13   Images in Motion, from Haptic Vision to Networked Space

Mona Hatoum's landmark *Measures of Distance* (1988) uses the tactile qualities of ana-
log video to embody a longed-for contact between the artist and her mother, separated
during the Lebanese civil war. The video became an emblem of Palestinian struggles to
maintain community and physical contact in exile. Two decades later, a number of
changes have raised the stakes for how images can create contacts between people.
Palestinians, even on their own land, are increasingly restricted in their mobility. Ana-
log video with its soft, tactile qualities has given way to the optical crispness of digital
video. Israeli forces use sophisticated military surveillance technologies to convert the
image into a contact medium, that is, to identify targets for arrest and destruction.
Meanwhile (in another development of military technologies), networked media carry
moving images to viewers around the world.

   This chapter looks at works of Palestinian media art and cinema that offer a history
of image strategies for making contact between people. These strategies have waxed
and waned over the past couple of decades, but they are all still important: images as
representation, images that invite embodied contact, performative images, and images
that travel through networks. How do Palestinian media artists now deal with the ever
more urgent need to stay in touch across distances? I'll revisit the embodied, tactile
strategies that were so effective in *Measures of Distance* in 1988 and ask how they have
fared in the conversion to digital cinema and the rise of networked media. I'll suggest
that representational images have become newly important with the rise of Internet
media and small-screen reception. As the formal qualities of images diminish in impor-
tance, the performative power of images, used both by and against Palestinians,
increases. But what these Palestinian movies most powerfully suggest is that images
make contact and have real effects by being in motion, in circulation. I'll propose this
theory along the way.

Optical and Haptic Images

The default visual mode for the moving image remains optical images, which maintain
sharp focus, good contrast, and, often, deep space, and the corresponding optical

visuality, which keeps its objects at a distance and maintains a clear separation between subject viewing and objects viewed. Optical images are good for representing things clearly and allowing the beholder to take the mental distance that narrative requires. But film and video (to maintain these terms for a while, even though they have merged in digital media) always had a haptic underside. Some analog filmmakers explored film's graininess (especially 8mm), soft focus, blur, close-up shots, and (in seeming contrast) filling the screen with detail. These qualities gradually migrated from experimental to mainstream cinema and advertising, where the haptic image is now standard fare. Incidentally, haptic images are not very useful for identifying people.

Analog video amplified the haptic aesthetics of the moving image in these ways and in ways peculiar to the medium, including its low resolution relative to film, especially in video recorded in low light or reproduced multiple times. It seems that videomakers didn't take up the medium's haptic potentials until later in the life of the young medium, sometime in the 1980s. Many videomakers and viewers considered analog video's haptic qualities to be faults and strove for a crisp, "cinematic" image. But others pursued these effects, appreciated their difference from optical images, and took pleasure in them. Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* captivated viewers with the powerful emotional effects it wrung from the haptic image and the contrast between haptic and optical, close and distant, that reflected on the distance forced between daughter and mother by the Lebanese civil war, as Hatoum was far from home in the United Kingdom while her mother remained in Beirut. [figure 13.1] Here is what I wrote about it in 1998:

Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* begins with still images so close as to be unrecognizable, overlaid with a tracery of Arabic handwriting. As the tape continues, the images are shown from a greater distance and revealed to be a naked woman with a luxurious body, still veiled in the image's graininess and the layer of writing. Meanwhile, Hatoum's mother's letters, read in voice-over, make us realize that these are images of her that her daughter took; further, they tell that Hatoum's father was very jealous of his wife's body and the idea of another, even/especially his daughter, being in intimate proximity to it. The pulling-back movement powerfully evokes a child's gradual realization of separateness from its mother, and the ability to recognize objects: to recognize the mother's body as a separate body that is also desired by someone else. It also describes a transition from a haptic way of seeing to a more optical way of seeing: the figure is separate, complete, objectifiable, and indeed already claimed. At the point where the image of the mother becomes recognizable, narrative rushes in.[1]

In *Measures of Distance*, then, haptic images give the beholder a sense of being both physically and subjectively connected to the image source.

That article, "Video Haptics and Erotics," explored analog video's haptic properties and proposed that they invite the viewer to inhabit a close, embodied, and multisensory position. I suggested that haptic images and haptic visuality encourage a subjective position of intimacy and mutual entanglement between viewer and viewed. "By
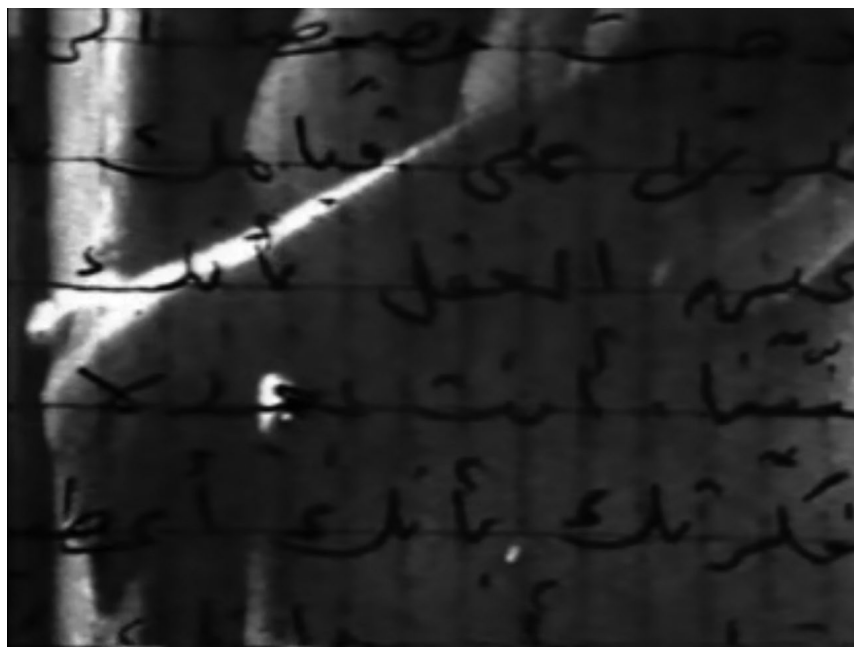
Figure 13.1
Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988)

engaging with an object in a haptic way, I come to the surface of my self … , losing myself in the intensified relation with an other that cannot be known. The giving-over to the other that characterizes haptic visuality is an elastic, dynamic movement."[2] *Measures of Distance* provided one of the main examples. In another example described in my 2000 book, *The Skin of the Film*, Samirah Alkassim's 16mm film *Far from You* (1996), another Arab diasporan media artist used the tactile, disintegrating televised image of the Egyptian diva Um Kholtoum to create a sense of simultaneous distance and closeness: here to emphasize not only the diasporan artist's longing for home but also Arab people's temporal distance from the triumphant days of Nasserist pan-Arabism, which Um Kholtoum came to represent.

Of course, movies cannot really make contact with their object; the distance is unbridgeable. For optical images, the distance between viewer and beheld allows the viewer to maintain some kind of sovereignty. But haptic images draw viewers close and open their senses, making them feel connected and vulnerable to the beheld. Hatoum has continued to make powerful works that enact the painful dialectic of closeness and distance on the very skin of the beholder, as Anna Ball has discussed.[3] Haptic images rely on their recipients to activate them in their perceptual reception.

The theory of haptic visuality that I proposed in my 1998 article and in *The Skin of the Film* proved very popular. Yet ironically, just at the time of the writing, analog video was giving way to digital video—to the great relief of most videomakers, given how difficult analog video is to edit. Filmmakers who have never taken an interest in analog video also began to turn to digital video, especially as its image quality improved, because it was relatively cheap and easy to edit. The haptic qualities of video became a historical artifact, and those of film did as well; to a large extent, they became obsolete.

Trying to Get in Touch, Digital Version

Video artists began to work with the medium's haptic qualities in the 1980s, Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* prominent among them. However, visual aesthetics were giving way to something more conceptual:

In the twentieth century, the perceptible world became more and more textual, sign based, and informational: it demanded to be not just perceived but read. The locus of art making shifted again, in cognizance of the information that organizes the perceptible world. Artists began to focus on how image unfolds from information—or refuses to unfold. The site of interaction with the world became not the eye but the brain. … The performative act of unfolding became the subject of art.[4]

By the late twentieth century, and concurrent with the shift from film and analog video to digital video, the concerns of the medium became less visual and more about the invisible connections in which it is embedded. In addition, those invisible contents changed. In information-based media and in the information era in general, the important invisibles are databases, algorithms that manipulate them, and networks that facilitate the exercise of power, often government and corporate power.

Haptic or Optical, Images Are Worse Than Useless

Palestinian and other Arab filmmakers frequently turn their cameras against those of the news media, denouncing them for the pornographic proliferation of "suffering porn" that seems to make no political difference. Nadia Yaqub examines this critical practice in Azza El-Hassan's documentaries *Newstime* (2002), *Three Centimeters Less* (2003), *Kings and Extras* (2004), and *Always Look Them in the Eyes* (2009). As Yaqub observes, El-Hassan seemingly sets her documentation up for failure, spoiling the opportunity to produce a triumphant, heart-rending, or folkloric image of Palestinians, and drawing attention to the ways that people perform for the camera. In this way, she places responsibility with the spectator to respond ethically in the absence of clichéd images of Palestinian victimhood. *Newstime*, shot during the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000,

concludes that filmmaking is impossible in such circumstances unless the filmmaker is to end up producing the same pornographic images of suffering that already flood mass media.[5] Other filmmakers use the strategy of silencing or enfolding media coverage of Arab suffering in order to try to draw out some other aspect of the past (see the discussion in chapter 8). But a grim aniconism continues to dominate much of Palestinian independent cinema—and for good reason.

The title of Basma Alsharif's 2009 video, *We Began by Measuring Distance*, suggests a riposte to Hatoum's *Measures of Distance*, and its concluding image constitutes a chilling rebuke of the comforts of haptic images. It is a devastating work. A dignified male voice-over contrasts the boredom and futility of Palestinian life now with images of the noble Palestinian past, fixed in a glossy book: an elderly couple in traditional dress, a stone house in ruins, ripe pomegranates hanging from a tree. [figure 13.2] The voice tells how the bored "we" of the title amused themselves by making meaningless measurements: a circle, a foot, an apple that becomes an orange (suggesting that measurements are untrustworthy); and then, measures of distances "more challenging and important to us": the distances between the cities of so-called peace negotiations, Rome, Geneva, Oslo, Sharm El Sheikh, the folly of the years of futile negotiation suggested by the increasing distance of the cities where they were carried out. figure 13.3]

Figure 13.2
Basma Alsharif, *We Began by Measuring Distance* (2009)

Figure 13.3
We Began by Measuring Distance

It appears that "we," the Palestinians, were in a druglike state, lulled by hope of nego-tiations, unable to seize on the right things to measure, what's important. Disorient-ingly, the "virgin forest" where "we" go to rest is not a forest at all but an aquarium; though the description of the forest—"A visitor gazing toward the ground / will often mistake dead trees in early stages of decay / for live trees"—might be a metaphor for the condition of occupied Palestine.

The hypnotic, entrancing images of coral soft as fur, gliding fish, and balletic jelly-fish that follow are indeed haptic, but in this narcotic condition, which is compounded by a grotesque-sounding waltz by 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, they seem to mock any idea of taking comfort in images. The mockery sharpens as the aquarium video gives way to a deadly slow-motion ballet of bombs falling on a city at night, resembling jellyfish in the extension of their tentacles, and the clouds of glowing smoke rising from the explo-sions. Over a very slow-motion shot of a woman running and falling to her knees, her face stricken with grief, the voice says, "We began to have the distinct feeling / that we had been lied to / that we / unfortunately / had not rested at all."

The effect for me is a rousing rejection of any notion of haptic healing. It suggests it's a mistake to go to images for comfort—neither crisp, fetishistic images of a now

unattainable past nor haptic images that draw the viewer close. Moreover, we need to be skeptical about information, for it is not neutral but expresses relations of power: measure an apple and it turns out to be an orange; measure a peace agreement and it turns out to be a capitulation.

However, when an image connects us to the information it enfolds, and that information in turn connects us to people and events—when it unfolds what had been hidden—we can receive this unfolding in our bodies, sometimes quite powerfully. I think this happens in *We Began by Measuring the Distance*. In the moment that it takes to realize that the dreamy images of underwater creatures have been overtaken by footage of explosions, our feeling of submission to the images becomes a terrible betrayal. This realization might hit you as a cold chill or a tingling of the spine. A mental operation— "these are bombs"—perhaps connected with other knowledge, given the date of the video, that they are Israeli bombs falling on Gaza in the brutal bombardment of December 2008. unfolds undeniably in the body. I think it makes viewers more sensitive to the footage of the weeping, fleeing Gazans, which would not happen if Alsharif only showed images of them, whether haptic or optical.

We Began by Measuring Distance despairs that images can do anything good for Palestinians. Handsome photographs of lost ways of life are devoid of meaning, mass-media images of Palestinian victims function like pornography, and haptic images are comforting pillows for the dying.

Moreover, Alsharif's harsh critique underscores that a viewer's affective response is not an end but a beginning. To actualize the video, a viewer needs to do cognitive work, study up, connect the place names and dates with more detailed histories of wars and negotiations, and then get involved in activism. (As I argue in chapter 15, affect resolves in adequate ideas.) For example, a viewer can join organizations that advocate for Palestinian rights, pressure her legal representatives to place sanctions on the state of Israel until it ends the illegal occupation and desists from war crimes, and engage in activism on more specific issues.

Many scholars over the decades have debated the ethics of mass-media images of suffering.[6] To simplify greatly, often a hierarchy is posited that implicitly or explicitly grants power to the photographer or filmmaker and person photographed. The spectator too is seen to have "power" over the person photographed. As Yaqub puts it, "In other words, images that seek only to inform can only ever leave the photographed persons at the mercy of the ethical positioning of their spectators."[7] This hierarchical view has loosened up in recent scholarship that emphasizes that images are constituted by a network of participants. Ariella Azoulay, whose approach Yaqub takes up in her examination of the works of El-Hassan, argues that photographs exist in a relationship between the person photographed, the photographer, the camera or other medium, and the recipient. Through a close study of the history of ownership and rights in which photographic practices developed, she emphasizes that the relations implicit in

photographs grant a degree of agency to the people photographed and a civic responsibility to the recipient.[8]

In a similar spirit, I propose that images gain existence by circulating, or being in motion. This understanding of an image (or indeed any other sign) partakes in the ethical relationships that Azoulay perceives to undergird a photograph. This theory is based on Charles Sanders Peirce's definition of the sign: "A sign … is something which stands to somebody for something in some capacity." To insert Peirce's technical terms, "A sign [or representamen] … is something which stands to somebody [an interpretant] for something [an object] in some capacity."[9] The original sign gives rise to a new sign, the interpretant, in the mind of the receiver. A couple of implications follow from this. First, interpretation is central in this semiotics: a sign represents something *to somebody*. Second, this is a processual, sociable theory of the sign. Signs are realized only in relation; they have to move, to circulate. Peirce calls this basic principle of connectivity *synechism*. A sign grows stronger through use as it "spreads among the peoples." I am suggesting, in the exact opposite of Baudrillard's argument about the simulacrum, that the more images circulate, the more real they get. Images constitute a connective tissue between their perceivers and their source. And finally, even though signs transform as they move further away from the original object, a germ of the original object always remains.

This theory of images in motion does confirm the phenomenon that El-Hassan critiques in her works and Alsharif laments in *We Began by Measuring Distance*, namely, that images can evolve to be interpreted in dominant ways, such as the objectifying shots of Palestinian misery on the TV news. But it asserts that the image itself is, in a way, innocent; it is not the image that does the violence but the ways in which it circulates. And furthermore, even an image that seems to immobilize and objectify its object can be interpreted in a new way. I like Peirce's theory of the sign because it suggests that if the person receiving it has the will and desire, she can reach deep into the sign, touch the original object, and retrace the path of its travels.[10] And then, of course, she can impart this newly enriched sign to others—indeed she has to if the sign is to live. The image-agnosticism of Alsharif's video permits such interpretations because she slows down the circulation of images so that we can see how they transform. The folkloric photograph of Palestinians passes under the eyes of bored Gazans, an idea of whose interpretation (irony, say) is then carried to the viewers of the video. By playing the news video in slow motion, Alsharif invites viewers to reach into the image and connect it to its source, to perceive the wailing woman more completely. At the same time she makes us aware of where the image has circulated, as one of hundreds of the December 2008 bombardment broadcast on news media, and invites us to interpret it differently. Then viewers may be moved to extend this interpretation into political action, in the ways I have suggested.

Let's carry on, equipped with this pro-image theory.

Images Make Connections

Another ambivalent reflection on the power of images for and against Palestinians, by an image maker who also cares deeply about the medium of his profession, offers a striking comparison to *We Began by Measuring Distance*. Abdel Salam Shehadeh's documentary *To My Father* (2008) is acutely aware of the way images circulate and attempts to redirect that circulation and reconnect images with their objects. His history of photography over several decades makes it possible to pinpoint when things went wrong, when images began to be used not by but against Palestinians. Shehadeh's father, Alhaj Salameh, operated a photographic portrait studio on Sharia al-Bahr, the street where all the photographers had their studios, in the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza from 1956 to 2002. After that the younger man, a professional videographer, took it over. *To My Father* observes the changes in Palestinian lives and Palestinian photographs over these decades. When his father began his studio practice, photographs were precious and few, and a means to communicate between loved ones. As a love song plays on an old phonograph, we get to see many of Salameh's carefully posed, shot, and printed 4-by-5-inch black-and white portraits from the 1950s and 1960s. Some of them are framed by flowers, hearts, and coffee cups. Shehadeh relates that his father would carefully retouch the girls' photos and give them a beauty spot. "Sometimes he would spend a whole day on one picture." [figure 13.4]

The filmmaker repeatedly evokes the time photography used to take to shoot, develop, print, and retouch, which intensified the desire for the picture. Customers anxiously waited for the print to be ready. "He mailed the photographs to loved ones waiting for them in Egypt and Jordan," Shehadeh says, emphasizing that waiting increases the photograph's value for the one who finally receives it. Shehadeh tells how when he was a schoolboy, Alhaj Salameh would arrive on his bicycle to carefully pose the boys and take their group photo and return in a week with the prints. The boys would look at each other's photos even though they were all the same and find something new in each print.

The care the photographer took over a photograph strengthened it, gave it "legs," prepared it to travel. Peirce's theory of the sign helps appreciate the will and desire operating at both the origin of the sign and its destination. Shehadeh remembers a portrait shoot, perhaps a compilation of such events that made an impression on him as a child. "I see her with her long loose hair and long pretty legs. She looks at us and at who the picture is going to. We all wait with fear to see how the picture will turn out."

In the course of the documentary, Elhaj Salameh returns to his studio, delighted to see his photographs again. "I photographed millions of people. Egypt, Saudi Arabia. *Ya lateef* ([oh my goodness]! Now I am unable to stand on my feet."

Figure 13.4
Abdel Salam Shehadeh, *To My Father* (2008)

Increasingly since the 1967 defeat, photographs have become instantaneous, plentiful, and used not among but against Palestinians for surveillance, propaganda, and martyrdom portraits. Palestinians became subjects not for their own but for others' photographs. Leafing through a handsome black-and-white photo book, the filmmaker remarks, "UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency] has turned us into photos and distributed them. We started to see ourselves in magazines and in their newsletters. Well dressed, getting vaccines and injections, drinking milk, and taking fish oil pills."

The UNWRA also used cinema to discipline Palestinian refugees. In *Gaza 36mm* (2012), discussed below, Khalil al-Mozian's mother remembers that the agency would erect a screen in the camp and "show movies on brushing your teeth." The organization that took on representing Palestinians to the rest of the world used cinema to treat Palestinians as barbarians who don't know how to clean their teeth. It seems a particular cruelty to show hygiene films to refugees who could have benefited more from beauty, pleasure, and vicarious adventure.

Ominous music takes over *To My Father* as the filmmaker relates that after 1967, "When soldiers invaded our homes, they would take photos by force, to arrest the people in them"—a new interpretation of the photographs that employed

Figure 13.5
To My Father

their indexicality in the most violent way. And of course, ID photos required rapid production. Shehadeh relates his astonishment when he first saw a Polaroid camera that could produce four photos promptly. "It was able to photograph all the people of Rafah in a single day."

With an anxious searching that is more than nostalgia, Shehadeh seeks in the old photographs for something that is lost. "Eyes used to be more beautiful. Not sure what's different now, the camera or the eyes." Now, crude, colorful martyr posters line the streets: we see a press cranking them out. [figure 13.5] There's a gulf between these propaganda pictures and the small, cherished portraits that Shehadeh's father used to make. He states an interesting wish: "Hopefully there will be one copy without a negative or an archive, for the sake of our children."

To My Father documents how photos were converted from loving communications among people who know each other to means of surveillance and spectacles. But Shehadeh retains hope that photos can be meaningful. He wants to slow the circulation of photographs so they can be treasured again. More than this, he desires to produce an imaginal image: one that might will a better Palestine into existence. "I want to photograph our country, add fine detail, give it a port and airport, light it up at night, open its borders."

Digital Materialities

Can digital media achieve the bodily, tactile qualities of analog works like Hatoum's *Measures of Distance*? Compared to the way that haptic cinema expresses the material qualities of the medium, it seems at first that digital cinema abandons materiality. But in fact its materiality is just harder to perceive. Digital video has made crisp, optical images the default visual mode, asking to be received mentally, as narrative and as information, more than physically, as bodily contact. Movies are often composed and lit in order to be legible on the small screens of computers and mobile phones,[11] in a viewing experience that exacerbates the informational and narrative capacities of the image. Some people (including, interestingly, people who were not around in the analog video days) yearn for the softness and tactility of analog video and small-gauge film. Digital filmmakers also push their media in order to create haptic images: some apply effects in postproduction;[12] others exploit the capacities of low-resolution digital video media, such as mobile phones. But most of the time, these low-resolution images are hard to see, and their sound is hard to hear. So it is more rewarding to "get an idea" of these works in terms of representation, narrative, and concepts than to engage with them sensuously.

Curators and critics of Arab independent and experimental cinema sometimes note that these works rely on storytelling more than on formal experimentation, in contrast to their Western counterparts. In part this is because they draw on the long Arabic tradition of storytelling. But it also reflects the fact that Arab experimental cinema came into fruition in the digital era. The decrease in formal experimentation also reflects the fact that "video art" has given way to "artists' video," a seemingly benign change of phrasing that in fact reflects the shift of the market for experimental media art from the cinema and film festivals to the gallery and biennial exhibitions (see chapter 1). More people making video are trained as visual artists, not as filmmakers. Visual artists working with video tend to draw on television and commercial cinema for precedents, not on the long tradition of experimental cinema.

Despite all this, it's still interesting to pay attention the material qualities of digital media. Some scholars assert that we are living in a "postmedium condition" in which digital media are independent of their platforms and thus cannot be thought of as material media.[13] But they can. Digital media rest on analog bases, as anybody who lives near a toxic dump of obsolete electronics knows—or anybody who endures the glitched image and sound of her distant loved ones on a poor Skype connection. Life is analog, and surely Palestinians, living in their lands and in diaspora, know this better than many other people do. The many kinds of software that support digital media are also material, have histories, and circulate in economies—as people who use pirated software know especially acutely. A materialist approach to media artworks takes into account the hardware, software, and networks in which they are produced and

circulated. In addition, digital media exhibit their materiality when they fail to perform properly, in signal loss, compression, and "glitch," a topic of chapter 12.

Stay Still and Be Beautiful or Circulate and Get Ugly …

The material properties of the array of digital video platforms mean the cameras are cheap and the files are easy to edit and, most of all, to embed in networks. Artists and activists can upload digital video and link to it, and people all over the world can access it—in principle, that is; in practice, the ease of doing all these things depends on reliable electricity and Internet connections, proprietary platforms, and other kinds of material support.

To upload digital files, people often compress them to a low resolution. As a result, the video that users see on the other end is kind of an audiovisual idea of the original. Reception via the Internet also contributes to the hard-to-perceive quality of digital media. Watching and listening to pirated media, downloading compressed files, and communicating on live video platforms, people get used to errors and low-resolution images. If downloaded videos are of such poor quality, is it any surprise that people receive them for their narrative or conceptual content? It's hard to appreciate the formal qualities of a work when you can barely see or hear it. More charitably, we can remember that in traditional storytelling, listeners create images in their imagination, and that is probably going on in the reception of audiovisually scanty works too.

A stunning counterexample to the small-screen trend is Khalil al-Mozian's *Gaza 36mm*. Though Gazans get images from the outside world through satellite TV and the Internet, al-Mozian and his collaborators, Mohammed and Ahmad Abu Nasser, better known as Tarzan and Arab, lament the fact that they have no cinemas. Since the late 1980s, Gaza's ten movie houses have all closed, many of them destroyed by fundamentalists. Gazans long to see films on the big screen: to see figures as big as themselves and hear clear sound. I also discuss this Gazan *Cinema Paradiso* in chapter 8 as one of a body of Arab films that try to reconstruct the glory days of movie houses and explain why they fell silent. Here I focus on how *Gaza 36mm* operates in the tension between the formal qualities and circulability of Palestinian cinema.

A movie that laments the absence of large screens in Gaza, *Gaza 36mm* demands to be appreciated on the large screen itself, with its dynamic camerawork, complex staging, intricate spatial compositions, and rhythmic montage. Al-Mozian studied filmmaking in St. Petersburg, and maybe this Russian training inspired his interest in working the *mise-en-scène*, the camera's optical milieu, and the edit in a plastic, almost sculptural way. The narrow alleys of Gaza are shot in a tender way with loving details of people napping outside the house, laundry hanging, and the familiar tangles of electrical wires. Inside the abandoned movie houses, the camerawork and editing are much more lively, staccato and insistent, as though attesting to an imaginative life

Figure 13.6
Khalil al-Mozian, *Gaza 36mm* (2012)

now muffled in Gaza since the theaters closed. [figure 13.6] The camera quickly pans tattered movie posters including *Lorna Doone*, *The Birds*, *Persona*, *The Message*—this last one, a respectful depiction of the campaign of the Prophet Mohammed, surely a jab at religious scholars. It attends to old projection equipment scarred by fire and shreds of once-opulent (and locally produced) fabrics. Adnan Abu Beed, the former proprietor of the grand old Amer cinema, kicks through a dusty tangle of 35mm film.

As well as on camerawork and editing, *Gaza 36mm* thrives on performance. The film treats us to scenes of Tarzan and Arab creating the elaborate *mises-en-scène* for their movie posters: they snarl, chomp on cigars, and swig from whiskey bottles; there's lots of fake blood and an awfully convincing hanging. Al-Mozian, Tarzan, and Arab perform in the pro-filmic space, sticking their heads out of the former projection booths and sitting watching the empty space where the screen used to be, in shots disconnected by jump cuts. Clever montages, like a shot of al-Mozian getting his head shaved followed by bald and wigged mannequin heads in a shop window, attest to his affection for the visual joke.

These and other shots that inventively bring the old cinemas to life are intercut with interviews of former proprietors, local historians, and scholars. One explains that the cinema came under threat with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists in Gaza. This explanation occurs over formal compositions on the ground of shadows and light, painted graphics, and carefully placed objects such as a halved apple. The primitive effectiveness of these shots alludes to the origins of cinema, as though proclaiming that cinema will always rise again. And it does: the film concludes with the first screening at a new cinema club.

Ironically, Tarzan and Arab are more famous on the visual art scene for their posters of imagined movies than al-Mozian is on the film scene for this supremely actualized film. Tarzan and Arab's project Gazawood, a series of posters for nonexistent movies, has been exhibited widely and received awards. In 2010 the A. M. Qattan Foundation's

Young Artist of the Year Award allowed them to realize their first film, *Colorful Journey*, for which they relied on al-Mozian's expertise.[14] In 2013 they realized their second short video, *Condom Lead* (2013), a parody, from a script by al-Mozian, of the Israeli attack Gaza in 2008 called Operation Cast Lead. This fourteen-minute work was in competition in Cannes in 2013. I mean no criticism of Tarzan and Arab's smart and charmingly inventive work, and I don't share Omar Kholeif's opinion that they are naively playing into neocolonial fantasies of the helpless Palestinian.[15] However, Kholeif points out that Tarzan and Arab's success has overshadowed the more nuanced work of other Palestinian artists, and it seems unfair that their conceptual art project should receive so much more attention than al-Mozian's richly realized and audiovisually complex feature film. Chalk it up to the relative ease by which conceptual art travels. However, as Jad Abi Khalil of Beirut DC, a strong advocate for *Gaza 36mm*, said to me regretfully,[16] perhaps the lukewarm success of the film is due to documentary audiences' low tolerance for audiovisual experimentation.

Despite the long complaint I've just made that aesthetics disappear in small-screen, networked media, the good side of uploaded video may just outweigh the bad. The materiality of digital video expresses itself most crucially in the way it circulates, or doesn't circulate. Arab independent media art is not well distributed. The majority of the works I write about in this book are very difficult to get hold of. Some artists have European or North American distributors, but many self-distribute, including by uploading their work to Vimeo or YouTube, so that viewers can access it online. Proprietary, economic, and environmental problems arise from these conduits, as discussed in chapter 1 but media artists are finding ways around the first two of them at least. The fact that artists and activists can reach viewers by uploading their work is revolutionary. Bashir Makhoul argues that this capacity is of prime importance for Palestinian video artists. Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, and especially in Gaza, are brutally immobilized by Israeli policing and the apartheid wall. But being able to transmit their work online, Makhoul argues, not only reaches audiences—both around the world and nearby on the other side of the wall—but also constitutes the identity of the Palestinian nation:

What I mean by identity is a process of transmission, constantly in a state of becoming and, ironically, Palestinians have been forced by circumstances of their location to embrace this. What I contend is emerging is a form of national location whose co-ordinates are found not just in historical territory but also and more productively in de-territorialised processes of transmission.[17]

Makhoul's galvanizing contention envisions a Palestinian transnational identity that can overpower the borders and laws that would keep Palestinians in place.

The material properties of digital video, especially its capacities to be compressed, uploaded, and downloaded, are alive and well as part of the aesthetics of Palestinian video today. But they are not especially visual properties or audible ones. Visual haptics

have given way to information-based media and to network connectivity, with its haptic accidents.

Network Media Entangle People in Networks of Stories

Syrian curator Abir Boukhari, in her program for the expansive Arab Shorts series organized by the Goethe-Institut Cairo from 2008 to 2011, points out that storytelling was always a networked medium:

In his role as a story-maker, the storyteller uses his words to weave diverse images and emotions and send them into our imagination, creating long-lasting ideas and images in our minds that are occasionally resurrected in the form of lived reactions. In this way, the listener becomes the storyteller and begins to compose a tale joined to his own life. Thus does the story branch out to permeate people's daily lives. The imagination becomes part of reality, woven by the fantasies of the storytellers and their listeners over the years.[18]

The linear story is a fairly recent invention, arriving with the eighteenth-century European novel and dominating Western culture, and then world culture, for a couple of hundred years. Nonlinear narratives are much older. Religious books, for example, are databases to be retrieved selectively and interpreted, generating additional databases of commentary. Storytelling is interactive, each story linked to a database of more stories, as Grahame Weinbren writes.[19] These stories loop, starting over with variations; they embed other stories; they respond to the demands of users. Storytellers themselves are databases, performatively retrieving and connecting stories in response to the desires of their listeners. *The Thousand and One Nights*, a set of Persian and Indian stories compiled in tenth-century Iraq, is a nonlinear, database-driven narrative. Shahrazad, who pulls all these stories together, tells her husband an enticing new story each night, like a looping algorithm, to forestall his threat to kill her the next morning.

In all these ways, as Weinbren points out, digital media correspond to long histories of storytelling. Now people can also upload videos, either complete works or fragments, into a mutual online storytelling database, to which people make alterations and add their own stories on video and social media websites. The swirl of stories creates, or at least has the potential to create, a kind of tactile quilt of communal memory and imagination.

Because Palestinians with foreign passports have much more mobility in Israel and the Occupied Territories, it is often much easier for them to exhibit and distribute the work abroad. Saed Andoni's documentary *A Number Zero* (2002) takes place entirely in a barbershop in Andoni's old Bethlehem neighborhood. Andoni is home from London to shoot his graduation film, just in time for the Israeli army's invasion of Bethlehem. When he visits the neighborhood barber shop, the mood is both tense and relaxed. All conversation leads back to the invasion and political situation, yet the men in the

shop, at ease with Andoni and his camera, create a microworld where all the energies of suffering, mutual affection, outrage, and resistance converge within the safety of its walls.

Andoni uploaded *A Number Zero* to YouTube so that anybody can see it. It doesn't look very good: in the low light of the barber shop, people's features blur into foggy pixels and details vanish. But watching this low-resolution version, you can feel the presence of other people watching it, including people back in Bethlehem and Palestinians in other towns who can't easily travel to Bethlehem due to Israeli roadblocks and visa restrictions. Uploaded, *A Number Zero* makes a connection among people who, though they live in close proximity, cannot meet. [figure 13.7]

Information-based media draw individuals into networks. Interestingly, the subjective effects are similar to those of haptic images. Interacting in networks—especially in those that they feel personally connected to, like social media sites—people are drawn so close that distinctions between subject and object break down. Networks organize people's subjectivity on the surface, not in depth. In *Enfoldment and Infinity*, I wrote, "A

Figure 13.7
Saed Andoni, *A Number Zero* (2002)

proliferation of abstract lines gives rise to haptic space. If those abstract lines consist of computers' connectivity, then the haptic space they produce would be the network. Are networks the new haptic space?"[20]

No and yes. Networks do have the haptic qualities of making people interdependent and drawing them out of themselves. They permit nonhierarchical political organization. Like haptic images, "networks disperse control and organize subjectivity not in depth but at the surface, for it is our surfaces that interact and 'interface' with others. … Networks, the media of grassroots political organization, dissolve subjectivity at the same time that they reinforce connectivity."[21] But as we know, the networked media of the Internet became instruments of surveillance and control with dismaying rapidity. The visionary ideas of the Internet pioneers were quickly colonized for profit and military motives. By our time, networks are a means of surveillance and control as much as, or more than, nonhierarchical media for grassroots organization. Far from liberating people, networks "create the conditions for a new mode of sovereignty," as Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker point out, adding that networks urge, "Express yourself! Output some data!" easily feeding self-expression into a means of further control.[22] By now we know that the seemingly generous interfaces of Web 2.0–based corporations like Facebook and Google, encouraging people to upload, comment, interact, and reveal more about themselves, act as massive data farms that extract information from us, like the conversion of humans into tranquilized, fetal batteries in *The Matrix*.

If networks are to be the new haptic space, then the relationships they create would have to be relationships that extend individual subjectivity into social actions in physical space. How do people receive network-based movies? Do we receive these works cognitively, as information to be processed, or perceptually, or affectively? I suggested that perceptual properties are not so important. Nevertheless, affect does accompany the movement of unfolding. When an image connects us to the information it enfolds, and that information in turn connects us to people, to things that happened—when it unfolds what had been hidden—we can receive this in our bodies, sometimes quite powerfully. Then we can put what we have learned into action. This dynamic occurs very much in the same way that storytelling does; it just has an informational twist. So to conclude this inquiry, yes, network media are haptic to the extent that they change the recipient, who then takes action to make change in the world. Makhoul describes this process in his confident appraisal of the nation-building capacity of Palestinian networked media art. I would add that this work mobilizes not only Palestinians in diaspora but all viewers who care enough to fight for Palestinian rights.

Images in Motion and Facts on the Ground

Shehadeh documents that Palestinians' precious photographs were appropriated by Israeli forces in order to identify people whom they could then locate, arrest, and

imprison. Outside Palestine and Israel, other Arabs' photographs have been used against them too, as in Egypt, where the "temporary" military government used social media posts by Tahrir revolution activists to locate, arrest, and imprison them. These dark facts are enough to turn the most ardent image lover into an iconoclast.

Surveillance media provide another way for Israeli forces to intimidate Palestinians and Arab Israelis. Israeli surveillance gets spoofed in Arab cinema, as in the funny scene in Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* where the turret of an Israeli tank, operated by an unseen soldier, rotates to follow every move of Nazarenes who are just talking on the phone or taking out the trash. Suleiman also gives us the pleasure of watching his character accidentally destroy the tank with a random apricot pit tossed in its direction. But the humor of this scene lies in the cruel imbalance of power that *Divine Intervention* jovially disavows. Sherif Waked also makes a clever joke of surveillance in his well-loved *Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* (2003), in a fashion show for men that suggests elegant ways to expose one's torso in order to prove one is not hiding a bomb. But *Chic Point* pairs this amusing sequence with documentation of armed Israeli checkpoint soldiers making Palestinian men hoist their long thobe to reveal their naked midsections—an everyday humiliation that reiterates that power is on the side of vision. Surveillance is treated more darkly in Hany Abu Assad's *Omar* (2013). Mossad, the Israeli secret service forces, forces the protagonist to inform on his comrades. Israeli intelligence gathers information not only on suspects but also on innocent Palestinians, including details of their health, sexual preferences, infidelities, and financial problems, in order to blackmail them into collaborating.[23] Omar's contact in the secret service presents him with incriminating photographs and recordings of his meetings with them. Mossad seems almost magically capable of documenting Omar's slightest action and most intimate conversation.

Surveillance media rely not on images as such but on the capacity to extract information from images.[24] Information then becomes operable, especially when it includes spatial coordinates, as with surveillance video. The Israeli Defense Forces' surveillance technology is probably the best in the world. Many of these technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles and all-terrain robots, are operated remotely, disembodying the surveillant eye but delivering surveillance information to operators on the ground. Robots "could also potentially carry remotely detonated explosives, adding a more active dimension to its observational role," as *Army Technology* observes coolly.[25]

Meanwhile, a number of works emphasize what Palestinians are able to see and hear even though they are immobilized or incarcerated. At a literal level, the 2002 compilation *Palestinian Windows* consists of five condensed poems consisting of what the five filmmakers, Ala' Abu-Ghoush, Ahmad Habash, Esmail Habbash, Dima Abu-Ghoush, and Mohammad Jaber, confined indoors by curfews during the long siege of the West Bank and Gaza, observed at the window. One can remark bleakly that such movies meet Gilles Deleuze's criterion for the time-image, namely, that when a character is

unable to act, he becomes a "seer," and perception interweaves with memory and hallucination. In fact, some of the most bitterly visionary contemporary Palestinian videos are made by people who are immobile—not only in the fact that they cannot travel, but, as Sobhi al-Zobaidi argues, "more essentially in their inability to reaffirm their identities as they relate to space." Al-Zobaidi analyzes works that take immobility as the starting point on a terrifying trip into hallucination, paranoia, and sexual perversion, including Tawfik Abu Wael's *Diary of a Male Whore* (2001) and his chilling feature film *Atash* (Thirst, 2003); Annemarie Jacir's *Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003); Nahed Awwad's *The Fourth Room* (2004); and Sameh Zubi's *Be Quiet* (2005).[26] Deleuze's prototype for the cinematic seer is L. B. Jeffries, the photographer in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). Immobilized in a wheelchair with a cast on his leg, Jeffries is "reduced as it were to a pure optical situation," and his reduction to a spectator within the film opens the film outward, implicating the spectators.[27] Of course, there is also a character within the film capable of action: when Jeffries thinks he has witnessed a murder across the courtyard of his Manhattan apartment block, it is his girlfriend, Lisa, who puts herself in danger to investigate.

Even the most brilliant political film is no match when the state of Israel keeps establishing "facts on the ground" in the form of illegal settlements, bombardments that may constitute war crimes, economic barriers, and restrictions on Palestinians' everyday movements. How can images in motion give rise to material change? For an answer, I turn to a work of Palestinian countersurveillance, *Al Jaar Qabla Al Dar* (2009), produced by the Mumbai-based collective CAMP: its title is borrowed from the Arabic proverb, "Choose the neighbor before the house." Invited to participate in the Jerusalem Show, curated by Jack Persekian and Nina Montmann, CAMP, which often works with both CCTV and collective production, brought joystick-operated pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) cameras commonly used in surveillance to East Jerusalem and lent them to eight Palestinian families. The families used the cameras to observe activities in their neighborhood while remaining invisible themselves. In their own performance of closed-circuit surveillance, they operated the cameras from their windows, using their capacity to zoom in at extremely high resolution (up to 250 times), and viewed the footage on their televisions. The resulting video functions as a performance documentation as well as a finished work. On the soundtrack, you can hear their comments and conversations with CAMP member Shaina Anand. Anand explains that they did not need an Israeli filming permit because no filming took place outside.[28] *Al Jaar Qabla Al Dar* utterly reverses the usual surveillant overexposure of Palestinians and Arab Israelis, allowing them to remain invisible while enjoying unprecedented visual control of their surroundings. CAMP uses the wonderfully detailed archiving platform on Pad.ma to share the raw footage, transcripts, and descriptions. [figure 13.8]

The first sequence is not anonymous: it is shot from the last remaining Palestinian home in the Moroccan Quarter, where Haifa Khaldi lives and manages the Khaldi

Figure 13.8
CAMP, *Al Jaar Qabla Al Dar* (2009), footage on https://pad.ma.

Library. We hear Anand request, "Because there are so many layers between your memory and the history of this site, start as far back as you have a memory." First in English, then switching to Arabic, Khaldi explains the history of the Moroccan Quarter, which the Israelis demolished in 1967. She operates the camera, panning and zooming into the square below her window "Over here you can see the Jews praying. It is Shabbat for them today. The women are on one side and the men are on the other side."

Another resident uses the camera to survey a neighborhood where the apartheid wall was built, separating East and West Jerusalem. He shows that the wall created a dead zone in the crowded city: local businesses were cut off, and people abandoned their houses and moved in order to keep their East Jerusalem IDs. The speaker urges his colleague who is translating to remember every detail. Another woman surveys the barrier wall, the mass of razor wire on top of it, and the Israeli surveillance tower. She zooms in on the home of her cousin whom she can no longer visit. Explaining that her house is now inside the wall, her best friend's outside, she pans the camera on zoom, sights set into the distance, as though traveling by vision alone. "They have closed us in completely. … Even our neighbors we are unable to speak with, except through the windows."

Several of the families from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah were only recently expelled from their houses, which Israeli settlers now occupy. They involved CAMP in

their protest against the confiscation and were willing to be identified. A member of the Hanoon family, surrounded by the voices of boys, uses the camera to observe the home her family lived in for three generations, her garden, the satellite and solar panels her father and uncle installed, the veranda her husband built. She shows the words they wrote on the exterior wall, *lan narhal* (We will not leave), before Israeli soldiers broke into their house on August 5, 2009, at 5:00 a.m. With the camera zoomed in at 220 times, we can see lemons hanging from her lemon tree; she complains the settlers have not watered the tree for the sixty-one days since they occupied the house. With disgusted fascination, the whole family watches a settler taking in her laundry on their former rooftop and discover another settler in red beard and yarmulke entering their front gate. They are frustrated that they can't see into the house.

Then—a performance for surveillance camera! At sixteen times magnification, the sister of the woman operating the camera appears in front of the confiscated houses, glances up toward the camera, then elaborately peers in at the front gate of her own former house. More performances follow in the video observations of the Ghawi family as the camera observes their relatives sitting outside their own former home, leisurely chatting as though it were a peaceful afternoon and not a political sit-in.

The countersurveillers pay close attention to the Israeli surveillance apparatus of towers and cameras, and also to their enforcement apparatus. Haifa Khaldi, surprised to see a large group of Israeli soldiers assembling and testing their weapons, begins to laugh nervously. "If only they knew, that we are here watching them and we are seeing them this way, oh God ... it would be really bad for me ... I am going to be interrogated." One of the Hanoon boys from Sheikh Jarrah, narrating in English, zooms in on the gun of a settler leaving his former home and the permanently stationed police van. Later, Anand tells me, "Sharihan, the spirited teenage operator of the Hanoon camera, went on to go on UN visits to the United States as a spokesperson against the settler activity in Sheikh Jarrah."[29] In the same sequence, one of the men jokes that they have become "Palestinian Mossad." The woman warns him, "Everything you say is recorded—be careful." She may be joking too, but their comments show the depth of Palestinian self-censorship and the awareness that images and sounds can easily be translated into executable information.

As they peep at their former homes, disparage the changes the settlers have made and the state of their lemon trees, and exclaim excitedly when they spot one of the interlopers, the hidden observers show the affective side of surveillance. This is especially so when children are operating the camera: they love to zoom in and then pan wildly, trying to follow the interloper, and the resulting blurry image figure their desire rather than representing their target.

Mostly, though, the footage together with their commentary is extremely precise, making *Al Jaar Qabla Al Dar* a historical micromap, spiraling out from the center of the city in the old Moroccan Quarter, of Israel's illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. Israel's

actions have turned neighbor against neighbor, as in the mutual surveillance documented in Abu Assad's *Omar*, deprived Arab Israelis of their sovereignty even in the microterritory of the neighborhood, and replaced physical neighborhoods with an informational terrain of surveillance. *Al Jaar Qabla Al Dar* also fragments physical space into information, but it is counterinformation, precisely documenting Israeli abuses of the law. In a crucial difference from Israeli surveillance, the Palestinian families do not have an armed presence on the ground to enforce the laws.

In this way, the *Rear Window* comparison remains apt: the Palestinian families are Jeffries, observing a murder but incapable of intervening from their immobilized vantage point. Hitchcock anticipated the translation of social relations into information, and there's no going back to a simpler time, though *Rear Window* does end with all the neighbors happy and the murderer in jail. Images circulate by becoming valued as knowledge to be executed. The character of Lisa, of course, is us, the audience. We cinephiles may be image lovers, like Lisa, the fashion designer, but like her, we can act when people are in danger.

Palestinian media artists and their supporters struggle tenaciously to produce films and videos and keep them alive and circulating. These works have that haptic quality of almost making contact: they arouse sympathy, move imaginations, and help mobilize international support. But the fight for Palestinian sovereignty finally requires bodily contact. Images in motion, like the Palestinian views examined here, really reach their receivers when we take up the obligation to act on them.