ART AS RESISTANCE IN POSTWAR LEBANON

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This article attempts to define a regime of visibility proper to postwar
Lebanon by studying a number of Lebanese artists working in the
immediate aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War, as well as a genera-
tion of younger artists working today. It argues that we can trace a
certain continuity between the first postwar generation of the 1990s
and its contemporary heirs, insofar as both share a common prob-
lematic that crosses different regimes of visibility. I will show how
each artist proposes a visual form that resists the historic way of
seeing, or, in Foucault's terms, the hegemonic regimes of visibility
imposed by *central capitalism* on the periphery.[1] Following Deleuze
and Guattari, by *central capitalism* I mean the advanced capitalism
of the Global North, the West, or the First World, while by *peripheral
capitalism* I imply less developed forms of capitalism pertaining to
the South, or what is usually referred to as the Third World.[2] Against
the dominant historical narratives that define the temporality of
artistic creation in postwar Lebanon as oriented toward a traumatic

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1   On the distinction between central and peripheral capitalism, see Gilles Deleuze and
     Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of
     Minnesota Press, 1987), 465.
2   Deleuze and Guattari refer to Samir Amin in his distinction of central and peripheral forms
     of capitalism. Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*, vol. 2, trans. Brian Pearce (New
     York: Monthly Review Press), 390–94.

past[3] or a wishful future,[4] I will propose that the act of artistic creation is fundamentally an act of political resistance in the present. That is, artistic creation acquires its political dimension by creating images that propose alternative ways of seeing in conflict with pre-established aesthetic regimes.

EXCESSIVE MATTER IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR

The cultural atmosphere before and during the Lebanese Civil War was characterized by the tension between modernity and tradition.[5] In the 1990s, a number of young artists who had lived through the Lebanese Civil War—and who had witnessed the aftermath following its declared end in 1992—were forced to reflect on the aesthetic and conceptual forms that could communicate such an experience. The war acted as a force of conversion, reorienting the gaze from a wished-for modernity or traditional fantasy toward the presence of rubble, bullet holes, car

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3   Mark R. Westmoreland, "Making Sense: Affective Research in Postwar Lebanese Art," *Critical Arts* 27, no. 6 (December 2013): 717–36.

4   Ilinca Todorut and Anthony Sorge, "To Image and to Imagine: Walid Raad, Rabih Mroué, and the Arab Spring," *Theater History Studies* 37 (2018): 171–90.

5   For example, Sarah Rogers, "Daoud Corm, Cosmopolitan Nationalism, and the Origin of Lebanese Modern Art," *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 46–77.

bombs, unidentified corpses, disappeared citizens, and militia. Walid Sadek has conceived of this conversion of the gaze as leading to an attention to the traces of the war in terms of what he calls "excessive matter." Sadek defines excessive matter as a presence that emerges after a violent interruption and that resists any rationalization or subsumption under a coherent narrative.[6] The scars left over from an accident that we discover after waking up from a coma,[7] a cadaver lying in a street that the father is unable to recognize as being his own son's,[8] the corpse at the center of a funeral wake,[9] a destroyed neighborhood the morning after a bombing, a disappeared relative who returns home,[10] and so forth are all, according to Sadek, "excessive presences." What characterizes these presences is a rupture between presentation and representation. Sadek argues that this rupture must be carefully measured, since it must remain in the realm of the family and the familiar, and it is only by maintaining such familiarity that presence can reach the paroxysm of estrangement. One experiences this excessive

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6   Walid Sadek, "Place at Last," *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 39.

7   Sadek, "Place at Last," 39.

8   Walid Sadek, "In the Presence of the Corpse," *Third Text* 26, no. 4 (July 2012): 489.

9   Sadek, "In the Presence," 479.

10   *Phantom Beirut*, directed by Ghassan Salhab (1998, Pellisier Productions), DVD.

materiality, for example, when one fails to recognize the familiar, the estrangement here being not that of the utterly other, but of an otherness that affects the most intimate, the most known, and thus intensifies the feeling of estrangement.

In fact, excessive materiality is not pure matter. If it is not simply the unnamable, this is because excessive materiality is the familiar presence of a name we still hold in our mouths but are unable to utter or attach to such a presence. According to Sadek, civil wars and familial wars between neighbors secrete this excessive presence.[11] Sadek once recalled his visit to the suburbs of Beirut after the 2006 Israeli air raids, how he stood there "holding in one hand" the names of these familiar neighborhoods and "in the other hand" the localities of these same neighborhoods. He remarks on how he was unable to associate the name with the place, and how this inability measured the impossibility of subsuming the places under their names, turning the scenery of destruction into an excessive material presence. As he puts it: "One may say that Beirut is twofold: A receptacle of abandoned names and an excess of tangibility. It is names afloat over neighborhoods and apartment buildings constructed out of previous rubble, a mix of fragments."[12]

Excessive materiality resists representation, rationalization, or explanation. In his essays, Sadek proposes solving this problem by providing the reader with concepts that allow him to experience the excessiveness of the present situation. Meanwhile, in his artistic interventions, Sadek restages the rupture between presentation and representation, the material thing standing there and its name, and through this gesture he re-presents this excess. While Sadek's texts conceptualize a number of situations pertaining to excessive materiality, his artworks try to provoke an experience of it, as we will see in the following examples.

In the essay "Love Is Blind," Sadek introduces Moustafa Farroukh, an artist blinded by his attempts to awaken the decaying nations of the Arab world by turning alternately toward Islamic tradition and European modern academicism.[13] Sadek shows how his forefathers were incapable of seeing their own present, because in their endeavors

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11   The different articles mentioned show such production of excessive presences in the context of a civil war.

12   Walid Sadek, "From Image to Corpse," *Naked Punch*, no. 8 (August 2006): 59.

13   Walid Sadek, "In Health but Mostly in Sickness: The Autobiography of Moustafa Farroukh," in *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2006), 66–71.

aimed at civilizing the Arab world they were always fixated on the future, or on the past. By revealing their blindness, Sadek returns to us the capacity to see, and to inhabit the present.

On the other hand, in the artistic version of *Love Is Blind* (2006), Sadek presents a number of silk-screened aphorisms printed under the info-labels of Farroukh's paintings, which are hung on empty white walls. Most of the aphorisms revolve around the disconnection between places and names, a disjunction that one finds repeated in the mismatch between the labels and the paintings to which they ostensibly refer: the name of a painting refers to a supposed painting and plays a referential function, but only in order to point toward an empty wall. This disjunction reorients the viewer's gaze toward the white walls of the gallery. Thanks to this measured disjunction between presentation and representation, the pure materiality of the wall ends up becoming the artwork to be seen, and in so doing replays the reorientation of the gaze toward excessive materiality, in an attempt to put the viewer in the presence of its excessive presence.

In 2008, Walid Raad asked Sadek to give him permission to borrow *Love Is Blind* for his exhibition Scratching on Things I Could Disavow, targeting the history of modern and contemporary art in the Arab world. Raad reproduced the installation *Love Is Blind* (2008) in the form of a painted mural emphasizing the shadows that shaped Sadek's walls and captions and that were Raad's real object of interest. As Raad later commented: "Walid [Sadek] must have sensed that what fascinated me was not his installation, and even less Farroukh's paintings. He must have sensed that what drew me to his work were the shadows that shaped his walls and captions. And that in this regard, I don't need his permission because these shadows move independently of his *Love Is Blind* and are prone to manifesting themselves here and there and in forms other than shadows."[14] If Sadek's strategy to re-present excessive materiality consisted in restaging its structural relations, Raad's approach consisted of gestures of diversion.

Raad's artworks are traps; they serve as vehicles for preserving and making available peripheral elements that are in fact the real, valuable elements in Sadek's *Love Is Blind*. Another example for such a strategy

14   Walid Raad, wall-text of the exhibition from the show at Paul Cooper Gallery "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World / Part I_Volume 1_Chapter 1 (Beirut: 1992–2005)," from November 6–December 19, 2009.

is Raad's *Index XXXVI: Red* (2008), a piece consisting of a series of Arab artists' names cut in white vinyl and glued on a white wall where future artists, by means of telepathic communication, supposedly suggest to Raad the correction of some of the printed names of the Arab artists that he has silk-printed on the walls:

> Today, I'm convinced that artists from the future, they did it on purpose. You see, they on purpose misspelled Tehan's name when they sent it to me via telepathy. Because artists from the future are not interested in Tehan, they're not intent on sending me on some corrective historical missions. Artists from the future want or need something else. And today I know that artists from the future want or need a color. More precisely, they want or need this particular shade of red that's going to appear in the cook's sprayed corrections.[15]

Similarly, the costly museums that house artworks on Saadiyat Island in the United Arab Emirates are not really designed to shelter and promote art but to make available and visible a number of gestures and postures performed by visitors in the vicinity of the artworks.[16] These convoluted and humorous narratives visualize the strangeness of the everyday in an area hit by a series of disasters. Raad explains his intentions by illustrating the notion of withdrawn tradition, first introduced by the Lebanese thinker, writer, and artist Jalal Toufic. In a situation of withdrawn tradition[17]—that is, when an event is such that it provokes the withdrawal of meaning from cultural products, rendering them opaque to those who used to belong to that tradition and witnessed that event—Toufic proposed that the task of the artist is to make available for future viewers and artists the shapes, gestures, lines, and colors that surround him, given that he is no longer able to decipher their meaning. Raad describes such an experience, in which:

> I expected such colors, lines, shapes, and forms to hide in paintings, sculptures, films, photographs, and drawings. I thought that artworks would be their most hospitable hosts. I was wrong.

15   "Walid Raad. Index XXXVI: Red. 2010 | MoMA," https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/21/430.

16   Raad, "Scratching on Things," http://www.scratchingonthings.com/.

17   Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition after a Surpassing Disaster* (Forthcoming Books, 2009), e-book, http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads/Jalal_Toufic,_The_Withdrawal_of_Tradition_Past_a_Surpassing_Disaster.pdf.

Instead, they took refuge in Roman and Arabic letters and numbers; in circles, rectangles, and squares; in yellow, blue, and green. . . . They planted themselves inside the frames that circulated not front and center but on the periphery of Lebanon's cultural landscape.[18]

The framework that makes these artworks available to us also turns them into presences encapsulating strange powers and revealing the everyday as an excessive material, in Sadek's understanding of the term. To make visible the withdrawal of tradition is then to present the everyday as an estranged place, to reveal beneath the obviousness of meaning a presence that resists meaning, a presence wrested from essence, and by doing so to reveal the truth of the situation as that of a withdrawn tradition.

Raad, Sadek, and Toufic point toward the same struggle: the situation in postwar Lebanon is defined by the withdrawal of tradition that manifests itself in what Sadek refers to as an excessive materiality. The struggle consists of reorienting the gaze toward this excessive estrangement by pushing away the readymade categories that cover that reality under a comforting system of identifications, such as "this is an Arab," "a Sunni," "a painting," . . .

It is along the demarcation line that divorces things from words that we can evaluate the distortions that Raad imposes on war reports by Western media outlets. As the artist argues, during the Lebanese Civil War, the modus operandi of Western journalism aimed at subsuming events under Orientalist views and clichés that ended up evacuating all existential, historical, and political understanding of the conflict.[19] Equipped with powerful broadcasting systems, with troops and journalists on the ground, and diffusing print material and televised images on a large scale, central capitalism, as represented through its mass media broadcasting channels, such as TF1 or CNN, elaborated a credible fiction that allowed viewers to identify all the actors and components of the events. It is in this sense that the *Bashar Tapes* (2001), a video by Walid Raad in which a supposed Lebanese man, Bashar, recalls his experience as one of the detainees in a Western hostage crisis, subverting the Western narrative of the abduction of a number of Westerners

18   Walid Raad, "Appendix XVIII: Plates 88-107(1)," *Art Journal* 69, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 7–10.
19   Walid Raad, "Beirut . . . (à la Folie): A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, New York, 1996), 94.

in the Iran Gate scandal by revealing the clichés, stereotypes, and rationales that surrounded and formatted the narratives of that crisis. In the video, Bashar questions why the story of the captives refers to the psychological dimension of the ordeal, then wonders why the Westerners begin their accounts of captivity by mentioning the weather, but then also make sexual allusions. Raad had analyzed all of these themes in his doctoral thesis, "Beirut . . . (à la Folie)," in which he shows how the psychologizing and naturalizing of a Western hostage crisis aimed at giving an ahistorical and apolitical version of the events that ended up covering their complexity with a cloak of simplified identifications. In his thesis, Raad also shows how the Westerners' accounts are filled with sexual and cultural clichés about their abductors that evacuate all political credibility from their actions.[20]

Another work by Raad, *Missing Lebanese Wars* (2002),[21] is a graphic work consisting of pages from a notebook, in which each page includes the newspaper clipping of a racehorse and notes indicating the horse's distance from the finish line, the name of the winner, and the time of the race, among other details.[22] The story goes that these notebook pages document the weekly gambling habits of a group of Lebanese historians who used to bet on the capacity of the race photographer to capture the exact moment when a horse would cross the finish line. In this work, Raad aims at producing an image of the impossibility of pinpointing historical events and personalities, echoed in the impossibility for the race photographer to capture the exact moment when a horse crosses the finish line. Each page from the notebook includes a description of the winning historian who was able to provide the best guess as to the distance between the horse's head and the finish line. The description of the different winning historians refers to texts, mostly taken from *The New York Times*, that reflect on the impossibility for photojournalism to precisely capture historical events: for example, in Plate 01 of *Missing Lebanese Wars*, the winning historian is Ataturk,[23] a historical figure who can't be captured objectively because of sociopolitical taboos and the myth that surrounds him, as detailed in *The New York*

20   Raad, "Beirut . . . (à la Folie)," 147.

21   See Walid Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* (Lisbon: Culturgest, 2007), exhibition catalog.

22   https://www.sfeir-semler.com/gallery-artists/the-atlas-group-walid-raad/view-work/.

23   Stephen Kinzer, "Bodrum Journal; Ataturk the Icon Is about to Take a Bit of a Hit," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/03/world/bodrum-journal -ataturk-the-icon-is-about-to-take-a-bit-of-a-hit.html.
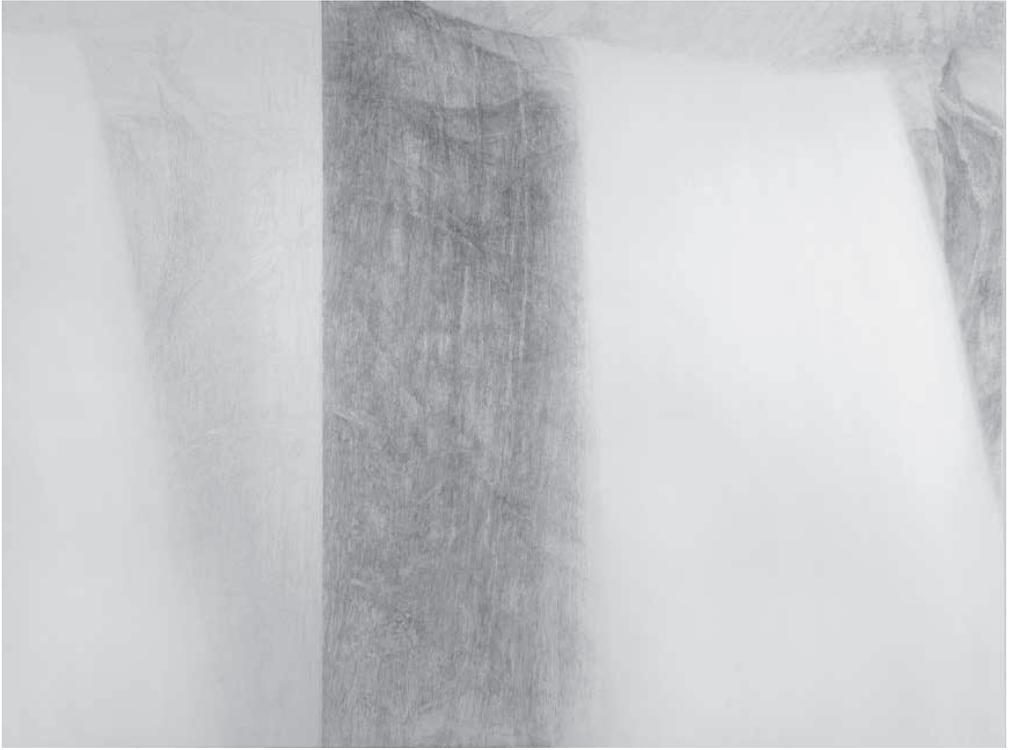
Times on October 3, 1997. By contrast, the winning historian in Plate 08 is Said Mekbel,[24] a journalist killed by Islamist fundamentalist groups, as reported in a *New York Times* article from December 25, 1994, whose content addresses the difficult relation between military security and journalistic coverage.

Missing Lebanese Wars is a web of counterinformation in which Raad stages the impossibility of identifying events in historical situations. The work also considers how one can reverse that impossibility in a productive practice that reveals the strangeness and complexity of what lies underneath simplified journalistic, historical, or political accounts. The impossibility of rationalizing the violent Lebanese events leads to the rupture of words and things, revealing the excessive presence of the ruins and dead bodies that can no longer be included in a clear rational or historical account. It is this excessive presence that needs to be preserved in order to resist hegemonic simplifications, such as the reduction of the Lebanese wars to some innate hatred between

24 Roger Cohenzagreb, "In Bosnia, the War That Can't Be Seen," *The New York Times*, December 25, 1994, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/hnpnewyorktimes /docview/109333028/B62BE092F37941A4PQ/1?accountid=8555.

Muslims and Christians, and to call for a new culture that might be able to make sense of such excessive material. A genuine culture that can stem from these regions that witnessed such violent events would be one that is capable of expressing, rather than suppressing or obviating, this excess, as I tried to show in my reading of Raad's work.

ART AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE
IN THE ELECTRONIC AND DIGITAL ERAS

Deleuze defines "control societies" as societies that are able to govern their subjects in open spaces.[25] I argue that the regime of visibility that characterizes these societies is the regime of the *previsual*—that is, a regime in which perceptions are determined in advance by conditioning the viewers to perceive as "already seen" or to see in advance what they are going to see. This previsual regime of perception can be periodized according to the primary electronic or digital technology of control that it employs: television or the internet.[26] Advertising billboards, newspapers, TV news, and TV jingles all characterize the electronic previsual regime, where any visual item, be it a product, person, or nation, is coupled to a predetermined meaning or sound. Meanwhile in the digital previsual regime—including social media, viral images, cybernetic data, and simulation techniques—each visual item is linked to another such item or action, which allows places, products, and persons to be visualized and controlled through cybernetic feedback loops *before* any occurrence in actual space.[27] At the center of capital, the previsual regime of perception orients the consumption of its subjects and shapes public opinion by imposing systems of pre-identifications and behavioral patterns. On the periphery of capital, the previsual regime has to exercise an additional function: that of simplifying the historical and political complexity of these areas in order to allow interventions from the powers of the center, such as sending troops, geopolitical divisions, implementing educational institutions, and controlling sectors of the market.[28]

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25   Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7, http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828.

26   On the tensions between the analogical and electronic eras, see *Network*, directed by Sidney Lumet (1976; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer).

27   Eric Sadin, *La vie algorithmique, critique de la raison numérique* (Paris: Editions de l'échappée, 2015).

28   These interventions span from military intervention to geographical partitioning, displacing populations, and the like. The mentality of General Gouraud in this regard

Alfredo Jaar can be considered an exemplary figure opposing the electronic previsual regime and the simplified narratives television imposes on zones that witness waves of violence. In his 1996 artwork *Eyes of Gutete Emerita*, Jaar criticizes the modus operandi of the televised image. As Rancière argues, the TV news format consists of giving those in power the privilege of speech, while the images exhibit the suffering and dead bodies of an anonymous unprivileged mass.[29] To oppose such a distribution of the visible, Jaar concealed the images of the cadavers by enclosing them in black boxes, and revealed the proper names and personal stories of the victims by inscribing them on these boxes.[30] Jaar was able to redistribute the relation of the speakable and the visible, and to disturb the mode of presentation proper to television.[31] The act of resistance in the center consists, then, of giving a proper name to the victim, and hence a refusal to reduce individuals to an anonymous material for the generic speech of those in power.

Even if Jaar's gesture is laudable, it still pertains to the center. We have seen that Raad's critique of the mass media covering the Lebanese Civil War moves in the opposite direction, given that it embraces the status of materiality that Jaar revokes. Raad affirms the situation of anonymity and excessive materiality that strikes individuals living in a culture that has witnessed a surpassing disaster. Raad doesn't advocate for a humanization of the victims by giving them back their proper names and stories; rather, he creates delirious narratives that end up presenting everything and everyone as a pure material presence that can't be subsumed under a generic televised account or under personalized story. The affirmation of excessive materiality allows a specific assessment of violence in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War that escapes its repression under the well- or ill-intentioned conceptual frameworks and artistic gestures imported from the center.

If Jaar represents a line of resistance in the electronic era, we can say that Alex Katz represents a line of resistance in the digital era. In the

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is typical: "Gouraud favored partition into big entities: 'It will be easy to maintain a balance among three or four [Syrian] states that will be large enough to achieve self-sufficiency and, if need be, pit one against the other,' he wrote in a memorandum to his superiors. In September 1920, he had it his way." Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 85.

29   Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 96.

30   Ibid., 97.

31   Ibid., 99.

digital era, the previsual regime operates by doubling the visual world with a previsual world: cyberspace doubling real space, one image always preceding another, where what is seen for the first time always seems to be seen for the second time. Such operations of previsualization turn the world into something ever-familiar: Google maps, commercial apps, and globalized commodities make it so that, most of the time, we encounter what we have already seen in cyberspace. Katz inverts the modus operandi of the previsual image by showing that we can bring the world back to its freshness by revealing that the second sight can stand in for a first sight. Katz's light is a *quick light*: the painting splashes and hits the viewer; the viewer sees the whole painting in one glance.[32] In this sense, Katz's way of seeing differs from that of other modernist painters. We know that Kandinsky conceived of his painted surface as a keyboard on which the composition is played by the eyes,[33] whereas Klee's concept of polyphony invites the eye to read a painting in multiple directions.[34] For Klee and Kandinsky, the eye must appreciate the painting part by part; the composition must be read in order to extract the symphony or the complex meaning it encloses. Contrary to such progressive apprehension, quick light hits the viewer in one blow. To implement this quick way of seeing, the painted motifs—such as light dancing on flowers, swirls on the surface of running water, reflections of light on a flying bird, or people moving on a sunny day—are external fleeting images that escape sight. The motifs are then themselves fast images, difficult to perceive properly at first sight. Add to that the fact that the technique of painting that Katz uses, the *wet on wet* technique, is itself a fast way to paint, so that the whole painting must be painted in one session in order to give the impression that it is a glazed surface cast from one material, eliminating in this way any brushstrokes on which the eye could linger. By using such motifs and techniques, Katz is able to capture light's quickness on canvas, and hence bring to a point of stillness that which escapes our vision when seen for the first time: indeed, it is difficult to really see a flicker of light, or reflections of light, at first glance. In looking at a Katz painting, we experience the inversion of the previsual, as if we were seeing something already seen, but for the first time. The painted image here is a

32   Alex Katz, *Invented Symbols* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 2012), 40.

33   Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Micheal T. H. Sadler (Floating Press, n.d.), 61.

34   Paul Klee, *On Modern Art*, trans. Paul Findlay (London: Faber, 1966), 17.

second iteration of a flicker of light, but it is only in the second iteration of the same image that we see the flicker of light for the first time. Through such a gesture, Katz brings back the visual world to the freshness of its birth, as if we needed the artwork in order to learn how to reacquire sensitivity to the world and unlearn the anesthetized way of seeing induced by the excess of televised or electronic images. Katz shows that there is an inherent blindness in man when it comes to his most immediate environment, and that the work of art must, in one and the same gesture, bring back to sight that which eludes sight *and* make palpable the ever-growing blindness and inattentiveness to the world.

In an inverted gesture, Daniele Genadry's[35] painting occupies the dimension of *slow light*, as opposed to Katz's *quick light*. For instance, Genadry's *Glow* (2014) is a painting that pictures a flash of light, with the flash occupying most of the center of the canvas, relegating to the sides a painted motif of some external scenery. In this painting, the artist lets us linger and move around a traumatic point in time, rather than a fleeting one. The flash of blinding light that we can situate in our visual memory is brought to a standstill. That moment of vision that we can't withstand, a moment from which we have to turn away or raise a hand to protect our eyes, is now available to sight. The painted flash of light allows us to linger, move our eyes around the edges of the flash, cross it at ease, and see in a second instance what can't be seen in the first. Another work, *Light Fall* (2017), is a painting that features a waterfall as its central motif, yet the waterfall is left white and glowing as a luminous surface framed by purple textured rocks. In this work, the background as such is brought into visibility. The naked canvas stands for light that is shaped into a figure: the waterfall is a blinding white surface of light. The surface functions as a place or site where light and matter exchange their determinations, where matter becomes light and light becomes material: the picture, a represented waterfall, collapses into the material world by simply being presented as a naked canvas, just as the ambient light in the room turns into a pictorial figure when reflected on the naked white canvas that constitutes the central figure of the painting (the waterfall). The figurative elements of the painting—for example, the painted rocks—are limited to the periphery and function as a frame for the figure of light on the blank canvas. The act of painting

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35   Daniele Genadry is a Lebanese-American painter based in Beirut. "Daniele Genadry," http://www.danielegenadry.com.

in this case consists in preparing for the appearance of the background, be it the material background of the canvas or that of the ambient light that illuminates it. By fusing a presentation and a representation in the shape of that paradoxical figure, the waterfall, which is itself a figure of canvas/light, the two backgrounds are made visible for the first time. Genadry shows that in order to make visible the conditions of sight, we need to bring these conditions into the pictorial realm, since it is in this realm that the perceptible becomes visible. Indeed, the ambient light of the room and the naked canvas can only be seen if they are brought to our perceptual attention as constituting a figure on that very canvas. Without the inclusion of the two backgrounds, the viewer would consider that she was seeing nothing, as if she were looking at an empty canvas or at ambient light reflected on empty walls.

Genadry's painting technique is itself very slow, with paintings sometimes taking months to complete. The technique consists in very small brushstrokes in which Genadry doubles each color with a contrasting color, in order to bring the surface to a state of vibration. The palette Genadry uses verges on neon colors that serve to accentuate the luminous and vibratory effect of the painting. However, all the painterly work functions only as a frame to reveal the central motif, which is a glowing white surface. The glowing surface is itself barely worked, and thus contrasts with the frame. The form of light in Genadry's painting is located at the intersection of the digital, previsual organization of perception and the prerogatives of the gaze's reorientation toward excessive materiality in a context of withdrawn tradition.

Contrary to Katz, Genadry uses natural motifs, such as painted rocks or mountains, to reveal an excess of formlessness that needs to be brought into view. If Katz exemplifies a line of visual resistance against the hegemony of the previsual system of control, Genadry is able to resist that same system and subvert its modus operandi by creating a rupture in the system of identifications. Katz's work illustrates how visual resistance in the center will be shaped by *fast light* aimed at liberating the lines, colors, and shapes from cliché. That light draws our attention back to the world, thus resisting the way of seeing implemented by digitized images. On the other hand, *slow light* traces a possible line of visual resistance in the periphery by orienting the gaze toward the excessive materiality of the present, a materiality that is usually obliterated under the imported images of the center: Genadry's paintings induce a way of seeing the everyday as a strange, excessive

presence.[36] If the problem for Katz is to reach the fleeting perceptions and sensations that crystallize in our objective world, the problem for Genadry is to see what is here and now, what is perceptible and yet never visible. Genadry's paintings are visual machines that make present presence itself, by exposing the materiality of light itself. The reorientation of the gaze toward the materiality of light is part of the visual machinery of painting: these paintings' temporality anchors them and their viewers in a perpetual present—that is, in a present in which each viewing differs from the next, depending on the ambient light.

While in the center the main problem is to free the individuals from the systems of control implemented by electronic and digital technologies and imageries, at the periphery we have the additional problem that such technologies and images are imported and coopted by a population that does not contribute to their production and is not represented by them. This imported layer of values, fashions, behavioral gestures, intonations, music, and political categories forms an additional problem, in that it ends up obscuring the everyday. In addition, the way the

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36   "The cinema author finds himself before a people which, from the point of view of culture, is doubly colonized: colonized by stories that have come from elsewhere, but also by their own myths become impersonal entities at the service of the colonizer." Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 222.

center represents the periphery is itself exported to the latter, leading to the imposition of the generic political and social categories broadcast by the Western mass media, as analyzed by Raad. Scratching away that imported layer reveals a world without culture, and yet a world that cannot be reduced to a state of nature. We have seen that Raad reveals that, after the withdrawal of tradition, we are left with lines, colors, and gestures that have lost all meaning or cultural determination, and that for that reason, if we scratch at the imposed categories, we end up seeing a world that is fully constituted, an everyday scene, standing there as pure presence. What is revealed beneath imported culture is a civilization reduced to its materiality, a living ruin: bodies, places, colors, lines, postures, and lights without names, without use, without a future or a past—in other words, pure material presences.

SEEING BY WAY OF DEATH AND SEEING BY WAY OF BLINDNESS

In his essay "Seeing Rude and Erudite," Sadek argues that the proper way to see excessive presences is as a way of sight whose temporality is identical to the temporality of the physical, organic eye: when looking at a corpse, the eye can't go beyond the object of its sight, yet sees its own future, becoming aware of its own mortality and organic decay. Sadek coins such a modality of seeing a *seeing by way of death*.[37] The eye begins to feel, perceives itself as an organ, and waits for the last image, the eschaton, that will be glued to the retina before the final extinction of the gaze. The image in the dying eye touches the eye, its colors blend with the eye's body, and the life of the image joins the life of the eye. In seeing by way of death, the time of the image and the time of the seeing eye meet at last.[38] With the modality of seeing by way of death, Sadek advocates for a type of image that would model itself on the ruin, or excessive presence, in a quasi-tactile way, rejecting all future images, as in those of reconstruction projects that hastily aim at erasing the ruin, or in the obsessive documentation of the traces of war, as one finds in archival practices that amass war anecdotes and images. Only by holding on to an absolutely fragmentary present can the image itself become an excessive materiality that is part of this excessive material culture. In seeing by way of death, the image produced on the retina is glued to the eye of the one seeing and takes the shape of his life. To illustrate this

37   Walid Sadek, "Seeing Rude and Erudite," *Third Text* 21, no. 3 (May 2007): 264.
38   Sadek, "Seeing Rude," 263.

modality of seeing, Sadek gives the example of Ghassan Salhab's *La Rose de Personne* (2000), a ten-minute video consisting of tracking shots from a car driving towards Beirut's Hamra Street.[39] The overall impression of the different tracking shots gives a grainy texture to the image, in which we start to feel the materiality of Hamra, as if the image were produced by an eye rolling on its surface and accumulating grains on its spherical body. The image of the street is glued to the eye like the last image or eschaton that the dead sees, merging the time of seeing and the time of the image.

Similarly, Genadry's "seeing by means of blindness" contracts in one shot the dimensions of time, what we see for the first and second time, before and after: we see in the painted constructed image what can't be seen without such reconstruction, and what is nevertheless considered to have been seen at first sight. Of course, such "first sight" is not the inadvertent seeing of some object due to our lack of attention, as when we enter a room and fail to notice all the objects that are there. The first sight is blind, in this case, in a structural and necessary way: structural, given the situation of cultural importation pertaining to the periphery, and necessary, because even when we are perceiving a number of objects, these objects are not visible as such, but only visible as covered by imported categories, and not as what they are in that context—that is, as excessive matters. It is in this sense that work is required in order to bring back to visibility what is being perceived. To that end, seeing must be oriented toward an excessive strangeness, whereby the time of the image and the time of its sight and production occupy the same present. The blending of the eye and the image, echoing the eschaton, is exemplified in Genadry's painting *The Fall* (2015), a work in which the image appears as a function of the eye's adaptation to the light striking the canvas. At first sight, the painting presents a valley suffused by light, with large white areas being surrounded by mountains. As we look more attentively, however, an image starts to appear from these white areas; we start to distinguish lines, and rocks. This image is not affixed, as in Sadek's eschaton, to the dead physical eye, but is dependent on the latter's contractive movements—that is, on the adaptation of the eye to the luminosity of the painted surface. The image hovers between the viewer and the material canvas. In that intermediate space, we access another form of encounter between the

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39   Walid Sadek, "Place at Last," *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 81.

temporality of the image and the temporality of the eye: the image varies in relation to the viewer's attention and the length of viewing time, and in this way acquires details with the focus of the viewer. If inadvertently the viewer turns away, the fleeting image disappears and may never be seen for a second time. *The Fall* in this way indicates that the space of sight is located between the viewer and the canvas; it is there that we can see the image as a strange apparition.

This estrangement reaches a new level when a number of paintings are gathered in the same exhibition space. In her last solo show at the Beirut Art Center (2018), Genadry's paintings surrounded the room, delimiting a vibrant volume of light. In this volume of light, the postures and gestures of the viewers were made available and became visible by becoming solids bathing in an ambient visible light. This yielded a strange sight where wandering nameless bodies seemed like emanations amidst the light generated by the paintings and where the paintings acted now as the background supporting such a vision. If in one painting the aim is to make visible the ambient light itself, when brought together, the different paintings start to give consistency to the volume of light that they now seem to delineate. The material volume of light becomes visible as the space between the walls becomes material and reaches visibility. At the same time, the different paintings acting together reveal the viewer as an integral part of the work. While the individual paintings are void of any human figures, when these paintings face each other, they begin to frame the viewers, and the viewers begin to populate the paintings and the visual field. The radiance of the white surfaces intensifies their outlines, gestures, and bodily positions. We start to see for the first time these ever-present perceptions, familiar faces, postures, and dresses, but it is as if these figures were being taken into a strange glowing landscape. The representational realm seems to leak into the world of presence, giving presence to presence and bringing to sight that pure estranged material that is the fabric of our everyday lives. Contrary to Sadek, in this case, it is not the restaging of the structural relation of word and image characterizing excessive materiality that conveys such presence; it is the visual machinery itself that allows Genadry to bring into the open the excessive materiality of the everyday in places from which tradition has withdrawn.