have Paul survived?

CK Great question. I'm a great believer in luck, charmed coincidence, which is probably why I'm a writer, not a public policy person. It's very unlikely Catt would have done this for Paul if they weren't connected on this intimate level as lovers. Really, there is no altruism. It just isn't

very realistic. There is *definitely* an underclass in the US that has replaced working class culture. And that's a consequence of not just the prison industrial complex, but so many things: the impossibility of single-wage households for all but the rich; the fact that businesses cannot pay living wages and benefits and still be competitive; the replacement of most regional culture by corporate media.

SS Why the title *Summer of Hate*?

CK The story takes place in that freakishly hot summer of 2006 ... and it's the opposite of the 60s "Summer of Love." I couldn't believe no one had used that title! But actually, there is a metal band of that name.

SS In an interview you mention that fiction carries with it this real possibility of being able to "describe the world." How do you do this through what poet Eileen Myles has called a "cunt exegesis?" Myles was referring to your work in *I love Dick*. What is a cunt exegesis? And does it apply to *Summer of Hate*?

CK Well actually, I think that was "dumb cunt exegesis," that is a phrase I used in *I Love Dick* ... the idea was that the "dumb cunt" might actually narrate her own story, on her own terms. The phrase was hyperbolic, of course, but—apparently even now—not inaccurate. The idea that women and girls might have a less institutional form of "discourse," of emotional thought, that is rarely respected within the culture.

NOTES

(1) Kraus, Chris. *Summer of Hate*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). 2013.

IV:

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Open Collectivities:

Red Channels In Conversation with Nasrin Himada

In a climate of perpetual warfare, ecological disasters, state divestment from social welfare, sanctioned police violence, and neocolonial urban planning procedures, Red Channels, a collective based in New York City, curate films that bring into the present context a history of struggle in America and other places around the world.

Red Channels uses cinema as a tool to mobilize—an idea that stems from a history of revolutionary organizing in the 60s and 70s. Filmmakers, such as Mostafa Abu Ali of the Palestine Film Unit, and Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas from Argentina, who directed *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), used cinema as way to document—and spread information on—the proto-revolutionary process. Cinema as a weapon was the idiom used in the revolutionary struggle for liberation from colonial and state military regimes. Red Channels brings this sentiment back to present day struggles, through what they show and the films they make. They ask: how do cinematic images inspire us to create platforms for conversation, action, and expansive organizing?

For Red Channels, this enquiry has extended beyond film curation. Putting emphasis on modes of participation, Red Channels organize discussions, walking tours, and they mobilize around local struggles, such as anti-budget cut rallies in New York City, or public transit fare hikes. What is impressive about Red Channels is the multiplicity of action taken under the guise of one collective. With no clear mandate or mission statement, the collective functions precisely because it is open. They are open in the sense that they consistently collaborate in order to merge art and politics in a thoughtful and challenging manner, as well as, are not limited to one ideological position.

What makes them so interesting today is the reversal of the relationship between what a collective represents and its extension into what it does. Red Channels is not a container of pre-determined practices and beliefs, but a mobilizing machine interested in how the public engages with varied content, material forms and its present political context.

There are well over forty active members in Red Channels but I happened to speak to two, Sunita Prasad and Malek Rasamny, in New York City, on July 11 2011.

NH: How did you get involved with Red Channels?

SP: Red Channels had paired up with Paper Tiger Television, one of the oldest, non-profit, open volunteer-based video collectives around, whose purpose is to produce non-mainstream forms of media like public access television. Paper Tiger Television was taping a public access show about military contracts and a friend told me that they need people to be on camera. I went and read military contracts in front of a camera for a single day. That's how I met Matt Peterson, who

was running Red Channels. At the time, Red Channels was not yet a collective, but less than a week later Matt called for its collectivization, I believe out of a desire to enact a political principle of cooperation, and collaboration with others. We met for the first time in Prospect Park, in June 2010, and around twenty people showed up for the meeting. They consisted of filmmakers, curators, archivists, documentarians, but mostly people who are loosely related to film and video.

MR: I found out about Red Channels when I attended a couple of screenings that Matt had organized. What I really valued about the screenings were the discussions. Matt was really good at mediating and making sure the discussion was instigated as a collective effort. I was really struck by that. For the first time, I saw a panel discussion structured as an open conversation. Even though there were “experts” in the room who provided valuable context, Matt saw to it their voices were not privileged above anyone else’s. The discussion was allowed to flow in different directions that brought the work into contact with various other issues and concerns. We were allowed to go “off-topic” — something that most panel discussions steer away from — which proved very valuable. This format provided the conceptual framework for how audience participation would be approached in later events once Red Channels became a collective.

NH: How exactly did you envision Red Channels as a collective?

SP: Originally, and still, Red Channels is an open collective, meaning anyone can join at any time.

We did a film festival here in New York City during our collectivity season, called “Our friendships are constructed on the basis of conflict.” I think this title is indicative of how we operate, because we find camaraderie in our differences and value productive arguments. We don’t want to have a mission statement. We’re not all Marxists and we’re not all anarchists. Those kinds of political tendencies are in conversation with each other all the time in each event Red Channels holds. When we work together, we don’t do it from a position of a specific political agenda, but instead debate, for example, the value of flexibility in organizing against what has been called “the tyranny of structurelessness.” This term emerged from an article written by Jo Freeman, a feminist writing in the 1970s. Freeman, focusing on the women’s movement at the time, describes how the bid for non-hierarchical groups often simply precluded discussion within the group of the hierarchies that form anyway.

Red Channels strives for fluidity in structure, in part to avoid hierarchy and bureaucracy within the group, but we have to acknowledge that hierarchy bubbles up. There are times when we defer too much to people who have been working with the group longest. And there are other times when the hierarchies that crystallize perhaps make more sense or are even useful to us. For example, deferring to experience and letting people who have been putting more work into a particular project take the lead.

MR: As a group we don’t want to create a firm and rigid philosophy and approach that would confine our actions. Rather, we allow our actions to define us and in that way we allow our actions to determine who we are as a collective.

SP: Red Channels is not a consensus-based collective, because we don't know who's going to be at the meetings. Usually, two or three people are always there and the other seven people who are there could be from anywhere; altogether we're about forty people. Because of this, it would be difficult to call anything that gets decided in a meeting a true consensus. We feel that we don't all need to agree on everything that Red Channels does as a group. If three people decide they want to do something, they can, and often their initiative is infectious.

MR: I think that is a really significant model in dealing with an age-old problem or contradiction that exists in so many collectives, which is the problem of maintaining a certain level of activity, momentum and sustainability without becoming too rigid or authoritarian. The model of two or more allows Red Channels to be constantly active and responsive without introducing any sort of hierarchy. This allows the collective to act on various initiatives that were individually conceived harmonizing individual imagination and group action.

SP: And you can do it under the banner of Red Channels even if a lot of people in the group don't necessarily want to participate. We don't all have to agree with the project or initiative. We're generous and understanding with each other about that. It's a nice way to operate. This characteristic is key to how the collective functions. And another characteristic is that we don't have a venue, and we like not having a venue. We like moving around the city.

MR: We've met in parks; we've met in members' homes, like mine and Sunita's; and we've met at various institutions like The Brecht Forum, The Maysles Cinema, and The Bushwick Center for the Arts. We've also collaborated with 16 Beaver, and we've met in places like Bluestockings, a café and bookstore.

SP: Another identifying factor of our collective — that is not unique but something I feel is becoming part of the identity of Red Channels — is that we have no funds and we have no budget. We don't do anything that raises money, or that costs money, or at least not more than a small amount people working on the project are willing to put in individually. We don't do events in venues that charge us, and we don't charge for our events. We generally get copies of films for free, and if we need materials or services like paper or copies, we try to use our connections in other areas of our lives to get them donated.

NH: What I find fascinating about Red Channels is that you're not all film curators, and Red Channels is not fixed on film curating. Can you talk more about the multiplicity of Red Channels? How does it fit into the model of the collective that you are describing?

SP: Red Channels works on multiple platforms: curating and holding events and discussions; organizing actions in the city; engaging the city in collective research, such as the walking tours; and acting as an affinity group in larger protests/demonstrations.

MR: We organized a walking tour of prisons in Manhattan. People often think of prisons as institutions that function in far away places, outside of city parameters, and are therefore more of a general political problem, not one that is directly related to the fabric of city.

NH: These prisons are in Manhattan? They're *that* local?

MR: Yes. It wasn't a walking tour in obscure places. The walking tour took place amidst heavy pedestrian traffic.

SP: Some of them are maximum-security prisons.

NH: I had no idea that there are maximum-security prisons *in* the city.

MR: There's one on the West Side Highway, two in the Wall Street area, one near the Brooklyn Bridge, one on 110th street, another one in the Murray Hill area.

Another project that was initiated by Infinite, a member of Red Channels, had to do with the subway fare hikes. We created a campaign around the unlimited fare ride metro card, where we let people know that if you had a card, you can swipe them through. It's illegal for people to ask to be swiped through.

NH: It's illegal for someone to ask to be swiped through to get on the subway?

MR: Yeah, it's illegal for me to stand in front of the subway toll and ask people who have unlimited to swipe me in. I can get arrested for doing that.

NH: How was that made illegal?

MR: It's defined as a form of panhandling.

SP: Or theft from the MTA [New York City Public Transit].

MR: But it's legal for me to give someone my card. I can offer my unlimited card, but they're the ones who are in danger in asking me. So we devised a way to make people visible if they want to swipe other people through. We had to make decisions like, do we use both English and Spanish, should we use images or symbols rather than text, and how do we get people's attention. It was an aesthetic question, very tangible. How to make people visible so that others know who they can approach so card carriers can swipe them in and they don't have to be afraid.

NH: What did you decide on in the end?

SP: We made two-inch buttons out of expired metro cards.

MR: I wanted to mention — in regards to your question about how these activities fit into the model of the collective — that Red Channels feels more like we're made up of different constellations. You can be organizing one project and other Red Channels events are happening around you. It's not systematic, so that we're doing one thing after the next. There are always different planes of activity occurring simultaneously.

Another non-film activity is this reading group we organize based on having someone nominate a list of five books, and the collective votes from the list on which one they're most interested in

reading. The first book we read was Henri Lefebvre's *Right to the City* and we had Peter Marcuse, a professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University, attend the last reading session of that. This reading group runs concurrently with other campaigns, projects, film festivals and actions all occurring under the banner of Red Channels.

NH: It sounds like any time a big event occurs, Red Channels is on it somehow and you begin to mobilize around it.

MR: Yes. For example, during the release of the Wikileaks cables in February 2011, in response to both the information that was released and the democratization of journalism that the release seemed to point towards, we had an informational potluck/teach-in. It was an open call for people to present information about or from the Wikileaks cables using open-source media. The event first took place in Bushwick, Brooklyn and again in Harlem.

SP: Another Red Channels action took place at a big anti-budget cut rally on May 12 (2011) in the Wall Street financial district in Manhattan. The city was reviewing a proposal that would cut the budgets for schools and other social services in the city, and a lot of student groups, workers and immigrant groups organized a day of action. Red Channels made this big black sheet and we were going to try and drape the bull that has become a symbol of the financial world — it was originally a piece of illegal public art. We made a video of the sheet being used in the march, intercut with a text we wrote in response to the demonstration.

For each of these actions, there's a communiqué that gets released that is collectively written. I think the communiqués are excellent pieces of writing. They're short, one page texts, where we write over each other, using google docs, until we get somewhere that satisfies all of us, or we run out of time.

We have also collaborated with Todos Somos Japon, which is a group that is trying to radicalize demonstrations already happening in Japan.

MR: That was the origami crane-folding event.

SP: We did that to criticize the Japanese government and TEPCO's [Tokyo Electric Power Company] response to the Fukushima disaster. In the communiqué we distributed to accompany the action, we pointed out how the Japanese government had fiddled with the legal limits of radiation to avoid providing evacuation services, and how both the government and nuclear energy corporations were willing to place communities on a precarious perch at the brink of annihilation with this dangerous energy source.

Todos Somos Japon organized a rally and we brought giant origami paper with radioactive symbols on it. We made really big radioactive paper cranes and we walked them from Tompkins Square, in Lower Manhattan, to Rockefeller Center in midtown where the General Electric building is. GE sells the reactors that were used at Fukushima and has expressed their intention to continue with this model. They are also a major lobbyist for nuclear energy in the US and abroad. We made a shrine of cranes fly in front of the GE building at Rockefeller Center, which is full of tourists, and tussled with the security guards.

NH: Can we talk about your film programs? What is Red Channels' main mandate in terms of film programming?

SP: Red Channels has a big identity; it has become bigger and more nebulous. But it is interested in film screenings with a focus on rare and radical work.

One of the programs we did was on women in prison. It included films by Third World Newsreel (*Inside Women Inside*, 1978), Dara Greenwald (*The Package*, 2010), and Blair Doroshwalther (*The Fire This Time*, in progress). Vikki Law, who writes on women in prison, was present, and we had a conversation about issues particular to women, women's health and gendered assumptions in prisons, such as the notion that women prisoners don't organize for their rights. In fact, strikes in women's prisons just tend not to get the same publicity and support as in men's prisons. Also, health issues particular to women in prison are not often discussed in the prison solidarity community at large.

MR: Another film program we organized was a screening of early works by Albert Maysles and DA Pennebaker that they made when they were in the Soviet Union. The films were rarely screened. Even the directors themselves hadn't seen them since they made them more than fifty years ago. I watched *Russian Close-Up* (1957) with Albert Maysles for the first time since he made it. The series traced the roots of what later became known as cinema-verité. At the time, Stalin had died, the Iron Curtain was fading somewhat, and western filmmakers were seeing the Soviet Union for the first time. In fact, the series was called "The Thaw: Early Cinema-Verité in the Soviet Union."

SP: The program we mentioned earlier, "Our friendships are constructed on the basis of conflict," was a smashing success.

NH: Can you talk about that program a bit more?

SP: Yeah. Maria and Molly, two members of Red Channels, worked really closely with Troy from Spectacle, where the screening took place.

MR: Spectacle is a micro-cinema in Williamsburg.

SP: And Molly is an archivist and film curator, and Maria was working at Paper Tiger Television, and they just did an amazing job of collating a huge range of films by collectives.

MR: Films by The Invisible Committee, the Black Audio Film Collective, TTVV, Videofreex and the Worker's Film and Photo League were screened.

SP: Grupo Ukamau, a film collective from Bolivia making indigenous themed films in the 60s, did really amazing work. There were films from Third World Newsreel, a major activist documentary collective in NYC, and General Idea.

MR: And Voina, a very controversial performance collective from Russia who stage provocative and politically charged public performances.

SP: One thing we did mention earlier is that discussion is really one of the few mandatory things about a Red Channels event. We lead open discussions on a range of topics. We try to make it clear that we are not an inner-circle trying to “teach” the audience about these topics, but instead we are all contributing to what happens in the room and hope that members of the audience will join us in presenting the next event. We are just starting conversations, and encouraging others to start conversations.

MR: If we’re dogmatic about one thing it’s that. We never screen a film and call it a day. We want to push the idea of an event beyond its own structure. Often it’s about endurance. Like the screening of Peter Watkins’ *The Paris Commune* (2000). That’s a six-hour film, and we had discussion afterwards. New York is constantly producing cultural or artistic events and activities, which at times people approach in a consumerist fashion. Red Channels’ events challenge this kind of approach. We will screen a six-hour film straight through at 16 Beaver. Or, when we do the walking tours, you’re walking around in the heat for six hours or more.

SP: Yes. And after we screened the six-hour film, we got some dinner and talked for another few hours. It’s a full day.

NH: Right. So you’re committed to the event by giving time. That reminds me of a workshop I attended led by the co-creator of The Pinky Show, a DIY radical educational television program that you can watch online. He made it mandatory to sign up for an eight-hour workshop if you wanted to participate. For him, it had a lot to do with time and duration. It takes time to have a conversation with strangers, and to really get at things, to unpack them in such a setting. And people came and we stayed. It was amazing to have that much time.

MR: Focusing on the duration and endurance of an event positions the audience within a new frame. The situation becomes more intimate because each audience member is part of creating a collective and participatory dynamic that is radically different from most panel discussions, where the audience asks questions that are then answered by people in a position of expertise. The discussion is then restrictive and formal.

At a Red Channels event, discussion becomes a collective effort. We don’t focus on questions like “Is this work well made? Is it good or bad work?” These are ineffectual questions that emphasize aesthetic judgment. Rather, we push the attendees to think about whether a work is radical or not, and if so, how. We also try to include all the voices in the room, and not just hear from people who are more talkative than others, or who are more knowledgeable about the topic at hand.

Our discussions really challenge the boundary between audience and artwork, or audience and presenter. As a spectator, you’re merely there absorbing the content. But as a participant, you’re entering a new configuration, where you’re pushed to challenge the content, to respond to what is being brought into the room, to invest in what’s happening.

NH: What is a radical or political film or event? How would you articulate the politics that drives Red Channels?

SP: That's the kind of question we refuse to answer.

NH: Why do you refuse to answer it?

SP: Because, as we said earlier, our politics are demonstrated through our actions. This sounds a little self-important, so I'll phrase it differently. It is very difficult to speak for the group on what politics drive Red Channels, because it is such an intersection of many politics. However, maybe politics is something we can generate in real-time through our interactions. I think that's what we hope to do.

MR: There are some commonalities between our politics, but we don't need to state them or over determine them in the collective. We do not want to be bound to a framework circumscribed by statements or specific wording that constitutes a set of beliefs. And that was an issue from the very beginning. There is a certain common political understanding between us in terms of resistance to structures of political, economic, social or cultural authority. We're different as individuals, but there is an unstated affinity.

NH: I am totally in agreement with you, and I get that refusal to, as you say, over-determine what the politics are of a collective, or group, but I think I also want to get at why it's important to refuse a definition.

MR: And that's not being apolitical. We're not refusing politics. We just don't want a definitive politics that forms a set of principles or manifesto.

SP: I am going to answer that kind of sideways. I have continued to work with Red Channels over the past year consistently and be as involved as I can because it makes me really happy. I come away from meetings feeling really happy.

MR: Me too.

SP: Red Channels consists of a group of people that I don't share everything in common with but who I genuinely really like.

MR: Yeah. Absolutely, and it's fun.

SP: But when you think of collectives that do the kind of work that we do from a political perspective, however nebulous and unstated, then it doesn't seem to matter that we like each other as much as I think that we do. The secret is, I don't think we would bring our politics into public dialogue as well as we do if we didn't have respect for each other and have a good time doing it.

NH: The point isn't necessarily to make new friends, but that can also happen.

SP: Right. And I think that the reason it makes me so happy is because it is such a concert of thinking and doing together.

MR: That's a nice way of phrasing it.

SP: Red Channels has a politicized way of organizing thinking and doing together that I think makes for a better community that considers each other. Red Channels is a coalition of people who consider each other more, and listen to each other more, and that make each other happier.

MR: We're not very disciplinarian in terms of contribution or participation. We manage to get a lot done but we're not task enforcers.

Red Channels has a core membership that has more or less remained stable. But because we're an open collective, where people are constantly coming in and out of meetings and participating at different times, we don't ask for people to commit in a way that they can't. We remain open.

SP: I'll call it an ethos of what we do — determining who we are and how we're represented — also comes into how we organize collectively. We make decisions at meetings, but we don't judge or chastise people for not showing up at meetings. And by the same coin, they understand when we have to make decisions in their absence. Red Channels is what its constituents are, and as much as they're participating is as much as it's operating.

BIOS

Nasrin Himada is a film programmer and writer residing in Montréal. Her most recent curatorial projects include *Images in Time//Images in a Time of War* (Concordia University, Montreal), *Entre Palestina e Irak: La Historia y Memoria de los Archivos* (Espacio g, Valparaíso, Chile), and *Excessive Palestine* (with Vicky Moufawad-Paul and 16 Beaver, NYC). Nasrin has contributed in writing to *Inflexions*, *West Coast Line*, *Montreal Serai*, and *Scapegoat: Architecture, Landscape and Political Economy*. She is currently completing a PhD in The Interdisciplinary Program in Society and Culture at Concordia University.

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Malek Rasamny is a writer, filmmaker and film curator living and working in New York City. He grew up in Westchester County outside of New York and moved to Lebanon, where his parents are from, when he was fourteen. He graduated from Bard College with a degree in Anthropology. In addition to working with Red Channels and doing curatorial work for the Maysles Institute, Malek is writing a semi-fictional novel, his first, based on testimonials of reincarnation gathered from members of the Druze religious community of Mount Lebanon.