

تحت... ديبا... رضية... وما... وكان... بيصيص... الجرائم... لنفسه أشفع... باختفائه وبر... مرثيا ثم تقول... عندما يصار لا... وبليز يكي وتالم... بطل رواية

ببصيرته فلم يقتل بنى جنسه
عندما يصار لا وبليز يكي وتالم
بطل رواية
مرثيا ثم تقول باختفائه وبر
لنفسه أشفع الجرائم
عندما يصار لا وبليز يكي وتالم
بطل رواية



عندما يصار لا وبليز يكي وتالم
بطل رواية

Maha Maamoun The Law of Existence

24 February - 12 June 2017



راحة، الخلاء، صبرية التصميم تناسب مهام حفر وتجريف وتنظيف أنفاقه تحت الأرض

تكون وهدد الصدمات الخارطة ليست كل شيء، فكل قنصة
التراب من بطون الديان التي تأكل وتغضب التربة فيها
ببروتين صاف، ولا تلتبنا أمعاود، وعندما تكون هناك وفرة في
طعامها هذا في مواسم الحريف والشتاء المبلتة، يقوم الحمار
والجفاف، ولتوفر ما تحتاجه الإناث من تغذية كثيفة طوال
شدة حملهن والولادة والإرضاع. تنز آهوا حفاري الأنفاق
لما يحتوي على مادة مخدرة تشل حركة الديان قبيل قضم
الأرضية، فيصمم الحفرون طويلا بلا حفساد، وكان هذه الكائنات
العمياء تحت الأرض، تطبق ما تدرده كثيرا دون أن تعمل بما
تدرده، حين تقول إن «السمة تشد من راسها مؤشبين إلى
أن كل المفاسد تبدأ من الرأس» وما أرق وأخفى ما تقرب منه
عشرون عاما في الطوارئ فبما أنها تكون بالقرب من أف
عشرون عاما في طلبة «التشبيث»، بيوت
عشرون عاما في طلبة «التشبيث»، بيوت
عشرون عاما في طلبة «التشبيث»، بيوت
عشرون عاما في طلبة «التشبيث»، بيوت

الذئب الخارجي للكتك تدعم كفايته، فيعمل كجوارف وشركة
حلال ومنازة معا. وسكة تغرس أسنانيا في الطمي عميقا،
وجاروف يغوص فيه ويسحب منه، وعلة تنحى الريم وتتكون
أو تنثره عبر أنفاق راسية، فتفتح على سطح الأرض وتتكون
حولها كومات ما يبرزه الحفازون من تراب. كومات تكثف عن
وجود هذا الحفار تحت الأرض حاملة اسمه: «للال الخلد»
MOLE HILLS. ويقدر ما يُبسر هذه الأنفاق الراسية القصيرة
فغالبية الحفر ونطاقه الأنفاق الأفقية الطويلة، بقدر ما تكثف
كومات التراب المتراكمة حولها عن وجود حيوانات الخلد تحت
الأرض، فاضعة سر هذا الوجود الخفى في عالم الاختفاء
تحت التراب.
وها هو واحد منهم ممسوك في قبضة مزارع وصياد خلد
أريب. يتعجب المزارع من غرابة منظر صيده لكنه لا يكرهه.
يدرك أنه لا يأكل جذور مزروعاته ولا يسهه إليها بل يفيدها
بتهوية باطن التربة بشبكات أنفاقه. لكنه في الوقت ذاته يضر
عندما يسخر موسم الأمطار فيفيضه، تتحول هذه الأنفاق إلى
قنوات مائية تعرق جذور النباتات حتى الاختناق. أما أكثر ما
يسوء المزارع، إن كان بستانيا، فهو تشوبه مسطحات المشب
الخضراء المشدبة كومات تراب الحفر الثثور من باطن
الأرض.
يتلمس الخلد المشبيل الأسير مُنزعجا في قبضة صياده، لا
لأن القبضه تنتمسه، فهي لا تعطل، لكن لأنه يقاسى في الهواء
الحلق من وفرة الأكسجين ونبهة النورا هو بالفعل يتعدب.
فالدور الذي لا يراه يشمل ظلمة ما تبقى من بصره المتلومس
بسواد ذي وميض خفيفه، والهواء الغنى بالأكسجين فوق طاقة

الأرواح وعقول
الشباب خاصة
منسبيها من
الشباب خاصة
منسبيها من
الشباب خاصة
منسبيها من



أحدى الطبقات الحديثة من
رواية الرجل الخفى التي لا
تكف المطالع عن إعادة نشرها

السقوط
المنذور حتما
الرجل الخفى
حديثا من
يملكون نوعا
الوهمية
بأسمائهم
أشباح الإنترنت

وعند غيوري... ذلك يلح على... التراب من؟... الموتى... حيوان الخلد... الأرواح... والج... التراب من؟... ذلك يلح على... وعند غيوري...

Newspaper clipping from “Under Caps of Invisibility,” written by Mohamed Makhzangi and published in *Almasry Alyoum* on 1 January 2015

Exhibition graphics: Mind the gap

Booklet design: Mind the gap

Printing: Byblos Printing

Drawing references from literature, cinema and vernacular imagery, Maha Maamoun's films and photographs are an investigation into the circulation, consumption, and function of images. *The Law of Existence*, Maamoun's first solo show in Lebanon, brings together works dealing with the many faces and forms of state power in contemporary Egypt, from its manifestation in the intimate lives of citizens to power solidified in the edifices of government headquarters. The works exhibited here were produced within the last six years, during a time of great change and upheaval in Egypt. At the heart of these works is a reflection on human nature in times of uncertainty.

Shot between Cairo and different locations in India, the film *Dear Animal* (2016) weaves together a short story by writer Haytham El-Wardany – titled "Lord of the Order of Existence" – about a drug dealer who turns into a strange animal, and a selection of letters written by Azza Shaaban, a director-producer involved with the Egyptian revolution and now living in India, from where she sends notes about her travels and healing process after the revolution. At once occupying disparate temporal and spatial registers, *Dear Animal* is a meditation on our relationship to power, violence, and the unfamiliar.

Compiled from mobile phone footage posted on YouTube, *Night Visitor: The Night of Counting the Years* (2011) documents the break-in by protesters at the State Security buildings in Cairo and Damanhur in 2011 after the first wave of the Egyptian revolution. Shaky cameras and pixelated images take us through the dark interiors of these previously impenetrable structures, from secret prisons up to the lavish offices of government officials, hung with gilded portraits and connected through direct phone access to the president. The work's title references the 1969 film *The Night of Counting the Years (Al-Mummia)* by Shadi Abdel Salam.

Two videos, gleaned from YouTube, act as a footnote to *Dear Animal*, speaking to animal/human relationships through the case of a lion shot by police during a drug raid.

Nora Razian

Head of Programs and Exhibitions, Sursock Museum

A Speech Not Ours

Doug Ashford

“Compulsive thinking has been defined ... as having to think continually; this contravenes man’s natural right of mental relaxation, of temporary rest from mental activity through thinking nothing, or as the expression goes in the basic language, it disturbs the ‘basis’ of a human being. My nerves are influenced by the rays to vibrate corresponding to certain human words; their choice therefore is not subject to my own will, but is due to an influence exerted on me from without. From the beginning the system of ‘not-finishing-a-sentence’ prevailed, that is to say the vibrations caused in my nerves and the words so produced to contain not mainly finished thoughts, but unfinished ideas, or only fragments of ideas, which my nerves have to supplement to make up their sense.”

—Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903)

The condition of rejecting insanity as a form of non-humanity is historically well known. Similarly, the politically revolutionary, the socially alternative, or sexually profound have all been diagrammed by power as outside of the coherently human. In Judge Daniel Paul Schreber’s glorious account of his life as mentally ill, he accounts for many of the distinctions inflicted upon him by state and medical society, acknowledging that these are produced by the overwhelming fear in others that he has somehow escaped from reality. But in relaying his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, he insists through example and repetition that his work is not to leave this world – but to change it. According to his understanding, the actual energy of the universe (communicated to him by birds and interfering with his capacity to speak clearly) could ultimately succeed in transforming him into the voluptuousness of an advanced state of multi-sexuality, as a woman-man-god-thing. The misunderstandings of this desire, destructively documented as repression by Sigmund Freud, have lived with us for a long time, as has the dismissal by authority of most identities created by individuals to disturb the “basis” of a human being. As creations, they are not escapes in the traditional understanding: they are a

way to inhabit our circumstances. One of his symptoms was partial aphasia, a habitually but periodic stuttering or falling off in finishing his sentences while speaking.

Some years ago, during the organizing of activist art projects, I looked to 17th-century historical paintings for a way to imagine a resolution of the anxiety I felt (and still feel) when confronted with the conflation of the aesthetic (a self) and political (a circumstance) in public speech. This demand is a frustration we often place on art. On the one hand, there is the looking for an epiphany related to intense pleasure; and on the other, the reorganization of the self as part of an imperative toward ethical transformation. The false choice between subjective rupture and virtue has often perniciously distracted us from what art can actually do. In the pre-modern paintings that present a utopian distraction to European courtly life, I found both a solace and a challenge: what can we ever do to release ourselves from the confines of a managed life that enables so much violence? In a picture of pastoral harmony by Jean-Antoine Watteau titled *The Embarkation for Cythera* (1717), for example, I found more than the servicing conversation piece for the prince’s salon: it

offered the possibility of sublimity leading to a collective excursion, a departure from what is expected in life toward a radically improvised performance of a self. This escape lasts as an extremely contemporary proposal. Watteau and his students insisted that the tension between the drive toward sensation and the social necessity of politics are, if noticed, intricately linked to the performance of every human exchange. When we dance, we pose and reform. When we converse, we challenge and accept. Paintings of social disappearance articulate social form without speech, and sway our witnessing to entertain happiness outside of their given humanity and feel political subjection as both produced by and dependent upon this "outsideness." We may become who we are by resisting what

we are told to be; while telling ourselves there is no end, or no known humanness, to who that might be.

These days I have a recurring dream that I am a drug addict, barely surviving the exigencies of my life. In it, there is always the same scene: I am still up in the very early morning, unable to perceive differences between a thing in front of me, the atmosphere, and my own flesh. I am mainly caught up in not being able to see the color of the sky; it appears as both black and bright green. This misrecognition of color is both familiar and startling at daybreak, after long periods of intoxication matched with a condition of significant physical pain. As I look out the window, the changing color I experience could be the natural declension from night



Maha Maamoun
Night Visitor: The Night of Counting the Years (film still), 2011
Single-channel video, 8'30''

to dawn, or at the same time, a parallel effect of coming down from the inebriation of the day before. In this hallucinatory thought, there is a clear understanding of the relativity of suffering to sensation; the realization that self-destruction is based in part on a determination to make the world different – because as it shifts the drives of bright life, the dark world that is produced can be sensed as if under control.

On waking from this dream, I am always in deep melancholy. But an explicitly confused one, based on the realization that the darkness of such a self-transformation – however destructive – lends a kind of inverse light to the dullness of social acceptance and normality. Seeing one's own senses changed through self-inflicted pain is an affecting proposal for the politics of real life: an invention of the mind that could evince life's regimentations as a dream we are working through. The consciousness of a dream is always recolored (in this case from black to bright green and back again) and then seen as producing, as new lighting often does, a different world.

The melancholy of pain, whether self-inflicted or caused by others, wants one to understand an art that demands the disordering of the world's restrictions. Art has claimed such a position of reversal or of turning around, away from the rationalization of everyday life and preconceived progress, away from desire's contemporary confinement into commodity and violence. This may seem reactionary, like turning away from the future, but it is possible that it is a positive reversal from the false certainty of modern progress. Leaving aside humanism's claims of progress and improvement is often frightening. In so doing, we are leaving aside notions of linear time, the divisions of space and objects created over time, or the singularities of identity that progress has so far defined. Outside of the state's formal apparatus of citizen

building, I can propose myself as any new body, or even any new thing. I could become inappropriately joined to those not related to me. Together we could adopt histories not our own, obsess together on excessive refusals to reproduce the present, and most simply, just forget how we are supposed to speak. Finding uses for a self that will no longer contain a rationalized future is physically felt in the body, and sometimes demands that the body be re-stylized in abstract thought or form – miniaturized to be free and overlooked, deformed to collect new fantasies of use and agency, monstrously over-scaled to see beyond the sciences. And although this re-stylization might feel akin to deformation, monstrosity, or death, it is useful to life in its requirement that we turn away from the world that can't accept the full implications of our mind. It is probably why trying to live beyond rationality often separates us – our minds and bodies – into something that appears to be on the verge of insanity. An insane self may be the real addressee of the silences inherent in works of art: like a random passerby, seeing the archive of the civilization reformed onto our thoughts, exposed, and helplessly facing a formal request to become someone in pain, speechless, a non-human being.

In Maha Maamoun's film, *Dear Animal*, two individuals release themselves from a disaster. One, the activist Dolphin, has retreated to heal the psychic wounds of failed revolutions and becomes figuratively a dolphin, enjoining a gradual self-sequestering. She speaks only in the epistle to finally describe what it was like to be spattered by the blood of others in the struggle against authoritarianism. Her pastoral retreat is, of course, a form of repair, but also of (un)building. The other, Walid the gangster, is unconsciously jinxed into the form of another animal – a zebroid goat that wants to fly – separating

him from his clan of criminals and exposing their absurd immorality. Although his leader and colleagues realize that “his speech is not ours,” they cannot allow him to live. More than unbuilt, he is brutally killed by those following orders, who loved him.

Although the causes and resulting destinies of these two transformations are profoundly different, the resulting condition of cogency in autonomy and aloneness is the same. Maamoun’s escapes into solitude, whether tragic or idyllic, are reasonable results from what the devastation that denial of human rights inflicts on the soul. When I am speaking outside of what can be understood, I am outside the lives of the ordinary, needing the attention of society in ways that call up all its non-state apparatuses of supposed “healing” – the hospital, the God, and the family. The pastoral retreat and the turning into animal seem both to be aspects of the same drive, one that allows an escape from the confines of regularity, utility, and the violence of existing social formation. They both suggest a lost coherence and demand sublimation in the face of the exigencies of life: instead of continuing the paradoxical struggles of a given life, the physical form, habit or place will transform existence. And they both demand a reorganization of how that transformation might be communicated; declaring that self-description in speech may be inadequate. To take a position against speech, like against representation, appears at first to be indefensible. But any departure from language – the muteness of animal, the silence of divinity or death, the aphasia of the insane – all request that as listeners we look beyond the violently scientific definitions of society for another manifestation of the self. Perhaps this reveals a new kind of paradoxical political energy that has been alongside rational effort all the time: the energy of the colored lights decorating the

corpse of a camel that illuminate the Cairo of Maamoun’s film; the glowing rays that enter the body of Schreber and render him beyond the human; the electric confusion of not knowing the color of morning light; the pull of love that brings us to a new island – all rebellion.

Doug Ashford is an artist, teacher, and writer based in New York. He is Associate Professor at The Cooper Union where he has been teaching sculpture, design, and interdisciplinary studies since 1989. Ashford’s visual practice from 1982 to 1996 was the multi-form practice of Group Material, whose work has been recently compiled in the publication *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (Four Corners Books, 2010). His most recent public effort culminated in the project *Who Cares* (Creative Time, 2006), which brings together a series of conversations between Ashford and other cultural practitioners on public expression, ethics, and beauty. Recent exhibitions include *Abstract Possible: The Stockholm Synergies* (2010–12), dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel (2012), and the Gwangju Biennale 11 (2016). A collection of essays, titled *Doug Ashford: Writings and Conversation*, (Mousse Publishing, 2013), was published on the occasion of his retrospective exhibition at the Grazer Kunstverein that year. He is represented by Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam.

Overleaf
Maha Maamoun
Dear Animal (film still), 2016
Single-channel video, 25’30’’





Dear Animal

Notes in a Conversation on a Film by Maha Maamoun

Mohamed Beshir

I.

It was related to me that in a farm on the outskirts of Cairo lives a billy goat, which resembles a zebra with “short strong legs, wide stout neck, and fine black stripes crossing his body.” If goats had any memory for names, this one would respond to Walid Taha.

Before life on the farm, before the acquired stripes and the bestowed name, the goat most probably lived the average life of an urbanized animal for years. Eating and drinking from the waste of humans and the provisions of the land, it might have even enrolled in a couple of financial trades, shifting owners and shifting mates.

Yet, none of these experiences could have prepared it for the moment it stood in front of a camera to embody the role of a shape-shifting drug dealer in Maha Maamoun’s latest work *Dear Animal*, a 25-minute film that interweaves scenes inspired by Haytham El-Wardany’s short story “Sultan Qanun al-Wujud” (Lord of the Order of Existence), and the notes Azza Shaaban has irregularly posted on her Facebook wall since leaving Egypt in 2013.

II. Haytham El-Wardany

...*Yet in short stories, it’s not the force of construction that is at play. There is a different force that aims to stretch what already exists to its extreme limits. A force that seeks a fragile balance in the moment of collapse. Such force has no control over its subject, for it functions over a gaseous state of matter. From that perspective, the story resembles a poem, for both of them perceive a hallucinatory*

*viewpoint towards the gravity of the real. At this point, novelistic structures disappear in favor of prosaic threads. Here erupts the cosmic dust and shine the stars in the sky.*¹

It’s specifically this instinctive force at play, at that moment of collapse, that acts as a key to unlocking the multilayered tale of Sultan Qanun al-Wujud; the story of a ring of drug dealers who find themselves in a curious situation when one of them, Walid Taha, who has stashed their latest consignment of drugs, inexplicably turns into a hybrid animal: a curious amalgamation of goat and zebra. The storyline follows their desperate attempts to get any word out of him as to the whereabouts of the drugs. More importantly for their boss, however, is to set an example out of Taha so that no one tries this trick again. Order must be kept and business must be protected.

The underworld laid out in Wardany’s story seems as complex as it is callous; too callous that when faced with the sudden transformation of the drug pusher, the only conceivable reactions from the parties involved, on either side of the law, are along the lines of either total engulfment or total annihilation. Amid the conflict between two generations of drug dealers, and their attempts to approach the problem at hand, a devolution is highlighted. The story that initially lends itself to a heritage of surreal metamorphosis quickly reveals inherent remarks on the codes of a certain subculture, and questions how much moments

¹ القصة القصيرة. انزان هش في لحظة السقوط. جريدة التحرير (2016-05-28)

of transition can reveal about power structures.

In his text “How to read Kalila wa Dimna,” Abdelfattah Kilito bluntly states: “...Narrative is the weapon of the defenseless.”² The statement is driven by his remark that in the frame tale – full of talking animals, usually arguing and negotiating – the lion is the least talkative.³ For one, the lion’s paws are mightier than any argument, but more notably, the power of his words comes from their scarcity. Withdrawal requires and implies strength. The dramatic conflict in the fictional half of *Dear Animal* instantly surpasses the metamorphosis to center around the mundane effect of the withdrawal of Walid Taha’s speech abilities as a man turned animal, or rather the critical timing of it.

III. Azza Shaaban

*For as long as I can remember, I’ve always known I was a dolphin, and recalled events from my previous life.*⁴

Taking her cue from the Rabaa massacre in August 2013, Azza Shaaban embarked on an open-ended trip to India. The idea of leaving Egypt had already been brewing in the minds of many Egyptians by that time, especially those who saw bloodshed of friends and fellow protesters on the streets of Cairo from 2011 onwards, as they slowly realized that the last blood was yet to come. Shaaban’s exit to seek healing for physical and psychosomatic maladies led her to the foothills of the Himalayas, where she started a process of unloading and disentangling. Despite the extreme distance she took, or maybe as a result of feelings synonymous with such displacements, Shaaban soon felt an urge to maintain a channel of communication with

Cairo, and she found it in the form of open letters that she posted irregularly yet frequently on Facebook. In these ongoing letters, which always begin with “Dear Animal,” and end with “Signed: The Dolphin,” Azza Shaaban is speaking in the first animal already. She/ The Dolphin addresses her friends in Cairo, “the animals,” through the digital forest of Facebook, sharing her present state of mind and body, and sometimes hinting at shared, scarring memories.

Much like Wardany’s protagonist, Maamoun’s film took to hybridity itself. If Sultan Qanun al-Wujud explores the elementary particles connecting the atoms and molecules of a certain power structure, the film’s other half, Shaaban’s Facebook notes, occupy another state of “matter”: a post-apocalyptic state where ambiguity is the rule, and where classic boundaries of space, time, gender, and species give way to moments of interplay and contemplation.

IV. Maha Maamoun

*In the couple of years following the 2011 Egyptian revolution, I noticed a rise in the appearance of animals in the writings of people around me. Has this always been the case but I just noticed it then? I started looking and finding more animals, animal news and analogies appearing in the news, talk shows, opinion pieces, literary texts, and art projects. Possibly an attempt to revise, or conversely to re-assert, the status-quo and its catastrophic power relations. In this film, I focused on two significant pieces of writing from that period in which animals curiously appeared, not as metaphors, symbols or prosthetic tongues for an endangered political subject, but as indeterminate shifting forms with uncertain beginnings and ends.*⁵

² عبد الفتاح كيليطو (2009). من شرفة ابن رشد. دار توبقال للنشر. (ص 6)

³ Meaning: the story within the story.

⁴ As quoted in a conversation with the author on a Zamalek Balcony, September 2016.

⁵ As quoted in a Skype conversation with the author, September 2016.

As opposed to classical views of animals as creatures that “do not know what is meant by yesterday or today,” “leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again,” and “from morning till night and from day to day” – “fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure” – are “neither melancholy nor bored,” the dolphin Azza Shaaban evokes is granted voice, memories, a present and future.⁶

In one scene, over images shot by Maamoun herself of Shaaban’s balcony overlooking the serene forests of Dharamsala, Shaaban’s voiceover describes her daily life in India, and how she’s treading roads shared by humans, animals, birds, and cars. The redemption of the dolphin in Shaaban’s narrative opens up a new potential in her present moment. In signing out of restrictive, linear, hu(man)-centric narratives of history, an animal persona/pen-name harps on an animalistic historic ambivalence and allows for the writing of an alternative history.

Maamoun’s film, as opposed to her previous video and photography work, primarily raises the question of the viability of narrative vehicles to map out metaphysical/mystical concepts often inhabited by theology, mythology, or niche philosophy. How far can the emotional embodiment of thoughts – and the banking on the heritage of dramatic representations and melodramatic gestures – relate to concepts tackling the boundaries of form?

These questions are partly addressed in the very structure of the film. The steady intercutting between the documentary-like footage of Dharamsala and the fictional scenes shot in Cairo impels an internal dynamic; one that threads lines of divergence and convergence, alternatively opening up channels between two regimes that are otherwise separated.

This is a concept that shares some lineage with early Soviet theoretical approaches to film and montage, where images are edited in a dialectical structure that propels a chain reaction of feelings and meanings, and notions run in parallel like train rails, projecting an imaginary meeting point on a virtual horizon in the viewer’s eyes.

The investment in maintaining the vague connections within the film proves essential to the breathability of its own fabric. The entanglement points to the film’s dual parts and instigates feedback loops between them. The muteness of Walid Taha/the zebroid goat is faced by the first-person voice of Shaaban; her addressing of Cairo and the past from her nonhierarchical, anachronistic perspective brings a new individualistic angle to an inherently collective experience of history.

Such an angle resists the rigid flow governed by progress, which in turns highlights the gravity of Walid Taha’s individual withdrawal, and the risk this withdrawal poses on the credibility and survival of the cemented rules of existence governing the world he belonged to.

V. Maha Maamoun

I came across the hanging camel skeleton that appears in the film by chance – in a picture taken and posted by Mahmoud Khattab on his Facebook page. When asked by the stunned viewers about the whereabouts of this thing, he shared the address of the butcher’s shop. Apparently a butcher in Eastern Cairo, who sells camel and other meat, reassembled a camel’s skeleton, decorated it with colorful blinking lights and hung it in front of his shop as a sign. It hovers high above a constant stream of people and vehicles passing through the long narrow street that is lined on either side by residential buildings and shops to which the hanging skeleton is attached and from which it draws its electrical life-force. I was

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 60.



Maha Maamoun
Dear Animal (film still), 2016
Single-channel video, 25'30''

struck by this image and struck even more upon encountering the thing itself. Turning a corner and seeing it in situ, hanging above a busy residential area like any other casual decoration, gave me goosebumps. It's both morbid and fun, but maybe its impact is in its unfamiliarity. It's not a traditional, local, familiar object or aesthetic. Again, it felt like another instance where a yet unidentifiable fluid flux of thought and feeling is finding form. Here again via the animal. It's still hard for me to understand this thing and what it expresses. And though it appears in passing in one scene of Dear Animal, for me it was like a third text informing the film.⁷

Despite their differences in terms of form and aesthetics, the roots of the two halves of *Dear Animal* share a primitive space of ambiguity that resists metaphors: a space where people are not just people and animals

are not completely animals, but both are not yet something else in particular.

That middle space of perpetual flux traverses the three-dimensional world of narrative towards a fourth one, not very different from the realm where mythology draws its force. In the landscape of a myth, historical truth is meaningless, and the categorization of fiction and reality is suspended. It's this ahistorical space, where forms, identities and concepts escape the gravity of narratives and gain more permeability. Here, they are allowed to reconnect to forgotten origins and foundations that give myth its overarching quality.

While for most of the time we lie at the consuming end of mythology, we indeed do provide it with meaning. As Jean Luc-Nancy noted, "we know that although we did not invent the stories (here again, up to a certain point), we did on the other hand invent the function of the myths that these

⁷ As quoted in a Skype Conversation with the author, September 2016.

stories recount...⁸ Perhaps the most stimulating notion in *Dear Animal* is the attempt to re-question that portal, and to hack this mythical origin space, reactivating an atrophied lane in the two-way road between the storyteller and the audience. In *Dear Animal*, the viewer's automatic urge to connect the dots between the two stories reflects something in us, and the film's self-awareness of the distance it keeps summons the possibility of a collective, active, and imaginative space.

VI. Azza Shaaban

*I imagine the reason behind my reconnection to my animal past has to do with my perception of time. I've always mistaken events from the past to be in the future, and vice versa.*⁹

In the thirteenth century, when the grand sheikh of Sufism wanted to attest to signs of his early sainthood, he brought a herd of zebras to act as witnesses. The story in the Meccan Revelations tells of an incident where the adolescent Ibn Arabi – still then in what he dubs as his *jahiliyya* phase – rides a horse in a travelling caravan across al-Andalus alongside his father and a group of guards. As the caravan approached a group of feeding wild zebras, which the armed troupe was bound to disturb, Ibn Arabi, who was ahead of the caravan, believed in his heart that he would not be of harm to them. So he passed through, his spear almost touching their napes, and the zebras did not even look up. It was only when the rest of the caravan arrived that the herd flinched and dispersed.

One way of reading this incident would be that to the zebras, Ibn Arabi was not identified as an-other; his own subjectivity expanded to intertwine with that of the other creatures and components of the cosmos, rendering

conflict obsolete. Another possibility would be that between his ideas of space-time, and between the animals' alleged ambivalence towards the flow of history, Ibn Arabi was, from a certain perspective, invisible: in the time, but not of it.

The idea of a traversing, fluid subjectivity is tangible in the choices made in the making of *Dear Animal*. In the joint between the voice and the voiceless, the present and the withdrawn, we are urged not only to surpass dichotomies, but to also question the idea of subjectivity altogether. A proposition mediated not by our accumulated knowledge of boundaries, but rather through a revisiting of the very structure of our perception.

VII. Haytham El-Wardany

*It's not just a one-way interaction, I imagine that animals have their own agency, and at some points they can recall themselves into our reality... it's not a realm that can be exclusively explained via the rules of causality.*¹⁰

Somewhere on the outskirts of Cairo, in a farm near the pyramids of Abu Sir, lives a goat with faded paint patterns on its body that might still respond to the name Walid. Legend has it that on one night, the goat will have a dream about aquatic mammals, mind-altering substances, revolutionaries and humans in a dark room watching projected light. The goat will wake up confused and go silent for a certain period, after which he might speak his real name.

This essay was originally commissioned by Ibraaz, and can be viewed online at the following link: <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/17>

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⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 45.

⁹ As quoted in a conversation with the author on a Zamalek Balcony, September 2016.

¹⁰ As quoted in a Skype conversation with the author, September 2016.

Maha Maamoun

b. 1972, Oakland, CA, USA
Lives and works in Cairo, Egypt

Maha Maamoun's work is generally interested in examining the form, function, and currency of common cultural, visual, and literary images as an entry point to investigating the cultural fabric that we weave and are weaved into. She also works collaboratively on independent publishing and curatorial projects. She co-founded the independent publishing platform called Kayfa-ta in 2013. She is also a founding board member of the Contemporary Image Collective (CIC), an independent non-profit space for art and culture founded in Cairo in 2004.

Recent exhibitions include *The Time is Out of Joint*, Sharjah Art Foundation, 2016; *Century of Centuries*, SALT, 2015; *Like Milking a Stone*, Rosa Santos Gallery, 2015; *The Night of Counting the Years*, Fridricianum, 2014; *Here and Elsewhere*, New Museum, 2014; and *Ten Thousand Wiles and a Hundred Thousand Tricks*, Meeting Points 7, 2014.

Works on display

Twin Gallery 1

Newspaper clipping from "Under Caps of Invisibility,"

written by Mohamed Makhzangi and published in Almasry Alyoum on 1 January 2015

Night Visitor: The Night of Counting the Years, 2011

Single-channel video, 8'30"

Arabic with English subtitles

Drug dealer raises a lion in Tanta

YouTube video uploaded by MrTa3b on 25 May 2011, 1'51"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaJWayxiUCU>

Lion at Tanta police station

YouTube video uploaded by hany zeed on 25 May 2011, 1'59"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6KiVg54T2s>

Twin Gallery 2

Dear Animal, 2016

Single-channel video, 25'30"

Arabic with English subtitles

Film begins on the hour and on the half hour

تحت طوق الأقفال

Sursock Museum
Greek Orthodox Archbishopric Street
Ashrafieh, Beirut, Lebanon
www.sursock.museum

المثاليين في كل فن، التي استكناه قوانين التحولات الجميلة أو الجميلة في مصائر البشر، والتي لا تنصّب هاهنا على تحول إنسان إلى الخفاء، بل تكشف بقدرته تحليل واستشراف نفسيين ملهمة، عن مسار ومصير المصائر التحول، في كل حالات التخفي، وهو ما يمكن أن نراه مجلّء مفرغ، في تحول المصائر البشرية مع تحولات التجمعات السياسية أو الاجتماعية أو الدينية أو الثقافية، إلى حركات سرية وتنظيمات كتيمة وخطابات طابعية، تتبّع منتسبها ونسبها، فيشقون بسريتهم وخفتهم، ويشقون أوطانهم والناس والحياة.

كان هناك البداية، شعرت بالغبثيان، وبكيت في أحيان كثيرة، وأخذت أكتب نفسي، لكنني لم أجد، لن أنسى أبدا منظر يدي عند ما رايتهما، أصبح لونهما كورقة بيضاء، أصبحتا شفافتين كالزجاج. في البداية كنت ضعيفا كطفل صغير، أسبقني لا أستطيع رؤيتهم.. بهذه السطور القليلة، رسم الكاتب البريطاني الأقرى هيربرت جورج ويلز آلام وأحزان لحظة تحول إنسان، من كائن منظور لا مرئي، في راعته السليطة العميقة، الرجل الخفي، التي أبدعها عام 1918، وهي مثل كل أدب عظيم تتسلل بعدوية العرض والتشويق

احتماله، ف على حمل على جريه بالآلا ويجري، ووو ويجري، يعبر الأسماء العذب بالأمم بقوادمه الما يعفر، نالر سستراحة ا ما قورن بعن مبعصرتين، ا



الخلد نجومي الأنف الذي الأحدي وللاذن شعبة انفاقه تحت قاع البحريرات والمستعلمات

3 رؤى

في رؤاير اربا، رواد اربا، ومستشرفا لكل من اخابا السرية، التي المستغنى إلى الجحور الباعدي البعير غفقت، ا

التنظيمات السرية أيا كانت هي فإخا لقتل

3 يعذبه النور ويخنقه الهواء
فيما تكون أرجل هذا الكائن الخلفية قصبية وبذله قصيرا تتمازق قوادمه وتتقاطح راحاتها، تكتسى بواطنها بجلد سميك أجود، وتبرز من أطرافها خمسة أصابع في كل كف، ومضاقا إليها أصبح سادس مندغم لا يبين، شبة عظيمة مغطاة في

الأرض، أشاء، غزو المارتيز الأثيم لذلك الشرق الكونك الميميد. ولعل ابتكار ذلك الجهاز كان مستلهما بالفعل من قدرات هذا الكائن الضعيف المجهيب، الذي لم يحرمه خالفته من استثناء يعينه على ملاصقات عيشه المسير، وأمايز يحصاه عليه أباطرة الدولة الأكبر عدوانية وغنى وتقدما علميا في العالم؛ هو كائن لا يكف عن الحركة والألتام، يحنر ويأكل، ويعفر ويأكل، فيبينما ينق طريقه صائما انفاقه دون كمال في الليل كما في النهار، ويمدد يصل إلى عشرون مترا في اليوم الواحد. تتساقط من سقوف وجوانب ديدان الأرض، غداؤو الفضل الذي يلثم منه يوما ما بعدال نصف وزنه وسرعمة تكاد لا ترصدحدا العين البشرية. ثلاث قصبمات في الثانية

الرجل الخفي في واحد من عشرات الأرقام التي ولدت من زخم رواية ويلز العبقرية

انطماس بصره بسبب عيشه تحت الأقبال

تغور ليس على عشبنا منظر دون من وجود شبيهة تنطق بالإنها، غفقت، ا

خاصة من والسريرة، منهم بمد أن تكون البصيرة، الشرف والجلال، ويغود الجانبة الكثرة، ما ظاهرة المناق، فإداحة والكثفة، البصر.