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Visions of Performance in Exile: The Book, the Exhibition, and the Digital Archive

> Performance is as much about forgetting as about remembering.
> (Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*)

> And yet, in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?
> (Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains*)

How does one interpret the afterlife of a performance when it re-appears in different contexts of fruition? How does one describe the displacement experienced by the audience – both in terms of the practice of seeing, and of critical direction – when the ephemerality of a performance is challenged by technologies of vision that offer other "ways of knowing" and new "modes of remembering"?[1] This essay adopts the trope of exile to investigate the transit of artworks dislocated from their original places of representation – or 'homeland' – to new critical and poetic sites of technical visibility. The critical perspective of my paper relies on the debate around the two most important issues in the expansion of Performance Studies since the 1980s: (1) whether and how performances disappear and/or remain, and (2) the question of the 'authenticity' of the visual media, the texts and the re-stagings through which a live event is passed down through time.[2]

Here, the *oeuvres* by Emily Jacir, Shilpa Gupta and Latifa Laâbissi will be introduced to emphasize the 'exile' of their shifting and mobile visions across temporal recurrences and spatial displacements. In particular, I will focus on Jacir's photography in her *Were We Come From* (2001-2003), Gupta's installation *I Have Many Dreams* (2008), and the choreography created by Laâbissi in *Loredreamsong* (2011). In their performances, the 'here' and 'now' of intense events is destined to end and disappear in time and space. Although the stigma of ephemerality attaches itself to every live performance with a sense of loss, visions of performances "remain differently":[3] Jacir's photographic acts, for instance, are experienced in the form of reading offered by the page of a lasting 'book'; Gupta's voices are envisioned in the continuing space of an art 'exhibition'; Laâbissi's choreographic gestures are transformed into the catalogue of a 'digital archive'.[4]

In the transition from one space to another, as in any experience of exile, the performative aspect of these artworks generates the surplus of a critical and visual interpretation which keeps on stirring the audience's imagination. By tracing the migration of these works from one media to another, I would like to discuss how the audience (and, possibly, my reader) is taken on a journey that moves between

[1] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Time of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 98.

[2] See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and the recent *Perform, Repeat, Record,* edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol, and Chicago: Intellect, 2012).

[3] Schneider, *Performing Remains,* 98.

[4] The performances have been selected after I read the 'book' *Seeking Palestine. New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home,* edited by Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh (North Melbourne, Vic.: Spinifex Press, 2012), at the time I visited the 'art exhibition' *DigitaLife-2012*, and also during my surfing of the on-line 'digital archive' *re.act. feminism # 2 - performing archive* (project 2008-2013).

'forgetfulness' and 'remembrance', 'visibility' and 'invisibility', 'access' and 'denial', concentrating on the elements – the book, the exhibition, and the digital archive – that offer the new visual perceptions and the new contexts inside of which these performances disappear and re-appear, technically and poetically.

I would like to emphasize that these works belong to an aesthetics of female artists who come from various geographical, political and cultural spaces: the Palestinian Emily Jacir lives between the city of West Bank, Beirut and New York, and is particularly known for her conceptually-based photography; Shilpa Gupta lives and works in Mumbai, producing interactive videos, websites, sound-scapes and public performances; Latifa Laâbissi is an Arab dancer living in France, who creates subversive and grotesque choreographies by integrating theatre and dance, lectures, sounds and voices. Each of these artists shows a unique use of language and technology; still, we can compare them in that their works gather around the common feminist practice of 're-visioning'. As theorized by Adrienne Rich, 're-visioning' refers to the construction of new spaces of writing, the poetical methodology which allows women to "see with fresh eyes" and, because of this, enables them to survive: "Re-vision. The act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of enter-ing an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival."[5]

The American poet and writer indicates the urgency of 'asking women's questions'. Jacir, Gupta and Laâbissi share and embrace such methodological practices of raising questions through their multi-disciplinary performances, which activate a critical investigation and an interrogative process that aims to prove the ability of women to creatively 'survive' beyond the difficulties of their exiled existences.

Reading 'Acts' of Memory

> Our Narrative, our story is absent from history books.
> (Emily Jacir, IMEU website)

In 2012, the independent researcher Penny Johnson and the lawyer and writer Raja Shehadeh asked a number of some Palestinian essayists, novelists, poets and critics to exchange reflections and memories on their exile. The resulting work is *Seeking Palestine. New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, a collection of stories and visions that 'imagine' Palestine today. In this imaginative narrative, writing proves an act of survival; the present lives of the authors benefit from sharing their experienced historical trauma, anticipating a kind of future through their personal and collective struggles both at 'home' and 'abroad'.

The condition of being in exile was the trauma experienced by 850,000 Palestinian refugees in the 1948 Nabka; for the generation of writers involved in *Seeking Palestine*, this state has been historically internalized. Along the dispersed routes from Beirut to New York, from Ramallah to the Jenin refugee camp, from Jordan to Kuwait, the multiple identities gathered around the project delve in private

[5] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: Norton, 1979), 35. In this essay, Rich narrates how she found her female voice inside the male-dominated structure of society and literature. In infusing the term "re-vision" with new meaning, she encourages women, who have been represented as mythological tropes throughout the literatures of the past, to subvert these untrue representations.

memories. By inscribing their remembrances, the narrators open up areas of their minds which were previously kept secret. The release of a forgotten experience, the return of an emotion can occur in the memories of childhood by the Palestinian-American scholar and writer Lila Abu-Lughod in her "Pushing at the Door: My Father's Political Education and Mine".[6] It can materialize, as in Rana Barakat's "The Right to Wait", in the hope of returning 'home'[7]. It can result in the practice of fixing and repairing, as in Jean Said Makdisi's "Becoming Palestinian".[8] These strategies are meant not only as a way to inhabit, or to be dispossessed from, the lost homeland: behind and beyond each narration lies a language of resistance and revolution, an affirmation of belonging, of conservation and reconstruction.

Initially, the narrated stories and the represented visions can be acts of writing/reading that see Palestine as a new 'beginning'.[9] The essayist Susan Abulhawa, an activist for the rights of the Palestinian children in the occupied territories, goes back to the time when she was Susie, a girl who, abandoned by her mother and growing up in an orphanage, experienced life in a different way from the majority of the Palestinians; in this sense, hers cannot but be the "Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story". At the same time, even though Abulhawa belongs to "a political discussion called 'The Question of Palestine'",[10] and continues to live far from home and heritage, she is determined to re-affirm 'where she comes from'. When she writes of her Palestinian identity, and her "intifada", it is in the written act of remembrance that she involves the reader as an essential part of her personal triumph: "My stories are the stuff of my intifada. And every reader is part of my triumph."[11] In another poetics, which intensifies the idea of Palestine as a new 'beginning', the architect and writer Suad Amiry builds her identity as "An Obsession", along with the contradictions of a woman who, though trying to remember what it means to come from Palestine, desires to forget her 'land': "How I wish for a stroke that / will neatly delete everything related to you: thoughts, memories, emotions / Gone forever."[12] In her affirmation-denial of identity, Amiry depicts the internal exile from her mother country as a lover haunted/acted upon by ambivalent feelings of joy and grief: "Miss you / Love you / Defend you / Cry for you / Write for you / Talk about you / And, in command form, love you".[13]

Seeking Palestine, however, does not rely only on the images of the internal exile and the assumed belonging inscribed in the pieces of its writing; it also shows the visual materiality of seeking Palestine. The sections of the book – "Exile/Home", "Home/Exile" and "At Home in What World?" – are each introduced by an image from *Where We Come From*, Emily Jacir's photographic series. These pictures function as a visual interruption for the texts of the collective volume; in fact, they intertwine with the narrations by providing further actions of hope, normalcy and movement.

Born to a Bethlehem family, and growing up in Saudi Arabia, Jacir attended high school in Italy and university in USA. After living in Colorado and in Paris for a time, she now lives between Palestine and USA – a condition shared by many

[6] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Pushing at the Door: My Father's Political Education and Mine", in *Seeking Palestine*, 43-61.

[7] Rana Barakat, "The Right to Wait", in *Seeking Palestine*, 135-146.

[8] Jean Said Makdisi, "Becoming Palestinian", in *Seeking Palestine*, 160-177.

[9] See Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intentions and Methods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

[10] Susan Abulhawa, "Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna", in *Seeking Palestine*, 11.

[11] Ibid., 18.

[12] Suad Amiry, "An Obsession", in *Seeking Palestine*, 76.

[13] Ibid., 77.

diasporic Palestinians in the world. Her creations, which include installations, performances, videos, films, and pieces of writing and sound, show a unique expertise in the technologies that allow the artist to explore, from her female perspective, the condition of the Palestinian displaced, exiled and 'occupied' existence. Specifically, Jacir intends to emphasize the activism in her art by performing a series of desired and forgotten 'acts' of free movement: her personal and political work is set against the restrictions and the limits imposed both on the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation, and on the exiled people who are forbidden to travel back to their homeland.

With such engaged activism, between 2001-2003, Jacir produced the series *Where We Come From*, a collection of photographed 'acts' performed by her after she asked some Palestinians living in exile and some people who had seen their freedom of movement violently restricted by Israel, the following question: "What can I do for you in Palestine, where you can't go but I can?" Almost thirty people answered this question by asking Jacir to perform simple and everyday actions, coming from impossible memories or desires connected to past and lost circumstances, which they themselves could not realize. Their answers are translated and performed into a series of acts carried out by the artist who, by taking advantage of her American passport and "using her constitutive mobility",[14] 'remembers' and acts out the tasks requested by those exiled in Europe, Syria, Lebanon and America, while also documenting the reasons why they were prohibited or restricted from entering Palestine. The outcome is a collection of photographs and texts, both in Arabic and English, which record the forgotten visions and the undermining acts of prohibition. Jihad, who owns a Gazian I.D. and who, since he left for Ramallah in 1995, has not been allowed to return home, asks Jacir: "Visit my mother, hug and kiss her and tell her that these are from her son…". Haña, born in Beirut but living in Houston, Texas, advances Jacir with the request: "Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street." Sonin, a citizen of Israel who has been forbidden entering Gaza, asks: "Go to Gaza and eat Sayadiyeh."[15] In *Where We Come From*, however, the simplicity of these everyday acts collide with the complexity of being 'remembered' (the trauma is still working, producing painful effects) and, especially, of being 'fulfilled' across the physical borders and the violent limitations imposed on the exiled Palestinians. The invention carried out by Jacir is exactly that, in reading, beyond the 'stillness' of her photographs, what the audience perceives is the unbearable 'waiting' – an experience ingrained in the memory of most exiled Palestinians. As Edward Said says in his introduction to Emily Jacir's work in *Grand Street*:

> For the most part, Palestinians wait: wait to get a permit, wait to get their papers stamped, wait to cross a line, wait to get a visa. Tons of wasted time, gone without a trace. … Emily Jacir's series "Where We Come From" cuts through all that, reducing an intractably untidy mess to the simple, humane question "What can I do for you in Palestine, where you can't go but I can?"…. Her compositions slip through the nets of bureaucracies and nonnegotiable borders, time and space, in search not of grandiose dreams or clotted

[14] Stephen Wright, quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Her Dark Materials", *The Daily Star*, 8 February 2006, http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/her-dark-materials, 1 November 2012.

[15] These are the three stories from Jacir's *Where We Come From*, which were selected and included in *Seeking Palestine* by the editors.

> fantasies but rather of humdrum objects and simple gestures like visits, hugs, watering a tree, eating a meal – the kinds of things that maybe all Palestinians will be able to do someday, when they can trace their way home, peacefully and without restriction.[16]

Jacir's art survives 'without restriction'. *Where We Come From* is, indeed, a performance-collection that keeps travelling and returning, in its condition of exile, on different planes of visual reading: from its initial publication (which only circulated in Palestine) to the issue of the magazine *Grand Street*, from its exhibition version (the first in 2003 Artspace Annex II, New Haven, Connecticut; in this occasion, Jacir organized the space using her passport, and a video with the existing texts and photographs) to the international galleries and museums.[17] Recently, the 'remains' of such travelling memories return to the printed media of *Seeking Palestine*, to be read on the book's double page, through some framed texts and unframed photographs, a technical choice that Jacir explains by confessing that "I felt the photographs should not be framed because this is a dream".[18] The forbidden and forgotten dreams, with the personal and collective visions, are recalled and re-performed in the 'book', which opens its pages to a global readership, finally able to overcome physical and political restrictions. Through the reading of this book, the 'hope' is that Palestinians begin the difficult process of re-membering the exile of their own memories.[19]

Envisioning 'Voices' of Hope

> What I am referring to are the embedded and often invisible structures that steer the way we think in daily life … What I am interested is in the ways of looking into people's imaginations.
>
> (Shilpa Gupta, "Embedded Structures: An Interview")

From the 'acts' inscribed in the pages of a book we move to the multimedia 'voices' of a digital exhibition. For the third year running, the Fondazione Romaeuropa has promoted *DigitaLife-2012 Human Connection*, an art exhibition devoted to the connection between creative languages and advanced technologies.[20] The installation is conceived and staged as a journey-like modular project, and the participating artists are invited to reflect on the relationship between space, technology, and art by creating digital artworks focused on the exploitation of human connections. The Macro Testaccio (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma) is one of the hosting spaces to the exhibition. The place, previously a slaughterhouse, is an inspiring artistic home for new aesthetic creativities, where visitors are invited to wander through its re-organized architecture, and to explore a series of multimedia installations, acoustic environments and interactive works.

While walking through the exhibited digital visions in their visit to *DigitaLife-2012*, the spectators experience a condition of exile. Indeed, the path of the exhibition is covered by artworks that mainly satisfy the sense of sight: the space is mapped by

[16] Edward W. Said on *Where We Come From* by Emily Jacir, http://www.grandstreet.com/gsissues/gs72/gs72d.html, 10 October 2012. Initially, Jacir's performance appeared as a publication to be circulated mainly in Palestine. At the time, the artist preferred the page of a book because she reckoned that, had it been exhibited in galleries, only a few people would have had the chance to see it; later, some 'remains' of this work appeared in the magazine *Grand Street*.

[17] The work was recently acquired by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

[18] See Wilson-Goldie, "Her Dark Materials".

[19] In exploring the forbidden/forgotten memories of the Palestinian stories in the form of a book, Jacir's interest or 'poetic return' is evident in her last installation *Ex-Libris* at dOCUMENTA (13); see http://www.alexanderandbonin.com/artist/emily-jacir, 2 December 2012.

[20] See http://www.museomacro.org/it/digital-life-human-connections, 2 December 2012.

screens, installations and projections of experimental bodies and objects, activating diverse physical trajectories and critical understandings. The collective exhibition gathers some conceptual artists who investigate the plural dimensions of the aesthetic body when exposed to a digital visual domain. In the video-performance *The Onion* (2003), the body presence of Marina Abramović deals with its physical and psychological potentialities according to the repetitive gestures of the artist while eating a whole onion on the stage. In *I'm bare…dedicated to my computer* (2009), the Italian performer Ciriaca+erre explores the intimacy of computer devices in order to express, record and share her cry of liberation from creative constrictions. In moving from a screen to the next, from a body to another body, we come across the video-installation *Until the end* (2011). The Italian duo Masbedo, using HD-video technology, explore and digitally touch, with an intrusive close up, the feet of a female dancer, thus capturing its intimate and partial physicality by an extreme exercise of anti-gravity – the body's struggle to leave the ground on tiptoe.

At a first glance, these artworks stimulate and satisfy the sight as their primary phenomenological sense. When the traveller/visitor arrives at the installation untitled *I Have Many Dreams* by Shilpa Gupta, however, she is invited to activate the more imaginative, in-visible capacity of hearing. Indeed, the Indian artist investigates technology as a narrative strategy, aiming at building an 'auditive' archive of dreams and aspirations. On the exhibit space, there is actually nothing to 'see', because the installation is created by recording the aspirations of four interviewed Indian girls. "What would you like to be when you grow up?" was Gupta's question. In hearing the children's 'voices', the invisible traces of their visionary dreams, the audience is provoked to 'imagine' their stories made of hope and future.

Fig. 1: *I Have Many Dreams*, 2007-2008. Series of photographs print on canvas, sound, 168 x 137 cm each. Ph. Ela Bialkowska. Courtesy GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin

In *I Have Many Dreams,* Gupta presents the portraits of four Indian girls; each portrait has an audio track through which the audience listens to the girls' voices that offer four different narrations of hope, dreams and future plans.[21] Once the headphones are on, the audience begins to move on a path of exile, visualizing the different stories told by the young women. Gupta's initial request is: "Tell me your name and age and what you would like to be when you grow up." At this point, the young performers begin dreaming: one girl wants to be an architect, another wants to become a fashion designer or a singer, a journalist, a dentist, a doctor, a dancer, a detective… Their imagination runs wild when Gupta further asks them: "What is your second or third choice?" In the displaced movement from the eye to the ear, the audience envisions a series of different dreams when, for example, it is Aadhya's voice to be digitally re-performed:

[21] See http://shilpagupta.com/pages/2008/08girls.html, 2 December 2012.

> **A:** I want to grow up and become an artist because I love drawing and I can spend as many hours drawing because I get inspired by it and it's lot of fun and you can keep doing it everyday but some people don't like it. I don't know why but I like art, you can draw picture as you want and you don't have to copy sceneries. Sometimes you can draw whatever you want, like M.F. Hussain draws horses. But his thing is to draw horses, but he doesn't draw it clearly like it has to be a real horse, he makes front teeth pop out and all that he does, all funny stuff.
> **SG:** If you don't get to be an artist, what is your second choice?
> **A:** If I don't get to be an artist then I would like to be a detective because I just love to read mysteries…
> **SG:** 3rd choice?
> **A:** I would like to travel the world and write about it. I'll go to different countries and be a journalist may be and get all the information and check on all cool stuff.
> **S.G:** If not this, then?
> **A:** Then I don't know what I am going to become because I have got many dreams but I have to concentrate on only one dream so I don't know.[22]

[22] Ibid.

Fig. 2: *I Have Many Dreams*, 2007-2008. Photograph print on canvas, sound, 168 x 137 cm. Ph. Ela Bialkowska. Courtesy GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Le Moulin

From her 'homeland' India, Aadhya's voice is spatially displaced and digitally transformed when the invisible installation travels to Europe to reach the venue of *DigitaLife-2012*. Here, through the process of 'listening' and 'imagining', the work acquires a new critical direction that cannot be extrapolated from the current Western perceptions of women in India. Right at the time of writing this paper, global attention is being given to the scandalous scale of abuse and rape suffered by Indian women. This unbearable injustice is enhancing a diffused desire to fight against all forms of private and public violence endured by women. In a society deeply impacted by globalization, and facing complex social and cultural changes, what is urgent, especially in terms of female discrimination, is a politics of gender equality and social justice. In the Indian State, often proving indifferent to, or complicit in, misogynist violence, the relevance of Gupta's

performance is exactly to discover women's future possibilities and ambitions. The voices of girls, as re-heard and re-performed in the repetitive technology of her work, acquire a particularly powerful and emotional resonance. The aspirations and expectations of the women interviewed by Gupta, lead the audience on a pleasant, invisible and auditive 'exile', where the girls' envisioned dreams can be 'visible' again, surviving in other people's imagination, becoming hopefully true in a future-to-come.

Documenting 'Gestures' of re.action

> I express my convictions through my dancing, which forces me to push beyond my own taboos. When I appear naked, with this grotesque, animal quality of nudity, I scare myself; I begin questioning everything I learned from dance, everything we were taught to think about ourselves in dance and elsewhere.
>
> (Latifa Laâbissi, "Artist's Profile", *Dancer 281*)

Another 'exile' can be proposed along the path that moves from a series of in-visible voices to the hyper-visible gestures documented on an inter-active digital archive: in the wake of *re.act.feminism # 1* (2008/2009), the long-term project *re.act. feminism # 2* is designed as a living archive that gathers feminist and gender-critical performance artworks from the 1960s to date. This on-line digital domain gives access to the "detritus" of live performances in forms of visual documentation.[23] In their curatorial statement, Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer explain the specific passion embodied by female creativity, the geographical perspective and the archival intention that support their project:

> Since 2008, re.act.feminism considers feminist and gender critical performance art from the 1960s to the early 1980s as well as the 'return' of this artistic practice in the form of re-enactments, re-formulations and archival projects…. *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* is a continually expanding temporary and living performance archive travelling through six European countries from 2011 to 2013. In its current version it presents performance art by 125 artists and artist collectives from Eastern and Western Europe, the Mediterranean and Middle East, the US and several countries in Latin America in the form of videos, films, photographs and texts. It will also be 'animated' through local exhibitions, screenings, performances and discussions along the way, which will continuously contribute to the archive.[24]

What the statement underlines is that this performing archive never acquires a definitive shape. When new performances and new documents are added to its digital deposit, more archives are produced, recalling the 'fever' experienced by the philosopher Jacques Derrida: "the archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future."[25] Indeed, *re.act. feminism #2* interrogates the archival thought of a performance, highlighting the "complex relationship between live performances, their traces and documents, and their reception".[26] Its archival structure is like a dynamic device that saves the ephemeral gesture of a performance from disappearing while keeping its eventful

[23] Matthew Reason, "Archive or Memory? The Detritus of Live Performance", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 19.1 (February 2003), 82-89.

[24] Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer, *Curatorial Statement,* http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=198&e, 1 November, 2012.

[25] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68.

[26] See http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=198&e, 1 November, 2012.

appeal alive. The archive is an instrument through which individual and collective memories are re-shaped in their past and in their future by their authors and their recipients, in the process of their appropriation and re-interpretation. In other words, the project is based on the idea that the 'productivity' of the document asserts the dynamic quality of documentation: "Many items of performance documentation (photographs, videos, scores, etc.) acquire a life and a quality of 'liveness' of their own. They are often made deliberately with a future audience in mind, and for an anticipated future 'encounter'."[27]

[27] Ibid.

In its vocation towards future encounters, the documented event is deferred and displaced, thus 'abandoning' its homeland or 'original' enactment, in order to be exiled into the traces, the texts, the images and the biographies that offer them the space and the time of other accesses and fruitions. Moving from live gestures to digital residues, the selected performances are fragmented and disseminated in the 'spectrality' of their disappearance and re-appearance.[28] According to the *téchne* of the web, other enduring gestures, proving new aesthetic and poetic translations, will emerge. As the curators repeat: "re.act.feminism takes us on a time travel, inviting us to engage in a lively dialogue beyond the limits of time and space. Our focus is not on historical reconstruction, but rather on infecting gestures and productive translations."[29]

[28] See Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Écographies de la télèvision* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

[29] Knaup and Stammer, *Curatorial Statement*.

In the knowledge provided by these events lies the access to a series of performative gestures created, elaborated, produced and performed by women, who now become the 'archons' – those who hold the "commencement and commandment" – of a digital matri-archive that "augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas*".[30] Indeed, the website of *re.act.feminism* provides renewed visibility to the feminist avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s; at the same time, it hosts the oeuvres of female artists of a new generation, who recall – and 're.act' to – the past gender-critical practices beyond any strategy of canonization. The cross-generational approach is supported by an archival architecture that allows the selected works to be consulted by following the artists' names – renowned personalities are placed alongside a list of emergent performers – or by clicking on the choice of its tags, connections and references. 'Displaced' in their technological exile, across the archive of visions and documents, the visitors of *re.act.feminism* can choose their own routes, languages, practices, and also choose which media to consult and which performances to re-vision.

[30] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2 and 68.

In surfing on *re.act.feminism #2,* I had my own experience of performative exile. Among the documents of the archived pictures, texts and corporalities, for instance, I experienced the re-emergence of the anti-fictional gestures of the Italian-American Simone Forti in her *Solo N.1* (choreography, 1974) and the improvised anti-heroic movements of the American choreographer Yvonne Rainer in *Trio A* (choreography, 1978). In their famous performances, the two members of the historical *Judson Church Group* of New York declared a new choreographic strategy based on anti-virtuous patterns of improvised dance, known today as 'post-modern dance'. It is worth remembering how Rainer uttered her performative,

cultural and political denial and deep reaction to the canonized language of dance, often managed, choreographed and 'commanded' by male choreographers: "No to the spectacle / No to virtuosity / No to transformation and magic and make-believe / No to the glamour and transcendence of the star image / No to the heroic …".[31]

Among the digitally archived documents I also accessed the images of the provocative Cuban Tania Bruguera who, in *Homenage a Ana Mendieta* (photographs, 1985-1996), re-enacts the exile of her fellow countrywoman in the 1970s. In the documented work, the audience witnesses Bruguera's creative attempt to bring Ana back to Cuba, as a personal and collective gesture of sisterhood in memory of the women who struggle to survive in their countries and who find a new 'homeland' or a new place of expression *elsewhere*. In the archive, these memories of the past overlap with the recorded performances interpreted by a younger generation of artists. Among these gestures, there is the live action *My Honey* (2007), where the Italian performer MaraM combines the 'matter' of her corporality with another 'materiality', thus transforming and exceeding the established discourses on the female body. Moving from the past to the contemporary time, in the direction of new performances *à-venir*, the documented gestures of 'reaction' demonstrate the incalculable potentiality of female creation and subversion. The visitor, 'exiled' across these re-appearing and anticipating performances, accesses an exclusive open archive that, in its unquestionable commitment and liquid architecture, 'reacts' against all patriarchal/patri-archival practices of consultation and documentation.

Something even more explicit happens when the visitor of the archive *re.act. feminism* encounters the choreographic work *Loredreamsong* by Latifa Laâbissi. The choreographer completed her training in dance at the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York; later on, her experimental and choreographic training was enriched by other technical and poetic gestualities, as is evident in her biography: "Dance 'codes' are disturbed by recalcitrant bodies, alternative stories, montages of materials infiltrated by certain signs of the times."[32] Today, her performances are focused on the investigation of marginalized subjectivities, while her language of 'reaction' is usually shown in specific settings, such as for example, in universities, art schools and centres of choreography, which provide the appropriate places for her to express her radical perspective.

Laâbissi herself can be interpreted as a living body-archive that stores, recalls and personally re-executes the performativity of other artists. As her artistic profile explains, "her dance pieces often feature contortions of the body and grimaces, thus harking back to such artists as the radical dancer Valeska Gert".[33] The archival process, which materializes the gestures of female 'care' in selecting, sorting, storing and consulting, is what Laâbissi embodies and activates in the creative agency of her works (this was particularly relevant for her choreographed-lecture *AutoArchive*, given in 2011).[34] In *Loredreamsong,* the Arab-French artist, dancing with the Nigerian Sophiatou Kossoko, produces a sarcastic work that mixes the languages of theatre and dance, mimic, music

[31] Yvonne Rainer, "No Manifesto, 1965", quoted in Rumsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theatre, Performative Traces* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

[32] See http://figureproject.com/english/biographie/, 13 January 2013.

[33] Artist's profile on http://www.reactfeminism.org/, 1 December 2012.

[34] See http://figureproject.com/english/autoarchive/, 1 December 2012.

and poetry, so as to materialize in choreographic patterns the specific question: "What does a ghost do?" The performance's conceptual inquiry moves the gender-critical reaction to this question, into a dance that breaks with some common beliefs concerning veiled women, and with general categories affecting women, interpreting femininity as a ghost that haunts the cultural and social lore/home of their cultural inhabitation. On stage there are two 'Arab women' whose identities, images and corporalities are displayed as 'ghosts': in a masquerade of the *burqua,* their bodies are entirely covered by a long white sheet, with two holes at the eyes' level. Later in the piece, two other dancing bodies provocatively recall two black bodies in Afro-textured hair, representing some 'monstrous' figures built by a myopic patriarchal vision:

> Two ghosts begin singing karaoke, but the accompanying music is missing. This is the start of a truly frightening set of events: a one-hour live performance that recalls a minstrel show, a popular American entertainment format in the mid-19th century. The two white ghosts become two completely black figures with big black wigs, faces painted pitch-black and deep red mouths. [35]

[35] See *Loredreamsong*, http://www.reactfeminism.org/, 1 December 2012.

In this sense, the title *Loredreamsong* refers to the values, gestures, and visions that belong to the female corporality when it is stereotyped in a globalized and materialistic society. The 'dreamlike' performance has the chance to manipulate common beliefs by dancing, challenging and disturbing the audience's vision. The performative gestures are choreographed in a way that disseminates and discovers unexpected associations and meanings. The different languages of theatre and dance, mimic, music, and poetry, overlap and create a one-hour live feminist universe:

> In several short acts, the two figures compound racist jokes, pop music fragments, twisted fairy tales, prejudice poems, propaganda speeches and preposterous gestures – all in at least four different languages – and a dance using a whole arsenal of weapons, in which the audience literally becomes a target.[36]

[36] Ibid.

The excess of coverage, the exaggerated enactment of equivocal figures and folkloristic codes, and the choreography of in-accessible and monstrous bodies constitute the elements that emphasize Laâbissi's desire to 're.act' against patriarchal structures, breaking with the traditional and consolidated masks imposed upon women. Indeed, in *Loredreamsong*, the corporeal memory of Laâbissi's and Kossoko's body-archives re-activate the "carnivalesque body" as theorized by Mary Russo, where the dancers "make a spectacle of themselves", calling attention to "the spectacle as process and construction".[37] Here, the exploration of the movement of the disturbing silhouette of a ghost, in its veiled, anonymous and monstrous shape, constructs a choreographic pattern of gestures that manages to prove, provokingly, in-accessible – or accessible *otherwise* – to the audience's common vision and understanding.

[37] Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory", in Teresa de Lauretis ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 85.

The poetic/technical in-accessibility of Laâbissi's live performance increases when it is exiled on the performing archive *re.act.feminism*. Once the live visualization of *Loredreamsong* is technically transformed into a series of 'documents', and when its visual corporalities are accessible in the texts and pictures digitally archived on the web, Laâbissi's choreography is somehow 'denied', turning into the 'ghost' of which it precisely speaks. The spectator accesses the 'residual' effects of the dance, the deferred images of the artist's gestures of reaction – which are not, because of this, less alive.[38] Indeed, if the pictures and the documentation cannot render the essence of the phenomenological experience of the dancing itself, the gaze of the mobi-spectator remains suspended and fulfilled by the traces left by the performance recoded 'in exile' on the web.[39]

Conclusion

Among the accessible and inaccessible corporalities of visible or invisible voices, through the traces of forgotten and remembered acts, the virtual or actual spectator cannot experience the 'liveness' of the described performances; at the same time, she can follow the visual exile of these works in their technological 'afterlife'. Survival is poetically visualized on the pages of the book that re-offer the photographs capturing the Palestinians' memories as witnessed by Emily Jacir; 'survival' lends an ear to Shilpa Gupta's voices dreaming of the Indian women to-come on the path of her multimedia exhibition; 'survival' is finally felt when viewing Latifa Laâbissi's dance on the matri-archive of 'reacting' feminist performances. At the always-postponed end of their journeys, the female visions offered by these *oeuvres* find hospitality in the minds of the spectators encountered during their on-going 'exiles'. By moving across different technologies, they find their future in the space and time of their creative re-visions.

[38] For the 'expanded trace' of the 'document' – "the spoken word, the image and the gesture" – see Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[39] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (London: Dance Books 1966).