Occupied Territories: Mapping the Transgressions of Cultural Terrain

an interview-essay with Jayce Salloum and Molly Hankwitz on some of the video works of Jayce Salloum

Molly Hankwitz: As a video artist/cultural producer who has worked on a specific geographic region of the globe, the Middle East, the politics of representation in general, and the representation of resistance in South Lebanon specifically, can you discuss issues of representation with respect to your work which specifically deal with the subject of resistance and who would you most like your videotapes to be affecting and why?

Jayce Salloum: Perhaps it’s best to talk about this in terms of process. The process of producing and the process of viewing/reading or the reception of the material in an experiential sense. At times this work does feel like intervention, or prodding, poking with a stick, pushing or tugging at something, like seams and creases, or disjoints and fissures. I’d love to think of these as cracks in the underbelly or an implosion of the stereotypes, the conventions, but that may be wishful thinking. Intervention does not have to start out as a obvious public act, but in a psychological sense something has to take place within the viewer/reader. Somewhere in the midst of this transaction the work serves as a means of exchange. Redefinition is possible on some scale at least within the work itself and the various discursive activities that take place around it. Maybe the most we can hope for is some type of lasting effect in our community, what ever community that is, and that in itself may take all of our energies.

I think of what I’m doing as rather obscure and provisional, the years it takes to get a project off the ground and out there takes such a toll that one has to be making it for oneself first, and then for a small circle of friends and colleagues expanding outward, occasionally growing exponentially. This
From the videotape: This is Not Beirut/ There was and there was not, 49:00, 1994.
has happened with some of the videotapes and within other activist/cultural communities. Any ‘audience’ beyond the immediate one is a rather amorphous object to predict, so I set up the work to be ‘read’ on different levels by different viewers, at times in different languages, and sometimes through the structure and familiarity of content, specific audiences would have over others. I always try to construct an active audience, not providing easy answers or passive information as pabulum, but often aiming to provoke, producing a ‘productive frustration’ in the viewer where the viewers are responsible for how they’re perceiving, or at least raising questions about the baggage they’ve brought to the work and the responses they have within a very particular/problematized ‘field’ or set of inquiries.

I’m not into this knee-jerk game of show and tell PBS (public television) style. I don’t think ‘understanding’ is possible, or that the ‘subject’ can ever be ‘known’, as far as the western viewer understanding the other culture. The most we can hope for is a kind of empathy, an awareness of the situation on the ground and some sense of the subjectivities at stake. This is both a visual/aural sense as well as a sense of the political/subjective positions. I am still asked about balance and objectivity, as if there is a place where context is equivocal or there is a parity of voices and access to an audience. This question is not only naïve, (often times the work isn’t shown because of the overt politics of the tapes or because programmers can’t find an opposing voice to ‘balance’ it out), it also betrays a very narrow and simplistic understanding of media. There is no such thing as ‘objectivity’ in this domain, you have to look to and through the subjective for whatever ‘truths’ you find. Balance has to be looked at in a greater context than what you are seeing in one particular moment. We forget there is a whole history of misinformation, misrepresentation and blatant lies accepted as ‘truths’ here in this county and others like it, especially considering the history of the Middle East, and the more recent Israeli and other western aggressions there.

So there is no one privileged audience but many corresponding or parallel audiences having various accesses to the work. Because the tapes are constructed in a manner that lends themselves a discursive reading, referencing a ground, a history of social acts and re-construction, I am not worried that they could be taken out of context or de-materialized. Their arguments are self-contained. They’re meant to be effective both conceptually and physically, at times actually working with the equilibrium, the visceral and emotional conditions of the viewer, always though with a direct connection to the perception, the reading of the representation, the history of that representation and the questions raised herein.

As a general paradigm ‘resistance’ could be thought of as a key, the underlying precept to the impetus of my work. There are many different forms of resistance, on the ground, in the political arena, in social and cultural relations/positionings and productions,—they all must play a role. In the work I’ve produced there is not only ‘resistance’ being represented—
Zahra Bedran, from the opening sequence of the videotape: Talaeen a Junuub/ Up to the South, 60:00, 1993.

for instance, the resistance to the occupation of South Lebanon by the Israeli Army, the resistance to the continuity of misrepresentation, and resistance to the use of Lebanon as a product/subject and ‘laboratory’ for the West (in the testing of new & banned warfare technology, the ‘coverage’ by writers, journalists, travelers and ‘experts’, and as a case study for social/cultural studies) — but ‘resistance’ is also being (re)produced structurally, formally, and ideologically in the pieces themselves albeit in a much different capacity. One way or another these productions are a type of resistance, a part of a greater movement, and though limited in its means it still plays a role. It correlates to other work on the ground or groundwork by engaging and one would hope mobilizing a viewer/reader through the agency that the work demands.

I work hard to create an audience, a circulation for my work by making it known to all types of institutions, grass-roots organizations, cultural clubs, societies, cinemas, and galleries, through to universities, film/video festivals, and museums. In attending many of my screenings, literally hundreds, I engage the audience directly, and try to invite them into the intricacies and context of the work, this closeness allows for a concrete dialogue to
develop with reality checks of various sorts along the way. To know that one’s work can have an impact, an apparent domino effect and actually affect concrete catalytic change in someone’s life is enough motivation to keep one going. I have heard that طالع عن عا لبرت في (Talaeen a Junubah) Up to the South.² did realize some of it’s ambitions in this regard.

MH: Will you discuss some of the critical mediations you employed when you went into Lebanon, viewing it as a site of experience and ‘documentary’ production? How did your methodology change, either by necessity or intellectual decision? Can you discuss this specifically, especially with regard to . . . Up to the South, هسه ايرست بيروت / كان يا ما كان (This is Not Beirut) [There was and there was not]³ and your new work which includes material on Soha Bechara?

JS: My methodology is constantly being re-invented, through the production and conceptualizing of each project I try to develop an approach specific to those sets of terms and experiences. Video does have constants though, its mediating properties. These are often mixed up with the properties of language. Video is not a ‘language,’ it may have elements of language, but this is subject to misreading when the two semantic vocabularies are talked about in an overly simplified notion of ‘video as language’.

Going into Lebanon there was plenty of conceptual baggage (not to mention over half a ton of video equipment) that I was bringing along for

From the headline/ title roll segment of the videotape: This is Not Beirut/ There was and there was not, 49:00, 1994.
better or worse. There was also the ‘tools’ of the process, the syntax structure or editing system and the critique inherent in it, the methodology of research, the shooting mannerisms, the collecting of appropriated footage, the intricate obsessive logging of all, the refining and slicing up of the material, building of sequences, the re-joining, the deliberate weaving and layering, the conceptual and physical shifting, the building of narrative through reoccurrent images and metaphors, the spreading out of narrative, fragmenting it in continuous and discontinuous threads, the use of disjunctive video and audio elements, the matching & mis-matching and editing of audio from material recorded and gathered, the use of text in titles, subtitles, inter-titles & headlines, the lack of easy monikers, the use of visual and aural jokes, using laughter as a critical tool, the suspension of belief, the ending of information, the insistence on moments of pleasure and the production of frustration. These are all elements or “nuances” if you like, that I had been developing in my work in video and other media since 1978.

In Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal (Introduction to the End of an Argument) Speaking for oneself . . . /Speaking for others . . .4 I was able to direct these elements at a specific political situation regarding the construction of the ‘Arab’ in the media and the representations of the Middle East, Arab culture and the Palestinian people produced by the West. Initially this project had started out as something very different from the way it ended up. In 1988 I went to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and spent a few weeks recording Palestinian accounts of the occupation both inside and outside the ‘Green Line’ and following an NBC news crew around to different locations in the middle of this ‘eye witness’ tour with educational and religious leaders from Houston, Texas. This was shortly after the beginning of the ‘first’ Intifada (Dec. 8, 1987). After spending three weeks in Beirut on my way back to California I still was trying to figure out what to do with the forty plus hours I had recorded. I was adamant that I wanted to do something completely different than the works with appropriated TV footage I had done before (“In the Absence of Heroes . . .” Warfare; A case for context, 105:00, 1984, and “The Ascent of Man.” Parts I–III, 23:00, 1985–87), partly because it was too labor intensive and partly because I thought that this type of material warranted a different approach. While I was mulling this over I finished a short videotape in California, ‘Once You’ve Shot the Gun You Can’t Stop the Bullet’, 8:00, 1988, which combined footage from travels through sixteen different countries, including my hometown, and my mother pointing to our place on the map, to watching the ‘Cosby’ show in Beirut. The tape tackled the idea of distance and alienation in moving through cultures and personal relationships and the space, the separation that always remains. It turned out to be a blend of my older style of quick editing with some of the techniques I was to use subsequently in Lebanon when working with longer first person accounts. Right after finishing this tape, I moved to New York, thinking what I wanted to do with the material collected in the Occupied Territories was to produce a
piece stringing together stories of life under Israeli occupation. I started looking for someone to work with to do the translations and to help make sense out of the material, ideally someone both inside and outside of the culture. After meeting with several Palestinians living in New York who were involved in the media community I decided to work with Elia Suleiman, and after much discussion and negotiation I agreed to turn this tape into a collaboration using my material as found footage, together with appropriated footage ranging from Lumiere’s depictions of Egypt, through Valentino, Elmer Fudd, Exodus, Elvis in ‘Harem Scarum’ etc. up to the ‘Raiders of the Lost Arc’ and ‘Nightline’. I dreaded the thought of once again coming face to face with volumes of television and movie material but was reconciled to the fact that before one could make any more representations of/ from the Middle East, we had to confront the representations that existed previously forming the dominant images and stereotypes that we were up against. We had to carve out a space, arresting/deconstructing the imagery and ideology, decolonizing and recontextualizing it to provide a rupture, a rift for other voices and projects to emerge or exist. And in doing so we needed to

re-place and open up this former space of subjectivity that was absence enforced, consistently denied and marginalized to its furthest extremes in the ‘media’. We mimicked the form of television, trying to subvert its methodology in an implosionary means. Basically we made a conceptual attack, an aggressive work, but conceptual nevertheless because realistically we couldn’t hope to dent the mass of misrepresentation that existed and continued to exist. This was in part an action for our own minds, and our own working process practically speaking where we knew that this had to be done first before other projects could have an appropriate context to be seen and heard.

The Lebanon project including the tapes and year long workshops, both extended and provided alternatives to the positions adopted in Introduction to the End. . . . Approaching Lebanon I had first had to ‘find’ it, locate it, its history of representation, its consumption in the West and its current situation, this is what This is Not Beirut. . . . tries to deal with, this and the experience of being there, and the making of . . . Up to the South. . . . Up to the South works with the notion of accounting and re-counting experience. We (Walid Ra’ad and myself), had to devise a method to present these stories while still constructing a piece that would critique the documentary genre and its history of representing other cultures. This was done for the most

From the ‘dictee’ sequence of the videotape: This is Not Beirut/There was and there was not, 49:00, 1994.
part in the editing process long after having been there. While there we gathered as much material as we could (over 150 hours of interviews and close to 50 hours of archival material), the methods we devised for this were more of a shooting plan, figuring out a schematic of representative subjects then interviewing them and recording the moments in-between. So this was a new way of working for me, instead of an all-encompassing initial gathering of material, we focused on a group of people that we tried to locate and get close to. I carried some techniques over from previous works and developed them further, for example, highlighting the idea of ‘naming’, and how terms like ‘terrorism/terrorist’ are used to efface the historical roots and current conditions of conflict, and the positions of power concerned. In...

Up to the South the experiences recorded transgress the imposition of ‘naming’, the story told/accounted for and revealed, contains a particular subjecthood that one is at once close to but always kept distant from. In an attempt to make evident the machinery, the apparatus of ‘documentary’, we also made the acts of mediation obvious. Forefronting the cutting, the editing, the elimination and obsessions of the construction process, visual and audio segments are presented and received one after another. Basic blocks are linked conceptually over broken spaces, gestures are cut off, their weight collapsing them forward into a spiral of consecutive accounts that slice up, or sever the ‘approach’ of ‘documentary’, the encroachment, the manipulation that is the inevitable by-product of this history of scientific and cultural imperialism. This is a mediating ‘language’ of transposed experience, a ‘reluctant documentary’.

We had many discussions about what forms or levels of manipulation should/could be used when handling the interview material, what we had to ‘preserve’, remain ‘truthful’ to, whether scripting could be mixed into the ‘live’ accounts, and how we had to handle this material differently or not than the appropriated type of footage used in my earlier tapes. And this idea of the responsibility of representation, who and what it was responsible to, the subjects taped, or the object of the tape itself. We didn’t rule out much in the gathering stage and figured the rest of it out as we went along. It’s like this for each tape though, trying to come up with the most appropriate methodology, usually stumbling along for quite a while without really knowing how things will look in the end.

MH: How do you approach videotaping, or editing, lets say, when it comes to very sensitive areas of political culture... to avoid reified narratives for example in the long run, in the final piece? What is important to you in terms of handling the material over a period of time?

JS: There is a tendency when dealing with politics of any type, that one should state things simply and clearly, this belies the fact that things are seldom so. This is not to say that you can’t make things clearly complex and
engage viewers/ readers on several levels simultaneously in the process of pointing/ illuminating certain ‘injustices’ or violations and oppressions. I see this as a form of praxis (practical action), in the modes of cultural production we are involved in as viewers, commentators and producers, going beyond a simple level of the recognition of injustice to scrutinize the underlying ideologies at work and the hold they have on us. There is a public and private aspect to this experiential mode of interaction/ interpolation with an artwork. I try to collide the ‘normally’ distinct spaces of political discourse/ inquiry and subjective presence, to collapse the ‘objective’ positionality of the critical observer and the position of the engaged subject. When the subjective inclinations and presence of the viewer and producer meet, the experience is changed from passive to active. To do this I rely heavily on my ability to produce, and in the viewer to perceive/ reproduce, dialectical montage as not solely a representational system but one that is directly referential to the situation on the ground, in the site, and in the context of the subjects and forces entwined, including the relationship to the viewer’s/ producers’ assumptions, previous knowledge/ experience and the constructions of our collective and individual psyches. I try to maintain a certain intel-

From the ‘. . . resistance, what resistance . . . ’ sequence of the videotape: Talaeen a Junuub/ Up to the South, 60:00, 1993.
lectual distance and visceral intimacy attained through the material and the methodologies described earlier. These mediations always return the cycle of comprehension/‘understanding’ back upon the viewer/reader’s willingness to internally debate the arguments or images put forth, and collapses the manipulations used with standard narratives of all sorts. I approach my taped subjects as collaborators, they and I are using the medium, the project for specific aims, there is a trust developed as they have no idea what I will do with the material once I start editing and there is a responsibility that I unsparingly agree to, that is, not to distort the subjectivities involved. The reified narrative (like the mythological construction or stereotype) doesn’t have a chance to survive in these projects but it is often critically referred to and played off of. I am against humanistic work which aims to prove one’s or a peoples’ humanity and thus justify their resistance, actions, or existence, this is a paternalistic gesture at best, dehumanizing at worse. These types of narratives (all too abundant in ‘documentary’ and ‘fiction’) systematically naturalize the representation of cultural and political mythologies. I also wage a fight there, in a position that is ‘outside’ the restricted gaze of the documentary as spectacle and in opposition to its claims of objectivity.

It seems that the months and sometimes years that I labour over material are necessary for me to understand it. I have to live with the material to get inside of it and inside of myself. Not just literally, but painstakingly how each image and audio bit will exist when seen/heard within the context of the piece, and how that resonates with where it came from, and where it will go once it leaves my hands. It is only with this familiarity that I feel I can actually make something of value. Something that I would want someone to spend their time engaging with.

MH: In your installation (Kan Ya Ma Kan) you fill the gallery space with artifacts and videotapes from successive trips to Lebanon and research done here—videotapes, documents, reproductions, books, letters, t-shirts, buttons, cigarette packs, newspapers—elements from daily life along with photographs of the city—can you talk a bit about that collection of material and how you see its relationship to your work? What were you trying to do with this project?

JS: Lebanon was chosen as the site for much of my past work because it embodies the dilemma, the ‘crisis’ of (mis)representation involved with the contestation/inscription of identity, identity politics and the agency of militant, quotidian, philosophical, and representational resistance. I developed a multi-faceted approach to deal with a strategy that is essentially critical, materially conditional, aesthetic, visceral, tactile, and informational. In this installation and in my tapes, political and social issues are cycled through various manners of depiction and elucidation, and recycled into the different mediums and acts of presentation or possible perception. . . .
"Kan Ya Ma Kan" is a transposition of a working studio and ‘found’ archive incorporating twelve years of collected research materials, ‘resources’, artifacts, many series of photographs, all my single channel videotapes focusing on the ‘middle east’, five videotape loops, texts, hundred’s of enlarged text and visual quotes, an ‘orientalist library’, reproductions, maps, and three light boxes. The piece as a whole calls into question our notions of history & research methodology and their roles in the construction and effacement of histories and the layers involved in the mediation, depiction/representation, definition and perception of another culture.

The installation is not modeled on the viewing of art (i.e. painting) but on an approach to research/reading, an active archive, or a walk-in CD-ROM where viewers can wander through an array of diverse physical files of seemingly infinite amounts of material and be responsible for their own comprehension within the parameters and idiosyncratic fields I’ve set up. The installation is interactive and activated as the audience becomes fully participatory, all the bound texts can be removed off the walls for perusing and the objects are meant to be sifted through, handled and replaced. Through this the viewer/participant develops an intimate relationship to materials which makes visible the ‘gaps’ in representation and perception, the leaps of faith or suspension of ‘disbelief’, the enjoining of the previously mentioned conceptual ‘gaps’, their contextualization within and outside of other discourses, and the politicized decoding of documents/objects. There
is also attention paid to the reliance on meticulously packaged ‘information’, speculative conjunctions, formalist materiality, and a visceral or tactile engagement that draws viewers in for hours at a time. The attempted layers of ‘resistance’, and the severance of nostalgia and lingering sensuality is transported when one leaves the space. From the levels of interaction evident, . . . (Kan Ya Ma Kan) does challenge the concept of an exhibition and the relationship the viewer/participant has with/ in the work.

MH: Considering the range of this work what links the videotapes and installations conceptually to a definition of ‘occupied territories’ or the sense of a metaphorical and real landscape?

JS: One can’t talk about ‘landscape’ without talking about the politics of that land, both externally and internally, I mean both the ‘land’ as concept and the land as physical substance, where ‘nation’ crosses over into imagination and attachments are beyond the metaphorical. I see spatial and psychological demarcations as territorial as well, this is where conceptually as well as ideologically the work links up in its engagement or attempted transgressions of political domains. Starting with the earlier tapes where most of the footage was ‘appropriated’ from television this is pretty straight forward, I was moving into this space of a pedagogical device, this narrow transcription of information and emotion with an overwhelming sphere of influence in the political and personal realms of one’s life. The trial here was to undercut the belly of the beast, its hegemonic status, using its own imagery, its own tools to expose its organs, its inner workings so to speak. The danger was that people would read my incursions as formal collage and not see the other acts taking place between the seams, behind the various levels of production and destruction.

After this I went into other awkward areas of experience, ‘occupying’ spaces or working with positions that wouldn’t seem immediately or apparently mine to work with. I’ve heard Episode 1: So. Cal., 33:00, 1988, called a ‘woman’s tape’ because that’s where the obvious subjectivity is, of the speaking protagonist, but it’s more about moving between colliding or transferring cultures and the geo-political and social conditions of living in Southern California. . . . Gun . . . was working with the connections between the metaphorical and the ‘real’, collapsing landscapes or exploding the relationship with an ex-lover and juxtaposing the two to play off the extremes and subtleties of what remained. It used the schematic of culture and nation but transposed any of its substance towards this collapse and regeneration. It was transparent enough in doing this while retaining the edge of contact with the other, the subject or culture.

In (Introduction to the End . . .) this idea of spatial encroachment was further defined, there was the representation of the Occupied Territories (of Palestine) and that of the Arab subject. There was as well our own positions and subjectivities claimed and denied within the collaborative process. The
metaphorical aspect so rich in the descriptive history of the Middle East got carried into and reversed in the collaborative aspects of a westerner with Lebanese origins working with a Palestinian living in the West, together trying to make sense of or re-presenting the triangulations involved at the same time as advocating a moratorium on images/representations of the area produced by the 'West'.

Going into Lebanon we were familiar with the problematic ‘territories’ (conceptually and physically) we were working within and those we were trying to avoid. Lebanon has been used as a metaphor, as a ‘site’ serving the real and imaginary both for the inhabitants as well as the various ‘visitors’ throughout its history. It had been a ground for a history of claims, ideological agendas, discursive texts and acts of ‘re-construction’ becoming an adjective for the nostalgia of our past and the fears of the future, and surrounding that, the cycle of the seduction by, and repulsion of the ‘orient’. In the ‘West’ we came to understand so very little in spite of the massive amounts of ‘information’ we received regarding Lebanon, the war and especially the situation in the south of the country that for one to even mention the name all sorts of images came to mind. What basis in which realities did these images have, where in Lebanon were these realities situated? Who were we really talking about, us or them, or some other construction
in-between? For it is *in-between* that a ‘documentor’ in a culture or a landscape is caught.

Other issues we faced were once again, the ‘West’s’ and our construction of knowledge of that area, and how the projects were going to be read (here and there), that of representing diverse subjectivities and positions within groups and individuals, the continuation of this string of ‘documentary production’ intricately tied up in the history of colonialism, post-colonialism and the mediation of images and this extenuated orientalism (traced back through the Crusades and Napoleon’s engravers on his ‘Orient’ flagship to Egypt in 1798, and up through the countless histories of contemporary ‘coverage’ and ‘big budget histories’), and what was our own position as image/video makers, ‘artists’ and cultural producers. We were placed or placed ourselves somewhere between being family members, visitors, tourists, resident tour guides and unwilling orientalists—never occupying any one position for too long, fluctuating peripatetically between the act of re-producing and the deconstruction of such an act and its object... setting out boundaries in the project and transgressing them, placing/situating our own subjectivities in relationship to the positions involved and the instability of identity existing within a diverse culture and the displacement between cultures.

In the Lebanon projects we also asked, what is the history and structure of the documentary genre specifically from the perspective of the subjects/culture viewed and the practitioners practicing, especially in this West-East relationship. In our projects (videotapes, installation, photographic works, and ‘performance’) there is a heightened aggression towards the western viewer, a demand to view the material for what it is, of positions not of victimization but of confrontation or at least an a non-acquiesced presence. We stressed the imperative of local production and the need to be involved in the community at as much of a fundamental level as we could. We set up a media studio in Beirut inviting whoever was interested to produce videotapes of their own. In the end 16 people produced their own projects many of which I’ve distributed since. Some people started but could not finish as the necessities of survival were at the forefront and making a tape wasn’t the first thing on their mind. What was more important was the way this studio functioned as a meeting place, bringing together people who had rarely if ever passed from West Beirut to East Beirut (and vice versa) during the preceeding years. I have recently set up a similar studio and ongoing media workshop here, where local residents can produce their own works in this neighbourhood (Vancouver’s downtown eastside), one of the most neglected urban areas in Canada.

In my new project *untitled*, 2001—... which includes material on/with Soha Bechara6 (*everything and nothing*), the dialectical relationship of the speaker and the spoken is highlighted, meaning is articulated in around the literal and metaphorical spaces of displacement and dwelling, the con-
stitution of this being viewed as cultural meanings rather than only as an extension of (an)other locale/ space or subjective relationship. With Soha it is necessary to look at her image as a figure of the resistance that has been occupied by a history which is still being played out. This history which grew into a near mythology is used by contradictory forces to justify their aims. Her imagistic strength is superceded only by her actual life so it is an interesting task to try to do a piece with her and a critical reading of her representational ‘over exposure’.

everything and nothing, is the first part of a new (endless) videotape and installation project which subjectively theorizes borders, nationalisms, movements (shifts, transitions, and interstitial space/ time) and the conditions of living between polarities of culture, geography, history, and ideology. The second part of this project centres on the former Yugoslavia7 (part 2: beauty and the east, 55:00, 1999–2002), addressing these issues in that specific context as well as looking at alienation, refusal, identities, ethno-fascism, body as object & metaphor, agents, monsters, abjectness, subjective affinities, and objective trusts. The third part will be a personalized confrontation of the Palestinian dispossession and dispersion, the predicament of refugees (the representational equivalence of the interstitial state or condition), and an attempt to come to terms with the problem of representing the unrepresentable, unrepresentable due to over exposure (made banal or sensational due to facile coverage), effacement, omission, and repression. Integral to the totality of this project is the defining of interstitality but in a way that doesn’t rest in the dysfunctional. This could also be seen as a challenge to monolithic beliefs, and the examination of legacies of empire and the contested and conflicted notions of homeland, nation, diaspora, exile, travel, assimilation, refuge, native and other in an attempt to challenge our realities and perceptions and in doing so, reclaim and reconstruct an agency that is complex and self determining.

As may be evident, nationalisms and dogmas of all sorts tend to worry me. I don’t support a culturally chauvinist view, I’m more interested in the blurred aspects of a post-colonial condition, the non-essentialized positions, where hybridity is the norm and identity is a continual negotiation of sorts. I do champion and promote the position of the right to self-representation especially when that identity is being negated or trying to find its space. But I would draw the line where that claiming becomes exclusionary to the point where essentialism takes over and the authority is not empowering anymore but reductively defining others’ identity for them. You must allow for multiple identities or affinities to exist, and you must get beyond that. That’s the irony, when its turned around and one’s own complexity of identity, subjectivity, affinities or whatever you want to call them, are thus denied, and you are prevented from speaking. So, as is talked about in . . . Up to the South, the point is more how one speaks, how
the story is articulated and the references made, on what level, and at what point of contact are the issues expressed.

MHI: Thanks.

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Molly Hankwitz is a media artist working between architecture and new media. Recent writings are included in: Fibreculture:— A politics of the digital present (Fibreculture, 2001) and The Sarai reader, edited by Geert Lovink. She operates a research and urban design collaborative with David Cox called ‘Archimedia’ and is based in Brisbane, Australia.
Notes

1 Parts of this essay were previously published in Felix, Vol. 2, No. 1, New York, 1995. Before re-asking the previous questions (and answering them) they were overhauled, refined and updated to take into consideration new works, and the ongoing concerns of past works (most of which are as relevant today as they were during the time of their production). The previous responses have been augmented, updated and in some cases re-written considerably with additional material. Some of the specific additions are; the discussion on creating an audience, process, resistance as a key to the work, and the work of/as resistance (the representation and production of resistance). Two completely new questions/responses were added (the 3rd and 4th) which deal with my approach to working in sensitive areas of political culture and narrative, and an installation from 1995–2000. (JS)

2 طالعن ٍعا جنو ب طالعن ٍعا جنو ب Talaeen a Junuub/Up to the South, Jayce Salloum + Walid Ra’ad, 60 min. videotape, 1993: Focuses on the social, intellectual and popular resistance to the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, as well as conceptions of ‘the land’ and culture, and the imperiled identities of the Lebanese people. Simultaneously the tape self-consciously engages in a parallel critique of the documentary genre and its traditions.

3 This is Not Beirut/ There was and there was not, (Jayce Salloum, 49 min. videotape, 1994): A personal essay on the popular misrepresentations of Lebanon which documents Salloum’s experiences while working there. Situated between genres in order to better expose commonplace assumptions it is a critical engagement of the disparities and disjunctions arising on site.

4 Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal (Introduction to the End of an Argument) Speaking for oneself . . . /Speaking for others. . . ., Jayce Salloum & Elia Suleiman, 45 min., videotape, 1990: With a combination of Hollywood and other film, documentary, news coverage and excerpts of ‘live’ footage shot in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza strip, this videotape critiques representations of the Middle East, Arab culture, and the Palestinian people produced by the West.

5 كان يا ما كان, Jayce Salloum, installation, 1995–2000: This installation, serves to examine the representation of ‘Lebanon’, and its history as constructed in our collective and individual psyches. It posits representation itself as a politicized practise.

6 untitled part 1: everything and nothing, 43:00, 1999–2001: A dialogue with Soha Bechara, ex-Lebanese National Resistance fighter in her Paris dorm room after release from captivity in El-Khiam torture and interrogation centre (S. Lebanon) where she had been detained for 10 years, 6 years in isolation. The videotape weaves back and forth between representations of a figure (of resistance) and subject, revising notions of resistance, survival and will, separation and closeness; the overexposed image and body of a surviving martyr speaking quietly and directly into the camera juxtaposed against her self and image, not speaking of torture but of the distance between the subject and the loss, of what is left behind and what remains. This material that I recorded of the time spent with her is not precious, just time, and a conversation, and intense intimacy at a close and unbreachable distance.
untitled part 2: beauty and the east, 55:00, 1999–2002: With material taped predominantly while moving through Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Skopje, the subjects conversing come from a range of constituencies: migrants, asylum seekers, residents, students, workers, and cultural producers—recounting experience, locating sites, shifts, events, and the theorizing and accounting of the issues at stake. Associated ambient imagery helps to form specific histories of locations, and locations of histories at the intersection of cultures in this/these particular place(s) and time(s). Abstract moving landscapes and cityscapes are used to materialize the verbal and localize the discourse through levels of physicality, materiality and immateriality. The speakers are closely framed, creating a complicity with and acknowledgement of the ongoing mediation. Boris Buden, Marina Grzinic, Zarana Papic, Eda Cufer, Dunja Blazevic, Renata Salecl, Slavica Indzevska, Mihajlo Acimovic, Ella Shohat, Ammiel Alcalay, and Carmen Aguirre amongst others are featured.