

# The Present against the Past and the Future: Reclaiming the present as a strategy of cultural resistance in Post-War Lebanon

## Abstract

*The aim of this article is to show that the present is the temporality of cultural and political resistance in the context of civil wars. The second aim is to show that political revolutions can only become Great Revolutions that bring in a new system of values if they are coupled with a cultural revolution. The main argument claims that such cultural revolution will be itself in return nothing but the affirmation of the manifest dimension of the revolution as such, i.e. of the civil war. In that sense aesthetics is called forth to complete history and the revolutionary awareness given that only aesthetics can be the science of the manifest presence of the civil war. The method followed will focus on exposing the aesthetics of the civil war developed by artists and thinkers witnessing such a civil war. After such exposition these aesthetical systems will be placed in opposition to other thinkers that tried to grapple with the thorny issues of the advent of a new social order stemming out from revolutions and civil wars. Hence the article is divided in three parts: first a summary of the aesthetics of the civil war as exposed by Walid Sadek, followed by the aesthetics of the undead developed by Jalal Toufic, and last the position of these two aesthetics in vis a vis with authors such as Hegel, Marx, Castoriadis, Dardot and Laval as to the question of the advent of a new world order.*

**Keywords:** Civil war, Revolution, Aesthetics, Sadek, Toufic

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### **Abstrakt**

Namen članka je pokazati, da je sedanost časovnost kulturnega in političnega odpora znotraj konteksta državljanskih vojn. Drugi cilj je pokazati da lahko politične revolucije postanejo velike revolucije, ki prinašajo nov sistem vrednot le, če so povezane s kulturno revolucijo. Glavni argument je, da takšna kulturna revolucija sama po sebi ne bo v zameno za nič kot potrditev manifestne razsežnosti revolucije kot take, tj. državljanske vojne. V tem smislu je estetika poklicana, da dopolni zgodovino in revolucionarno zavest glede na to, da je lahko le estetika znanost manifestirane prisotnosti državljanske vojne. Uporabljena metoda se bo osredotočila na izpostavljanje estetike državljanske vojne, ki so jo razvili umetniki in misleci priče državljanske vojne. Kasneje bodo ti estetski sistemi postavljeni proti drugim mislecem, ki so se skušali spoprijeti s kočljivimi vprašanji prihoda vojne novega družbenega reda, ki izhaja iz revolucij in državljanskih vojn. Zato so je članek razdeljen na tri dele: najprej povzetek estetike državljanske vojne, kot jo je razkril Walid Sadek, sledi estetika nemrtvih, ki jo je razvil Jalal Toufic, na koncu pa je predstavljen položaj teh dveh estetik v odnosu do Heglom, Marxom, Castoriadisom, Dardotom in Lavalom glede vprašanja o prihodu novega svetovnega reda.

**Ključne besede:** Državljska vojna, revolucija, estetika, Sadek, Toufic

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## Walid Sadek: aesthetics as making present the presence of excessive materiality

We can say that the whole work of Walid Sadek<sup>1</sup> is an effort to show that the Lebanese civil war generates specific lived experiences. In order to think properly this war, we are invited with Sadek to reflect on and create concepts proper to that lived experience, hence we need an aesthetics of

<sup>1</sup> Walid Sadek, born in 1966, he is a Lebanese artist and critical thinker that focuses his work on the complexity of the experience and politics pervading the context of post-war Lebanon, <https://www.aub.edu.lb/fas/faah/people/Pages/sadek.aspx>

civil war. It remains that the tendency to import concepts from the “East” or from the “West”, from “tradition” or from “modernity”, is a very strong and well-established habit of thought. Such habit is itself backed up by the dominant political discourses that claim themselves to be the spokesmen of modernity and its promised future, or of the tradition and its venerable past. To resist such tendencies, one has then to work, to labor, to make an effort in order not to be carried away by such binaries. To achieve that Sadek is going to organize his aesthetical system into six labors: the first, the labor of mourning, deals with the problem of the traces of violence; the second, the labor of missing deals with the problem of the disappeared; the third, the labor of forgetting, deals with the problem of memory and commemoration; the fourth, the labor of seeing, deals with the problem of the way we see in a civil war context; the fifth, the labor of witnessing, deals with the problem of witnessing violence; and last the sixth, the labor of the ruin to come, deals with the problem of inhabiting such a context<sup>2</sup>. In what follows I will reconstruct some of the arguments of Sadek pertaining to these labors by stressing on the tripartite structure with which he organizes his essays: an argument for the tenants of the past, another for those speaking in the name of the future, and last Sadek’s position as reclaiming the present.

The labor of mourning addresses the problem of the traces of violence. Sadek shows that these traces are an excessive presence because they can’t be neutralized by some historical or conceptual rationale: witnessing one’s destroyed neighborhood fills one with an experience that can’t be reduced to any political or historical explanation (Sadek 2007a). It is because such experience is in excess to any ready-to-hand concepts that it is unconscious but also, for that same reason, that it calls for a conceptual creation to be able to be apprehended as such. Indeed, the available tendencies in relation to these traces is either to perceive them as a mere rubble that needs to be wiped out in order to move on and rebuild the city, such as in the SOLIDERE<sup>3</sup> project, or to perceive them as a mere residue, a material left over, of the glory of the heydays of a mythical Beirut inviting us to indefinitely live in a bygone dematerialized life that we will never be able to concretize again<sup>4</sup>. In order to resist such tendencies Sadek is going

2 A sum of his texts and approach can be found in his book, *The Ruin to Come: Essays form a Protracted-War* (Sadek 2016).

3 SOLIDERE is a Lebanese joint stock company launched by Prime Minister Hariri in 1994 to rebuild the destroyed city center of Beirut. This company ended up causing more destruction than the war itself given that the vision of Hariri consisted in a brand-new city center that just saw in the traces of the war a cumbersome obstacle.

4 To recall the mythical past of Beirut is for example the position of Nazih Khater. When

to reclaim the experience of this excessive materiality as relevant and the ground from which a new present temporality can be opened. To conceptualize such experience Sadek calls for the experience we have when we *mourns in the presence of the corpse* (Sadek 2012b). The corps of some relative or beloved stands here as an analog of the traces of the war and opens the present temporality of the experience of its excessive presence. Such experience in the presence of the corpse can't be reduced to the memories we have of the deceased, nor to the time that will follow his inhumation (Sadek 2012b). Sadek shows that this poignant experience stands as what is common among those witnessing the traces of violence and can become the living ground for stitching a community torn by violence. Indeed, a difficult conversation issue while the community is gathered in the presence of the corpse, developing a peculiar capacity to speak<sup>5</sup>, but also, a capacity of sight proper to the perception of ruins and corpses<sup>6</sup>. These capacities are going to individualize the community undergoing such experience and generate a culture stemming from that experience.

The second labor, the labor of missing, is concerned with the issue of the disappeared<sup>7</sup>. The missing also comply with the definition of a presence in excess. Such excess results from the fact that the poignant experience that the relatives of the disappeared go through is such that it can't be reduced to the narrative of his whereabouts or even erased by the event of his return<sup>8</sup>. When faced with the disconcerting episode of disappearance the available tendencies are first to search for the disappeared by all means and try to provoke his return, second, and after repeated failures, to fall into a melancholic life that lingers with the memory of the disappeared,

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faced with the destruction of Hamra, Khater dematerialized Hamra street to turn it into an attitude, a mythical style, that can't be reduced to its geography. We can see how distant Sadek is from such attitude that claims the past, a mythical past in this case. (Sadek 2007a)

5 Sadek describes the difficult conversations one has when sitting in a funeral while the corpse is still lying there. Such conversation is interrupted by heavy silences, it tries to establish a dialogue, but the dialogue is always interrupted. It remains that the few exchanged words carry all the weight of that experience and end up tying the friends of the deceased together (Sadek 2012b).

6 Seeing by way of death and in near blindness are two ways of perceiving ruins and corpses. These modalities of sight will be covered in the labor of seeing.

7 17 000 people went missing in the Lebanese civil-war, and until today no one is able to know their whereabouts, nor if they are dead or alive.

8 Sadek commenting on Salhab's *Phantom Beirut* (1998), considers that the return of Khalil, the main character that was reported as disappeared during the civil war, doesn't erase the fact of his disappearance. On the contrary, Khalil is portrayed as an excessive presence, a character that can't reintegrate the normal course of his past life. His bringing back to the world will require a work on the material presence of his absence, a work without which he is doomed to disappear again (Sadek 2012a).

and third, to decide to move on, forget, and build a new life worth living by declaring the disappeared dead. Against such attitudes that try to evade the experience of the void left over by the disappeared, Sadek invites us to inhabit the temporality opened by the event of the disappearance and to feel its peculiar form of presence. Such a dwelling requires to develop new capacities, capacities pertaining to entering into a soliloquy<sup>9</sup> with the disspread, to open up a dialogue and invent a form of speech where the disappeared accompany us in our daily lives even if he is not physically there (Sadek 2012a). The disappeared leave then behind them a material in excess, their absence is excessively present, and it is only by sculpting this material and by inhabiting the temporality it opens that one will be able to live such an experience without the need to obliviously move forward nor to melancholically fall into the past. This capacity to soliloquize with the disappeared and to make them present with us creates a new community sharing such a capacity, a capacity that is itself based on the experience of living in the shared time opened by such excessive absence. Absence is by that transfigured into a positive substance that is worked by a community in the making<sup>10</sup>.

A third labor is the labor of forgetting that consists in dealing with memory in the context of a protracted civil war. Here again Sadek presents his argument in a tripartite form: memory can either be mobilized to dwell on the past by commemorating heroes and opening on a future of vengeance, or it can become oblivious, call for some mythical fetishized past and promise brighter futures, and last it can be mobilized to inhabit the present. The first posture is represented by an attitude that values commemoration, regardless of the political affiliation of those undertaking such commemorations. Sadek shows for example that after the 1958 confrontations both the left coalition and the right-wing coalition were quick to erect monuments<sup>11</sup> for their deceased in order not to forget in view of taking ven-

9 Sadek illustrates this capacity to speak to absence with the last scene of *Beirut, The Encounter* (1981) by Borhane Alaouié, where we see Haydar speaking alone to his beloved Zeina, now that he realized that she is gone and he will never meet her again (Sadek 2012a).

10 In his artwork, *The Wreck of Hope* (2011), Sadek gives substance to the negative by showing that absence can also be a material presence. He comments on that by saying: "to make of the negative an experience in itself that is not lamentingly compared to a lost substantive positive" (Sadek and Fattouh 2012).

11 These monuments erected in 1960 are the Beq'ata memorial garden commemorating the heroes of the left and the Mazzacurati monument commemorating those of the right. The Beq'ata memorial consists of a garden decorated revolutionary slogans and houses the tombs of a number of the heroes who fell in the 1958 insurrection. The construction and the design of the memorial were under the guidance of Kamal Junblat which was the leading figure in the insurrections of 1958 against the state power of Sham'un. The Mazzacurati monument is the one that we can still find until this day in the Martyr's Square in Beirut and it aims at recalling the power of the State.

geance. These monuments mobilize then a linear historic time stretched between battles to remember and battles to be won (Sadek 2016, 179–83). The second attitude is one that simply claims the future in an oblivious way disregarding the weight of the violent events and the memories that still hang over a place torn by a protracted civil war. This attitude consists in celebrating the new, a celebration that reduces the past to itemized cultural traits pertaining to heritage, “tradition” and the like<sup>12</sup>. Against these two tendencies Sadek argues that we need to give another orientation to memory in order for us to apprehend the experience of remembering in places which are haunted by violent memories and saturated by traces of violence. Such traces and memories turn these places into excessive presences given that neither the historical heroic narratives nor obliviousness are able to cast away the ghosts and the poignant experience that seize us when entering homes, discotheques, public gardens, underground parkings, etc. and knowing that these places were places of torture, kidnappings, murder and might still shelter traces of such a past<sup>13</sup>. To confront such weight, the first gesture would be then to unearth the traces of violence in order to bring out what is weighing beneath the surface, while the second gesture will consist in re-composing these traces in order to trigger the workings of memory. The living work of memory doesn't only preserve or forget, but, argues Sadek, it can be a work of distortion, partial erasure, decomposition and re-composition, and hence a whole labor of forgetting. Sadek champions the installation of Ziad Abillama, *Where are the Arabs?* (1992) as mobilizing excavation and forgetting. This work is made of pieces excavated from the place of the installation, fragments of found bomb shells, tank seats, broken plastic chairs, etc. that hint back to the war, without pinning an event to commemorate nor falling into a fetishized oblivious “heritage”. These recomposed fragments activate the memories of the viewers, each remembering personal experiences, haunting stories, and the rumors that surround this place (Sadek 2003). Memory is hence mobilized as an active faculty that can apprehend the weight of these places, a weight that is experienced as an excessive presence that needs to be

12 Sadek shows that *The Archaic Procession* (1992–1997), by Nadim Karam, best represents this neoliberal attitude reducing the weight of history and memory to mere multicultural archetypes moving towards the future (Sadek 2018).

13 In his artwork, *Half-Man* (1995), Sadek shows that the Sanayeh Garden, one of the public gardens of Beirut, is still inhabited by the unfinished story of Tarraf, a man accused of murder and hanged in the garden on the orders of the then not officially president Amin Gemayel. The work of Sadek disperses fragments of the body of Tarraf, made of card boards, evoking his memory and the way he still haunts the garden. His position on that work are commented on in *A place at last* (Sadek 2007a), *Tranquility is made in pictures* (Sadek and Fattouh 2012), and *From excavation to dispersal* (Sadek 2003).

modulated and distorted through the labor of forgetting in order to reintegrate the present of the living. Heroic histories and liberal obliviousness are incapable of feeling such weight and have a tendency to overlook such experience. What commemoration and obliviousness overlook is the materiality of memories. These memories are material in the sense that they have an excessive weight that we experience, but also because they offer themselves as a material to work on. Haunting memories are then called forth as a material, while the activity of memory is used as a tool to sculpt such a material in an enduring collective present<sup>14</sup>.

The fourth labor is the labor of seeing that deals with the ways we can see destruction, ruins, haunted places, cadavers and the traces of violence in general. Here the argument also unfolds into a tripartite form: a first modality of sight will be the one of a well-organized sensory-motor perception, a modality coupled with classicism and academic art, the second will be a modality of sight characterized by fascination and the portraiture of the future, last the position of Sadek that advocates for a time proper for seeing, a seeing that dwells in the present of the excessive objects. Sadek considers that Mustapha Farroukh<sup>15</sup> represents the first alternative, that of the artist as civilizer that draws both on the European Academic tradition and on the Islamic tradition to provoke a cultural rebirth in the Arab world. Such posture hence dives into the past in order to construct a better future and is reflected in a modality of perception that is able to dispose of an open horizon<sup>16</sup>, the openness of space<sup>17</sup> corresponding to the openness, availability and continuity of time (Sadek 2006a). For Sadek, the second position is epitomized by Mohamad Rawas's<sup>18</sup> eclectic artworks

14 We can see how distant this conception and use of memory is from a pacifying memory, a memory that we call for in order to learn from the past and avoid the same mistakes in the future, a pedagogical memory mixing commemoration and obliviousness, where one only remembers in order to move on and better forget.

15 Mustapha Farroukh (1901-1957) is one of the most renowned Lebanese painters of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he is known for introducing academic western painting into Lebanon after studying at the Beaux-Arts de Paris.

16 The artwork *Love is Blind* (2006) enacts the criticism of Sadek as to the availability of the horizon in the Lebanon of the civil war. For that Sadek uses the labels of Farroukh's paintings, but now these labels only point towards an empty white wall. In a situation of civil war time is not available and spaces doesn't open up on some horizon but is blocked and seeing is a seeing by near contiguous blindness (Sadek and Fattouh 2012).

17 The argument that the openness of space and the disposition of a horizon actually reflects our possible actions in time is fully developed by Bergson in *Matter and Memory* (Bergson 2005, 32).

18 Mohamad Rawas (1951-) is a well-established Lebanese painter and print maker that work on eclectic compositions that draw on different visual codes borrowed from different cultures.



that reduce the past to a collection of visual goods available for the compositions of the artist and aimed at portraying some multi-cultural future (Sadek 2018). Mohamad Rawas would by that incarnate the visual posture of fascination, a posture he shares with the visual imagery of SOLIDERE, consisting of simulated images of cities to come, made of all kinds of architectural “styles” and “cultural references”, while disregarding the heavy histories above which they float (Sadek 2006b). Against these two positions, Sadek proposes a modality of sight that will be coextensive to the temporality of the object being seen. In fact, the traces of violence are excessive presences, presences that are just there and upon which we can't project any future plans or actions. Ruins, rubbles, dead bodies, landfills covering mass graves, etc. are objects that open their temporality proper and seize the one looking at them. These objects don't have a form, they are the formless, they are without a name<sup>19</sup>, they are the nameless, and they weigh, they have a power of gravitational attraction given that they carry all the condensed violence that brought them into being. To apprehend such objects, one needs then to have an eye for the formless and an eye for the heaviness of the dead. The first is theorized by Sadek as a seeing by way of blindness, a seeing that, like that of the blind, becomes tactile, a touch of the eye, that molds itself on this excessive materiality<sup>20</sup>. The eye by that stop seeing at a distance, it sees only because it accumulates layers of this material on its spherical body, passing over and over again on these traces of violence, unable to detach itself from what is being seen (Sadek 2007a). The second is theorized by Sadek as a seeing by way of death where now the time of seeing coincides with the time of the excessive object because it is inhabited by the decaying rhythm of this object. Indeed, when apprehending a corpse, the eye realizes its organic dimension and its orientation towards death. In the decaying corpse the eye sees its own destiny, until itself it dies and perceives the last image, the eschaton, glued in the insides of its spherical body. In the eschaton, the time of the production of the image by the process of death, the time of the decaying dead object, and the

19 Sadek gives the example of the Israeli bombardments in 2006, where one looked at the destroyed neighborhoods by still having in memory the names of these neighborhoods even if the extent of the destruction made it impossible to determine where these neighborhoods are. Violence then separate names from places, death separate the name from the body, and so on. By that violence forces us to just be in the present of these excessive presences. As Sadek says in the same article, we lose the capacity to name given that “we name because we cannot but love the future” (Sadek 2006b).

20 Sadek considers that Ghassan Salhab's *La Rose de Personne* (2001) represents such modality of seeing by way of blindness. In this video Salhab draws a portrait of the destroyed Hamra of the post-war years by overlaying the different trajectories he filmed of that street. The result is a granular image that seems to be an tactile imprint of the street on the movie pellicle (Sadek 2007a).



time of the seeing subject coincide (Sadek 2007b). Excessive presences call then for a specific modality of sight, a seeing that can neither reconstruct nor project, a seeing that can't represent but is captured by the time of such excessive materiality, a seeing that unfolds with the unfolding of its object and dies with the death of its object.

The fifth labor, the labor of witnessing is similar to the labor of seeing. In this case, the excessive materiality is going to provoke speech, a modality of witnessing that rejects all forms of representation. When faced with a violent scene one is impregnated by what he is witnessing, the scene is ingested, and the one speaking now ventriloquizes from within, the excessive event speaking through him as if now the speaker had two tongues to speak – a forked tongue<sup>21</sup>. The other form of witnessing that stems from the ingestion of a violent event consists of a difficult silence where one is muted by the weight of what has been seen<sup>22</sup>. Here the witness lingers as a silent witness, he persists in the visual field with his insistent gaze, emanating from within his person a palpable weight, remaining there in the place of the events as a mute trace of their violence (Sadek 2016, 136–40). These forms of witnessing that ingest and carry the event extend the time proper of the excessive event by giving it a way of speaking and a form of visual presence. These forms of witnessing, proper to the impregnated witness, are different from the traumatized witness who is fixed on the traumatic past as if time has stopped there<sup>23</sup>. The impregnated witness also differs from the oblivious witnesses, what Sadek calls the over-livers who, after being crammed in fear inside shelters, corridors, and behind walls, resume their lives as if nothing happened<sup>24</sup>, forgetting violence and populating the reconstructed fragments of the city (Sadek 2016, 165). The impregnated witness neither then dwells on the traumatic past, nor is he a witness that needs to forget in order to move on, but one that carries the violent events

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21 Sadek illustrates this forked tongue by the irony of Traboulsi, releasing his tongue in humor and poignant imagery from his forced exile in Paris (Sadek 2016, 140). We can think of Genet's *Four Hours in Shatila* as a form of forked tongue, where the witnessing of the horror fills the witness and liberate his tongue, as if now it is the event itself speaking through him (Genet 1983).

22 Sadek illustrate this modality of witnessing where one witnesses by his silence because the events are too harsh to recount by the figure of Semaan, as portrayed in *The One Man Village* (2008) by El Haber, a man whose mother and father were killed during the civil war, and when asked about the event remains silent and pensive about it (Sadek 2016, 157).

23 Sadek illustrate the traumatic witness by Eid's *What Happened?* (2009) documentary, where Eid goes back to his village to uncover the identity of those who massacred his family (Sadek 2016, 161).

24 Sadek illustrate these over-oblivious-livers by Waddah Sharara's book, *The Wars of Subservience*, where Sharara describes this population that goes from fear into the everyday as if nothing happened (Sadek 2016, 165).

within himself, unfolding these events into new capacities, that sculpt the excessive materiality of these events. It is then by laboring with such excessive events that the witnesses will generate a present for these events but also a way of being and speaking that delineates a culture in the making.

The last labor is the labor of the ruin. Here again the argument can be summed up into three positions. The historicist ruin<sup>25</sup> will keep the destroyed city at a distance, project it in a past that needs to be overcome into the future of reconstruction (Sadek 2016, 176). The other posture considers that the human habitat is by nature a ruin, grounding such considerations on the natural entropy that will plague any human enterprise, all human constructions being doomed to decay one day or another or to be left by its inhabitants<sup>26</sup>. Against the historicist ruin and the a-historical ruin, Sadek proposes to acknowledge all the weight of history and violence that produce these ruins and to carry such weight. The ruin to come will sum up the different labors that we have encountered in order to turn the physical ruins into a habitat and the weight of these ruins into a shared experience<sup>27</sup>. As we have seen what was common to the different labors is that they all work some excessive materiality. This excessive materiality is produced by the violent events and is characterized by the fact that it provokes a poignant experience that can't be subsumed under any rationale, whence its excess. It remains that it is this poignant experience that generates new capacities in those who undergo such an experience, and with these capacities they are able to sculpt this excessive materiality into a collective work. In that sense the excessive presence of the material becomes present, the temporality of the ruin becoming coextensive to the temporality of the ruin

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25 Sadek illustrates the historicist ruin with the post stamps of 1958 portraying the destruction of Beirut by an earthquake, where one image shows the rubble and the other one shows the reconstructed city. This posture can also be illustrated by SOLIDERE or by Beit Beirut, two interventions that disregard the weight of history and its violence and only deal with the plastic aspect of ruins that either need to be restored to the identical, as some of SOLIDERE restoration did, or preserve the ruined building as a testimony of the war, as the rehabilitation in the rehabilitation of the Barakat Building that preserved all the destroyed aspect of the building. (Sadek 2016, 178).

26 Sadek gives the example Simmel as illustrating this position. He also considers that Toufic partakes in the conception of the ruin as an a-historical ruin, given that for Toufic humans are mortals and hence they are doomed to leave these places turning them into ruins (Sadek 2016, 186–88). We will cover this point later in the section below on Toufic's work.

27 In *Peddling Time While Standing Still*, Sadek shows that actually physical violence and physical ruins are produced by the political parties that disregard the present in which they live and are only concerned with some justice to come – like the party of Prime Minister Hariri, or some vengeance to come – like the Hezbollah and his hoped-for victory against Israel. It is because they are oblivious to the present that these parties end up disposing of space as an *underfoot of time*, considering that all what is present is simply at their disposition to destroy in order to achieve their future plans. By overlooking the present of the ruins these political parties end up hence producing even more ruins and destructions (Sadek 2011).

in the making. Only then can those who went through these cycles of violence inhabit their present, become the poets of these ruins, and resist the tendency towards obliviousness or melancholic paralysis (Sadek 2016, 174).

The aesthetics of Sadek is hence a materialist aesthetics that shows that communities will be built by acknowledging the materiality and weight of the experiences they go through and by giving form to this material rather than by being deported in some representational or idealist discourse that keeps such material and collective experience at a distance. The community to come that stems out of a civil war is not built then by “learning from history” nor by celebrating consumerism, but by a collective labor on the collective experience that the civil war itself has produced. Only by dwelling on this experience and only by giving it a shape can the community live in the temporality opened by such an experience and by that turn this collective experience into an enduring present.

## Jalal Toufic: aesthetics as making present the presence of the tradition

The tradition for Toufic<sup>28</sup> is not a constructed historical system but stems from an unworldly dimension. The tradition<sup>29</sup> is what allows us to understand and intuit our condition as being mortals, and hence why we die, why we live in a world, why we need a redeemer, the origin of evil, paradise, hell, and so on (Toufic 2018, 97). In that sense the tradition is a-historical, even if it can have effects in history and, in return, it can be itself affected by historical events (Toufic 2009c). Toufic defines the surpassing disaster as a historical event whose impact can have an effect on the tradition: “In other words, whether a disaster is a surpassing one (for a community—defined by its sensibility to the immaterial withdrawal that results from such a disaster) cannot be ascertained by the number of casualties, the intensity

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28 “Jalal Toufic is a thinker, writer, and artist. He was born in 1962 in Beirut or Baghdad and died before dying in 1989 in Evanston, Illinois. Many if not all of his books, most of which were published by Forthcoming Books, continue to be forthcoming even after their publication.” A more extensive bio and the publications of Toufic can be found on his webpage: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/profile.htm>

29 Toufic mainly draws on the Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions, the Abrahamic tradition, but also on Buddhist and other esoteric traditions. His writings also hint at local traditions embedded in these overall encompassing traditions: for example, Lebanon has its tradition and it was withdrawn due to the civil war, Palestine too had its tradition and it was withdrawn due to the Nakba, etc. (Toufic 2009c, 12).

of psychic traumas and the extent of material damage, but by whether we encounter in its aftermath symptoms of withdrawal of tradition.” (Toufic 2009c, 12). When suffering from a surpassing disaster, a community can still have access to the material supports of the works of art and thought, but the immaterial content of these works is not any more available for this community. It is in that sense that a surpassing disaster ruptures time, the temporal rupture being due to the fact that now the transmission of the tradition from a generation to the other is severed. Hence, even if the tradition is untimely, the rupture in transmission of the tradition affects and characterizes the historical times in which we live: there are times where the tradition is incarnated and alive, there are times where it is just transmitted, there are times where it withdraws, times where the withdrawal itself is withdrawn<sup>30</sup>, and last times where it is resurrected (Toufic 2009c, 34).

In a place hit by a surpassing disaster, some remain oblivious as to the immaterial consequences of such a disaster and end up living in a historical epoch that is now bygone. Those who are not aware of the withdrawal still believe that the immaterial dimension of the works is available because of the availability of the physical supports of these works. In that they add a collateral damage to the damage induced by the disaster because they don't feel the urge to show that the tradition has withdrawn making us by that even more blind to the fact of such withdrawal (Toufic 2009c, 15). An additional damage carried by these oblivious thinkers and artists consists in producing a counterfeit of the tradition by transmitting a content that is now void of any contact with the unworldly (Toufic 2009c, 30). Others, such as enterprising promoters and the like, overlook the material supports of the tradition because they feel that now these supports have lost their value given that their immaterial content has withdrawn. This attitude leads to more damage and destruction, as it was the case with the SOLIDERE project that destroyed what remained of Beirut's City center (Toufic 2009c, 61). We can see that the oblivious thinkers and artists that still transmit the tradition lag behind their time, the time opened by the withdrawal of the tradition, while the promoters think that they are ahead of their time, when actually they are simply blind to their present situation and unaware of the reasons why they have this urge to cause more destruction and to move forward. Toufic adds that it is because the intellectuals fail to reveal the withdrawal or resurrect the tradition and act as if the tradition is still

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30 Toufic gives the example of the time where the Prophet was here, followed by the time of the Sahaba, and then the event of the Battle of Siffin that caused the withdrawal of the Quran opening on the time of the lesser occultation, followed by a time of the greater occultation where even the memory of the withdrawal vanishes away, and last the resurrection of the tradition achieved by the coming of the Messiah (Toufic 2009a, 48).

available that the promoters feel free to destroy the material traces of the withdrawn tradition (Toufic 2009c, 60). Liberal entrepreneurs and conservative traditionalists are hence the two faces of obliviousness in a time of a withdrawn tradition.

Only by being aware of such withdrawal the thinkers or artists can be of their time and become the witnesses of this time, and only by being contemporaneous to that time can they avoid inflicting further damage and start the work of the resurrection (Toufic 2009c, 14). In that sense, artists and thinkers that are aware of the withdrawal will have a number of strategies in relation to such a withdrawal. A first strategy will aim at producing images and texts that will reveal the withdrawal<sup>31</sup>: "With regard to the surpassing disaster, art acts like a mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there." (Toufic 2009c, 57) Another practice will consist in documenting the traces left over by the disaster in order to preserve them as documents for the future<sup>32</sup>, for the time when the resurrection of the tradition will occur (Toufic 2009c, 58). A third practice, the most demanding one, will consist in an attempt to resurrect the tradition<sup>33</sup>. By resurrecting the tradition the resurrection makes what is present available to perception, it brings back the immaterial content to bear on its material support (Toufic 2009c, 16–23). Coinciding with one's time, being contemporaneous to the present, is what allows to unfold these strategies of intellectual and cultural resistance against the oblivious normalized posture that grounds itself on the opposition between violence and culture, barbarity and civilization. Only an awareness of the relations between history and tradition and how they affect each other can save one from believing that "culture" exists in some transcendent untouchable realm that is safe from historical violence<sup>34</sup>. It is then only by being present to the

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31 Toufic gives the example of *Wonder Beirut* (1998) by Hadjithomas and Joreige, an artwork referring to a fictional photographer that used to take photos without developing them as an artwork that reveal that the tradition has withdrawn (Toufic 2009c, 74).

32 The artworks *Appendix XVIII* (Raad 2010) and *Index XXXVI: Red* (2008) by Walid Raad mobilize the concept of a documentation for the future. In these artworks lines, colors, fonts, etc. are preserved for future generation to be able to decipher them when the tradition will be resurrected.

33 Toufic give for example the remake of Herzog, *Nosferatu* (1979), as an attempt to resurrect the *Nosferatu* (1922) of Murnau, given the surpassing disaster caused by the Nazi rise to power (Toufic 2009c, 16). The project of Toufic can be considered to be an attempt to resurrect the Arabo-Persian-Turkish culture anchored in the Abrahamic Tradition (Toufic 2011, 132).

34 The call of the Order of the Architects to stress on culture rather than destruction for the Lebanese Pavilion planned to open in Venice in 2021, and the proposition by the Architect Hala Warde go in this direction, where a number of art works will be presented to counter balance the Beirut Explosion of August 2020. In that sense we can wonder if such works are

temporality of the surpassing disaster that we can resist the well-intentioned discourse that opposes culture to barbarity but in that only ends up overlooking the deep effects of the disaster leading to more destruction and barbarity. Cultural resistance will claim then that things cannot be the same anymore, not even in the cultural, artistic or intellectual realm when a surpassing disaster occur.

Such cultural resistance entertains a complex relation to political resistance. First, political resistance shares with cultural resistance its reclamation of the present: "The revolution has nothing to do with the future. It has to do with the present. The revolutionary is of his or her time. He or she is not trying to change society as much as reveal to it, sometimes violently, that it is lagging behind the change that has already occurred." (Toufic 2007, 38) It remains that the present proclaimed by the revolution is not identical to the one aimed at by cultural resistance. The revolution aims at making present a change that has already occurred in the exoteric, material world and hence it is an effort to put the clocks back on time. On the other hand, cultural resistance, when inscribed in the aftermath of a surpassing disaster, operates in the esoteric dimension addressing the immaterial side of things, and hence it is an effort to make us aware of the rupture of time. Second, the revolutionaries have an instinctive grasp when it comes to the esoteric withdrawal of the tradition that make them reject counterfeit memorials and other well-intentioned civilizing discourses<sup>35</sup> because they feel that they are emptied from any immaterial genuine content (Toufic 2007, 17). If promoters, such as SOLIDERE, in their obliviousness, destroy the physical supports of the tradition, revolutionaries on the other hand are allies of the witnesses of the withdrawn tradition in so far as they instinctively protect these physical supports and, on the other hand, destroy the counterfeits produced by well-intentioned intellectuals and artists. Third, the revolution itself can become a vector to resurrect the tradition, but for that it needs to be a Great Revolution, its greatness being measured to its power to resurrect the tradition, or even deeper and deeper layers of forgotten traditions (Toufic 2018, 177).

In the wait of the resurrection of the tradition by some Great Revolution, still available after such an event, or if it wouldn't be better to withdraw such works in order to reveal their unavailability. In any case the exposed works will be haunted by the images of the explosion that will overshadow the exhibited works.

35 An incident illustrating that is the graffiti by the activist Khaldoun Jaber stating "My government did that", facing the wall of the Beirut Port where the explosion happened. This graffiti was painted over by Lara Karam, a teacher of non-violent communication. Jaber, re-painted over the well-intentioned cleansing of Karam to re-affirm his position. <https://observers.france24.com/en/middle-east/20210420-graffiti-rinse-repeat-how-graffiti-on-a-wall-became-a-symbol-for-lebanon-s-frustration>

or by some Great Thinker, the work of artists and intellectuals will focus on *deserving* the events, i.e. on producing concepts, percepts and affects that will transfigure these events into works of thought and art. To deserve the events, and especially violent events such as the ones that occurred in the Lebanese civil-war, the basic task of bringing the criminals to justice is not enough and needs to be complemented by artistic and conceptual creations (Toufic 2007, 14). Indeed, the complementarity between the artists and thinkers and the revolutionaries is double: the first will provide the new culture that is emerging from the disaster, while the later will achieve the necessary justice related to that disaster or simply unfold such a disaster. The complementarity of the cultural revolution and the political revolution is then articulated around coinciding the exoteric present with the esoteric present. We can say that the cultural revolution would be un-manifest if it is not coupled with the political revolution, while the political revolution would be blind if not coupled with the cultural revolution. Only then can we say that time coincides with itself, not only because the revolution has wiped out the relics of a bygone political regime, but mainly because the revolution amidst the disaster will be itself enlightened and guided by concepts, percepts and affects that stem out of the disaster itself. We can say that, with Toufic, the thought of the disaster amidst the disaster can make time coincide with itself and hence achieve the Great Revolution that will resurrect the tradition and by that cut the wordily course of time in half. The work of deserving the event undertaken by the thinkers and artists is then a propaedeutic that enlightens the revolutionary action that whence empowered by the lights of the transfigured disaster can achieve itself as a Great Revolution that in return resurrects the tradition.

If revolutions and civil wars bring back the tradition, it is because they first open the gates of hell<sup>36</sup>. The civil war itself make hence present an unworldly dimension that is manifested in the actualization of unworldly spatiotemporal forms and in the proliferation of strange characters that are neither dead nor alive. As Toufic shows, in the context of a civil war space manifests its labyrinthine nature. The labyrinth itself opened up when Adam ate from the fruit of Knowledge before eating from the fruit of Life, introducing by that an ungodly form of death (Toufic 2003, 27). This form of death doesn't consist in a simple end of life, but introduces a dissociation between the I and the self (Toufic 2018, 115). In the toufican world the I is the proper of God, God being the only absolute identity, or the absolutely

36 We are not using "hell" here as Toufic uses it, i.e. as a technical word, but as a familiar expression. Indeed, during the Lebanese civil wars as Toufic shows, people were still capable of praying and hence weren't in hell properly speaking. What opens up as we will see is the unworldly in some of its branches (Toufic 2007, 11).



living being, proclaiming the “I am I” or the “I am who I am” (Toufic 2005b, 28). When Adam still had his adamic nature, he didn’t have a proper name, but his self simply referred to his generic self, the human species, the name “A-dam” standing for “Man” in general. Only when he ate from the fruit did he acquire a proper name, the I now not only referring anymore to the human generic self of A-dam, but also to his proper name Adam (Toufic 2018, 54). Through that partial dissociation from his godly self, Adam died before dying and became dead while alive, a mortal (Toufic 2011, 49). As a mortal Adam and his kind are lost in the labyrinth, a place of a fractal nature having a structure of self-similarity where any two points are interconnected (Toufic 2003, 25), making what is distant close and what is close distant (Toufic 2002, 15), what inside outside<sup>37</sup> and what is outside inside (Toufic et al. 2010, 31). Being never inside or outside, when one is in the labyrinth he is then lost because he can never be found (Toufic 2003, 27), but also having no right or left one can never turn when called, all his turns being overturned by an overturn (Toufic 2005b, 97). This is why mortals need proper names (Toufic 2018, 55). Being projected in the labyrinth and always being there while alive, when they die they need to be called by the Messiah whose call is the only one capable of overturning the overturn that will bring humanity out of the labyrinth, and by that cures it from its sickness into death (Toufic 2018, 125).

What civil wars and revolutions make visible is the labyrinthine dimension to which all mortals are virtually coupled. Ruins are of a labyrinthine nature, they are an actualized worldly labyrinth. A place turns into a ruin when it is abandoned by its inhabitants. This is why some buildings which are intact can yet be ruins, implicit ruins (Toufic 2003, 67). The first ruin was the tower of Babel because it was the first structure to be deserted by humans (Toufic 2018, 117). Places also become ruins when they are inhabited by revenants (Toufic et al. 2010, 38) or when a specter appears in such places (Toufic 2002, 13). In that sense streets<sup>38</sup> are not ruins because they are not inhabited in the first place (Toufic 2003, 70). Ruins are labyrinthine because they seem to belong to an undefined past, containing in themselves their own ruination, they are like contemporary archeological sites, where, while being here, we are at the same time carried to a distant past (Toufic 2003, 72). The space of a civil war is then one that makes pre-

37 In destroyed cities we see the inside of the homes outside due to destruction, which makes them labyrinthine (Toufic et al. 2010, 36).

38 Toufic gives the examples of the streets in post-war Beirut, where they are clearly delineated. We can see these images in *Out of Life* (1991) by Baghdadi, where a number of tracking shots were taken in the destroyed street of Beirut’s city center.

sent the labyrinth, destroyed cities, abandoned cities, are ruins where one is disoriented, projected in different undefined temporalities<sup>39</sup>, and where one feels that he himself ends up haunting the places in which he dwells (Toufic et al. 2010, 36). Other spatial topologies of places hit by civil wars are relative and radical closures. In a relative closure, such as in a city that is enduring a civil war or hit by a pandemic (Toufic 2009b, 105), the living and the dead start mixing up and the usual codes of behavior are inverted<sup>40</sup> (Toufic 2003, 136). If in relative closures one can still have the urge to escape because the space is still connected to other spaces, in radical closures on the other hand the space is absolutely disconnected from all other spaces, like when a camp or a village are subjected to massacres or ethnic cleansing. These spaces open either on nothingness or on unworldly entities<sup>41</sup> (Toufic 2009b, 105). In these places we witness a permutation in everything, one becoming the other and the other becoming one, like this dead corpse sitting like a boxer on a chair with his opened white eyes and enormous puffed head, or that plastic limb that now seem to be disturbingly alive compared to the scattered bodily pieces<sup>42</sup>. In radical closures one starts to over-see and over-hear, he develops an over-sensitivity where screams, voices, revenants and cadavers taking unworldly shapes seem to appear from nowhere (Toufic 2009b, 50).

As too the creatures that populate such spaces they distribute themselves into a typology of the living dead. A normal human being is a mortal that lives in a well-structured world consisting of an oriented space and a chronological time (Toufic 2002, 31). Mortals, as being dead while alive since Adam's ate from the fruit, have though an amnesiac double that exists in the labyrinth (Toufic 2018, 113). It remains that mortals only experience the labyrinth in peculiar situations, such as when they dream (Toufic 2010, 51) or go through a psychotic episode (Toufic 2018, 160). In the context of a civil

39 In *Alone With the war* (2001) by Daniele Arbid, a number of militiamen share their feeling of being still in the past, they still hear voices and visit the places where they committed their crimes. One of them says than when one tastes blood he remains stuck in that place and can never get out.

40 Toufic gives the example of plagued cities as relative closures and the carnivals that issue in these plagued cities where the chaste start to perform sodomy and the misers throw their money from the windows. This is illustrated in Herzog's *Nosferatu* (1979) where we see orgiastic scenes in the streets mixed with scattered cadavers. Movies such as Schlöndorff *Circle of Deceit* (1981) also show this mixture of intense living and death during the Lebanese civil war.

41 Toufic gives the example of the siege of the Quarantina camp where a massacre was perpetrated against Palestinian refugees. During this massacre birds appeared above the camp like unworldly ahistorical apparitions. (Toufic 2014, 107)

42 Jean Genet's *Four Hours in Shatila* can be seen as an illustration of a situation plunged in a radical closure and how it opens on unworldly ahistorical entities (Genet 1983).

war extreme situations multiply leading to a number of mutations in the mortal's normal structure. One of these experiences is the one where one dies before dying, such as when one goes through a violent experience, such as an explosion<sup>43</sup>, and start wondering if he is dead because he sees people standing like props, frozen cadavers, or time moving slowly etc. (Toufic 2018, 162). In such situations one experiences that he is dead while alive and hence realizes that, as a mortal, he was always dead while alive. Realizing that, the one who died before dying wakes up and becomes a lucid dreamer because he sees that the others, those who didn't experience death before dying, live in a dream thinking that they are just alive (Toufic 2014, 152). The one who died before dying becomes a witness of death, a *Shahid*<sup>44</sup> or martyr, achieving by that piercing sight and an intense life, now that he realizes and experiences his true nature (Toufic 2005a, 56). Other variants on the martyr figure are the posthumous martyr, such as political martyrs that only become martyrs after they die and not while they are alive (Toufic 2005a, 63), or suicidal martyrs<sup>45</sup> that use their death as a tool of political bargaining (Toufic 2005a, 61). A living martyr is one that is able to disconnect himself from the world, die to the world, in order to resist an extreme situation, while fake living martyrs<sup>46</sup> are those who only survive an assassination attempt without actually dying to the world (Toufic 2007, 23).

Another series of figures that populate the closures and ruins of the civil war are the ghosts, the zombies, the specters, revenants and the undead. The ghost is the one who is unable to die because he still has some unfinished business in the world of the living<sup>47</sup>. The ghosts by that are dying to

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43 Recently, with the Beirut Blast, many reported their experience of the explosion in these terms. Many also saw themselves as dead because they were supposed to be in a place or because someone else died in the place where they were supposed to be.

44 "Shahid" in Arabic means in the same time the one who sees, the one who witnesses, and the martyr.

45 Toufic gives the examples of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri that was assassinated by the Hezbollah as a posthumous martyr that doesn't achieve by that piercing sight. As to the suicidal martyrs he gives the examples of the Hezbollah fighters and Hamas fighters who think they can give their life for a cause, while actually only God or the Life, Jesus, can give life. By that these suicidal martyrs also don't achieve martyrdom proper (Toufic 2005a, 61–63).

46 Toufic gives the example of Riad El Turk as a genuine living martyr who was able to resist inside the Syrian prisons by drawing everyday a scenery with lentils' grains, a scenery that he had to erase each time a guard went into his cell. El Turk explains that these drawings allowed him not to think of the world and by that withstand his condition in jail. On the other hand, Marwan Hamade who only survived a political assassination is not a living martyr because he didn't die to the world (Toufic 2007, 23).

47 Toufic gives the example of the King in Hamlet that is dying to tell to his son that his brother assassinated him (Toufic 2005b, 98). The Lebanese war context is also filled with ghosts because of the plethora of unfinished businesses, unresolved crimes and kidnapping that haunt Lebanon. Toufic thinks that a place for these ghosts must be given in fiction, such

tell us something because without telling us what still attach them to this world they won't be able to die (Toufic 2005b, 98). Zombies on the other hand are those who cast away the ghosts, those who do not carry out the unfinished business of their dead ones and lead an insouciant life amid chaos, such as many did in postwar Lebanon (Toufic 2007, 42). The zombies become, like the mother of Hamlet, creatures that have "eyes without feelings, and feelings without sight" (Toufic 2003, 104). Specters need to be distinguished from ghosts, they are residues from the consciousness of the dead that try to reach the unconscious of the living (Toufic 2002, 12). As to revenants they are the result of hasty burials when the living, in the urgency of the events, don't take the time to die before dying to be able to properly bury their beloved ones. In such situations the dead return because in the Christian era Jesus instructed to "let the dead bury the dead" (Toufic et al. 2010, 39). The undead<sup>48</sup> on the other hand is the one who willfully dies before dying and repudiates his adamic human self in order to be able to bury his beloved one (Toufic 2003, 21).

The context of a civil war then opens up on the unworldly where places turn into labyrinthine ruins, undergo relative and radical closures that host chaos and violence turning the world into hell. The proximity of death makes it such that the human mortal structure itself is modified and turn people into martyrs, ghosts, zombies, revenants, specters and the like. We can see that civil wars bring into presence the unworldly dimensions of the tradition but that these dimensions are withdrawn in so far as they are not recognized as the dimensions of the unworldly. To deserve a place hit by civil wars and surpassing disasters one needs then to reveal the unworldly structures that get actualized in these places by giving a place to the dead, the ghosts and all the other unworldly creatures (Toufic 2007, 13–15). This is when the brute presence of the unworldly is raised to being present to our consciousness in works of art and thought. We can see then that, in the toufican world, the tradition is always there, even when it is withdrawn. In a state of war and surpassing disasters we need to understand that the tradition *is* withdrawn in the most literal sense, i.e. that it has a material presence without its immaterial meaning being revealed to those who undergo the impact of such a material presence. Deserving the civil war will consist in becoming contemporaneous with the withdrawal of tradition, and only

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as in *Phantom Beirut* (1998) by Salhab, and if this doesn't happen it means that the dead themselves became amnesiac (Toufic et al. 2010, 38).

48 Toufic gives the example of Dracula who abdicated his human self and renounced by that God because he wanted to bury his beloved Elisabeta. Indeed, Toufic argues that Dracula by that follows the Christian precept to the letter where one can only bury his beloved if he is already dead (Toufic 2009a, 26).

then can one transfigure violence into concepts, percepts and affects<sup>49</sup>.

To clarify the necessity of such transfiguration and the predicament of resurrecting the tradition one needs to delve into the notion of the Redeemed World as developed by Toufic.

The Redeemed World is the world that will be instituted after the Great Resurrection. The Great Resurrection, undertaken by the redeemer, will cure humanity from its sickness into death, from its projection into the labyrinth and hence from all Evil (Toufic 2018, 125). In such a world where Evil is made impossible, the scriptures won't be any more understood as moral commandments that necessitate the will<sup>50</sup> but as constituting the physical structure of the that world – “you shall not kill” enunciating now the impossibility of murder rather than its prohibition (Toufic 2003, 214). By that the scriptures will be literally manifest, no interpretation of the holy texts being needed anymore given that now the world itself is holy. (Toufic 2018, 187). With the arrival of the redeemer the wait for the messiah will be over and hence we enter the time of the pure Present, where the physical structure itself of that world doesn't allow any waiting nor any delays anymore, not even the perceptual delays due to the finite speed of light<sup>51</sup> (Toufic 2011, 35). Last, the Redeemed World being a world where death was casted away, it is a world of a pure affirmation of life, a life that is not coupled anymore to the sickness of labyrinthine death. In that regard, only the percepts, affects and concepts that can eternally recur will constitute the fabric of that world, what can't endure the ordeal of eternal recurrence eliminating itself by itself given that it can't be a full affirmation of life<sup>52</sup>. Hence in the Redeemed World what can't be deserved and transfigured, affirmed as such, will simply not exist (Toufic 2007, 18). The content of these percepts, affects and concepts will be those of the transfigured tradition, and it is in this sense that Toufic says that

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49 Deleuze considers that Bacon is able to transfigure death into life and by capturing the sensation of horror he is able to give a living form to that horror and by that showing that he is capable of affirming life even in such an experience (Deleuze 2004, 61).

50 Kant introduced the notion of necessitation of the will that results from the opposition between the rational self and his animal tendencies (Kant 2011, 55). The idea that paradise is a nature governed by the moral law where crime becomes impossible is also Kantian (Kant 2002, 57). The difference with Toufic is that for Toufic Evil also pertains to a physical/ethical cause and not to some opposition between our natural being and our supernatural being, Evil being also itself unworldly and hence supernatural.

51 Toufic considers that at the birth of the messianic age, when the Mahdi, the redeemer, will come, people might see two suns, one as we usually see it delayed by 8.32 minutes and another as present without delay (Toufic 2011, 39).

52 The vision of the eternal return in Nietzsche's thought shows that a vile will to power, a will that aims at destruction and the negation of life, ends up negating itself when pushed to its last consequences. Hence the eternal return is selective and will only return what has a living power, what affirms life (Deleuze 2002, 68).

the Great Resurrection will also resurrect the works of art and thought that were capable of affirming life in the fallen world (Toufic 2018, 202). If then the transfiguration of the withdrawn tradition is required, i.e. of the civil war, it is because such transfiguration gives us glimpses of the Redeemed World, right here and right now, glimpses of the experience of a pure present<sup>53</sup>.

The pure present and the religious dimension of the genuine aesthetical experiences reveal themselves hence to be different in nature from the course of time and our other sensitive experiences. In fact, chronological time itself is nothing but an artefact introduced by Iblis<sup>54</sup> to forget the suffering caused by his separation from God (Toufic 2002, 31). The time of the Fall<sup>55</sup>, the chronological time, is the time where the present is doubled<sup>56</sup> by its own past in order for it to pass (Deleuze 1989, 79). Against this chronological time, we have the time of the pure event, against Chronos we have Aion<sup>57</sup>. The aesthetical experience belongs then to the temporality of the Redeemed World and revokes chronological time as the time of the doubles, the counterfeit, the time of the wait and the time of Iblis (Toufic 2011, 86). History by that is nothing but a mixture of the pure present with the passing course of time, history being the chronicle of the events, i.e. of

53 The aesthetical experience that comply with the configuration of the Redeemed World is the one that gives us an actual lived experience of pure presence. As Deleuze shows some artworks and experiences have a direct impact on the nervous system (Deleuze 2004, 34).

54 Referring to Hallaj, Toufic considers that Iblis is the real monotheist because he refused to prostrate to Adam given that he would only prostrate to God (Toufic 2011, 44). When God casted away Iblis, the separation from God threw Iblis in Hell given that Iblis had an immeasurable devotion and love for God. In order to endure Hell Iblis created base distractions to distract himself, time to forget, pride to alleviate suffering (Toufic 2002, 30–32). By that Iblis is the demiurge, the one who mixed the world created by God with his creations that allow us to forget and endure our separation from God (Toufic 2018, 140).

55 We can consider that History is the time of the Fall, a temporality where the passing time of Iblis is the locus of irruptions and injections from the unworldly dimensions be it in the form of religious revelations or political revolutions. In that sense we interpret that the birth of history is better accessed by a schizophrenic, i.e. a person who dies before dying, than by a political thinker such as Badiou, because the schizophrenic has access to the untimely dimension (Toufic 2018, 176).

56 We can consider that for time to pass the memory of the perception of the bell toll must be co-present to the perception itself. Indeed, such memory of the bell toll can't be produced before nor after the bell toll but at the same time, and hence time is conceived as a doubling structure where all sensations are doubled by their mnemonic double. The memory of the first bell toll is then added to a new bell toll making the new one a second bell toll, opening up on chronological succession. Bergson discuss the doubling of the present by its own past in *Mind - Energy* (Bergson 1920, 150).

57 Deleuze distinguishes two sides of Chronos, a dark chaotic side and a luminous ordered side. It remains that in both cases chronological time is characterized by a thick present that includes the past and the future. On the other hand, the Aion is the time of the event that float on the surface of the bodies. This time, the Aion Deleuze qualifies as labyrinthine (Deleuze 1990, 166). We can argue that this time is similar to the toufican pure present that one perceives amid violence during a civil war.

the irruption of the unworldly in this world<sup>58</sup>. It remains that history and historical thinking can never grasp the event as such, can never unpack the categories of the living tradition but only describe the background on which the tradition irrupts<sup>59</sup>. This is why an aesthetics is required, aesthetics and especially the aesthetics of the civil war, beginning where history stops<sup>60</sup>.

It is from that eschatological horizon that we can now re-assess the temporality of political and cultural revolutions by articulating them around the notion of presentence. What Toufic invites us to think is that the present has a revolutionary and an eschatological dimension. In fact, a political revolution can be bloody, opening up the gates of hell and giving a presence to the labyrinthine unworldly dimension of the tradition, which calls for an awareness that will make present such a presence. In that, presence and the present coincide making the tradition itself manifest as a forthcoming sign of the Redeemed World<sup>61</sup>. It remains that as long as political figures only undertake revolutions in the name of the worldly concerns, such revolutions are not aware of their unworldly *raison d'être* and by that remain blind and incapable of a genuine Great Revolution that can resurrect the tradition and give it presence in the world of the fall. Only great political and religious figures, such as the Prophet, are aware that their political revolt opens on the unworldly and by that are capable of undertaking a Great Revolution<sup>62</sup>, where the worldly presence and the unworldly present coincide. If the present is hence the

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58 Hegel and the divinization of history made him accept everything that happens in history as belonging to the divine. By that his affirmation is that of the donkey who carries everything without distinguishing what is a genuine affirmation of life from a false affirmation (Deleuze 2002, 178).

59 Deleuze considers that the affect can't be reduced or explained by history, it is not eternal but supra-historical, 'internal' and is expressed on the surface of things (Deleuze 1986, 106).

60 Similarly to the limitation of knowledge that allowed Kant to give a place for faith (Kant 1998, 117), we can say that Toufic limits history in order to give a place for aesthetics as the manifestation of religion.

61 We shouldn't think here that because the experience of the pure present in this world signals the Redeemed World to come that we are back to chronological time and some future projections. Indeed the experience of the pure present is the same as the one that we will experience in the Redeemed World even if in this world we can only experience it as an exceptional situation or for a short time. The fact that such experience of the pure present is seen as a forthcoming sign is only a retroactive re-construction that we make after the experience, while, when we are in the pure present, we neither experience such a present as having another temporal dimension nor as being a sign for something else.

62 "Great Politics" is a nietzschean notion that considers politics away from the worldly struggles and deal with events that can cause a transmutation of the whole system of values and the quality of the will to power – Zarathustra is the annunciator of such politics (Nietzsche 2006, 144). Nietzsche distinguishes his Zarathustra from the previous prophets and religious figures but it remains that great politics is played on this line, that of a general transmutation of all values and the way we experience and conceive the world (Nietzsche 2006, 72).



temporality proper of the revolutions it is then not because revolutionaries only make present changes that has occurred in the exoteric world, but more profoundly because they prepare the advent of the tradition, an advent that itself gives us an experience of the world of absolute contemporaneity, eternal recurrence and justice. Great Revolutions are then glimpses<sup>63</sup> on the Redeemed World, through them one is awakened as a mortal to death, and one starts to believe in the General Resurrection (Toufic 2003, 225).

## Aesthetics as politics: messianic revolts or the politics of the present

Hegel considers that the historical movement of the Spirit can only be achieved through a series of conflicts, wars and civil wars, that express the inner contradictions pertaining to some community before moving into a new one<sup>64</sup>. The production of a new system of values requires hence a violent dissolution of the old system of values, no reforms being possible given that reforms will still be conceived in the terms of the old system<sup>65</sup>. It remains that such new values are created unconsciously, the historical figure being incapable of recognizing the new meaning of their actions given that they still think these actions with the categories of the old system<sup>66</sup>. The historical figure hence follows passionately the divine law amidst

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63 We can say that in the toufican thought Great Revolutions are glimpses on the Redeemed World, and in that they echo the Kantian symbolization of the Good in the experience of beauty (Kant 2000, 225), or the discovery of our supernatural destination in the experience of the sublime (Kant 2000, 144). It remains that for Toufic the aesthetical, political and religious experiences are already experiences of the Redeemed World and open on the supersensible not because they symbolize morality but because they are ethical and prefigure the experiential modality of the Redeemed World characterized by being in a pure present (Toufic 2003, 214).

64 As Harris explains, "all religions contain two perspectives – backwards towards nature and forward towards conceptual self-consciousness." This is why the Spirit is divided into a divine law and a human law, and their conflict must lead to the resolution of the conflict and identification of these two laws (Harris 1997, II:4).

65 Geiger explains that for new values to be created it is necessary to dissolve the old ones given that we justify our actions with the system of values we were born in. Hence civil wars are necessary because only in civil wars do we return to a state of nature where there are no more values and only from there the creation of new values become possible (Geiger 2007).

66 Hegel gives the example of Antigone as paradigmatic of the historical figure that unconsciously changes the laws of his community. After the civil war opposing her brothers and the refusal of the king Creon to bury Polyneices, a traitor, Antigone insists on burying her brother by following the divine law and opposing the human law. Without knowing it Antigone enacts that all must 'respect humanity as an end' (Harris 1997, II:117), while consciously justify her actions with the conceptual framework of the old system (Harris 1997, II:187).

a situation of dissolution of all values, and by that she is able to give value through her passion and her sacrifices to the unnamable, to what is rejected as being valueless in the eyes of the human law. For Hegel, the new value issues then from a transfiguration of the disaster<sup>67</sup>, it is created amidst the dissolution of all values<sup>68</sup>.

In the Hegelian course of history, the revolution is hence required to dissolve the old system of values and it is the expression of such dissolution. It remains that Hegel doesn't consider the manifest dimension of such a dissolution as such. Similarly to Toufic, Hegel considers that the divine law is the service of the dead (Hegel 1977, \$453), the law of the unworldly, but he doesn't consider that the civil war as such reveals the world of the dead but rather that the civil stands as a return to the state of nature<sup>69</sup>. In that sense the Hegelian dialectical movement remains historical, it explains the causes of the revolution, but it doesn't grasp the revolution as a pure aesthetical manifestation. In fact, the Hegelian aesthetics is confined to the description of the religious manifestation in the arts, the different artistic expressions indicating the degree of religious awareness, culminating in the revealed Christian religion<sup>70</sup>. The Christian religion reveals that history itself is divine as the movement of manifestation of God leading to the absolute rational community. The life of Jesus is in fact a representation of such a historical process, but also a part of this same historical process, and the divinization of Jesus's life only means the divinization of what is occurring in history in general – the one perceiving the Son perceiving by that the Father –, the singular historical events converging into the global universal history, the finite lives of men being a contribution to the infinite path of the advent of the divine (Hegel et al. 1998, x). Rather than using

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67 Hegel for example in the chapter "Absolute Freedom and Terror" of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, considers that democracy is reached as a self-conscious concept after the bloody and violent revolutions of 1789. The clear understanding of what was going on is only achieved later and elevates the unconscious actions to consciousness. (Hegel 1977, 355–64)

68 The thesis of Geiger on the Hegelian conception of the movement of history develop that point in details – values are transfigurations of situations civil wars because only wars dissolve the old value system and only passion can still value something in that state of dissolution, leading to a new value (Geiger 2007).

69 The revolution turns the world into a world of terror where everyone can kill everyone else. The revolution signals then the dissolution of all human values including the rituals for the dead, where absolute freedom turns into the most abstract death (Hegel 1977, \$590).

70 In his account of the evolution of religions Hegel shows how, for example, Egyptians expressing their religious beliefs in the construction of pyramids and mummification only conceive the God as a dead God, while the Greeks giving a human idealized shape to God signal by that a progress conceiving by that God as an intelligent God, and last Christianity that gives to God the shape of a singular living human is the most advanced conceiving God as the human historical life itself (Hegel 1977, CC).

the messianic to divinize the world, Toufic shows that the revelation is our experience of the unworldly in this world, an experience that is not historical but that rather opposes history as what is against this form of time, as what is untimely<sup>71</sup>. The unworldly is then not one of the components of the dialectical struggle leading to the advent of the rational State, but it is rather the whole that stands against the world and prefigures, in violent and aesthetical experiences, the after-world as a world of pure presence. If the messianic announces the exit from the world of chronological time and occupies the temporality of the pure present, such annunciation will hence also reject historical and causal thinking<sup>72</sup> to replace them by an aesthetics, i.e. by a thought capable of producing the concepts pertaining to the poignant presence of artworks and unworldly manifestations. Given that causality and history are enmeshed with chronological time, they are part of Iblis's artefacts, and by that they are incapable of capturing pure presence which pertains to the Redeemed World, a world from which all the works of Iblis are banned. In the world of the Fall then the historical movement and causal thinking can only set the stage for the manifestation of the unworldly, be it by making present the unworldly in bloody revolutions that stem from conscious interests and reasons, or by achieving new technological and scientific breakthrough that will only reveal even more the extent and the power of the unworldly<sup>73</sup>. History hence stops at the threshold of aesthetics and stands as a propaedeutic for aesthetical awareness, but also revolutions must now be included in the aesthetical domain, even when they are bloody<sup>74</sup>, because they are signs of the Redeemed World. By that aesthetics reveal its true nature as the science of real experience<sup>75</sup>, the real

71 By that we can say that Toufic brings together the messianic and the untimely conception of the event as developed by Nietzsche through the identification of the Messiah/Mahdi to the overman (Toufic 2011, 39).

72 Kant has shown the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the causal relation is the rational ordering of the temporal relation of succession (Kant 1998, A-144).

73 Toufic reads the advances of quantum physics and general relativity as manifesting some of the features of the unworldly. On quantum physics we discover that there are different branches of the universe in the same way as the one who died before dying is able to collaborate with his dead counterpart (Toufic 2018, 79). Black holes are radical closure that can open up when all the permutations of particles are achieved leading to the irruption of a particle on the other side of the black hole (Toufic 2009b, 120).

74 Toufic interprets in this sense Godard's "Not blood, red", where a revolution is poetical or bloody (Toufic 2007, 37). Deleuze also shows that the revolution is a becoming revolutionary where a revolutionary affect returns, relating by that the revolution to the aesthetical dimension (Deleuze 1994, 90).

75 Deleuze considers that aesthetics should cast away its functions as the science of possible experience but also the division between considerations on the aesthetical on one hand and on space time on the other. For Deleuze aesthetics must become the science of real experience by describing the way experience itself unfolds (Deleuze 1994, 68). We can say that

standing here for the world of the absolute present, or the enduring event as such.

Marx, in the *Articles on the Law on Thefts of Wood*, develops an aesthetics in order to ground his argument justifying why the poor have the right to collect wood (Marx and Engels 1975, 1:224). To establish that Marx draws a similarity between the poor as a residue of society and the left overs of nature, and by that establishes that the poor would instinctively feel some kind of sympathy tying them to these left overs, a sympathy that gives them the right to take possession of these left overs. Such feelings mediate between a form of juridical naturalism and what will be then instituted as a human law: the rich will have the right to the living trees and the fruits of these trees while the poor should have the right to the pilfering of wood. Marx will later abandon the need for an aesthetics that will justify the opposition to the established order and stand as the ground for the community to come. In the *German Ideology*, Marx shows that it is capitalism itself that will, in a kind of natural determinism, pave the way towards the advent of communism by being the force that is going to organize and assemble humans to form one collective force (Marx and Engels 1998). In the *Civil War in France*, Marx considers that once this force is unified it will confront the capitalists and take their place as the organizing power by organizing an alternative form of power in such confrontation (Marx 2009). It remains, as Marx notes in the *18<sup>th</sup> of Brumaire*, that the revolutionaries don't have the language that can properly describe their actions and the new values they are fighting for, always dressing their revolutionary acts in old costumes borrowed from the past. This is why Marx calls here for a poetry of the future that will be up to the expectations of the revolutionary action (Marx, Cowling, and Martin 2002, 22). The position of Marx hence oscillates between a natural aesthetics, one that can ground new regulations against the established laws, and an aesthetics of the future that should imagine the new values of the new world to come. By coupling such aesthetics of the past and the future with the determinism of capital Marx reaches a double dead end. The first touches on the Marxist determinism and shows that the law dictating the universal tendency of capital<sup>76</sup> won't reach its hoped-for

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Toufic complies with this definition and specifies it by showing that what is ultimately real is the pure eschatological present. Sadek too complies with this definition by describing our real experience during a civil war.

76 The universal tendency of capital stipulates that capitalism has an inherent contradiction because it needs the process of industrialization to maximize production while such an industrialization will reduce the surplus and liberate the workers by giving them more free time. This free time will set the workers on intellectual emancipation leading them to topple capital (Marx 1972, chap. 15 & 20).

goal anytime soon, the liberation of the workers by the industrialization process being forever postponed<sup>77</sup>. The second is that the different revolutionary actions, wars, and civil wars are only mobilized by conscious goals and hence are always reproducing the unconscious system of values instituted by capitalism<sup>78</sup>, or by some other archaic obscurantists territorialities<sup>79</sup>, whence the need for a poetics of the future, whose possibility itself seems to be inconceivable. This deadlock, brought Castoriadis, in the *Imaginary Institution of Society*, to advocate non-causal events that interrupt the course of historical determinism and consist in the creation of new norms (Castoriadis 1987, 44). Such social creativity requires a radical imaginary stemming, in an unconscious way, from the anonymous collectivity, a creativity that introduces mutations in our everyday behaviors and that can become the ground for new institutions (Castoriadis 1997, 134). Castoriadis defends the position that only such an imaginary can see new possibilities that are not reducible to social or economic causalities and by that rupture the established order grounded on causal and social necessities. The real institutional power is the power of this collective imagination that is able to create new values and new meaning. It remains that, as Dardot and Laval show, Castoriadis is unable to give agency for the individual creative power that remains confined in a form of autistic phantasmagorical power that doesn't reach the collectivity. Without the creative conscious agency of the individuals the collective imaginary ends up being identified to custom and its unconscious mutations that don't necessarily lead to any emancipatory outcome. Dardot and Laval conclude to the impossibility of achieving social change by relying on the collective imaginary, given that such imaginary is unconscious and hence a-political, or through political action, given that politics pursue conscious goals and by that is governed by historical and

77 In *Empire*, Negri and Hardt show for example that capitalism operates by intensification and the ever discovery of new markets and sources of exploitation and the destruction of the old ones. They consider that now we are moving into an era of real consumption where all forms of human activities, including rest and leisure will be exploited and monetized by capital (Hardt and Negri 2001, 256).

78 In her interview with Dominique Noguez, Duras shows that Marxists and activists are still too attached to gain and property, they still aim at comfort and better products. She opposes to that her motto "let the world go to its loss". She advocates for a whole other vision that that of material security that echo to a great extent the world of the undead that we encountered in Toufic (Duras 2001).

79 We can consider that the Iranian revolution is such a failed revolution that couldn't imagine or create a new system of values when it toppled the Shah. If Foucault was right in seeing that the new forms of revolutions will require a spiritual dimension, it remains that he was mistaken by considering that the Iranian revolution had anything spiritual (Foucault 1998, 211). Toufic sees very well that today the Shi'a are not part of the Army of the Mahdi, but a counterfeit, the Army of the Mahdi being one that explores the Imaginal World and other unworldly dimensions (Toufic 2007, 81-83).

social determinism foreclosing all novelty (Dardot and Laval 2019, 293). To exit this deadlock, Dardot and Laval think that a possible solution would be to reflect on the unconscious forms of political praxis itself, i.e. on the implicit rules that guide spontaneous actions and communities oriented towards autonomy, in order to achieve a conscious institution of such a praxis (Dardot and Laval 2019, 301). By that Dardot and Laval consider that they can avoid the contradictions plaguing the Marxists determinism and the creative approach of Castoriadis. It remains that Dardot and Laval end up proposing a program that only repeats the all too well known democratic values that are nothing but the negation of the established values (Dardot and Laval 2019, 311).

It is at this point that the work of Sadek can bring in a possible solution. Indeed, Sadek's work is focused on bringing to clarity the categories of our experience when witnessing the unfolding of capitalist violence. Such an experience can't be reduced to historical and economical causes even if, indeed, it results from these causes. It is at this point that Sadek rejoins Castoriadis by showing that there is an a-historical dimension in history, but contrary to Castoriadis, such an a-historical dimension is not due to some creative collective agency but rather to what can't be recuperated or subsumed by history. As we have seen violence manifests itself into excessive presences, i.e. presences that generate a palpable and poignant experience that resist any form of rationalization. Add to that, the work of Sadek can't be characterized as resulting from his individual creativity, nor is it the expression of some collective custom, but rather it consists in bringing to consciousness a collective experience that stands as the residue of history. In another way Sadek reconnects with Marx while still opening a different orientation. Indeed, the awareness of the excessive materiality can't be identified to the material conditions of production that paves the way to revolutionary action. In fact, the categories that Sadek brings forth are those of the unfolding of revolutionary violence and civil wars and not the categories that prepare conscious political action and civil wars. If civil wars introduce something new it is because they modify the structure of space and time and require those enduring such violence to develop new capacities to survive, and hence they force one into a new form of life. Novelty appears here in all its strangeness, in these characters soliloquizing with silence, these witnesses speaking with a forked tongue or turning into persistent images, this collectivity that mourns in the presence of the corpse, etc. Through such an aesthetics of the civil war Sadek also departs from the well-intentioned discourse of Dardot and Laval that still frame the whole issue with the usual historical categories and project us in a better future,

repressing by that the actual and present mutation that we are undergoing. We can say then that the poetics of the future that Marx was looking for is nothing but the aesthetics of the present of civil wars.

Sadek and Toufic can be hence considered as two possible orientations for a politics of the present that is itself a messianic politics. Indeed, Toufic, through his reading of the scriptures, shows that the Redeemed World will be that of the pure present, and by that reveals to us that presence, be it the poignant present of some art works that hit us with their force or of some violent and limit case situations, is different in nature from the other dimensions of time. The past with its deterministic chains and the future with its embellished promises would be the works of Iblis. What is Alive is what is present, God being presence itself never passing away nor coming into being. In that sense what needs to be revoked is causal thinking itself in favor of a thought of the manifest as such. The manifest as manifest is what has a force of presence that casts away all need for interpretation and explanation. Such thought will be topological and typological and not anymore, a thought proceeding by causal chains or conditions of possibility<sup>80</sup>. The typologies and topologies of the civil war are the forms of the manifest that describe our ways of being in such extreme situations and such ways can't be recuperated by capitalism. The dwelling in the present opens a temporality that destroys the possibility of deferral<sup>81</sup>, temporal projections, speculations and the logistical partitioning of space-time. If we consider that the main operation of capital is to implement an analytical space-time that allows the control and discipline of production<sup>82</sup> in view of never ending accumulation, we can say that the present as present haunts such organization. Aesthetical experiences and limit case situations rupture the course of time and open on the pure present<sup>83</sup>. The political problem is

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80 The manifest must be distinguished from the phenomena and from appearances. Appearances would be the manifestation of some objective reality, be it a material reality or platonic Idea, while phenomena relate to the condition of possibility for the given to appear in such or such a way given the subjective transcendental structures. If Plato thinks the apparent, while Kant is the thinker of the phenomenon, we can say that the thinker of the manifest would be Nietzsche. Deleuze systematized a typological aesthetics in his *Cinema 01 & 02 books*.

81 Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, shows how inner worldly asceticism defers gratification. Weber argues that such deferral structures is due to the protestant ethics that relates religious merit to worldly obligations, a merit that will be reattributed in the afterlife (Weber 2001). It remains that the conception of the religious as pertaining of the *after* life can be contested through the readings of Toufic assessment of the revelation and the tradition as dealing solely with the present as we have seen.

82 We can read Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in that direction, where Foucault provides us with the spatiotemporal forms of capitalism (Foucault 1995).

83 The affirmation of the disaster and civil war, and of violence in general, as a way to create new communities and to prepare the advent of absolute justice can be similar to the



by that displaced, it becomes that of making such a pure present last and endure without falling back into chronological succession. We can say that such a time, the time of a lasting present, would be the time of the wait, and as Toufic writes, the Messiah will come when we will learn how to wait (Toufic 2007, 39).

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thesis advanced by Jameson in the chapter 'The Valences of History' of his *Valences of Dialectics* (Jameson 2009, 598). It remains that for Jameson, contra Toufic, it is history itself that irrupt during the revolution and not the a-historical, and contra Sadek and Toufic, Jameson doesn't expand on the categories of such manifestation. Jameson only mentions a collapse, or fusion of the subjective and objective dimensions of time without specifying exactly how such fusion can exist, as we have seen with Sadek, nor the meaning of such a fusion, as we have seen with Toufic. Last Jameson considers that violent events reveal in history the formlessness of time, where such a formlessness presents a reservoir of possibilities, while for Sadek and Toufic the formlessness doesn't concern chronological time, or the whole of time, but only the pure presence left over by historical and chronological time that need to be transfigured into a pure present which is outside of time.

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