Revolutionary reenactment: militant futures past in Rania and Raed Rafei's 74 (the reconstitution of a struggle)

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REVOLUTIONARY REENACTMENT: MILITANT FUTURES PAST IN RANIA AND RAED RAFEI'S 74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)

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Abstract | This article analyses how innovative narrative techniques operate in the movie *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)* by Rania and Raed Rafei (2012). The film is a reenactment of an historical event: the student occupation of the American University of Beirut one year before the start of the Lebanese civil war. The use of improvised reenactment, testimonials and the voiceover all strengthen the film's approach to the event as an embodied transformative experience, even as it descends into its defeat. While a cynical spectator might argue that the focus on "revolutionary becoming" reduces collective action to individual experience, the article argues that it is precisely this affective and embodied approach that allows the film to resonate with other times and places and to evoke a speculative state of agitation beyond closed narratives of defeat.

Keywords | reenactment; mockumentary; student movement; Beirut; 74

Résumé | Cet article analyse les techniques narratives innovatrices utilisées dans le film «74 (La reconstitution d'une lutte)» de Rania et Raed Rafei (2012). Le film présente, comme son nom l'indique, une reconstitution d'un événement historique: l'occupation de l'Université Américaine à Beyrouth, par le mouvement étudiant, un an avant le début de la guerre civile libanaise. L'utilisation de reconstitutions improvisées, de témoignages offerts face à la camera, et de voice-over, renforcent la démarche du film envers l'événement en tant qu'expérience incarnée transformatrice, même lorsqu'il dégénère vers sa défaite. S'il est vrai qu'un spectateur cynique pourrait soutenir que « le devenir révolutionnaire » réduit la lutte collective à l'expérience individuelle, cet article soutient que c'est précisément cette approche affective et incarnée qui permet au film de résonner en d'autres temps et lieux, ainsi que d'évoquer un état d'agitation spéculatif au-delà des récits cloisonnés de la défaite.

Mots clés | reconstitution ; mockumentaire ; mouvement étudiant; Beyrouth ; 74

Cairo, 2018. We have gathered for a screening of the film *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)*, hereafter *74*, a fictionalized rendition of the student occupation of the American University of Beirut in 1974. After the film, in the Q&A with one of the film's directors, a member of the audience comments, "this film accurately captures the situation in Egypt." This article seeks to analyze what it was that prompted his recognition. How do memories of revolution and defeat manage to resonate with a different time and place? And can we conceive of this resonance as something more than "capturing", as activating and setting into motion, in the spirit of militant cinema? This article argues that the film's method of historical reenactment by non-actors allows for an embodied relation between past and present in which the actor's performance is conceived simultaneously as a representation of past action and as a critical intervention in the present conjuncture of the film's shooting as well as of the context of reception by different audiences. It goes on to analyze the politics of historical reenactment and direct address in engaging memories of revolution and defeat in a post-uprising Arab world.

The following section contextualizes the historical event of the student occupation that forms the topic of *74*. The second section analyzes in more detail how improvised reenactment functions in *74* and argues that it causes a collapse of temporalities. The subsequent section analyzes the use of mockumentary style direct address as a tool to evoke a sense of verité as well as intimacy. The final section discusses the film's focus on revolutionary becoming and what that might mean in a context of defeat.

1974

Fig. 1 - Opening of *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)*

74 opens with a black-and-white photograph of students gathered in small groups at the campus gate of the American University of Beirut (AUB), their gazes turned outward, faces full of anticipation (see fig. 1). They were gathered there for a demonstration against an announced 10% increase of tuition fees. The photo is the only archival document in the entire film. The rest of the film consists entirely of improvised reenactment scenes, without expert commentary or archival material, and all set at one location – the occupied President's office at AUB. What happened here in 1974 and why did the filmmakers Rania and Raed Rafei choose to make this film about it?

The Lebanese student movement, quite active during the pan-Arab anti-colonial fervour of the 1950s, had experienced a lull in the 1960s to the extent that Professors organized conferences to discuss "student apathy".[1] But student numbers had quadrupled between 1961 and 1971[2] and after the 1967 defeat against Israel had started to settle in, and Lebanese students had returned from their participation in European student movements of '68, student activism took up steam. Worldwide sentiments of anti-authoritarianism, youth culture and the emergence of the New Left led to a general rejection of the status quo, and universities became hotbeds of ideological debates and politicization.[3] In May 1971, students called a strike and occupied administrative buildings in protest against the 10 percent increase of tuition fees announced by the president of the AUB. This occupation was a success. Students sympathized with the activists and the raise in tuition fees was revoked. In 1974 the raise was re-announced and 1000 students protested at the Faculty of Agriculture. In subsequent days, protests continued, building after building was occupied and a general strike was announced.

While the direct cause of the protests was the tuition hike, the directors of *74* were particularly interested in the ways in which the student movement was entangled with wider struggles for economic justice, with labour strikes, feminism, and the bread riots.[4] "In these years, AUB's students had a front-row seat to the region's

1- Anderson, 'The Student Movement in 1968'.
2- El Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976*, 76.
3- El Khazen, 76.
4- Rafei, interview.

crises."[5] While the Lebanese University and Saint Joseph University reflected divided politicization, the AUB and the Beirut Arab University were dominated by leftist and pro-Palestinian student activism. Seen as "an advanced model of indigenous revolutionary struggle", the post-1967 PLO was viewed as the vehicle for sweeping transformations in all aspects of society in the Arab world.[6] Palestinian liberation was thus central to the leftist position that student activists propagated at AUB, challenging the curriculum and accusing the University's administration of "spreading imperialism via a repressive educational apparatus."[7] They opened a "speakers' corner" on campus, printed leaflets and organized strikes.

In one of the early scenes of *74*,[8] the students discuss among themselves the wider implications of their cause. The tuition hike is aimed at elitism, argues Yussef, the struggle against the 10% is a systemic class struggle. Not just in Lebanon, adds Ghassan, the West seeks to create allies not only through military aid but by educating future Arab leaders at AUB. Culturally too, argues Hanzala, the institution tries to turn us into Americans. That is not about culture, says Fawaz, but about creating consumers to satisfy their market needs. Don't students join the American University to learn about Western thinkers in order to strengthen our own knowledge? Asks Alia. There are limits to that, argues Iyad, a Palestinian student - to present the Knesset as a model for democracy is unacceptable.

5- Anderson, 'September 1970 and the Palestinian Issue: A Case Study of Student Politicization at the American University of Beirut (AUB)', 263.the Israeli attack on the Beirut Airport in December 1968 and the Jordanian assault on the Palestinian fedayeen in Black September of 1970 catalyzed activism around a leftist, progressive, and pro-Palestinian political platform. The most frequent and most passionate protests waged by the students between 1967 and the start of the Lebanese Civil War were against the university administration and the Jordanian government. In the students' view, these actors impeded their freedom of action, speech, and political influence, while guaranteeing that the forces standing behind them, the United States, and Israel, increased their power in the region. The administration and the Jordanian leadership thus provided the prototypes for all the characteristics\nthe students opposed. Conversely, the students saw the actions of the\nPalestinian fedayeen organizations as not only a means for regaining\nPalestine but as a program for fighting imperialism in all its guises.»,»container-title»:»Civil Wars»,»DOI»:»10.1080/13698240802167975»,»ISSN»:»1369-8249»,»issue»:»3»,»page»:»261-280»,»title»:»September 1970 and the Palestinian Issue: A Case Study of Student Politicization at the American University of Beirut (AUB

6- El Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976*, 77.

7- Anderson, 'September 1970 and the Palestinian Issue: A Case Study of Student Politicization at the American University of Beirut (AUB)', 263.the Israeli attack on the Beirut Airport in December 1968 and the Jordanian assault on the Palestinian fedayeen in Black September of 1970 catalyzed activism around a leftist, progressive, and pro-Palestinian political platform. The most frequent and most passionate protests waged by the students between 1967 and the start of the Lebanese Civil War were against the university administration and the Jordanian government. In the students' view, these actors impeded their freedom of action, speech, and political influence, while guaranteeing that the forces standing behind them, the United States, and Israel, increased their power in the region. The administration and the Jordanian leadership thus provided the prototypes for all the characteristics\nthe students opposed. Conversely, the students saw the actions of the\nPalestinian fedayeen organizations as not only a means for regaining\nPalestine but as a program for fighting imperialism in all its guises.»,»container-title»:»Civil Wars»,»DOI»:»10.1080/13698240802167975»,»ISSN»:»1369-8249»,»issue»:»3»,»page»:»261-280»,»title»:»September 1970 and the Palestinian Issue: A Case Study of Student Politicization at the American University of Beirut (AUB

8- Rafei and Rafei, *74*, sec. 0:08:00-0:12:00.

The voiceover's repeated references to bread riots, strikes, diplomatic negotiations and Israeli fighter jets make palpable the urgency of the political climate within which student debates unfolded. Students questioned the university's complicity in the bourgeois capitalism and Israeli aggression at the root of deep-seated societal discontent they witnessed around them. The voiceover dryly states this tense context as headlines read out alongside the timeline of the student occupation.

> Day 6:
> Six hours of fighting in Golan
> Israel uses new American weapons9

The entanglement of the student revolt with such wider societal and geopolitical tensions receives added weight by our knowledge as spectators that the Lebanese civil war erupted only one year after the event. The final scene of the film is a still shot of an abandoned room, walls covered in graffiti, floor scattered with overturned chairs, tangled sheets and pillows. The voiceover comments:

> April 24, 1974
> A raid at dawn on the AUB
> 800 security forces beat the students with fists and rifle butts
> 61 students arrested
>
> [pause]
>
> April 13, 1975[10]

The date of the start of the civil war is the only reference to the war that was yet to come and comes at the very closure of the film. The directors explain that this particular historical moment right before the war erupted was haunting them. They were driven by a sense of blocked access to the pre-war past and an urgency to recover and remember.[11] But also by a sense of futures past, "because I think what happened in the seventies and could bloom into something, in the shape of a country that is not fucked up like today, didn't have its full potential."[12]

The Rafeis decided to leave out the aftermath of the event. After fighting broke out in 1975, one of the 103 militant students who had been expelled from AUB after the 1974 occupation, the Jordanian Najem Najem, returned to campus and shot and killed two deans.

9- Rafei and Rafei, sec. 0:14:33.
10- Rafei and Rafei, sec. 1:33:26 – 1:33:55.
11- Rafei, interview.
12- Rafei.

Now it was a big debate why we didn't want to include this story. [...] we wanted to keep all the film very condensed in the world of ideas and the world of *phantasme,* about being in the future and in the past, and we didn't want this event to conclude it. We didn't want anything to conclude. We wanted something to stay suspended in the air.[13]

This element – to recall the thrill of the revolutionary moment as a site of potentialities without closure – forms one of the main themes of the film and will be discussed in more detail below.

A third reason why Raed and Rania Rafei were intrigued by the event was that one of the main student activists, Mohammed Mattar, became a corporate lawyer for one of Rafic Hariri's firms and published a mea culpa distancing himself from his former radicalism. His account is now proudly cited by the AUB alumni magazine, stating "that we need not heroes … what we need is decent leadership".[14] It is this shift from radical leftism to unapologetic capitalism that intrigued the makers too. What happened to that world of dreams and ideas?

In short, the student revolt of 1974 was chosen as emblematic for its revolutionary spirit driven by fermenting discontent of the era, as well as for its defeat heralding a wider collapse of progressive dreams: the abyss of a 15 year civil war coinciding with the global waning of grand visions for societal change throughout the 1980s and 90s. Significantly, the film was conceived and initiated before the 2011 uprisings and was inspired precisely by a sense of apathy, "at a moment when the world – in particular the Arab world – seemed to have lost hope for another future."[15] In contrast, the shooting and reenactment were fueled by excitement about the waves of popular uprisings in the region.

Historical reenactment as temporal collapse

Initially, Rania Rafei made a documentary commissioned by Al-Jazeera about the 1970s student movement in Lebanon and her brother helped with the necessary research, but both were increasingly discontent with the limitations of the conventional documentary format and decided to launch their own project on this important topic.[16] Initially for budgetary reasons, they soon decided everything would be shot on one location. First, they produced a teaser with different characters, which also served as a casting. It was during the shooting of this initial project, titled *Prologue* that the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia erupted. With a selected group of political activists, all non-actors, they then spent a year doing extensive historical research and developing the characters modeled

13- Rafei.
14- Nizameddin, 'The Coming of Age of Student Activism at AUB', 38.
15- Rafei, Rafei, and Malkoun-Henrion, 'Un Pensée Du Devenir: 74 (La Reconstitution d'une Lutte)'.
16- Rafei, interview.

on real events. The unfolding of the Arab uprising during this process gave the project added relevance and vigour. "And this was interesting for us. How would they inhabit the past with their own ideas, illusions, fears and hopes for the present?"[17] This affective identification between past character and present performer was intensified during the shooting process.

While the preparatory phase was a slow and rigorous process, the eventual shooting of the film took place during 13 intensive, consecutive days in an abandoned space with lengthy sessions of improvisation. The cast and crew stayed on location for the entire period. As a result, the boundaries between the diegetic space of the *74* narrative, and the extra-diegetic space of the film's shooting blurred. The embodied experience of being locked in one space together, of making coffee and sharing breakfast and stumbling over each other's stuff was shared by characters and performers alike. The film presents this in close-ups resembling still lifes that foreground the materiality, all the *things*, needed to sustenain these bodies occupying the office: food, drinks, cigarettes, blankets (see figure 2).

In a crucial scene, that marks the fragmentation and eventual defeat of the movement, Alia – who from the beginning has propagated a more liberal notion of individual freedom than her more leftist comrades – challenges the legitimacy of the occupation and propagates a referendum as suggested by the student group *Al-Rabita*. The others reject it.

> Alia: "The students you intend to abandon followed you to revoke the 10%. And on the basis of the 10% now you want to liberate Palestine from AUB!"
> Yussef: "Alia!"
> Iyad: "… and what's wrong with that?"
> Alia: "It's an illusion."[18]

After an emotional exchange, Rima poses an ultimatum – either you stick with us until the end or you go home – Alia marches out, enraged.

Rafei explains that the performers from the very start questioned the presence of Alia, or rather of Sandra Njeim who impersonates her, but the directors insisted she should be part of the project. The scene of the confrontation was particularly intense. They were shooting for three hours straight, the camera constantly moving around the performers. Moreover, performers were not allowed to relax during the breaks in shooting to change shots or memory cards – a moment when actors usually release tension, let go of their characters and joke around. With the scene of the break, Alia/Sandra was sent away by the others in a moment where fiction and reality collapsed. In discussion with

17- Rafei.
18- Rafei and Rafei, 74, sec. 0:48:32-0:48:48.

the directors, she decided to come back and shoot a semi-conciliatory scene with Yussef, who in fact repeats his rigidity. "Maybe I had too much faith in our patience, awareness, will and determination, in the toughness that is required for this movement. I was wrong to think that everyone can be as tough."[19] Alia listens silently, exasperated.

Fig. 2 - Everyday objects cluttering the room in 74 (*The Reconstitution of a Struggle*), 1:17:47.

Fig. 3 - Singing a Sheikh Imam song in 74 *(The Reconstitution of a Struggle)*, 0:26:53

19- Rafei and Rafei, sec. 1:14:18-1:14:30.

Studies on historical reenactment often come from a concern with historiography and have therefore focused on the "uneasy relationship between realism, authenticity and affect", especially where improvisation is concerned.[20] That is because the reenactment is not aimed at "narrating past events and large-scale processes" as in the commissioned documentary for Al-Jazeera. Rather, *74* views history "as the substance of transformative experience and staging."[21] Reenactment operates in such a way that performers *embody* their characters in improvisation, rather than act out scripted scenes, that socio-political identification between performer and character can generate a collapse of temporalities.[22] This is further enhanced by the casting of non-actors who identify with their character in terms of socio-political position.

The approach resembles Peter Watkins' in his epic *La Commune (Paris, 1871)* which formed an inspiration to the directors. For *La Commune,* Watkins casted over 200 non-actors to each reenact a 19th century character belonging to a similar socio-economic class as the performer. In their performance they position their off-stage subjectivity vis-à-vis the historical event, while their on-stage words and gestures throw new light upon their off-stage socio-economic conditions. Vanessa Agnew points to the risk of such affective identification. "Reenactment has the tendency to collapse temporalities, and this implies forms of historical continuity that are not only potentially inaccurate but also exploitable for ideological ends."[23] She cites Walter Benjamin on the danger of empathy with the victors of history by celebrating the spoils of class struggle as historical treasures,[24] but *74* and *La Commune* empathize with the vanquished not the victors.

La Commune should be seen as an innovative example of militant cinema in that its production process is as political as its content.[25] Bovier and Fluckiger understand its improvised dialogues as a form of Arendtian political action. "In line with the eminently political dimension of the Commune, the speech of action originates here within the open Councils, in which the actors relate the historical event of the Paris Commune to their own social condition."[26] The transformative and performative experience characteristic of revolutionary action is thus affectively doubled in its restaging. In addition, the performative act constitutes a social encounter, not only between performers and between characters, but also between the performer's subjectivity and social reality with their character. If the identification with socio-economic inequality or revolutionary thrill of the

20- McCalman and Pickering, 'From Realism to the Affective Turn: An Agenda', 9.
21- Agnew, '"History's Affective Turn": Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present', 303.
22- Agnew, '"History's Affective Turn": Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present', 309.
23- Agnew, 309.
24- Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.
25- Watkins was inspired by the radical playwright and filmmaker Arnand Gatti.
26- Bovier and Fluckiger, 'Le Langage de l'action Politique Dans La Commune (Paris, 1871) de Peter Watkins : « selmaire » et Utopie'.

past suggests historical continuity, this does not reinforce the closure suggested by victory for which Agnew and Benjamin warn, but rupture and agitation reopening the unrealized possibilities enfolded in defeat to the emergence of something new. Such an approach – while indeed exploitable for ideological ends – is actually very close to Benjamin's own complex vision of history as a storm or runaway train of ruination, upon which revolutions act as emergency breaks opening up a temporal delay of absolute potential.[27]

In her discussion of "temporal drag", Elizabeth Freeman speaks of "the mutually disruptive energy of moments that are not yet past and yet are not entirely present either."[28] Rebecca Schneider comments:

> This "mutually disruptive energy" is compelling, and it is, in Freeman's words, an energy of passing, an energy of affect's transmission. It is one time passing on, to and as another time, but also *not quite passing.* One time almost but not fully passing in and as another time. […] Something is different here than simply remembering, or a simple negotiation with 'a time gone by.'[29]

When the performers sing a revolutionary song of the Egyptian poet Shaykh Imam, they are not only evoking times gone by – the song mocks how Arab leaders hail a crooked Nixon – but also trigger the song's afterlife when Sheikh Imam's songs were repopularized during the Tahrir protests of 2011 (Fig. 3). There is joy and a sense of bonding in this singing together, in invoking other revolutionary moments. It shows how the presentism and futurity with which revolutionary action is usually analyzed may be lacking. Freeman's mutual disruption of past and present encourages us to become more attentive to the many ways in which the past is part of struggles for a better future "in a complex temporal overlay rather than a linear progression from past to present to future."[30] Throughout the improvisations, the performers of *74* show how past words and gestures, songs and objects resonate deeply with their socio-political present – as in the case of Sheikh Imam – but they also bring into relief dissonances – as with a Russian song they perform that is left without subtitles, the language of an ally now lost – *and* invest the past with their present desires and disappointments.

27- Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'; Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*, 6–8; Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 201–2.
28- Freeman, 'Packing History, Count(Er)Ing Generations', 742.
29- Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, 15.
30- Rigney, 'Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic'.

Mockumentary style intimacy

The improvised scenes are interjected with "testimonials". These are scenes where characters speak privately to a camera to reflect on events that have unfolded in scenes of action or dialogue. Testimonials have become a conventional format for reality television, from documentaries to real life shows. With the borrowing of this reality tv narrative technique, and the use of a handheld camera in the improvised sequences, *74* can be placed in the mockumentary genre. Even if its topic and aim are more serious than most mockumentaries, the mixed references to cinema verité, documentary and reality TV for the fictionalized characters work humorously.

Conventional testimonials are carefully staged. Characters are directed to avoid looking into the camera. The scenes are edited in such a way that they present a coherent self that speaks in full sentences and coincides with the intra-diegetic character that is presented in the action scenes. Such staging and editing aims to avoid breaking the fourth wall, even if the character shifts from diegetic character to extradiegetic commentary. The goal is to offer subjective views on the event and to create a sense of intimacy with the characters, not to inspire critical reflection on narration and mediality. *74* consciously breaks with these conventions. Characters are posited in the middle of the frame directly facing the camera, instead of the conventional ¾ facial view (Fig. 4 and 5). Spectators can hear the directors' questions, but cannot see them. The characters do not fix their gazes. Sometimes they look at the interviewer offscreen. They cast their gaze down when they hesitate or think. At other times they directly address the camera and the audience. Their lines are not smoothly edited but interrupted by jump cuts. All in all, spectators are made aware of the camera, the directing and the editing, and made aware that the characters are aware of the camera too.

Where direct address is most often discussed as a distancing device that interrupts our suspension of disbelief in a Brechtian moment of *Verfremdung*, I follow Robyn Warhol's argument "that the more the mockumentary text manipulates structures of address to heighten the audience's experience of meta-narration's effects, the more real its constructed people can appear to be."[31] This is because as audiences we have become accustomed to the smoothening of meta-narration in reality tv. When fictional characters break those rules, responding to the presence of the camera with unease or bravado, they come across as more truthful than the staged non-fiction they imitate. Thus, while *74* does break the fourth wall in the testimonials, the effect is "a peculiarly intimate link between performer / character and audience" rather than distanciation.[32]

31- Warhol, 'Metanarration', 64.
32- See also Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall : Direct Address in the Cinema*, 117.

This is enhanced by the questions, which address the characters' fears and desires.

> Raed: Your name and major
> Rima: Rima, academic year '73-'74, 3rd year, Psychology
> Raed: What idea about this strike do you cherish most? An idea that you're not willing to let go no matter what?
> Rima: I won't let go of the idea of the revolution and disobedience.
> Raed: What is this revolution for you? Would you call what you're living now a revolution?
> Rima: One might not call it a great revolution but I am sure that I am living a revolution with myself.
> Rania: Do you feel the strike will fail?
> Rima: [silence] eh.. It will falter most probably.[33]

Alone with the camera, Rima is disarmed. With her eyes shifting from camera to interviewer, she seems more vulnerable and more truthful than during the improvised scenes. Her expression of deep emotional involvement with the revolutionary moment even when it is at the point of falling apart is addressed directly at the camera. Likewise and in contrast to his bravado in the group scenes, Ghassan confides to the camera that his biggest fear is "to start resembling our oppressors."[34] It is in such moments of metanarration that the characters appear most "real" and the "temporal drag" most effective.

Fig. 4 - Rima (Rita Hodroj) in *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)*,

33- Rafei and Rafei, *74*, sec. 1:18:28 – 1:19:35.
34- Rafei and Rafei, sec. 1:00:00-1:00:11.

Fig. 5 - Yussef El-Shemali (Nassim Arabi) in 74 *(The Reconstitution of a Struggle)*, 0:55:10

The critical exchange between past and present is made even more explicit when Raed Rafei asks "Can Yussef El-Shemali become an extreme Islamist or a capitalist one day?" - he answers no - and later: "Yussef El-Shemali in '74, how do you picture him in 2011?" [35] Yussef smiles to himself while the image fades out, leaving the audience to reflect on that momentous year of 2011, and what would have become by then of this authoritarian young idealist. The testimonials thus function as interjections in which the directors address the question how these political activists "inhabit the past with their own ideas, illusions, fears and hopes for the present" more explicitly.[36] But while the affective and political identification between performer and character is foregrounded by these testimonials, performers never step out of their role in a Brechtian move to reflect on the process of reenactment or the film's mediality like in Peter Watkins' *La Commune (1871)*.

Revolutionary defeat and militant cinema

This final section seeks to situate 74 in the post-uprising Arab worldand the possibilities for Arab militant cinema today. At the time of writing this article in 2021, the anger and frustration that mobilized millions in 2011 Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, and again in 2019 Iraq, Sudan, Algeria and Lebanon, have not led to political or socioeconomic justice. On the contrary, in many cases the situation has worsened to unprecedented levels of repression, violence and despair. What could be the role of militant cinema in such a bleak aftermath of defeat, while the progressive force of the Third World Liberation movements that first inspired the genre has retreated yet again?

35- Rafei and Rafei, sec. 0:56:36-0:56:53.
36- Rafei, interview.

An answer to that question could start with the fact that defeat has always been part of militant cinema. It is a body of cinema that is haunted by "the exhilaration and fatigue that bracketed the events of May 1968 as well as the failed utopias that emerged with the global decolonizing movements of the late 1950s."[37] Likewise Arab militant cinema was inevitably marked by the string of defeats suffered by the struggle for Palestinian liberation, the Lebanese civil war and the Gulf wars. Samir Kassir diagnosed the region in the 1990s with the "Arab malaise", "a widespread and deeply seated feeling that Arabs have no future."[38] Militant cinema in the 1970s and early '80s, in the Arab world as well as across the globe, spoke from and against a condition of defeat.

David Scott maintains about the aftermath of the defeat of the Grenada revolution (British Caribbean) in 1983 that "in an abrupt and surprising reversal, the future had become the past and, denuded of its old, progressive dynamic, the present could be nothing more than the endless and melancholic repetition of itself."[39] And yet, when a member in the Egyptian audience recognizes the scenes in *74* as the opening of this article describes, it would be cynical to reduce this identification to the narrative of defeat as just another ending. Reflecting on the project, Rania Rafei contends that "from one defeat to another, there is not a repetition of the same, but rather an opening to a different possibility."[40] Laura U. Marks turns to Deleuzian Affection-Images and Time-Images to discuss cinema's potential to evoke an "agitated state" which vibrates with "the potential for new kinds of acts, feelings or perceptions."[41] For her, it is precisely the sense of despair in the Arab world that has allowed for an experimental cinema that avoids ideological dogma while opening up a more elusive political potential. "With a slight shift of energy, apathy converts into play, possessing a speculative lightness that might survive where more earnest attempts get bogged down under the weight of good intentions and ideology."[42] Hochberg sees experimental reenactment in the same vein as "an invitation to imagine the past as an enticing site of ambiguities" in sharp contrast to the region's present geopolitical reality.[43] It is this sense of the speculative that is thematized in *74* as "a sense of becoming, rather than having become, of the emergent rather than the static".[44] In other words, *74* may well be about futures past, but refuses to deal with that past as fully bygone.

37- Matthew Croombs, 'In the Wake of Militant Cinema: Challenges for Film Studies', *Discourse* 41, no. 1 (2019): 70, referencing Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in *The Sixties without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 178–209. See also: Paul Douglas Grant, *Cinéma Militant: Political Filmmaking and May 1968* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 4.

38- Kassir, *Being Arab*, 2.

39- Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*, 108–9.postsocialist temporality. The case study at its core is the demise of the Grenada Revolution (1979–1983

40- Rafei, Rafei, and Malkoun-Henrion, 'Un Pensée Du Devenir: 74 (La Reconstitution d'une Lutte)'.

41- Marks, Hanan Al-Cinema : Affections for the Moving Image, 4.

42- Marks, 7.

43- Hochberg, 'Archival Afterlives in a Conflict Zone: Animating the Past in Jumana Manna's Cinematic Fables of Pre-1948 Palestine', 40.

44- Rafei, Rafei, and Malkoun-Henrion, 'Un Pensée Du Devenir: 74 (La Reconstitution d'une Lutte)'.

The previous two sections showed how the "sense of becoming" of the historical event was doubled in its restaging and conveyed as an intimate and deeply moving experience in testimonials. The voiceover at key moments steps out of its dry enumeration of the historical timeline of the student occupation and its political context to a more poetic narration of that experience. *74* is divided in three parts, separated by title cards: "Occupy! Occupy!", "The Rupture" and "Isolation". The poetic reflections come at the closing shots of the first two sections:

> In a fleeting moment of silence
> that seemed to change the course of events
> voices cried out: "Occupy! Occupy!"
> Some kept wondering about the nature of that moment
> Lost glances meet
> A student turns to his fellow student
> A student clutches the hand of her fellow student
> A breeze blows a frill on a dress
> A throat cries out: Occupy! Occupy![45]

The revolutionary becoming is presented as a profoundly embodied and libidinal experience, of glances, hands and voices that search one another. The moment of rupture is initially presented as linguistic: "We are steadfast, they are reluctant. We are fighters, they are defeatists. We are dreamers, they are realists. We. They." But this too is experienced in bodily terms: "gazes avoiding one another" and again: "some kept wondering about the nature of that moment." Bodies in alliance, bodies turning away from each other, and the final section ends with bodies beaten up "with rifle butts", but instead of "wondering about the nature of that moment", the final section is cut short by "13 April 1975". My analysis has argued that the reenactment itself formed an embodied encounter too, generating collective energy but also painful division among performers in a dynamic dialogue with their historical characters. With this filmmaking as collective social practice, it stands in a longer tradition of militant cinema.

A cynical spectator could argue that *74*'s focus on "the nature of that moment" as an embodied "sense of becoming" both reduces and reifies collective action and societal change to an individualist "experience". I beg to differ. Kristin Ross argues that the narrative about May '68 has been vacated by the weight of defeat, "but the real question [...] lies elsewhere, outside the parameters of revolution, failed or not."[46] The narrative of defeat focuses on seizing power, but truly revolutionary moments are not about seizing power in the way wars or coups are, but rather about dismantling power, or at least temporarily suspending it. This is what Ross tentatively calls "equality", understood "as something that emerges in the course of the struggle and is verified subjectively,

45- Rafei and Rafei, *74*, sec. 0:31:20-0:32:08.
46- Ross, *May '68*, 73.

declared and experienced in the here and now as what is, and not what should be."[47] The power of *74* lies in recovering such subjective verification by invoking futures past neither as what was nor as what should have been, but as an encounter, staged or not, brimming with possibilities that can be experienced in the here and now even when fully acknowledging that hopes are being dashed

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ملخص | تحلل هذه المقالة كيف تعمل تقنيات السرد الإبداعية في فيلم ٧٤ (Reconstitution of a Struggle) للمخرجين رانية ورائد رافعي (٢٠١٢). الفيلم هو إعادة تمثيل لحدث تاريخي: احتلال الحركة الطلابية للجامعة الأمريكية في بيروت قبل اندلاع الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية بعام واحد فقط. عزز الارتجال في التمثيل والشهادات المعروضة والتعليق الصوتي من تعامل الفيلم مع الحدث على أنه تجربة مجسدة تحويلية وإن انحدرت إلى هزيمتها. وقد يجادل المشاهد الساخر بأن تسليط الضوء على *التحول الثوري* يقلل من الحراك الجماعي ويجعله تجربة فردية إلا أن المقال يقدم الحجة على أن هذا المنهج العاطفي المجسد هو تحديدا ما مكن للفيلم من ان يتردد صداه في أزمنة وأوقات أخرى ويثير حالة متأملة من المشاعر المتهيجة تتجاوز السرد المغلق للهزيمة.

كلمات مفتاحية | إعادة تمثيل ; وثائقي هزلي؛ حركة طلابية; بيروت ؛ ٧٤

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