"PĀRKŪR AL-QUDS".
THE BODY IN A PALESTINIAN SHORT FILM

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This article focuses on the analysis of a short film by Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb, Faḍā' al-aziqqah (Palestine 2013)*, that tells the story of an act of resistance by a group of young Palestinians who practice parkour in the Old City of Jerusalem. Here, the act of "disobedience" by young people acquires a particular value. After a brief presentation of the plot of the short film, my attention turns to the centrality of body movements in the scenes, to the power of words and to the means of communication used by young people to gain visibility.*

Premise

Parkour, the acrobatic street sport, was co-founded in France in the first half of the 1980s by David Belle and Hubert Koundé. It consists of acrobatic movements of the body in carrying out vaults, jumps, running, climbing, swaying, rolling, plyometrics, quadrupedals, all at great speed and without any support equipment. Because of its significant performative value, it has become the subject of various films. This sport favours the expression of identity among young people in urban contexts. It is enough to consider just a few examples, such as *Banlieu 13* (2004) and its sequel *Banlieu 13 – Ultimatum* (2009), both conceived by Luc Besson and directed, respectively, by Pierre Morel and Patrick Alessandrin, or the American remake, *Brick Mansions* (2014), directed by Camille Delamarre.

The first of the movies cited above tells the story of Leto, interpreted by David Belle himself, a young man who seeks to resist the criminality that destabilizes the life of the notorious neighbourhood where he lives – the 13th *arrondissement*. The second movie instead recounts the story of two young men (played by David Belle and Cyril Raffaeli, a karateka) who work at re-establishing peace in a neighbourhood contested by five rival gangs. The plot of *Banlieu 13* was then adapted by Besson for the American remake (with Belle supported by Paul Walker) in which the perspective changes: what is emphasized here is no longer the "positive" actions carried out by the young *traceurs* in the neighbourhoods of dystopian cities, but is rather the spectacular nature of the action and the acrobatics. While the films mentioned, especially the first two, offer interesting views on parkour and the problematic

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peripheral urban areas where it is practised, Palestinian director Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb's short film *Faḍā' al-aziqqah* (The Space of Alleys), translated as *Mate Superb* in English, artistically grants a particular political value to the actions of a group of young Palestinians who train and perform among the alleyways, roofs and walls of Jerusalem. This value is augmented by the fact that parkour is considered in its own right as a "deviant" and "marginal" discipline compared to others[1]. In acrobatically occupying and crossing through the public space of a wounded and contested city with their bodies, a city in which dividing barriers have been erected[2], the young Palestinians carry out actions that go against the mainstream and become social actors who are free, autonomous, rebellious and who, for these reasons, are prosecutable. I have already had occasion to turn my attention to this short film in examining its chronotope, i.e. its spatial-temporal interconnection, in relation to the representation of alterity and *voisinage*[3].

Aware of the importance of contextual references in the significance of performances, i.e. of the circumstances and spaces in which performative acts are carried out, my examination of this film underlines the importance and subversive function of non-verbal communication; body-language has a central position in this film text, and I also discuss the value that verbal and virtual language assume within it. Indeed, what grants efficacy to the film's message, evoking the viewer's emotions and participation, is precisely the nexus between the bodies moving in the scenes, the speeches uttered by the *šabāb* and the communications conveyed through social media.

Faḍā' al-aziqqah

Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb, born in Nazareth in 1990, received a prize at the Nazra Palestine Short Film Festival in 2017 for the short film analysed here[4]. With

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[1] On parkour and its social and political significance, see: Ameel; Tani (2012: 164-173) and Bavinton (2007: 391-412).

[2] There are now many studies on the "Palestinian question" and the role of Jerusalem in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. See, in particular: Said (1995: 5-14); Kaminker (1997: 5-16); Khamaisi (2010: 53-70); al-Šanāwī; Naǧm (2008); Makdisi (2009: 542-551); Zink (2009: 122-133); Guazzone; Pioppi (2010). For further reading I suggest the precious bibliographical work of Salemi (2012: 13-111).

[3] Cassarino (2020: 93-104). The contribution also contains a section dedicated to the director's biography, his background and his filmography. Here I will limit myself to providing a link to a site on which it is possible to view some videos that the director himself has uploaded: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=UU3I4zccrlxwBEfcKJ9ncqSA.

[4] The "Nazra Palestine Short Film Festival" takes place annually in Venice. The prize-winning films are then shown in various other Italian cities thanks to the work of associations such as AssoPace Palestina, led by Luisa Morgantini. The

explicit reference to *Banlieu 13* – it is actually quoted in one particular scene that I will discuss below – the director clearly indicates the line he intends to follow, that of engaged, critical films on parkour. He has, however, carried out an operation that acquires important and innovative semantic elements connected to the context in which the events take place. The plot of the short, which lasts 12 minutes and 58 seconds, is centred around a group of *šabāb* who plan a public performance in Jerusalem that will take place at a site that is symbolic for the history of Palestinians and the city – the square in front of the Bāb al-'Amūd, better known as the Damascus Gate. To prepare for the event, they train continuously in particular spaces and at particular times.

The scenes accompanying the opening credits are dedicated to a blue sky in which, after a few seconds, the bodies of two young people appear starkly as they perform parkour at top speed in an environment that becomes immediately identifiable. Subsequent frames show the alleyways and walls of old Jerusalem as well as the roads outside the walls, bringing to the viewer's gaze a police van, cars with writing in Arabic and Hebrew, uniformed Israeli policemen, groups of people in which some *ḥaredim* can be seen, the scene of an arrest. It becomes clear, from the outset, that these initial scenes constitute a sort of flashback, which has the function of rewinding events on themselves and immersing the viewer in the context of the narrated events: these are, indeed, the images that one of the youths, Muḥammad al-Bakrī, is watching on his computer screen at home. The scenes that follow are, instead, shot in an interior, in Muḥammad's home while he teaches some parkour moves to a very young child of about eighteen months old, probably his son. Muḥammad has him vault on the floor and in the air and provokes laughter from him. The meetings among the *šabāb* in the following scenes are interesting, including both exterior settings that, in the background, recall significant sites in the city (the Qubbat al-Ṣaḥrah, the Dome of the Rock, the walls of Jerusalem, the dividing wall built by Israel on the West Bank from the spring of 2002 onwards, etc.), as well as interiors. In Muḥammad al-Bakrī's home, for example, the young people discuss and make decisions regarding the time and place for their final performance, and they agree to spread news of it through social media. They then go to the steps of the amphitheatre that has been built in recent years in the space in front of the Damascus Gate to carry out an inspection and mark out the route to follow in their conclusive

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festival aims to disseminate short films by directors of various extractions, but with all of them being centred on the dramatic condition of Palestinians who live under military occupation. *Naẓrah* indeed means "gaze". The goal of the initiative is to show new and different points of view and to disseminate a culture of peace and justice. An interview with Luisa Morgantini on the festival's objectives, and with the young director who received a prize for the short film studied here, is available at the following link: https://www.facebook.com/1391677721093949/ videos/1919513888310327/.

performance. Then there are some sequences that show them, after having changed clothes, training on the walls under the rain, free from peering gazes, and then discussing the difficulties to be faced and the risks they run by doing parkour as a clandestine activity and without gymnasiums. At the end of the training session, they visit Aḥmad al-Karakī, another member of the "team", to inform him of their plan; Aḥmad has been in prison and is serving the rest of his time under house arrest. Here they find themselves talking about, amongst other things, the conditions under which political prisoners are held in jail. In homage to political prisoners and to continue the "struggle", Aḥmad recounts not only that he continued to train in the cramped spaces in prison, on the beds there, but that he also managed to involve other Palestinian inmates in parkour. When they say goodbye to one another, darkness has already fallen on the city and the *šabāb* go to train again in the deserted alleyways of the Old City, free of the closed-circuit television cameras which often appear in the frames of the short film.

The concluding part of the film is very brief and has a catalytic function. It is dedicated to the final performance that takes place one Thursday afternoon between two and three o'clock on the steps in the space before the Damascus Gate, under the gaze of the Israeli surveillance cameras and with a diverse audience made up of Israelis, Palestinians, policemen, photographers, tourists, children and young people. Some among the onlookers choose to document the *traceurs*' performance, capturing the most spectacular moments in photographs or filming it with their phones.

The youngsters have carefully chosen the time and the place for their performance – Thursday is the day that precedes the Muslim weekly break, and the timespan is rush hour, during which people generally leave their workplaces to return home.

The Social Actors and the Body-Process in Faḍā' al-aziqqah

With regard to Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb's film text it is worth remembering that cinematographic language (with its foreground shots, its framing, its editing), and the short film in particular, are special forms for discovering the real, capable of evoking profound emotions[5]. The director's choice to turn his attention to the Palestinian *traceurs* is very significant, from artistic as well as political, social and emotional points of view. Indeed, he does not transfigure reality, as happens in other forms of expression, but rather dedicates himself to restoring its "truth". Furthermore, it is precisely the emotional component

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5   On the effectiveness of the short film as a filmic means of expression and its particular features, see: Caillet (2015), Bertozzi (2018). On the importance of Palestinian cinematographic production in representing the conflict, see: Halbreich-Euvrard (2005); Ibrāhīm (2005); Camera d'Afflitto (2007: 189-195); Nicosia (2007); Gertz; Khleifi (2008); Halbreich-Euvrard; Shyman (2015).

characteristic of the cinematographic device that has the power to show, in the framework of historical stratification, the modalities that social actors adopt in reality and to effectively represent that which passes between the screen and the viewer: what the *šabāb* succeed in communicating with their bodies in movement, with their jumps, runs, pirouettes, tumbles and vaults, springs from states of being and from situations that are difficult to describe in words.

It can be useful, with regard to these aspects, to reaffirm that from the very beginning parkour has been considered a discipline that conveys "dissent", which transmits a "counter-culture" discourse[6]. Its founder, David Belle, was keen to highlight this particular trait, affirming that for the *traceurs* it did not involve performing simple acrobatics, which in any case have always existed, but involved acting in a sort of "combat" in situations of "urgency"[7]. Here, the setting within the space of the Old City of Jerusalem, with sirens in the background and the initial scene of the arrest, makes the viewer immediately aware of the fact that the conditions in which the young Palestinians live and act indeed constitute a highly conflictual environment.

The initial sequences in the film – those of the opening credits which are arranged as background, the flashback mentioned above in relation to the plot – function to transmit the setting and its atmosphere in just a few significant frames. One of the initial scenes is particularly significant in this sense: the camera dwells on the image of two figures that stand out starkly against the blue sky, looking like birds in flight, symbolically representing the desire for freedom and escape from a limited and limiting space perceived as a prison. The likening of the young *šabāb* to animals is manifest several times in the short film and recalls a very interesting aspect regarding Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb's significant recourse to "primitivism" to express and represent the archaic nature of man, his relationship with Nature, as well as his desire to escape from the control of the bureaucratic-institutional apparatus[8]. In addition to the man-bird image, there are another two moments I feel are particularly significant in this regard. The first happens in the shots at al-Bakrī's home where the director's gaze passes over some toy animals, a black sheep, a tiger and a monkey, in the room in which the performance is being planned. The second is much more explicit and regards the scenes in which the young people, after having inspected the space in front of the Bāb al-ʿAmūd in order to trace out the space in which they will move during the performance, go to the market and buy a bunch of bananas which, immediately afterwards, are thrown to the individual group members and eaten. In

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[6]   Atkinson (2009: 169-194).
[7]   Cassarino (2020: 93-94).
[8]   On the subversive aspect of primitivism in general see Bertozzi (2018: 40). On primitivism in the short film, Cassarino (2020: 101-102).

one of these scenes, one of them mimes the behaviour of a monkey, beating his chest with his fists and making monkey calls. Only after having eaten do the young man-primates start a training session, during which they are caught in the rain in a secluded place, far from the gaze of others. The mimicry assumes a particular meaning – these young Palestinians who train on the walls of old Jerusalem with series of leaps forwards and backwards, vaults, climbing, pirouettes, and who test out new movements too, become the ideal actors in a theatre that represents a primitive environment: once again, they seem like caged animals that are in endless movement. They "construct" the space, founded on a series of skills and competences that regard muscular strength and physical exercise geared towards improving their own performances, to go beyond themselves, aware of the risks to which they are exposing themselves. Bodies and senses are involved, therefore, in realizing particular practices of signification and, above all, of re-appropriation. Rendered invisible and deprived of political and institutional recognition, the young Palestinians favour the expression of their drama and their act of resistance by bringing it to the eyes of the spectators through the primordial movements of their bodies and through mimicry.

Furthermore, it is impossible not to dwell on the close-up shots that the viewer is presented with when Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb directs the camera to the faces of the protagonists, sometimes activating a sort of deterritorialization, i.e. placing them out of the context: the close-ups are configured as true and proper visual writings of the soul, emotigenic instruments[9] capable of transmitting the most intimate feelings of these young Palestinians through their gazes. These end up creating an affective relation between the protagonists and the viewer[10]. This is a reading that is also valid for other shots within the short film, which are also very significant.

To provide just one example, at a certain point the young men, after having trained on the walls, decide to visit their friend Aḥmad who is under house arrest. The scene that depicts them as they greet one another and talk together, initially outside the entrance to Aḥmad's home, is shot as an exterior. In the background, the director ably has the camera frame a significant element of the violated space of Jerusalem, i.e. the wall. Immediately afterwards, in a scene that is rendered almost poetic by the crepuscular light, we see the faces of Muḥammad and Aḥmad who exchange significant glances, a mixture of bitterness, irony and anger. Muḥammad, as he relates his own experience in prison to his teammates, mimes the action of one of the soldiers who had threatened him with an instrument he had used to floor him with powerful electric shocks and with which he then struck him on the head, which was still painful. Contrary to what one might expect, in this case the

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[9] On mimicry and the capacity of the body to evoke emotions, see Deleuze (1983: 109-110).

[10] Deleuze (1983: 103) writes of the close-up as "image–affection".

anger is substituted on the young man's face by the bitter smile of someone who has proudly carried out an act of resistance and who intends to carry on along this road, overcoming the prohibitions imposed by the laws established by the Israeli government. This is precisely the scene in which the young men cite Besson's film *Banlieu 13*, and they also express the desire to be filmed: they dream of disseminating parkour throughout the country, of becoming the protagonists of a film in which they recount to the world the injustices perpetrated against them in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Also, the frames that show the *traceurs* caught in the rain as they train on the walls of the Old City, motionless and silent for a few moments with their arms open and their eyes turned to the sky, are very interesting and dense in significance. Their bodies, which are here as expressive as their faces, speak just like gazes speak. They are bathed by the rain and thus "liberated" from their suffering and pain for a few instants. The water that falls from the sky, bathing everything and everyone indiscriminately, here comes to acquire indeed a sense of equity and purification that is not only physical but also, and above all, moral and spiritual. The scene describes a regenerative moment of pause, of a halt to the incessant and spasmodic activity of resistance that the Palestinian *traceurs* carry out. In that instant, the rapid passage of two *ḥaredim* with long beards, tunics and black hats, who do not even grant them so much as a glance, is probably a sign of incommunicability and is, above all, a metaphor, once again, of the lack of recognition that is painfully felt by the Palestinians. This is thus configured as an extreme representation of the figure of the "other" with whom they cohabit this city and this country of limits and boundaries *par excellence*.

The concluding minutes of the short film, full of tension, are dedicated to the final performance. The young men come down the steps on their arms alone, vaulting across each other's paths, leaping and pirouetting under the gaze of the onlookers – some of them there to watch because they had read the news on social media – to whom they offer not just an apparently improvised show of gymnastic skill, but an example of the appropriation of public space that they feel they have been deprived of.

The scenes in which the body and its manifestation are central are granted greater efficacy and semantic value by means of the acoustic dimension. Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb has chosen music by Jasper Kid and John Hanson which he uses in an "analogue" way, i.e. functional in underlining the visual content of the short film with its semantic proximity and the way it impresses, at moments, a particularly intense and involving rhythm for the viewer. The music, therefore, enters to play a leading role in the manifestation of the body, fulfilling precise pragmatic goals. As Malavasi writes with regard to these goals, referencing the distinctions made by Cremonino and Cono: «Among these last [pragmatic functions], the two authors identify three main functions – communicative, socializing and motor–affective – and, within them,

numerous sub-functions, including three that are "constantly present, even though with greater or lesser *relevance*": an emotive function (traceable to the first class), a function of *sense-motor induction* and one that is an *activator of emotions* (referable to the third category)»[11].

The alternating of the scenes of physical activity, on the one hand, and the scenes of pause, discussion and walking, on the other, are mirrored by the alternating sounds and silences. The music grants a pressing rhythm to the movements of the body, to the acrobatics, reinforcing the effect in the eyes of the viewer and involving the viewer in participative terms, both motorial and emotional. Vision and hearing succeed together in generating participation in the viewer and render cinema a social practice that is able to stir emotional states characterized by "real" qualities. It realizes an act of contamination that lasts well beyond the space of the theatre and the time of viewing. In this way the function of the interconnection between images and sound becomes explicit: it reinforces the communicative value and power of the scenes, introducing them into the viewer's mental space; it grants greater persuasive force to the message, stirring emotion or commotion and acting on the desiderative efficacy connected to the corporality of the figures.

Narrating the Body: The Power of Words

The bodies in movement play a dominant role in the short film, but the dialogues among the *traceurs* are also important. These dialogues are in fact testimonies, albeit very brief ones, of the objectives that these young men set for themselves, of the unease that they live through and of the awareness with which they turn to new forms of resistance. This is to say that in Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb's short film there is also a verbal translation of the shared feeling of the protagonists and their overall lived experience. During their dialogues they tell their stories, make denunciations, verbalize their passion for parkour and the political significance they attribute to it. Body and word are present and, in some cases, one stimulates the other, while in other cases one is the necessary substitution for the other precisely because of the communicative immediacy of the different procedures through which civil and political passion are manifested. There is no doubt that the syncretism of cinematographic languages allows the unveiling of the various modalities of articulation of the lived experience of these young Palestinians with regard to that of previous generations[12].

In the initial scene following the opening credits, which unfolds in the circumscribed space of the home, the narrating voice is that of Muḥammad al-Bakrī who has been released by the Israeli police and who speaks of himself, leading us into the sphere of the physical sufferings that torment him.

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[11] Malavasi (2009: 62).
[12] Camera d'Afflitto (2010: 189-195); Yaqub (2018).

Indeed, he recounts in Palestinian Arabic how, after having returned home, his body ached and how the marks of the handcuffs were still visible on his wrists. These facts prevent him from training outside of his home in the open air as he used to do (min. 1.04-1.18). When his teammates come to visit him immediately afterwards, the dialogues among them are instead concentrated on the planning of the new performance. Central to their exchanges are the time and the place where they will perform. The dialogue here has the function of adding important information that could not otherwise be communicated. In order to achieve the public success they desire, it is necessary to think of a day and a time that favours the presence of other people. Thursday at three in the afternoon seems to be the best moment in the eyes of the members of the group. The site to be chosen is also fundamentally important in order to define the political and social significance that they attribute to the performance. In this sense the site unanimously chosen, the Bāb al-'Amūd, has a precise significance. It is not only a large space, with the tiers of steps in the form of an amphitheatre which allows a certain freedom of movement, but it is also and, above all, «symbolic site in which to present the case of Palestinian prisoners» (min. 1.55). The intent, therefore, is purely political and acquires even more incisive value when the men make explicit, in words, their desire to disseminate parkour throughout the country; their goal is to make others aware of the violence to which they have been subjected by the Israeli soldiers in prison following their arbitrary arrests. Muḥammad al-Bakrī also highlights the importance of having managed to build, for the first time, a team that is able to express itself through performances that, once filmed and posted on social media, become visible throughout the world. So the emphasis is placed on new forms of social aggregation of young, self-organized groups and their relationship with politics, institutions and the globalized world[13].

It is not by chance, precisely with regard to relations with institutions, that in another dialogue Muḥammad al-Bakrī states: «Parkour is banned in Jerusalem because it is based on jumping. The Israeli defence forces are afraid of it because it becomes difficult to catch us. When the plain-clothed police chased me, they struggled to arrest me» (min. 00:04:05-00:05:07). In their discussion, the young men emphasize this aspect and speak of the difficulties they face training clandestinely, in the open air, on the roofs of the shops in the Old City, in the alleyways, outside of the security protocols. But, as they say: «This is our life». For them, parkour is a true and proper mission, pursued incessantly.

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[13] On those aspects relating to the new forms of juvenile aggregation and on the relations of groups of *traceurs* with politics and institutions, see Prévitali; Coignet; Vieille Marchiset (2014: 85-97). On the relationship with the globalized world, see Bauman (2005).

Aḥmad al-Karakī is not allowed to leave his home at all, and he tells the companions who come to visit him that he trains by night, on the roofs around his house, and that he has never stopped training, not even when he was in the cramped spaces of the al-Muskubiyyah prison. There he was *fêted* by the prisoners to whom he had also taught some parkour moves, just as Muḥammad al-Bakrī had done during his detention. The activity of parkour, practised spasmodically, is carried out exclusively in the name of Palestine. This is what Sāmī affirms in the final dialogue of the film which comes just before the final performance: «I don't care about fame, I want to make this sport famous». And, he adds, «to challenge the world with it. And parkour will be known throughout the country, throughout the country» (min. 00:10:42-00:10:54).

We have just seen how the brief dialogues are essential for highlighting the semantic value of the actions of the young protagonists, as an integration to or substitution of the images of the performances. They provide key information in revealing to the viewer the suffering, frustrations and emotions of the protagonists, rendering the viewer's role a participative one.

Communication through Social Media

One aspect of the activity of the *traceurs* that is very interesting is the fluid nature that characterizes it and, in particular, the dialectic between urban clandestinity and visibility. The young protagonists, as mentioned above, are aware of the fact that their movements are guided by improvisation – they train far from indiscreet gazes, in the rain, when other people are at home, or in the void and the silence of the city by night. In the above-mentioned dialectic, their use of social media has a foregrounded role. Indeed, they publicize their performances on Facebook and ensure a certain level of public success, not only with a live audience but also on the web by means of videos and recordings. Their "traces" have the purpose of outlining public space in order to occupy it, to re-appropriate it and render it legible and, therefore, communicable. If, on the one hand, through their unpredictability they evade the strategies of Israeli control, on the other hand they reveal themselves and become visible. Acting in a tactical way[14], the *traceurs* carry out a subversive act and exercise control over the reading possibilities of the promotion of the space. Bertoni's words on this space that he defines, not by chance, as «secretly public» seem to me very interesting and pertinent[15]. This space is delimited and built in the dynamic that involves showing it and concealing its accessibility, in indicating the possibilities of its use and in hiding those possibilities from the forms of control of public order, i.e. hiding them from unauthorized eyes. The expression «public secrecy», coined to the best

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[14]   De Certeau (1980).
[15]   Bertoni (2018: 175-188).

of my knowledge by Taussig[16], which brings social media into play, is indeed closely connected to the concept of public space in which the *traceurs* move. Jerusalem's spaces are thus continually disassembled and reassembled and, in the case of the performance at the Bāb al-ʿAmūd, a certain type of audience rather than another receives the revelation of the space, allowing for the removal of thresholds, barriers, boundaries. The wide-ranging possibilities of the dissemination of photographs, messages, videos through the web simply transmits the conflictual actions of resistance carried out very rapidly and creates a political field of legitimization and appropriation.

The modalities of aggregation are already in themselves significant, independent of the instances from which they derive. Now the secretly public performances of the *traceurs* express a meaning that exceeds the descriptions, in as much as they are configured as fundamental performative modalities in understanding the very definition of people. As Butler writes in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*: «Not everyone can appear in a bodily form, and many of those who cannot appear, who are constrained from appearing or who operate through virtual or digital networks, are also part of "the people", defined precisely by being constrained from making a specific bodily appearance in public space, which compels us to reconsider the restrictive ways "the public sphere" has been uncritically posited by those who assume full access and rights of appearance on a designated platform»[17].

Concluding Considerations

Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb's short film to which I have turned my attention here succeeds in effectively conveying the complexity of the present-day conditions lived by Palestinians in Jerusalem (and not only) and in showing the new languages and forms of struggle and resistance adopted by younger generations. History, never explicitly narrated except through the most direct and personal experiences of the *šabāb*, fully enters the short film and is present in the film's framework and in each of its scenes. Jerusalem, chosen as the theatre for this filmic text, has indeed undergone a series of remarkable transformations since 1967. In order to control the area, Israel has made enormous political and economic investments, greatly exacerbating the conflict and bringing about a physical, economic, social and juridical fragmentation of the city. This process, known as the Israelization of Jerusalem[18], has also touched the Damascus Gate, a historical meeting place for the

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[16] Taussig (1999).
[17] Butler (2015: 8).
[18] Various scholars have paid attention to the Israelization of Jerusalem. I limit myself here to indicating the contributions of Pieraccini (2005); Allegra (2010: 87-108); Shlomo; Fenster (2011: 54-63); Marconi (2012: 113-230).

Palestinian community – a market, a crossroads, access to which has indeed been modified by the Israeli government with the construction of tiers of steps that have altered its appearance and rendered access to the Old City less immediate. In 2017, following attacks on Israeli civilians and military, Netanyahu's government set out a security plan that targeted this very entrance to the Old City, an entrance that was already heavily controlled. It is now the only entrance allowed for Palestinians during set periods, with a sort of militarization of the site geared towards an all-pervasive and totalizing control. Many special tv cameras have been installed here (which not by chance are often featured in the short film) and drones have been used to reinforce aerial surveillance. The unequal nature of relations between the Palestinian and Jewish communities is clearly evident given that the Palestinians remain without any political and administrative representation. The question has been, and remains, the object of historical-political, juridical and sociological research. In an interesting contribution, Marco Allegra turns his attention to what he defines as ideal-types of urban conflict, a distinction between divided city, contested city and unequal city. Allegra's thesis is, indeed, to borrow his own words:

> […] that today it is the alterations effected in the metropolitan area that constitute the most significant obstacle to a peaceful solution to the conflict. Secondly, it is precisely these alterations that suggest to us that the deepening of the physical, economic, legal and institutional separation between Jews and Palestinians is not the antechamber of a return to the past – i.e. a new division of the city as in the two decades between 1948 and 1967 – but rather a continuation of the development of model of contested city[19].

This is not the appropriate place to go once again through the tragic history of the relentless conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians and to dwell on the responsibilities for their aggravation. What appears increasingly evident, however, in the light of what we have seen above, is the political and artistic value of Ḥamdī al-Ḥurūb's short film. In pointing his cameras towards young people, likened to birds or monkeys in cages, who with their bodies trespass across boundaries and barriers, the director artistically recounts their desire for recognition and freedom.

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[19] I quote the passage from the following link: https://www.academia.edu/1551588/_Storia_Urbana_Divisa_contesa_ineguale_Gerusalemme_e_la_sua_area_metropolitana.

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