

On Performing in a Hermetic Context Nathan Witt in conversation with Amira Gad

Amira Gad

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Nathan Witt's work is primarily interested in identifying value and meaning through the dissemination of visual culture and learned history. Since 2002, Witt has produced a varied body of work that includes texts as specific counter-images and counter-objects, focusing on the integrity of the motive and its manipulation; as well as defacing press releases, making books and drawing. His work is interested in looking at the material as a by-product, as well as questioning contemporary notions of participation and authorship. The research-based practices result in research-performance installations as with his more recent 'Non-Participation Performance' and 'Continuity' works. Over the last four years, Witt has been exploring seemingly disparate subjects in Occupied Palestine, Israel and Lebanon on his project 'A Interloper' which looks at the vernacular of religious calendars found in Jerusalem and originating in the Middle East, looking at different notions of bodily displacement. The project, of which these performances belong to, explores the recent failed attempt by the National Library of Israel to obtain Kafka's archives and the assassination of Dutch gay, Zionist turned orthodox lawyer, Jacob Israel de Haan, killed by the Haganah in Jerusalem in 1924.

Amira Gad: In 2012, you staged 'Continuity' one of your research-performances at the Birzeit University Museum. Can you talk about how it forms part of your on-going investigations?

Nathan Witt: In October 2012 the Birzeit University Museum, a few miles outside of Ramallah, kindly asked me to re-do an earlier research performance about non-participation, or remote-controlled participation. The Non-Participation Performance, which director Inass Yassin kindly invited me, was performed a few months earlier at the opening of The White Building in east London, in March, where I was writing about ecology and permacultures from a lift-shaft, feeding live-text and research to another computer placed in another part of the building.

Performance constitutes a small part of my practice, probably about 10% and it is very much a raw and unscripted thing, which I use primarily as a form of catharsis but also to show the way I work. Generally speaking I am always looking at lots of different ideas, approaching things from different angles and there are many moments of inertia when things become overly conscious or self absorbed. My work has been more pre-occupied over the last fifteen years with making A4 texts as counter-images, something I started as a



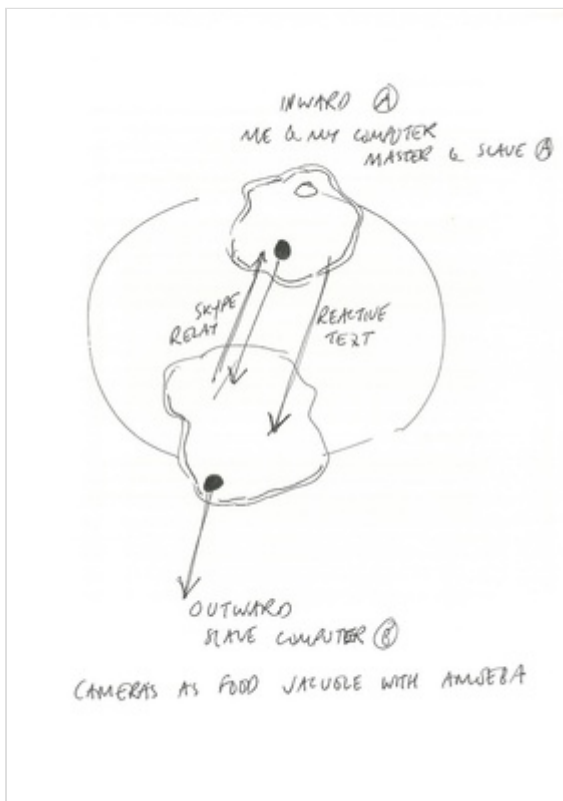
Syncing Prosthetic Devices Sketch, 2012.

Image credit: Sami Said.

means of resisting or delaying image making, or resisting the hegemony of visual culture – much in the same way that orthodox religion rejects the image and promotes the spoken word or text – and this is the main reason I went to Palestine and Israel and also Lebanon. I think in relation to any detached or hermetic performances there are obvious links to notions of iconoclasm that we see in orthodoxy, which I have long identified with and lately I have thinking a lot more seriously about this relationship between orthodoxy and conceptual art. Performance allows me a more immediate outlet to share more research and the raw data and the methodology – where no fixed outcome is necessary, other than the impossible but hopefully benevolent act of publicly learning whilst simultaneously sharing.

At Birzeit, it was decided to open up the work by trying to engage with the audience. We agreed to do the piece during the day, from 7am to 5pm for two to three days in the busy Kamal Nasser hallway outside the main lecture hall. Around the corner were two computers where I was working, on both a pc and a mac, in a partly hidden alcove. The mac was hard wired to the Ethernet via a 20 metre cable and the pc was rigged up to a projector, which displayed a live text feed as well as other research and music (just normal stuff I would listen to at home) being played through found PC speakers. The music was streamed to an online radio station and along with the audio from Skype was at times used to create audio loops and dis-synchronous feedback – and other loops with the Skype windows, which often happened when I was bored or was struggling with an idea. In the hall a webcam, along with a drawing about the impossibility of syncing computers to phones and other devices, were placed in a vitrine. The webcam fed back to the pc which projected the viewer reading either what was on the projection or what was in the vitrine – and so perceiving the two things at the same time, the same acts, was an impossible thing to do. The piece admittedly was slightly contrived, which my work can often be, particularly given my habit of going to absurd lengths to avoid working or talking about the metaphysical aspects of the work.

This performance was also where I started considering time a lot more technically, other than the durational



Schematic for Continuity Performance.
 Courtesy Nathan Witt.

aspect of it, where working longer means sharing more. The time aspect was partly conceived by failing, at the time, to sync my then iCal calendar on my phone to my laptop and thinking about the telecommunications restrictions imposed upon Palestinians, such as height restrictions on radio masts, restricted network coverage and keeping data primitive in order to make it easier to analyse what people on the ground are doing. Paul Virilio's text on time and surveillance in *The Information Bomb* has fascinated me for a long time, particularly when he talks, quite dramatically at times, of the technology of the telesurveillance that monitors nations. He writes of this technology as a new "false day" that "escapes the ancient diurnal relationship between day and night, describing an artificial sun rising in which "the simultaneity of actions should gain precedence over their successive character."^[1]

All of this is not to say that in this work I am suggesting that Israel is heralding any false technological dawn upon its dromologically ambiguous (new vs old) horizon as there is a clear militaristic and civic technological divide between

the occupying force and Palestine. I wanted to look at this from a different historical perspective, which is of simultaneity and the question of synchronizing ourselves to what particular [religious] time? I also find this notion of a false day interesting in that it underlines a certain artifice about technology and the notion of a 24/7 connected culture, which might ignore for example our physiological makeup and its biological and psychological reactions to the sun/ moon/ time – and the cultural dominance of weekdays/ months/ years that we work to.

It is only recently that the very few performances that I have done have made this transition from working remotely to having another computer as a remote-controlled participant, partly to compensate for my own non-participation from the event. I think this aspect of the work is quite threatening, both from myself and the object, which might appear innocuous enough in its domestic appearance but what we know of remote controlled phenomena is that they can invade our domesticity in the most terrifying ways imaginable, from drone strikes, to hacking, to identity theft. I admit that this appeals to the sadist in me as some form of exacting revenge against this kind of terrifying imposition into our daily lives. However, as I said I desperately wanted to try to look away from the overwhelming presence of military technology, instead looking at the historical divides (I say 'divides' in the plural very consciously) in the vernacular of different religious epochs that have existed for millennia in the MENA region. Also, there is something interesting in the popularity of technology, of using basic everyday products which, in the work, can look very innocuous at times but I like that clunky awkwardness and overlooked aesthetic (the text pieces that I make look like they are just made in an office – on Word – or found in a photocopier). At *Birzeit* I was overly conscious of doing something deliberately technically primitive and what its inference might mean and how it might be taken the wrong way.

AG: Aside from the choreographed schematic of this 'digital' and 'in situ' performance that you have put in

place. It is also framed by research you've conducted while in Palestine.

NW: At the time I proposed to the director of Birzeit University Museum to try and carbon date Palestinian amulets from the collection of Dr Tewfik Canaan, which is part of the Museum. Dr Canaan (1882 –1964) is fascinating for so many reasons^[2] and what attracted me to him was that his collection has a unique and alternative system of value and currency. As a doctor Canaan would treat sick patients and when they could not afford to pay he would accept payment in the form of a garment of clothing or jewellery. I find great comfort in the notion that the collection operates – has always operated – as a museum based on such an alternative currency but still focused on benevolence, charity and healing. The doctor does something ethically entirely different with an already virtuous existing set of ethics (medicine). It is a very beautiful idea and normally I am more interested in notions of vernacular than ethnography but in this case both things went out the window and I very much find myself wanting to remain in the idea.

Unfortunately we couldn't date the amulets due to both lack of facilities and technology and due to boycotting certain institutions like the Weizmann Institute in Tel Aviv, who are the closest people who have the most modern facilities to carry out carbon dating, we had to look elsewhere. Fortunately, Birzeit had a fascinating resident archaeologist called Mahmoud Hawari, who is also the curator in Islamic Collections at the British Museum but after discussion with them we quickly found that the exercise could not be carried out because interestingly Birzeit's amulets were too young and carbon dating is only useful for material over 5,000 years; thus confining and condemning the objects to our short conjectural history (I wanted to see if we could have carbon dated the amulets to the day). I say conjectural because the dating of things in this near present (the much discussed anthropocene) becomes apparently more precise in where it can be located but also exhaustingly more personalised in the multitude of responses to it.

I was looking at Israel as a graveyard: of demons, *jinn* and Jewish dybbuks, very much inspired by Canaan who was fascinated by demonology and wrote extensively on it.^[3] For my part, the work at the time was a deliberate and conscious effort to move away from Derrida's well-discussed essay *The Spectres of Marx* and the popular notion of 'hauntology'/ ontology which has been talked at length by Avery Gordon and TJ Demos, the latter placing the notion in a Post-Colonial art-making context^[4]. As pretentious as it might sound, my work has always prioritized ontology, or psychology, over collectivity and participation; or at least it has prioritized the logic of starting with ontology [yourself] before moving on to [being endlessly asked by commissioners to] consider participation and collectivity. This I will talk about later.

There was an attempt to commission a translation of a quite common paper talisman, printed in Cairo from the Canaan Collection called *Solomon's Seven Pacts with Jinn* which stopped after the translator's relative was tragically killed in a demolition outside of Bir Zeit and I didn't have any money to fund the translations. The story of the amulet is related to the popular beliefs of protection from 'Al-Qarena'; known in folklore also as 'Follower' or 'Mother of Boys'. 'Qarena' is usually an evil goblin 'Jinn', who is jealous of humans and causes fear and trouble for people. It is believed that prophet Suleiman obtained from the evil goblin 'Jinn' seven vows to grant protection for the person holding the amulet, which at the time people used to write and hang them in their homes, until the 1930s and 1940s, as they believe they will be protected from goblins. There are other amulets where the seven pacts are either angels, or planets, or scholars and this is also a Christian and Jewish practice as well, of the *mezuzah*, placing a rolled prayer in the doorframe. I think that the half-attempted half-translated paper talisman, re-made as a PDF, as a modernized digital version, and still being able to perform its traditional



Continuity, Research Performance, 2012, Birzeit University.
Image credit: Sami Said.

duties as an amulet and a superstitious object and image, which has always interested me; the ways in which an image can be reified, due to the way in which superstition grips our imagination.

During the performance a student appeared to read the notes and he would, at 2 o'clock each day for the next three days, remove the same piece of paper – a bibliography on Jewish liminality – and to place it on the floor to pray, resting his head upon it before returning the paper and silently walking off. Other pieces of paper and research and writing were recycled and pulped into balls that included tourist brochures from Jaffa, which is a place that obviously cannot easily, if at all, be visited by most Palestinians. Another student expressed that she wanted to take away all of the paper balls, talking about the importance of making and transferring these small gestural acts of violence, as an act of reclamation.

PDFs of the research placed on the wall to read as source material, or to act as footnotes for the performance and I like considering the A4 text pieces, PDFs, print-outs, slideshows, lists, re-made wiki-stubs, all on different subjects; to act as footnotes to some kind of unconscious essay. For me, this at least acts as a way to put a brake on my writing to become too didactic, or more essentialist than it already is (or maybe just to amplify it and revel in it) but as an artist you often either compelled out of duty to explain why certain things are being compared at or looked at, or you are asked far too much what things mean. Again working in such a pluralistic and uneconomical way, trying to explain what anything is, a lot of the time, pointless when you haven't even started researching and in the past I used to invest far too much time on working out what the motive was. The performances enable me to just get on with the work and leave the motive behind.

AG: The performance bridges the gap between the physical, the digital and immaterial realms. In a way, looking at all the different elements that constitute your performance, I would argue that it inhabits the discursive space prompted by the physical space that engages its viewer?

NW: Firstly, it is always the immaterial that attracts me with making any artwork, as I am always struggling to keep my material waste at a minimum, which is difficult when you like working with material – particularly enjoying the moments of capitulating or abandoning any [immaterial] ideology to do it. When you work to inhabit a particular place streaming and projecting live-text, working online, seems quite well suited to this; you can work quickly and diffusely; so I think the word 'prompt' is very appropriate as it underlines the urgency that, say, any isolated human being feels when they need to talk.

What also drives the work is my impatience towards the amount of time that it takes for art to be shared in a gallery setting and not wanting to rely on other people. I need the work to function as a housing for a variety of different ideas in quite a broad and random way; in this instance to function as something between a drop-in centre; or where texts are presented as an exploded essay where, as I previously said, each text operates as a footnote in its own right. But to follow on from the elements that you describe: the inhabitation, the discussion and engaging the audience; these things for me are quite complicated due to the generally disengaged way in which I make art.

I have tried to find things outside of the immediate conflict of the military occupation and the culture of misrecognition, and to discount any notion of audience as fiction is more of a deeply entrenched despair towards humanity that is carried about on one's person than out-and-misanthropy. So again, the act of research is an agonistic act or ritual or process but hopefully the honesty of the work, of sharing everything live, unadulterated/ not-yet-edited ends up very often where the writing becomes just a process of continual editing, which is a restrictive imposition that most writers want to rid themselves of. That discursive act that you mention ultimately ends up as a person talking to themselves.

Early 20th exiled Jewish writers who interest me

Person	Movement/ Exile/ Migration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Franz Kafka (1883-1924) 	Prague, Berlin, Austria
No will, Max Brod, executor	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dora Diamant (1898-1952) 	Prague
Secretary of Kafka manuscripts. Relationship with Kafka June 1923-24	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob Israel De Haan (1881-1924) 	Holland > Israel/ Palestine (from 1919)
Assassinated by Haganah on 30 June 1924. Dutch homoerotic author of <i>Pipelines and Jerusalem</i> . Initially Zionist but later Orthodox.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arnold Zweig (1887-1968) 	Germany > Israel/ Palestine (from 1933) < East Germany (from 1948)
Author of: <i>De Vriendt Goes Home</i> (1932), about Jacob De Haan. Also editor of <i>The Orient</i> (in German) based in Haifa. Invited to return to East Germany after WW2.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) 	Vienna > London
<i>Letters between Freud and Zweig, 1927-29</i> (Harcourt Press 1970)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Max Brod (1884-1960) 	Prague > Israel/ Palestine (1939)
Secretary of Kafka manuscripts, friend of Zweig. Will dated June 1961. Posthumous publisher of Kafka, against Kafka's will?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Esther Hoffe (1906-2007) 	Israel
Secretary of Brod's Kafka manuscripts. Arrested under suspicion of smuggling Kafka's work out of Tel Aviv in 1974, although a court ruling the year before exiled her to sell the estate. Sold a manuscript of <i>The Trial</i> in 1988 via Sotheby's for £1.98 million to the German Literature Archive in Marbach.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eva Hoffe/ Ruth Weisler 	Israel
Daughter's of Esther. Eva, sole-living "executor" (not benefactor) of Kafka	



AG: How do you perceive the tension between the sense of detachment and an idea of engagement with your work or performance in general?

NW: This, for me, is the weakest aspect of my work. There is something enjoyable – and for me regressive – about working in abandoned, strange or isolated spaces; whether in broom cupboards, living in between the walls at college (which I did for about a month, without the tutors noticing), enduring a vigil or conversely, sleeping in a graveyard, or under a boat; or writing and feeding text from a beer cellar in a club whilst everybody else is in the next room, drunk and dancing. It returns to the agonism, which can go from being a pathetic form of martyring oneself for your ideals, or cowardice, running away from something; hopefully it can be something more holistic, cathartic and reclaiming some form of goodness and sanity.

The notion of audience, for me, is very strange as they are by and large psychologically absent when I write. I mean: to whom does a writer address? The performances are not intended to be an assault on the audience, particularly as the audience is also not always able to be present all the time, such as in the studio. And neither are the performances intended to be standoffs with other people; the audience is not necessarily the main

reason for wanting to get ideas out of one's system, or to try and forget certain aspects about humanity's darker side. And like most writers, an audience's presence is often felt to be a distraction whereby you often stop working to have a chat with someone. On an everyday day-to-day basis the audience is absent from my studio practice and far too often there is a condescending tendency amongst many custodians to disingenuously remind artists and audiences alike that we exist, and are part of the world. I also need art to heal myself – and have to accept that responsibility to a very ambiguous end that has not always been pleasant, or consistent. If I were to address such things from the perspective of, say, identity politics, I would struggle even more, as it is myself I am also working to get away from – and crucially trying to recognize others.

The performances prefer to return to work in odd spaces and to try and inhabit them for as long as I can, usually in places that are often overlooked because of their utilitarianism, opening up the physical and architectural possibility of each space (and its vernacular), whether it is inside it or outside. And it is often occupying a space in between, or a vacuum or void of some description that draws me in. I set up the performances exactly as I would do in the studio, which is designed as a hopefully honest way of trying to concentrate and research in a detached state of external quietness that I hope can enable me to write. The desire to flee from society is an impossible desire working publicly and working in such a violent landscape as Palestine and Israel, the places I fled towards I guess there is an error in judgment in wanting to visit and continue to practice working in a closed or hermetic set-up.

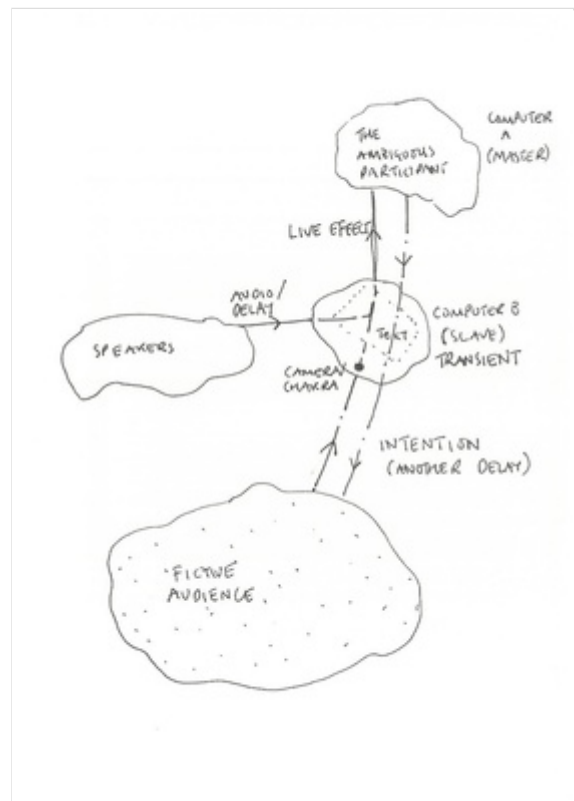
What I do hope to do is to focus on the ideas, the subjects and hope that the effort compensates for any lack of engagement, which again maybe more wish fulfilment or antagonistic for some but I do feel there is a tyranny in regards to participation and collectivity in art that is truly oppressive, as if being present, being in a group is the only way we can help ourselves. In many ways collectivity absolves us of assuming certain responsibilities for ourselves and instead we are continually reminded of the need of positive [collective] social positivity as a tool for reform because obviously we cannot do many things alone. In the performances I am not trying to reform anything, merely trying to learn and understand as much as I can in a set period of conflicting but ultimately set times – and then to share it with an equally displaced audience who is also not necessarily there.

AG: Derrida, in *Writing and Difference*, discusses the contradiction of simultaneously writing to remember and writing to forget and quotes Hegel: 'I will speak later about the profound differences between the person of sacrifice, who operates ignorant (unconscious) of the ramifications of what they are doing, and on the Sage (Hegel), who surrenders to a knowledge that, in their own eyes, is absolute.'^[5] How can this be linked to your work and the context in which you were working in?

NW: This question, to me means a lot and it also relates to another idea recently discussed by Etienne Balibar about the monastic occupation of learning and also the religious way in which many surrender to knowledge. Inhabiting a space, for me, provides a temporary respite where you are still trying to find a small degree of psychological and physical comfort but also a space to actually get on with the act of learning whether, as Derrida states, unconsciously – and revealing one's ignorance – or through surrendering to knowledge. What the question reveals, to me, is the effort required for these two types of persons, engaged in two acts of sacrifice (unconsciousness and concrete knowledge) that are closely linked, in order to learn.

The performances are always set up as an honest open studio with as little conceit as possible, other than my own ignorance. With most of my work and again, during the research/ performances, I try to avoid representation and metaphysical gestural acts, as it always means less time spent on research and, without

trying to sound too pompous, I do not want to relinquish any moral or ethical seriousness so I can then mess around. I know it's a bit Victorian but I wasted years of my youth happily on drugs, going to illegal raves and dancing for days on end. I guess what replaces that hedonism or play can be a bit nasty at times and sneaky; a crappy post-modernism which steals a lot, uses research as raw material, copies, transcribes, makes lists, clunky poems, re-designs Wikipedia pages etc. Maybe the collective tyranny is more of a cultural commissioning question, related towards popular culture or what Nietzsche referred to in *Beyond Good and Evil* as art as [Dionysian] revelry. What I am trying to occupy is opposite of that and nothing so emancipatory: instead I am just trying to create a more concrete space of learning objectively – in the sense of what Nietzsche referred to in its opposite: the Apollonian. Hopefully, it is just an honest attempt at learning, even if things are factually aberrant, bad, stupid or unfinished – and if I am to work publicly then I want to give as much as I can. Again Balibar talks about the social dangers of this idea of sharing and learning, where the wish to be virtuous and learn aberrates and reveals social prejudices and wider currents of judgment.



Schematic for Non-Participation Performance, 2012.
 Courtesy Nathan Witt.

I know as an artwork the work inevitably sinks into some metaphysical form of immersion and working, things do lapse a lot; these moments are interesting but I'd rather leave those things to the fictive audience knowing that they are things, as an audience member, I would probably be looking out for, or immersed in looking at anyway. This is not to say that the performances are not made without any contrivance, such as the arranging of materials, I just genuinely don't know what these things mean and find more truth in the unconscious aspect, so I have to leave it alone anyway. There is an attraction to this particular notion of unconsciousness, which maybe linked to forgetting a person's past, or a past that is not necessarily tied into Palestinian history in a way that we may imagine – and sometimes presume it to be in regards to others. The notion of erasure and denial is so heavily embedded into Palestine's history that it cannot be ignored when it comes to returning it to a piece of work. And as a visiting interloping outsider, rightly-perceived-as-a-colonialist/ tourist/ part of the problem, it is surely inevitable that they are at some stage going to be, as Derrida states, operating ignorantly of the ramifications of what they are doing.

In his chapter 'The Theatre of Cruelty' Derrida also discusses both the finiteness of the stage, representation itself and the overarching dominance of the occident.[6] I am currently reading an interesting text by Sherene Seikaly in *Living Together*, which is on Derrida in an Israeli/ Palestinian context that discusses the bodily and philosophical impossibility of reconciling any body in a state of synchronisation to the past. Seikaly, an American Palestinian, whose family lived in Haifa before 1948 and remained there since, talks painfully about anachronism, of an aberrant interpretation of history, its painful consequences and the impossibility of any reconciliation.[7]

The performances, instead, try to step back and return to – and inhabit – the notion studying different subjects (again, in the plural sense) before then moving on towards having to consider the economic, the political and the social, if they were ever absent. Derrida's notion of surrendering to knowledge, was also recently echoed by Adam Rothstein in *Rhizome* who discussed that it is not be unexpected that any 'speculative art and fiction is presaged by the reality it attempts to engage',^[8] he goes on to mention that any 'prescient author of speculative fiction, exploring near-future outcomes of technology with politically expedient accuracy, is truly a public intellectual.'^[9] Although an intellectual is a horrible word and not something to aspire to, his point of a performer submitting to this uncomfortable examination of valorisation is noteworthy. It is the not the effort of learning in a public context that I wish to leave behind but performance itself – and art – which you have to abandon at some stage. Maybe the word 'actor': an exhaustingly widely used expression in current NGO and legal parlance, does actually help things beyond recreating the scene but again, I think of those things as still being largely expressive, gestural, synthetic, mimetic, or forward facing the audience. Going back further we can use the traditional word *agonist* – from protagonist or *proto agoniste* (Latin for 'first actor'); and both words: agonist and proto-agonist seem appropriate terms for discussing the widespread discomfort that we traditionally endure, between both performer and [fictive] audience.

Derrida and Rothstein both underline a public attempt at learning. Rothstein eloquently states that such speculative work is hardly reducible to either a 'dystopic condemnation or fanatical futurism'^[10] which vaguely suggests working somewhere else and is quite intriguing (especially in relation to fiction) But for me, working is hopefully trying not to be seduced by technology – or any subject – despite overdoing it and submitting to it. In my performances, the technology is generally fudged, like so much of my work, and it can often end up a disparate and convoluted mess that struggles to disentangle itself from its own innate confusion. And despite there not wanting to be any hierarchy in the work other than the permanently exhaustive and unknown values of labour, the overbearing nature of surveillance with computers consumes itself at times, the technology becomes gratuitous – and worse, the non-passive subject [Palestine] become more abused. Hierarchies seem to assume themselves and where this leaves the audience is possibly even further back, lower down the order, and it puts an uncomfortable pressure on any live-text that is trying to be produced, which is not enjoyable, and underlines the notion of agonism.

AG: Writing, remembering, narrating history and – as with your work – performing history, becomes a duty and responsibility towards knowledge. But at the same time, this responsibility and the striving for knowledge is inherently akin to tensions.

NW: Yes, the act of talking, or who is talking – and to whom – is a compounding issue when people have to fight to assert their Protected Characteristics or when they are misrecognised by others. I admit that [as a white male] coming from a [former?!] occupying country I do not suffer this injustice and I realise that when looking at/ engaging with the things that people are fighting to articulate, whether legally, semantically or through action, that none of this comes without resistance, internally or externally.

Etienne Balibar in *Race, Nation, Class* addresses the hierarchy of learning in a dark social context, in regards to where seemingly noble intentions of study aberrate. The example he uses is academia, and academic language, and he sets out an interesting polemic between academia and religion that follows on from Derrida and Rothstein's notion of the effort of learning. Balibar, like Derrida, mentions the effort as the '*will to know*' – and he puts this will down to 'a violent desire for *immediate* knowledge of social relations'.^[11] He refers to this



Continuity, Research Performance, 2012 Birzeit University.

Image credit: Sami Said.

immediacy as something that has a violent function of misrecognition of other people at its heart and he reminds us of the fact that such functions of misrecognition exist because 'without which the violence would not be tolerable to the people engaging in it'.^[12] That misrecognition would be tolerable to the people engaging in it is a both an ever-present threat and a degrading actuality for those who are subjugated to violence. This is very much what Decolonizing Architecture and Campus in Camps are doing, which is trying to eradicate any notion of hierarchy in learning.

Balibar puts much of the emphasis of misrecognition as being endemic to academia and that it is a mutually sustaining act, born from people's desire for an urgent explanation of the collective social violence that they are part of. In her book *The Last Resistance*, Jacqueline Rose also discusses this collective violence in the state building of Israel in a Freudian context (guilt by association/ the killer as part of the collective). I would even go so far as to say that in Israel and Occupied Palestine there is an academic/ industry of misrecognition and of which I too am guilty of now as we speak, referring to French continental philosophers whilst the illegal occupation continues. This culture in and amongst academic language has been long discussed as endemically violent and colonialist and the culture of misrecognition, to me, is omnipresent and I guess when I am not running from it or fighting it, I want to return to/ approach something more culturally vernacularized, as that seems to be the things that is being eroded.

Returning, for me, is exploring the religious aspect of study although from the position of an atheist. Balibar

compares the difficulty for theologians (although I am sure he means all religious people), who have long consumed this 'violent desire' to understand through such an ideology and through a doctrine (a text) designed for popular consumption.[13] He mentions a strange but cognizant phrase which he refers to a means of escape for the theologian: 'unless one lapses into Gnosticism'. [14] which I interpret as a vacuum left by religion: a space to occupy and a space to perform and work in. By this I do not just mean the simple monastic act of studying in silence and for me, I want to interpret such a 'gnostic lapse' as consisting of both ambiguous artistic rights and to have a space for people to distance themselves, away from religion itself – and the judgment and violence that is enmeshed into art and the world; or to pause it and to continue to attempt to try and understand the world in some kind of rational form without having to be completely present and accountable to.

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Nathan Witt is a British artist. He was recently nominated for a Paul Hamlyn Award and has recently been working with Campus in Camps in Deheisheh as well as Decolonizing Architecture in Beit Sahour. He has also done residencies with Delfina Foundation and Art School Palestine, Hospitalfield Arts, [SPACE], Batroun Art Projects and attended Ashkal Alwan's Home Workspace Programme.

Recent exhibitions include the PARSE Biennale on Time, University of Gothenburg, Sweden (2015); *A Interloper* at CCA Gallery, Glasgow (2015); *Concerning the Bodyguard*, The Tetley, Leeds (2014); *A Museum of Immortality*, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2014); *NOA III (Not Only Arabic)* Research Week at 98 Weeks, Beirut (2013); *Points of Departure*, Al Mahatta Gallery, Ramallah (2013).

[1] Virilio, P; *The Information Bomb*, Verso Books. p.13

[2] <http://www.palestine-studies.org/jq/fulltext/78010>

[3] Yehudit Kirstein Keshet' Of Ghosts and Dybbuks, The Haunting of the Israeli Imagination; *Borderlands*, Volume 10 number 2, 2011

[4] Demos, TJ; *Return to the Post-Colony*, Sternberg Press, 2013. P7-18. Gordon, Avery; Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity; *Borderlands*, Volume 10 number 2, 2011. Gordon, Avery; *Ghostly Matters, Haunting and the Social Imagination*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

[5] Derrida, J; *Writing and Difference*; Routledge, 1978. p.325.

[6] Derrida, J. *Writing and Difference*. Page 294

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amira Gad

Amira Gad is Commissioning Editor (Essays) for *Ibraaz*.

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