

# JUMP CUT

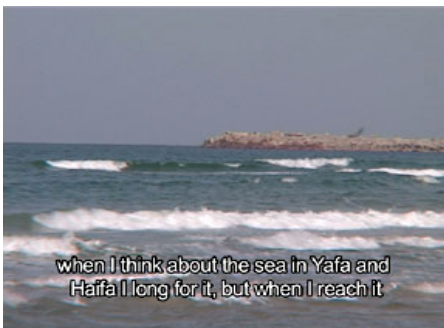
## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

### Tora Bora cinema

#### Images from *About the Sea*



We used to go to the sea everyday, even in winter.



When I think about the sea I long for it, but when I reach it...



#### by [Sobhi al-Zobaidi](#)

In Palestine, a new and independent cinema is emerging, and by independent I mean from the authorities of state, religion and commerce.[1] [\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) Independent filmmaking in Palestine is better understood as individual filmmaking because of the absence of the institutional base such as foundations, film collectives, film schools, groups, and most important censorship. In fact Palestinian filmmakers act competitively, most often incompatible with each other. Very rarely do they work with each other. An increasing number of filmmakers compete for the same resources. With no institutional bases whatsoever, the whole thing is left to individual improvisation. And maybe that's a good thing, because if institutionalized, who knows what it would be like?

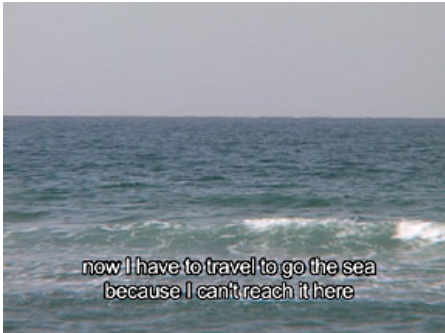
The Palestinian cinema developing now is one driven by artistic impulses to resist, travel, and otherwise negotiate the world — a body of work shaped only by the filmmaker and his or her circumstances. Impulsive, passionate films, bad quality films, homemade, homegrown, and desperate, but in their own way they reflect a great deal about the inhuman condition that Palestinians live in.

Ultimately we can sum up the Palestinian dilemma with the question, "What can people do without a geography?" Since 1948 with the founding of Israel, Palestinians have been living in an ever-diminishing space, a constantly transformed and disappearing geography. This has radically changed the way Palestinians practice space and the way they orient themselves in the world. Palestinians have emerged as disoriented people not only in the sense that they don't know where they are going but also in the sense that they know where they want to go but can never reach there. To combat this loss, Palestinians resort to poetic and imaginary means such as those found in the arts, religion, and digital media. These provide Palestinians with the virtual worlds they need in order to negotiate their loss and confinement.

If the Palestinian is a prisoner, digital media has made it possible to make a film about his life in his prison cell. All that is needed is a small video camera mounted on a tripod and the tape always rolling. But what will the inmate film? Himself or the iron bars or



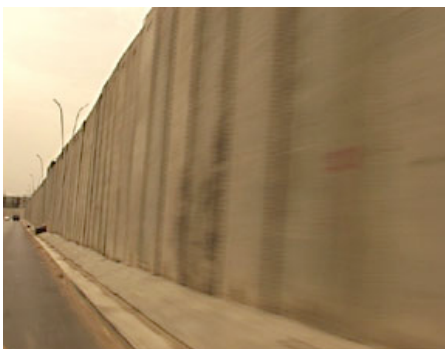
... it is not ours.



Now I have to travel to go to the sea because I can't reach it here.



"I remember when I first realized that we don't have a sea." Visually, the sea disappears...



his cell's concrete walls? And how would the prisoner convey his confinement within these few square meters? How would the prisoner film himself "doing time," as the word goes? Maybe through a lifelong-zoom-in to a concrete wall (as in *Wavelength* by Michael Snow)? Would he try to show his thoughts, his imaginings? Or maybe invoke all the other space, the outside space that he has no access to? My quest in this paper is partly inspired by this imaginary situation: What kind of film would be made by an inmate in his prison cell "doing time."

In this paper I focus on a number of films made by Palestinians within the last few years, a period mostly marked by the Israelis' building an apartheid wall that further segregates Palestinians into isolated ghettos. The films I discuss here are films by people made immobile, not only in the sense of their inability to travel, but more essentially in terms of their inability to reaffirm their identities as they relate to space. I posit memory at the core of this problem. And by memory I don't mean *only* recollections of the past (the lost paradise) but also dealings with the present moment, with the actual, the bare fact. A Palestinian's memory is mostly composed of an uninterrupted flow of uncertainties, insecurities, wars, and a general and detailed sense of destruction. What causes disorientation and loss is not "memories of things past" but of things present. The films I discuss here are more than just concerned with the present moment. They are the very product of it, images of it.

Fundamental to these films is a dislocation between memory and geography, a distorted sense of space, some kind of non-correspondence, and the result that the individual is driven towards virtual worlds in search of continuity. Memory in these films, to use a metaphor, is very much like *fantasy* in the psychoanalytical optic, where fantasy is *the mise-en-scène of desire* (Laplanche). Gilles Deleuze conceives of memory as a dynamic movement resulting from a

"fundamental split in time, that is to say, the differentiation of its passage into two great jets, the passing of the present and the preservation of the past" (*Dialogues II*: 151)

Memory is the internal projector that sets in motion our perceptions, thus producing our sense of orientation in the world. My quest in this paper is to trace moments where memory dysfunctions, where there is a loss of orientation, where memory does not correspond to geography.

I do so through ideas and insights from Deleuze's chapter on the "Power of the False" in his book *Cinema 2*, especially his thesis on the emergence of the "*crystalline regime of the image*" as a sign for the collapse of a normal sense of space or "sensory-motor schemata." I also use Laura Marks's text on "intercultural cinema" (2000) where she reads Deleuze's ideas into cinematic

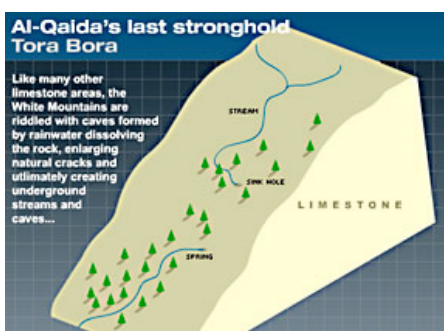
...behind the wall.

works made in the last two decades by a new generation of filmmakers who are refugees, immigrants, and exiles who settled in the West. I also build on images and observations made by Edward Saïd and W.J.T. Mitchell in two separate essays published in *Critical Inquiry* in winter 2006 in a special issue on "Geopoetics, Space Place and Landscape." They provide valuable insights and critical perspectives on the invention and production of both memory and geography.

My reading is also powered by images, such as the image of the inmate in his cell. But I also use the image of Tora Bora. Yes, Tora Bora, the one in Afghanistan. I use Tora Bora as a site, a performance, and a metaphor. Tora Bora as a terrain, a passage, an escape, a maze of some sort, a very different kind of relation to space. These images of Tora Bora and the inmate in his cell serve as a shortcut to the kind of experiences that I want to convey in my reading of these films. By image I don't mean just visual image or representation of a thing, rather I follow Bergson's notion in *Matter and Memory*;

"and by "image" we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing* - an existence placed halfway between the "thing" and the "representation." (1991: 9) [highlights in the original]

The Guardian's images of Tora Bora



Tora Bora mountain.



In a way, it is against my own memories of incarceration, of being made immobile and absent, that I conduct this whole reading. In what follows I want to pursue a reading of Palestinian cinema that goes beyond categorizing them as "roadblock movies" around which identities clash, power is practiced, and struggles take place (Gerz and Khlefi). As informative as they can be, these readings tend to simplify a much more complex and radical Israeli-Zionist discourse that aims at erasing the Palestinian. In the "road-block-movie" model, the Palestinian character is faced with an obstacle, which, most often is overcome metaphorically or defied by use of the camera. In the films I discuss, it is not the roadblock that presents the crisis, but memory itself. These films are "space block" movies, where no camera tricks can overcome the obstacle.

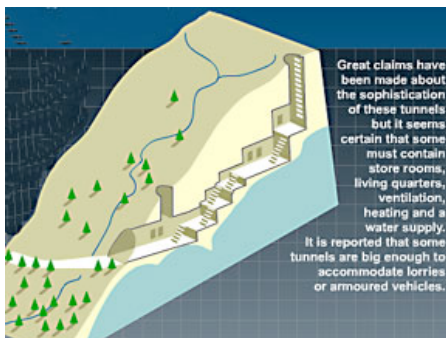
## Tora Bora

Beyond the geographical designation for a location in the White Mountains in Eastern Afghanistan, the term Tora Bora has become synonymous with some sort of a spatial maze, a web of underground tunnels where someone (like Osama bin Laden) can hide and disappear. In the media as well as in public imagination, Tora Bora has come to mean a new kind of territory, interior territory that cannot be mapped or fully revealed or exposed and whose elusiveness gives rise to ever more fantastical imaginings. In





Tora Bora, cross section.



Deep inside Tora Bora.

2004, Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf joked about the inconclusive U.S. bombardment of the caves by calling on the Afghans to open Tora Bora for tourists; maybe their curiosity would dig up Osama bin Laden.[2]

Here is an entry on Tora Bora in CBC News Online:

“Tora Bora is a system of tunnels and chambers carved out of existing caves in the icy White Mountains southwest of Jalalabad, in the eastern part of Afghanistan, near the border with Pakistan.”

The writer, after much description, concludes with the following:

“The caves themselves are built deep inside the mountains, so the American 'bunker buster' bombs, which penetrate 30 meters into the earth before exploding, aren't very effective. The Pentagon admitted that even the massive, seven-ton "daisy-cutter" bomb dropped on Tora Bora on Dec. 10 was mostly for psychological effect.”[3]

In Wikipedia, the entry is lavishly descriptive:

“In 2001 it [Tora Bora] was in use by al-Qaeda and was suspected to be the headquarters of Osama bin Laden. It was described variously as a multi-storeyed cave complex harnessing hydroelectric power from mountain streams, or a lower-rise dwelling with hotel-like corridors capable of sheltering more than 1,000.”

In the *Guardian Unlimited* you can find visual graphs that illustrate the supernatural qualities of Tora Bora.[4] Inside limestone rocks deep in the mountains, the graphs reveal a smooth, well-structured passage with ventilation and water sources. The relation between the inside and the outside is like that of the human body. The inside is connected to the surface in particular places; the rest is not to be exposed. Anything inside is either to be protected and kept, or destroyed. In this sense Tora Bora is not a place, but a passage, a connection, a vessel that carries a thing from point to point. The body becomes a Tora Bora when it is used, for example, to smuggle.

In Palestine the term Tora Bora has become popular as a designation for "those really dangerous passages" between different Palestinian villages and towns cut off by the Israelis. Tora Bora is the name taxi drivers (like the protagonist of Hani Abu Asaad's *Ford Transit*) use to refer to the treacherous geographies that have been multiplied by Israeli violence. Tora Boras are those kinds of passages that one is not sure whether one can or cannot reach: both possibilities always equally exist. The line *forks* and one never knows which way one will end up — dead, arrested, or free. Palestinian Tora Boras are very much like the "last sky" in Darwish's poem.[5] They are last possible movement before decay

and death, the last possible space, the body. It is my body that moves me through Tora Bora, and everything outside my body is hostile: the air, the space, everything is threatening.

But Tora Bora is not another name for the roadblock, because Tora Bora starts from beyond the roadblock. Tora Bora assumes movement to start with. It is a passage, a crack, a flight, or a leap. It is anything but death. Cinema provides Palestinians with this place to be. Cinema is Tora Bora *par excellence*. In cinema Palestinians can smuggle themselves anywhere (in and out of Palestine) and they can go everywhere — as in *Divine Intervention*, with the ninja woman defying gravity, and where an apricot seed destroys an Israeli tank.

[Go to page 2](#)

---

[To top](#)   [Print version](#)   [JC 50](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](#).

# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

### Images from *Yasmin*



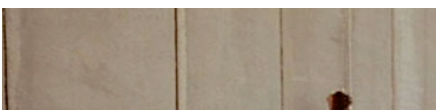
I want to marry the one I love.



In Jericho, lover's despair.



Where are you?



Palestinian Tora Boras are different from Ben Laden's. Ours are on the surface. We hide inside our bodies and not inside the earth. And we weave our space as we go, constantly reconstituting ourselves in relation to changing geographies. In a way, one can describe the Zionist project in its entirety as a geographical invention which, for Palestinians, translates into the destruction and appropriation of their space, the destruction of memory and the appropriation of geography. The Palestinians have an ever diminishing space, especially after the construction of the apartheid wall and ghettoizing of Palestine. Palestinians are constantly driven out of their land, their places, and their practiced spaces into exiles, prisons, graveyards, anywhere, whence they don't return. Erased from the surface, not seen, this is how Israelis want to see Palestinians. Sari Hanafi, a Palestinian researcher at the American University of Beirut, describes the Zionist project in Palestine as "*not genocidal but a 'spacio-cidal' one.*"

I use *space* here in terms made familiar by Giles Deleuze, Michel de Certeau, Edward Saïd and W.J.T. Mitchell, for whom space is always a mixture of the objective and subjective, intensive and extensive, smooth and striated. These distinctions correspond to two fundamental experiences or senses or perceptions of space. One experiences space as discourse, as organizer, a master plan, a war machine. The other experiences space as an extension of the body, where movement, motion, and repetition are made possible and so subjectivities are formed and a sense of identity is born. For Deleuze, our "sensory-motor schemata is concretely located in a hodological space" (1989, 127), where hodological space (as developed by Kurt Lewin) is a space that corresponds to paths traveled rather than distances measured. This concept of space differs from mathematical space in that it corresponds to the factual (physical, psychological) human experience, where, when crossing from point A to point B, one knows the way back to point A. It is within this hodological space that we make our voyages, our well planned trips, vacations, daily commutes to work, etc.

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze points to cinematic instances, situations, and images that correspond to a collapse of sensory-motor schemata, i.e. one's inability to orient oneself in hodological space (one cannot move from point A to point B, or one cannot move back to point A after crossing to point B.) This collapse gives birth to a new regime of images; what Deleuze calls the *crystalline regime* (127) The collapse of hodological space corresponds to *fleeing* as opposed to traveling, where each road becomes a one-way road and each trip is in fact a departure with no return ticket. The road forks and keeps on forking, and there is no trace any more of a point of origin or of where we came from.



Can you hear me?

In the essay "Invention, Memory, Place," Edward Saïd illustrates how space can be made up of an overlapping of geographies and memories, both of which can be invented:

"geography as I want to use the word as a socially constructed and maintained sense of place." (180)

No better example than Palestine can serve Saïd's sense of geography here, with the Zionist imaging of Palestine as an empty land, an empty space that can be filled:

"the Zionist memory had succeeded in emptying Palestine of its inhabitants and history, turning its landscape instead into an empty space." (Invention, 188)



Yasmin!

Notice how Saïd here refers to "memory" as the active part through which the project is carried out, it is "their memory" that succeeded in displacing ours, that is ultimately the site of struggle. Worth noting also is Saïd's use of "landscape" as the visual verifier for this operation: landscape as an act of erasure, of taking places into leaps of time bypassing all consequences. Following upon Saïd, W.J.T. Mitchell in his essay "Holy Landscape, Israel, Palestine and the American Wilderness" provides compelling insights into the process of this geographical invention / destruction through "landscape." Palestine has been reduced to the status of a landscape: framed, hedged about, shaped, controlled and surveilled from every possible perspective (207). Mitchell writes:

"It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the landscape perspective is one way of grasping the totality of what Saïd calls 'the question of Palestine.'"



The wall between them.

As an example for the power of "holy landscape," Mitchell presents us an image he found on the Internet after random search under "Israel Landscape." It is an image of "Neot Kedumim"[6][[open endnotes in new window](#)] a "Biblical landscape reserve" in Israel.

The entry in the website explains further the image or this invented archeological site:

"Neot Kedumim — the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, is a unique endeavor to re-create the physical setting of the Bible in all its depth and detail ... The Bible conveys its ideas not in abstract terms, but through a clear and vivid record of long human interaction with the land of Israel. Neot Kedumim draws on a variety of disciplines — such as Bible scholarship, botany, zoology, geography, history, and archaeology — to bring the Bible and its commentaries to life."[7]

To all of these disciplines that are collaborating in this discourse, I would add, the Israeli army, the bulldozers, expulsions, deportation, house demolitions, confiscation of lands and the uprooting of trees ... Because after all, the Zionist project is not an abstract one and Neot



Kedumim, as Mitchell comments, is

“a window into one fantastic realization of Zionism. Zion is not just an abstract concept: it is a place, a land, and a landscape.” (213)



Neot Kedumin



imagined landscape

Carrying out a random search, like Mitchell, I found an imaginary map of Jerusalem in the first century posted in the "Bible History Online" website[8] that serves as another *fantastic* holy landscape, where Jerusalem is emptied of all but Jewish signs. No signs of Christians and Muslims can be seen anywhere, and the perspective from where it is seen — from the Mount of Olives — is where we usually see Dome of the Rock and Al-Aksa Mosque — at least for the last millennia. It is here replaced with the second temple. And Jerusalem as we know it is a crowded place, crowded with people and buildings, signs and narratives, memories and images, but here it looks empty, more like a small pastoral one-layered village. This map works to "purify" the city in the way of expelling what "does not belong" to this imagined geography and reinvented memory. A striation that renders it impossible for any smooth space to be practiced by another, be it Muslim or Christian.

Both Saïd and Mitchell in their respective essays reach the same gloomy political conclusion, that peace between Palestinians and Zionists is difficult if not impossible, based on this fundamental conflict.

Images from  
*The Fourth Room*



Nabil

“Only by understanding that special mix of geography generally and landscape in particular with historical memory and, as I said, an arresting form of invention can we begin to grasp the persistence of conflict and the difficulty of resolving it, a difficulty that is far too complex and grand than the current peace process could possibly envisage, let alone resolve.” (Saïd, 183)

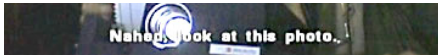
Mitchell sees no way out, not even through a binational state (an idea which Saïd himself entertained as a solution):

"the long-range future of Israel/Palestine must be a way out of this wilderness to a land that is not merely binational or bi-anything else but a holy landscape of reconciliation among all the contended parties." (Mitchell, 222).

Of course, one would ask, "But what is a landscape of reconciliation?"







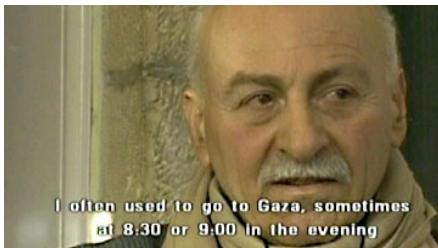
I used to take many photos.



Look at Nabil when he was young.



This is my red car.



I used to drive it to Gaza.



In short, the Zionist project in Palestine is, from the position of Palestinians, spacio-cidal, in that it annihilates places that are the sources of Palestinians' orientation in the world, of movement and repetition, of memory. Disorientation, loss of senses, paranoia, madness, and sexual perversion are recurring images in new Palestinian films:

- *Diary of a Male Whore* (2001), a short fiction by Tawfik Abu Wael,
- *The Fourth Room* (2004), a documentary by Nahed Awwad,
- *Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003) a short fiction by Annemarie Jacir,
- *Looking Awry* (2001) by Sobhi al-Zobaidi,
- *May It Be for the Best* (2004) a documentary by Raed Elhilo,
- *Be Quiet* (2005), a short fiction by Sameh Zubi
- the feature-length *Ford Transit* (2002) by Hani Abu Asaad
- the feature-length *Divine Intervention* (2002) by Elia Suleiman
- *Yasmin's Song* (2005), a short fiction work by Najwa Najjar.

These films are not about what *Israelis* have done to the Palestinians, but about what has been done, regardless. In these films, as I will explain, there are no stories but rather there are ghosts. The story collapses and suddenly the "agent" is turned into "a seer." [9] When there is a story, as in *Yasmin's Song*, it is stopped, broken, arrested, incarcerated. In these films, space is very often reduced to the body, where everything outside of the body is hostile, and thus the body becomes the vessel, the smuggler, a Tora Bora.

In the documentary *The Fourth Room*, Nabil, the main character, a store owner tells us of his four or five secret rooms, which, he says, are locked and no one but he can enter. We are shown one room in the film but we can sense all the others. Nabil's internalized practice of space, a practice that ultimately gives up on geography, is the achievement of a lifelong displacement. Originally from Ramleh, southeast of Yafa, he and his family fled in 1948 to Dir Ghassane, a village in the West Bank, and then moved to Ramallah. In the only room the camera is allowed to enter, we see a crystallized image of an Israeli raid some time ago when Israeli soldiers came in and searched the house. They wrecked the room and broke things, but Nabil refuses to fix the damage:

"Why? Shall I move them so they break again? No, just leave them like this."

Nabil keeps film and slide projectors and he mounts them both to share memories with us. The super-8 footage is of a family trip to the sea, and we hear his wife's comments, remembering names and jokes. In one of the slides we see a picture of a small red Fiat car he used to drive. Nabil smiles when he remembers all the trips he made in the car—which he refuses to get rid of despite the fact that it doesn't run anymore. He adores the car and also his camera, which he refused to sell to the Israeli captain who searched his house. His stationary shop, a former bookstore, is cluttered with objects, leaving very minimal space to move around, piles of objects everywhere. He can barely move, but he moves nonetheless.

I have some films to show you.



An image from his former village.



His room after it was invaded.



One soldier wanted to buy my camera.



A day trip to sea, images from the past.

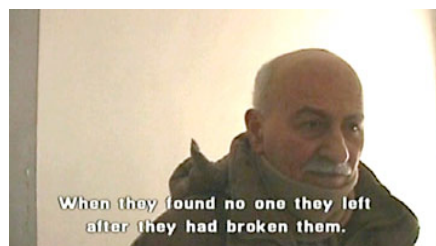


Why shall I fix it? So they come back and destroy it again?

Nabil lives not only in an actual place but also in spaces where he can demand that memory stand still. He has his own time projector working just like his film projector, his most cherished object. It is here that we may speak most precisely of crystalline image:

"the coalescence of an actual image and its virtual image, the indiscernibility of two distinct images." (Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 127)

Nabil's "imaginary" or "real" rooms are his own private Tora Bora, with passages, secret rooms and secret routes, hidden deep inside away from the surface. They are virtuals that only Nabil can actualize.



I don't come in this room any more.



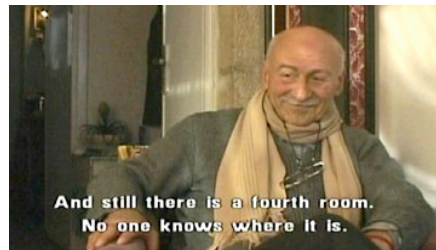
I started my life in this room.



You see how it looks now.



I don't want to fix anything.



There is yet another room.



Would you like to stop here?

[Go to page 3](#)

---

[To top](#)   [Print version](#)   [JC 50](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](#).



# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Images from  
*Like Twenty Impossibles*



Kalandia checkpoint 2002.



It is going to become a border.



Shit, soldiers.

In *Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003), Annemarie Jacir, an American-Palestinian woman comes to Palestine to make a film. With her are three men, a sound person, driver and an actor, Rami. On their way to Jerusalem from Ramallah, they find that Kalandia checkpoint is closed (this part of the film is filmed at the actual checkpoint), so they take one of the "Tora Bora" routes, and this becomes the location of the film. As their Ford makes its way through the Tora Bora, the filmmaker and Rami talk about the first time they saw each other four years ago, and his pleasure to be acting in her film now:

"When you came back this time I was so happy, and now that you are making a film and I am in the film. I feel that you are helping me to be in front of the camera doing something I like. It is important to me, I love to act."

He goes silent for seconds then continues:

"But why did you chose me to act with you?"

Jacir responds, laughing:

"Because you are good looking."

Rami comments,

"But until today you didn't ask me to do anything. You didn't ask me to act."

Suddenly the crew comes face to face with the force of the Israeli army (now at a staged checkpoint). The trip is aborted, movement is arrested, and unlike Nabil's private Tora Bora, this real and physical one turns out lethal. At this staged checkpoint with Palestinian actors playing Israeli soldiers, the soundman in the film is arrested and so the film crew retreats from Tora Bora, without sound. The last few minutes of the film are not silent but deaf and mute. This is how it feels when one experiences a collapse, loses orientation; one sheds one's senses as one flees. To flee is to *break* as Deleuze points out:

"A clean break is something you cannot come back from; that is irretrievable because it makes the past cease to exist." (*Dialogues II*: 38)

To flee is not a voyage, for in a voyage, one is coming back to a point of origin. In *flight*, you don't come back, or you don't know if you will come back; you just go, you take a step, a leap. The crew retreating back without their friend is not really their returning to where they were or where they started, it is not the same space. The sky that gathered them until that point — the vehicle, the jokes, the intimacy

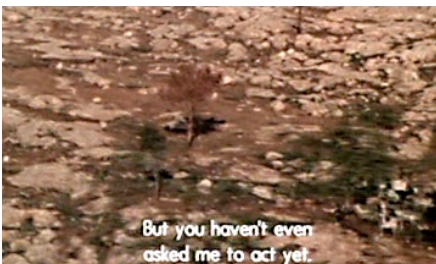




Soundman arrested.



I thought a lot about you...



...but you have not asked me to act on anything yet.

and the memories they were able to share — that was a last sky.

As I mentioned earlier, in Tora Bora anything can happen. Like graveyards in horror films, there are no

"legal, causal and logical connections" (*Cinema 2*, 127).

Continuity and discontinuity depend on what may suddenly appear in the way:

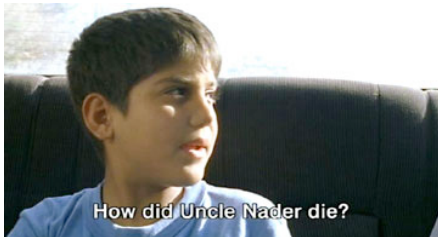
"... spaces reduced to their own descriptions ..." (136).

Where Nabil in the *Fourth Room* was able to survive by constructing a "hidden" last sky, in *Like Twenty Impossibles* the last sky is lost; the characters get swallowed by a black hole; they disappear in the graveyard. In comparison to the "any-spaces-whatever" which, Deleuze suggest as the spaces of ruin and disuse that dominated European cities and films after World War II, this Tora Bora is a "no-space-whatever"; it is the last space before completely disappearing. "Any-space-whatever" are spaces that we no longer know how to describe, spaces that are "deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction" (*Cinema 2*: xi), where "characters are not actors but seers." In a no-space-whatever, the characters are not actors and not seers. They are delirious, they are in flight, their spaces are totally striated, the experiences of smooth space and intensive space are impossible. All space is extensive and striated, by watchtowers, electric gates, electronic fences, surveillance cameras, and dogs. Even the air is striated: the Palestinian Authority could not claim to use the air space between Gaza and the West Bank to broadcast radio and TV.

*Like Twenty Impossibles* starts at an actual checkpoint — Kalandia checkpoint at the time of shooting — which we learn is closed, so they try a Tora Bora, and there the film proceeds with a staged checkpoint. What I find interesting in this part is its transparency in terms of the difference between fiction and documentary, similar to *Ford Transit* by Abu Asaad. By transparency I mean what others might call opacity: there is no difference between what is "real" and what is "staged" in the mind of a Palestinian filmmaker. Staging a checkpoint or a beating, a shooting, the demolition of a house, etc., is not the stuff of fiction. It is real life, reenacted, performed, and remembered. In *Looking Awry*, I weave a fictitious story around real checkpoints and real events, that footage of the checkpoints and of the clashes between demonstrators and police in the mosque is footage of documentary value. What is "staged" is life itself, life unfolding. This is why I think that Palestinian filmmakers do not hesitate to mix real with staged events.

The notions of fiction and documentary do not apply here. Elia Suleiman's work in general is a good example of a free-floating exchange between staged and actual events. Hanna Elias does this as well in his film *Olive Harvest* (2003) by filming staged scenes in Arafat's headquarters while the leader's helicopters are landing and officials are waiting to receive him. I did this in my first film, *My Very Private Map* (1998) by mixing poetry and archive. Najwa Najjar

### Images from *Be Quiet*



### How did my uncle die?



### He had heart problems



### What is going on?



### Israeli army are shooting at people

does the same thing in *Yasmin's Song*, (2005) where she stages a love story between a young woman and the man she loves, when she is forced to marry someone else. On the day of her wedding she runs away in search of her lover, only to come face-to-face with the monstrous Israeli wall that bars her from him. All that is fictitious about the story ends up face-to-face with a very real thing, the wall. Fiction in these films is memory coexisting with the real object, the way Deleuze explains memory in the "The Actual and the Virtual."

"Bergson shows, memory is not an actual image which forms after the object has been perceived, but a virtual image coexisting with the actual perception of the object. Memory is a virtual image, contemporary with the actual object, its double, its 'mirror image.'" (*Dialogues II*, 151)

The bridal white dress in *Yasmin's Song*, the intimacy in *Like Twenty Impossibles*, Nabil's car and his film projector, are but objects of memory, crystallized memory that can be replayed any time in order to relive times past. And whenever such times are acted out, reenacted, remembered, recollected, retold, it is about the reality of the virtual, the power of the "false."

*Be Quiet* by Sameh Zu'bi is a film takes place traveling from Jenin to Nazareth, first in a taxi, then in a private car. Father and son are going back to Nazareth from Jenin after attending the funeral of the mother's brother. From the very first few shots we learn that the boy needs to piss, but the father tells him to hold it. "We'll be home soon," he keeps telling the boy. The father has only one aim, which is to cross from point A, to point B, he wants only to get home. The taxi reaches a point where it stops and is ordered to turn back; the father gets out of the car and he is told to go back because Israeli snipers are shooting at Palestinian cars.

But then they ask him if the red car with yellow plates is his? He drives through only to reach another checkpoint where an Israeli force orders him out of the car. This whole thing happens while at the same time the young boy is struggling to contain his anger at his father because the father lied when he told him that his uncle has died of a heart attack, when in fact the uncle was killed by the Israelis.

The young boy asks his father about the color of the car's license plates:

"Why are they different? Father?"

"So they can tell who is Palestinian and who is Israeli."

"So who can tell?"

"People."

— a moment of silence

"I don't understand, but we are Palestinians."



Is that your car with Israeli plates?



Why are our car plates yellow...



... and my uncle's car plates green?



No journey is a smooth one.



Son sees father being searched.

When Israeli soldiers search the father and the boy's bag, the father notices the uncle's bloody kuffiya in his son's bag, and he blames him for carrying it:

"You could've got us arrested. Who gave you this kuffiya? Did you steal it?"

And we see in the son's big eyes certain contempt for the father, he distances himself from the father. And this is after they cross the roadblock, which, becomes so insignificant when compared to the more fundamental checkpoint that resides in the very fabric of father-son relation as well as inside each one of them.



His uncle's blood on the kuffiyah.

The father's sole aim is to reach point A from point B. He doesn't think about the movement back to point B (Jenin in this case), he mentally erases it, while the son does the opposite. The boy is carrying his sense of orientation in his bag: his private map, his own striation, his way back to Jenin. The father is disoriented: you can see it in his face, in his vague answers, and in his "submissiveness" to the soldiers. The father has no memory, he keeps none, or so he constantly erases his memory in order to deal with the actual division that he lives, while the son seem more oriented, more determined and with his eyes wide open, seems to know more about the future.



The son carries memories with him in his bag, memories of his uncle and of Jenin, and in Nazareth he will nurture these memories in order to be able to go back.



You almost got us arrested.



I don't like them.

Who gave you the kuffiyah?

I don't like them.



It's Uncle Nader's scarf, isn't it?



Keep on being a good boy and I'll take you to McDonald.

I'll keep this kuffiyah with me.

I'll take you to McDonalds.



- Put the stone down.  
- No!

Son confronts father.

Images from  
*Diary of a Male Whore*



I masturbate with the old man  
looking



The father lives an extensive space while the son lives an intensive one. Space for father is measured, calculated; the right license plates, the right form of identification card, and the right exchange of words with the soldiers and you can cross. There is no need to remember more than what lets you pass through hostile space. The father has no smooth moments, his sense of space is optical, he is on the lookout all the time, surveying and spotting obstacles, while the son is having his haptic moment clutching on the bag.

This sort of "loss" of memory that befell the father in his way of adapting to the real objectified space, and the resulting identity crisis is very apparent in films by Israeli-Palestinian filmmakers such as Elia Suleiman, Hani Abu Asaad, Nizar Hasan, Tawfik Abu Wael and Sameh Zubi. This work deals with the portion of Palestinians who remained living in historical Palestine (over a million in 2006) and who became Israeli citizen with rights to vote and all that. They have been subjugated to an intense process of de-memorializing, and deterritorializing, while not allowed total assimilation because they are not Jewish. So on the one hand, an Israeli-Palestinian is requested to forget, but on the other hand, is not allowed to forge a new memory. This kind of emptiness is felt in films by Suleiman such as *Divine Intervention* and *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and in the films *Diary of a Male Whore* and *Atash* by Abu Wael. *Yasmin* and *Istiklal*, two documentaries by Nizar Hasan, are made from the same material. In these films what you sense most of all is a disorientation that is now related directly not to the loss of space, but to the loss of memory.

In *Diary of a Male Whore* it is the body that remains, only the body and its forces trapped within itself, fluctuating in the form of sexual perversions. This amounts to zero memory, the loss of it completely. This is the body as a sexual maze fluctuating in a sexual maze. A Tora





my body pleasures made me  
forget my hunger

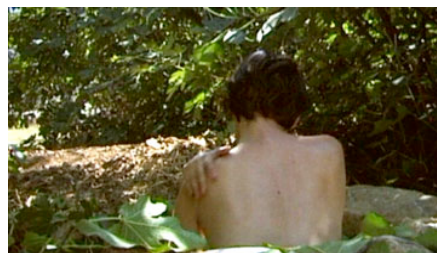
Bora made of flesh, of smells and touches that turn the body mobile only in the way of reliving, replaying, reenacting the same memory over and over again, the memory of the mother being raped by an Israeli soldier. It is with this memory that Abu Wael registers the 1948 Jewish occupation of Palestine. This memory, this crystallized virtual, mirrors all other acts of becoming; it replaces and displaces the actual.



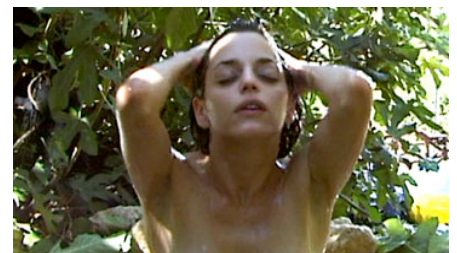
as a child



I'd watch her



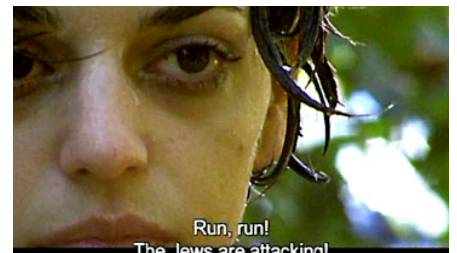
Suad was very beautiful



she knew I watched her



her father used to beat her



run, run Jews are attacking

A time image, a crystalline moment, a collapse in coherence occurs. There is no sense in the space that surrounds the main character; the only sense is through his body which moves him, carries him from one place to another without having to have any of the coherence that's usually endowed in one's practices of space such as one's home, office, homeland: "I roam aimlessly all night, during the day I sleep at any street corner," as the frame below reads. The film begins and ends with the main character inside the car of an Israeli elder, who is old enough to be from the time of the mother's rape, i.e. 1948. The Palestinian man performs a sex act, masturbating, only for the perverted pleasures of the old Israeli man. This is where his body takes him to places of the primal scene, the first displacement, as an ever-occurring thing; it is all whatever happens, all whatever is. It's a loss of "hological space" where one goes aimless, mad, demonic, anything but normal.



The main character in *Diary of a Male Whore* and the father in *Be*

The war began, my father was killed.



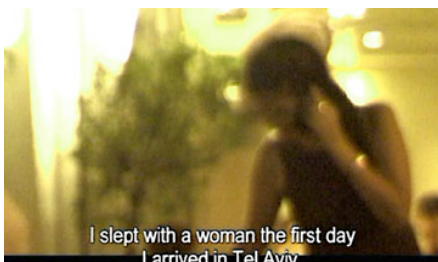
I heard my mother's screams.



A soldier raped my mother.



I walk aimlessly.



*Quiet* are two people with no memory. There is a vacuum there, some kind of collapse, a disorientation that forces them to go only where their bodies can take them. This ambiguity in their sense of identity as it relates to space and memory can be related to the fact that from 1948 until 1967, Israeli Palestinians had no contact whatsoever with Palestinians or Arabs anywhere. Only after 1967 when Israel occupied the rest of Palestine did they start to contact other Palestinians. So on the one hand they were not allowed to identify with Arabs and Palestinians and on the other they have not been allowed to become equal Israelis because they are not Jewish, and they still live this dilemma. Zu'bi in *Be Quiet* reinvents this lost memory through the young boy.

Similarly, in *Atash* (2003) by Abu Wael, the son kills the father in order to liberate himself and his family from the father's tyranny. The mise-en-scene of that film is brilliant in depicting a landscape of misery, in a grim, un-homely, "unheimlich," cold, distant, disconnected, and hostile former Israeli military training post. The father's space almost obliterates orientation for the rest of the family (the girl looks pale and aimless all the time). Like the father in *Be Quiet*, the patriarch of *Atash* lives an objectified space, a space where he has to smuggle himself through all the time, where he cannot be visible. He has no point of origin, he just wants to go from point A (the village) to point B (outside of the village). The father doesn't represent anything from the past; he is completely the product of the moment and that is what is scary about him. Here too the father's sense of space is only optical — hiding, surveying, stealing. He too is living an extensive space, space that is not his, a space where he is always foreign. In his way of living he is subjecting his family to live with him this "loss of space and of memory," but the others have a different sense of space and so they feel alienated by their father. He is the source of their pain and disorientation and so they kill him; they eliminate the source of their misery; they want to be visible where the father wanted to keep them invisible.

This visibility / invisibility split is at the core of Palestinian cinema, as Hamid Dabashi writes in his introduction to the newly published collection on Palestinian cinema:

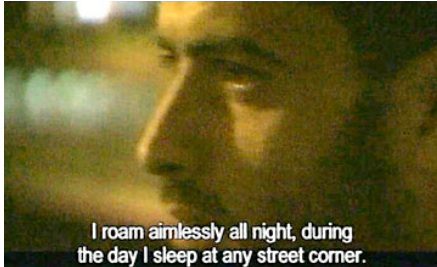
"At the core of the Palestinian historical presence is thus a geographical absence. The overriding presence of an absence is at the creative core of Palestinian cinema, what has made it thematically in/coherent and aesthetically im/possible."

Edward Saïd makes a related observation in his preface to the same collection:

"In fact, the whole history of the Palestinian struggle has to do with the desire to be visible." (Dabashi: 2)

This visibility entails as a condition one's ability to practice space, smooth space, a space that is filled by "events or haecceities" as Deleuze writes.

All he remembers is he slept  
with a woman when he first  
arrived in TelAviv.



I roam aimlessly all night.

“It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic rather than optical perception ... it is one of distance not of measures and properties”(1989, 479).

Palestinians who live under Israeli occupation do not have this space, while Palestinians who live in Israel have the space, but they struggle with their memories as whether to conceal or to practice those memories. Palestinians in exile have neither space nor memory. What they have is a virtual image of Palestine as a "lost paradise," a fixation of some sort through which they live and relive their "postponed drama of return" as Saïd described it in *After the Last Sky*. In exile, Palestine is a hallucinatory space that is malleable but that can only accommodate memories of things past and not of things present. Palestinians in exile can only live in the past when it comes to Palestine, while Palestinians in Palestine can only live in the present moment.

The difference can better be articulated by contrasting Tora Bora cinema, with concepts of *intercultural* and *accented* cinemas, as developed by Laura Marks and Hamid Naficy. Marks' book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* and Naficy's *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* offer rich perspectives and complex readings into cinematic works made by people who immigrated, or where uprooted, displaced or sent into exile.

Where "intercultural" cinemas "attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge"(Marks, 2000. 1), "accented" cinemas

“signify upon exile and diaspora by expressing, allegorizing, commenting upon, and critiquing the home and host societies and cultures and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers.”

Thus both *intercultural* and *accented* cinemas are made in the margins of cultural encounters between those who left their homelands and those who received them. In relation to these, then, Tora Bora cinema is that of those who did not leave, could not leave, do not want to leave, but are made to disappear. If the new "hybrid race of mutant immigrants" possess a "third eye" (Rony, quoted by Marks) "which allows them to perceive the dominant culture from both inside and outside" (Marks, 2000, 28), then I propose to think of "Tora Bora cinema" as that of a "mutant race" that sees with just one eye and can only see from inside. If *intercultural cinema* "indicates a context that cannot be confined to a single culture and suggests movement between one culture and another" (Marks, 2000, 6), then Tora Bora cinema is not contextual but singular. In Tora Bora cinema there is always an actualization of the virtual but without ever there being an actual, no fruits fall from the plane.[10][[open endnotes in new window](#)] These films do not aim at breaching or teaching, or victimizing or accusing, or even revealing. These are pure moments of life, as if the cinematic projection apparatus has momentarily but totally taken over the "projector of life itself":

“whether it is a matter of thinking becoming, or expressing it, or even perceiving it, we scarcely do anything other than activate a sort of internal cinema projector.” [11]

[Go to Notes page](#)

---

[To top](#)

[Print version](#)

[JC 50](#)

[Jump Cut home](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](#).



# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

### Notes

1. I want to thank Dr. Laura Marks at the School of Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University, for her help and her valuable insights while writing this paper. [[return to page 1 of essay](#)]
2. Reuters, September 13, 2001.
3. <http://web.archive.org/web/20041010142231/http://www.cbc.ca/news/indepth/targetterrorism/backgrounders/torabora.html> (20 December 2006)
4. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/flash/0,5860,616624,00.html>.  
(20 December 2006)
5. "Earth Presses Against Us" in *Unfortunately it was Paradise, selected poems*, trans. and ed. by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché, University of California Press, 2003.
6. <http://www.n-k.org.il/public/index.htm> (26 December 2006).  
[[return to page 2 of essay](#)]
7. Ibid
8. <http://www.bible-history.com/jerusalem/index.html> (10 January 2007)
9. Deleuze explains this movement from the "agent" to the "seer" as that of the movement from organic descriptions where an object exists independent of the description and this object becomes a source of orientation. This is where the actor is an agent, but when the description stands in for the object, replaces it, here the actor or the character becomes a "seer." (1989, 126)
10. In the *Actual and the Virtual*, Deleuze uses the metaphor of a falling fruit to describe the emergence of the actual. [[return to page 3 of essay](#)]
11. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, quoted in *Deleuze on Cinema*, by Ronald Bogue, Routledge, 2003, p. 21.

### Works cited

- Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Translated by N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, New York, Zone Books, 1991.
- Certeau, Michel De. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.
- Dabashi, Hamid, ed. *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*. Preface by Edward Saïd. London: Verso, 2006
- Darwish, Mahmoud. *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems*. Translated and edited by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché (with Sinan Antoon and Amira El-Zein), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Dialogues II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Gertz, Nurith and George Khleifi. "Palestinian Roadblock Movies," *Geopolitics* vol. 10, no. 2, 2005.

Hanafi, Sari. "It Is a War Seeking the Abolition of Territory," *Outlook*. Beirut: AUB, vol. 36, no. 4 (October 31, 2007) p.3.

Laplanche, J. and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith with an introd. by Daniel Lagache. New York: Norton, 1974

Marks, Laura. "Mohamed Soueid's Cinema of Immanence," *Jump Cut* 49, 2007

Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

Mitchell, W.J.T. "Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness. *Critical Inquiry* 26, winter 2000.

Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001

Edward Saïd, "Invention, Memory, Place" in *Critical Inquiry*, No. 26, winter 2000.

## Films cited

- *Like Twenty Impossibles* (ka-Innana Ashrun Mustaheel). Dir. Annemarie Jacir, Palestine 2003, 17:00, 35 mm.
- *Diary of a Male Whore* (Yawmiyat Ahir). Dir. Tawfik Abu Wael, Palestine 2001, fiction, 14:00, Arabic w. English subtitles
- *The Fourth Room*. Dir. Nahed Awwad, Palestine, 2005, 25:00, digital video
- *Atash*. Dir. Tawfik Abu Wael, Israel, 2004, 110, 35 mm, Axiom Films.
- *Be Quiet*. Dir. Sameh Zubi, Palestine, 2004, 19 min., video.
- *Yasmin's Song*. Dir. Najwa Najjar, Palestine, 2005, 19 min, DigiBeta.
- *Ford Transit*. Dir. Hani Abu Asaad, Palestine, 2002, Betacam, 80 min.
- *Looking Awry*. Dir. Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Palestine, 2001, Betacam, 30 min.
- *My Very Private Map*. Dir. Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Palestine, 1998, Betacam, 22 min.
- *About the Sea*, Dir. Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Palestine, 2006, BetaCam, 9 min.

---

[To top](#)   [Print version](#)   [JC 50](#)   [Jump Cut home](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/).