

in the body of the translator

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Purple, Bodies in Translation – Part II of A Yellow Memory from the Yellow Age

Joe Namy

2017, single-channel video installation, color, 15 min., English, Arabic.

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The installation is based on two texts that discuss the act of translating war and resilience. It is designed as an immersive experience, to create a reflective space for the audience to think through the intricacies of the wars in Syria and Iraq, mediated through testimony. The video merely shows a color: purple, projected on a mirrored screen that allows the viewers to see their own reflection, to see themselves within the subtitled text. Lina Mounzer's essay *War in Translation: Giving Voice to the Women of Syria* weaves the testimonies she is translating with her own personal experience of living through the civil war in Lebanon, and how her own experience shapes how she processes and internalizes the testimonies in order to distill the essence of the words. Stefan Tarnowski's essay *Subtitling a Film* describes the intricacies of translating subtitles for the anonymous film collective Abounaddara and the special collaborative process of working for someone he has never met. Tarnowski uses this experience to reflect on the role of the subtitle, the details lost in translation, and what additional elements and contradictions are created by the differences between subtitles and image.

I was on the balcony reading, a quiet night overlooking Jabal Sheikh (Mount Hermon, on the border with Syria). In the distance beyond the mountain, faint sounds erupted with a purple light that flashed dimly. I tried to figure out what was happening, what these sounds and this color meant, but the more I tried to understand the deeper the shade shifted. Since then I've seen this purple appear in texts, in videos, in headlines, on the street; in various translations of a colored situation that I am no closer to understanding.

Here are four of the shades I've come across:

quiet purple (silence):
the absent, the unknown, and the unexplainable;

dark purple (in the body):
Lina Mounzer on translating testimonials;

purple on purple (the subtitle and the subtitled):
Stefan Tarnowski on subtitling a film;

purple fish *porphyra* (a color and a feeling):
the Greek etymology of purple.

Joe Namy

Joe Namy, born in 1978 in Lansing, USA, is based in Beirut, Lebanon. He works with visual media and music, often addressing aspects of identity, memory, power, and currents encoded in organized sound. He is currently serving as an advisor for the Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace independent study program. He studied jazz, Arabic, and heavy metal drumming in Detroit, where he started out making hip-hop music videos. His work has been exhibited, screened, and amplified internationally in museums, galleries, and festivals. Some of his projects fall under the sound art platform titled Electric Kahraba, which operates as an experimental radio program.

Films

2008: *Locusts* (10 min.). 2009: *People Not Places* (12 min.), *Jnoub/South Lebanon* (12 min.). 2010: *Detroit Summer* (4 min.), *Foreclosure Reversal* (4 min.), *Under the Shade of Apprehension* (7 min.). 2014: *Testify* (6 min.), *Half Step* (1 min., Forum Expanded 2014). 2015: *Dive* (5 min.), *Stones Gods People* (5 min., Forum Expanded 2016). 2017: *Purple, Bodies in Translation – Part II of A Yellow Memory from the Yellow Age*.