

Forthcoming

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The God of the Nizârîs and the En-Sof of the cabalists are certainly beyond speech, the unspeakable, but not Hell or the Apocalypse (see the Bible, the Qur'ân, Dante, Hieronymus Bosch, many accounts by schizophrenics, etc.), and therefore not the concentration camps (even if one is able to write and speak concerning them only with a voice-over-witness). What is indecent is not speaking about the surpassing disasters of the atomic devastation of Hiroshima, the Rwandan genocide, Auschwitz, the Khmer Rouge 1974-1977 rule in Cambodia, the genocidal US-imposed UN sanctions on Iraq; but any implied attendant disregard of the consequent withdrawal. The tact of Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour* is that while speaking about and showing the nuclear conflagration of Hiroshima, it stresses that there has been a withdrawal: "You have seen nothing in Hiroshima."

What is appropriate past the surpassing disaster is either a "more sober, more factual... 'greyer'" language (Paul Celan), or the dazzling, colorful language of the messianics.

One way of viewing the difference in Islam between the esoteric (*bâtin*) and the exoteric (*zâhir*) is to consider it a consequence of individual spiritual encounters and events alerting some Moslems to other meanings of what they might otherwise have taken only in a literal sense: this is what one encounters in Sufism. But Sufism did not initiate the differentiation between the *bâtin* and the *zâhir*; such a distinction first appeared among extremist Shi'ites (*ghulât*). The battle of Siffîn between the fourth caliph 'Alî and the renegade Mu'âwiya was tilting toward a victory by the caliph, when Mu'âwiya ordered his army both to raise all the available *masâhif* (copies of the Qur'ân) on their lances and to say: "Their contents are to be authoritative in our dispute." This order was given in 657, barely twenty-five years after Muhammad delivered to his community the last revealed words: "This day have I perfected for you your religion and fulfilled My favor unto you..."; and only a few years after the recension of the canonical version of the Qur'ân in the final years of the third caliph, 'Uthmân ibn 'Affân (d. 656)! Lo and behold the five hundred or so copies of the Qur'ân available to the Syrian army were raised on lances. What Mu'âwiya hoped for happened. Led by a band of Qur'ân reciters (*qurrâ'*) in 'Alî's camp, a large group of the caliph's followers pressured him to put a stop to the battle. The Qur'ân, extensively cited by many of the combatants during their declamations preceding their individual duels, continued to be cited during the debate concerning whether or not to discontinue the battle. I imagine that becoming weary of resisting the obstinate and insolent pressure of the dissenters, and feeling deserted by many of his followers, 'Alî was on the point of acquiescing when, catching the unsettling sight of the copies of the Qur'ân on the lances, he, known for his vaticinal gifts, had a vision of horsemen shouting with reverence his name while trampling Qur'ân copies and slaughtering pilgrims. I imagine him disconcerted to hear in the vision the 'Alî of helpless invocation screamed by some of the pilgrims (who, at the approach of the end, were letting go of their *taqiyya* [dissimulation] and disclosing their allegiance to him and his descendants) echoed by the triumphant 'Alî of

the terrific horsemen who struck nonetheless. Instead of persuading him to consent, such a vision would have made him more vehement in his insistence that the battle resume. I envision him saying to the dissenters: “If we do not unintentionally trample the *masâhif* now, in the commotion of the battle, they are certainly going to be intentionally trampled, and justifiably so, around and in the Ka’ba itself. I see this happening as I see you.” Only after being threatened with murder by Mis’ar b. Fadakî al-Tamîmî, Zayd b. Husayn al-Tâ’î, al-Sinbisî and a band of *qurrâ*: “‘Alî, respond to the Book of God when you are called to it. Otherwise we shall indeed deliver you up entirely to the enemy or do what we did with Ibn ‘Affân,” did ‘Alî, aware through the quite recent example of the murder of the third caliph of the catastrophic consequences such an assassination would have on the fledgling Muslim community, acquiesce. “Do not forget that I forbade you to do this, and remember your words to me.” One group at the battle of Siffin remained largely unaware that the Qur’ân was affected fundamentally by being inserted in the conflict: the Umayyads—one more indication of their distance from and basic indifference to the Qur’ân. Another group, the proto-Khârijîs, whose nucleus was the band of reciters of the Qur’ân in ‘Alî’s camp, intuiting the danger of withdrawal, asserted all the more vehemently the absoluteness of the Qur’ân, refusing the subsequent arbitration between ‘Alî and Mu‘âwiya, since the Book should and can be the sole arbitrator. Only the (proto-)Shi‘ites were really attuned to this gesture, sensing that the Qur’ân has somewhat been withdrawn. The fundamental difference between Shi‘ism and Sunni Sufism, giving them their different tonalities, is not so much the displacement of the spiritual leader from the imâm in Shi‘ism to the shaykh/pole in Sufism, but that they largely came to esotericism by different routes: the latter mainly through unveiling (*kashf*) and taste (*dhawq*); the former mainly through a withdrawal of the literal.¹ The following words were attributed to the sixth imâm, Ja‘far al-Sâdiq: “Coming from Him, this Word [the Qur’ân] returns to him.” His imâmî disciple Hishâm b. al-Hakam declared: “The Qur’ân is an abrogated concept (...) which left the Prophet’s Companions and returned to heaven when they apostatized and established Abû Bakr [the first caliph] in place of ‘Alî.”² The dubious gesture of the Umayyads, purported to unite all Moslems around the Qur’ân, by implicating that sacred book in the divisiveness and the catastrophic battle, separated it from itself. Among the differential symptoms and consequences of the withdrawal of the Qur’ân according to various Shi‘ite sects, one can note:

- Viewing it as created, differentiating between it and *Umm al-kitâb* (the Archetype, the mother of the book) as the transcendent, uncreated word of God, limiting the withdrawal to the former.
- Differentiating between a *zâhir* and a *bâtin*, a differentiation reportedly introduced by Abû Hâshim ‘Abd Allâh, a grandson of ‘Alî, and that goes far beyond the basic distinction mentioned in the Qur’ân between sûras that are *muhkamât* (clear) and ones that are *mutashâbihât* (ambiguous).

¹. One can appreciate the intense tonality of withdrawal in Shi‘ism if one remembers that in that branch of Islam one reaches the esoteric through the imâm rather than through unmediated experience, and then notes that since the tenth century the imâm has been occulted in Duodeciman Shi‘ism.

². Quoted in Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallâj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 139-140. See also Muhammad b. Ahmad Abû’l-Husayn Malatî (d. 987), *Kitâb al-tanbîh wa’l-radd ‘alâ ahl al-ahwâ’ wa’l-bida’* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna/Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘ârif, 1968), p. 25.

- The primacy given in certain Shi‘ite sects to the esoteric sense over the exoteric one, with a consequent downgrading of the messenger Muhammad: in Isma‘îlîsm, Muhammad is considered just the legislator of the Qur’ân in its exoteric, literal sense, with ‘Alî and the other imâms raised in rank to become those who alone know its esoteric meaning.³
- The Isma‘îlî belief in “cycles of occultation” (*adwâr al-satr*), during which the esoteric meaning is concealed behind an exoteric one.
- The discarding of the exoteric sense for the esoteric sense(s), the sole legitimate one even when it is the exact opposite of the literal sense.
- The view of many of the *ghulât*, but also of such pre-Buwayhid Duodeciman Shi‘ite authors as the Nawbakhtîs and al-Kulaynî that the Qur’ân, in the guise of the canonical version recensed under ‘Uthmân, is somewhat forged, parts of it having been altered, and parts not included, suppressed. The faithful recension of the Qur’ân, initially detained by ‘Alî and passed through his descendants, the imâms, is going to be publicly revealed only with the parousia of the presently occulted twelfth imâm.
- The Isma‘îlî notion of the cyclical abrogation of one prophetic legislation by a subsequent one, a descendent of ‘Alî and Husayn being the one who abrogates the revealed legislation of Muhammad (this in spite of the insistence in Moslem dogma that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets). This abrogation had its most sublime form in the Great Resurrection of ‘Alamût and other Nizârî strongholds from 1164 to 1210; it also took place briefly in Yemen under the *dâ‘î* ‘Alî b. al-Fadl.
- The trampling of the *masâhif* around the Ka‘ba itself in 930 by Abû Tâhir Sulaymân al-Jannâbî’s Qarmatîs. The Qarmatîs’ trampling of the Qur’ân, an action that Orthodox Sunni theologians and writers prefer to attribute solely to attempts by Persian, Hellenic, and other non-Arab elements in the land of Islam to subvert the conquering religion, is the reflection, in the distorted mirror of the surpassing disaster, of the placement of the Qur’ân on the lances by the Umayyads in 656. These are two images of a parallel montage across around three centuries.

When the Umayyad army raised the *masâhif* on their lances, they said: “Who will protect the frontier districts of the Syrians if they perish, and who those of the Iraqis if they all perish?” But were the Arab Moslems spared by the raising of the *masâhif* on the lances and the subsequent cessation of the battle? The answer to the sparing of Moslems by the Qur’ân in the battle of Siffîn was the slaughter of the pilgrims by Abû Tâhir al-Jannâbî’s Qarmatîs in 930. As customary with the general population, they were offended and scandalized by the Qarmatî action but not by the Umayyad one. Can one have enough contempt for the general population? I would answer with a categorical “No,” were it not for my knowledge that these people are also mortals, therefore already undead, and thus cannot be limited to their petty measure as living common people.

³. This downgrading of the revealer of the Qur’ân did take coarser guises: adh-Dhammiyya blamed Muhammad, viewed by them as the Apostle of ‘Alî as God, because he was sent to call people to ‘Alî but called them to himself; the Ghurâbiyya held the view that since Muhammad and ‘Alî were as indistinguishable from each other as one raven is from another, when the angel Gabriel was sent with the divine revelation from God to ‘Alî (an eleven-year old boy then), he gave it by mistake to Muhammad (a forty-year old man).

The same phenomenon of withdrawal of tradition due to the surpassing disaster is encountered in Judaism following the expulsion of all professing Jews from Spain in 1492; the forced mass baptism of the Jews of Portugal in 1497;⁴ and the mass reprisals against Jews in Poland during the 1648 Ukrainian revolt, led by Bogdan Chmielnicki, against the extremely oppressive *Arenda* system of land use in which many Jews were implicated—these latter events were experienced as particularly depressing and unfortunate since according to many Cabalists basing their calculation on *gematria*, 1648 was to be the year of the redemption. This withdrawal is intimated in the messianic movement around Sabbatai Zevi. “Radical” Sabbatians advocated the systematic violation of the Torah, now viewed, in contradistinction to the Torah of *atzilut*, of the messianic time, as the Torah of *beriah*, of the unredeemed world. From the perspective of the surpassing disaster, the Torah has been withdrawn and this withdrawal has to be made plain through the Torah’s transgression or even through apostasy—the latter extreme step required the surpassing disaster of the apostasy of the messiah himself (messianism is a problematic response to the surpassing disaster, not least because it often itself turns into a no less devastating catastrophe). Thus the conversion of some “radical” Sabbatians, the Frankists, to Catholicism; and, following Sabbatai’s example, of some others to Islam: the Dönme. It is characteristic of the bigoted journalist Elie Wiesel that he should inveigh against the Sabbatians in his preface to a fiction book on Jacob Frank.⁵ He, the ostensible upholder of tradition and memory after the surpassing disaster of the Shoah, the self-proclaimed “emissary of the survivors and the dead,” has no appreciation that the Sabbatian response is a just, albeit problematic, reaction to a surpassing disaster—can any genuine response to a surpassing disaster be other than problematic? It is disingenuous

⁴. On page 76 of *Archive Fever* (1997), having quoted Yosef Yerushalmi’s statement in his *Zakhor*: “Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people,” Jacques Derrida asks: “How can one not tremble in front of such a statement?” Why and how does Derrida implicitly presume that Yerushalmi did not tremble while writing such a statement? I have trembled while writing many an idea in my books, most recently the exigency of the slaughter of the pilgrims by Abū Tāhir al-Jannābī’s Qarmatīs. I have enough respect for Derrida to know that he must have trembled while writing a number of his statements. Even more disturbing is trembling Derrida’s response to that statement: “Unless, in the logic of this election, one were to call by the *unique* name of Israel all the places and all the peoples who would be ready to recognize themselves in this anticipation and in this injunction...” (p. 77). Disconcerting solution from Derrida in a book that invokes Yerushalmi, the author of *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto; Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (Columbia University Press, 1971), a book that dwells on the forced mass conversion of the Jews of Portugal. Such a response does not make me tremble—the deaths of over 576,000 Iraqi children as a result of the US-imposed UN sanctions does. But this rhetorical and quasi-performative conversion forced on some other presently existing, or yet to exist peoples certainly induces in me the queasy sense of a threat (my qualification of the performativity of that Derridian gesture is due to the circumstance that the question of who has the right to convert is currently a quite contentious issue for Jewry, many Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews vehemently contesting the legitimacy of conversions performed by Conservative and Reform rabbis, indeed demanding that the Israeli government of Netanyahu enact this illegitimacy and promulgate it). Unfortunately such a kind of statement is not exceptional among a number of otherwise admirable contemporary French philosophers. In his book *Heidegger and the “jews”*, Lyotard writes that he is using “jews” to indicate that he is not writing only about the Jews, but about those hostage to an unconscious affection. I could respond: why not use “shi’ites”—except the logic and structure of these quotation marks, of designating by the unique name of one people other peoples, is loathsome to me even when it does not, as is virtually always the case, quickly degenerate, despite qualifications and disclaimers, into either a restriction of the ones who would be designated with the quotation marks to solely those who are usually designated without such marks: when Lyotard lists three pairs of “jews” and Christians, all the former turn out to be Jews: Kafka, Benjamin, Celan; or else to instigating some sort of conversion: Lyotard, who abhors talk of a Judeo-Christianism, ends up expecting those supposed to be included in “jews” beside the Jews to acquiesce to conversion.

⁵. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Man Who Would Be Messiah*, Foreword by Elie Wiesel (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988).

and simpleminded to divest oneself from Sabbatians, Nizârîs, and Qarmatîs by branding them nihilists. Past the withdrawal of tradition following a surpassing disaster affecting Islam, all Moslems are placed in the position of nihilists, whether they care to assume expressly such nihilism or not; past the withdrawal of tradition following a surpassing disaster affecting Judaism, all Jews are placed in the position of nihilists. Indeed, past the withdrawal of tradition following a surpassing disaster, it is those who do not clearly assume explicitly the nihilism into which they have willy-nilly been placed who are the most treacherous nihilists (Wiesel is more insidious than the reportedly sinister Jacob Franck). Nizârîs and Qarmatîs, who abrogated the Mohammedan revealed religion and its law, are Moslems, for it is in reaction to Moslem surpassing disasters that their abrogations were enacted. Similarly, and notwithstanding the bigoted view of their Jewish opponents, “radical” Sabbatians are Jews because their transgressions of the religious law and even their conversions were the consequence of their sensing that Jewish religion and tradition has withdrawn due to the preceding surpassing disasters affecting Judaism, including the apostasy of the Messiah. Excommunicated, the Frankists, engaged in several disputations with the rabbis. If I had to side with one of the two antagonistic parties, I would certainly concur with the Sabbatians that they, including those among them who converted, were then legitimately who they called themselves: *the believers* (*ma’aminim*). At that point the rabbis were the unbelievers through their continuing belief in a tradition and a religious law that, owing to their withdrawal past the surpassing disaster and in the absence or failure of their resurrection, had become counterfeits of themselves, with the consequence that it had become as sinful to still follow the commandments of the law as it was previously obligatory to act in accordance with them. This reversal, which was also enacted by the Nizârîs under imâm Hasan ‘*alâ dhikrihi*’-*l-salâm*, started with Sabbatai’s “strange actions,” which included causing ten Israelites to eat “fat of the kidney” in 1658, an act which is strictly prohibited by the Torah, and punishable by “excision” (getting cut off from among one’s people); reciting the following benediction over the ritually forbidden fat: “Blessed are Thou, O Lord, who permittest that which is forbidden”; and abolishing the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz in 1665. It progressed to the abrogation of the Lurianic devotions “which had now become not only obsolete but almost positively sinful;”⁶ and culminated in the conversion of the “radical” Sabbatians to Islam or Christianity. The Sabbatians’ response to the surpassing disaster revealed that the majority of the official rabbinical authorities, customarily considered the elite, belonged to the common people, those not sensitive to the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster. I include among the common people those rabbis who excommunicated or banned Sabbatai Zevi solely for abrogating the law; I do not include among them those rabbis who excommunicated Zevi or endorsed his excommunication not for transgressing the Law and the prohibitions of the Torah, but because he proclaimed himself the Messiah. Nizârîs and Qarmatîs are Moslems, and the Sabbatians are Jews, also because their abrogations fundamentally affected respectively Moslem and Jewish religions. The reinstatement of the Sharî’a in 1210 by the grandson of Hasan ‘*alâ dhikrihi*’-*l-salâm* can be viewed as a diplomatic move to ward off the intensifying threat to his initiates from

⁶. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, trans. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 278.

a Sunnism again on the ascendancy, the Nizârîs again resorting to *taqiyya* while maintaining their esoteric beliefs; or as due to a new period of *satr* (occultation); or as a realization that enlightenment and salvation can only be achieved by individuals⁷—in which case the subsequent amalgamation of Isma‘îlî Shi‘ism and Sufism would not be solely a result of the Mongols’ destruction of the Nizârî strongholds and their persecution of the surviving Nizârîs in the Sunni empire they established. But it is also possible that the abrogation of the law—a response to the latter’s withdrawal—contributed toward its resurrection, and therefore toward its reinstatement forty-six years later. Those Qarmatîs who returned to the fold of Islam after the debacle of the episode of the false messiah Zakariyya al-Isfahânî with its abrogation of the Mohammedan revelation could validly do that because the preceding Qarmatî reaction contributed to resurrecting that religion and its sacred books and places. Those who returned to the fold after the devastating apostasy of Sabbatai did so possibly successfully because of the redeeming measures the Sabbatians took in gauging the measure of the disaster. The rabbinical authorities and the ‘ulamâ’ had the last word because what the Sabbatians, Nizârîs and Qarmatîs did probably resurrected what was withdrawn.

The withdrawal of the holiness of Palestine past a surpassing disaster affecting Jews is clear in the Sabbatian outlook, where for the majority of the adherents, including Nathan of Gaza, there was an opposition to the notion of immigration to the Holy Land, which opposition became even more intense in the aftermath of Sabbatai’s apostasy, turning toward the middle of the eighteenth century into a distinct anti-Palestinian bias especially among the Frankist wing.⁸ Indeed, one of the theses the Frankists submitted in their disputation with the rabbis in Kamenets-Podolsk from June 20 to 28, 1757, was: “We do not believe that Jerusalem will ever be rebuilt.” One still finds lapses in the vigilant sensibility to the surpassing disaster even among the Sabbatians: the notion advanced by some of them that one should immigrate to the Holy Land because breaking the law in Jerusalem is a more effective transgression is still a (negative) stress on, and thus continuing election of, the traditional specialness of the land of Palestine. Similarly, an objection to immigrating to Palestine in terms of eschewing a *forcing of the* [messianic] *end* through the ingathering of the exiles—one of the preconditions for, or changes of the messianic era—implies a continuing election of the traditional specialness of the land of Palestine—unless the advanced reason be merely a pretext not to go to a land one senses no longer to be the Holy Land. It is from the standpoint of the withdrawal of the holiness of Mecca that one is to interpret and evaluate the symbolic setting of the pulpit to face west on the day when the Great Resurrection was proclaimed in Alamût, a direction opposite to the one toward which all Moslems have to turn during their prayer; and in an even more valid manner (since the Nizârîs’ placement of the pulpit precisely in the opposite direction to the Ka‘ba in Mecca can still be construed to give a negative emphasis to the latter, at least to still refer to it), the sacking and desecration of the Ka‘ba by the Qarmatîs, and their transfer of the Black Stone to their capital, al-Ahsâ’, Bahrain. Can

⁷. Is enlightenment communal as in messianism (the Nizârî communities during the Great Resurrection, etc.), or individual as in Sufism? I feel it is neither, but universal, affecting not only all humans but all sentient beings, as in Mahâyâna [Great Vehicle] Buddhism.

⁸. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), pp. 121-123.

one easily displace the *axis mundi*, which is the closet spot to Heaven on earth, and which cannot be truly viewed outside its complements in the Imaginal World (*'alam al-mithâl*), circumambulated not by humans but by angels?⁹ I think that the Qarmatîs' action was not to consecrate a new *axis mundi*, but to indicate the withdrawal of the traditional one as a consequence of the surpassing disaster.¹⁰ If the Nazi Final Solution to the "Jewish question" is a surpassing disaster, a withdrawal of the holiness or special traditional significance of a certain land have ensued. Therefore the question that intrigues me is not the hypocritically naive one: "How did victims of a racist state (Nazi Germany) become racist oppressors¹¹?"; but rather: How is it that the surpassing disaster of the Shoah has not produced a widespread attitude among Jewish artists, writers, and thinkers revealing the withdrawal of the traditional holiness or specialness of a particular land? While a good number of Jewish writers and thinkers have written about the death of God in Auschwitz, rare are those who have written or talked about the demise of the holiness of the land (it seems it is more difficult to relinquish belief in and cathexis of the holiness of a certain land [and in the messiah] than in God!). Notwithstanding the sanctimonious discourse of those Jews who while underscoring the Shoah encourage or at least condone the renaming of occupied Palestinian cities, towns, and villages with Biblical names, and decry the remissness in accomplishing the ingathering of the exiles through the *aliya*, the ascent to the holy land, it is to the Jews' honor that the Diaspora has continued despite the establishment of the state of Israel. I believe that many Jews have not gone to Israel owing to an intuition of this withdrawal rather than because they had become assimilated in the host countries, or because of the dangerous and harsh conditions in the early years of the establishment of the state of Israel, or because of ethical and political qualms concerning the colonial origin of that state, as well as its continuing imperial and racist policies toward its neighboring countries and its brutal illegal occupation of Palestinian land.¹² The

⁹. See "The Configuration of the Temple of the Ka'bah as the Secret of the Spiritual Life," in Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. Philip Sherrard, with the assistance of Liadain Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986).

¹⁰. Contemporaneous with this sacking that is to be understood within the context of the withdrawal, there is the rhetoric of Sufi interiorization in Hallâj's insistence that the Ka'ba is in the heart of the believer. Hallâj was accused of being a Qarmatî, or at least of having Qarmatî affinities; if such an accusation was legitimate, then his view that to perform the pilgrimage incumbent upon Moslems one did not have to actually travel to Mecca in West Arabia, but could do it in the locale in which one happened to be, would not be a consequence of an interiorization and spiritualization of the exoteric pilgrimage, but a response to the withdrawal of the holiness of a certain spot, until then the *axis mundi*.

¹¹. On racism in Israel see Arie Dayan, "The Debate Over Zionism and Racism: An Israeli View", *Journal of Palestine Studies* XXII, no. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 96-105 (Dayan's article first appeared in the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, 27 December 1991); Oren Yiftachel, "Democracy or Ethnocracy: Territory and Settler Politics in Israel/Palestine" at <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer207/yift.htm>; Orit Shohat, "Only Jews Need Apply," *Ha'aretz*, March 27, 1998 (<http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/scripts/article.asp?id=16143&wordd=orit+shohat&mador=4&se=true&datee=3/24/99>), and "A Lesson in Citizenship," *Ha'aretz*, November 6, 1998; United Nations press release HR/ESC/98, 4 December 1998

(<http://www.unhchr.ch/Hurricane/Hurricane.nsf/0e3eb737630f44ea80256601005b87be/63a920aa28ec3b02802566d300364295?OpenDocument>); United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 (see [gopher://israel-info.gov.il:70/00/un/unhist/3379.unh](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/doc/3379.unh)): "the [United Nations] General Assembly... determines that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination"—Unfortunately, this resolution was revoked on 16 December 1991 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/86 (see [gopher://israel-info.gov.il:70/00/un/unhist/46-86.unh](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/doc/46-86.unh)); Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years*, foreword by Gore Vidal (London: Pluto Press, 1994); and Uri Davis, *Israel: An Apartheid State* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

¹². Anyone who has not protested vehemently against the barbaric sanctions imposed on Iraq, the land where three great Semitic civilizations have flourished: the Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Arabic; and who either fails to protest,

continuing Zionist discourse, in its emphasis on tradition and on the ultra-special significance of the land of Palestine; let alone the ultra-orthodox view of Gush Emunim and Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook that the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine is a religious messianic event, are thus an obliviousness to the “Final Solution” as a surpassing disaster, through its treatment as a vast, extreme catastrophe with localized effects. The ambivalence that many of the Zionists in Palestine betrayed toward the survivors of the Shoah,¹³ especially during the early years following the second world war and the establishment of the state of Israel, is to be ascribed not only to a wish to forget the figure of the Jew as a passive victim; but also possibly to an intuition that the more the Shoah is underscored and pondered, the more it would reinforce the feeling of the withdrawal of the holiness or simply traditional ultra-special significance of the land of Palestine. Thus while it is fitting that there are memorials to the Shoah at Treblinka, Auschwitz, and in the United States, home to around a third of contemporary Jewry, it is unsettling and dismaying to encounter such memorials in Israel, the *Jewish State* (Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem, Nathan Rapoport’s *Scroll of Fire* [1971], the Day of Holocaust and Heroism [*Yom Hashoah Vehagvurah*], etc.): only if, consequent of the surpassing disaster of the Shoah, Israel is no longer viewed as the holy land, would the presence of memorials to the Shoah there be valid. One can easily argue that unlike the Qarmatīs who were in the tenth century a formidable military power, the Jews, up to the recent establishment of the state of Israel, were in no position to desecrate Jerusalem to reveal the withdrawal of its holiness, for instance by possibly further damaging the remains of the Wailing Wall. But they are in a position to do that now. Yet I do not see any response on their part that comes close to what the Qarmatīs did (certainly some of the ultra-orthodox view the secular situation in Jerusalem as already a sort of desecration—but they condemn such a condition).

When it comes to surpassing disasters, the damage is never only the material one, but, especially in past eras, the withdrawal of spiritual guides and allies, and of divinities. Reportedly, shortly before his death, the last deputy of the twelfth imām, Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Samarrī (d. 329 A.H./940-41), received a note from the imām saying: “In the name of God. O ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Samarrī... do not appoint anyone in your place, since the complete occultation has taken place.” When Shi‘ites came and asked him about his successor, he said: “The matter is in the hands of God, and He will bring it to accomplishment.” The Greater Occultation of the twelfth imām was thus ushered.¹⁴ It is crucial in relation

condons or even encourages the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians, who are Arabs, and therefore Semitic, brandishing the accusation of anti-Semitism only when Jews are being unjustly attacked, is a hypocrite. If one does not protest the former acts of injustice as anti-Semitic but only the latter, one should by now, half a century after the Shoah, use the term *anti-Jewish*. The Anti-Defamation League, the self-proclaimed “world’s leading organization fighting anti-Semitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry,” is actually one of its loci since it never considers that there is an anti-Semitic attack when Arabs are slandered and discriminated against in the US, France, or Israel. Indeed since one of the main loci of anti-Arab bigotry is Israel, the latter is one of the major anti-Semitic countries.

¹³. See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

¹⁴. The Greater Occultation cannot be validly explained just by the sociological, historical, political, and economic conditions that were prevalent then and that made the continuation of the Lesser Occultation quite problematic: conflicts were beginning to arise among the various claimants to the deputyship, partly over disposing of the fifth of the Shi‘ite’s earnings due to the imām; the expiration of the optimal human life-span of seventy-five years since the purported birth date of the imām...

to a certain Shi'ite and Jewish rhetoric of powerlessness and victimization that not only continues unabated even during periods when these communities have achieved political ascendancy, but sometimes intensifies despite that ascendancy, that one take into account that the patterns of response the chronic persecution of these two communities must have inculcated in them cannot wither away in a short period. In turn, it is critical that one unmask the hypocritical abuses to which such a rhetoric can lead. In turn, it is vital that one not become oblivious of the withdrawal past a surpassing disaster, which is the reason that would validate the continuation of such a rhetoric. Could the mighty empire and great civilization of the Safavids have genuinely and legitimately, rather than hypocritically, experienced itself as an empire and civilization of disaster? Yes, it could have. Did it experience itself in that manner? Yes, it partly did, since for many Duodeciman Shi'ites in the great Shi'ite state that was Safavid Iran, the determinant circumstance continued to be the withdrawal of the imâm. Once the Greater Occultation began, either it is persisting, in which case the notion, position and function of the *Nâ'ib al-'âmm* (the general representative of the Hidden Imâm) assumed by the 'ulamâ' (who argued that what has been canceled by the twelfth imâm is not the function of representative as such, but that of an individual representative, of the *Nâ'ib al-khâss*) is a travesty; or else there is a *Nâ'ib al-'âmm* and thenceforth the assumption of a continuing Greater Occultation should be replaced by that of the resumption of the Lesser Occultation. Who among the ayatollahs and 'ulamâ' has the audacity to clearly instigate this move, which entails an imminent parousia? At one level, there is a manifest and crucial difference between on the one hand Duodeciman Shi'ite Safavid Iran, and on the other hand the Nizârî state during the Great Resurrection (1164-1210), the Qarmatî state during the Zakariyya al-Isfahâni episode in Ahsâ', and the Fâtimî state. In the former, past the initial period of the extremist (*ghuluww*) view of the Shah as the imâm himself, especially among his Turkmen followers, the Qizilbash, and prior to the time when the notion and function of the *Nâ'ib al-'âmm* was introduced—a move alleviating the occultation of the imâm—the sensibility to the withdrawal, in the guise of the imâm's occultation, continued despite Shi'ite rule; in the latter three, the imâm was present in the world in the form of their leader. And yet even in the Nizârî 'Alamût of the proclamation of the Great Resurrection, an intimation of withdrawal was maintained, however transiently, amidst the manifestation of the esoteric sense: in his *Khutba* on the 17th of Ramadân, during which he proclaimed the Great Resurrection abrogating the Mohammedan religious legislation, Hasan II placed himself as the imâm's *khalifa* (deputy). It is only later that his son and successor, Nûr al-Dîn Muhammad II, explicitly claimed the imâmte for his father and for himself. The process by which the Great Resurrection was proclaimed may be considered sloppy from the strict perspective of the messianic advent as a supernatural event. Hasan II's speaking in the name of another could then be fully ascribed to his having been successfully pressured during the reign of his predecessor and ostensible father, Muhammad b. Buzurg-Ummîd, to publicly divest himself both from the claim that he was the imâm and from those of his followers who were making such a claim on his behalf; and/or to a reluctance on his part to assume such a momentous role (the Face of God on earth). But from the perspective of the conflation of a withdrawal past a surpassing disaster with a messianic manifestation, that Hasan '*alâ dhikrihi'l-salâm*'s announcement of the manifestation of the

esoteric sense and the abrogation of the exoteric law is done in the name of another, the still hidden imâm, is not sloppy, but rigorous and precise, since it allows, at least until he himself is clearly declared the imâm, the maintenance of the tonality of withdrawal even amidst the messianic epiphany. The surpassing disaster produces a withdrawal of tradition, which the one proclaimed Messiah “merely” enunciates.¹⁵ In which case, if there is an ominous imprecision to be resisted, it is the danger of mistaking the proclamation of the abrogation to be a performative rather than a description of what has already taken place owing to a surpassing disaster: the Messiah does not annul the Law but manifests a condition that has already occurred, namely that the law has withdrawn. The *Khutba* of Hasan ‘*alâ dhikrihi*’-*l-salâm*, in ‘*Alamût*, with its two-step revelation, minimizes this danger.

According to a Talmudic saying, the son of David would appear only in a generation that was “either wholly sinful or wholly righteous”;¹⁶ and in Islamic tradition, the Mahdî is going to fill with justice an earth filled with oppression. If the messiah appears in a generation that is wholly righteous, the manifestation of the esoteric, barred under the law of the cycle of occultation, ushers the messianic era proper, the cycle of epiphany. The abortive manifestation of the esoteric in a generation that is not wholly righteous can function as an occult sign that the parousia is near, since it indicates that the world has been totally given over to impiety: the highest, secret name of God has so much withdrawn that even its manifestation won’t reveal it. *Taqiyya* (dissimulation) and the discipline of the arcane in general is no longer mandatory in the aftermath of the surpassing disaster, since it is already implemented by the consequent withdrawal. As long as *taqiyya* is still obligatory, the withdrawal has not become maximal and the time of the messianic revelation has not yet come. It is the circumstance that the first manifestation did not reveal anything that announces the necessity of the messianic ushering of the cycle of epiphany. In such a situation, the messianic manifestation has to be done twice: once, abortive, to intimate the time of total occultation; another, auspicious, the messiah having received, in complement to the holy *nefesh, ruah*, and *neshamah* which he already has, the highest soul-light called *yehifah*,¹⁷ thus becoming capable of inaugurating the period of redemption.

The surpassing disaster does not, and perhaps cannot, remain an external circumstance: for the Shi‘ites, the slaughter of Husayn, ‘Alî’s son and the grandson of the prophet, with most of the prophet’s family and many of his companions, etc.; for the Jews, the destruction of the Temple, the *galut* (exile), the expulsion from Spain, etc. It sooner or later becomes internal: the surpassing disaster for the Isma‘îlîs is the delay in the answer of the Second Emanation in a Gnostic drama in Heaven, which delay produces its retardation to the 10th rank and its subsequent attempt to catch up and ascend again to the third rank;¹⁸ the

¹⁵ Nietzsche: “*This, too, is worthy of a hero.*—Here is a hero who has done nothing but shake the tree as soon as the fruit was ripe. Do you think this too little? Then take a look at the tree he shook.”

¹⁶ Regarding the appearance of a messianic figure in a generation from which all evil has been abolished, see the section “*You Said ‘Stay,’ So I Stayed*” in this book [*Forthcoming*].

¹⁷ See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 41 and 53.

¹⁸ See “*Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism*,” in Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983).

surpassing disaster for the Lurianic cabalists is the *breaking of the vessels* that were supposed to contain the supernal light, this leading to the dispersal of sparks of that light in the *qelippah*, the demonic realm.

Have the desertion of West Beirut by the Arabs and the rest of the world during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the continuing sanctions against Iraq, now in their sixth year, divested these two communities from the rest of the Arab world, undoing any notion of an Arab community? If so, is it accurate on my part to have written in *Over-Sensitivity* that the conjunction of catastrophes affecting the Arab world in Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon, and earlier Palestine added up to a surpassing disaster? Is the tradition for such communities no longer the one that used to be theirs, but the other communities of the surpassing disaster: Gnostics, Nizârîs, Qarmatîs, Sabbatians? Unfortunately, these communities, which have tried to deal with the withdrawal consequent of a surpassing disaster, have been subjected to another kind of withdrawal, a material one enforced by their orthodox enemies: most of the works of the Nizârîs, Qarmatîs, and of the Sabbatians have been burned or destroyed (the Mongols' destruction of the library of 'Alamût, etc.).

In his *Heidegger and the "jews"*, setting it against the activism of the resistance fighter Robert Antelme, Lyotard appreciates the attitude of the Jews of Sighet, Romania, on the eve of their deportation to the concentration camps, as described by Elie Wiesel in his book *Night*: obliviousness to the imminent catastrophe—an attitude widespread among Jews then. Unfortunately, the dichotomy Lyotard sets is not only between the Jewish community of Sighet and that of Jewish resistance fighters, but also between Wiesel and Antelme. To set the latter dichotomy, one has to be blind—and in case one is as attuned to timbre as Lyotard is, one has to blind oneself—to Wiesel's critical tone in *Night* with regards to his community's attitude. The discernment of such a tone—an easy enough task for the impartial—would spare one, particularly in a book addressing the shock induced by the depth of Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis, from being taken aback by Wiesel's subsequent lauding of the activism shown by the Israelis, and his total embrace of the actions of the Israeli army in a series of flagrantly prejudiced articles.¹⁹ When the

¹⁹. See *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel*, selected and edited by Irving Abrahamson (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985), vol. II, pp. 171-218, and vol. III, pp. 139-143; Elie Wiesel, *A Jew Today*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 33-39 and pp. 101-113; Elie Wiesel and Philippe-Michael de Saint-Cheron, *Evil and Exile*, trans. Jon Rothschild (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 137-150. My genuine apology to the reader for exposing him or her to such poisonous material, and my apology to my book for dirtying it with such references. Does anyone who has even the barest clue as to what a brutal, unjust phenomenon any war quickly becomes have to get acquainted with the disclosures about massacres perpetrated by Israeli soldiers on Egyptian and Syrian war prisoners (See Ronal Fisher, "Mass Murder in the 1956 Sinai War," *Ma'ariv*, 8 August 1995; and Gabby Bron, "Egyptian POWs Ordered to Dig Graves, Then Shot by Israeli Army," *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 17 August 1995. Both pieces were translated in the October 1995 edition of Israel Shahak's *From the Hebrew Press* and reprinted in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 99, Spring 1996, pp. 148-155) to feel incredible revulsion at lines such as: "During the Six-Day War the Jewish fighters did not become cruel [how does Wiesel, who moreover was living then in the USA, know that? But one should not be surprised by such a statement from someone who assumes the role of 'the emissary of the dead,' talking in their name]. They became sad... And if I feel something towards them, the child-soldier in Israel, it is profound respect." (*Against Silence*, p. 195)? I hold the one who said "Do you think that there is a single Israeli soldier who enjoys what he's doing? I am ready to swear on the Torah that not a single soldier is acting with joy or pleasure. But that is forgotten." (quoted on page 145 of *Evil and Exile* from an address by Wiesel to the Rashi Center, Paris), a Nobel Peace Laureate, to be ethically an accomplice to every torture perpetrated by any single Israeli soldier on the thousands of Palestinians held without due process often for years in Israeli prisons, as well as on the thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese who were held in the Ansar prison camp in Israeli-occupied South Lebanon (See Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians* [Boston, MA: South End

obliviousness to the surpassing disaster continues past it, is it permissible to wax appreciative about such obliviousness? Wiesel's failure to feel the Shoah as a surpassing disaster is shown not only in his extremely negative attitude to the Sabbatians, but also in his very positive attitude to the Zionist enterprise and his unquestioning adherence to the state of Israel. "But Jalal, How can you write about an obliviousness on his part? Are you forgetting Wiesel's express 'This is why I write certain things rather than others: to remain faithful.'²⁰" Is it simple to remain faithful to the dead, who, undergoing *every name in history is I*, thought-insertion and doubling, are betraying themselves, betrayed by themselves (Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*)? Wiesel: "I owe the dead my memory. I am duty-bound to serve as their emissary... Not to do so would be to betray them."²¹ To think and write about the dead as they were when still alive is already a forgetfulness of them—as undead. Wiesel: a bigoted, hypocritical sort of Horatio. How much filtering out and repression of the dead is going on in Wiesel's books for him to think that the dead need an emissary, and to pompously feel the duty to be that emissary. Were Wiesel to harken more, he would discover that while playing his role of the emissary of the dead, they are already interfering with his discourse on them as they were when they still lived. One has to have died before dying to encounter modalities of the dead-undead, those who do not know and are alien to the laws of the living, the sort of entities Judge Schreber encountered. Were the author of *Twilight*—a novel purportedly revolving around the mad and madness and largely set in an asylum, but that at no point induces in the reader any feeling of anxiety, of the uncanny—to encounter the insertion of ostensibly alien thoughts in his head, and to hear unsolicited voices at inopportune moments that speak in the name of people who died in the camps but sometimes exchange obscene remarks in lascivious, demonic tones (the dead are in one of their modalities obscene, as obscene as the Nazi guards), would he listen to them? Would he not so much welcome them—who can welcome the uncanny?—as try not to repress their talk as quickly as possible? Were Antonin Artaud, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski, Judge Schreber, the Jean Genet of *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, or the author of *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* to have proclaimed themselves emissaries of the dead, this would be barely bearable; but that Elie Wiesel should do that is the epitome of the derisory. But precisely none of these authors would claim to be the emissary of the dead; they are aware of how indecent it is to talk for the dead. Even such a revengeful spirit as Hamlet's dead father has the decency of not doing so: "But that I am forbid / To tell the secrets of my prison-house [including of "myself" as dead], / I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / (...) But this eternal blazon must not be / To ears of flesh and blood." Even the dead (as revenant) does not speak in the name of

Press, 1983], pp. 221, 390-391; "Torture sous contrôle médical en Israël," *Le Monde diplomatique*, Janvier 1997, p. 8 [<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1997/01/A/7536.html>]; Amnesty International at <http://www.amnesty.org>, and do a search for *Israel*; B'Tselem at <http://www.btselem.org/>, and specifically <http://www.btselem.org/Subjects/Torture/Torture.htm>; Human Rights Watch at <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/search.html>, and enter *Israel*; and LAW at <http://www.lawsociety.org>). Had such a line come from a decent Frankist or Donmeh adherent, people who have sensed and acknowledged the withdrawal of the Torah (of *beriah*), I would appreciate its irony. In any case, I infinitely prefer the attitude of detachment of the Samurais and of the sword masters of Japan, and the karma-yoga, the yoga of action, that lord Krishna teaches his disciple Arjuna (*Bhagavad-Gita*), to sadness.

²⁰. Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), p. 16.

²¹. *Ibid.*

the dead (as undead); even the ghost, ostensibly a revenant, is not allowed to speak about himself or herself as dead, to fully be his or her own emissary. But then the revengefulness of the ghost of Hamlet's father is as nothing compared to that of Wiesel. Can one blame Wiesel for that revengefulness? No; but neither does one have the right to accept gullibly what he proffers and confer on him the Nobel Peace Prize. The vengefulness of the living is somewhat determined, and limited; even when seemingly totally indiscriminate, it usually spares someone: one's child, mother, or the stranger. That the vengefulness of the revenant is motivated, a demand for a specific retribution, would thus indicate that the ghost still belongs, however tenuously, to life, that he is not fully a creature of the undead realm. And when we encounter such sort of restricted vengefulness in the writings of someone, we can be sure that he or she does not speak in the name of the dead (in the undeath realm), for the revengefulness of the latter is not circumscribed. The latter vengefulness is of no use to the revengeful living human, all-too human Wiesel. What is also of no use to Wiesel with regards to mortality is that "everything mortal expresses defenselessness. It is just as clearly inscribed above the head of a young bird as above the skull of a human petrified by evil and stupidity. But it requires great spiritual strength to see the likeness and the correlation in it" (Vilhelm Ekelund). Even the Nazi concentration camp guards, even the torturers in Israeli, Bosnian Serb, and Iraqi prisons are mortal and therefore infinitely defenseless, that is both utterly exposed and—notwithstanding the vile justification the Nobel Peace laureate and journalist Wiesel gives through one of his characters in his book *The Fifth Son* for the torture of Palestinians by the Israeli army: "Now Ilan is convinced: the thought, the prospect of not suffering worries the terrorist. Yet he does not appear stupid. Ilan doesn't understand, but he hides his irritation. Then, he sees a shudder quick as lightning go through the prisoner. It lasts only a fraction of a second but Ilan notices. What is he so afraid of if it is not suffering? And suddenly, the answer is obvious: he wants to suffer. He has prepared himself for suffering, for torture, probably for death. The reason? Perhaps to set an example. To lengthen the list of Palestinian martyrs. To feed anti-Israeli propaganda. And also to force the Jewish adversary to practice torture, therefore to betray himself, therefore, to choose inhumanity"²²—unjustifiable.

In collaboration with students, Jochen Gerz collected extensive data on the Jewish cemeteries that were in use up to the National Socialist dictatorship. Between April 1990 and May 1993, during the night and with no authorization, the students removed cobblestones from the pathway to the entrance of the Saarbrücken castle, temporarily replacing each with a substitute. After incising on the underside of each removed stone the name of one of the cemeteries, they secretly placed it back in the path, the name facing down. The result was *2146 stones—Monument Against Racism, Saarbrücken*. One can discern in this monument and memorial both withdrawal: the most complete list of Jewish cemeteries in pre-Nazi Germany is provided in an unavailable form;²³ and, through the undetected temporary substitution of the

²². Elie Wiesel, *The Fifth Son*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Summit Books, 1985), p. 142.

²³. Unless this monument acknowledging and presenting the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster has resurrected and made available again such information, it was a mistake on the part of Gerz to have accepted the publication of a book that makes available the names chiseled on the underside of the stones: *2146 Steine Mahmal Gegen Rassismus Saarbrücken* (Verlag Gerd Hatje).

stones, the counterfeit associated with resurrection. Past a surpassing disaster, the memorial and memory have to pass through the ordeal of the impression of counterfeit since the events and knowledge they are accessing are being resurrected. Rather than taking away from this act of reminiscing, the withdrawal and the impression of counterfeit signal that it is legitimate. What would have proven that Jesus is Christ, the son of God is not simply his bringing Lazarus back from the dead, but also that following the latter's resurrection, not once did any of those who encountered Lazarus feel, whether fleetingly or for an extended period, that he is not really Lazarus, but a double, a counterfeit. If there was a miracle, it would have resided less in bringing back Lazarus from the dead, than in the absence of the impression of dealing with a double that accompanies resurrection.²⁴ For the early Christians, the surpassing disaster could already have started with Jesus Christ's abandonment on the cross as well with the absence of the series of catastrophes that he had prophesied to end the world within a generation and usher the Day of Judgment. This (son of) God who in the New Testament presumably brought back from the dead a man without any impression of counterfeit, of the surreptitious replacement by the double ever haunting the latter, was in all probability himself affected with a withdrawal and a sense of counterfeit in some Christian sects, especially of the Gnostic strain.

In countries such as Bosnia, Lebanon, or Rwanda, that have suffered a brutal "civil"-war, one encounters myriad cases of traumatized survivors. Many of these survivors seek psychiatric treatment to regain a cathexis of the world, including of tradition and culture in general. But that subjective working through cannot on its own succeed in remedying the withdrawal of tradition, for that withdrawal is not a subjective symptom, whether individual or collective, and therefore cannot be fully addressed by psychiatrists or psychoanalysts, but demands the resurrecting efforts of writers, artists, and thinkers. Without the latter's contribution, either the psychiatric treatment fails, or else though the patient may leave ostensibly healthy, he or she soon discovers that tradition and art are still withdrawn.

With regard to the surpassing disaster, art acts like the mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there. "You have seen nothing in Hiroshima."²⁵ Does this entail that one should not record? No. One should record this "nothing," which only after the resurrection can be available. We have to take photographs even though because of their referents' withdrawal, and until their referents are resurrected, they are not going to be available as referential, documentary pieces—with the concomitant risk that facets relating to the subject matter might be mistaken for purely formal ones. A vicious circle: what has to be recorded has been withdrawn, so that, unless it is resurrected, it is going to be

²⁴. In the New Testament, what indicates that the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) was not meant as a proof of the status of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and consequently that viewing Jesus as the Messiah still required faith, is that Lazarus is mentioned subsequently only once and that in passing (John 12:1-11), so that we do not have the occasion to ascertain whether he was at any future point considered to be an impostor. If Dreyer's *Ordet* is about faith, it is that it does not cover the years following the resurrection of Inger (this continuation into the old age of the protagonist across an extra-diegetic ellipsis is something Dreyer does in his next film, *Gertrud*) to show whether she remained basically the same, did not at any point give others the impression she is an impostor.

²⁵. I have the feeling that although in all likelihood they despised horror films, Duras as well as the Tarkovsky of *The Sacrifice* would have nonetheless been impressed by the mirror device in vampire films, the undead not reflected in the mirror.

overlooked; but in order to accomplish that prerequisite work of resurrection to avert its overlooking, one has initially to have, however minimally, perceived it, that is countered its withdrawal, i.e. resurrected it. But how can one speak of a withdrawal of “civil”-war Beirut buildings when refugees still noticed and lived in them? Yet aren’t these refugees, who are marginalized because of their lack of political power and their economic destitution, affected with an additional overlooking through their association with these withdrawn buildings? The Lebanese’s overall obliviousness and indifference to documenting the carnage through photographs, films, and videos cannot be fully explained by the circumstance that toward the end of the “civil”-war they must have grown habituated to the destruction around them, as well as by the fact that many of these ruined areas were declared military zones, off-limits to cameras. Can photographs of these withdrawn buildings become available without resurrecting their withdrawn referents? It seems such photographs become themselves withdrawn. There is going then to be “a time of development” of the chemically developed photographs taken during the latter stages of the war. The documentation is for the future not only in the sense that it preserves the present referent for future generations; but also in that it can function as a preservation of the referent only in the future, only when the work of resurrection has countered the withdrawal. He thought that until such photographs become available, one of the appropriate sites for their exposition is the Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, next to the spaces left blank following the 18 March 1990 theft of several famous paintings from the museum, this confronting the viewer with two different kinds of unavailability, a material and an immaterial one. While in the West there has been a proliferation of new museums (Mario Botta’s San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain; Steven Holl’s Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland; Steven Holl’s Knut Hamsun Museum, Prestied, Norway; Hans Hollein’s Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art; Daniel Libeskind’s Felix Nussbaum Museum, Osnabruck, Germany; Richard Meier’s Getty Center, Los Angeles...); extensions to existing museums (Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum, an extension of the Berlin Museum; the Grand Louvre Project (1981-1999), which involved the doubling in size, to 60,000 m², of the exhibition areas of the museum...); new libraries (Sandy Wilson’s British Library, St Pancras, London;²⁶ Dominique Perrault’s Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Mete Arat, Hans-Dieter and Gisela Kaiser’s German National Library, Frankfurt am Main...); of cataloguing and inventorying, as exemplified by Macmillan’s *The Dictionary of Art*, 1996, with its 34 volumes, 41,000 articles, 6,802 contributing scholars, and 15,000 black and white illustrations, Afghans, Bosnians, Iraqis, etc., have been divested of much of their artistic tradition, not only through material destruction, but also through immaterial withdrawal. Even were substantial parts of the contents of both the National and University Library and the Library of the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, and of the National Library in Mostar to be recovered, this would not be enough to make them once more fully available. Increasingly in the West, absence is affected with a modality of presence through telepresence and telesensing; increasingly in the “Developing” countries, presence is affected with an absence through the (negative) matting due to the withdrawal of tradition past surpassing disasters.

²⁶. The library’s design dates from 1975.

After the surpassing disaster, while the documentation of the referent is for the future, the presentation of the withdrawal is an urgent task for the present. If he tried to document specifically the *Aswâq* area, it is not that it particularly was withdrawn since physically turned into ruins, but because it was in imminent danger of being erased without true deliberation, to provide space for the construction of a new city center. He had to explicitly show that these ruined areas have been withdrawn, as a preventive measure against others, although ostensibly perceiving them, unconsciously acting as if they weren't there. To allow the discussion about the fate of these ruined areas not to be a foregone oversight, it was crucial not only to criticize the financial interests at stake, and the subjective wish to forget whatever had strong associations with so many individual and collective traumas; but also to either resurrect these buildings or make manifest their withdrawal through art and architectural works, so that they would still be available for the argument against their demolition. What contributed to the failure to save these ruined or deserted buildings in the *Aswâq* area was that artists and filmmakers neither managed to resurrect them nor to manifest their withdrawal, so that the withdrawal not having become explicit, hence not having become a factor that one could consciously and intentionally try to counter when thinking and planning the future of the city, these withdrawn buildings could so easily be overlooked, and thus could so readily be demolished so that an all-new commercial center could replace them. Did they erase the ruins to forget, or was it rather that they were able to erase them so easily because these ruined buildings were withdrawn by the surpassing disaster and therefore somewhat already quasi forgotten, so that the erasure largely implemented the forgetfulness embodied in these ruined buildings? Not being part of the community that suffered the surpassing disaster that ravaged Sarajevo, the American architect Lebbeus Woods can notice the ruins and recommend in a book their integration into the future reconstructed city. But, as a consequence of the withdrawal, those belonging to that community are likely to treat that book with obliviousness, overlooking it and its recommendations. After the surpassing disaster, the duty of an artist is either to resurrect what has been withdrawn (Godard's *King Lear*), or to disclose the withdrawal (Duras' *Hiroshima mon Amour*, 1961; Boltanski's *Monument: La Fête de Pourim*, 1988).

Jocelyne Sa'ab's *Once Upon a Time: Beirut (Kân ya mâ kân Bayrût)*, 1994, is a film about forgetting, unfortunately mainly in the sense that it is an unmindful film: it is grotesque how quickly it forgets even the memorable Duras epigraph with which it starts. Memory is not to be limited, as in Sa'ab's film, to human recollection and archival images. The loss of memory in *Hiroshima mon amour* is implied not only in the French woman's melancholia as to the ineluctability of forgetting her German lover and the devastation of Hiroshima; but also in the Japanese man's repeated "You have seen nothing in Hiroshima." Forgetfulness is not always the result of subjective factors, but is sometimes an effect of an objective withdrawal of beings due to a surpassing disaster. Memory of what has thus been withdrawn is a betrayal of it, a false memory. To take the measure of Duras' opening words regarding the desperate attempt to remember set against the ineluctability of forgetfulness would have entailed showing that the archival documentary footage Sa'ab presents, for example the images of Lebanon in the 1920s, is withdrawn. Is there a more effective way to hide that the images are inaccessible than to have the characters enter in them? But

past a surpassing disaster, one's appearance in images of an earlier era rather than implying that they are available, and that they thus provide and instance some form of memory, would in a genuine film, on the contrary, suggest that the country that underwent the ordeal of the disaster was so divested from the others that it turned into a radical closure. The characters are then inside the images because of irruption due to radical closure,²⁷ but the images themselves in which they irrupted are withdrawn. Even the film reel that is forgotten in the taxi cab and presumably lost gets returned to the two young female protagonists and projected: a missed opportunity to subtly imply the withdrawal. Sa'b could still have intimated the withdrawal by designing the insertion of the two present-day female actresses in the archival images in such a way as to put in doubt the authenticity of these images; or else by having the images of the two characters in the film scenes they shot of each other in contemporaneous Beirut present the same impression of artificiality and overlaying as the clearly matted shots earlier. Unfortunately this is not the case in Sa'b's work. It is not fortuitous that Beirut is represented mostly through bad Egyptian movies in a film directed by a journalist, i.e. by someone belonging to a profession that has not provided many examples of sensing the need for resurrection, let alone accomplishing such a task. While with rare exceptions popular culture, which to many is what is most linked to actuality, has not been withdrawn by the series of catastrophes that hit the Arab world and that added up to a surpassing disaster; much of avant-garde writing and art, as well as all genuinely classical art and writing, viewed by many as the part of culture least connected to contemporary events, has been withdrawn by the present surpassing disaster. After a public reading from his book *Over-Sensitivity*, he played back *taqâsîm* on *maqâm nahawand* performed by Riâd al-Sunbatî and on *maqâm kurd* performed by Munîr Bashîr. Soon after the music started, and except for him, the Middle Easterners present there began swaying their heads to the sounds. After the music stopped, he said: "I am trying to resurrect to be able to really hear this music again, accompanying it with the quasi-*dhikr* of a musical high (*Allâh!... Allâh!...*)."²⁷ Judging from their reaction to the surpassing disaster, many presumably elitist artists and writers are much more in touch with actuality than popular culture, even before the present financial prominence of the Gulf states have reduced the latter, especially in Egypt, to utter crassness. Tradition is not merely what materially and ostensibly survived "the test" of time: in normal times a nebulous entity despite the somewhat artificial process of canon-formation, tradition becomes delineated and specified by the surpassing disaster. Tradition is what conjointly materially survived the surpassing disaster, was immaterially withdrawn by it, and had the fortune of being subsequently resurrected by artists, writers, and thinkers. Many works one had thought

²⁷. In *Over-Sensitivity*, I used the term *eruption* to describe the sudden appearance of unworldly entities in radical closures. I now prefer and use the term *irruption* since eruption, if considered not in the sense I wanted, as an indicator of tonality, namely the breaking out of a rash on the world, but as a violent or sudden release of some pressure, could easily be misunderstood in terms of a return of the repressed. While in radical closure artistic and literary works from an earlier era the sudden appearance as such of entities belonging to the referential world had only a modality of irruption, in contemporary such works there is a double modality of irruption and eruption, since in this era where behind the image is not reality/the referent, but another image (Deleuze) or a code (Baudrillard); and where actors are increasingly replaced by digitally-manipulated images of them, even up to having dead actors posthumously play in new films and roles, the worldly that is being repressed, shunned by the postmodern artwork, can then still appear only as a return of the repressed eruption.

part of tradition are revealed by their availability past a surpassing disaster as not really part of tradition; contrariwise many modernist works of art which vehemently attacked “tradition” are, prior to any reluctant gradual canonization, revealed by their withdrawal to be part of that tradition.

There were two fundamental kinds of out-of-focus and/or of sloppy compositions in the photographs, films and videos of the period around the “civil”-war:

— Those from the “civil” war’s period itself were due to one or several of the following factors: the threatening conditions under which the photographer was taking them; the aversion of his or her look on encountering the gutted, decomposing corpses; the proximity of the dead—come to prevent the world’s desertion of those suffering a surpassing disaster from turning into a radical closure—against whose freezing, not as corpses (*rigor mortis* is still a variety of motion) but as creatures of the undeath realm, all motions, including the restless immobility of the living, appear blurry; the entranced states in which the encounter with the dead often occurs.

— Those from the aftermath of the “civil” war were due mainly to the withdrawal of what was being photographed.

Like so many others, he had become used to viewing things at the speed of war. So for a while after the “civil”-war’s end, he did not take any photographs nor shoot any videos, waiting until he learned to look again at a leisurely pace. This period of adjustment lasted a full two years. Yet even after he became used to looking at buildings and experiencing events at the rhythm of peace, the photographs of the ruins in Lebanon taken by this Lebanese photographer, who classically composed those of his photographs shot in other countries, still looked like they were taken by a photographer lacking time to aim since in imminent danger, the compositions haphazard and the focus almost always off. He was asked if he was influenced by such works as Vito Acconci’s *Fall*, 1969: a series of photographs Acconci produced by clicking his hand-held camera as he reached the ground while repeatedly falling forward; or Michael Snow’s *Venetian Blind*, 1970: twenty-four snapshots he took with his eyes closed, each showing a blurred Snow against the accidentally framed background of a section of Venice. He was aware of and attracted by the blurring in Snow’s piece and by the random compositions in Acconci’s photographs. But he could recognize no basic similarity between these works and his current photographs, since the earth and grass in the Acconci photographs, the sections of Venice in *Venetian Blind*, as well as the road, filmed without looking through the viewfinder, in Snow’s *Seated Figures*, are available to Acconci and to Snow. The question revealed a misunderstanding, since in his work the out-of-focus and/or the haphazard framings were not a formal strategy but due to the withdrawal and thus unavailability to vision of the material.

They sent him to shoot a photographic portfolio of the destruction in Bosnia. He returned with thousands of largely blurred and haphazardly framed photographs of intact buildings with no shrapnel, with not even broken glass. He insisted that these photographs should be grouped into an exhibition called *The Savage War*. Some felt offended at what they found to be tasteless humor; others had to admit that they were surprised that so many buildings had survived the carnage unscathed. Many thought that he was facetious or that he was apologetic for the aggressors. Someone remarked critically: “One more example of

a disciple trying to outdo his master: a Baudrillardian photographer implying that not only the Gulf war but also this one did not take place.” He did not care to reply to someone who simplified both his work and that of Baudrillard. Someone unaware that due to the withdrawal something in the referent cannot be localized exactly, whether with regards to framing or focus or both, asked critically whether the blurring and hit-or-miss framings were intentionally created by him to give the sensation they were shot during the war. “No.”

Someone had forgotten a high quality laser reproduction of Boltanski’s *Altar to the Chases High School*, 1988, in the copy of *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (Rizzoli, 1995) that he checked out from a library. Is the blurring in Boltanski’s reproduction of a graduating class photograph he found in a school yearbook an enhancement of the expressivity of the photograph, as curator Lynn Gumpert proposes (“Boltanski transformed them into skeletal vestiges—their eyes reduced to empty black sockets, any hint of a smile metamorphosed into a grimace of death”²⁸)? Does it render for us the loss of individuation to which those depicted would have been subjected in the camps? Is it to give the sensation that those depicted are already fading from memory? Or is it rather to render the stereotypical association of the dead with haze and furtiveness? None of the above. These blurred photographs disclose to us nothing beyond their referent’s withdrawal and possibly their own consequent withdrawal as a result of a surpassing disaster.²⁹ After looking at that Boltanski photograph for a few minutes, he went back to looking at the illustrations and photographs in the book. He could no longer really focus on them. They had become blurred and distant. He felt that it was with eyes adjusted to the blurriness of that Boltanski photograph that he was looking at the Auschwitz prisoner identification photographs included in the book. Is it conceivable that a curator would place a Boltanski piece such as *Reserves: The Purim Holiday*, 1989—based on a photograph of Purim celebration at a Jewish school in France, 1939—in The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.? It is certainly conceivable, since the vast majority of curators would be oblivious of how this would affect all the items there with a blurring. In which case, I would not be surprised were some spectator at the museum’s cinema, to suddenly yell: “Focus!” Who may have such an experience on seeing Boltanski’s blurred photograph? Is it everybody? Not at all, and this despite what Boltanski himself implies in an interview in the journal *Autrement*, 1996. Only those who belong to the community of that surpassing disaster would have such an experience.

The “You have seen nothing in Hiroshima” said by the Japanese man to the visiting French woman could at one level mean: You, a French woman, removed from the direct experience of either the atomic explosion or its radioactive aftereffects should not have the presumption to consider that you have seen anything in Hiroshima. At yet another level, it includes her in the community, since she is experiencing the withdrawal due to the surpassing disaster. If she reacts negatively to the Japanese man’s words, insisting that she has seen certain things, it must be because being an ethical person, she is not sure

²⁸. Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), p. 103.

²⁹. Certainly in the voluminous work of Boltanski, the out-of-focus in some other instances reproduces a stereotyped image of the dead as revenant (some of the photographs of the series *Detective*); in yet other instances, it is simply formal.

she is yet of that community.³⁰ Those Americans who managed to pressure the Smithsonian to an out-and-out scaling back of the exhibit “The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II” it planned to hold in 1995 at the National Air and Space Museum are certainly not ones who “have seen nothing in Hiroshima”; they are merely ones who do not want others to see what they think is perceptible. To very few Westerners would I say: “You have seen nothing in West Beirut” or “You have seen nothing in Iraq.” How little has Herzog, the director of *Lessons of Darkness*, 1991, seen in Iraq and the Kuwaiti theater of operations in the aftermath of the Gulf War! With rare people would one progress from “You have seen little in Iraq”—most frequently because they have scant historical knowledge and no direct experience and depend for their political outlook on the biased mainstream media of the West; to “You have seen nothing in Iraq,” because they now belong to the community of the surpassing disaster and thus are affected with the withdrawal. The first expression is critical and exclusive; the second is inclusive when in relation to communities that underwent a surpassing disaster. I highly respect Duras for having “seen nothing in Hiroshima”; I feel contempt for her for how little she saw in Palestine and in Iraq. I certainly would not have said to the living Duras: “You have seen nothing in Palestine and Iraq. Nothing”!

In the two film series I curated at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, I did not show any works whose main function is to provide a critique or parody of stereotypes of Middle Easterners, let alone works that do not even furnish such a critique but merely the occasion for subsequent verbose discussions full of resentment. Anyone whose “art” merely revolves around how better to express and convey such a critique reveals that he is an academician himself or herself precisely through this obliviousness even at the intuitive level to the connection of stereotypes to the unconscious. Certainly by now any aspiring academician who intends to once more catalogue the litany of stereotypes the majority of Westerners have of Arabs, Iranians, etc., as his or her contribution to one more anthology negotiating something or other around issues of multiculturalism, orientalism, etc.,* has to ask himself or herself how much these stereotypes are linked to the unconscious and its processes—no widespread stereotype is not implicated with the unconscious—and therefore, while arguably effective at the rational, conscious level if not at doing away with these stereotypes then at least at problematizing them, how little effective is the placement of a *no*, a negative sign, a critical attitude before these views whose addresser and addressee is mostly the unconscious, which admits of no negation; indeed how largely counterproductive they are at the level where it really matters with stereotypes, the unconscious level. These critics and academics are playing an important role in the maintenance of these stereotypes at the level of the unconscious; moreover, they are indirectly propagating such stereotypes to sectors previously immune to them, since many people from other cultures and ethnic groups relax their vigilance when dealing with these academics seemingly defending them. I find the encounter with such ostensibly critical academic catalogues of stereotypes of Arabs even more oppressive than the rude transactions with

³⁰. Does the “You have seen nothing in Hiroshima” automatically include the non-Japanese film spectator? No. In principle, most film spectators are not included in such a statement.

*. The author must be referring to the deservedly forgotten plethora of 1990s books, mostly anthologies, with the title “Negotiating —” (some future editor of this book [*Forthcoming*]).

prejudiced airport security officials or embassy employees. All in all, that the representation of Arabs and Iranians in the most simplistic manner (up to denying their existence: the description of Palestine by many of the early Zionists as “a land without people”) can facilitate the Israeli destruction of villages in South Lebanon in the name of a defense against terrorism (even guerrilla operations by the Lebanese against military targets in the part of Lebanon illegally occupied by Israel are termed terrorist!) is no excuse for limiting oneself to critiquing or parodying such widespread misrepresentations. “A woman cannot do much harm to a man. He carries all his tragedy within him. She can bother him, provoke him, she can even kill him—that’s all.”³¹ That is, all is not all.³² To any totalizing “that is all,” we, laconic mortals, have the reaction, and not tautologically: “That’s all.” That which exceeds the all is this difference between *that’s all* and *that’s all*. The margin is the difference between *c’est tout* and *c’est tout*. Every artist, every writer, certainly Shakespeare, knows that we cannot be reduced to creatures who can bleed, laugh, and biologically die. They can make us bleed, laugh, they can treat us like potential terrorists and kill us—that’s all. But is that all they can do? Kill us—in the hundreds of thousands? Unfortunately, they can do worse: produce a surpassing disaster and thus a withdrawal of tradition.

A Kashaya Pomo chief and scholar recently expressly discontinued the transmission of a tribal dance. Something must have indicated to her that the discontinuation of the transmission of the dance would be less detrimental and problematic than its handing it down. Were it the case that their forebears had undergone only a vast catastrophe, the issue for the contemporary Native Americans would plainly be to do everything possible to transmit the traditional songs and dances to their contemporary youths in spite of the latter’s acculturation and indifference. But in case what was suffered was a surpassing disaster, one must be sensitive to the eventuality of the withdrawal, and, in the absence or failure of the resurrection of tradition, of the obligation to suspend transmission, so as not to hand down counterfeit culture.³³

Jalal Toufic, *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Atelos, 2000), pp. 46-75.

³¹. Quoted in Godard’s *New Wave*. Some women might feel oversensitive to and wary of such formulation. I have no patience for a reflex reversal, or any other abstract reaction; what I can appreciate is some reformulation from a concrete filmmaker, for example, Nina Menkes or (disregarding her inane *A Couch in New York*, 1996) Chantal Akerman.

³². This is clear also in the case of a radical closure and the structural eventual irruption of fully-formed a-historical entities in it: the radical closure is all, but, as is made manifest by the irruption of unworldly entities, that all is not all.

³³. Past some surpassing disaster and the consequent withdrawal, it is not the ninth, the twenty-second and the thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* that are written by the Menard of Borges’ “Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*” that are counterfeit, but rather Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.