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Article abstract

L'*Atlas Group Project* de Walid Raad (1989–2004) élabore une contre-histoire des guerres civiles libanaises à partir de la création d'archives picturales qui interrogent les discours existants et perturbent les normes historiques établies. Raad a oeuvré pendant plus de dix ans sur ce projet, créant un corpus aux multiples facettes qui illustre les façons dont les récits historiques sont assemblés, autorisés et validés. Il dévoile la logique interne de l'archive et met en doute la préséance associée à certains types de discours d'autorité, en particulier la valeur témoin accordée à la photographie. Il souligne la faculté de persuasion de ce discours documentaire et le peu de résistance avec lequel il est accepté. De plus, Raad emploie l'humour et la fiction, examinant leur capacité à communiquer des connaissances utiles et la comparant à celle des faits historiques traditionnellement acceptés. Cette analyse du projet de Raad porte sur ce qui constitue la validité d'une archive, les protocoles auxquels l'archive est soumise, et, en particulier, le rôle de l'historien / archiviste dans le maintien de ces protocoles. En fin de compte, il s'agit de savoir si une contre-histoire est possible. La question devient alors : est-ce que la façon innovatrice dont Raad utilise les protocoles d'archives permet un nouveau type de récit historique, ou est-ce que les protocoles se réinscrivent subtilement dans son travail afin de le normaliser ?

Walid Raad's Double Bind: *The Atlas Group Project*, 1989–2004

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Résumé

L'*Atlas Group Project* de Walid Raad (1989–2004) élabore une contre-histoire des guerres civiles libanaises à partir de la création d'archives picturales qui interrogent les discours existants et perturbent les normes historiques établies. Raad a œuvré pendant plus de dix ans sur ce projet, créant un corpus aux multiples facettes qui illustre les façons dont les récits historiques sont assemblés, autorisés et validés. Il dévoile la logique interne de l'archive et met en doute la préséance associée à certains types de discours d'autorité, en particulier la valeur témoin accordée à la photographie. Il souligne la faculté de persuasion de ce discours documentaire et le peu de résistance avec lequel il est accepté. De plus, Raad emploie l'humour et la fiction, examinant leur capacité à communiquer des connaissances utiles et la comparant à celle des faits historiques traditionnellement acceptés. Cette analyse du projet de Raad porte sur ce qui constitue la validité d'une archive, les protocoles auxquels l'archive est soumise, et, en particulier, le rôle de l'historien / archiviste dans le maintien de ces protocoles. En fin de compte, il s'agit de savoir si une contre-histoire est possible. La question devient alors : est-ce que la façon innovatrice dont Raad utilise les protocoles d'archives permet un nouveau type de récit historique, ou est-ce que les protocoles se réinscrivent subtilement dans son travail afin de le normaliser ?

Photographic technologies and archival classification systems emerged almost simultaneously during the mid-nineteenth century. It is generally accepted that this was not a coincidence. Both were seen as tools of knowing and were predicated on a belief in the reliability and authenticity of photographs as evidence. Because of its mechanical origins, photography was perceived as "an unreasoning machine" with a capacity for exact reproducibility through technology, which explains why photography has played a critical role in the practice and authority of the modern archive.[1] The authors of the 1916 book *The Camera as Historian* declare that, "The claims of the photographic record to superiority over all other forms of graphic record is [*sic*.] incontestable."[2] The technology of photography and the idea of memory made permanent suggest a parallel with the purpose of archival records, where the photographic rhetoric of transparency and truth is mirrored in the archival ideals of authenticity, reliability, and objectivity. Writers such as John Tagg tied the close relationship between photography and the archive to the emergence in the nineteenth century of new institutions and practices that were central to the restructuring of local and national state industrialized societies.[3] Photography's evidentiary promise was thus bound up in new discursive and institutional forms, subject to, but also capable of, power and ideological control. Yet, in spite of its connection to the apparatuses of power or, perhaps, because of it, the incontestability of a photographic record still required the same protection, in the form of organizational rules and archival protocols, as other spheres of documentation. This protection was largely left to the authority of the historian/archivist.

It is precisely this kind of authority that Walid Raad's *The Atlas Group Project* explores through the creation of an archive of the Lebanese civil wars. Raad's archive consists of photographs and documents in a compelling mix of fact and fiction. The line between the two is often blurred, revealing the persuasiveness of photographs and documentary discourses. Tagg and many others such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Hal Foster, and Allan Sekula have written about archives and their complicity with existing power structures.[4] In *The Atlas Group Project*, Raad illustrates how deeply ingrained in everyday life archives remain. On the surface it may seem a postmodern exercise marked by a preoccupation with the document and the documentary in relation to problems of truth and fiction, but with some justification, Raad has on numerous occasions tried to distance himself from this kind of interpretation. He is more concerned with who has the authority to produce knowledge, what constitutes a valid document, and how history is constructed from an archive of primary source documents. *The Atlas Group Project* vividly problematizes historical narratives' privileging of certain types of authoritative discourses, in particular through the use of photography as a supporting evidentiary tool. Raad insists, "the primacy of facts must be questioned."[5] However, he and his project are put into a double bind, since he is not merely critiquing an archive but actually building one. He denies that a history of the Lebanese civil wars can be written and attempts instead to create a counter-history of them. In the process, he becomes subject to the same rules and protocols that are deemed necessary for the construction of an archive. This paper explores Raad's identification of some of these historiographic conundrums and the extent to which he is able to navigate them.

There is a rich history of artists building archives in contemporary art, including some well-known examples from the 1960s such as Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, Bernhard and Hilla Becher's photo archive of industrial architecture, and Marcel Broodthaers's *Museum*. More recent examples by Renée Green, Thomas Hirschhorn, Fred Wilson, Christopher Williams, and Matthew Buckingham signal a shift from the act of building an archive to that of starting one's practice with research in archives. These artists' works invite viewers to think not only of the past, but of the ways in which the past is represented and constructed. Like Raad, many such artists engaging with archives have expressed an interest in creating alternative

histories for those who have been previously denied access to archives. Raad also addresses the political power and authority of the archive, but my interest in his work stems from his concern not only with representations of history that are often excluded from archives, but with the larger process of creating history as an object of analysis itself.

Photography is often seen as a way of giving immediate and direct visual access to the past, a kind of memory device that can withstand the decay of time. From its inception, photography was employed as a tool of conscious historical preservation, a notion to which Raad continuously turns in order to address the devastation that took place in Lebanon. This perceived role of photography is especially pertinent in the case of Lebanon where history in the form of archives, buildings, and artworks has been so thoroughly destroyed by war that it begs the question of how one could possibly reconstruct that history. Raad's starting points are the well-known civil war that took place in Lebanon between 1975 and 1991 and the brief 1958 civil war between Maronite Christians and Muslims. When Lebanon became independent from its French colonial master in 1943, the Maronites assumed power in a parliament that gave representation to both Christians and Muslims. The 1960s was a period of relative calm and prosperity. The country's tourism and banking sector flourished, and it was during this period that the city of Beirut earned the moniker, the "Paris of the Middle East." In the early 1970s disagreements grew between Muslims and Christians over the presence of Palestinian refugees from the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Tensions escalated to armed conflict after the assassination attempt on Maronite Christian Phalangist leader Pierre Gemayel in 1975. While the Lebanese civil war has been mainly characterized as a Christian/Muslim conflict, in actuality it was a far more complex affair. Multiple sects within each camp were often at war with each other, and there was ongoing foreign meddling by Syria, Israel, and the United States. By the end of the war, an estimated 100,000 people had been killed, 100,000 wounded, and more than 900,000 displaced from their homes. Today, Lebanon remains marred by sectarian tension and violence.

The realities and memories of the civil wars have shaped the way Lebanon has been defined both locally and internationally. The modern history of Lebanon after 1946 is not taught in Lebanese schools because the committee of historians responsible for the national curriculum has been unable to produce a narrative of the wars that is satisfactory to the country's different sectarian factions.[6] Even the country's ancient history is a thorny issue. Dozens of government-approved history textbooks offer different versions of the past, and depending on their religious affiliation, schools can choose books that describe the French as colonialists or liberators, while the Ottomans can either be conquerors or administrators. Christian schools tend to focus more heavily on the Phoenician past, with which the Christian community identifies, while the Muslim schools teach more about Lebanon under the Arabs.[7] The result confirms historian Hayden White's claim that "the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetical or moral rather than epistemological."[8] The inability to establish a hegemonic history, particularly of the civil wars, is explored in art works such as the Akram Zataari's videos, with their disruption of narrative cohesion, and Raad's archive, with its separation into files, each claiming an authoritative version of history.[9]

Like Raad, many post-civil-war Beirut artists are known for their archival aesthetic. During the early 1980s artists able to escape war-torn Lebanon went on to acquire their training primarily in the United States, thus complicating their backgrounds and influences. Ziad Abillama, Berhard Khoury, and Lamia Joreige attended the Rhode Island School of Design. Walid Sadek studied at Claremont College, Raad at the University of Rochester, Akram Zaatari at the New School University in New York, and Jayce Salloum at the University of California.[10] Many came into international prominence in the 1990s, particularly after they were included in curator Catherine David's 1997 *Documenta X* exhibition. Yet, as artist and theoretician Jalal Toufic claims,

> We do not go to the West to be indoctrinated by their culture, for the imperialism, the hegemony of their culture is nowhere clearer than here in developing countries. Rather, we go to the West because it is there that we can be helped in our resistance by all that we do not receive in developing countries.[11]

Despite the manifold circumstances through which these artists produce work, the historical specificities of the Lebanese civil wars are never far from centre stage. More generally, many Lebanese artists address the eradication of history and tradition that occurred during the civil wars and the resulting deeply felt cultural loss. Toufic describes the ways in which artists choose in certain instances to "resurrect" artworks, and outlines the crucial role of the "counterfeit" as part of this process of revival.[12] Many artists' works, including Raad's, attempt to document and preserve some aspect of Lebanon's lost history. In 1997, photographers Samer Mohdad and Fouad Khoury established the Arab Image Foundation, which included Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad as founding board members.[13] The mission of the foundation is to collect, preserve, and study photographs from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Arab diaspora. Its expanding collection is generated through artist- and scholar-led projects. The establishment of this more traditional archival project conterminously with other artistic archival practices mirrors Raad's own mixing of fact and fiction.

Raad has also worked closely with artist Jayce Salloum, who collected representations of Beirut in the forms of video footage, postcards, photographs, and maps for his archival installation, *Kan ya ma kan* (1988–98). Together, the two artists produced the 1993 documentary *Up to the South*, which focused on the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon.[14] Raad's collaboration with Salloum was undoubtedly a precedent for his examination of archives as both a means to preserve history and as a way to create a counter-history.

In 1999, Raad established the Atlas Group, an imaginary collective of which he is the only member—an ironic twist on contemporary theory's critique of singular authorship. His purpose at the time was to collect, produce, and archive documents of the Lebanese civil wars. The *Atlas Group Project* is a series of multi-media lectures/performances of historically plausible stories that recount situations in the margins of the civil wars' major events. Depending on the venue, a given event/lecture may be accompanied by a gallery exhibition of various components of the project, whether video, photography, notebooks, or other material. Raad's practice for this project also includes publications, installations, and the Web. Even though the Atlas Group was established in 1999, Raad has in the past dated the *Atlas Group Project* to 1947, 1967, and 1999, and has recently settled on 1989–2004. These inconsistent dates subvert art history's own method of archiving. Raad has performed and exhibited the *Atlas Group Project* both in the Middle East and internationally: it was included in the 2000 and 2002 Whitney Biennals, the 2002 *Documenta XI*, and the 2003 Venice Biennale. A retrospective show of the project was held at the California Institute for the Arts' REDCAT Gallery in 2009.

Raad's lectures/performances typically consist of a detailed description and PowerPoint presentation of the content of a file from his Atlas Group archive. The writer-curator André Lepecki recounts Raad sitting at a desk on stage and speaking with what Lepecki calls a "historian's voice" but exaggerating his Middle Eastern accent.[15] This gambit allows Raad to present himself as an authentic Middle Eastern man who, through his privileged access to an archive, has the credibility and authority to relate a valid history and to give evidence of the Lebanese civil wars.

I will focus here on the Fakhouri file, which is available on the Atlas Group archive website and is, together with all its notebooks and other contents, a product of Raad's imagination, as the artist explains in his lectures (but does not make explicit on the website). While the file and the archive are fictitious, its contents, comprising photographs and documents, give it a faithful resemblance to an actual archive and make it almost indistinguishable from the real thing. In the file, the fictitious Dr. Fakhouri is presented as "the foremost historian of the Lebanese wars" until his death in 1993. The file continues, "At the time of his death, and to everyone's surprise, the historian bequeathed 226 notebooks and 2 short films to The Atlas Group for analysis, preservation and exhibition."[16] Convincing photos show Dr. Fakhouri in 1958 and 1959 during his one and only trip outside Lebanon, to Paris (fig. 1) and Rome. The photographs are square and black and white, like those produced from 1950s popular medium format consumer cameras, giving them an authentic look for the specific time period. The subject, purportedly Dr. Fakhouri, is dressed in a dark suit and could easily be taken for an historian in front of Notre Dame Cathedral. The photographs do not look doctored, and their perceived authenticity acts to subsume any doubt about the narrative and to disguise its fiction.

Figure 1. Walid Raad, *Civilizationally, We Do Not Dig Holes To Bury Ourselves*, plate 924, 1958–59/2003, from the Fakhouri file, *Atlas Group Project*. Photo: © Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Notebook 38 from this file, titled *Already Been in a Lake of Fire*, consists of "145 cutout photographs of cars" that match "the make, model, and colour of every car that was used as a car bomb between 1975 and 1991"[17] (fig. 2). An accompanying text written in Arabic "details the place, time and date of the explosion, the number of casualties, the perimeter of destruction, the exploded car's engine and axle numbers, and the weight and type of the explosives used." The photograph, taken years after the bombing to match the details of the exploded car, gives the file its necessary "proof" as a representation from the real world.

Figure 2. Walid Raad, Notebook 38, *Already Been in a Lake on Fire*, plates 55 and 56, 1991/2001, from the Fakhouri file, *Atlas Group Project*. Photo: © Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Furthermore, the accompanying statistics "speak" to a documentary discourse of facts. The photograph acts as a stand-in for both the exploded car and its facticity. It works as a sort of quasi-truth where the statistical data of a real exploded car bomb are combined with a photograph of a stand-in copy. This becomes a double substitution: a photograph of a substituted car and the history of the Lebanese wars replaced by the "facticity" of an exploded car. Despite the fact that this document is about a car bomb, there is no depiction of the explosion, of death, of blood, or of any trace of the trauma of war. A question arises: how can statistics accurately represent a graphically violent act? The ambiguous veracity of the notebook implies that while photographs and statistics are believed to represent objective facts, their supposed neutrality is often notoriously easy to manipulate to reflect different points of view.

Notebook 57 contains plates from a film attributed to Dr. Fakhouri. The notebook claims he carried a camera with him "wherever he went." Curiously juxtaposed here are the professional historian and the amateur photographer. While John Tagg contends that the power to bestow authority on photographic representations by government and police departments is not similarly granted to amateur photography,[18] Dr. Fakhouri's amateur photographs reveal a "truth" that is not found in the more official forms of photography. It is important to note that it is the professional historian who is able to produce this truth through his amateur photographs. The notebook explains that Dr. Fakhouri "exposed a frame of film every time he came across the sign of a doctor or dentist's office"[19] (fig. 3). These signs often include the doctors' official accreditations such as the details of their education. Almost always, the training took place

Figure 3. Walid Raad, Notebook 57, *Livre d'or*, plate 7, 1993, from the Fakhouri file, *Atlas Group Project*. Photo: © Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

in the West, mainly in France, the United States, or the United Kingdom.[20] According to Raad, "You could tell the history of Lebanon and the colonial mandate, and its legacy, through these signs."[21] Raad's nod to post-colonial critique identifies the Western training evident in the doctors' signs as a demonstration that these individuals possessed a validated form of knowledge not too dissimilar to that of a historian who has the accreditation and authority to access the archive and speak for it. It also displays a certain authority attributed to capital, since the doctors had the financial means to travel and be educated abroad. The process of getting the proper, meaning Western, accreditation mirrored, somewhat ironically, Lebanese artists such as Raad's own education in Western universities. Thus the question arises as to whether this Western training helps build a resistance to Western cultural hegemony as Jalal Toufic claims or, instead, subtly ingrains a set of values that results in a kind of homogeneous international, i.e., Western style.

Notebook 72 reveals the amusing but "little known fact that the major historians of the Lebanese wars were avid gamblers"[22] (fig. 4). According to Raad, every Sunday the historians went to the racetrack. The sectarian division among the historians manifests itself even in this leisure-time activity:

> The Marxists and the Islamists bet on races one through seven, Maronite nationalists and socialists on eight through fifteen.
>
> Race after race, the historians stood behind the track photographer, whose job was to image the winning horse as it crossed the finish line, to record the photo-finish.[23]

But the photographer would never get it exactly right, so the historians would bet on "precisely when—how many fractions of a second before or after the horse crossed the finish line—the photographer would expose his frame."[24] Each page of the notebook contains a picture of the winning horse from a newspaper (an "official" source), statistical information (the calculation of averages, the bets), and other textual information such as a description of the winning historian (fat, bald, prone to drink, etc.). Thus on one page, Raad records three different but typical kinds of documentation: photography, statistics, and textual description. This documentation is, of course, fictional. The notebooks claim to be from the era of the civil wars even though the photographs were taken from editions of the Lebanese daily *Annabar* that were published years after the civil wars.[25] Here again Raad creates documents after the fact, tying the present with the past. He does not attempt to recreate the past event but superimposes the present onto it in order to generate the question of how we got here from there. In doing so, he echoes Michel Foucault's insistence that a historian is not writing a history of the past, but of the present.[26]

Notebook 72 presents other interesting historiographic problems. The historians' division along sectarian lines is of course pointed. The photographer's inability to get the winning moment quite right is also significant, as it mirrors a historian's inability to ever finally arrive at a true historical moment: you can come close to getting history right, but you can never get it exactly right. In her article about Raad entitled "Forging History, Performing Memory," Sarah Rogers argues that gambling can be seen as another way of thinking about history.[27] Gamblers often employ statistical and mathematical analysis in an effort to beat the odds, seeking a rational logic in the law of chance. This notion is similar to the historian's desire to produce a logically coherent, factual, and precise narrative from a conglomeration of historical traces. Rogers also notes that in one of his *Atlas Group Project* lectures, Raad claims that historians have at various times bribed newspaper photographers.[28] He thus shows that the whole mission of photographers, newspapers, and historians to provide truthful and reliable information is easily turned on its head through human greed.

Raad's lectures question not only the authenticity and validity of the archive, but also the authority of the historian to explicate what is found in the archive. Raad exposes as shaky any belief in a built-in evidentiary power for history, or for what historian Dominick LaCapra calls the documentary style of historiography.[29] Raad points to the difficulty of assessing the truth-value of a document and explains that,

> I always mention in exhibitions and lectures that the Atlas Group documents are ones that I produce and that I attribute to various imaginary individuals. But even this direct statement fails, in many instances, to make evident for readers or an audience the imaginary nature of the Atlas Group and its documents.[30]

The authoritative commentary combined with the "evidentiary" photographs, statistics, and plausible narrative blur the memory of Raad's introductory comments for many viewers. This forgetting of the imaginary nature of the project testifies to the authority that is associated with archival documents and with any historian who speaks for them.

LaCapra describes the documentary model's research process as a study of "hard" facts derived from the critical sifting of sources.[31] The purpose of this kind of historical analysis is to produce narrative accounts based on documented facts and to submit the historical record to the analytic procedures of hypothesis-formation, testing, and explanation. In this methodology, the historical imagination is limited to plausibly filling the gaps in the record. It does not attempt to see the phenomena differently or to transform their perception through interpretation.[32] Such historical practice has its roots in the works

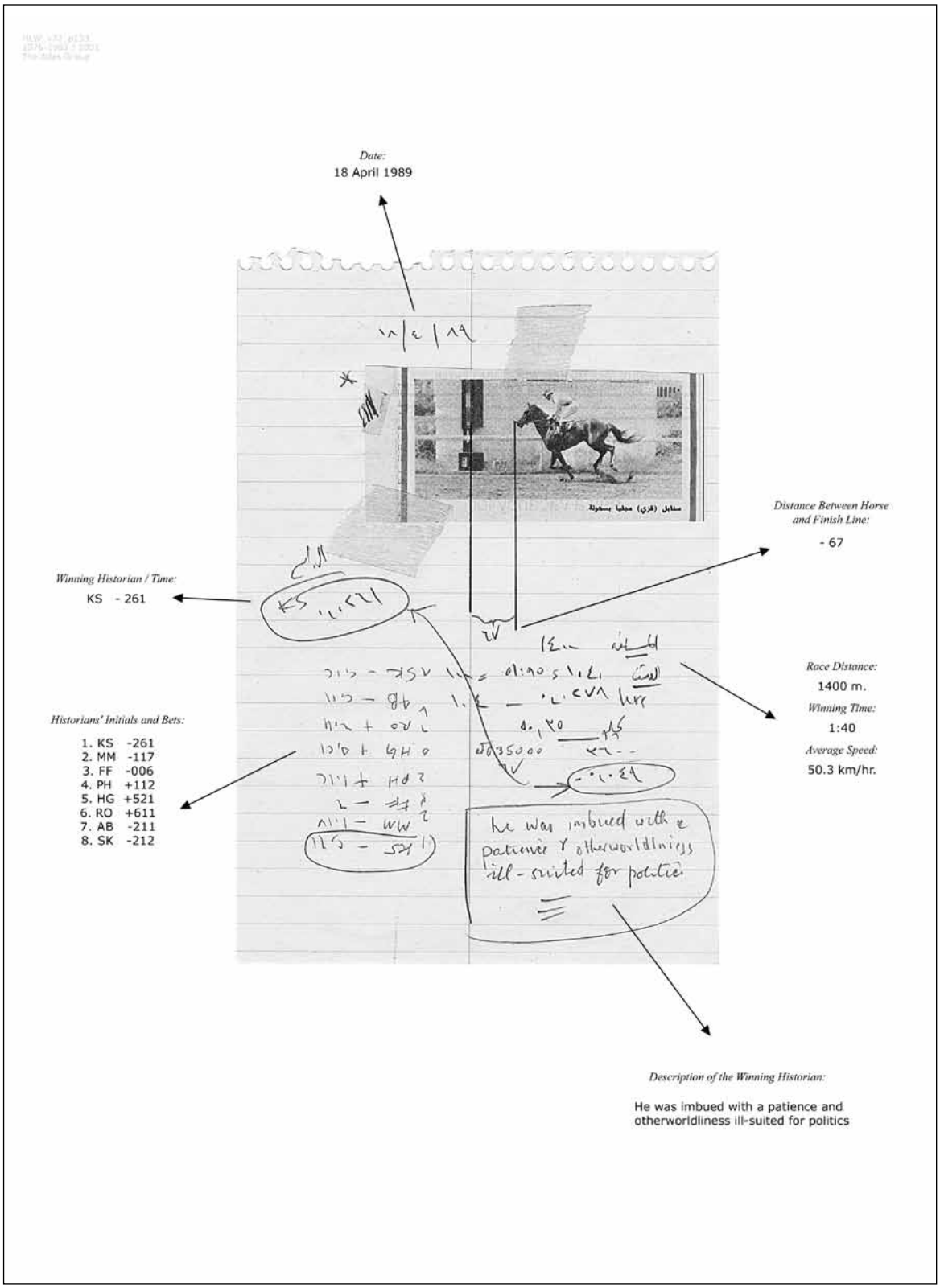

Figure 4. Walid Raad, Notebook 72, *Missing Lebanese Wars*, plate 133, 1989/1998, from the Fakhouri file, *Atlas Group Project*. © Photo: Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Figure 5. Alexander Gardner, *The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg,* 1863. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

of nineteenth-century Prussian historian Leopold von Ranke. Ranke is credited with establishing a school of history with a large following. He insisted on the need for studying primary sources critically, taking into account all details, and arriving at a synthesis from these original facts.[33] For Ranke, there is an emphasis on the ideals of objectivity and the subordination of the historian to the "truth" of his or her materials.[34] Ranke's scholarship roughly coincided with the discovery of photographic technologies and the introduction of new archival classification. The rhetoric surrounding photographs, archival records, and Ranke's methodology all made similar demands on the reliability and unmediated nature of their evidence as accurate representations of reality.

It is well known, however, that in spite of claims to objectivity, photography from its inception has been bound up in a certain sleight of hand. Susan Sontag, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, points to American Civil War photographer Alexander Gardner's *The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg* (fig. 5) as an example of a photograph where the duty to record history as an indisputable truth required alterations to what the battlefield left behind. Here, the dead Confederate soldier was actually moved from where he fell in the field to a more photogenic site by the rocks.[35] The rifle leaning against the barricade was placed there by Gardner. However, it is not the special rifle a sharpshooter would have used, but rather a common infantryman's weapon.[36] What Sontag finds odd is not that the

photographs were staged, but that "we are surprised to learn they were staged, and always disappointed."[37] It is precisely this continued strong belief in the authenticity of the photograph and archival document that Raad undermines by revealing the audience's fundamental role as a crucial accomplice in the production of the archive and of the historian's authority. The audience is, in a sense, the partner in the artist/historian's forgeries and manipulations.

By fictionalizing components of data in the archive, Raad poses the question of what constitutes a valid or truthful historical document (although Raad does not acknowledge this as his intent). The historical event has been transformed into archival data through a documentation process that begins with the perceiver of an original historical event. This perceiver is no less an interpreter than the subsequent historian who emplots the event in a narrative. The raw data of history are thus loaded with narrative. So how is historical truth distinguished from non-truth? The historian Hayden White, who emphasizes the fictive and anti-realist nature of historical narrative, does not address this question fully: he simply affirms the existence of factual (truthful) historical statements, which he calls "singular existential" statements.[38] He does not elaborate on how, or indeed whether, such statements can be validated. The *Annales* school of historians, on the other hand, are concerned with the validation of historical statements. For *Annales* historians such as Roger Chartier, the discipline's toolkit for validation includes "the construction and treatment of data, the production of hypothesis, the critical verification of results, the validation of coherence and the plausibility of interpretation."[39] Historical statements can be verified by procedures proper to history, which Chartier claims allow the historian to recognize fakes and forgers, and to resist what he calls the mythical reconstructions of the past governed by the needs of "communities" that "create narratives to suit their desires and expectations."[40] Nevertheless, these weapons are rather toothless when faced with warring religious and moral factions, like those in Lebanon, that have their own opposing procedures for the construction of historical accounts, which each claim are proper and factual.

Sociologist Thomas Osborne has written about the archive as a real place, modelling his theories on the work of Michel Foucault.[41] Osborne contends that the archive has a principle of credibility that allows it to function as a resource in a discipline's assertion of claims to authority. He uses the study of history as an example: unless able to generate archival credibility, one is not considered a historian.[42] The principle of credibility is simultaneously epistemological and ethical for Osborne. It is epistemological because the archive is a site of knowledge, and ethical because knowledge of the "archive is a sign of status, of authority and a certain right to speak, a certain kind of author-function."[43] Osborne builds on Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" in which the French philosopher describes the notion of "author" as a "privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas" that grants the right to make statements about the past.[44] Osborne's idea of archival credibility is likened to the anthropologist who does fieldwork, where fieldwork represents both a form of truth and knowledge, and a certain ethical authority to speak.[45] Osborne proposes something he calls "archival reason," that is, a form of reason devoted to detail.[46] He claims that the disciplines that are closest to the ideality of the archive are those, such as art history, which are devoted to traces, signs, deposits, and clues that require expert interpretation or differentiation.[47] For Osborne, "archival reason" tends to favour the explanatory relevance of the mundane, the obscure detail or the unremarkable fact. He poses the problematic question of whether there could even be a discipline of history without the historian's willingness to pursue the hidden and apparently mundane. The historian is the one who re-animates the discourses that he or she discovers in the archives, giving them an "aura of certain rarity, a kind of extraordinary ordinariness."[48] As a result, a historian's credibility is related not only to the degree to which he or she is a virtuoso of the archive, but to the extent that he or she can bring forth the "hitherto unseen world" of the everyday in an extraordinary way.[49]

The Atlas Group archive is likewise filled with rather mundane details. The spectacle of the violent and volatile civil wars is depicted through unremarkable tourist photos, a gambling notebook, doctors' signs, and items such as sunset videos. Raad states,

> The geopolitical history of contemporary Lebanon that was being written was leaving out so much of what I considered to be my experiences of these events. The mere ability to walk freely from West to East Beirut unhindered by checkpoints is not an experience one would have had 15 years ago. I wanted to make documents that were conscious of that.[50]

Raad's counter-history of commonplace details thus differs from the "important events" chronology of historical facts. But it is comparable to Osborne's notion of archival reason. Raad's trivial everyday details, largely illustrated through collections of ordinary photographs, are precisely the kinds of features that historians eagerly use to demonstrate their virtuosity in being able to tease out the visibility of questions of power. Raad—the sole person behind the "collective" responsible for constructing the archive, as well as the archivist, historian, and artist—anoints himself with the epistemological and ethical credibility to speak. He explains, "Some things can only become manifest in fiction and nowhere else. These things also exist with rules and laws, notations of space and time. One hopes they are rigorous enough and that they hold up."[51] But what are these fictions supposed to hold up? Elsewhere he has stated,

> While some of the documents, stories and individuals being presented are real, in the sense that they exist in the historical world, others are imaginary in the sense that I imagine and produce them. But all the material I present is informed by research in audio, visual, and print archives in Lebanon and elsewhere.[52]

Ironically, Raad is citing the archive, the very thing that he is questioning, as the source of his credibility. This is the double bind, either intentional or not, that I see in Raad's project. He questions the veracity of the very data upon which the archive is built, and at the same time builds his own version out of archival data, but then purports it to "be rigorous enough" and to "hold up."[53] Thus history as a discourse of sovereignty or political events is replaced by the glory of the historian/artist who reanimates the mundane into a counter-history. Osborne's archival reason appears to win out in the end.

Raad repeatedly claims he is less interested in revealing the fallaciousness of the material he presents than in suggesting that only through fiction can an adequate image of the Lebanese civil wars be created. This argument is not dissimilar to Hayden White's response to criticism regarding his own understanding of history as fiction. White points out that literature and fiction are also forms of knowledge and that fiction does refer to the real world, tells truths about it, and provides useful knowledge of it.[54] Raad similarly uses fiction (photographic as well as textual) to insert into his historical archive forms of knowledge that are not the domain of serious history, but that work to illuminate a counter-history. For example, the injection of humour and absurdity into Raad's personal histories illustrates people's attempts to carry on with their everyday lives in the face of overwhelmingly tragic circumstances. Thus Raad shows that it is not their daily lives that are absurd, but the circumstances of the political events in which people find themselves. Raad does not distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence. For him, all forms of violence are absurd and irrational. Rationality cannot adequately tell this history. This is why he parodies the documentary style of historiography, which he believes is simply not able to make sense of the absurdity of the situation. Raad's archive is composed of unconnected files that tell different stories because there is no rational way to reconcile the stories that have been played out in Lebanon.

The political aspect of the *Atlas Group Project* is the other facet of this story. Clearly Raad is compiling a narrativized counter-history of the Lebanese civil wars from the perspective of an artist interpreting everyday Lebanese peoples' lives during the conflict. It is not a narrative of causation or of important political events so much as one about coping with these events. In this sense, Raad is keeping his personalized history of the Lebanese civil wars alive. His is an effort to counter the social amnesia that occurs with many events of the recent past. As new political events preoccupy the world, others such as the Lebanese civil wars slip into the distance, yet the Lebanese people continue to live with the consequences and repercussions of those wars. Raad's project is his attempt to keep this story in the present, to engage viewers in an investigation of the past, and to reconsider how the past is represented.

It is more than a little contradictory, however, to speak of the impossibility of a rational history, and then to engage in writing history—an activity that assumes a rational process. Raad's construction is a narrative that although avowedly part fiction, claims to be "rigorous" and based on the validity of research in "real" archives (predominantly the Arab Image Foundation collection of more than 600,000 photographs from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day). Photography forms the core of his historical research, and demonstrates how amenable its supposed neutrality and objectivity are to re-narrativization. Thus Raad's counter-history begins to sound like the same old history with all the same old problems. In the end, perhaps, Raad does not add anything new to White's and LaCapra's arguments about how history is written, but he does manage to animate a rather dry academic inquiry and bring it to life for potentially new audiences. Historian Jae Emerling describes the ability of certain photographic art practices to pierce existing discourses and disturb normalized power relations. Although Raad succumbs to a certain extent to Osborne's archival reason, his practice nevertheless illuminates the ongoing aporias of documentary photography and archives.[55] He performs an artistic act that could be classified as part of the "education turn" of contemporary art, engaging viewers in an investigation of the past and how it is represented. His project shows that the aesthetic production of doubt can act as a powerful impetus to challenge dominant narratives.

Notes

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