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Simona Schneider

Invocation by Proxy: Ali Cherri's "My Pain is Real"

It is entirely conceivable that life's splendor forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. *If you invoke it with the right word, by its right name, it will come. This is the essence of magic, which does not create but invokes.*

... Ruft man sie mit dem richtigen Wort, beim richtigen Namen, dann kommt sie. Das ist das Wesen der Zauberei, die nicht schafft, sondern ruft.  
— Franz Kafka, October 18, 1921<sup>1</sup>

One large monitor roughly 60cm x 32cm hangs adjacent to two abutting 9" screens (19cm x 14cm) like the ones used in cars. The displays engage in an oblique crossfire, issuing indirect addresses to the viewer standing at their intersection, who turns towards and away and wears the headphones attached to the small screens. Lebanese artist Ali Cherri first showed his three-channel video installation "My Pain is Real" (2010) at Galerie Iman Farès in 2010 in Paris as part of the inaugural exhibition "Co-incidences" in this configuration. The scale bookends the human. The larger shows a man's face more tightly cropped than a talking head and closer to an intimate interlocutor skyping from a relaxed position, but its size moves the visitor back. Conversely, the two smaller monitors bring the viewer closer and accommodate the interval between the eyes, recalling viewfinders. As his visage progressively becomes bruised, battered, and wounded, he looks both on and out without saying a word and with muted emotions.

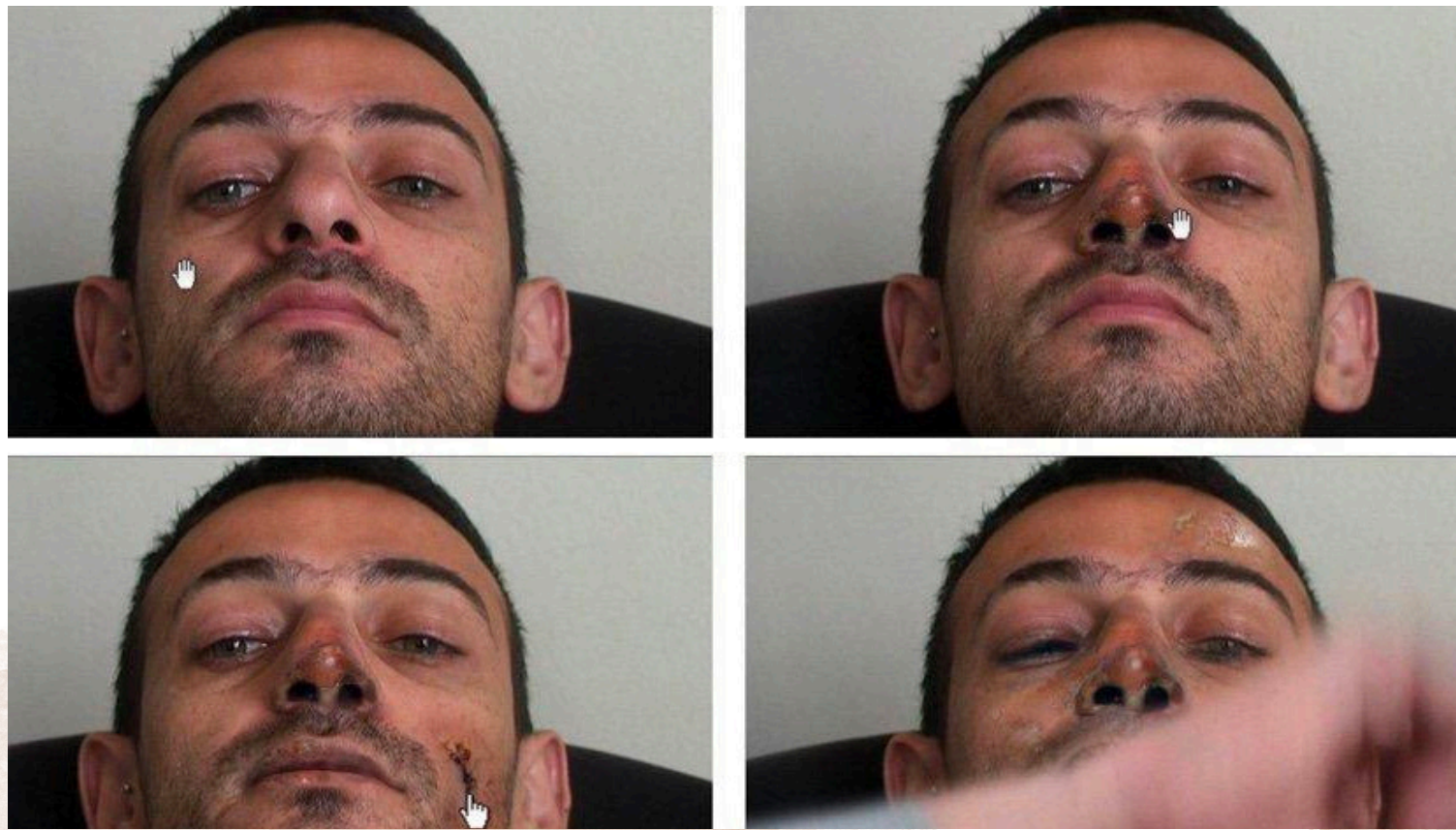
Meanwhile, the diptych alternates between identical and slightly overlapping, contiguous images, including idyllic, long takes of a sun-drenched, still room and a more tumultuous sea interspersed with flickering, fast-paced montages of war media footage and everyday scenes. All three videos run on a loop, but the video on the main display runs more than twice as long as that of the two mini consoles and consists of one long take (that form often championed for its veracity) internally cut as a collage through special effects.

When I first saw the piece, Cherri, who was present, projected this channel—his own countenance—on a cinema screen, and his gigantic, imposing face stared down towards the spectators into a middle distance.<sup>2</sup> In its original installation, two people watching the adjacent screens must occupy nearly the same position in intimate proximity. Otherwise, it is possible to revisit the piece through Cherri's website (ali-cherri.com) on a personal computer. The mouse inter-

1. Translation modified and italics added. Kafka, Franz. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1914-1923*. Translated by Martin Greenberg, vol. 2, Schocken Books, 1948, 195; Kafka, Franz. *Tagebücher*. Edited by Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002, 866.

2. This first viewing occurred on the occasion of the 2013 *Unfixed Itineraries: Film and Visual Culture from Arab Worlds* conference at UCSC Digital Arts Research Center organized by Peter Limbrick.





"My Pain is Real," 2010. Four stills from the large screen of the three-screen video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

mingles with and rebels against the mouse onscreen, stopping the piece to discover its details, refusing to go forward since one soon very well knows how the loop ends: with the artist's death. The big brother, "interactive," and intimate versions of the installation each amplify its inherent ethical stakes: how to experience and "host" digital and internet images, especially violent ones, with care while imagining and creating a space for an encounter with an equal and lively other.

"My Pain is Real," among other contemporary digital work, propels this elaboration of haptics and embodied spectatorship to account for the way "proxy poetics" imply touch and other senses to obviate their absence. This move invokes the viewer as an active and potentially limitless sensor. It summons through the imaginative capacity for hosting experience and for being hosted, coextensive with the material and existential limits of that which is called upon to witness and participate both. Framing himself as an onlooker who visually witnesses the progressive mutilation of his own face, Cherri evidences a lack of accompanying physical sensation in the act of viewing. As an actor, he performs his own defacing through facial expressions of shock and surrender rather than pain. On

the one hand, he strikes the pose of a Christian martyr or practices the imagination of death during life that 11th-12th century Sufi philosopher Al-Ghazhālī recommends for an ethical life in *On the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife*. On the other, he represents an intimate, incredulous, and numb relationship to mediated violence. As witness and artist, his implicit collaboration with the events onscreen unsettles any number of dichotomies, not least active-passive spectating and hosting.<sup>3</sup> The performance suggests an ethics of hospitality for hosting traumatic memory and remediating the (un)dead.

#### Describing "Poetics of Proxy"

Phenomenological accounts of the cinema tell how the spectator's body cannot resist the

3. For a dismantling of partition of capacities implied in the passive/active binary and a compelling argument for moving beyond it, see Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*. 2008. Translated by Gregory Elliott, Verso, 2011.

cinema's haptic properties. Notable in some recent video works, especially those that mediate archival footage, however, is how the artist, often on screen and in voiceover, distinctly offers their body, affect, and senses to counter the *absence* of a physically proximate relationship to images circulated in digital media. These interventions communicate the embodied experience of an individual to one who is unavailable, whether emotionally driven to mental distraction or physically removed, through what I will call "poetics of proxy." This proxy mode often hosts difficult or disturbing images in an immanent presence with counterbalancing care and attention. Rather than an avatar, which renders and represents an entity understood as a constant "self" in a different realm or medium such as in video games, a proxy only temporarily hosts another subject, making the activity of hosting primary and the relationship to the subject fluid. It can intimately host aspects such as desires, associations, or fears without corresponding consistently with any one person in an identificatory relation.

Like haptics, proxy poetics of digital media embrace the ability of cinema to convey intimacy through sound and texture as tangible, experiential phenomena. However, in their case, visibility remains among the senses, less synesthetically and more as tactility as it touches opacity. Haptic and feminist scholars celebrate attention to these cinematic elements as a less-alienating alternative to a fetishistic, gaze-oriented attitude.<sup>4</sup> The proxy mode's place resides in privileged intimacy with the filmmaker and the viewer. Nevertheless, in foregrounding the remoteness of the visual, the video attests to the precarity and ephemerality of that promised intimacy and to the opacity and the solidity of images that resist abstraction. Martiniquan poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant develops the concept of opacity as that "irreducible singularity" of each individual that undoes the binary of self and Other. His image of each citizen coexisting as a thread in a weave of fabrics is particularly evocative for the digital layering technique that will be described here (Glissant 190). Opacity remains of utmost importance as a

4. Jennifer Barker concludes, "Exploring cinema's tactility thus opens up the possibility of cinema as an *intimate* experience and of our relationship with cinema as a close connection, rather than as a distant experience of observation, which the notion of cinema as a purely visual medium presumes" (Barker 2) [original italics]. For a recent media archaeological approach, see Wanda Strauven's *Touchscreen Archaeology* (2021).

visible trait. For, unlike accounts of cinema as ghostly, here opacity accounts for an overlapping solidity and an intertwining of digital pixels that is opposed to the imaginary of paranormal haunting as translucence.

In its military connotations, the proxy is an occupation and haunting that is an infiltration. Of the Lebanese context, Chad Elias writes that a general belief that ongoing wars are proxy wars has given rise to the colloquial expression "the others' wars on our land" (*hurūb al-akharīn 'alā ardūnā* حروب الآخرين على أرضنا) (Elias 6, FN. 7). This mindset has also provided a constant alibi for local sectarian conflict and political corruption. The August 4th, 2020, ammonium nitrate explosion at the Port of Beirut, which killed over 200 and wounded more than 6,500, is another tragic example. Proxy poetics as counter-strategy surface in epistolary-cinematic forms and collaborative projects in which participants create a relay where direct participation is impossible. Digitization promises the globe at one's fingertips precisely as it becomes no longer accessible with countless closed borders and manners of exclusion. These artistic interventions accrue increasing relevance in light of mandates to evolve technological innovations that privilege detached communication and remote warfare.<sup>5</sup>

Proxy aesthetics connote the possibility of hosting, care, and hospitality, connotations that get lost in the term's use in the context of warfare. In reflecting and distorting regional public servants', political actors', and the mass media's rhetoric of irresponsibility for the body, artists working in this mode reveal its poverty and raise the question of these supposedly neutral and objective "servers" complicity. In examples of this mode, an artist or actor appears "in the image," whether bodily or vocally. They bear witness, host, and are temporally and spatially hosted by the images "before" them in an attitude of care. By foregrounding the medium's proxy aspect and casting themselves as the first spectator, artists have sought to overcome the abstract forms of experience and implication involved in digital and networked spectatorship, especially during periods of crisis.

Cherri can be considered a younger member of a cohort of Beirut artists and filmmakers whose work takes up questions of authenticity in photographic evidence and historical artifacts. By creating archives, evidence, and alternative narratives, they presciently brought attention to the ways facts are manipulated to

5. On the history of unmanned weapons' role in proxy wars, see Katherine Chandler's *Unmanning: How Humans, Machines and Media Perform Drone Warfare* (2020).



serve certain interests.<sup>6</sup> His work can be said to extend these themes but to seek solid ground, even if it can still become a rumble, vibration, or a quantum wave, amidst post-modern objects. His more recent moving image work, including *Pipe Dreams* (2011), *The Digger* (2015), *The Disquiet* (2013), and *Somniculus* (2017), continues his media/archaeological concerns with outer space, post-apocalyptic scenes, museum installation, artifacts, and natural history. This article will limit itself to a hypothesis about how Cherri's "My Pain is Real" creates its distinct proxy mode to host the past and the other in the present. An interview with Cherri allows interrogation of how the artist's use of Adobe After Effects® makes a difference in interpreting its gestures.

### Digging, Layering, and Tectonic Glitching in After-Effects

Reflecting on the 2006 Lebanon War, Cherri looked into the archives of the *Al-Safir* newspaper.<sup>7</sup> A photograph of a woman's wounded face stood out to him. The shot is an intimate close-up, as if in a relaxed video meeting with a loved one, but distinctly looking down from a high-angle shot. Leaning back on a couch in a quasi-psychotherapeutic posture, Cherri gets into a pose that allows his face to correspond to that of the woman whose photo haunts him. Although he seems to be uncovering the images, counterintuitively, he layered the photo onto his face, reversing the order of the "original," or reference, and its derivative in After Effects®. Instead of uncovering, revealing, or digging up history, it is an added layer.

Instead of making the top layer translucent or transparent, the method upholds the opacity of both parties. Cuts and bruises arrange a death mask or shroud to preserve the face's contours, but Cherri has already struck this position as a living mask. Though the scars appear upon his face, he hosts them and brings them momentarily back to life. By contrast to

the small-screen videos, on the larger monitor, Cherri does not speak and does not impart his sensual experience except through widening eyes that look toward but not into the camera. The representation suggests its transparency and implies figurative wounded interiority. However, the literal, external injuries of others and the eye's flickering agency speak to opacity. The process Cherri uses to make the abrasions appear further reinforces the condition of the subject's density.

The face, usually given a more privileged role in recognition and surveillance than the body, is cropped higher than a bust, closer to a beheading. It undergoes a mute poetic blazon that carefully addresses each feature while dismantling the whole into fragments. Upon its first exhibition, Kaelen Wilson-Goldie wrote, "It is unclear whether the hand tool represents a gentle lover or a brutal attacker."<sup>8</sup> The icon of the familiar gloved hand evokes the uncanny innocence of Mickey Mouse and the sleight-of-hand of a magician. Though no physical touch occurs, it alludes to the viewer in the same position as that of the unknown hand moving the mouse. Cherri's gaze changes from looking at its face as the cursor visits it to recognizing the viewer and the artificiality of the scene with a wave of his magician-like hand at the end—but this switch is never decisive as the video recommences.

Participation of the spectator under these conditions occurs through their interpellation.<sup>9</sup> However, here an invocatory address figures through the mouse and its deixis. In other words, its indication beyond the frame from the reference point of it coaxes phantasmic absence into presence, the attitude, affect, and emotion of which are voluntary. As Mary Ann Doane writes of indexicality in post-digital media, "The index is reduced to its own singularity; it appears as a brute and opaque fact, wedded to contingency—pure indication, pure assurance of existence" (135). Invocation here means defining the indicator and indicated through the relationship between the largely unknown agential individuals it invokes. In this case, the suggestion of touch does not guarantee a reality defined by physical phenomena knowable through the senses.

Even as the title of the piece insists on the reality of

6. These preoccupations can be found in the work of Lebanese artists Akram Zaatari, Rabih Mroué, Lamia Joreige, Walid Raad, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige and resonate with the work of Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour, among others.

7. During this war, the Israeli Defense Forces disproportionately bombed Lebanon after Hezbollah attacked soldiers on the border, leaving a trail of destruction to military and civic buildings such as schools, out of which Hezbollah agents were said to be operating.

8. Wilson-Goldie, Kaelen. "Beirut Art Center's 'Exposure' Grows up and Gets Real." *The Daily Star*, December 3, 2011.

9. Answering the interpellation by an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) turns one into a proxy agent for this ideology. As James Martel has shown, drawing directly from Louis Althusser, only nine out of ten interpellative addresses reach their mark (Martel).



*"I keep in my head scenes, images, sounds that have no great interest and that I shouldn't have been remembering." "My Pain is Real," 2010. Courtesy of the artist.*

a privatized, proprietary and subjective pain, it is self-aware of the notorious unknowability and immeasurability of sensation and of pain in particular.<sup>10</sup> The title's insistence paradoxically seems to "really" mean the film's indexical qualities (the documentary photographs), while the animated hand seems to summarily represent an abstract and unaccountable agent. Hollywood has trained viewers to watch violence on every platform indiscriminately as fiction and make-up. Cherri's particular lesions are both documentary evidence just as much as they are "special effects." Not only the meaning but also the sound of the title points away towards an association, a kind of Freudian slip. Cherri has also noted that other people revealed a double-entendre in the title to him that he had not initially noticed: "is real" sounds like "Israel," perhaps the "real" (if reality is the subconscious) referent of the pointing and source of the pain. "Israel" in this sense functions as a symbolic placeholder that structures experience (always with at least the potential to host) in an otherwise disrupted relation to home. What might otherwise read as gestures of touching "the real" function instead as deixis, pointing to a displaced agent.

As if to underscore the non-self-identity between speaker and persona, a glitch momentarily interrupts the illusion of correspondence between death mask

and proxy. While the cursor is on the left side, the layer jumps and comes back into place on the right. The unruly pixels reveal the mechanism and provide an opening to interrupt the automation. Cherri says that he noticed the jump and intentionally left it. In this automated and seemingly inevitable unfolding, one thinks, too, of the mechanism of interpellation and the automation of subjectivization by the state. It is proof of a failure and of a narrow opening and 'play' between what otherwise would be two superimposed but parallel layers. On the larger screen, the mouse points visually in two directions and two temporalities at once.

### Positioning the Viewer, Invoking the Viewer's Position

At the same time, invocation on the smaller two occurs primarily through sound and the way it beckons across and into the visual interval between the two screens, highlighted by other kinds of glitch-like compositions. Cherri names sense-memories in a voiceover soliloquy, filling the screen bodily through the voice and its qualities, language, and descriptive content. First, ambient room noises grow slowly to include street echoes from the open balcony, allowing distinctive registers to describe a space. A layer of intermingling voices on a radio cover and homogenize the rest from outside it. In contrast, Cherri's

10. The "reality" of other people's pain has been taken up substantially in philosophy and anthropology, notably by Stanley Cavell, Veena Das, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.



disembodied voice appears very near. The smaller screens question the practice of remembering historical events merely through indexical media evidence of the event itself. Cherri states in voiceover, “With every major event taking place/is associated an incident of my daily life. It was a disturbingly quiet day.”<sup>11</sup> His smaller memories overwhelm the world events such that he no longer remembers which sense memory corresponds to which political incident.

Into this liminal space of reaching towards and across, where sense memory bridges, the inability to touch compels Cherri’s intervention into digital post-production. An arhythmic mechanical disturbance cuts the audiotrack as when two signals cross and touch. The intimate voice regains control over the soundscape as it interweaves with the onscreen sound of waves breaking. Cherri summons his memory through a rolling image of the sea.<sup>12</sup> The sea offers a resistant, mobile bridge in its redundant edges, a glitch, even as it is interrupted, like that of memory in the face of the intermittent assaults from media imagery spectacle.

This double image recalls the stereoscope, the proto-cinematic, photographic viewing device that creates the impression of three dimensions. Each eye sees two shots from slightly different angles separately and stitches them together to form a space. The apparatus reminds the viewer of the relativity of perspectives on any one event. Sense memories relayed in voiceover, such as the smell of matches in the teacher’s room, stand in for the affective realm and its withdrawal from the image catalogs that make up historical records. This phrase, translated in the subtitles as “matches in the teacher’s room” without “the smell of” limits their sensory qualities for a non-Arabic speaker and reveals only their situatedness. These memories create another kind of three-dimensional effect. Meanwhile, an interpellating voice makes an injunction about things that Cherri “shouldn’t have been remembering.”

11. This text comes from the video’s subtitles. In Arabic, Cherri uses word مَشْهَد. Translated as “incident,” the same word can mean “scene,” “sight,” and “spectacle” and comes from the root شَهِدَ, which forms the basis for the nouns “witness” (شاهد) and “martyr” (شهيد).

12. The invocation of the sea seems to function here as the one in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1968), as a way of summoning memory.

## The Undead, the Phantasm, and the Proxy: The Problem of Haptics as Authenticity

In presenting a proxy for the “use” of the spectator, these poetics probes empathy’s bodily limits. It invokes shared sensory phenomena precisely to signal their absence, deficiency, and unavailability. As such, it offers a defamiliarization technique that asks the viewer to consider their physical involvement and affective investment, or lack thereof, without fetishizing presence, inviting into participation but only through the recognition of absence.<sup>13</sup> Suggesting that contemporary filmmakers from Beirut operate within a “poetics of phantasm,” Mark Westmoreland writes of “disembodied news footage” that it comes to replace the exilic subject’s relationship to home. In particular, Westmoreland argues, contemporary Lebanese filmmakers accentuate sense memory in their films and videos. He postulates that while these poetics reveal “the gap between the sign and the signified as disembodied conflict, memory serves to negotiate a visual expression of loss” (Westmoreland 37).<sup>14</sup> Laura Marks has also found fertile ground in the same bodies of work,<sup>15</sup> through them suggesting that haptics “is a visuality that functions like the sense of touch” (Marks, *The Skin of the Film* 22) by evoking a multi-sensory experience and memory to “represent the experiences of people living in diaspora” (xi). Sense memories and other memories summoned in the poetics of phantasm, like a phantom limb, make the immanence of loss explicit and palpable.

Hosting the other in a community enables the redistribution and reappropriation of unmoored signs through sharing and shared embodied memories. This attitude toward the other differs significantly from the accounts of subjectivization whereby recognition creates the subject. The affect of that recognition or shout, “hey you!” could be care or blame. How-

13. This defamiliarization technique notably relies more upon techniques and markers of intimacy than Brechtian epic theater would. Unlike Antonin Artaud’s “theater of cruelty,” for instance, it does not presume the viewer’s capacity for total participation.

14. Westmoreland draws on Rachel O. Moore’s investigations into primitive impulses and the play of cinema upon the psyche, it’s “ability to touch without hands, to elate or shock the body” (34).

15. Marks’ most recent contribution, *Hanan Al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image*. The MIT Press, 2015, is entirely dedicated to work from the Middle East.

ever, singular contact offers an opportunity to notice internal fissures, glitches, and non-identity. In the case of “My Pain is Real,” the proxy is the artist, with whom one cannot identify and must remain in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis one’s complicity in watching. Furthermore, one tends to judge the experience (here of pain) based on its performance. Laura McMahon writes that Jean-Luc Nancy’s conception of touch as singularity “demands that one think this mode of contact deconstructively, that is, without collapsing back into a faith in the referentiality and authenticity of the artwork.” Instead, “differing, deferral and spacing” disrupt “(re)investment in self-presence and immediacy” (McMahon 6-7). Obviating the impulse to judge authenticity by drawing attention to the act, Cherri substitutes deixis that indicates but does not touch (however cartoonishly it may try) for the thing itself.

Authenticity or the “reality” of the titular pain does not reside in its presence but in his gestures towards its notable absence and inability to communicate it. Jean-François Lyotard writes, “the deictic is not merely a value within the system, but an element that from the inside refers to the outside: the deictic is not conceivable *in* the system but *through* it. This difference is of the greatest importance and does not imply any return to a ‘metaphysics of presence,’ as Derrida fears” (Lyotard 420).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the contours of Cherri’s face as the interface highlighted by the wounding and the temporality of the long take afford the spectator receptivity. The viewer’s position outside of a representational framework or sensorial experience comes to consciousness through gradual and successive pointing and smoothing, rather than impatient clicking similar to pulling a trigger or detonating a bomb. At its limit, it summons us, the embodied viewer who is just off-screen.

Jalal Toufic has authored several theoretical tracts that have influenced many Lebanese filmmakers using the undead framework. These thoughts appear in *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993), his first book of essays, in which he considers the undead in film and film itself as an undead medium.<sup>17</sup> In this text, he writes from a “post-cinematic” perspec-

16. Here I allow the quote to point outside the limits of this text, to Derrida, in honor of the thought.

17. Cherri co-designed the Post-Apollo Press’s 2003 re-release. Kamran Rastegar writes of the theme of vampires and “cinematic tropes of the undead” in post-war Lebanese film and video “as a critical reflection on unresolved calls for justice” (157).

tive that the body of the film produced by the Hollywood studio system, with its para-colonial, narcissistic tendencies, is undone and done again, such that it is now “undead,” unresponsive but haunting. A short section entitled “Breathless” describes the encounter with a vampire that could also apply to the individual experience of watching a computer screen. No longer a reason to communally gather in a crowd, as the cinema was, this media platform would seem to suck the breath out of the viewer without returning it to a larger body. He writes that the undead has no mirror image, for “[i]f they don’t wipe the mirror, living people cannot see their image in it in winter since their breath, visible then, hides the surface of the mirror. But, with the vampire, one encounters an in-existent mirror image hidden by in-existent breath” (Toufic 39). Revisiting the installation through the breathless and undead post-media experience Toufic describes, Cherri’s image appears whole and in a condition of visibility (onscreen), yet the images of the undead fog it, taking the place of the otherwise missing collective breath in the digital.

Instead, the wounds reveal the surface of his face-as-screen, functioning as an opaque surface upon which those bodies become visible. Cherri wipes the screen in a magician-like gesture at the end of the video before the video repeats, making the entirely disfigured face disappear and reappear shortly after, alive and unblemished. The motion suspends the action, inviting the viewer to both catch their breath and notice themselves in the act of viewing. Without this interruption and without the slow processual time of the wounding, the miraculous recovery would mimic the magical thinking of “before and after” photos of plastic surgery, weight loss, or acne advertisements. Wiping the mirror allows the breath to “show up.”<sup>18</sup> Cherri’s (s)wiping of the image at the end of the loop can be read as cleaning the mirror rather than clearing the deck—a reference to almost imperceptible breath and the out-of-frame<sup>19</sup> that is not simply a homogenous continuation of vampiric code.

18. In another earlier video, “Slippage,” (2007) the camera records impassively while Cherri, staring into it, attempts to hold his breath for as long as possible. No one intervenes but Cherri cannot hold back and periodically gasps and pants.

19. Deleuze 16.



Conclusion

I wish to emphasize how much proxy poetics invoke the spectator and their relation to the “server.” If I am to argue this convincingly, I must offer my particular experience of the piece and, in doing so, admit my coordinates, my positions, my memories, and my experience. I had no direct contact with the 2006 bombings in Beirut. I was studying in Manhattan when the September 11 attacks occurred but experienced the event predominantly through the media. With its performance of watching a hyper-media event, Cherri’s piece invoked me through my own sense memories of absent-presence and present-absence. Cherri’s inclusion of the 9/11 attacks with the 2006 war, announced at a distance through the radio and the open window, synchronizes his video with a global time of impending, vampiric crises.

Though located only 7.5 miles north, I heard of the strike from a chorus of news reports. These blasted from the cathode-tube televisions in the common spaces located at opposite corners of the donut-shaped building and were joined by private TVs and radios intermingling in the building’s shaft. My sense memory reveals that the import of the event was not as immediately cognizable or disturbing as the synchronization and affective consensus of confused and uncertain voices over the same few images on loop. The texture of voices resonated in contrast to the dampened, muted sounds of carpeted chambers and passages of an otherwise quiet, still morning. I seem to remember a window with a languorous curtain very much like that in the video bringing breezes from elsewhere. The synchronized media time established then seems to have held both globally and as a moment of history in which time does not move forward. Endeavors to strike hopeful peace deals in the Middle East have sorely stalled if not been completely abandoned. The living ones remain so only with a revolutionary consciousness of the dead; life feels like the gift given into the care of proxies tasked with hospitality and care in the present.

In this essay, I argue that documentary proxy poetics evoke neither empathy nor identification, those common values attributed to fiction, as primary concerns. Cherri’s video performs exactly how identification and presence have limits. Instead, coordinates and correspondences that evidence the positionality of the viewer allow for a differentiated and complex understanding of one’s relation and complicity, bringing a panoply of viewing positions together without

compromising the multi-faceted and multi-valent social and geographic positions made local through the senses. The viewer’s invocation into an in many ways old-fashioned hall of mirrors on the contrary suggests an urgent ethical imperative of accountability and care for the other.



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