
Close-reading *Electrical Gaza*, Minou Norouzi offers a critique of empathic engagement as a redemptive act for viewers and considers an appraisal of discomfort as ethical labour.

[The essay "On Discomfort & Empathy in Rosalind Nashshibi's *Electrical Gaza*" is published in MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture, Focus Issue 11](#)

"emergency addendum"

* Minou Norouzi 16.10.2023

The essay that accompanies the online exhibition of *Electrical Gaza* was written six years ago and its recent publication coincides with the violent events currently unfolding at neck breaking speed with colossal consequences.

To register the utterly changed reality that Gaza and Israel, too, is experiencing now in the most literal sense, it feels appropriate and necessary to include an addendum that acknowledges the timing of this publication, and addresses how this throws up a host of questions not present in the original essay: What does this new reality mean for film practice, for the writing on film ethics and politics, as well as the reception of political cinema? In light of the atrocity that is fast unravelling in Gaza, academic publishing can't just rumble on regardless.

Just like the "status quo" that has been in place for years – according to which Gaza and the occupation of Palestine can be contained without being resolved – the essay, its author, the artist, and reality have been shaken by the sudden events that were both foreseeable and entirely surprising.

Something about the interplay of timelines—the slowness of the academic publishing process and the immediate, life-changing eruption of extreme violence—may call for a realignment of ideas, artistic forms, and our moral and emotional responses.

What, in the face of this catastrophe, can art *see* and how should it *show*? The core of the essay argues against cinematic practices that seek to engage viewers by soliciting their empathic identification with suffering to ask: What spaces of contemplation and feeling are released when the screen-scape is left open to interpretation – as is the case in *Electrical Gaza* for example – where the filmmaker does not impose a point of view, does not show familiar images of war and suffering? This core question, which I'm not the first to raise, stands.

In light of this unprecedented moment and new historical reality, and given an opportunity to write again about *Electrical Gaza* and what it articulates about being in this world and about witnessing, this "emergency addendum" exists as a placeholder to extend the discussion to the film's reparative timbre, how it navigates a landscape of emotions that does not rely on its display, how it creates the space and time for unlearning looking itself to arrive again at the core question the essay raises: As a viewer of, or witness to systemic, structural or individual wrong-doings, what is my role?

* This addendum was written in discussion with Anat Pick and Rosalind Nashshibi.