

LAMIA JOREIGE

HERE AND PERHAPS ELSEWHERE

Below, opposite, and on following pages:
 Lamia Joreige, *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere*, 2003.
 Video stills.



What are we left with from happy or dramatic experiences such as love and war? What do we retain from these events? Remembrances which are more or less clear, feelings which are more or less strong, impressions which are more or less blurred, but mainly obscure areas. They are obscured owing to the mechanism of memory itself, to its distortions and the possibility, even the necessity, that human beings will forget. They are obscure owing to the fact that assembling all the testimonies and documents relating to past events is an impossible task. Jalal Toufic eloquently expresses this in his comments on William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* (1803): "I have no time to remember the event as I have yet to explore and exhaust it."

I find myself caught in a tension between the temptation and even the necessity of recounting that history, and the impossibility of fully accessing it.

Some facts, dramas and experiences will never reach us and will remain unspoken, buried. We will never be able to witness their existence, but only presume that they are there, yet missing. So history appears to be missing and becomes subjective stories, stories in the first person. An immeasurable loss of words, images and sounds, the magnitude and nature of which we will never know.

As history escapes us, only fragments remain, words and images; each fragment carries its own memory and its whole history. These fragments are memory and oblivion at the same time, parts of an incomplete whole and assembled subsequently.

Rearranged and re-interpreted, they border fiction.

Similarly to the mechanism of memory, my work attempts to collect, record, erase, invent, forget, capture, miss and divert. I say, attempts, because in all my work, I point out the impossibility of accessing a complete narrative, thus underlining the loss, the gaps of memory and history. By creating a device through which I assemble and accumulate documentary and fictional narratives, I hope to restore an essential speech.

To make visible and audible speech that has been willingly or unwillingly concealed or simply ignored. Essential, because this speech is symptomatic of a peculiar period of our history; essential also because, even when it becomes fictitious, this speech is evidence of intense and rare human experiences which, even if related to a specific context, attain a universal dimension. The diversity of the many stories recounted, their accumulation and unequal repetition link each personal experience to the collective one, making difficult if not impossible the idea of a unique truth.

During the Lebanese civil war, thousands of people disappeared. In most circumstances, the bodies were not found and the circumstances of their disappearance are not certain.

In the documentary *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere*, I accumulate a diversity of narratives, recorded along my journey through what used to be the dividing line between East and West Beirut, and where militias set up their checkpoints, the scenes of many kidnappings, and crimes. By asking each inhabitant I encounter if he or she knows someone that has been kidnapped here during the war, I trigger the process of memory, and reveal the immensity of this drama, the presence of war and its prevalence in language and various discourses. As I cross town and discover places laden with history, I draw a personal map of this city.



