TRANSLATION
If we understand irony as a riposte or a horror on the part of a counterpart, a negation embracing the existing and employing the affirmation of the existing, then the irony in the appearance of the image resists in, as Noren Kierkegaard puts it, the “appearance not being the essence but the opposite of the essence.”54 Kierkegaard’s understanding of irony is apt for describing Sabella’s singular use of the “filmtext.” The expression of irony, as the “infinite absolute negativity” (and any addition must by its essence be understood as a negativity), is engaged in negation and thus “(irony) destroys the given reality by means of that very given reality.”55 The 2014 work 38 days of re-collection, begun a year after Sabella’s exile in 2009, is the result of a process of multiple imprints, like Till the End and yet quite different. The work adheres to a strict principle, it is not an act to a compulsion to bring things together that construct history in its very breaches, of life, of suffering, of distortions, and hopes. It is not about the reconstruction of history but about the act of photographing as disaster, following Maurice Blanchot’s The Writing of the Disaster and its central statement: “The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact.”56 In 2009 Sabella rented a house in Elin Karim in Jerusalem, which a Palestinian family had abandoned, to secure themselves, when they heard about the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948. He stayed in it for thirty-eight days, taking photographs of objects—duvet, walls, pictures—visually frisking the history of the place. Then, in his parental home and in other houses in the Old City of Jerusalem, he removed pieces of walls, little bits of painted plaster, or just of stained chalk. The color photographs were copied onto black-and-white film, and the pieces of fresco, flayed bits of wall, were covered in an emulsion, and the negatives from the house he lived in projected and fixed on that emulsion. Because of the different colors of the carrier, the black-and-white images take on a mysterious, dreamlike presence that really belongs to no place and no time. They look ghostly; are the absence of presence and the presence of absence, and it is hard to decide which place or time they belong to. The carrier, the fresco, is no thinner than photographic paper yet much more fragile, like a dried piece of parchment, and can be regarded as something that can disintegrate just by being touched.

The national disaster, the “Nakba,” destroyed the homeland of the Palestinians in May 1948. More than seven hundred thousand Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and were permitted to return to them.57 As we are all aware, this dislocation had catastrophic consequences for the people of Palestine, who over the subsequent decades would be dispersed, ghettoized, imprisoned, or exiled. The wars, the settlement policy, and the invidious that cause unbearable sacrifices. In one of his poems Mahmoud Darwish describes the visit he made by Edward Said to a place near the house in Jerusalem in which he was born:

...I STOOD LIKE A BEGGAR AT THE DOORSTEP.
DO I ASK PERMISSION, FROM STEAKERS WHO SLEEP IN MY OWN RED, TO VISIT MYSELF FOR FIVE MINUTES? DO I HOW RESPECTFULLY TO THOSE WHO ENSIDE IN MY CHILDHOOD DREAM?
WOULD THEY SAY TO ME: THERE’S NO PLACE FOR TWO DREAMS IN ONE BED?58

The 28 days of re-collection bring about transfer — Sabella’s own house has become an image superimposed by images of an occupied house. As in Till the End, the retrieved objects are exhibited in display cases, like archaeological items, historical excavations, and finds belonging to two eras, one placed upon the other, each with its own duration. These are splinters of time, splinters of existence, and in their fragile materiality they carry within them proximity and distance, at one and the same time. It is as if, contrary to all physical laws, moments in time and space had found themselves again, and now a moment carries a half a century into our time as a result of the mere touch of light, just as the moment, the instant, donates its own present to the past again. Sabella collected the moments, gathered them up like Rasoulade’s rag-and-bone man gathered together the image of history into a constellation of the present from fragments, residues, what had been abandoned and picked up. The original pieces of wall— frescoes—determined the place; they were the place from which they were removed to be infused with another time. The palimpsest-like amalgamation of the colorful frescoes and the black-and-white photographs developed on them convey the impression of a present simultaneously appearing and disappearing. It is as if the light were spread carefully over the fragile plane with a brush, as if to preserve the latency of the image in all its potential and also to see it as an image: “The true image of the past flies by,” writes Benjamin on the concept of history, and, “THE PAST CAN BE SEIZED ONLY AS AN IMAGE, WHICH FLASHES UP AT THE INSTANT IT CAN BE RECOGNIZED AND IS NEVER SEEN AGAIN.”59

The 28 days of re-collection bring about an updating of history that still awaits its correspondence here, in thirty-eight veiled, fragmented and ruined accumulations of time. This work of art turns the bitterness of exile into the sensuality of the search. In these superimpositions, where images, periods of time, and material combine, a work of mourning is carried out that at the same time has an aesthetic and epistemological element. “It is not that what past casts its light on what is present or what is present its light on what is past, rather the image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill.”60 Benjamin is referring not to the continuous time between past and present, but to the “erratic” dialectical time-jumping: “what has been to what is now.”61 What the medium of photography does is bring about this constellation of encounter and riposte, operating against time, as it were, and against the agenda of photography. The artistic work of Steve Sabella undertakes its process of translation not so as to produce similarities or a mimesis of approximation, but to reflect on the inherent conditions of pictoriality (Bildhaftigkeit) and its historical role in the dissemination of the image. The work on the 28 days days of re-collection lasted from the first year of his exile in 2009 to this year, 2014, and hence embraces the other works done during that period.

In 2010 Sabella created the work In Transition, a tableau of nine color photographs of trees, which as in Euphorus, the sky as their horizon; that is to say, they are taken from a diagonal vertical angle, the head tilted to the fragment and without a view of the body: The fragment thus flashes into view behind the treetops twisting in the dizziness of the gaze. The different movements in the nine photographs, arranged in three horizontal sequences, produce a rhythm in a state of delirium. The circular movement, in which the world rises and falls as if on serpentine, stopped in each individual image and dynamized again in the correspondence between the images, seems to cast off any burden in the frenzy, like a wet dog shaking to dry himself. Dancing images, albeit a
dance macabre. But it can also be a euphoric dance; both border on delirium or longing. The "erratic" constellation of time in the *38 days of re-collection* emerged as a spatial constellation in *In Transition*, as if there was no back to be concealed, no past to be encountered.

**AND SOON THERE WILL BE A NEW PRESENT FOR US. IF YOU LOOK BACK YOU WILL SEE ONLY THE EXILE OF YOUR LOOKING BACK.**

Whereas the horizontal gaze also has a gaze toward the back, demands a looking back, the vertical gaze fixes itself of this temporal bond. The earth, the ground, does not look back, nor does it have leniency (*Nachsehen*). Art truly dissolves the boundaries of life, and the heavenly perspective signifies a "delirium of evacuating" (*räumen*) that applies solely to the "here," the undivided "on site," the presence beneath the trees. Conversely, the back stands for a non-place and for death. In the short novel *Pompes funèbres* (Funeral Rites, 1947–53) the narrator Jean Genet searches for the place where Jean was shot by a collaborator. He can only see and refer to the place "designated by the here," and asks whether it is true "that the philosophers doubt the existence of things that are behind them?" What speed is required in order to see the *behind in the here*? The revolution of an airplane propeller? "Then you would notice that the things have disappeared, and oneself with them." In *In Transition* actually marks a transition and negotiates, as it were, between the temporal constellation of one’s biographies, of presence and absence, dwelling and exile, identity and loss, and the spatial constellation of possibilities, of alterity.

**38 DAYS OF RE-COLLECTION**

*2014*

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