

Representing National Traumas: Alternative Histories, Experimental Art Practices and
Narratives by Transnational Artists from the Lebanese War Generation.

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by

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Abstract

As the diverse Lebanese socio-political parties fail to reach a consensus regarding contested national memories, identities, and ideologies, an official history of Lebanon has yet to see the light. In this vacuum a number of visual artists and scholars from the War Generation, a generation denied a chance to work out its post 1975-1990 childhood war traumas, have been attempting to historicize contemporary Lebanese traumas using avant-garde art practices. Driven by a need to voice their traumas, these artists have been experimenting with new genres of representation by combining critical theory with art practice. Because their Lebanese specific post-warfare themes reflect global contemporary art concerns, these artists have been attaining international recognition. This study aims to demonstrate how the complexity of the Lebanese socio-political and cultural context, overdetermined by war traumas and national identity crises, have set the stage for the development of sophisticated art practices by transnational artists from the Lebanese War Generation.

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This thesis stands in memory of everyone who passed away, suffered, or suffers still because of the 1975-1990 wars and their ongoing repercussions. I hope that this study will open a new window through which people can reassess the long term effects of war on art and on humanity as a whole.

I dedicate this study to my Lebanon and to my Canada.

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Introduction

Where does art stand in the realm of war?

War and art have been two consistently interconnected features since the dawn of history. From as early as Paleolithic cave paintings portraying heated struggles of survival, to more recent depictions of victorious rulers, battle scenes, and anti-war sentiments, artists have attempted to represent war using visual means. In that regard, the twentieth century constituted an epitome of this long relationship between war and art in terms of the unprecedented volume and diversity of wars and their respective visual representations.

In his essay, “The Art of War in the Twentieth Century,” David D. Perlmutter notes that the twentieth century – “the ‘century of blood,’ a ‘stinking’ century, the ‘Black Century,’ and the century of ‘total war’”¹ – constituted the climax for two human characteristics: the ability to make war with manufactured weapons, and the ability to create pictures on artificial or natural media.² Perlmutter also observes how, unlike artists from previous centuries, the twentieth century artists interpret war through ideas, emotions, and fragmentations instead of rendering war scenes with utmost fidelity.³ Of course, Perlmutter is not the only scholar investigating the relationship between war and art in the twentieth century; needless to say, such a major topic couldn’t have avoided widespread academic scrutiny.

Scholarship on War and Art

Scholars from various disciplines have approached the subjects of war and art from different perspectives. One genre of war/art studies focuses on officially sponsored war art and examines political and/or military structures behind it by exploring notions of propaganda, presentation, and display.⁴ Another approach examines the historiographic nature of war-art by treating artifacts as archival materials that capture and reflect events, policies and customs which were common at the time a certain artwork was produced.⁵ A particular line of study investigates the repulsive nature of war atrocities commonly highlighted in artworks by anti-war artists.⁶ Finally, a number of war/art studies venture into the realm of memory, remembrance, mourning, and commemoration;⁷ such studies are commonly based on psychoanalysis and specifically deal with traumatic and post-traumatic aspects of art in wartime, and beyond.

Hence, the relation between contemporary war and art emerges as an extremely broad academic topic. The goal of this study is to highlight an interesting war/art case study: art practices by the 1975-1990 “War Generation”⁸ in Lebanon (Fig.1). Of course, focusing on the Lebanese traumas is not meant to diminish or undervalue the regrettably numerous national and cultural traumas in other parts of the globe today; however, there are enough reasons to believe that the Lebanese case is comprehensive enough to serve as an excellent case study of contemporary war, trauma and art.

What makes this case study significant is the complexity and current prevalence of each of its main components: Lebanon, the artists, and their art practices. While Lebanon constitutes a uniquely complex case of a postcolonial country caught amid national and international crises, the artists provide a solid example of contemporary transnational citizenship, and their art practices experiment with new methods of representation while questioning the old ones at the same time.

Hence, this study aims to demonstrate how the socio-political and cultural complexity of the Lebanese traumas drove the artists to experiment with innovative art practices to match the complexity of the country whose traumas they seek to represent. Their multicultural and transnational experiences facilitated their articulation of Lebanese traumas in a language easily understood in the Western academy. The fact that such artwork has been exhibited in major venues worldwide and has been winning prestigious awards attests to its significance, actuality, and timeliness.

Alternative art practices

As the diverse Lebanese socio-political parties fail to reach a consensus regarding contested national memories, identities, and ideologies, the official history of Lebanon has yet to be agreed upon.⁹ It has frequently been said that history is written by the winners; yet, in Lebanon any discussion of victors and vanquished is forbidden. A delicate balance of power between antagonistic parties has long been maintained through internal-external political affiliations.¹⁰ Due to its sensitive geopolitical locale,

Lebanon has been a playground for regional and international politics and a battleground for proxy wars since the dawn of history.¹¹ For the past 3000+ years, successive invaders of Lebanon took the time to record their conquests on a rocky cliff by the seashore in Nahr al-Kalb, a recently designated World Heritage site.¹² In the past century alone, Lebanon has witnessed a substantial number of conflicts of which the 1975-1990 wars are the most prominent. In 1990, warfare in Lebanon was put on hold; however, no war crime trials were carried out and no truth and reconciliation committees were established.¹³ Instead, the history of the civil, non-civil, and uncivil wars in Lebanon was repressed in keeping with official policies of forgetting, and a complacent will among the Lebanese public to deny the tragedies.¹⁴

In the early 1990's, a group of visual artists and scholars from the War Generation, a generation denied a chance to work out its traumas, attempted to document the Lebanese war traumas and highlight the ongoing national identity crises. To accomplish this task, they experimented with alternative methods of recording history, including the use of archival material to compose real, anecdotal, and fictitious narratives. Interestingly, these individuals found in visual art a powerful means to accomplish their task. Using an amalgam of art practice and critical theory, the avant-garde art practices of the War Generation artists established new relationships between art and war. This study aims to demonstrate how the complexity of the Lebanese socio-political life, overwhelmed by war-traumas, facilitated the emergence of alternative art practices by transnational artists from the Lebanese War Generation.

Few scholars have studied the artworks of the Lebanese War Generation; this fact is related to the absence of an art history discipline in Lebanon. Moreover, of the few studies that do exist, none sufficiently elaborates on the subject of Lebanese war traumas. This is the driving force behind this thesis, which aims to fill the gap in scholarship by initiating a discussion on these artworks from a post-traumatic perspective.

Theoretical framework

Choosing a theoretical framework for discussing the art practices of the War Generation was a huge challenge. These art practices cannot be referred to as war art, for the term is commonly affiliated with officially sponsored art productions. Neither do such art practices belong to conventional anti-war art productions, which commonly lack the visual and theoretical complexity found in the art practices highlighted in this study. Consequently, a successful articulation of these artworks required an interdisciplinary approach drawing from the fields of psychoanalysis, history, and art history while focusing on essential keywords such as trauma, memory, identity, war, art and representation.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One introduces the traumatic Lebanese context which constitutes the subject matter of the art practices under study. The chapter also attempts to

demonstrate how a whole population could be traumatized by war, and how war-trauma is more severe in the case of children. Hence, the chapter aims to build a relationship between the art practices of the War Generation artists and their childhood war trauma.

Chapter Two begins with a psychoanalytic definition of trauma and moves on to discuss the particular question of its representation. The chapter is meant to define the scholarly framework within which the artists are experimenting with art as a medium for representing trauma.

In turn, Chapter Three highlights the characteristics of the Lebanese War Generation art by focusing on a number of key artists' statements. The chapter draws attention to methods of engagement in which the artists combine theory with practice to produce complex visual narratives which testify to their traumatic context.

Finally, Chapter Four is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the work, *Wonder Beirut*, in the context of the exhibition *Hadjithomas + Joreige I'm There Even if You Don't See Me* which took place in Montreal in the fall of 2009, and which constitutes an excellent example of contemporary art practices by Lebanese War Generation artists.

Endnotes

¹ David D. Perlmutter, "The Art of War in the Twentieth Century," *At War*, ed. by Eudald Carbonell et al. (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2005), 136.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 137, 140.

⁴ See the works of Laura Brandon (*Art and War*, 2006); Sue Malvern (*Modern Art, Britain, and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony and Remembrance*, 2004); and Susan Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2004).

⁵ See Peter Paret's (*Imagined Battles: Reflections of War in European Art*, 1997) and David D. Perlmutter's (*Visions of War: Picturing Warfare from the Stone Age to the Cyber Age*, 1999).

⁶ This would include artists such as Goya, Picasso, the Chapman brothers, Leon Goleb, Nancy Spero, and Botero. See Philip Shaw, "Abjection Sustained: Goya, the Chapman Brothers and the Disasters of War," *Art History* vol.26, no.4 (September 2003): 479-504. See also Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

⁷ See the works of: Jay Winter, "Commemorating War" in *At War* (2004); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* (1989); and James Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today," in *Art and the Public Sphere* (1992).

⁸ In Lebanese colloquial, the term War Generation (*jeel al harb/ jeel ahdes*) refers to children who were born or raised between 1975 and 1990.

⁹ Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?" *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Usama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 201.

¹⁰ Antagonistic internal groups seek the intervention of foreign powers which escalates internal tension to the level of international crisis, necessitating international intervention. See Samir Khalaf, "On Proxy Wars and Surrogate Victims," *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Contact* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-23, 204-252.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Lucia Volk, "When Memory Repeats Itself: The Politics of Heritage in Post Civil War Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, (2008): 291-314.

¹³ The exceptions to a general amnesty were Christian leaders who did not cooperate with the new regime, and who were thus assassinated, brought to trial, imprisoned or exiled. Ibid., p. 299-303.

¹⁴ Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?" ..., p. 204. See also Stephen Wright, "Tel un Espion dans L'époque qui Naît: La Situation de L'artiste à Beyrouth Aujourd'hui," *Parachute*, no.108 (2002): 13-31 and Miriam Cooke, "Beirut Reborn: The Political Aesthetics of Auto-Destruction," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* vol.15, no.2 (Fall 2002): 393-424.

Chapter I

Lebanese Traumas and the War Generation

War is the ultimate in human aggression. In addition to the destruction of life and limb, property and culture, it often exacts a fearful, though less visible, toll in psychological damage.¹

N.A. Milgram

Traumatic experiences scar the individual and weaken his resilience to future stress ... whatever the possible benefits of successful stress resolution, repeated battery will eventually fell even the hardest souls.²

Zahava Solomon

War-related news commonly focuses on primary war tolls such as physical casualties and material destruction, dismissing secondary tolls such as psychological disorders. The toll of the 1975-1990 wars is both tragic and substantial, yet, recounting the painful, complicated and overwhelming details of these wars would require the production of volumes of historical data, but in the end this would fail to achieve the main purpose of this paper which is to highlight the effects of the war on contemporary Lebanese artistic practice. Consequently, this chapter focuses on the psychological effects on the Lebanese War Generation. Beginning with a consideration of the intergenerational transfer of war trauma, the chapter moves on to reflect the symptoms of everyday war related stress among the Lebanese public, who have been living in conditions of perpetual war for two centuries. Thereafter, the chapter assesses the general psychological effects of war on children, and deduces that the Lebanese War Generation suffers from a psychoanalytic overdetermination of trauma, where

overdetermination refers to “the idea that a single observed effect is determined by multiple causes at once (any one of which alone might be enough to account for the effect).”³

Intergenerational War Trauma

In 1990, warfare stopped in Lebanon, but the war did not. This fact parallels the broader Lebanese history of irresolvable wars and atrocities that has resulted in an overdetermination of trauma in Lebanon. Due to its strategic geopolitical locale, Lebanon has long been a ground for regional and international wars. A short list of the most prominent wars which took place in and around Lebanon in just the past two centuries alone includes:

1800	Napoleon Bonaparte’s initial campaign in Egypt reaches southern Lebanon.
1820	A Lebanese Christian peasants uprising over taxes breaks out.
1830	The Governor of Egypt rebels against the Ottoman Empire and occupies Mount Lebanon and Syria.
1840	European colonial powers form an alliance with the central Ottoman Empire and Lebanese Christians against the alliance of Egypt’s Governor and Lebanese Druze.
1860	A Christian peasants’ insurgency against their feudal lords transforms into a sectarian conflict with the Druze, and escalates into acts of mutual ethnic cleansing. This results in a sort of autonomy of Mount Lebanon under Ottoman Empire rule in addition to European privileges therein.
1914 to 1919	World War I hits Lebanon. The Ottoman Empire falls apart.

1919	The Allies launch a war against King Faisal over Lebanon and Faisal's grand Arab Nation-State. The majority of Lebanese Christians request French assistance to build an independent nation-state, while the majority of Lebanese Muslims request to be joined to Syria; hence, the birth of the identity crisis.
1920 - 1943	Lebanon falls under the French Mandate.
1939 - 1943	World War II hits Lebanon under the Vichy regime.
1949, 1967, and 1973	The Arab-Israeli wars have serious repercussions for Lebanon, including thousands of Palestinian refugees.
1958	The first Lebanese civil war begins and ends in the same year due to requested U.S. military intervention.
1968, 1973	Israel attacks Palestinian guerillas in Lebanon and bombards Lebanese civilian infrastructures including the airport. The Lebanese army also clashes with Palestinian guerillas in an attempt to restore Lebanese sovereignty.
1975 - 1990	A series of civil, regional and international wars erupts on Lebanese grounds. A Palestinian, Lebanese Muslim, pan-Arabist and leftist coalition engages in battle against right-wing Lebanese Christians. Later conflicts include Christians vs. Christians, Muslims vs. Muslims, Israeli invasions and Christians vs. Syria.
1990 - 2005	Lebanon falls under what is termed Syrian "custody" (a situation that the Christian Right refers to as "occupation" and the Muslim Left considers a "friendly presence").
1990 - Present	The Gulf and Iraqi wars have serious repercussions for Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole.
1993, 1998, 2006	Israeli wars against Hezbollah and the Lebanese civil infrastructures.
2005 - 2009	Political chaos, assassinations, car bombs and general insecurity follow a vacuum in power and civil tension.
2007	The Lebanese army is drawn into a war against Islamic Fundamentalists inside a Palestinian refugee camp in North Lebanon.

2009 - 2010	A fragile truce is held in place pending regional political changes.
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In retrospect, the 1840-1860 strifes established a socio-political rhythm which has been governing Lebanon up to the present and which could be summarized in three main points: Firstly, the violent period transformed religious beliefs in Lebanon into political identities accentuated by the division of the official state positions according to a sectarian quota.⁴ Secondly, Lebanon was transformed into a playground and battleground for international politics through the imposition of a power balance between the antagonist internal sectarian groups backed by external foreign powers in protégée/clientele relationships. Subsequently, no single Lebanese group has been able to (or allowed to) win the successive civil strifes against the other Lebanese groups. Thirdly, by taking refuge in politically fortified religious groups and related protégé affiliations, corruption in Lebanon, including war crimes, has been, thus far, immune from judicial prosecution.⁵

Psychological studies have concluded that war trauma is transmitted to future generations long after the traumatic events cease.⁶ In that regard, one is invited to consider the compounded residual effects of two centuries of ongoing insecurity in Lebanon, and the respective intergenerational transfer of war trauma therein.

In “Traumatic Effects of Political Repression in Chile: A Clinical Experience”, Margarita Diaz Cordal explains:

...the parents’ damage is transmitted to the second generation as a ‘cumulative trauma’... The persistence of threat, persecution and death throughout time displaces the centrality of the

parents' protective role and prevents the development of the recognition that is essential for the working through of the trauma.⁷

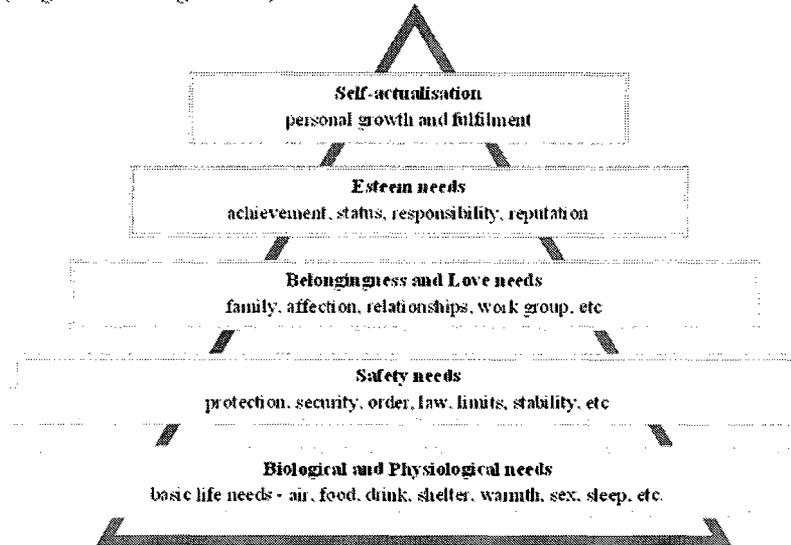
Accordingly, cumulative trauma has trapped the Lebanese society in a cycle of violence preventing it from working through its long sufferings. The War Generation, in particular, inherited two centuries of war traumas and has been living in perpetual insecurity for almost four decades now. The aftermath of wars in Lebanon, including the perpetual absence of justice, law enforcement, and security, has immersed the whole population in secondary war-traumas. Although people in Lebanon are intuitively aware of this fact, it has been rarely discussed in terms of academic theory. Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation serves as a suitable framework for understanding the Lebanese secondary war traumas manifested in everyday stress disorders.

Lebanon and the Hierarchy of Needs

In "A Theory of Human Motivation" Maslow states that: "Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need."⁸ Maslow argued that in order for a human being to reach self-actualization he must first satisfy necessary and sufficient biological, safety, belongingness, and esteem needs. Furthermore, Maslow argued that if at one point we loose a basic need we had already satisfied, we shift our focus towards repairing that need and temporarily discard higher accomplishments.⁹

The following diagram represents Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in which biological and physiological needs lie at the base of the pyramid while personal growth and fulfillment needs stand at the peak.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
(original five-stage model)**



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In light of this diagram, the Lebanese population appears to have been in perpetual lack of basic survival needs for more than four decades. Of course, during wartime, most of the Lebanese population was also deprived of physiological needs such as food, drink, shelter, warmth, and sleep. Almost every Lebanese individual who survived the wars recalls a personal near death experience, the improvised bomb shelters, or the sight of long lines of people waiting to buy bread or to fill water containers, not to mention the memory of the foreign toxic wastes which were buried in

Lebanese soil. In fact, twenty years after the civil warfare ended, the Lebanese public still lives in below-standard living conditions; the recent wars and turmoil have made things worse. Clearly, the first step on the Lebanese hierarchy of needs has been broken for a considerable time.

As for security needs, the Lebanese individual lacks any sense of safety and realizes that his or her life may be terminated by a violent outbreak at any point. Wars in Lebanon take alternative shapes during the interludes of peace and manifest in such ways as detonations, assassinations, civil strifes, prosecutions, kidnappings, and foreign occupations. Furthermore, the Lebanese citizen suffers from the absence of firm law enforcement, due to the weakness and corruption in official institutions. Even trivial civil-court disputes seem to take forever to go through a *corroded bureaucracy*, if they are not illicitly intercepted first.

When it comes to belongingness needs, national belonging constitutes the foundation of Lebanese national trauma. In Lebanon, one can speak of separate cultures and separate nations in constant conflict over what it means to be Lebanese. On one hand, the majority of Christians believe in Lebanese Phoenician roots and a long Western heritage. On the other hand, the majority of Muslims privilege an Arabic heritage. Hence, in contrast to the parties' proclaimed intentions of seeking harmonious coexistence, the rift between their imagined spaces for the Lebanese national identity has never been sincerely addressed.

On the level of economy, Lebanon is known for its lack of natural resources, which, together with the constant insecurity, leaves the narrow job market with an overflow of over-qualified, and thus unemployed, citizens. The few vacant positions are usually filled according to personal, religious, or political affiliations, rather than personal qualifications. Moreover, the working conditions are generally contaminated with abuse or corruption. Consequently, Lebanese individuals who refuse to join the ongoing corrupt socio-political game are seldom able to reach the top of the motivation pyramid and satisfy self-actualization needs. Not surprisingly, these citizens often seek to emigrate or work abroad. Regrettably, this has been the case for the majority of educated Lebanese youth during the past century.¹⁰ In fact, ever since the 1975-1990 wars ended, emigration numbers have increased dangerously and exponentially.¹¹ In addition to the evident losses resulting from the emigration of the country's mainly young men, their absence provides more fertile conditions for corruption to grow.

Hence, the Lebanese hierarchy of needs suffers from severe damages at its base, middle, and top levels. Accordingly, it is safe to say that the level of individual and social stress in Lebanon has always been critical. Taking into consideration that "events are much more likely to be experienced as traumatic when a person is tired, ill, or under stress,"¹² it becomes clear that the Lebanese individual predisposition to trauma is enormously high; even more so when one considers that "trauma is not caused by an isolated event or experience [but] on the contrary...is the product of a series of traumatic sequences that are part of the subject's social context."¹³

Hence, with exposure to innumerable atrocities and the absence of basic human motivation needs, the Lebanese individual suffers from a psychoanalytical overdetermination of trauma. In the perpetual absence of the basic needs for human motivation, the Lebanese public has been living in a state of "learned helplessness," which is "a laboratory model of depression in which exposure to a series of unforeseen adverse situations gives rise to a sense of helplessness or an inability to cope with or devise ways to escape such situations, even when escape is possible."¹⁴

Samir Khalaf, a prominent Lebanese historian, informs us that "the Lebanese became deadened and numbed. Like other victims of collective suffering, they became ... desensitized and overwhelmed by muted anguish and pain."¹⁵ This explains why the circle of violence in Lebanon is never broken, and why every subsequent conflict is more violent than the preceding one, being agitated by constant stress and fear of annihilation.¹⁶

Needless to say, the whole Lebanese population suffers from traumatic stress disorder. Still, the level of such stress and its seriousness differs according to individual situations. Symptoms of the Lebanese public's psycho-traumas may be easily perceived in various aspects of everyday Lebanese life. In fact, the Lebanese resilience and their *joie de vivre* that many brag about are nothing but psychological defense mechanisms against continued stress and trauma. Foreigners commonly misinterpret these stress defense mechanisms and refer to the Lebanese as masters of adaptation. For instance,

in a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television report titled “Prozac Nation: Welcome, Literally, to Lebanon,” Nahlah Ayed, the CBC correspondent in Beirut, states:

I often wonder what their secret is. Is it because they've had to learn to adapt, or is it something they're born with, related to their innate freedom of spirit? Maybe it's the invigorating influence of the vast sea at Lebanon's threshold, or their particularly wilful desire to survive against all the odds. A love of life, perhaps, or the irreverent, who-cares-about-tomorrow attitude that makes today too incalculably important to waste. It's probably a bit of all that.¹⁷

Reading this quotation, the Lebanese seem to have developed superior adaptation skills; however, their apparent adaptation is in fact symptomatic of an extreme case of traumatic repression and denial. In the same report Ayed adds: “In Lebanon, it seems, when there is a will, there are a hundred ways. There is also, it seems, more than an ample supply of antidepressant medications.”¹⁸ Hence, the Lebanese apparent indulgence in life is a result of their permanent fear of losing it; their coping mechanisms are however medically concerning.

Prozac Nation

Until a few years ago, antidepressant medications were available to the Lebanese public without medical prescriptions; even today, the ease with which doctors prescribe antidepressants raises concerns. The abundant and casual use of medical drugs in Lebanon earned the country the designation, Prozac Nation. Most Lebanese individuals are uncomfortable with, and ashamed of talking about their psychic health issues in a country where privacy and personal space are quite limited. Lacking

psychiatric treatment, the majority of traumatized individuals displace their suffering either in anxiety attacks within closed circles, or through excessive indulgence in the *joie de vivre*. Nevertheless, the small number of individuals who actually break the social taboo by seeking psychiatric help in Lebanon are numerous enough to yield alarming statistics.¹⁹ In 2008, CBC TV reported:

Post-traumatic stress disorder following the 1975-1990 civil war here [in Lebanon] was epidemic. And many people are still suffering from it nearly two decades later. A team of local researchers recently found that exposure to war-related events increased the likelihood of a mood disorder among Lebanese by threefold. The likelihood of an anxiety disorder jumps sixfold. The same team concluded that one in four Lebanese has had a mental health disorder in their lifetime. Much of it to do with a series of misfortunes that have befallen this country, all lumped by the Lebanese under the title of the 'Situation.'²⁰

Consequently, any Lebanese adult who witnessed the wars and their aftermath in Lebanon must have developed a certain level of psychological disorder; this assumption multiplies in the case of children.

Children and War

In 1996, Graça Machel submitted a ground-breaking report to the United Nations General Assembly in which he drew global attention to the devastating impact of armed conflict on children.²¹ The report highlighted various traumatic experiences that children face during armed conflicts that are routinely ignored. Recruitment in armed struggle, sexual exploitation, educational challenges, and psychological tolls are a few examples of such traumas. The following excerpts from Machel's report elaborate the psychological impacts of war on children:

(article) 166. Armed conflict affects all aspects of child development - physical, mental and emotional - and to be effective, assistance must take each into account. Historically, those concerned with the situation of children during armed conflict have focused primarily on their physical vulnerability. The loss, grief and fear a child has experienced must also be considered....

168. The ways in which children respond to the stress of armed conflict will depend on their own particular circumstances. These include individual factors such as age, sex, personality type, personal and family history and cultural background. Other factors will be linked to the nature of the traumatic events, including their frequency and the length of the exposure. Children who suffer from stress display a wide range of symptoms, including increased separation anxiety and developmental delays, sleep disturbances and nightmares, lack of appetite, withdrawn behavior, lack of interest in play, and, in younger children, learning difficulties. In older children and adolescents, responses to stress can include anxious or aggressive behavior and depression.

169. Relatively little is known about the psychosocial long-term effects of recent lengthy civil wars. The loss of parents and other close family members leaves a life-long impression and can dramatically alter life pathways...

170. All cultures recognize adolescence as a highly significant period in which young people learn future roles and incorporate the values and norms of their societies. The extreme and often prolonged circumstances of armed conflict interfere with identity development. As a result, many adolescents - especially those who have had severely distressing experiences - cannot conceive of any future for themselves. They may view their lives very pessimistically, suffer from serious depression or, in the worst of circumstances, commit suicide. They may not wish to seek help or support from adults. Moreover, sudden changes in family circumstances, such as the death or disappearance of parents, can leave youth without guidance, role models and sustenance. During conflicts, some adolescents become responsible for the care of younger siblings. Youth are also often under pressure to actively join in the conflict, or are threatened with forced recruitment. Despite all of this, adolescents, during or after wars, seldom receive any special attention or assistance. This is a matter of urgent concern.

171. In addition to the suffering they undergo as a result of their own difficult experiences, children of all ages also take cues from their adult care-givers. Seeing their parents or other important adults in their lives as vulnerable can severely undermine children's confidence and add to their sense of fear. When armed conflict causes a change in the behavior of adults, such as extreme protectiveness or authoritarianism, children find it very difficult to understand.²²

These excerpts amply reflect the gravity of the psychological impacts of armed conflicts on children. Moreover, Lebanese children are one of the groups profiled in the report.²³ Those born or raised between 1975 and 1990 not only endured 15 years of active warfare accentuated by a century of intergenerational traumas, they were also

deprived of the chance to work through their war traumas in the post-1990 period, as will be demonstrated below.

The Lebanese War Generation

For the past two centuries, almost every Lebanese generation could lay claim to the title “War Generation”, however, the children who were born or raised during the protracted civil and uncivil wars in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 seem to have been granted this designation in contemporary Lebanese colloquial discourse. Of course, the designation is not necessarily a positive one, often connoting that the War Generation is, fundamentally, a ruined generation.²⁴

What makes this generation’s experience unique is the extended period of hostilities they witnessed, inasmuch as war was the only reality these children knew. It became the new norm. Because the wars persisted for most or all of their childhood, individuals from that generation usually had to leave the country for a more peaceful community to realize the gravity of the traumatic situation in Lebanon. This is a notion worth remembering when considering the work of Lebanese transnational artists. In other words, people who have not left Lebanon have had no chance to work through their traumas. The following explains why this is the case. The 1975-1990 wars in Lebanon remain the freshest and most unprocessed memories in the Lebanese psyche today.

In *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Judith Herman explains how total societies can suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after civil wars.²⁵ Herman particularly stresses the need to bring perpetrators to justice and to establish public forums where “victims can speak their truth and their suffering can be formally acknowledged.”²⁶ She further adds: “Recovery requires remembrance and mourning,”²⁷ and also states, “Like traumatized individuals, traumatized countries need to remember, grieve, and atone for their wrongs in order to avoid them.”²⁸

In Lebanon, there was no chance for recovery after the battles ceased. The so-called warlords became the post-warfare officials running the government and the parliament of the Lebanese Second Republic. Herman states that war perpetrators aggressively seek to stop any attempt at accountability and use anything in their power, including their old methods of intimidation and deceit, to attain “amnesty, a political form of amnesia.”²⁹ This was exactly what happened in Lebanon after the wars; a general amnesty was granted and an enforced attempt to forget was imposed by the new political regime. Instead of recuperating from the 1975-1990 wars, the Lebanese went through another series of traumas driven by neighboring and distant nations, including fifteen years of Syrian hegemony, and ten years of Israeli partial occupation and recurrent combats.

By missing the chance to heal, and enduring a new set of traumas, the festering country turned into a bomb awaiting a trigger. Herman states: “if there is no hope for

justice, the helpless rage of victimized groups can fester, impervious to the passage of time.”³⁰ By 2005, a series of national, Middle Eastern, and international events triggered the Lebanese rage, and the dormant ghosts of the civil wars returned to spread fear throughout the country.³¹ The chaos that erupted in this period of transition towards renewed independence brought the contradictory national ideologies back to the surface. Once again, Lebanon was caught up in a vicious circle of violence that it never actually escaped from.

Hence, the term “post-war” is actually not applicable to the Lebanese situation. In Lebanon, war is omnipresent and peace is only a transitory interval between battles when hostilities cannot be afforded. The combination of this constant insecurity with secondary war traumas, intergenerational traumas, and suffocating social codes psychologically overdetermine trauma in Lebanon, both individual and national. Lebanese artists from the War Generation are not exempt from the effects and stigmas of such traumas. Zahava Solomon states: “Traumatic experiences scar the individual and weaken his resilience to future stress ... whatever the possible benefits of successful stress resolution, repeated battery will eventually fell even the hardest souls.”³² Not all Lebanese artists from the War Generation have chosen to reflect upon their personal traumas in their art; some have reflected unconsciously, while others have consciously experimented with avant-garde methods to represent the national traumas. This study is concerned with the last group and will examine their methodologies in the next chapters.

This chapter provided the socio-political backdrop against which artists from the Lebanese War Generation experimented with visual art as a means of representation. After considering the art production of this group presented in the next chapters, the reader is invited to further reflect upon the individual and national traumatic situations discussed herein to more fully understand the complex messages these artists are trying to convey.

Endnotes

¹ N. A. Milgram quoted in Zahava Solomon, "Does the War End When the Shooting Stops? The Psychological Toll of War," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* vol. 20, no. 21 (December 1990): 1733.

² *Ibid.*, p.1738.

³ "Overdetermination." TheFreeDictionary.com. March 27, 2010. <<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/overdetermination>>. For a more elaborate article see "Overdetermination." *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Alain de Mijolla. Gale Cengage, 2005. *eNotes.com*. 2006. 26 Mar, 2010 <<http://www.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/overdetermination>>

⁴ This political system of power sharing according to religious affiliation in Lebanon has come to be known as Confessionalism. The Taif Accord (1989) which was imposed as the agreement concluding the civil wars, amended the Lebanese constitution with articles confirming the equal division of higher government positions between Christians and Muslims; this includes the parliament seats (previously 6 Christians to 5 Muslims). The new constitution also states that the President of the Lebanese Republic **must** be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Parliament Spokesman a Shiite Muslim.

⁵ For instance, between 2005 and 2009, fourteen terrorist attacks were transferred to an international tribunal established through the United Nations. Regrettably, the Lebanese fear that this international tribunal will be as corrupt and politicized as the national ones, especially since, after five years of international investigation, no substantial evidence has been found or accusations made regarding any of the fourteen attacks.

⁶ See Thabet and Vostanis 1999, Korol 2005, Cordal 2005, Daud et.al 2005, Solomon 1990, Bohleber 2007.

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- ⁷ Margarita Diaz Cordal, "Traumatic Effects of Political Repression in Chile: A Clinical Experience," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* vol.86, no. 5 (October 2005): 1319.
- ⁸ Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Twentieth Century Psychology: Recent Developments in Psychology*, Ed. by Philip Lawrence Harriman and George Wilfried Hartmann. (Manchester: Ayer Publishing, 1946), 22.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* 25
- ¹⁰ See Paul Tabar, "Immigration and Human Development: Evidence from Lebanon," United Nations Development Programme: Human Development Research Paper 2009/35. August 2009. <http://origin-hdr.undp.org/fr/rapports/mondial/rmdh2009/documents/HDRP_2009_35.pdf > (Feb. 17, 2010)
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* 7-10
- ¹² Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 170.
- ¹³ Becker quoted in Cordal, "Traumatic Effects of Political Repression in Chile..." p.1317
- ¹⁴ Learned helplessness. Dictionary.com. The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary. Houghton Mifflin Company. [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/learned helplessness](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/learned%20helplessness) (accessed: February 16, 2010).
- ¹⁵ Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon...* p.310
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.* 235 – 236.
- ¹⁷ Nahlah Ayed, "Prozac Nation: Welcome, Literally, to Lebanon," *Mideast Dispatches*, CBC news, Friday, June 6, 2008. <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/reportsfromabroad/middleeast/2008/06/post.html> > (Sept. 17. 2008)
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ For detailed statistics and charts of Lebanese psychological disorders see Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon...* p.253-258 and Lamia Shehadeh, *Women and War in Lebanon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 272-315.
- ²⁰ Ayed, "Prozac Nation"
- ²¹ Graca Machel, *Impact of War on Children* (New York: UBC Press, 2001), also available online <http://www.unicef.org/graca/> (Feb. 19, 2010)
- ²² Graca Machel, *Impact of War on Children...* <http://www.unicef.org/graca/a51-306_en.pdf> p.39-40 (Feb. 19, 2010)
- ²³ *Ibid.* 7
- ²⁴ The term War Generation was also the title of a Lebanese film made by the artists Jean Chamoun and Said Masri in 1988 which questioned the destiny and future of these children. See Jamil Molaeb, "Artists and Art Education in Time of War, Lebanon," (Ph.D dissertation, Ohio State University, 1989), p 17.
- ²⁵ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 240 -245.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.242

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Although none of the following timelines is sufficiently objective or inclusive, they offer a glimpse of the main events for the mentioned period:

“Timeline: Lebanon,” *BBC News*, 11 Nov. 2009,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/819200.stm>, (21 Feb. 2010);

David Johnson and Beth Rowen, “Timeline of Key Events in Lebanon,” *Information Please*. Pearson Education. <<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/lebanontime1.html#1991>> (21 Feb. 2010);

“In Depth Lebanon Timeline,” *CBC News*. 30 Jan. 2007.

<<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/lebanon/>> (21 Feb. 2010)

³² Zahava Solomon, “Does the War End When the Shooting Stops? ... p.1738

Chapter II

Trauma and the Question of Representation

There are no representations, no signs of symbolization—only traces, primordial anxieties, physical sensations. Their trauma speaks only through symptoms, which bear witness of a ‘hole’ in the mind.¹

Kinston and Cohen

...even when part of the traumatic experience is transformed into words—a transformation that is only possible in the context of a relationship that reflects and acknowledges the shock—part of this experience will never be successfully symbolized. Patients keep to themselves a quantity of horror impossible to symbolize that will never find words to be expressed—it belongs to the category of the unthinkable, the unknowable.²

Margarita Díaz Cordal

Reserving a chapter for articulating and defining the notion of trauma and its representation was imperative for understanding this study. Since the subject of trauma is a broad one, this chapter aims to define a specific definition of trauma and its relative implementation in the fields of cultural studies and social sciences. The chapter is thus intended to facilitate the comprehension of art practices by the Lebanese War Generation. Opening with a psychological definition of trauma, the chapter moves on to define trauma's relationship to art from a particular line of discourse in literary studies known as “the question of representation.”

The study of psycho-trauma has developed significantly during the past century due to the extensive number of wars and their attendant traumatic aftermath. However, it was not until 1980 that trauma was granted official recognition as a medical disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, in the form of Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) as a result of intensive lobbying by mental health workers and lay activists on behalf of Vietnam War veterans.³ Signifying a piercing or a wound in its Greek origin, the contemporary psychiatric term "trauma" denotes "an event of such violence and suddenness that it occasions an inflow of excitation sufficiently strong to defeat normally successful defense mechanisms; as a general rule trauma stuns the subject and, sooner or later, brings about a disorganization of the psychic economy."⁴

In other words, trauma occurs when the subject experiences an event of extreme shock or stress beyond the capacity of his psyche to integrate it into normal memory channels. Different studies have examined where and how traumatic memories are registered;⁵ nevertheless, the rule of thumb states that unlike regular memories, traumatic memories remain raw, unprocessed, and beyond the confines of the subject's conscious state:

Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary controls.⁶

Yet, traumatic memories do not hide forever; in some cases, witnessing something reminiscent of the original traumatic event may result in its resurgence. In other cases, the patient's mind intermittently brings those memories to the surface in an attempt to eventually deal with the trauma.⁷ In both cases, the patient painfully relives the traumatic event where he or she is "obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience, instead of... remembering it as something belonging to

the past.”⁸ Hence, trauma messes with the notion of time: “the traumatic experience/memory is, in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, middle and end... If it can be told at all, it is still a (re) experience.”⁹ Alternatively, healing occurs when the patient is capable of putting the traumatic events in a narrative instead of reenacting them:

In the case of complete recovery, the person does not suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, behavioral reenactments, and so on. Instead the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality.¹⁰

It is this powerful interplay between narrative, memory, history, identity and time which is present in the process of traumatization and healing that have recently captured the attention of various scholars in different fields of the human sciences. Trauma offers an ideal median between memory and history,¹¹ between the past and the present, and between the self and the other. Thus, it is no surprise that the subject of trauma began to pervade academic discourse around the turn of the twenty first century as Paul F. Lerner and Mark S. Micale have written:

...the concept of traumatic pathogenesis has become an attractive, but controversial paradigm for explaining a number of the most important and troubling features of late-twentieth century Western society. To date, the fascination with trauma has been fed largely by medicine, psychology, sociology, law, theology, feminist theory, and Holocaust and genocide studies; yet, in addition to these disciplines, the study of trauma has begun to inspire a rapidly growing historical dimension. As an increasing number of scholars are discovering, the issue of trauma provides a useful entry into many complex historical questions and uniquely illuminates points of juncture in social, cultural, military, and medical history.¹²

Unfortunately, recent trauma studies “remain conspicuously disparate and uncoordinated.”¹³ In a triptych study titled “The Trauma Must Remain Inaccessible to Memory: Trauma-Melancholia and Other (Ab-)uses of Trauma Concepts in Literary

Theory," Harald Weilnböck explores various misinterpretations of psycho-trauma in recent literature and cultural studies.¹⁴ Troubled by how "fashionable" the concept of trauma has become in recent years, Weilnböck states that trauma "has turned into a sort of buzzword for a small and heterogeneous group of literary critics."¹⁵ However, Weilnböck's concerns do not eliminate the fact that a number of reputable scholars have successfully articulated the relationship between trauma and art; particularly, the question of representing trauma through artistic practices. Such studies mainly attempt to answer *the question of representation*: if trauma is indeed dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary controls, how can it be represented in art?

This thesis is interested in scholarship which "probes the therapeutic importance of transforming traumatic memories into narrated stories and the role of shared narratives of psychic trauma in cultural identity formation."¹⁶ A good introduction to this particular line of academic discourse may be found in the anthology, "Trauma and Crisis," edited by Petar Ramadanovic, which addresses the escalating interest in theories of trauma and representation:

This collection, unlike some currently available works on trauma, does not claim that trauma is beyond the limits of representation, but that in order for an assessment of trauma to acquire significance we need to situate the study of trauma in a specific way, namely as a study of the constitutive limitations of knowledge and experience.¹⁷

The artworks presented in the following chapters are situated within the theoretical field of this collection, in the sense that the artists are consciously working/maneuvering within the scholastic fields of trauma and the unconscious. To be more

specific, the artists are experimenting with representations of trauma by combining visual arts, literary narratives, and relevant theories of trauma. The objective of such productions is to testify to the artists' traumas expressed through their visual art.

In his introductory essay to the anthology, "Trauma and Crisis," Ramadanovic examines how literary texts are able to unfold history and socio-political events that may not be represented otherwise.¹⁸ Ramadanovic builds on the work of other scholars such as Cathy Caruth who argues that "trauma is an overwhelming experience which is in some way present in and through a literary text."¹⁹ Ramadanovic elaborates on this idea by stating that:

What makes literature into the privileged, but not the only, site of trauma [the use of the term site here is engaging with Pierre Nora's *Lieux des mémoires* to be discussed later in this study] is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or ... in order to be witnessed. What is thus also presented through a text is a certain truth about history that is not otherwise available.²⁰

It is this power of literary text to represent truth that a group of artists from the Lebanese War Generation are aware of, and are consciously employing to create visual narratives that document an alternative history of contemporary Lebanon which testifies to the artists' traumatic experiences. The group's urgent desire to represent contemporary Lebanese traumas through visual narratives is derived from a psychological need to work out their childhood war experiences discussed in the earlier chapter. Arguably, the art practices of the War Generation act as a projective medium of their unresolved traumas.

Well known for its therapeutic benefits, art has been recently proposed as an educational psychological model to address unresolved trauma in young adults.²¹ According to Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, in addition to its remedial benefits, art holds an exclusive advantage for representing trauma. They write:

‘the art of trauma’, because of its indirect, unaestheticised and dialogic nature, may be the only possible medium for effective representations of trauma. The real witnessing presence created in the art of trauma can act as an antidote to the annihilation of the internal ‘other’ that occurs in the traumatic experience and to the resulting absence, which both constitutes the core of trauma and precludes its representation.²²

Consequently, two motives behind the art practices of the War Generation artists may be deduced. Firstly, these art practices provide exclusive and ultimate representations of the Lebanese traumas; secondly, these art practices simultaneously address the artists' unresolved childhood war traumas. The following chapters examine these twin assertions in more detail; this chapter has set the necessary academic framework.

Endnotes

¹ Margarita Diaz Cordal, “Traumatic Effects of Political Repression in Chile: A Clinical Experience,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* vol.86, no. 5 (October 2005): 1321.

² Ibid.

³ Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, 1st edition (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1 - 2.

⁴ "Trauma." *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. ed. by Alain de Mijolla. (Gale Cengage, 2005) eNotes.com, 2006 <<http://www.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/trauma>> (25 Oct, 2009)

⁵ Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 158-182.

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- ⁶ Janet, Pierre qtd. in Van der Kolk Bessel A., and Onno Van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past:..." p.160.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 163-175
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 167
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 177
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 176
- ¹¹ I here draw attention to Pierre Nora's well known essay, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989): 7-24.
- ¹² Micale and Lerner. *Traumatic Pasts:...* p.6
- ¹³ Ibid., p.9
- ¹⁴ Harald Weilnböck, "The Trauma Must Remain Inaccessible to Memory: Trauma Melancholia and Other (Ab-)uses of Trauma Concepts In Literary Theory," Part I, *Eurozine*, 19 Mar. 2008, <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-03-19-weilnbock-en.html>> (28 Oct. 2009).
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Micale, Mark S., and Paul Lerner. *Traumatic Pasts:...* 8
- ¹⁷ Petar Ramadanovic, "Introduction: Trauma and Crisis," *Postmodern Culture*, vol.11, no. 2 (January 2001) <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.101/11.2introduction.txt>> (October 28, 2009)
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Caruth, Cathy qtd. in Ramadanovic. "Introduction: Trauma and Crisis,"...
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ See A.C. Loock et al., "Art as Projective Medium: An Educational Psychological Model to Address Unresolved Trauma in Young Adults," *Education*, vol. 123, no.1, (June 2003): 705-13.
- ²² Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, Abstract, "Art and Trauma," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol.75, (1995): 995.

Chapter III

War Generation Art

An examination of art practices in Lebanon over the past decade reveals an increase of war related art production that parallels the escalation of tension and violence. The surge of such art was around 2006 when everyone was afraid of the return of internal warfare. Interestingly, most of the subject matter was related to the 1975-1990 war events rather than the more recent 2005-2006 period. That is not surprising in light of the psychological postulate: it takes a second trauma to trigger repressed memories of a first trauma.¹

Considering that there is no major art funding in Lebanon, no major art collectives, no sophisticated Lebanese art markets, no institutions to offer commissions, and only a small number of people interested in the visual arts, the impetus for producing war-related artwork seems to mainly derive from the psychological will of the artists. Hence, war-related art by Lebanese artists should be first and foremost approached as a method for them to breathe out and let go. The aim of this chapter is to point out that the artists under study are aware of the gravity of their traumatic situations and are trying to represent them using unconventional art practices. More specifically, this study is concerned with artists from the War Generation addressing the question of representation in a Western academic context.

It is significant to mention here that the artistic practices under study are not affiliated with a certain collective or school of art; instead, they constitute an artistic trend which has emerged in reaction to the Lebanese socio-political circumstances marked by war traumas. Hence, the term “War Generation artists” is presented here for the first time, and is based on the artists’ common age, shared childhood war experiences, and their similar artistic experimentations. Artists contributing to this trend are generally unaware of such inclusive terminology. Accordingly, in order to define art practices by the War Generation artists, it is essential to look for the defining symptomatic aesthetics or criteria listed below:

- The subject matter of the art practices articulates the Lebanese traumas. Contributing artists commonly represent war scenes or situations that haunt the collective memory of the War Generation. Alternatively, the artists may highlight aspects of the national identity crises that often precipitate the wars.
- Contributing artists share a common style of engaging with critical theory to represent the dilemmas of the Lebanese traumas.
- The artists’ statements are relatively lengthy, theoretically charged, and frequently constitute the primary elements of the artworks.
- Artists’ statements usually include narratives which reflect personal traumatic experiences along with historical content.

- The art often incorporates archival practices that employ various documentary mediums such as photography, cinema, manuscripts, and testimonials.
- The art practices oscillate between the poles of several dualities, such as memory and history, forgetting and remembering, fact and fiction, the past and the present, life and death, presence and absence, tradition and modernism, and the East and the West.
- Artists from this group come from various academic backgrounds; their collaborative efforts give their art practices a distinctive interdisciplinary character.
- Art from this group exists within the confines of the Western canon and is of particular interest to the informed viewer due to its high level of engagement with contemporary critical theory. This is often reflective of the transnational experiences of the artists who have studied in the West, or continue to travel between Lebanon and the West.

Having presented the key characteristics of the War Generation artists, this study is neither claiming that all the artists from the Lebanese War Generation are using art as a projective medium for their traumas, nor is it implying that Lebanese artists from other generations have not been representing the same traumas; this paper is simply pointing out the fact that there are several aesthetic and methodological commonalities among a wave of art practices, enough to differentiate these practices from contemporaneous

art in Lebanon. Engagement with critical theory is the first key characteristic, as Kaelen Wilson-Goldie explains in the following statement:

In contrast to both previous and parallel art movements in Lebanon, these artists are less concerned with work that positions a purely aesthetic object in a local commercial market and more concerned with work that is experimental, research-based, and critically engaged with sociopolitical issues related to identity, representation, the writing of history, the production of knowledge, and the exercise of power.²

Consequently, art from this group posits a challenge to foreign art historians, and the handful of local art connoisseurs, since the artists' statements are usually quite explicit, and loaded with academic keywords that leave little or no space for further critical interpretation. This may relate to the fact that most of the artists in this movement are either active researchers or fresh graduates from Western universities. For instance, a quick reading of the artists' biographies in the *Out of Beirut*³ exhibition catalogue reveals that Ziad Abillama, Lamia Joreige, and Bernard Khoury are graduates of the Rhode Island School of Design, Walid Raad from the University of Rochester, Ali Cherri from DasArts Amsterdam, and Paula Yacoub from St. Martin's School of Art in London.⁴ Hence, based on their contemporary Western education, these artists are well aware of the importance of critical theory in contemporary art practices. As the Lebanese art milieu falls short of sufficient resources to critically support contemporary artists, War Generation artists must be their own art critics and art historians. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige explain why they tend to critique their own artwork:

It is always an embarrassing bother to speak of one's own work. However, this is a recurrent approach for many of us in Lebanon. In the absence of a critical and theoretical structure, we often find ourselves in the process of theorizing our work, saying it, writing it.⁵

Susan Cotter elaborates on this statement:

In Beirut, there are no contemporary art museums, no major art prizes, and no art fairs mobbed by huge crowds of people. In short, there is no public for contemporary art so to speak of, certainly not on any significant scale. [...] instead, a network of artists, writers, performers, and film-makers run independent spaces and organize events and small festivals where work can be presented for short periods. [...] the apparent urgency of the work produced in this context reinforces the paradoxical sense of privilege for many artists who, while keeping their day jobs working at universities, newspapers and television stations, remain unfettered by the cultural and economic policies of public institutions and the market with which we are familiar elsewhere.⁶

Therefore, the weakness of the Lebanese art infrastructure worked in favour of the War Generation artists, providing them with an opportunity to enrich their art practices with supportive critical frameworks. The artists combined their knowledge of contemporary Western critical theory with their Lebanese traumas to produce innovative art practices. They were simply bringing something new to the table. Cotter adds: "These artists, many of whom work between Beirut and Paris, Berlin, New York or London, while informed by critical practice in photography, film, performance and conceptual art, confront us with a new set of possible frameworks for art in contexts of resistance."⁷ In turn, Simon Harvey describes such art practices, which are in active reciprocal exchange with critical theory, as "contrabands" of the clandestine social life of Beirut "smuggled" into spaces of representation.⁸ Harvey states: "Artists are using social anthropology, ethnography, history, and geography as tactics of complex visibility and smuggling,"⁹ where smuggling implies "being as near to ordinary as possible while carrying out extraordinary action."¹⁰

Clearly, the art practices of the War Generation artists are more profound and complex than they seem. Not only do such artworks represent war traumas, but they concurrently articulate relevant historical and sociopolitical issues. To be more specific, such art practices reflect ongoing national identity crises relative to oppositional imagined spaces for the Lebanese Nation; Kaelen Wilson-Goldie explains:

More broadly, and beneath the trauma of the civil war itself, their work touches on the failures of nationalism, the fading relevance of the leftist political movements that pushed for social justice and secular modernism in the developed and developing world and the polarization between the West and the Arab world that has become dangerously pronounced in the post 9/11 era.¹¹

In that sense, art practices by the War Generation artists are mainly occupied with socio-political issues and little concerned with financial profit. For instance, Tony Chakar, a prominent artist from this group, states: "We are sincerely uninterested in building an artistic career but we are rather engaged in serious debates which require different strategies for dissemination."¹² Chakar's statement is accentuated by the fact that most of the War Generation's art is exhibited in "the Laboratory, an art space reserved for shows that are, by Beirut standards, experimental and non-commercial."¹³

This combination of a weak artistic infrastructure and conditions of personal trauma allowed personal motivation to give rise to unique art practices unconstrained by commissions or money granting bodies. Stephen Wright states:

What bothers me elsewhere is that art is largely written by the market. Here in Beirut, because there is a total lack of market forces, artists do what they do through a sense of urgency, not because someone commissioned them to. Demand does not dictate production. This means artists all have to have day jobs, such as teaching or doing TV production.¹⁴

In the words of the Arab Image Foundation cofounder Akram Zaatari, “it is exactly the absence of any corporate, state, or institutional demand for art that marks the kind of art practices coming out of Lebanon.”¹⁵ This, Zaatari states, is what “makes the art hard-edged, and allows for experimentation.”¹⁶ Zaatari is frank enough to admit that the wars had positive side-effects on art; he states: “The war produced a certain rhetoric of images that otherwise would not have existed. It bred a political consciousness, linked among other things to how we look at images, believing and not believing them all at once.”¹⁷ Zaatari's statement explains why “conversations with artists in Beirut are infused with skepticism, irony and a tangible air of defiance.”¹⁸

The combination of skepticism, irony and defiance justifies the elaborate use, and abuse, of archival material by the War Generation artists. Cotter observes: “The inscription of the personal in relation to ‘events’[the wars], by way of the photographic document and the archive, is one of the most compelling and consistently interrogated forms used by artists coming out of Beirut.”¹⁹ These artists are employing “documentary practices, eyewitness testimonies, and archival images to produce art that probes the history and legacy of Lebanon’s civil war.”²⁰ However, these historiographic attempts are not always innocent or accurate. These artists are replacing a deficient official Lebanese history with alternative histories which are sometimes real, and sometimes imagined. For instance, Walid Raad, the most prominent artist from this group, “explored the possibilities and limits of writing the history of Lebanon by concentrating on what was said, believed, known and imagined about the wars over the past thirty

years.”²¹ When confronted with charges of faking history by composing fictitious narratives using real archives, hence displacing archives, Raad admits to the charges but elaborately defends his case:

What we have come to believe is true is not consistent with what’s available to the senses... If truth is not what’s available to the senses, if truth is not consistent with rationality, then truth is not equivalent to discourse. Today, we find ourselves in a position where what we take to be true is what rings true at the level of the psyche ... In Freud’s analysis of hysteria, when a subject undergoes a traumatic experience, what they come to believe has little to do with what actually happened to them. But what they come to believe is certainly related to fantasies that are based on memories and those fantasies are very important. You can’t just dismiss them and tell them, wake up, these are just fantasies. The fantasy captures the subject’s imagination and is his or her reality. So those are called hysterical symptoms. The hysterical symptoms bear no resemblance and have no real proximity to the event that caused them, and that’s what fascinated Freud ... And I think the hysterical symptom then becomes, in a way, a document of something. And the interesting thing about it is that it’s not a question of returning to the origin, it’s a question of the future. It’s a question of the production of a narrative that rings true to the subject ... The story you tell yourself may have nothing to do with what happened to you, but that’s the story that may cure you.²²

Jalal Toufic, another War Generation intellectual, agrees with Raad and justifies the fictitious endeavors by stating: “In Beirut some features of ‘the real’ [in reference to Jaques Lacan] must be fictionalized to be thought.”²³ In that sense, “Raad’s installations, video, photo and text works are vehicles of encryption in which distinctions of meaning and meaninglessness are rendered indiscernible.”²⁴ For this reason, the War Generation artists are deemed guilty of “...reinventing the imaginary of a country which for now only seems able to experience its identity through the permanence of war in all its forms, including that of peace, the most insidious of all.”²⁵

Yet, as intriguing and avant-garde as such historiographic art practices may appear, some critics are concerned with their factitious archival allure. For instance,

Saree Makdisi explains that the “risk of such work is the development of an ‘alter-history’ that replaces the ‘genuine’ history via a process of ‘anesthetized numbness.’”²⁶

Makdisi is thus concerned with the emergent takeover of conventional narrative by mute visual representation; he argues that: “In being frozen in visual form, history threatens to become an aesthetic object, a commodity, a spectacle, a fetish, rather than a narrative, a process, or a struggle.”²⁷

Although Makdisi’s concerns are valid in theory, the fact remains that the War Generation artists have better represented the Lebanese traumas, and have better engaged a global audience than conventional media or history books have done in decades. The *Out of Beirut* exhibition is an excellent example of such accomplishments. Presented between 13 May and 16 July, 2006 at the Modern Art Oxford gallery, U.K., *Out of Beirut* constituted the largest gathering of Lebanese War Generation artists under one roof, and was, thus far, the most comprehensive, acknowledged, well presented, and elaborately documented exhibition of Lebanese War Generation art in Europe. This exposition left quite an impression on its audience and artists alike, having formalized the War Generation art practices as a new genre of art with an official international status. T.J. Demos, a critic who wrote an elaborate review of this exhibition for the *ArtForum* periodical, summarized its accomplishments in the following words:

“Out of Beirut” proposed through its fictional figures and ancillary narratives that art’s most provocative function is to allow the reality of war – what increasingly seems a perpetual condition – to emerge at the level of representation, debunking the complacency and illusory consensus of official myths. Far from being solely responsive to its local context, the exhibition consequently offered a microcosm of concerns that are paramount in contemporary art around

the world today. A sad irony was that if the art on view proposed that the civil war had never really ended, the hypothesis was confirmed all too tragically.²⁸

On 12 July 2006, three days before the *Out of Beirut* exhibition closed, an abhorrent new war broke out in Lebanon.²⁹ This war eventually re-destroyed the country's recuperating infrastructure, crippled its sick economy, and intensified the tension between the diverse Lebanese political parties. As Demos noted, the tragedy confirmed the artists' fears as reflected in their war representations. Ironic as it was, the tragic confirmation simultaneously conferred an aura of legitimacy and achievement on the War Generation art practices and their aesthetic experimentation. Demos outlined a key accomplishment of this art on the international level: "The art demonstrated that documentation is never fully truthful and, correlatively, that the deepest encounters with reality necessarily entail a flight into imagination, personal and cultural alike."³⁰ Bear in mind that it was the unique Lebanese context that brought the artists to this stage of awareness. The political chaos and anarchy of the diverse ideological currents criss-crossing Lebanon subject the Lebanese to an onslaught of varied narratives on the same topic, obliging them to doubt everything, and only seek the truth through personal experience.

Sample works

Having set out the key features of the War Generation art practices, it is appropriate to include a number of artists' statements which reflect the spirit of this

particular art genre. The work *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere*, 2003 (Fig.2), offers a good starting point.

***Here and Perhaps Elsewhere*, 2003 by Lamia Joreige. Artist statement:**

What are we left with from happy or dramatic experiences such as love and war? What do we retain from these events? Remembrances which are more or less clear, feelings which are more or less strong, impressions which are more or less blurred, but mainly obscure areas. They are obscured owing to the mechanism of memory itself, to its distortions and the possibility, even the necessity, that human beings will forget. They are obscure owing to the fact that assembling all the testimonies and documents relating to past events is an impossible task. Jalal Toufic eloquently expresses this in his comments on William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* (1803): 'I have no time to remember the event as I have yet to explore and exhaust it.'

I find myself caught in a tension between the temptation and even the necessity of recounting that history, and the impossibility of fully accessing it.

Some facts, dramas and experiences will never reach us and will remain unspoken, buried. We will never be able to witness their existence, but only presume that they are there, yet missing. So history appears to be missing and becomes subjective stories, stories in the first person. An immeasurable loss of words, images and sounds, the magnitude and nature of which we will never know.

As history escapes us, only fragments remain, words and images, each fragment carries its own memory and its whole history. These fragments are memory and oblivion at the same time, part of an incomplete whole and assembled subsequently rearranged and re-interpreted, they border fiction.

Similarly to the mechanism of memory, my work attempts to collect, record, erase, invent, forget, capture, miss and divert. I say, attempts, because in all my work, I point out the impossibility of accessing a complete narrative, thus underlining the loss, the gaps of memory and history. By creating a device through which I assemble and accumulate documentary and fictional narratives, I hope to restore an essential speech.

To make visible and audible speech that has been willingly or unwillingly concealed or simply ignored. Essential, because this speech is symptomatic of a peculiar period of our history, essential also because even when it becomes fictitious, this speech is evidence of intense and rare human experiences which, even if related to a specific context, attain universal dimension. The diversity of the many stories recounted, their accumulation and unequal repetition link each personal experience to the collective one, making difficult if not impossible the idea of a unique truth.

During the Lebanese civil war, thousands of people disappeared. In most circumstances, the bodies were not found and the circumstances of their disappearance are not certain.

In the documentary *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* I accumulate a diversity of narratives, recorded along my journey through what used to be the dividing line between East and West Beirut, and

where militias setup their checkpoints, the scenes of many kidnappings and crimes. By asking each inhabitant I encounter if he or she knows someone that has been kidnapped here during the war, I trigger the process of memory and reveal the immensity of this drama, the presence of war and its prevalence in language and various discourses. As I cross town and discover places laden with history, I draw a personal map of the city.³¹

Through her prolonged and theoretically charged artist statement, Lamia Joreige set the course for discussing her artwork binding it to three keywords: memory, history, and trauma. To adequately anchor the previous statement we need to acknowledge Pierre Nora's well-known essay, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,"³² which provides a major key for deciphering this artwork and other artworks by the War Generation artists.

In this essay Nora argues that: "Les *lieux de mémoire* are sites that embody memory through a sense of historical continuity."³³ Anything, Nora argues, even a materialistic archive may become a *lieux de mémoire* if "imagination invests it with a symbolic aura."³⁴ In light of this brief definition of *les lieux de mémoire*, Joreige's video emerges as an expedition to the Lebanese sites of war memory. Her choice to begin at what used to be the Green Line dividing the city holds a dual significance. Firstly, it is the *lieu* of the checkpoints (the location of many kidnappings and crimes), hence, the physical site of the war traumas. Secondly, the Green Line represents the national identity trauma for the line divides the capital along ideological beliefs. East and West Beirut refer not to mere geographic or socio-political locales, but to the location of the Other where one is haunted by feelings of insecurity. Although the Green Line has

ceased to physically exist, it remains *psychologically present* today; so does the national identity crisis demarcated by the post 1975-1990 wars' *geography of fear*.³⁵

The wars resulted in a religious demographic displacement during which individuals moved their residence – voluntarily or involuntarily – to zones controlled by groups belonging to the same religion.³⁶ The fact that very few people returned to their original residences after the warfare, in addition to the fact that newer generations also feel afraid to visit the *Other* regions, is what defines the *geography of fear*. Consequently, the Green Line constitutes a *lieu de mémoire* where memory and history, in the words of Nora, “reciprocally overdetermine each other.”³⁷ It is hard to think of a better location to start writing the unwritten history of the Lebanese wars and document their traumas.

Joreige's site of memory gradually branches off into numerous sites of memory with each interviewee. Lamia, who holds archival pictures of the old checkpoints in her hands, arbitrarily asks people she meets to identify the present location of the long gone checkpoints. She uses the mute photo archive to build an audible video archive with subjective narratives. The video records various reactions of different people along with their different attitudes towards the subject matter and even the artist. If these interviewees were old enough to remember anything, and not too skeptical to talk, a traumatic narrative might unfold.

For instance, in the eight minute preview of this video available online,³⁸ the first person who decides to speak narrates how his brother was shot in the back by a sniper while crossing the Green Line on his way home. The second, more enthusiastic interviewee, feels impassioned to talk about the Black Saturday, the day on which people were stopped at checkpoints and, depending on what religion they belonged to, were either slain or spared.³⁹ The same interviewee, who was a driver working in crossover deliveries, goes on to describe how long it took to cross checkpoints, and how hard it was. Finally, in response to Joreige's question if he knew someone who had been kidnapped at one of the checkpoints, the person recounts his own kidnapping, and how he had been spared at the last moment because he knew someone who knew someone, and how an unfortunate inmate had been taken to the chamber downstairs...

Through this person's account, we are introduced to other sites of memory: detention, torture, and liquidating centres on each side of the Green Line. These narratives actually reconstitute collective sites of memory; anyone who lived through the wars is aware of these events and locations. These sites have actually made their way into history books. However, none of these books or collective memories is as present, as credible, and as moving as the testimonies of the interviewees in this video, and the artist is aware of this advantage.

When Joreige speaks of the tension between "the necessity of recounting that history, and the impossibility of fully accessing it,"⁴⁰ she engages with the question of

representation discussed in Chapter II. By providing testimonies, she is documenting history and simultaneously offering a chance of healing for the interviewees and any other individuals who relate to their traumas. Furthermore, when she speaks of “laden history” and drawing a “personal map” she engages with Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* by drawing a personal topography of trauma.

Joreige’s video, which at first glance, seems to be a documentary of checkpoints and the missing individuals, is slowly revealed to be an experiment in public and private memory. When an interviewee mentions the name of the artist’s uncle among the people who were kidnapped at one of the checkpoints, the video facilitates a personal quest to determine the fate of the artist’s uncle. The video becomes a tool of personal investigation and subjective history; Joreige states: “History appears to be missing and becomes subjective stories, stories in the first person.”⁴¹ This subjective historiography through visual narratives is a major feature of War Generation art. Of course, this should be no surprise as history has come to play such an important role in contemporary life that each individual has become his own historian in an attempt to define individual identity. Nora states:

*The passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his own historian. The demand for history has thus largely overflowed the circle of professional historians. Those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are not the only ones haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts. Following the example of ethnic groups and social minorities, every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity. One of the costs of the historical metamorphosis of memory has been a wholesale preoccupation with the individual psychology of remembering.*⁴²

Accordingly, the War Generation artists are searching for their identity lost amid the national crises and buried under the ruins of successive wars. Their artist statements seek to place personal trauma within the larger National Trauma. An excellent example is Tony Chakar's *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, 2002 (Fig.3) in which the artist employs the story of his father's death to tell a personalized history of Lebanon.

***4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*. 2002. Postcard by Tony Chakar. Artist Statement:**

Tony Chakar's father, a policeman, was one of the first victims of civil war in Lebanon. On a day off duty in the first days of the war in 1975, he left his home in East Beirut to do some shopping downtown in West Beirut. He was killed by a sniper as he crossed what would come to be known as the Green Line, separating the city in two. In his pocket, there was a shopping list with a single entry: '4 cotton underwear for Tony.'

After the end of the war, all victims were attributed the status of martyrs, whatever the circumstances of their death.

In 2001, Tony Chakar decided that since his father henceforth enjoyed the status of a martyr despite himself, he should also enjoy the appropriate martyrological iconography. He therefore went to see one of the official portrait painters of Hezbollah (Ahmad Abdallah), showed him a black & white identity picture of his father, and asked him to paint a portrait of his father keeping with the iconological conventions used for depicting Shiite martyrs.

The painter, unaccustomed to portraying Christian martyrs, decided to add several cedar trees to the picture, thereby reinforcing the pictorial paradox inasmuch as Lebanese Cedars do not grow in the Shiite south of the country, and are in fact emblematic of the First Republic, that is, of the republic of Christian hegemony in Lebanon.⁴³

Chakar's personal trauma, unlike that of Lamia Joreige, is quite evident, and constitutes the key event around which the whole work circulates. Bear in mind that it is not clear whether the story, in whole or in part, is real or fictitious. Either way, the title, which at first glance seems banal, inadequate, or simply awkward for an art project, soon acquires added weight and respect for the memory of the dead father. The artwork's seemingly light and humorous title swiftly acquires a somber meaning,

reflecting the artist's painful memory and his bitter sarcasm. The title of the piece is a coded personal indictment: the father died because he went to buy his son underwear – not exactly a noble motive for martyrdom. Accordingly, Chakar moves on to criticize an official decision to grant the status of martyrdom to everyone who died during the Lebanese wars.

The narrative takes on a socio-political dimension when Chakar states that he asked a Hezbollah-affiliated painter to commemorate his late Christian father who unwillingly became a martyr. The artist's choice of hiring a painter from the *Other* Lebanese group has political connotations. On one hand, it reflects a political era during which martyrdom seemed exclusive to the Shiite party. On the other hand, the artist's choice of a Shiite painter mirrors a shift in the power balance after the Lebanese wars and the end of the First Republic's Christian hegemony. In turn, the perplexed painter and his stereotypical depictions reflect the gap between the diverse Lebanese imagined spaces for national identity and its relative symbolism.

An equally interesting aspect of this work is its designation as a postcard. Postcards are powerful reflections of collective identities and often designate the way in which a local group wishes to be seen and remembered by foreigners. Chakar's commemorative postcard holds a lot of history; it testifies to his personal and national traumas. The reason Chakar chose a postcard motif through which to share his traumas

may be found in Rabih Mroue's performance, *Make Me Stop Smoking*, from 2006 (Fig.4), discussed below.

Make Me Stop Smoking, 2006, by Rabih Mroué. Artist statement:

I have been collecting worthless material for almost ten years now, taking good care arranging it, documenting it, indexing it, and preserving it from any possible damage. This material is made up of cut-outs from local newspapers, photographs, interviews, news stories, excerpts from television programs, objects and other things.

Today, I possess what resembles an archive, or let's say I possess a real archive that relates only to me: a kind of added memory that occupies different corners of my domestic space, despite the fact that I do not need it. It is an invented memory that is exhausting me, and from which I cannot liberate myself.

For this reason, I will uncover some parts of my archive, hoping that, by making it public, I can rid myself of its weight. This is my attempt to destroy a memory that doesn't know how to erase itself.

Rabih Mroué's statement sheds light on the use of academic discourse on memory to produce artwork in Lebanon. In this particular case, Mroué highlights the "Do you move on or do you hang on?" dilemma, and its crippling effect on representation. Miriam Cooke, an American scholar who has been observing Lebanese cultural productions for decades, states that: "Between forgetting and remembering comes a moment of crisis in representation."⁴⁴ This crisis is due to the fact that representation holds power over the past: the real past is gone, what is left is its representation, what the representation consists of reflects the decisions of the author/visual artist regarding what to include or exclude; what to remember or forget.

Objectivity thus requires collecting everything; “hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting to complete the conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past.”⁴⁵

Mroué engages with this discourse on contemporary archival practices by confessing his addiction to collecting documents in his statement. Creating a personal archive is, for him, a method of mastering his present and past. Yet, his archival practices seem to close in on his personal space and suffocate him. The negative connotation is established with the artist’s use of the words “worthless material.” Is Mroué criticizing the Lebanese media, deeming their productions worthless? Is he disturbed by the status quo where news always seems to be fixated on the same traumas? Is it an individual criticism of the choice to not let go? Whatever the reason, Mroué’s “memory that doesn’t know how to erase itself” is a traumatic one, and as discussed earlier, healing a traumatic memory requires working it through and transforming it into a narrative. In Mroué’s case, the narrative takes the shape of a live performance. Mroué seeks to acknowledge his trauma by symbolically sharing the representations of his memories with the audience through his personal archive. The artist hopes that by sharing the weight he can be healed. The invented memory has to be destroyed in order for him to move on.

Mroué's approach is reminiscent of cultural management strategies for controlling the traumatic past by controlling its representations and sites of memory;

Adrienne Fricke, a scholar who examined Beirut's reconstruction project, explains:

The cultural management strategies employed to overcome the horrors of the past involve...past mastering: the way a society deals with inherently disturbing sites through erasure or forgetting. The two aspects of past mastering are the erasure or eradication of the negative heritage and the inscription of a safe, sanitized past.⁴⁶

While Mroué seems to have taken the first step of past mastering in his attempt to eradicate his self-assembled negative heritage, Bernard Khoury, another artist from the War Generation, went in the opposite direction. Khoury's reaction to the official policies which ought to inscribe a safe and sanitized past embodied in Beirut's reconstruction project, was his architectural design for a vivid active monument discreetly commemorating the dark pasts: the B018 nightclub! (Fig.5, 6)

B018, 1998, Nightclub building by Bernard Khoury. Artist statement:

B018 is a music club, a place of nocturnal survival.

In the early months of 1998, B018 moved to the Quarantine, a site that was better known for its macabre aura. The Quarantine is located close to the port of Beirut. During the French protectorate, it was a place of quarantine for arriving crews. In the recent war it became the abode of Palestinian, Kurdish and South Lebanese refugees (20,000 in 1975). In January 1976, local militiamen launched a radical attack that completely wiped out the area. The slums were demolished along with the kilometer-long bordering wall that isolated the zone from the city. Over twenty years later, the scars of war are still perceptible through the disparity between the scarce urban fabric of the area and the densely populated neighborhoods located across the highway that borders the zone.

The B018 project is, first of all, a reaction to difficult and explosive conditions that are inherent in the history of its location and the contradictions that are implied by the implementation of an entertainment programme on such a site.

B018 refuses to participate in the naïve amnesia that governs the post-war reconstruction efforts.

The project is built below ground. Its façade is pressed into the ground to avoid the over-exposure of a mass that could act as a rhetorical monument. The building is embedded in a circular concrete disc slightly above tarmac level. At rest, it is almost invisible. It comes to life in the late hours of the night when its articulated roof structure constructed in heavy metal retracts hydraulically. *The opening of the roof exposes the club to the world above and reveals the cityscape as an urban backdrop to the patrons below. Its closing signifies a voluntary disappearance, a gesture of recess.* The building is encircled by concrete and tarmac rings. The automobiles' circular travel around the club and the concentric parking spots frame the building in a carousel formation. At night, the continuous motion of the visitors' cars animates the parking and becomes an integral element of the club's scenario. The entrance is located at the south end of the low-lying metal construction where a stair leads to two successive 'airlock' spaces manned by scowling [sic?].⁴⁷

Khoury's infamous and eminently popular after-hours nightclub clearly resembles a bunker (Fig.5). The tables and seats are designed as coffins and pictures of dead celebrities are hung prominently on the walls. When the roof is opened late at night, visitors to this vampire friendly venue can enjoy dancing on the "graves" under a starry sky (Fig.6). This may actually be true, as the site had been a quarantine in the past century and was later transformed into a refugee camp that witnessed massive massacres. Moreover, it served as the headquarters for a prominent wartime militia that included a detention and torture camp nearby.⁴⁸

Khoury was conscious of the site's negative heritage as he designed the night club; yet, he considers his projects to be "unaccountable, unthreatening and temporary."⁴⁹ Khoury states, "I am committed to doubt and uncertainty."⁵⁰ In that sense, the architect took advantage of, invested in, and eventually pushed the site's negative heritage to the limit by constructing a performative nightclub whose vampire-like guests unconsciously perform rituals harmonious with the site's dark past; they dance on graves in a bunker. Ironically, Khoury was generously rewarded for his acts,

both artistically and financially. Suzan Cotter described the B018 as a “dantesque underworld in which dancing bodies find escape in the delirious present.”⁵¹ In a French television documentary that can be found on Youtube,⁵² Bernard Khoury gives a tour of his nightclub in action and speaks of his fascination with Beirut’s resilience. The documentary was shot during the 2006 wars, yet, we observe Lebanese nightlife seemingly unaffected by the ongoing war. Of course, this brings us back to the symptomatic overindulgence in “*joi de vivre*” related to the ongoing Lebanese war trauma discussed in Chapter One.

A Common Language

The artist statements sampled in this chapter were meant to reveal a common overarching theme that brings the art practices of the War Generation together through a similar aesthetic language for representing trauma. This commonality is derived from their shared collective wartime experiences and the common social-political backdrop against which the artists operate. These examples were also meant to reveal the breadth of artistic mediums utilized by the War Generation artists which include: photography, film, architecture, literature, and performance. By assessing the residual impact of the war traumas on contemporary Lebanese art by the War Generation, art starts to emerge as a projective medium of trauma, and as a medium for individual and social healing. Interestingly, artists from this group were keen to build academically engaged conceptual art without compromising the works’ sophistication in terms of

formal aspects. In fact, their artworks are characteristically rich with aesthetic composition and media experimentation. The next chapter will elaborate on the formal complexity of such works. The multi-layered character of these works is what invariably renders the art practices of the War Generation artists both visually and conceptually complicated. Commenting on a Lebanese War Generation art research paper, Professor Barbara Gabriel noted:

One could argue that the Lebanese context poses questions of contested memory that, on the one hand belong to collective memory paradigms, and trauma discourses which speak to the problems of representation of traumatic experience, on the other. These are not the same thing, but they certainly complicate and overdetermine the problem in the Lebanese case.⁵³

With the above concluding words, I move on to discuss a particular case study of War Generation art in the next chapter.

Endnotes

¹ See Peter Madison, "Freud's Repression Concept: A Survey and Attempted Clarification," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* vol.37, (1956): 75-81.

² Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Contemporary Art Practices in Post-war Lebanon: An Introduction," *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 85.

³ *Out of Beirut* took place at the Modern Art Oxford gallery, U.K. in 2006 and constituted the largest gathering of Lebanese War Generation artists under one roof.

⁴ Suzanne Cotter et. al., "Artists' Biographies," *Out of Beirut* (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 116-119.

⁵ Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, "Latency," *Homeworks* (Beirut: Ashkal Alwan, 2002), 41.

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- ⁶ Suzanne Cotter, "Beirut Unbound," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Cotter, Suzanne et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 26.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Simon Harvey, "Smuggling Practices into the Image of Beirut," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 36-38.
- ⁹ Ibid., p.39
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p.38
- ¹¹ Wilson-Goldie, "Contemporary Art Practices in Post-war Lebanon:... p. 84
- ¹² Tony Chakar quoted in Stephen Wright, "Territories of Difference: Excerpts from an e-mail Exchange between Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz and Walid Sadek," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 58.
- ¹³ Wilson-Goldie, "Onto the Streets: The Heartland Collectives' Interventionist Perspective," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 91.
- ¹⁴ Stephen Wright, "Tel un Espion dans L'époque qui Naît: La Situation de L'artiste à Beyrouth Aujourd'hui," *Parachute*, no.108 (2002): 15.
- ¹⁵ Adrienne Fricke, "Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut," *International Journal of Cultural Property* vol.12, no. 2 (2005): 172.
- ¹⁶ Akram zaatari quoted in Stephen Wright, "Tel un Espion... p.15
- ¹⁷ Akram zaatari quoted in Stephen Wright, "Tel un Espion... p.28
- ¹⁸ Cotter, "Beirut Unbound," ... p.26
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p.31
- ²⁰ Wilson-Goldie, "Contemporary Art Practices in Post-war Lebanon:... p. 84
- ²¹ Cotter, "Beirut Unbound," ... p.32
- ²² Walid Raad quoted by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie in "Walid Raad: The Atlas Group Opens its Archives," *Bidoun Magazine*, no.2 (Fall 2004), <http://www.bidoun.com/issues/issue_2/01_all.html#article> (17 Apr. 2007)
- ²³ Cotter, "Beirut Unbound," ... p.28
- ²⁴ Ibid., p.33
- ²⁵ Wright, "Tel un Espion... p.20
- ²⁶ Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?" *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Usama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 206.

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- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ T. J. Demos, "Living Contradiction," *Artforum International* vol.45, no. 2 (October 2006): 238.
- ²⁹ In reference to the 2006 warfare launched by Israel against Hezbollah and the Lebanese civil infrastructures.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Wonder Beirut," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007) 17-18.
- ³² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no.26 (Spring 1989): 7-24.
- ³³ Ibid., p.7
- ³⁴ Ibid., p.19
- ³⁵ Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Contact* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 247.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Nora, "Between Memory and History ... p.19
- ³⁸ Lamia Joreige, "Here and Perhaps Elsewhere," *Lamia Joreige*,
<http://www.lamiajoreige.com/films/films_houna.php> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ³⁹ Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon...* p.43
- ⁴⁰ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Wonder Beirut," ... p.18
- ⁴¹ Ibid
- ⁴² Nora, "Between Memory and History ... p.15
- ⁴³ Tony Chakar, "Artist Statement," *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter et al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 62.
- ⁴⁴ Miriam Cooke, "Beirut Reborn: The Political Aesthetics of Auto-Destruction," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* vol.15, no.2 (Fall 2002): 400.
- ⁴⁵ Nora, "Between Memory and History ... p.13
- ⁴⁶ Adrienne Fricke, "Forever Nearing the Finish Line:... p.169
- ⁴⁷ Bernard Khoury, "B018," *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter et al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 97.

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- ⁴⁸ Being a well known site of wartime memory entrenched in the collective memory of the War Generation, the detention camp also made its way into the award winning novel *De Nero's Game* by Lebanese-Canadian War Generation visual artist and novelist Rawi Hage. In the book, the hero is held captive and tortured in the Quarantine detention camp.
- ⁴⁹ Cotter, "Beirut Unbound," ... p.29
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Bernard Khoury, "Lebanon Nightlife - B018," *YouTube*
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNMpJdfZZ9I>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ⁵³ Barbara Gabriel, course syllabus, lecture notes and discussions with the author, *CLMD 6104: Issues of Subject and Difference: The Subject of National Trauma* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2008).

Chapter IV

War Generation Art: A Case Study

HADJITHOMAS + JOREIGE I'm There Even if You Don't See Me is the title of the exhibition which took place at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery (affiliated with Concordia University in Montreal) between September 1 and October 10, 2009. The idea for this exhibition emerged as the organizing committee of the francophone festival, *Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal*, proposed the inclusion of the work, *Circle of Confusion* (1997) (Figs. 20, 21), by Hadjithomas and Joreige in their exhibition at Concordia's art gallery, in keeping with the ongoing practice of collaboration between the two organizations. Like their fellow War Generation artists, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige employed their artworks to represent Lebanese war traumas. Their works told narratives relating to their personal war experiences and to the traumatic socio-political situations in and around Lebanon. In terms of presentation and media, the artists experimented with photography and cinema by questioning these mediums' capabilities of representation. The artists also drew parallels between image mediums on one hand, and scholarship on memory, history, archives, and trauma on the other hand. Their engagement with critical theory and their experimental art practices earned them a spot at the *Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal* festival in 2009.

This chapter will introduce the venue, artists, and artworks in this exhibition, which serves as an excellent example of Lebanese War Generation art practices, and which was fortuitously presented in a Canadian context.

The Exhibition Venue

The Ellen Gallery is known for its engagement with contemporary art practices and has hosted a number of exhibitions dealing with war-related themes, including *Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War* in 2008, and *We Can Make Rain But No One Came To Ask: Documents from The Atlas Group Archive in collaboration with Walid Raad* in 2006.¹ In addition to the war-related themes, the interactive nature of the works in *HADJITHOMAS + JOREIGE I'm There Even if You Don't See Me* was in keeping with the mandate of the photography festival for that year, summarized in the words of the guest curator Gaëlle Morel:

The 11th edition of Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal is titled *The Spaces of the Image* and explores the questions of mechanisms and staging; due to the range of possibilities, photographers are increasingly called upon to become aware of their relationship with the exhibition. Production methods and viewing modalities, as integral parts of projects, exert a direct influence on the aesthetic of images.²

Michèle Thériault, the director of the Ellen Gallery and the curator of the *HADJITHOMAS + JOREIGE* exhibition, was persuaded to expand the initial proposal to exhibit one artwork by Hadjithomas and Joreige to include seven more of their pieces, making it their first comprehensive solo exhibition in Canada.³ From what I learned working with the education team at the exhibition, the addition of the other artworks

helped increase the level of understanding of the artists' complex themes. Victoria Newhouse, an architectural historian and author of the book, *Art and the Power of Placement*, informs us that "when a picture is seen near a work of the same period or with others by the same artist, its style and composition are more readily apparent than if it is seen alone or accompanied by works of different periods or by other artists."⁴ This was certainly the case at the Ellen Gallery. Moreover, the white cube exhibition space with hardwood flooring included elaborate bilingual artwork labels and pamphlets as well as a reading space to help visitors understand the various aspects of the displayed art projects. The exhibition also offered a number of regular and specialized guided tours, including a tour by the artists which served as the inaugural event of the photography festival.⁵ That said, one is compelled to ask who exactly are Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige?

The Artists

Both personal and professional partners born in Beirut in 1969, Hadjithomas and Joreige have been experimenting with visual art since the mid 1990's. Their work has been shown in film festivals, art galleries and museums around the world. The artists hold no formal training in applied visual arts but hold a *maîtrise* in modern literature, and a *licence* in theatrical studies. Together they put their respective Ph.D. dissertations on cinema and aesthetics on hold to focus on their experimental art practices. While Hadjithomas' Ph.D. topic was adaptation in cinema, Joreige's was the relationship

between new technologies, aesthetics, and practices in cinema.⁶ In Beirut, the artists taught at the Institute of Science and Audiovisual Studies (IESAV), a department of the reputable Francophone University of Saint Joseph.⁷ While Hadjithomas taught scriptwriting, Joreige taught aesthetics, philosophy of the image, and experimental video. Currently living in Paris, the artists teach cinema-related courses while producing art. Consequently, both artists enjoy a sophisticated awareness of recent art theories and practices with particular interest in those dealing with the subject of trauma and representation.

In general, their art projects – films, videos, installations and publications – deal with the subject of contemporary Lebanese experience, including the wars and their aftermath. Their visual experimentation comes out of an urge to reflect and voice their opinion on their present realities.⁸ Aware of their generation's traumas, their art seeks to document the history of the War Generation "caught in between a nostalgic and mythicised past, that of pre-war Beirut, the guilt of the war period, and the anxiety of an uncertain future in an unstable region."⁹ To complete their documentary task, the artists developed artworks that exist in a reciprocal relation with theory. They claim they have reached this stage after being "paralyzed by the crisis of representation of contemporary history"¹⁰ and "the difficulty of creating images during and after the war."¹¹ As a result, the artists attempt to "seek different ways of 'saying' in alternative ways through photography."¹²

Since the Lebanese context does not offer any significant opportunities for artistic productions, most of the artists' projects were the result of multi-national collaborations. For instance, their first feature film, *Around the Pink House* (1999), was a French, Canadian, and Lebanese co-production. Their movie *A Perfect Day* (2006) was a Lebanese, French, and German production that was awarded the *Fipresci* prize (International Critics' Prize) at the Locarno Film Festival in 2005.¹³

Their most recent film production was *I Want to See* (2008) featuring Catherine Deneuve, the star of the classic French film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), in which Deneuve played the role of a Westerner observing the post-war traumas in Hiroshima. In *I Want to See*, Deneuve plays herself on a journey to observe Lebanese post-2006 war-devastated neighbourhoods. The film is experimental in nature and reflects the film makers' profound knowledge of French cultural productions. This French connection is not surprising considering the artists' Parisian education and residence, together with their Lebanese experience of French culture.¹⁴ Enjoying a unique post-colonial and transnational perspective, Hadjithomas and Joreige were able to deliver their narratives of Lebanese traumas in a language conversant with the Western canon and which could be appreciated by the Western audience.

The Artworks

Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer (1997-2006).

This artwork is composed of three elements: eighteen enlarged reproductions of intentionally ruined postcards of pre-war Beirut (Figs.7,8); a story about an alleged photographer named Abdallah Farah, and the work, *Latent Image* (Fig.9). The artwork has been part of solo and collective exhibitions in Lebanon, France, Italy, Montenegro, Korea, Denmark, U.K., U.S.A, U.A.E, Germany and other countries around the world.¹⁵ Several factors contribute to the complexity of *Wonder Beirut*; its psychoanalytic terminology is perhaps the most evident. The first clue to the work's psychoanalytic character is the term "pyromaniac" used in the artwork's title denoting someone who is fond of setting fires. The artists' statement¹⁶ includes several other clues to the work's roots in psychoanalysis. The story also constitutes the most important component of this conceptual art project. As a matter of fact, one could go so far as to state that the physical artwork displayed at the exhibitions is merely the tip of the iceberg whose substantial mass lies in the artists' narrative included below:

We have been working since 1997 on a project entitled *Wonder Beirut*. Based on the work of a Lebanese photographer named Abdallah Farah whom we met at the beginning of the 1990's, the project, which includes many parts, deals with the Lebanese war, or rather wars. The project is an interrogation of history and our difficulty in writing it.

In 1968, Abdallah Farah published a series of postcards of Beirut. The absurdity of the Lebanese situations is underlined by the fact that these postcards are still on sale today in Beirut bookshops, although the monuments and sites they represent have mostly been destroyed.

At the beginning of autumn 1975, Abdallah began damaging the negatives of his postcards, burning them little by little, as if he wanted them to correspond to his contemporary situation. He imitated the destructions of the buildings he saw gradually disappearing because of bombings and street battles. His process was, at first, highly organized and documented, with the trajectory of shellings and corresponding defacing of his images relating to the events of the day. We called this first stage "the historic process". Later, Abdallah began inflicting, accidentally or deliberately,

additional destructions to those same buildings. We call this second phase the “plastic process”. We decided to have these images published as a new set of eighteen postcards of war.

The second part of *Wonder Beirut* is made up of the ‘invisible’ work of Abdallah Farah who, although still taking photos of his daily life, no longer develops them. It is enough to take them. The reels pile up. He notes, however, every single photo he takes in a book, describing each one in great detail. Hence his images are to be read rather than to be seen. This part is titled “Latent Images”. The work reflects our concerns. How can one produce images, reflect about their economy and their potency, considering the instability of our context: a feudal, confessional society where personal status is hard to achieve; where one can hardly find one’s own rhythm; where we question how history is written.

We are attempting to find new ways to create images through evocation, absence, latency. Latency is a state which haunts all of our work. Traditionally, latency is defined as the state of what exists in a non-apparent manner, but which can manifest itself at a given moment. The latent image is the invisible, yet-to-be developed image on an exposed surface.

To this should be added the idea of “the dormant”, of slumber, of slumbering, of something that can be awakened. To us, latency is beyond evidence. It is the reminiscence of an image, of knowledge but which can barely be grasped. How can one produce images, export them, move them around, while avoiding cut-and-dried definitions? As image producers, we try to avoid being made use of, or taken over by, propaganda within our country or our region, or reduced to a simplifying, often ‘Orientalist’, vision. Our work takes into account that possible risk, this breach.

Aware of this situation, we resort to the idea of the anecdotal. Etymologically, the anecdotal appears as something unrevealed, something kept secret, at odds with a certain concept of history.

In our opinion, the anecdotal is not necessarily metaphoric, but rather symptomatic. It is not small history trying to reflect history at large, but a research around sensations, and the re-appropriation of events, like elements of spare-time that record a specific, significant moment.

The symptomatic is therefore the possibility of an image, the manifestation of something made visible. A symptomatic image is intimately linked to its context, to a situation and to a history. It is a proposal, an experience. By going back to a personal fact, to a given event, or to “something secret”, we refuse the spectacular aspect and the general sociological subject. The symptomatic image is the product of a situation that cannot be reduced to an allegory or a symbol.

The anecdotal is the possibility of appropriating our history. If we consider official history as written by the winners, there is another unofficial and subversive space governed by the anecdotal, “the thing kept secret”, which perforates that official frame. Latency is about affirming a presence. The anecdotal is the story and the development of that presence.¹⁷

A psychological reading of the artists' statement

At the outset, we should understand that the story of the photographer functions as a narrative through which the artists’ trauma is displaced onto the fictional character of Abdallah Farah. This is a good example of “narrative fetishism,” defined by Eric Santner as “the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or

unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place.”¹⁸ The events of this story enhance and support the notion of traumatic displacement as the artists employ a classic pattern of traumatic behavior to construct their work.

Psychological displacement is defined as “a defense mechanism in which there is an unconscious shift of emotions, affect, or desires from the original object to a more acceptable or immediate substitute.”¹⁹ Accordingly, in the first stage, “the historic process,” Farah’s act of burning the negatives reflects his defense mechanism against war-trauma in which Beirut is the original object and the postcard images are its immediate substitute.

In the second stage, “the plastic process,” Farah’s repetitive destruction of the same negatives constitutes a behavioral re-enactment or a repetition compulsion, which, according to Sigmund Freud, is the mind’s tendency to intermittently repeat the traumatic event in order to eventually deal with it.²⁰

In the third stage, *Latent Image*, the alleged photographer ceased developing his negatives and took note of each exposure he shot instead. Here, the artists are experimenting with the psychoanalytic notion of latency defined by Dino Felluga as “the repression and estrangement of those earliest childhood memories that we find traumatic, evil and/or overly sexual.”²¹ As cited earlier, Hadjithomas and Joreige disclose how latency is at the core of their art productions:

Latency is a state which haunts all of our work. Traditionally, latency is defined as the state of what exists in a non-apparent manner, but which can manifest itself at a given moment. The latent image is the invisible, yet-to-be developed image on an exposed surface.

To this should be added the idea of 'the dormant,' of slumber, of slumbering, of something that can be awakened. To us, latency is beyond evidence. It is the reminiscence of an image, of knowledge which can barely be grasped.²²

Hence, the artists' definition of latency is in harmony with Felluga's psychoanalytical definition. On the practical side, Farah's undeveloped negatives are latent dormant images. The artists only speculate about the "conditions of apparition, or rather, the revelation of these images. At what moment and to what purpose will Abdallah Farah choose to develop his films – to subject his images to light? What would have had to change around him, in him, beyond him?"²³ Clearly, as long as Farah is traumatized, the negatives will not see the light. Having witnessed first hand the "materiality of existence"²⁴ in wartime, he has decided to repress the images which he now believes are too obscene and corrupt to develop. As Suzan Cotter puts it, "Farah's decision not to develop his photographs constitutes a form of withdrawal of tradition, in this case the possibility of creating lasting images of a reality that is too traumatic to express."²⁵

Obviously, Hadjithomas and Joreige structured a narrative reminiscent of clinical traumatic behaviour. Besides drawing attention to the traumatic nature of war experiences, their story holds historic significance as well.

Alternative Histories

The Farah narrative exponentially animates the work, *Wonder Beirut*. This anecdotal sample is meant to simultaneously subvert official history and complicate this

conceptual artwork. Through the story of Farah, the viewer becomes acquainted with individual situations during the war never to be found in the news or archives. In this narrative, a young photographer loses his father, his job, his studio, his freedom of moving around, and develops a psychic disorder; pyromania. The viewer is offered a glimpse of the ways in which war alters everyday life. The Farah story illustrates the power of narrative, revealing the ability of text to unfold social and political history and present historic truth that is unavailable through other mediums.²⁶ Farah's narrative is one testimony to the horrors of the Lebanese wars that will never be included in the official history.

Of course, the testifying character of the narrative is not complete unless there is a reader or a listener to witness it.²⁷ Hence, works such as *Wonder Beirut* require audience engagement to perform their testimonial duty. This explains why the artists insisted on publishing and distributing their version of the postcards in bookstores inside Lebanon and abroad, reaching out to audiences beyond the confines of the art exhibition.

In addition to the Farah story, the *Latent Image* component of the *Wonder Beirut* project constitutes another attempt at writing history on the level of the individual. The exhibited panels listing the notes Farah had written for photographs he took (Fig.9), act as small chapters of everyday life history as recorded by the photographer. The descriptions of individual shots range from banal observations such as "Clothes on the bed," to more politically charged entries such as "Little girl playing in front of the

Hezbollah stand that sells products for tourists.”²⁸ One panel narrates the events surrounding a miraculous revelation of the Holy Virgin Mary beside a gas station in the Christian sector, while the last few panels tell a story of love as the photographer shoots street posters that remind him of his loved one. This kind of documentation is something the artists refer to as “anecdotal history”. Again,

The anecdotal is the possibility of appropriating our history. If we consider official history as written by the winners, there is another unofficial and subversive space governed by the anecdotal, ‘the thing kept secret’, which perforates that official frame. Latency is about affirming a presence. The anecdotal is the story and the development of that presence.²⁹

The last sentence in this quotation brings us back to the subtitle of the exhibition: *I am there even if you cannot see me*. The works confirm a presence in the face of fears of annihilation. One’s own history, manifested in evidence of everyday life, constitutes proof of existence to combat fears and the void left by trauma.

By and large, the artists feel that official history covers up traumas and diminishes their impact while, in reality, each individual traumatic incident is gigantic on its own and deserves a separate narration, acknowledgment, and testimony. The artists seek to present such individual events as anecdotal histories, ones that are not easily reduced to allegories or symbols. In other words, each anecdote serves as an individual *case* of what happened instead of being a *symbol* for what happened. The singular event does not represent the plural, for the plural would reduce the value of the singular.

Another example of the artists’ anecdotal histories is found in their statement for the work, *Distracted Bullets*. The project consists of a sequence of videos depicting the socio-political and religious fragmentation of the capital city, Beirut. The footage

shows each sector of Beirut celebrating religious or political feasts by firing bullets in the sky while the other sectors remain quiet. The artists tell the story of a Lebanese child killed by a stray bullet fired during one such celebration; her death was never mentioned in the Lebanese media. Ironically, the local media was attentive enough to mention how a private aircraft owned by the prime minister was hit by stray bullets while parked at the airport. The artists say they hired Adel Nassar, a poet and writer, to review the Lebanese newspaper archives in search of stories of deaths caused by stray bullets. After reviewing thousands of records, Nassar was only able to find a few references to the subject. The artists subsequently raised the following questions:

How and why [does] an event become a 'document'? Does individual history influence collective history? Were these events considered too anecdotal for their imprint to appear in the archives of history? Is it the place we are in that determines our knowledge? How do we keep track of those stories held secret?³⁰

The artists inquiries resonate with Pierre Nora's study, "Between Memory and History", discussed earlier. Nora assesses the late 20th century obsession with archives as reservoirs of memory and points out the problematic nature of history which is always an incomplete reconstruction of what is no longer.³¹ Nora goes so far as to state that, "History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place."³² Nora's claim places history in direct confrontation with traumatic memory which repeats exactly what has taken place in the past. In this regard, our artists' anecdotes (as *cases* of trauma) are, on one hand, protesting against the

Lebanese news archive, and attempting to invent alternative methods for writing history on the other hand.

A Contemporary Art

Although the works of Hadjithomas and Joreige are experimental in nature, they remain grounded in late 20th century artistic practices. For instance, their visual art invites comparison to post-World War II French art movements in general, and is particularly reminiscent of the *Nouveau Réalisme* body of work, in its themes of questioning time, anecdotal history, and the everyday. In that respect, a comparison with Daniel Spoerri's artwork, *Topographie Anécdotée du Hasard* (Anecdoted Topography of Chance), 1962, would be a good starting point for arguing the potential influence of the *Nouveau Réalisme* art movement on Hadjithomas and Joreige.

In the case of *Wonder Beirut*, the artists took fragments of Beirut's "postcard" imagery, modified them, and presented them as art. This is a typical example of "found object" based art.³³ Moreover, by modifying the photographs of others, the artists also participated in another contemporary art practice known as "appropriation."³⁴

Martin Parr is an English photographer who has gained a reputation for reproducing old postcard images in seductive saturated colors.³⁵ His photographs are popularly collected as kitsch and his work is regarded as a "hybrid of social and cultural history, photographic documentary, advertising and popular culture."³⁶ Parr admits that his work is influenced by John Hind, a professional advertising photographer who

worked in the 1960's and 1970's.³⁷ Hind was known for his richly coloured and patterned images.³⁸ Parr appropriated a number of postcard images by Hind.³⁹ *Wonder Beirut* has much in common with Parr's work in terms of concept and style. And while no direct influence can be established, the similarities affirm the contemporary nature of *Wonder Beirut* in terms of visual aesthetics and concepts.

The use of appropriated art usually "raises questions of originality, authenticity, and authorship and ... questions the nature or definition of art itself."⁴⁰ Artists often use appropriation "to create a new situation, and therefore a new meaning or set of meanings, for a familiar image."⁴¹ Consequently, we need to understand the initial significance of the postcard image in general, and Beirut's postcard in particular, to identify what new meanings the artists are trying to convey in their new version of Beirut's postcards.

Postcards

Recent scholars have studied postcards as powerful representations of dominant collective identities and as cultural texts and visual narratives that reflect imagined spaces related to sites charged with collective memories.⁴² In "Reading the Aesthetics of Picture Postcards: An Argument for their Use in Historical Study," Keith A. Sculle invites us to investigate subjective values of postcards which "encode past intuitions that inform culture."⁴³ According to Sculle, one should refrain from studying a postcard for its limited documentary value as a literal portrait that preserves the look of a site at a

certain point in time, and focus instead on its strong relation to site specific representations, memories and feelings.⁴⁴

In turn, Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan cite scholarship on postmodernism, commercialism, and tourism along with studies on memory, identity and history in their well documented essay, "Mythic Geographies of Representation and Identity: Contemporary Postcards of Wales." Here, the authors explore how "picture postcards contribute to the cultural production, performance and consumption of landscapes, places and identities."⁴⁵ They examine the postcard as a cultural text and a visual narrative that privileges particular stories of place, culture and nationhood. The authors also explore how postcards, as repeated everyday visual images,⁴⁶ actively participate "in the construction of particular collective identities ... [and] ... the production of the nation."⁴⁷

Hadjithomas and Joreige are well aware of the significance of postcards and employ it as a major concept in their artwork. In addition to *Wonder Beirut*, the artists published postcards in conjunction with the launch of their films *A Perfect Day* (2005) and *I Want to See* (2008). In one of their statements on the work, *Wonder Beirut*, they mention their intention to publish their defaced versions of Beirut postcards as "postcards of war."⁴⁸ Here, war, a non-geographic *lieu de mémoire*, is transformed into a site worthy of a postcard. Hence, the memories of war obscure other memories of Beirut. Pierre Nora states that *les lieux de mémoire* are physical or abstract sites that embody memory through a sense of historical continuity they shed.⁴⁹ He adds, "[le] lieu

de mémoire is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations."⁵⁰

Around the world, the name Beirut has come to signify war. Andrew Nairne informs us that "the names of certain cities resonate around the world. Beirut is one of these cities. A famous resort, a place of culture and style became the site of terrible violence and trauma."⁵¹ Yet, for the Lebanese public, the image of Beirut is not as easily interchanged with the image of war. Instead, the Lebanese collective memory stands fixated on the vivid pre-war image of Beirut: Paris of the Orient, pearl of the Mediterranean and the metropolitan capital of Lebanon (Switzerland of the East).

The Lebanese have never come to terms with the wars. They rarely use the term war and instead refer to the "events" (*ahdes*) which took place between 1975 and 1990. Saree Makdisi notes that in conjunction with the public policy to forget the war, there is a public will among the Lebanese to deny it.⁵² This fantasy image of Beirut was passed on to the War Generation who never had a chance to see Beirut before the war. This generation composed a visual image of Beirut from their parents' passionate memories coupled with outdated postcard images of Beirut, or reproductions in school textbooks. Miriam Cooke refers to these postcards as relics of war.⁵³ In the essay, "Beirut: A City without History?", Makdisi mentions these postcards that remained on sale during the wars even when there were neither tourists to buy them nor mail services available to send them.⁵⁴ Makdisi relates the symptomatic fact that Beirut has no contemporary

postcards except those which were produced before 1975 to a memory disorder among the Lebanese public. He states:

These [postcard] images of an unrecoverable time in Beirut's past express neither nostalgia nor amnesia. They are prosthetic devices, [...] they do not, in other words, serve either to recall those times and places to memory, or to mourn their loss through a kind of collective and self-imposed amnesia. Rather, they serve as substitutes for the practice of both memory and of forgetting, and in doing so they fill in the gap left by the trauma of war. [...] The postcards function inertly, just by being there, and by enduring long after the eradication of the physical reality to which they once corresponded. In the face of the discordant asynchrony of contemporary life, the cards seem to relieve the Beirutis of the obligation to either remember or to forget; in doing so, the appeal of their presence is that they offer to free Beirutis from the burden of history itself.⁵⁵

The above quote summarizes the contemporary state of the Lebanese trauma embodied in the Beirut postcard. It speaks of the Lebanese *learned helplessness* and the dilemma of asynchronous pasts, presents and futures discussed in Chapter One. The old Beirut postcard is performing the duty of a narrative fetish which "releases one from the burden of having to reconstitute one's self-identity under 'posttraumatic' conditions; [where] the 'post' is indefinitely postponed."⁵⁶ The old postcard image of Beirut is supposed to be its past and future at the same time. Hence, it is an emblem of the Lebanese traumas that mess with time.

Ever since the 1975-1990 wars started, and twenty years after their intermittent suspensions, the Lebanese keep repeating, "Beirut will return the same as it was before the war." The whole problem lies in this notion of "the same." Time never goes backwards. Lebanon might get better, or worse, but there is no way it will return "the same." The Lebanese are voluntarily entrapped in chasing a mirage. This fixation prevents any chance of healing. Consequently, the Lebanese need something to snap

them out of their catatonic state; perhaps something as shocking as defacing Beirut's pristine (even sublime) postcard image. This is exactly what *Wonder Beirut* does, for a number of reasons. The artists' state:

By publishing and distributing these [ruined postcard] images, we are trying not only to publicize his [Farah's] work, but also counter the trend in Lebanon of idealizing the past and projecting a future fantasy by bracketing off the civil war and including it only marginally in our contemporary history.⁵⁷

Therefore, the first reason these artists are ruining postcards is to undermine the idealistic significance of the original postcards. These originals were shallow representations of the capital driven by official policies of a country in which tourism constituted more than 70% of the national income. Furthermore, these postcards were attuned to a popular mindset which was intoxicated by temporal economic prosperity and consequently swept under the rug a festering ideological struggle regarding Lebanon's national identity. Beirut was at the heart of that ideological struggle and served as its main battleground.⁵⁸ The battle between divergent Lebanese imagined spaces took its worst physical shape in 1975 with the beginning of the bloodshed in Beirut. Thus, by publishing the intentionally ruined postcards, the artists expose the materiality of the pre-war Beirut fantasy.

The second reason for publishing Beirut's alternative postcards is to protest against Beirut's reconstruction project carried out by SOLIDERE,⁵⁹ the company which was granted full rights to reconstruct the city centre. This is the projected future fantasy that Hadjithomas and Joreige allude to above. Many scholars have criticized various ethical, legal, economic, demographic, sociological, political and cultural aspects of this

reconstruction project which has gone on now for more than fifteen years. Makdisi compares the development to Walt Disney's Town of Celebration in Florida, considering it to be a reprehensible project of social and cultural engineering,⁶⁰ and Miriam Cooke labelled the project a form of "Auto-Destructive Art."⁶¹ Jalal Toufic characterizes the eagerness to reconstruct the city centre as a sacrilegious act of war.⁶² He states: "The demolition of many of the ruined buildings of the city center by implosions or otherwise, was war by other means; the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing."⁶³ Toufic's notion should be interpreted in terms of the political circumstances after 1990 which deprived the Lebanese people of an opportunity to mourn the atrocities that took place (as discussed in Chapter One). Beirut's reconstruction project created a physical façade to mask over the ongoing traumas. The reconstructed buildings were replicas of fantasy images. Thus, the reconstruction project was one form of bracketing off the civil war that Hadjithomas and Joreige protested against by defacing the advertised images rooted in the reified pre-war postcard fabrication of Beirut.

Ruins

The third reason for ruining the postcards was the need to produce visual ruins that perform a function of mourning. Judith Herman reminds us that "like traumatized individuals, traumatized countries need to remember, grieve, and atone for their wrongs in order to avoid them."⁶⁴ But mourning requires a site of commemoration;

Beirut's city centre may have been that ultimate substitute formation. Adrienne Fricke explains: "Although the fighting engulfed the entire country, the devastation of Beirut's city centre has come to symbolize the destruction of Lebanese society; its ruined buildings and infrastructure are the primary locus of the history of the conflict."⁶⁵ Yet, SOLIDERE's architects decided to wipe out any evidence of Beirut's molestation just as a raped victim obsessively cleans her body.⁶⁶ Their decisions conformed to official policies of forgetting. The decisions also served the interests of the investors in the reconstruction project eager to gain profit. Accordingly, any trace of the war ruins in Beirut's city centre was considered a site of negative heritage, resisting cultural rehabilitation and incorporation into the national imaginary, and thus deserving of eradication.⁶⁷ Consequently, the Lebanese lost a physical site for both displacing and displaying grief.

Ruins, Barbara Gabriel argues, are "both figure and ground of trauma."⁶⁸ In that respect, some Lebanese artists refuse to consider the renovated buildings in Beirut anything but ruins. Toufic states: "A ruin cannot be intentionally eliminated since even when it is reconstructed or demolished and replaced by a new building, it is actually still a ruin, that is, contains a labyrinthine [of] space and time [a trauma]."⁶⁹ Accordingly, the republished postcards preserve downtown Beirut in a ruined state offering the Lebanese a visual space for grief, testimony, and mourning.

In fact, a ruined version of Beirut's city centre may be mobilized for didactic purposes, providing a focus for discussions of negative heritage.⁷⁰ In this sense, *Wonder*

Beirut shifts towards a form of "poetic catharsis," which Julia Kristeva defines as "an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it."⁷¹ The quote is reminiscent of a famous Arabic verse by Ibn-el-Roumi from the Middle-Ages: "و داوني بالتي كانت هي الداء..." [translated: ...and heal me with what had been the disease.] Hence, keeping a trace of the atrocities serves as a vivid reminder and example for current and future generations to keep in mind before venturing into another round of violence.

Experimenting with the Medium

Worthy of respect is the loyalty that Hadjithomas and Joreige reserve for the medium of photography. Although their works are theoretically rich, which may be sufficient to produce contemporary conceptual art, these artists are clearly keen to work within conventional photographic experimental practices. This is evident throughout the exhibition. In the case of *Wonder Beirut*, a number of experiments are worth mentioning.

Although the ruined postcards seem to be digitally altered, the artists inform us that the negatives were actually physically ruined using lit cigarettes, heated needles, or hardware electrodes.⁷² The artists wanted to keep their ruining technique in sync with traditional photography where light burns the surface of the negative and leaves a trace.⁷³ They also wanted to reserve a spot for chance or coincidence by relinquishing full control over the final result.⁷⁴ Needless to say, their techniques of burning the

negatives are reminiscent of torture practices in detention camps. Furthermore, the artists' lack of full control over the final outcome of their destructive acts resembles the case of armed forces in warfare.

In the case of the artwork component, *Latent Image*, it is important to note how the artists took advantage of film technology to conceptually build their work; recognizing that one can subject a film to light (take a picture) but postpone the development process. The artists used this technical feature to draw a parallel to latent (delayed) traumatic memories which are saved in the unconscious and require evocation to come out to light.

Furthermore, the artists defied the notion of the image itself; usually, the image serves as an index for something, a trace of a certain view. Here, the artists pushed the image to the extreme by actually eliminating it and substituting an altogether different image. Once viewers read the text entries in *Latent Image*, they actually develop their own tailor-made version of the image, using their own imagination and whatever visual repertoire they have in their memory. The image becomes more subjective requiring the participation of the viewer to be developed. Hence, the image represents without physically existing; its idea of existence is sufficient to construct a virtual visual. This dependence on the viewer to complete or construct the image is actually a common feature in most of the artists' work; it is an interactive process they call "evocation".

Kitsch

Hadjithomas and Joreige's postcards carry a visual seduction manifested in the artwork's visual excess generated by its saturated colors and patterns. Add to this the fact that these postcards are recollections, *Wonder Beirut* falls into the category of kitsch. Kitsch, however, has a particular status in post-warfare Lebanon; it promises an "easy catharsis."⁷⁵

Samir Khalaf is a prominent historian who was keen enough to spot the role of trauma in Lebanon's cycle of violence. In his assessment of post-warfare traumatic symptoms in Lebanon, he reserved a spot for the proliferation of kitsch. Khalaf states:

Kitsch's rampant allures in Lebanon are symptomatic of the need to forget and, hence, it feeds on collective amnesia and the pervasive desire for popular distractions.⁷⁶

Kitsch becomes a form of 'false consciousness' and ideological diversion; a novel opiate for aroused and unanchored masses. To the rest, particularly the large segments who have been uprooted from their familiar moorings, kitsch feeds on their hunger for nostalgia.⁷⁷

As a result, *Wonder Beirut's* kitschy character falls in line with the work's stated intention to represent the Lebanese post-warfare society and traumas.

Wonder

Wonder Beirut's oscillating shift between repulsion (due to the abuse of the images and what they bring to mind),⁷⁸ and seduction (due to the vivid colors and kitsch-like character), leaves the viewer in a state of ambivalence and wonder. Yet the "wonder drive" in *Wonder Beirut* is not restricted to its oscillating aesthetics, but also has to do with the contradictory state of the people and the buildings depicted in the

postcards. Somehow, the Lebanese people depicted therein manage to remain cheerful while their surroundings crumble around them. The Lebanese ability to survive has always been a puzzling mystery (as discussed in the Chapter One). Beirut, often compared to the phoenix, has always managed to provoke ambivalent feelings of repulsion and seduction among both residents and visitors, capturing them with her charm. This may explain why *Wonderful Beirut* became *Wonder Beirut* in the first postcard of the series (*Wonder Beirut #1*) (Fig.7). By eliminating the “ful” from wonderful, the artists accentuate the *traumatic void* left in the post-traumatic national memory.⁷⁹ At the same time, Beirut does not become less wonderful; in fact, it turns out to be more of a wonder: more eclectic, eccentric, ecstatic, and indeed more esoteric. Miriam Cooke states: “Beirut is photogenic. Always has been. Always will be. Ironically, the Lebanese civil war made it even more so.”⁸⁰ This is what makes Beirut such a powerful representation of Lebanon; because of its cultural multiplicity, paradoxes, and fragmentation, it represents the contemporary Lebanese identity. Consequently, any mutilation of Beirut’s image is a powerful representation of the Lebanese national trauma. In her lectures on the subject of national trauma, Barbara Gabriel constantly stressed that:

Among other things, we [ought to] propose a model of national trauma as a wound or tear in the fantasy of nation, one which places subjectivity in crisis and puts renewed pressure on boundaries (complicated in the era of Globalism by problems of cultural translation and transnational identities.) [...] Our task is always bound up with issues of representation in a range of cultural practices... in many ways we will find that questions of representation raised generally around these practices ... are heightened and complicated when we add the problem of ‘trauma’ to the equation: partly because of the grammar of trauma (it messes with the primary historical categories of place and time) and also because it is/was a problem of representation from the start, even within the contested discourse of psychoanalysis.⁸¹

Hence, *Wonder Beirut* serves as an excellent example of Gabriel's proposed model of national trauma and its representation. *Wonder Beirut* represents a tear in Lebanon's fantasies, highlighting its national identity crises and its post-warfare traumas made visible by transnational artists from the War Generation.

Lasting Images, 2003.

Exhibition label text

Lasting Images is a 3-minute Super 8 film. It was shot in the 1980's by Khalil's uncle, who was kidnapped during the civil wars, just like 17,000 other Lebanese, and of whom nothing has been heard since. The film remained latent for more than 15 years. We found it in 2001 and sent it to the laboratory. When we had it developed, after all those years, it appeared fogged, all white. Through a lot of colour correction, images appeared progressively through the whiteness of the film as if they refused to disappear and came back to haunt us.

Lasting Images (Fig.10) is a silent projection of a Super 8 movie transferred to DVD. The first couple of minutes in this 3 minute movie are composed of ruined footage where the viewer sees nothing but skirmishes and scratches on the surface of the film; however, towards the end of the movie ghostly images, which require the interpretation of the viewer, begin to appear. Images of a sea port, a group of young people sitting around chatting... the ghostly images start to disappear again towards the end. The last still frame (Fig.11) informs the viewer that this movie was shot by an individual who was kidnapped at a militia checkpoint during the civil wars, and whose fate is still unknown – like that of seventeen thousand other Lebanese individuals.

In this artwork, the artists are once again manipulating the medium (cinema), and constructing a supporting narrative. The narrative in this case is a true personal story. The installation label informs us that the kidnapped person is Khalil Joreige's uncle. Hence, the anecdotal history in this visual narrative is indeed personal; it recounts and records an individual trauma related to the national trauma of missing people from the war. As well, the narrative effectively employs the concept of traumatic latency.

Found fifteen years after the uncle's disappearance, or so the artists claim, Hadjithomas and Joreige made several attempts to develop this old poorly preserved movie which also survived a war related fire. Initially this film, this family archive, came out blank due to film deterioration. Yet, technical efforts were made to push this ruined film to its limits and extract whatever images were inscribed on its decaying surface. Technically speaking, the film was originally exposed to light and images were inscribed in frames as traces of reality; yet, these images remained dormant for fifteen years. This notion of delayed stored images runs parallel to the notion of latency where memories are repressed for years before resurfacing (as discussed earlier). Here, the artists successfully smuggle a discreet narrative, an alternative method of recording history, an anecdote from the Lebanese wars commemorating a close relative and seventeen thousand others. The artists state that fifteen years after the kidnapping incident at a militia checkpoint, the images "refused to disappear and came back to haunt us."⁸²

On the other hand, the ruined state of the Lebanese society and its ruined individuals are displaced on the ruined film; it is a substitute formation, a fetish. The

artists could have easily cut out the first couple of minutes but they intentionally decided to keep them because the ruin is a powerful aesthetic motif in contemporary cinema.

As noted earlier, in her discussions of national trauma, Barbara Gabriel states that “ruins are both, figure and ground of trauma.”⁸³ Ruins are scenes of abjection that remind the viewer of the materiality of existence and the temporality of life. André Habib, a Montréal cinema professor, explores the dilemma of cinema as an archival medium destined to be ruined over time, and how recent cinematic attempts aesthetically accentuate this deterioration by intentionally highlighting the skirmishes of ruined films.⁸⁴ One ought not to forget that the artists are contemporary filmmakers who are engaged with current cinematic aesthetics and experimentations. In that regard, a companion installation is an actual deconstruction of this Super 8 film.

180 Seconds of Lasting Images, 2006.

Exhibition label text

180 seconds of Lasting Images is a work derived from the video installation *Lasting Images*, based on the Super 8 film of 3 minutes (180 seconds). We printed every frame of the film. Each one is treated as a separate entity, cut out and placed on a spiral forming a mosaic of 4500 vignettes. Each photogram, reduced to a size of 4 x 6 cm, is stuck to a Velcro strip, and seems to quiver. At first sight, the work appears to be a white abstract painting with some purple hues. However, depending on where the viewer stands, it becomes possible to recognize in its opalescent surface landmarks, ghostly figures, part of the sea, a faraway boat . . .

180 Seconds of Lasting Images (2006) (Fig.12) is an alternative representation of the same Super 8 film *Lasting Images*. The artists employed conventional cinematic

materials in unconventional ways to display the same movie. Here, they deconstructed each frame, projected and enlarged it upon a piece of paper instead of a screen (Fig.13). The artists then held the pieces together with a Velcro strip and placed them in a spiral formation reminiscent of the spiral action of the film on the reel. The artists invite the viewer, who initially sees a white abstract installation, to come closer and investigate each frame. The spiral acts as a vortex that draws in and hypnotizes the viewer in order to evoke, reveal, and bring out the latent images. The viewer assumes the role of crime scene investigator, reviewing a film autopsy. This forensic act is actually an invitation to see things from the standpoint of the artists; an invitation for the viewer to get involved and take the time to inspect an archive, the news, or history from a closer perspective; but, most importantly, to question and doubt it.

By employing the “aesthetics of ruins”, which is gravid with a sense of history and authenticity, the artists successfully set the right mood to smuggle anecdotes from the Lebanese wars; in this case, to commemorate an uncle and thousands of others. Facts blend with fiction. But are these all facts? We are not sure. Regardless, the uncle is not visible in the film, he is behind the camera, we see through his eyes, the eyes of a ghost who disappeared, we are made aware of a crime without a body, without evidence, the uncle becomes present; *he is there, even if we cannot see him.*

So important is the subject of the disappeared to the artists, they actually created a feature movie around the topic called *A Perfect Day* (2006), which was screened during *Le Mois de La Photo*, with the artists in attendance a day after their

exhibition's *vernissage*. *A Perfect Day* tells the story of "love, lost bodies and lost souls... in the aftermath of the long Lebanese civil wars."⁸⁵ Interestingly, the film's press release includes a set of still images from the film which are presented as postcards. What is also interesting in this movie is the way it highlights yet another traumatic aspect of the disappeared; according to Lebanese legislation, it is the responsibility of the family of a disappeared individual to declare that person dead, should they be missing for more than five years. The movie highlights the hardships this responsibility poses, and how families wrestle with the dilemma of moving on or waiting, of announcing a death without a body or a funeral. It brings up the concepts of delayed mourning and missing closure which, in turn, provide a solid base for discussing the next installation, *Faces*, 2009, (Fig. 14, 15, 16).

***Faces*, 2009.**

Exhibition label text

In Lebanon, we live surrounded by dead people looking at us. Since the beginning of the civil wars, posters have covered the walls of the city. They are images of men, martyrs who died tragically, while fighting or on mission, or who were political figures and were murdered. For years, we have been photographing the posters of martyrs belonging to different parties, religions or creeds, in various regions of the country, from south to north. But we only select posters greatly deteriorated by time. Hung up high, often in hardly attainable places, these posters remain there, the features and names have disappeared. There remains the rounded shape of a face, a barely perceptible silhouette, hardly recognizable.

We photographed these images at various stages of their progressive disappearance. Then, with the help of a graphic designer and various illustrators, we attempted to recover certain features, to accentuate others, to bring back through drawing, the image of a face, a trace, matter, a lasting image. The drawing is made on the basis of a study, attempting to retain a relation to reality, or on the basis of a sketch, referring more to a feeling or an impression. But can the image come back? Is it up to the promise it carries? In which way are these images to be read?

Coming across the work *Faces* during their 42 minute opening tour of the exhibition, the artists explained how this work reflects an ever-present reality in Lebanon today, a reality where the Lebanese are surrounded by dead people looking at them. In other words, by ghosts of individuals not yet at peace, and whose souls still await closure, or at the very least, a public moment of grief, mourning, and commemoration.

Regrettably, it seems as if those martyrs sacrificed their lives for nothing because the wars never achieved their goals and never actually ended. Their martyrdom becomes controversial in the sense that they are either perceived as heroes, or as criminals, depending on which group the viewer belongs to. This in itself, is another symptom of the ongoing national identity crisis. Consequently, almost two decades after the 1975-1990 wars were put on hold, there is still no official public commemoration to the people who died during the wars.⁸⁶ Pictures of martyrs belonging to different groups from that era still hang on walls which constantly host new waves of new martyrs' pictures as an ephemeral act of commemoration. Some of those martyrs suffer further abuse as their images are sometimes employed in parliamentary campaigns to push people towards voting for one candidate or another by triggering memories and emotions. Contaminated by corruption, the past haunts the present and threatens to usurp the future; it is no less than a total mess with time, a fixation, a trauma.⁸⁷

In this artwork, the artists challenge this model of commemoration as they choose to document how these images are being washed out over time. They

accomplished this by taking two photos of these posters separated by a six month interval. Of course, the images have faded away with time. In their experiment, the artists challenged the medium of photography by highlighting its materiality, its deterioration, and its failure to keep its promise of immortality. The failure of photography to keep its promise resembles the failure of communities to remember their martyrs. The commemorative acts of the communities, embodied in posters of the dead, have been washed out with time just like their memories. On the other hand, the blank faces make it easy for any Lebanese individual to project the face of his own martyr upon the image, potentially including his own face in a country where tomorrow does not always come. In the end, the posters are there, even if we fail to pay attention to them, and the martyrs are there, metaphysically or in memory, even if we do not see them.

Khiam, 1999-2007.

Artwork Exhibition label text

The video installation *Khiam 2000-2007* is an experiment on narrative, on how, through words, the image builds up gradually on the principle of evocation. It is made up of two films, shot at an interval of 8 years but according to the same set-up.

For the first film, the set-up attempted to compensate the absence of images because, at the time, it was forbidden to visit the detention camp of Khiam in South Lebanon, which was in an area occupied by Israel and its proxy militia, the army of South-Lebanon. We had no image of the place, a kind of impossibility of representation. The former detainees explain how they managed to survive thanks to a certain form of artwork, by secretly making a needle, a pencil, a chess game...

In May 2000, after the withdrawal of Israeli troops from south Lebanon, the camp was made into a museum, then was totally destroyed by Israeli raids during the July 2006 war.

In 2007, we met the six former detainees again. The situation was somewhat similar, since the detention camp was no longer visible, reduced to ruins. Although treated as heroes in the past,

the former detainees of Kham appear now as somewhat defeated. The victors of the moment often ignore them, the history of the period is being rewritten without them. We asked their reactions to questions of memory, of History, and also mainly to the proposal put forward to rebuild the camp of Kham as it was. But can one rebuild a detention camp? How can the traces be preserved?

While *Faces* questions photography as a permanent medium of representation, *Kham* (Fig.17) takes film, as a medium of representation, to a new level. In this dual monitor installation showing two separate 52 minute films which record the testimonies of six ex-detainees in a torture camp filmed in 1998 and 2006 respectively, the artists attempt to produce a documentary about a camp without actual footage of that camp due to a number of restrictions.

Up until 2000, the *Kham* camp was under the control of Israel and the collaborating militia (Army of South Lebanon) who held members of the Lebanese Left resistance therein. Consequently, it was impossible for the film crew to access the camp. In 2000, Israel withdrew from South Lebanon and the collaborating militia was dismantled. The resistance took over exclusive representation of the camp and transformed it into a museum highlighting Israel's criminality, from the perspective of the resistance, mainly Hezbollah and Amal.⁸⁸ During the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, the Israeli army bombarded the camp-museum and their aircraft rockets razed it to the ground. At that point, any hope of filming the ex-detention camp withered under the ruins.

Hadjithomas and Joreige once again employed the method of image evocation to film and represent the camp in imaginative fashion. In concert with recent discourse

centering on the power of narrative to represent otherwise irrepresentable trauma,⁸⁹ the artists filmed extended testimonies by ex-detainees to evoke images of the camp in the viewer's mind. The camp takes shape in the imagination even if one cannot actually see it. In the first film, the testifiers' descriptions of their daily life in the camp, their activities, tortures, and their acts of peaceful resistance convey the camp atmosphere. On the other hand, each testimonial constitutes a separate anecdote from the litany of Lebanese war-traumas. The testimonials voice the hardships of thousands of other detainees in that camp, in similar camps, and paradoxically, in camps controlled by resistance parties.

The second film adds a different layer of complexity to the question of representation. Eight years after the first *Khiam* film was shot, the artists return to the same ex-detainees asking them to voice their opinion on Hezbollah's post-liberation representation attempts, and also on the idea of reconstructing the camp which was destroyed in 2006. The second film thus highlights differences between Lebanese political parties that fought on the same side during the wars, revealing the confusing complexity of Lebanese politics. Through the words of the interviewees, the viewer is made aware of the problematic process of writing history: Who writes it? What is included? What is excluded?

As for the question of whether a reconstruction can really bring the camp back, the testifiers' answer was always: No. The camp is now engraved in the memories of the detainees and the imaginations of their listeners/viewers. But memory and imagination

are not stable. Time challenges memory and memory challenges history which changes with the passage of time. We are made aware of this fact in witnessing the changes in the features of the detainees, whose filmed testimonials, recorded eight years apart, are shown side by side in this installation (Fig.18). The same before/after technique is also used to highlight the traumatic time lag and fixation in the next artwork, *War Trophies* (Fig.18, 19).

War Trophies, 2006-2007.

Exhibition label text

A series of photographs showing military vehicles abandoned when Israel withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000. These 'war trophies' were temporarily exhibited in the camp-museum of Kham when they were destroyed once again during the July 2006 war. They cause a temporal shift: they are the indicators of another war, the witnesses and victims of a new one. Photographed from the same frontal set-up with particular attention to the depth of field, they produce a strange feeling of being out of touch with reality, they become symptomatic, and appear anachronistic and pathetic.

War Trophies is composed of two series of photographs of ruined military equipment that was abandoned by the Israeli army upon its withdrawal from south Lebanon. The first series was shot before the 2006 war when these ex-war-gears were displayed in the *Kham* camp as fetishlike symbols of victory. The second series was shot after the 2006 war when this equipment was bombarded during the Israeli raids on the camp. Ruins from the old war were further ruined and stood amid ruins from the new war. *Kham*, as a site of memory, a *lieu de mémoire*, to use Pierre Nora's words, now held an additional layer of trauma.

In this work, the artists intended to highlight the outdated significance of these military fetishes. They questioned war victory by questioning its trophies. They also intended to highlight the extended and barbaric nature of war which does not even exempt its old traces from new violence. In his reference to Lebanese ruins, Jalal Toufic states that “the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing.”⁹⁰ War, in this case, *is still there, even if you cannot see it.*

Circle of Confusion, 1997

Exhibition label text

Hadjithomas and Joreige have to deal with the lack of documentation on the history of Beirut, as well as with the often truncated accounts of its history. In *Circle of Confusion* (1997), they invite viewers to remove and scatter 3,000 fragments of an aerial photograph of the city. Reduced to a fragile and transitory surface, the image echoes the destruction, both historical and symbolic, of Beirut. *Offsetting the stigmatization and erasures of the events of the Lebanese civil war, the artists have created an image slated to slowly disappear, one that evokes memory gaps.*

This work questions the representation of the city and critiques ready-made definitions of it. Each of the 3000 fragments affixed on the mirror is numbered and stamped “Beirut does not exist”. The installation allows the viewer to choose to reveal himself through his own reflection: It is impossible to grasp the city, one can only take a fragment of it.

This installation brings us back to Beirut, the most complex site of memory in Lebanese contemporary history, a mythic labyrinthine site worthy of the title *Circle of Confusion* (Figs.20, 21). Occupying the main hall of the exhibition, this massive work is composed of an aerial view of Beirut fragmented into 3000 pieces individually adhered to a mirror. The artists used the technical connotation of “circles of confusion” (referring to photographic resolution and depth of field) to hint at the subjectivity of vision related

to the viewer's standpoint. The fragments represent these obscure circles that do not make sense individually unless you place them in the big picture. The artists invite the viewer to interact with the work by displacing these fragments or even taking a piece away and keeping it; something quite unorthodox in the gallery milieu where the viewer is usually requested to keep a distance and never touch the artworks.

Once a piece is removed, the statement, "Beirut does not exist", is revealed on its reverse side. This statement is meant to resonate with Jacques Lacan's "*la femme n'existe pas*," which refers to the impossibility of defining a universal woman.⁹¹ Consequently, the artists are trying to state that this aerial image is merely one of many ways to represent Beirut, and one which is actually unfamiliar to the Lebanese who see Beirut from different perspectives (physical, political and ideological).

On the other hand, the mirror revealed beneath the fragmentation is meant to accentuate Lacan's notion of the "mirror stage" during which an infant recognizes his or her un-fragmented image in the mirror for the first time; an essential stage for establishing personal identity. Hence, by the time the fragments in this image disappear, a more subjective representation of Beirut is revealed, a Beirut carried in the image and identity of each viewer. The artists state: "the investigation that searched for the body of the city led to our own body."⁹² Hence, the viewer is not innocent. By taking a piece of the work he is participating in the violent fragmentation of the city which represents a country and its traumas. He is reminded of his actions as he sees his reflection in the mirror underneath. He has a new identity: the perpetrator.

Although a relation to Lebanese war-trauma is a bit far fetched here, the work hints at the internal-external factors behind the Lebanese wars. The Lebanese groups who could not settle their national identity differences among themselves peacefully, invited international *protégés* to take part in the bloodshed, but the Lebanese slowly became pawns in a game of international politics that displaced, uprooted, and dispersed them around Lebanon and abroad, never to return home.

Like other artists from the War Generation, Hadjithomas and Joreige believe that Beirut is constantly being misrepresented in the media through stereotypical clichés, both positive and negative.⁹³ The *Circle of Confusion* de-stabilizes such clichés, defies Beirut's meta-narratives, and invites viewers to consider alternative representations of Beirut: "it is impossible to grasp the city; one can only take a fragment of it."⁹⁴ The artists place the city beyond representation; yet, the city remains there, inside each individual, even if one cannot see it.

Closing words

This chapter demonstrated how artists are experimenting with the mediums of photography and cinema, seeking to find alternative representations. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige have created highly complex representations of trauma by drawing on recent academic discourses and contemporary art practices. Their works, like their identities, transcend national boundaries and fluctuate between memory and history in an attempt to resolve the contested question of representation.

Conversations with visitors to this exhibition revealed that the Montréal audience was highly interested in these works, both aesthetically and thematically, and was able to establish a connection to these projects. One observer specifically noted how the works remind him of French critical theory; he was specifically interested in the way these works engage, yet alienate the viewer at the same time, noting how this characteristic also belongs to the theatre of Bertolt Brecht theatre. Brecht (1898-1956) was also known to combine theory with practice, engaging a theatre audience with political ideas. Lest we forget, Hadjithomas and Joreige hold degrees in theatrical studies.

Evidently, most visitors acknowledged the presence of subliminal socio-political messages behind the works. Despite their ignorance of Lebanese specificities, visitors still found the works revealing and interesting.⁹⁵ No doubt, this was due in part to the artists' good grounding in Western and Francophone cultures. It also has to do with art's power as a universal communication medium to transcend geopolitical barriers. After all, the 20th century has been so dark a stain on the history of humanity, that its wars have left almost no culture untroubled by its traumatic stigmas. The art of Hadjithomas and Joreige provides a common ground, a meeting site, a neutral territory for confiding in other human beings, stripped of their Otherness. Michel de Certeau states: "Standing in the same relation to time that an 'art of war' has to manipulations of space, an art of memory develops an aptitude for always being in the other's place without possessing

it..."⁹⁶ However, the Other does not have to be another person, as Dori Laub and Daniel

Podell remind us:

The real witnessing presence created in the art of trauma can act as an antidote to the annihilation of the internal 'other' that occurs in the traumatic experience and to the resulting absence, which both constitutes the core of trauma and precludes its representation.⁹⁷

Endnotes

¹ "Exhibitions: Archive," Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery,
<http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/en/expositions_archives.php> (21 Feb. 2010)

² Gaëlle Morel was the *Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal* 2009 guest curator; quote published on the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery website. "HADJITHOMAS + JOREIGE," <http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/en/expositions_hadjithomasjoreige.php>, (21 Feb. 2010)

³ Marina Polosa, discussions with the author, September – October 2009 at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, Montréal.

⁴ Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005), 258.

⁵ Some tours were tailored to match the interests of the visitors. This writer of this thesis also presented a *specialized public tour focusing on the traumatic representations in each artwork*.

⁶ Hadjithomas and Joreige, personal e-mail communication, 2 Nov. 2009.

⁷ Together with the American University of Beirut, these academic institutions were efficient vehicles of the Arabic cultural awakening (*Al Nahda*) in the late 19th century and onwards.

⁸ Hadjithomas and Joreige, in discussion with this writer, Montréal, September 2009.

⁹ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Press Kit," *A Perfect Day*
<<http://www.hadjithomasjoreige.com/anotherday/abstract/perfectdaypresskitenglish-mediumres.pdf>> (21 Feb. 2010)

¹⁰ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Latency" ... p.41

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ For a complete list of works and awards please visit the artists' website at www.hadjithomasjoreige.com

¹⁴ Lebanon is a francophone country enjoying a rich French cultural legacy inherited from the Mandate period 1920-1943. French remains, by far, the main language of instruction at Lebanese schools, while the French Cultural Expedition in Lebanon is considered the most important and most active

driving force behind contemporary Lebanese arts. The French cultural influence in Lebanon was the subject of an earlier study by this writer, completed in 2007.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The artists have published several statements about this work that vary in length according to the requirements of the publishing medium. Yet, their essay entitled "Latency" serves as the most elaborate version. I have included a more recent and concise version as it appeared in the *Out of Beirut* exhibition catalogue (2006).

¹⁷ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Wonder Beirut," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al., 17-18. Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007.

¹⁸ Eric Santner qtd. in Dino Felluga, "Lesson Plans for Psychoanalysis: The Holocaust," *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, Purdue U., Nov. 28, 2003 <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/psychplansholocaust.html>> (Jan. 18, 2009).

¹⁹ Displacement. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/displacement>> (21 Feb. 2010).

²⁰ Felluga, "Modules on Freud: Transference and Trauma," *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, Purdue U., Nov. 28, 2003 <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/freud5.html>> (Jan. 18, 2009).

²¹ Felluga, "Terms Used by Psychoanalysis," *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, Purdue U., Nov. 28, 2003 <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/psychterms.html>> (Jan. 18, 2009).

²² Hadjithomas and Joreige. "Latency" ... p. 41-49.

²³ Hadjithomas, Joanna and Khalil Joreige. "Latency". 42

²⁴ This resonates with Julia Kristeva's use of this term in her psychoanalysis study of the "Abject" and Jacques Lacan's notions of the "Real", both being stages of childhood psychic development re-visited by the traumatized adult.

²⁵ Cotter, "Beirut Unbound,"... p.28

²⁶ Ramadanovic, "Introduction: Trauma and Crisis,"... p.1,4.

²⁷ Ibid., p.3

²⁸ Hadjithomas and Joreige, *Latent Image*, Montreal: Ellen Gallery, 2006.

²⁹ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Wonder Beirut," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 77.

³⁰ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Distracted Bullets, Symptomatic Video Number 1," *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al. (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 23-24.

³¹ Nora, "Between Memory and History... p.8

³² Ibid., p.9

³³ See Found Object, "Glossary," *Tate Gallery Collection* < <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary>> (Jan. 18, 2009)

³⁴ See Appropriation, *ibid.*

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- ³⁵ Sarah Browne, "Our True Intent Is All for Your Delight: The John Hinde Butlin's Photographs, Gallery of Photography, Dublin," *CIRCA Art Magazine*.
<<http://www.recirca.com/reviews/johnhinde/johnhinde.shtml>> (Jan. 18, 2009).
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Martin Parr curated an exhibition of Hind's work at the Gallery of Photography, Dublin in 2009.
- ⁴⁰ Appropriation, "Glossary," Tate Gallery Collection.< <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary>> (Jan. 18, 2009)
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² See Sculle 1998, Pritchard and Morgan 2003.
- ⁴³ Keith A. Sculle, "Reading the Aesthetics of Picture Postcards: An Argument for their Use in Historical Study," *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, no. 20 (1998): 85.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. 80-85
- ⁴⁵ Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, "Mythic Geographies of Representation and Identity: Contemporary Postcards of Wales," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* vol.1, no. 2 (2003): 111.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p.127
- ⁴⁷ A. Moors, qtd in Pritchard and Morgan, "Mythic Geographies of Representation ..." p.111
- ⁴⁸ Hadjithomas and Joreige, "Wonder Beirut," ... p.18
- ⁴⁹ Nora, "Between Memory and History..." p.9
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p.24
- ⁵¹ Andrew Nairne, Forward, *Out of Beirut*, ed. by Suzanne Cotter et. al (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford UK, 2007), 7.
- ⁵² Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?... p.204
- ⁵³ Cooke, "'Beirut Reborn...' p.394
- ⁵⁴ Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?... p.203
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Eric Santner quoted in Felluga, "Lesson Plans for Psychoanalysis: The Holocaust."...
- ⁵⁷ Hadjithomas and Joreige. "The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer." *Cabinet the Sea*, no. 16 (Winter 2003): 37.
- ⁵⁸ For a more thorough treatment of the ideological struggle, and Beirut's role and symbolism, see Elise Salem, *Constructing Lebanon: A Century of Literary Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).
- ⁵⁹ Société Libanaise pour le Developpement et la Reconstruction du Centre-Ville de Beyrouth.
- ⁶⁰ Saree Makdisi, "Beirut/Beirut," *Tamass: Contemporary Arab Representations*, ed. by Walid Sadek et al. (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2002), 28.

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- ⁶¹ Cooke, "Beirut Reborn: ... p.393
- ⁶² Jalal Toufic, "Ruins," *Tamass: Contemporary Arab Representations*, ed. by Walid Sadek et al. (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2002), 22.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 242.
- ⁶⁵ Adrienne Fricke, "Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut," *International Journal of Cultural Property* vol.12, no. 2 (2005): 163.
- ⁶⁶ For an in-depth analysis of Beirut's reconstruction project and its cultural connotations, see Assem Nasr, "A Fragmented Unity: Lebanon's War and Peace in Cultural Memory," *Global Media Journal* vol.7, no.12 (Spring 2008). Web. <<http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/sp08/graduate/gmj-sp08-grad-nasr.htm>> (7 Jan. 2008)
- ⁶⁷ Fricke, "Forever Nearing the Finish Line... p.169
- ⁶⁸ Barbara Gabriel, Course Syllabus and lecture notes, *CLMD 6104: Issues of Subject and Difference: The Subject of National Trauma* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2008).
- ⁶⁹ Toufic, "Ruins... p.22
- ⁷⁰ Fricke, "Forever Nearing the Finish Line... p.169
- ⁷¹ Julia Kristeva quoted in Felluga, "Modules on Kristeva: On the Abject..."
- ⁷² Hadjithomas and Joreige, public tour and discussions with this writer, September 2009.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Theodor Adorno quoted in Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon...* p.313
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p.312
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p.313
- ⁷⁸ In a separate study by this writer, the repulsion factor was elaborated on in relation to Julia Kristeva's concept of "the Abject" and Sigmund Freud's "death instinct". One might also compare the effacements to other post-traumatic art, including that of Christian Boltanski and even Jackson Pollock.
- ⁷⁹ *Traumatic void* is a term commonly used to explain the hole in the brain that remains after a traumatic event. The term is used in critical theory in relation to artistic productions. Examples of such use can be found in Fabio Vighi, *Traumatic encounters in Italian film* (Portland: Intellect Books, 2006) 164; and Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic realism*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2000) 84.
- ⁸⁰ Cooke, "Beirut Reborn... p.393
- ⁸¹ Gabriel, course syllabus and lecture notes ...
- ⁸² Hadjithomas and Joreige. *Lasting Image*, Artwork's exhibition label (Montreal: Ellen Gallery, 2006).
- ⁸³ Gabriel Course Syllabus and Lecture Notes...

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- ⁸⁴ André Habib, "Ruin, Archive and the Time of Cinema: Peter Delpeut's Lyrical Nitrate," *SubStance* vol.35.2, no. 110 (2006): 120-139.
- ⁸⁵ Hadjithomas and Joreige, Press Kit, *A Perfect Day...*
- ⁸⁶ Arguably, one can speak of a displacement of such public need onto the old martyr's statue in Beirut's city centre; see Assem Nasr, "A Fragmented Unity: Lebanon's War and Peace in Cultural Memory," *Global Media Journal* vol.7, no.12 (Spring 2008). Web. <<http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/sp08/graduate/gmj-sp08-grad-nasr.htm>> (7 Jan. 2008).
- ⁸⁷ There is a wealth of literature and theory articulating the dilemma of past, present, and future in Lebanon today. See Ken Seigneurie, "Anointing with Rubble: Ruins in the Lebanese War Novel," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* vol.28, no. 1 (2008): 50-60.
- ⁸⁸ Hezbollah and Amal are Lebanese political parties whose members are mainly Shiites. Secular resistance movements were deprived the right of representation due to their military weakness.
- ⁸⁹ Ramadanovic, "Introduction: Trauma and Crisis..."
- ⁹⁰ Toufic, "Ruins... 22
- ⁹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. by Joan Copjec (New York: Norton, 1990), 60.
- ⁹² Hadjithomas and Joreige, "OK, I'll Show you my Work," *Discourse* vol.24, no.1 (Winter 2002): 94.
- ⁹³ Stephen Wright, "Tel un Espion dans L'époque qui Naît:... p.15
- ⁹⁴ Hadjithomas and Joreige. "OK, I'll Show you my Work... p.94
- ⁹⁵ Discussions with the writer, Montréal, September 2009.
- ⁹⁶ Michel de Certeau and Steven Rendall, "Story Time," *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 1* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984): 87.
- ⁹⁷ Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, Abstract, "Art and Trauma," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol.75, (1995): 995.

Conclusion

The desire to delve into the trauma of the civil war in Lebanon, to dig into its causes and consequences, is certainly particular to and arguably inseparable from conditions existing in Lebanon alone. But the fact that other artists in other locations are simultaneously engaged in similar practices indicates that something more universal is going on.¹

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

Although the War Generation artists in Lebanon construct visual narratives reflecting the realities of the post-traumatic Lebanese nation, their work possesses global dimensions as well.² Their art practices share commonalities with those popular in other parts of the world, such as art's engagement with critical theory, reworking the archive, and narrating alternative histories of national identities. The richness, timeliness and complexity of the War Generation artworks distinguish them as unique examples for comparative and interdisciplinary studies.

The number of contemporary global artists adopting art practices reminiscent of the War Generation's work affirms the *avant-garde* nature of the War Generation experimentations, since Lebanese artists such as Walid Raad, Joyce Salloum, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige have been engaging with this genre of art making for more than two decades. Today, their approach has become a trendy global language. A quick review of the global *Art and Education* newsletter for January, 2010 alone, reveals

that one third of the announced upcoming exhibitions reflect themes and styles similar to those of the War Generation artists. Following is a list of these exhibitions:

On Tuesday, January 26, 2010, The Sheila C. Johnson Design Center at Parsons, The New School for Design, New York presented *The Storyteller*, “an exhibition exploring how contemporary artists use narrative as a way to understand the social and political events of our time.”³ On Thursday, January 28, 2010, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University presented *Needle Work*, an exhibition in which the visiting artist explored “connections between craft, war and national identity.”⁴ The announcement stated:

Allison Smith creates large-scale multimedia installations that critically engage popular forms of historical reenactment — including sculpture, fabrics, ceramics and other traditional crafts — to redo, restage and refigure our sense of collective memory. Frequently drawing on ‘living history’ museums, battlegrounds and, most recently, the Internet, Smith explores notions of gender, culture and authenticity through craft and performance and the connections of both to war, violence and the construction of national identity.⁵

In turn, the Audain Gallery SFU Woodward's, Vancouver presented the exhibition *First Nations/ Second Nature* on Friday, January 29, 2010. The exhibition was “built of works which mediate the politics of site and the shifting conceptions of territory.” *First Nations / Second Nature* includes contemporary artists who consider Native North Americans’ ideas of place and nationhood in relation to the history of colonial encounters in Canada and the United States.⁶ Finally, on January 18, 2010, Swedish Bildmuseet Umea University presented the exhibition *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive* which questions:

How can we create an archive of the private memories of gender, love and sexuality that have been erased by official archives and excluded from the writing of history? How do we record and store feelings and intimacy? In the exhibition *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive* these issues are addressed from queer perspectives through art works offering alternative histories and reworked archives.⁷

The above mentioned exhibitions are, akin to the War Generation art practices, experimenting with alternative versions of history, employing archives, and negotiating narratives of identity. Of course, critical theory has always had an effect on contemporaneous art movements, however, recent art practices are proving to exist more and more in a reciprocal relation with theory and the academy. Contemporary art's increasing interest in critical theory has prompted several art institutions to design degree programs that reflect this growing interest. Once again, limiting the examples to the *Art and Education* newsletter notices received in January, 2010 alone, two instances of such art institutions' endeavors can be cited:

On January 27, 2010, the Berlin University of the Arts presented its program *Art in Context* which "is directed at those who seek to position their artistic work in the context of society. Working as an artist in the context of society not only requires special artistic talents and specific interests, but also high social and communicative abilities, endurance, and the desire and ability to reflect and form theories."⁸ In turn, on January 26, 2010, the Monash University in Melbourne, Australia sent a call for applications to its program *Art as Research: A PhD for Artists in the Faculty of Art & Design*.⁹ The newsletter included the following statement:

The Faculty of Art & Design recognizes that systematically developed visual outcomes constitute research. The doctoral program is built on the concept that research in art is in the artwork and that creative research outcomes build bridges between professional art practice and university research.¹⁰

Having adopted a reciprocal relation between critical theory and art practice for almost two decades now, the War Generation artists were among the pioneers of this global contemporary art movement. Their insightful practice came as a result of their hybrid cultural background and their transnational experiences. Their success is related to their ability to create projects which are universal enough to attract the interest of a global audience, and particular enough to project a halo of authenticity around their works. In our contemporary world, nations are struggling to find a balance between issues of globalism and the preservation of their cultural heritage. As political and economic issues have shifted towards the global, concerns with matters of identity have become more evident within artwork. The War Generation artists constitute an example of this artistic movement that explores individual identities in relation to globalization. Yet, their Western education and affiliations remain the key factor to their global success, for, as Nakoi Sakai tells us, the West has always been the point of reference in the era of modernity.

In his critique of modernity, *The Problem of Universalism and Particularism*, Nakoi Sakai states: "Indeed, the West is particular in itself, but it also constitutes the universal point of reference in relation to which others recognize themselves as particularities."¹¹ Sakai's concept is particularly applicable to art history for there is no

art history but Western art history. Of course, there is non-western art but the concept of writing the history of that art is, to my knowledge, exclusively Western. When art from other cultures is researched, the theories and methodologies adopted for research follow the Western canon; this study is no exception.

That said, the works of the War Generation artists constitute more than contemporary artworks influenced by the Western canon. They provide evidence of cultural “hybridity”¹² in their expression of three contemporary global “cultural flows” - Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes, and Ideoscapes - as defined by Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. In his book, the author predicts a future recession of the nation-state as a major determinant of individual identity, and an increase in border-free identity affiliations such as common beliefs, professions, and education. Appadurai relates the increasing deconstruction of nation-state boundaries to five major global cultural flows: Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes, Financescapes, Mediascapes, and Ideoscapes, and defines them as follows:

Ethnoscapes: landscape of people who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.¹³

Technoscapes: the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology ... now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries.¹⁴

Financescapes: disposition of global capital is now a mysterious, rapid and difficult landscape to follow than ever before as currency markets, national stock exchanges and commodity speculations move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast, absolute implications for small differences in percentage points and time units.¹⁵

Mediascapes: the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information. whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centered, narrative-based account of realities, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places.¹⁶

Ideoscapes: are also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologues of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. These Ideoscapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment world view, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation,* and the master term *democracy*.¹⁷

As most of the War Generation artists are transnational immigrants, refugees, exiles or, to a lesser extent, tourists working with political material, they belong to the Ethnoscapes category. Their image-centered art, narrative-based accounts of realities, and ideological themes fall within the Mediascapes and Ideoscapes categories. The fact that most of the War Generation production is funded and displayed abroad, together with the fact that almost all of their works are accessible online suggest links to Appadurai's categories of Technoscapes and Financescapes, although they do not directly fit within the author's definitions.

During the artists' conversation that followed the screening of their film, *A Perfect Day*, in Montréal, an audience member told Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige that, based on the way they thought and spoke, they seemed to be from Montréal rather than Paris or Beirut.¹⁸ Hadjithomas was not surprised by the comment, relating it to the fact that contemporary individuals belong to common *territories* which are not necessarily geographic, but, in this case, cultural.

Regrettably, while art practices by the War Generation have garnered significant international recognition, their achievements are rarely praised in Lebanon. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie states: "That the work these artists produce has a stronger presence internationally than locally, despite the fact that it is deeply entrenched in issues that are arguably more relevant and specific to Lebanon than anywhere else, is nothing short of paradoxical."¹⁹ The majority of the Lebanese public is simply disinterested in visual art. Wilson-Goldie adds: "local audiences remain largely indifferent and at times oblivious to or even disdainful of their [artists'] output."²⁰

The fact is, the Lebanese public has long been preoccupied with matters of daily survival and fixated on Byzantine arguments regarding national identity and divergent pasts, presents and futures. Consequently, the country has never fully appreciated its globally renowned artists. This has actually been the case since contemporary Lebanese art first saw the light. Freida Howling, a scholar who studied the blossoming of Lebanese contemporary art in the 20th century, explains how visual art remained a foreign body to the Lebanese public:

... it was only a small segment of society that began to show interest and to understand art. The struggle against public opinion about artists continued to restrain the growing of an art movement. A painter was believed to be a man condemned to die of hunger. The profession of painting, therefore, was not taken seriously by most of the Lebanese. The small segment of the people who might have appreciated paintings, and who could afford to buy works of art, did not invest much in Lebanese paintings because it was fashionable to possess European reproductions with all the glory of elaborately gilded frames.²¹

This fact remains true today. Helen Khal, a pioneer Lebanese-American visual artist, affirms this alienation in her study of women artists in Lebanon. She informs us of the bitter-sweet fact that Lebanese society accepts and supports their women artists because art is considered a talent and not a serious job.²² Meanwhile, in the continuing absence of Lebanese art history studies and institutions, the practices of War Generation artists, and their contributions to the discourse on national identity and socio-political criticism, remain better appreciated by Western audiences who, ironically, are unable to read the subtle Lebanese-specific messages included in their work. Not until the discipline of art history is fully developed at home will the accomplishments of the War Generation artists be truly appreciated by fellow Lebanese.

On the positive side of things, the wars have had a beneficial impact on Lebanese art. The War Generation artists who had to leave the country with an accumulation of childhood traumas, managed to find in art the means to express, represent, and share their traumas. Their Western education and living experiences provided them with the skills and opportunities to share their messages in a language which is comprehensible on a global level. Their art practices negotiate new ways of imagining a Lebanese national identity based on the traumatic experiences shared by all Lebanese. Thanks to the experiments of the War Generation artists, Lebanese art now enjoys a unique identity and successfully engages with the concerns of its society. This is a necessary aspect of any national art, but it was an aspect that was missing in Lebanon as the majority of its artists have been commonly occupied “with the practical aspects of art,

its techniques and history. Political aspirations are rare. Lebanese artists, so to speak, are detached from sectarianism and political division... Lebanese artists regard themselves more as artists than Lebanese.”²³

Hence, the War Generation artists are filling the gap of history and identity on one hand, and presenting an art which is more reflective and better engaged with the concerns of its society on the other hand. Their art practices, which speak to a global conscience in the wake of a traumatic 20th century, simultaneously challenge local art conventions and strive for new imagined spaces of national identity.

Like Lebanese post-war alternative literature,²⁴ the War Generation visual narratives “not only are descriptive but can serve a potentially useful or prescriptive function.”²⁵ These practices offer a visual space for displacement, acknowledgment, and testimony to the national war-traumas, and an alternative method for imagining the Lebanese nation. In other words, they offer a chance for working out repressed national traumas. In the past century, Lebanese narratives constructed an imagined Lebanese identity which remained stagnant, unchanged by immense and calamitous national traumas. In her book, *Constructing Lebanon: a Century of Literary Narratives*, Elise Salem writes:

Although the nation is assumed to be a cultural construct and a myth, its impact on daily lives is real [...] the imagined and fictional renditions of the nation were powerful and formative reflections of the [Lebanese] nation. Romantic myths of an early idealized Lebanon, for example, became fixed national symbols and remain integral validating principles in the wake of a devastated nation. The positive image of a pluralistic Lebanon was revealed to be simplistic in light of actual disintegration of the state, yet pluralism remains one of the most distinguishing features of Lebanon. The survival myth of

a resilient Lebanon rebuilding itself after war was undermined by the questionable priorities of a guiltless leadership and citizenry, but the myth persists in the national imagination.²⁶

Salem then demonstrates how narratives produced during and after the war attempted to undermine and subvert the old myths of Lebanese identity constructed on hollow grounds. She states: "The rich body of literature produced during and after the war is testimony to how complicated the process of narrating the ever-changing nation is and how necessary these narratives are in imagining a new Lebanon."²⁷ Interesting as they may be, whether such texts, including the War Generation's visual narratives, are strong enough to overcome the nation's traumas and build a new common imagined identity is something left for time to tell.

Art movements mould their characteristics from their contemporary environment. Social, economic, and political factors provided an adequate climate for Lebanese transnational artists to take part in an art movement that courted globalism without dismissing individual identity. It is an identity that, in Stuart Hall's opinion, will remain in constant fluctuation:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact,...we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.²⁸

To be continued...

Endnotes

- ¹ Wilson-Goldie, "Contemporary Art Practices in Post-war Lebanon... p.89.
- ² *ibid*
- ³ Art and Education. Announcements. 26 Jan. 2010
<<http://artandeducation.net/announcements/view/953>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ⁴ Art and Education. Announcements. 28 Jan. 2010
<<http://artandeducation.net/announcements/view/956>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ⁵ *ibid*
- ⁶ Art and Education. Announcements. 29 Jan. 2010
<<http://artandeducation.net/announcements/view/959>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ⁷ Art and Education. Announcements. 18 Jan. 2010
<<http://artandeducation.net/announcements/view/941>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ⁸ Art and Education. Announcements. 27 Jan. 2010
<<http://artandeducation.net/announcements/view/955>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ⁹ Art and Education. Announcements. 26 Jan. 2010
<<http://artandeducation.net/announcements/view/951>> (21 Feb. 2010)
- ¹⁰ *ibid*
- ¹¹ Sakai, Nakoi. "Modernity and Its Critique : The Problem of Universalism and Particularism." *Multitudes* 6, septembre 2001 available online <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Modernity-and-Its-Critique-The>
- ¹² See Homi Bhabha, "Signs taken for wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817," in *The Location of Culture*, pp.102-122
- ¹³ Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at large*. U of Minnesota Press, 1996. 33
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*. 34
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*. 34-35
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*. 35
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*. 36
- ¹⁸ Hadjiiothomas, Joana. At the screening of *CENDRES* (2003) and *A Perfect Day* (2005). The Cinémathèque Québécoise, Montreal. September 12, 2009.
- ¹⁹ Wilson-Goldie, "Contemporary Art Practices in Post-war Lebanon... p.85
- ²⁰ *Ibid*.
- ²¹ Howling, Frieda. *Art in Lebanon, 1930-1975: The Development of Contemporary Art in Lebanon*. [Beirut Lebanon]: LAU Press, 2005. 11

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- ²² Khal, Helen. *The Woman Artist in Lebanon*. Washington: The Institute, 1987.
- ²³ Farshad, Mohammad-Avvali. *The Role of Art in the Struggle for a National Identity in Lebanon*. GRIN Verlag, 2007. 9-10.
- ²⁴ See Ken Seigneurie, "Anointing with Rubble: Ruins in the Lebanese War Novel," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* vol.28, no. 1 (2008): 50-60.
- ²⁵ Salem, Elise. *Constructing Lebanon: a Century of Literary Narratives*. Gainesville FL: University Press of Florida, 2003. i.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, introduction, i.
- ²⁸ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed.by Jonathan Rutherford, (London ,1990), 222

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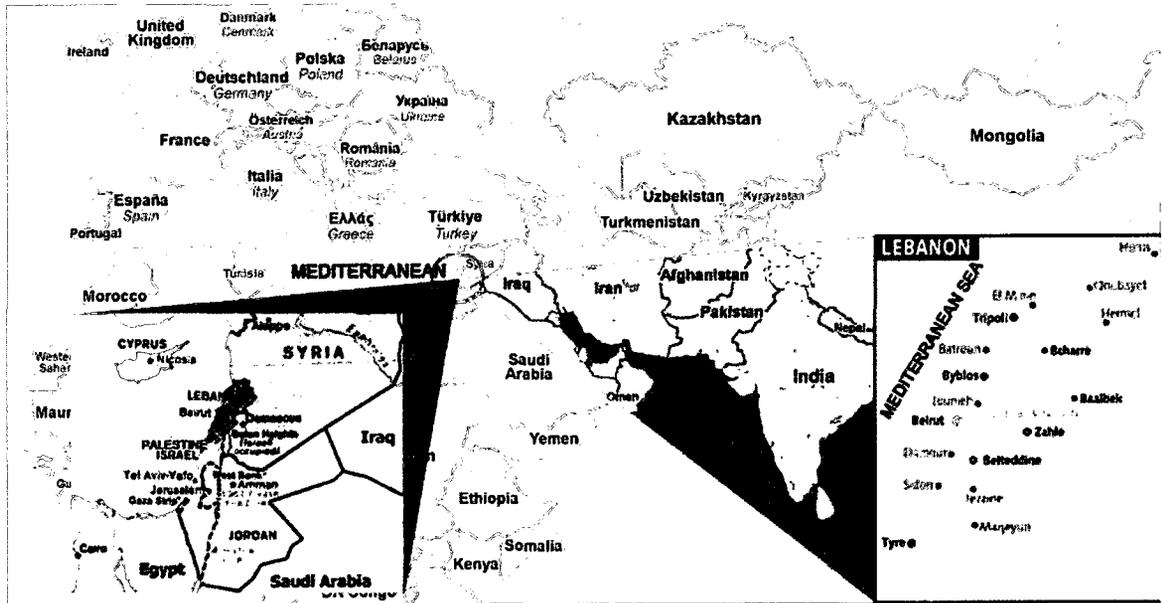
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(Fig.1) A map of Lebanon.



(Fig.2) *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* 2003. video still image.

Lamia Joreige



(Fig.3) *4 cotton Underwear for Tony*, 2002. Postcard.
Tony Chakar



(Fig.4) *Make me Stop Smoking*, 2006. Live Art Performance
Rabih Mroué



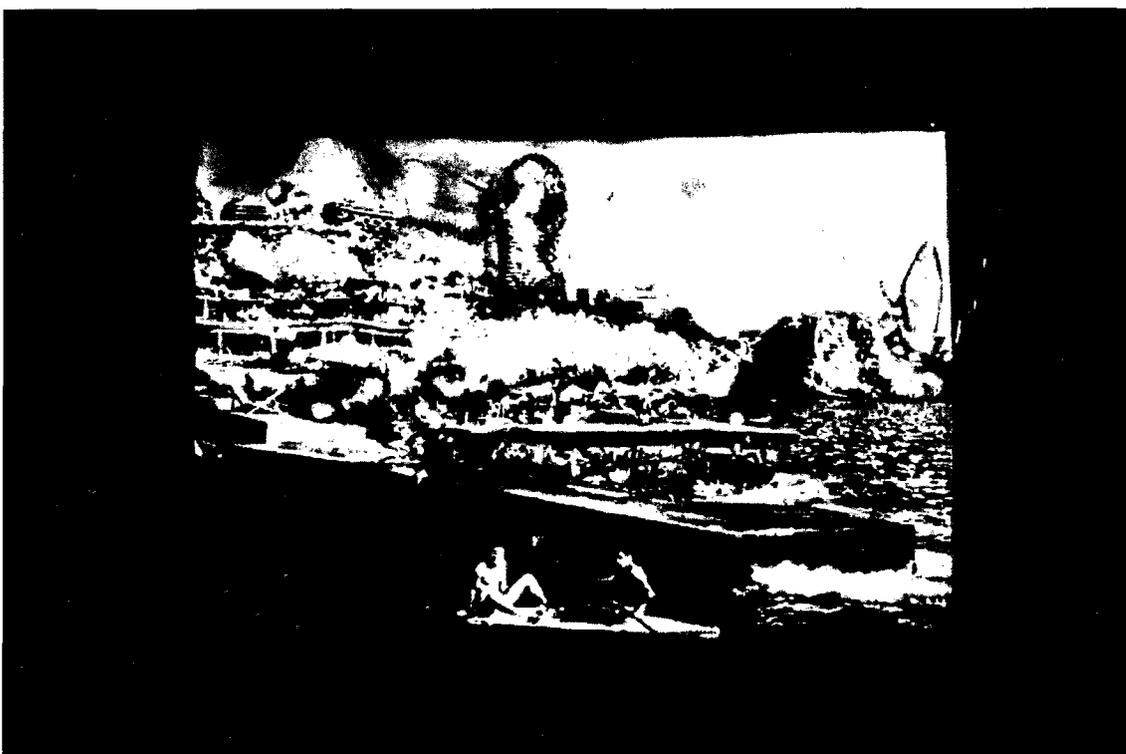
(Fig.5) *B018* . Bird's-eye view of the nightclub.
Bernard Khoury



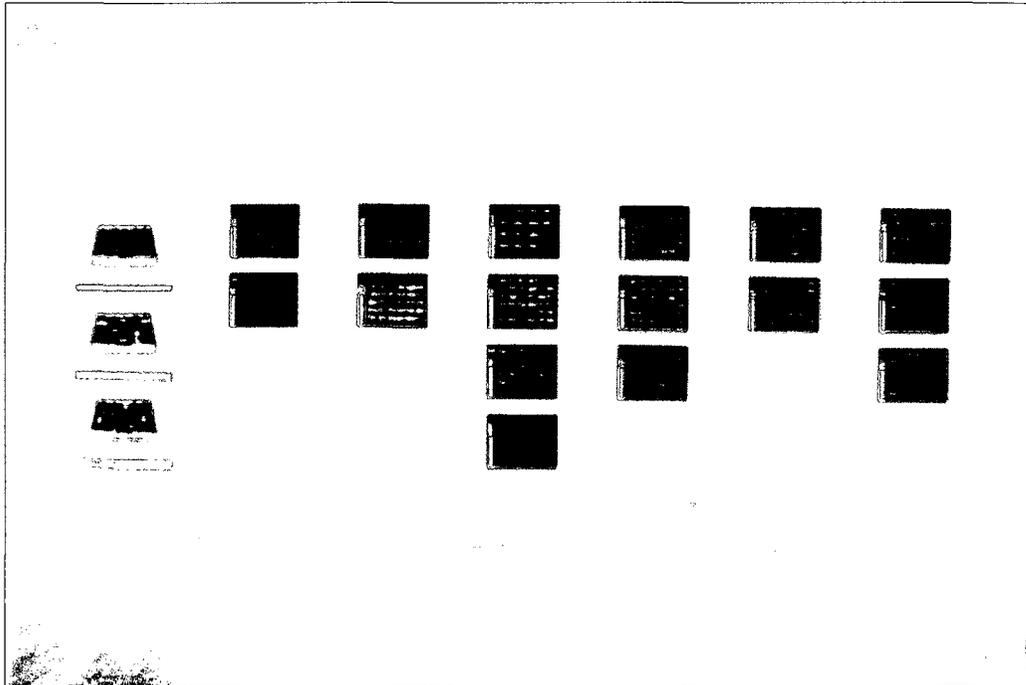
(Fig.6) *B018* . Interior view of the nightclub.
Bernard Khoury



(Fig. 7) *Wonder Beirut #1, Greetings from Beirut, 1998-2007*
lambda print mounted on aluminum. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.



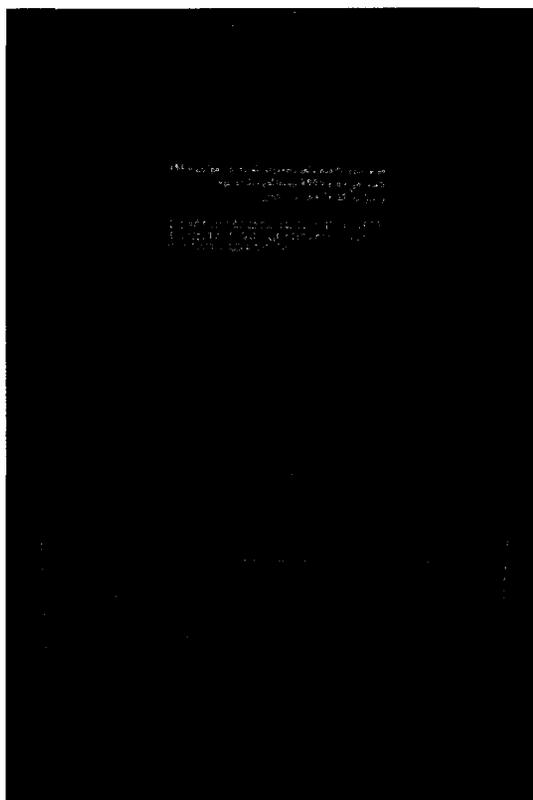
(Fig.8) *Wonder Beirut #7, Sporting Club Beach, 1998-2007*
lambda print mounted on aluminum. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.



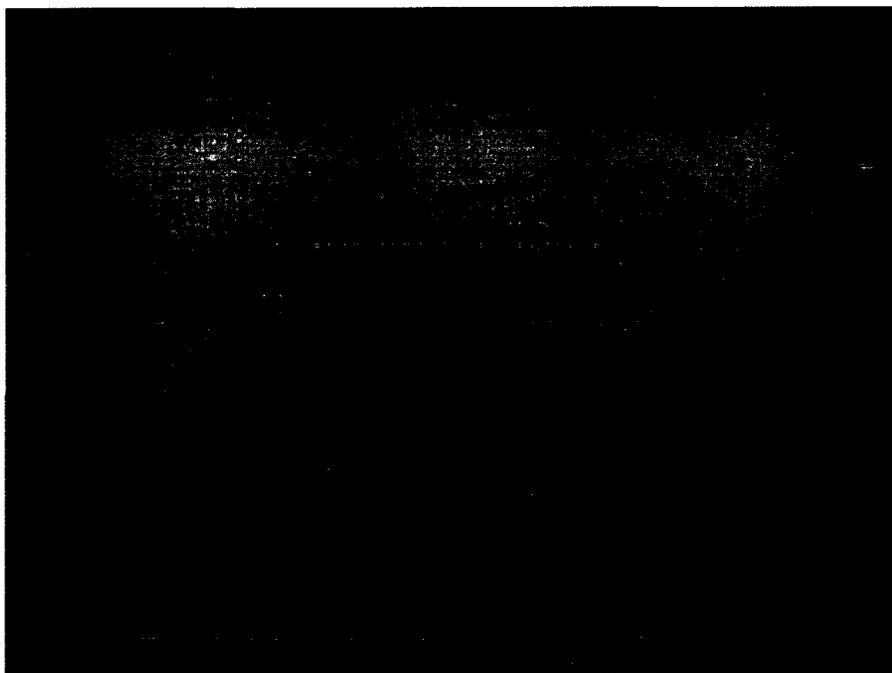
(Fig.9) *Latent Images*, 1997-2006. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 Diasec mounted photographs and Lambda prints on aluminum (English version)
 Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery



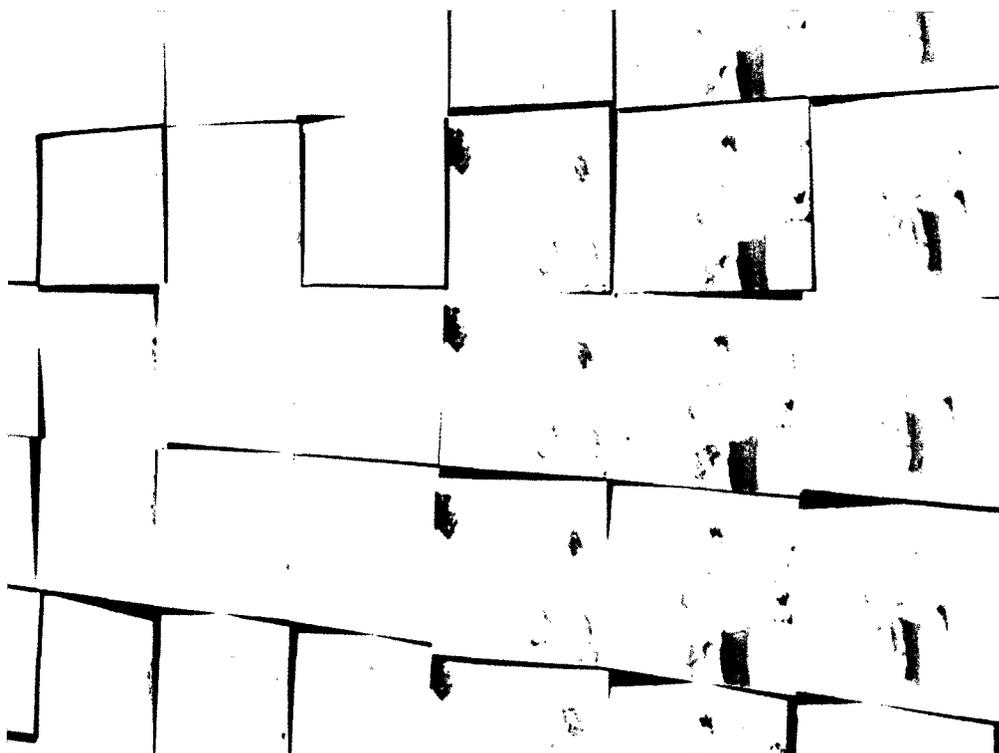
(Fig.10) *Lasting Images*, 2003. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 Video projection of Super 8 film transferred to DVD
 Video still courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, Photograph by Paul Litherland



(Fig.11) *Lasting Images*, 2003. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 Video projection of Super 8 film transferred to DVD
 Video still courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, Photograph by Paul Litherland



(Fig.12) *180 Seconds of Lasting Images*, 2006. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 Lambda print on paper, wood, Velcro, 4500 photograms
 Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery



(Fig.13) *180 Seconds of Lasting Images* (Detail)

Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery



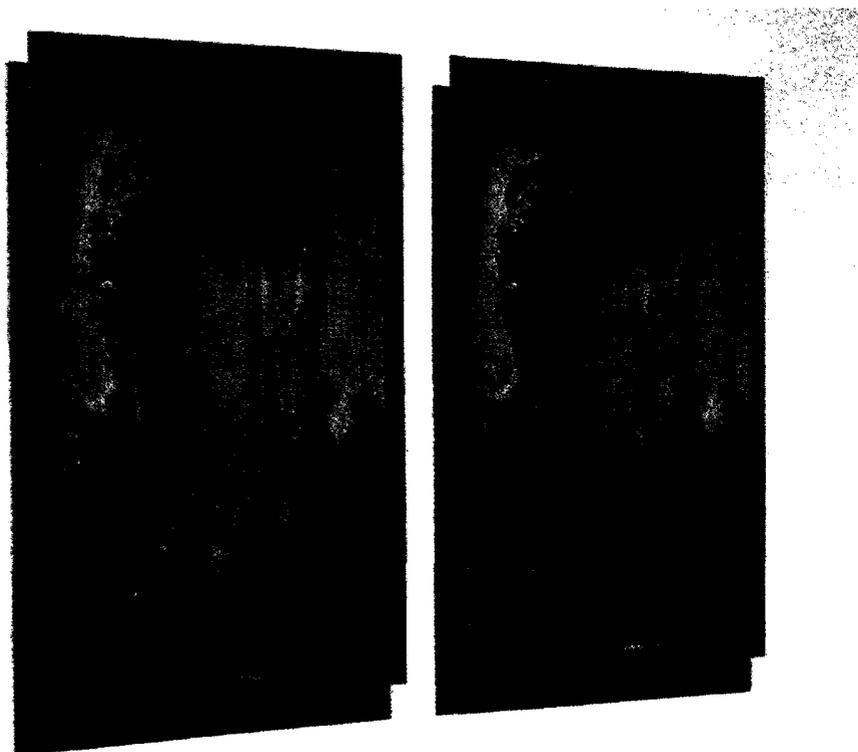
(Fig.14) *Faces*, 2009. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

Lambda print mounted on aluminum, Co-produced by the Sharjah Biennale, SB9
 Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery



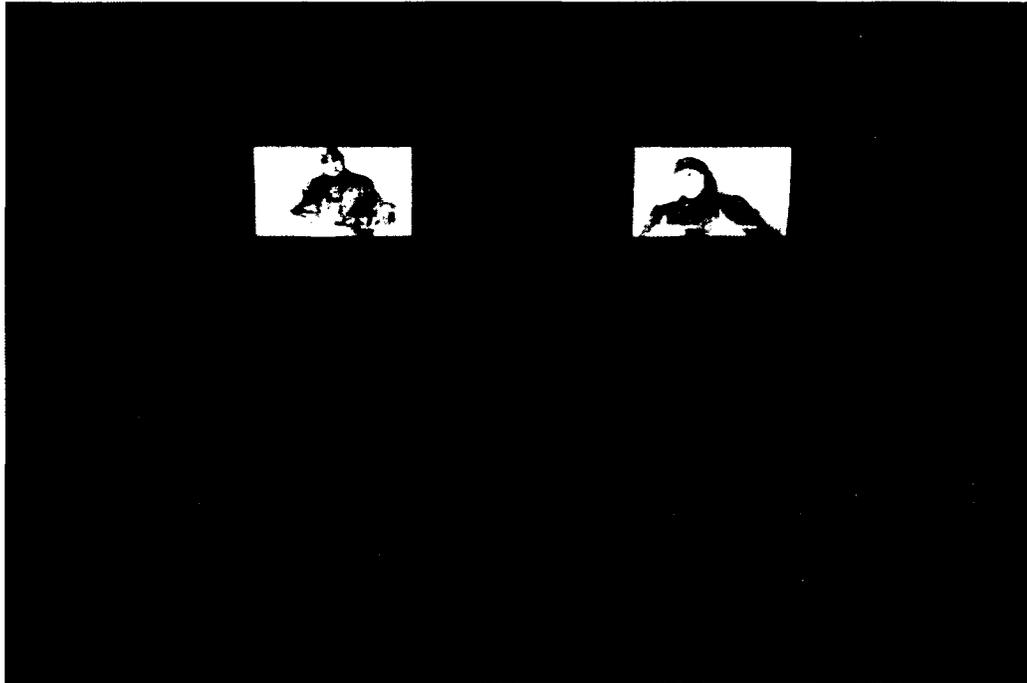
(Fig.15) *Faces*, 2009

Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery

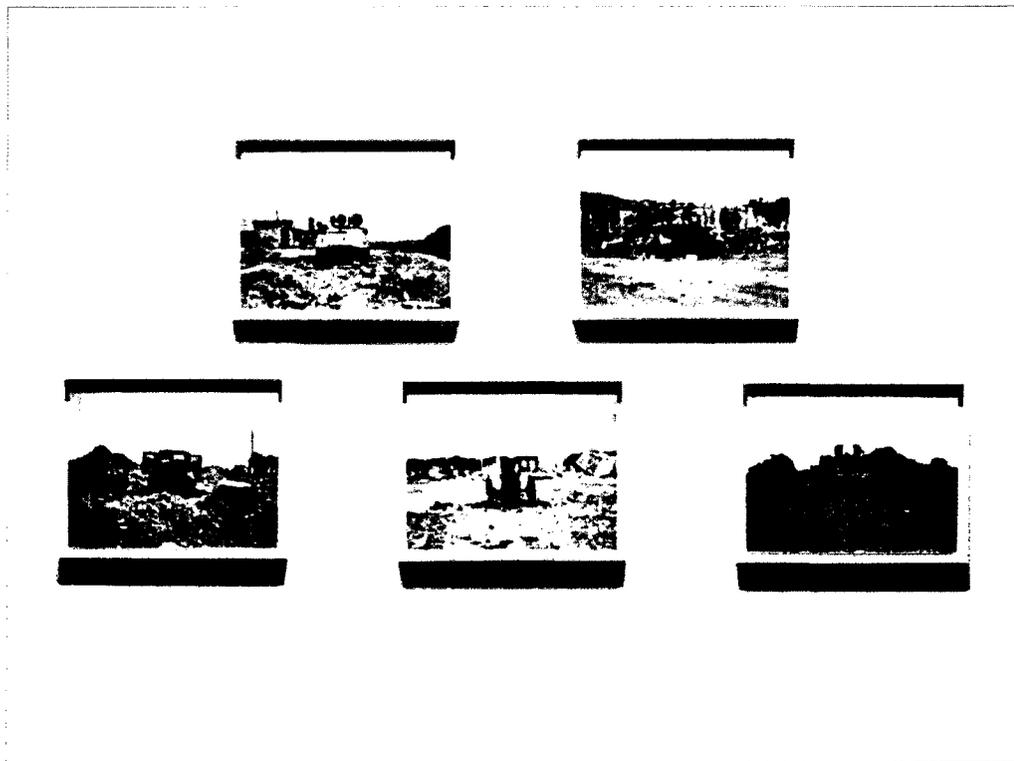


(Fig.16) *Faces*, 2009 (Detail)

Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery



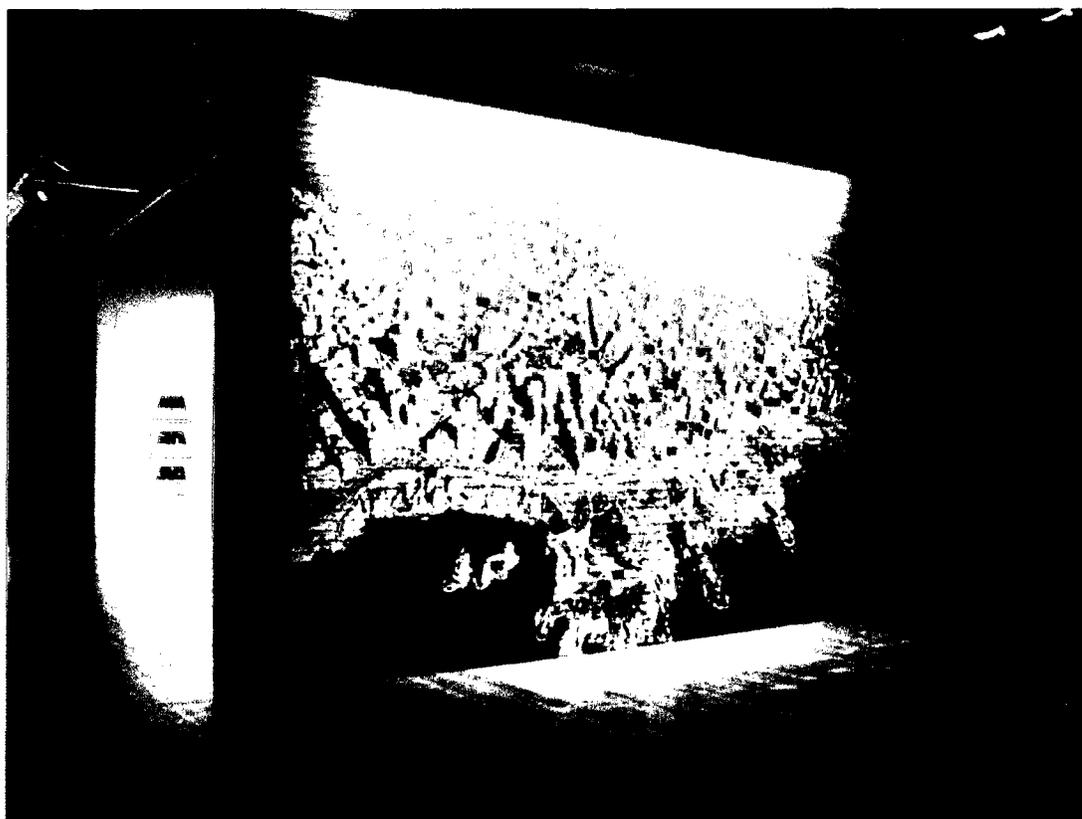
(Fig.17) *Khiam* 2000-2007, 1999-2007. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 Dual monitor installation, headphones, 52 min. each
 Video still courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, Photograph by Paul Litherland



(Fig.18) *War Trophies*, 2006-2007. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 9 photographic prints on barium paper
 Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery

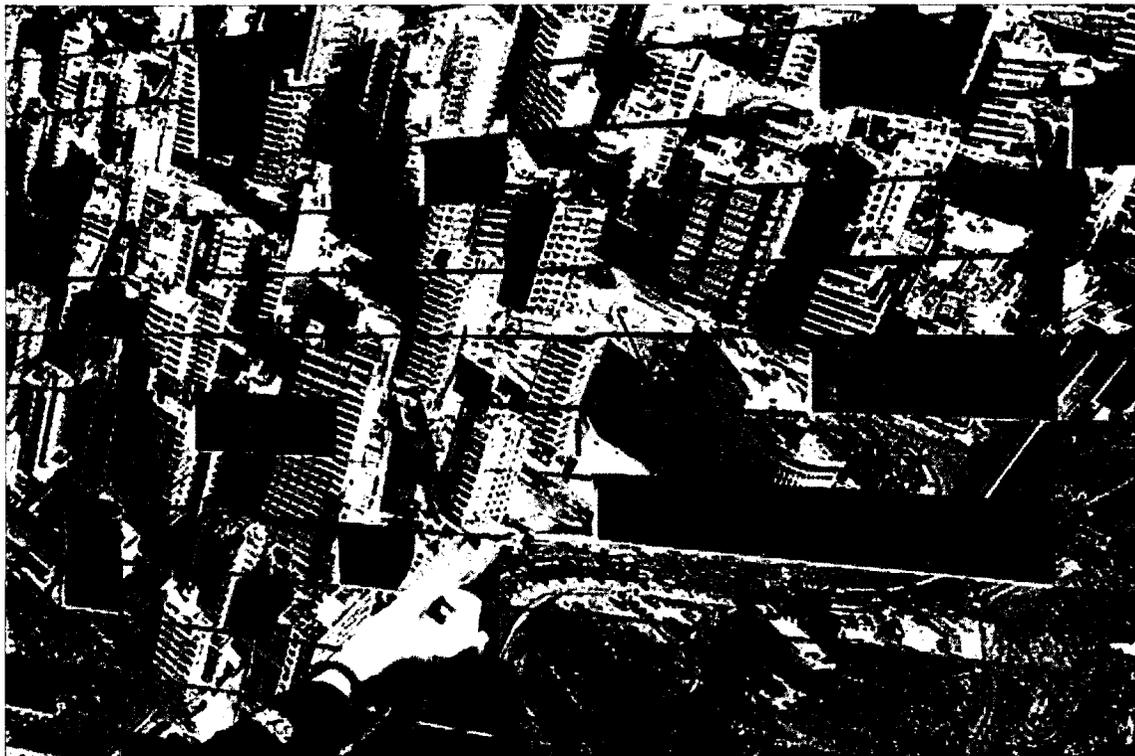


(Fig.19) *War Trophies*, 2006-2007. (Detail)
 Courtesy of Galerie In Situ / Fabienne Leclerc, Paris
 (Copied from the Ellen Gallery Website)



(Fig.20) *Circle of Confusion*, 1997. Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.
 Photographic installation: Mirror, colour digital prints (3,000 pieces), ink inscriptions
 Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery

The work *Circle of Confusion* by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige is produced and presented by Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal and the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University in the framework of the exhibition *I am there even if you don't see me*



(Fig.21) *Circle of Confusion*, 1997 (Detail)

Photograph by Paul Litherland, Courtesy of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery