

Martin Doll

**»Documents« from The Atlas Group Archive.
A ›Witness‹ Telling His Story/History:
Hostage The Bachar Tapes«**

Literaturnachweis

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mainstream mindset, once the virus has injected its hidden agendas and ideological code and how, on the other hand, this virus survives or even flourishes within the system of contemporary popular culture.

Martin Doll

**«Documents» from The Atlas Group
Archive. A «Witness» Telling His Story/
History: Hostage – The Bachar Tapes**

At Documenta 11 a multiplicity of documentary works were exhibited, giving the impression that artists have been attributed the ability to depict historical and social phenomena in a more reliable way. For example Ulrike Ottinger's 360-minute documentary *Südpassage*, a journey through Eastern Europe, is described in the Documenta-catalogue as follows:

With her impressive eye for detail and respect for the individuals she meets – how they work, dress, and live their lives – Ottinger presents a portrait of the peoples on the edge of Europe who have failed to benefit from the end of the Cold War.¹

Another example of the exhibitions framing would be Steve McQueen's *Western Deep*. McQueen's installation takes the observer on a journey into one of the deepest gold mines in the world:

¹ Nash, Mark: «Ulrike Ottinger.» In: *Kurzführer/Documenta 11: Documenta 11_Plattform 5: Ausstellung*. Ed. Christian Rattemeyer. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002. 176.

*Physically imploring the aid of the viewer, McQueen sets an organic experience of narration against the aggressive superficiality of the image that seems to have become the dominant form of representation in our culture.*²

In both these cases, the artistic documentaries are critically acclaimed for digging down deep under the surface of so-called superficial ordinary representations. This celebration of a more immediate exposure both to historical phenomena as well as to social conditions by way of aesthetic experience implicitly rejects any other form or mode of perception as being inauthentic.

Against this background of Documenta 11, the New York-based Lebanese artist Walid Raad³ presented his project *The Atlas Group Archive*. As the title indicates, his works – purportedly countless audio, visual, literary and other artefacts, marked by very large inventory numbers – are organized in an historical archive. All the included documents, stories and individuals are based upon research in existing archives in Lebanon and elsewhere. On the one hand, he places found historical materials in a narrative context: e.g. notebooks with commented photographs have been ostensibly donated to the Atlas Group by eye-witnesses. On the other hand, he invents or produces visual artefacts, locating them within the scope of well-known historical events, e.g. photographs taken after the war are recontextualized and backdated. One of the aims that Raad has pursued with this project is to «shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon.»⁴ He presents his works in exhibitions or in multi-media presentations/performances (e.g. *The Loudest Muttering Is Over. Documents from the Atlas Group Archive*) that look and sound like an artist talk or an academic presentation that incorporates a follow-up audience discussion with scripted questions. Having seen the documents displayed both in the museum and in his lecture performances, I would prefer the latter framing as the one that is more complex and intriguing since it highlights the involved documents' puzzling status. As André Lepecki points out:

*It is their presentation as virtual documents in the context of a lecture that adds performativity to their display, adding to them an ambiguous referential dimension – thanks to the theatrics of knowledge and authenticity created by Raad's performance.*⁵

I would like to argue that Raad's work explicitly deals with the composition of so-called authentic documents, taking into account their framing and medialization. His work not only rejects the ideal of artistic veracity, but, at the same time, also appropriates *and* questions certain forms of aesthetization that serve to illustrate or document historical reality in general and the history of the Lebanese wars in particular. Thus his work explores the rules that govern the particular discursive formations of historiography and, in doing so, reveals the profound effect that signification processes have in creating historical meaning. However, if it can be assumed that signs construct historiographies, it would not necessarily mean that the resulting narratives do not have any merits, validity or impact on our understanding of historical truths. Despite the dubiety of all presuppositions that attribute to art an inherent ability to represent reality in an authentic or plurimedial, multi-sensory way that permits a quasi-organic experience, this does by no means imply that art – in a kind of *l'art pour l'art* autonomy – has absolutely no connection with historical phenomena. This autonomy would condemn art to confinement within its own realm or at least to stick to unrelentingly predictable auto-referential gimmicks whether on stage or on canvas. Art has always toyed with the implications of verisimilarities *and* the way in which they are produced – not only visually (as illusion or trompe-l'œil) but also by signs indicating «truth» or «presence». Taking a contrary view, one could also argue that Raad neither dismisses historical narratives as mere constructions nor does he naively rely on what one would call an historical positivism, i.e. a direct access to historical facts free from any interpretations. He much rather sets out, in an ambiguous fashion, the way in which the various forms of the indispensable constructedness of historical facts provide

⁵ Lepecki, André: «After All, This Terror Was Not without Reason». Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive. In: *The Drama Review* 50.3, (2006) 88-99, 94. For an analysis on how the set up of the lecture performance and the voice of Raad (during his lectures he uses a Lebanese accent that he usually does not have) result in producing an authenticating effect, see 90.

² Basualdo, Carlos: «Steve McQueen.» In: Rattemeyer (2002), 154.

³ His name is sometimes spelled with an apostrophe (Ra'ad) and sometimes without (Raad). To simplify matters here the latter form will be used in this article.

⁴ Raad, Walid: *The Atlas Group Project*, 2002, 2 (PDF file provided by the artist).

information about the processes involved in working through the traumatic experiences of the Lebanese wars.

It is Raad's primary interest to reveal the tensions between fictionality and reality, historiography and fiction or between facts and fakes. With the use of the notion «fake» – as it is a common word within the German language – a difference to forgery is marked, which should not be overlooked: Whereas the latter is consummate, as long as it stays undisclosed, the disclosure constitutes the former. Thus the revealing of a «fake» can be presupposed to begin with. During the course of Raad's lectures, the audience thus begins to lose its confidence in terms of being able to distinguish between fact and fiction, its focus being increasingly drawn to the means of storytelling. Hence not only are given historical facts questioned but the hitherto reliable quest for historical truth is also marked as a never-ending task.

As a case study illustrating these ideas, I would like to examine *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes*, a video that has been shown in art exhibitions as well as it has been presented by Raad himself in short performance lectures.

Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (#17 and #31), 2001

The tape starts with a lead text informing the audience about the «source» of the «document», the circumstances under which it was produced and under which it is intended to be shown. In the performance lecture Raad advises the audience accordingly:

*In 1999, Souheil Bachar collaborated with the Atlas Group and produced 53 videotapes about his ten-year captivity in Lebanon. Tapes #17 and #31 are the only two tapes Bachar makes available for screening outside of Lebanon. In tapes #17 and #31 Bachar focuses on his three-month captivity with 5 American men in 1985.*⁶

⁶ Raad, Walid: *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes*, lecture/performance, Kampnagel Theatre, Hamburg, 31.03.2003. Other unattributed quotes in this article are taken from my transcripts of this lecture/performance.

Generally speaking, the video is primarily concerned with the cultural differences and the sexual relations between him and the American hostages during the events of 1985 in Lebanon, which is also known as the «hostage crisis». In addition to the five known American hostages, a sixth person is introduced as a «low-level employee at the Kuwait Embassy in Beirut» purportedly originating from South Lebanon. As Raad explains in an interview, he ascertained during the course of his research that every American hostage mentions such a man in his respective book about the captivity:

*[H]e became the object on which the American hostages displaced and projected their own anxieties about captivity, about forced cohabitation, and about fears of rape from the captors. It was less about him than about them. So I chose to invent him as opposed to finding him.*⁷

The beginning of the testimony shows the «witness» Souheil Bachar sitting in front of a drapery that is fixed to the ceiling. He apparently starts the videotape by recording himself with a remote control and starts by explaining his experiences and the circumstances of his captivity in Arabic. His statements are dubbed with an English voice-over translation spoken by a female actor:

Yes, our story is tragic. Yes, it is sordid. But you have to remember that it is first and foremost a story. And in this way it is familiar to you. I was held for 27 weeks in the same cell with five Americans. We ate, slept, talked, played and cried together. There isn't much that one can hide in a small room with five anxious men. Our routine was the same every day for 27 weeks. Nothing changed. After our release each of the Americans wrote a book and each book was published. In the 1990s five books written by five men who were held in the same 10-by-12-foot room have been published. Why? Why was the story told five times? Why were five different versions of it published? Because the story is not the same. Or as the hostages like to say: «Each man experi-

⁷ Raad, Walid, cited in Menick, John: «Imagined Testimonies: an interview with Walid Raad (March 25, 2002)», <http://www.johnmenick.com/writing/imagined-testimonies-an-interview-with-walid-raad>. Last access August 9, 2007.

ences captivity in his own way.» No doubt this is true. True not only of the experience of captivity, but of all experiences today. But there is more. I remember asking Terry, David, Ben... [Another male voice-over in news-speaker style acoustically superimposes his statement; Bachar's testimony is faded out]. For a brief period in the summer of 1985, six men were held in the same 10-by-12-foot room in a basement of a building somewhere in the sudden suburbs of Beirut close to the airport. Five were Americans one was Lebanese.

The video does not explain the political circumstances of the Hostage Crisis and the Iran-Contra Affair. It's more about how people try to manage their traumatic recollections of the Lebanese wars and taking them seriously. This is what Raad calls the «hysterical symptoms of the war»: «[T]he events depicted are not attached to memories of actual events but to fantasies (mine and others') erected on the basis of memories.»⁸ Whereas contingent, «insignificant» and «minor» details of events are normally suppressed in historiography in favour of a coherent text and a consistent argumentation, Raad challenges the criteria of what usually constitutes an historical event, focusing on the seemingly marginal aspects of history. Hence contemporary Lebanese history is shown not to be a kind of subject that can be dealt with by offering one final historical narrative. Instead of that, it is presented as a kaleidoscope of heterogeneous incidents that cannot be reduced to one single principle of cause and effect. As Raad puts it:

A historian who has written the conventional, chronological, geopolitical, biographical history [...]. And then say that historian has seen the limits and ends up with stuff that he doesn't know what to do with, but that the Atlas Group received.⁹

It is clear that the work of the Atlas Group is not so much focused on how to write in the margins of the canonical histories, but (given that the stakes in getting the story right are so high) is more concerned with

⁸ Raad, Walid, quoted in Kaplan, Janet A.: «Flirtations with Evidence.» In: *Art in America* 92, Oct. 2004, 134-138, 137.

⁹ Raad, Walid, quoted in Smith, Lee: «Missing in Action: The Atlas Group/Walid Raad.» In: *Artforum* 41:6, 2003, 124-129, 129.

the question of who is allowed to speak with authority about captivity. The author that speaks with authority may be found in the person of an official historian or an eyewitness – a person like Souheil Bachar. But there is more to this strategy: By presenting the fictitious hostage within the framework of the Atlas Group Archive's fiction, which «creates a position that you can speak with authority about»¹⁰, Raad goes so far as to raise his fake authorities from a personal to an institutional level.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Let us now take a closer look at how authority and authenticity are both produced and challenged. My point is to demonstrate that the boundary between fiction and fact is constructed and destructed simultaneously. Historical narratives, that seem self-evident, are rendered doubtful. The first time I saw the video at the Documenta in Kassel I was so puzzled that I immediately looked up the explanation in the short guide. It informed me that the Atlas Group is an imaginary foundation. In the installation itself, however, there was no clear evidence suggesting that the documents were misrepresentations. The question then arises as to how one should regard the status of the exhibited documents or, as Raad puts it, «under what notion of facts can we operate in our construction of «the history of» the history of Lebanon? How do we approach the fact of the war?»¹¹ In consideration of the above, Raad never presents his forged documents in their «original» materiality, but exhibits them in the form of colour digital prints, as DVDs or as PowerPoint presentations projected onto a screen.

¹¹ Raad, Walid, quoted in Kaplan (2004), 136.

Returning to Raad's question about the notion of fact, I would like to provide some etymological details enabling us to understand that, historically, the concept of «fact» has no fixed signification. In the 17th century the term «fake» was subject to a shift in meaning, i.e. scientific facts broke with the etymology that connected them to such a term as «factory» and other sites associating with making and doing. Fact was formerly known as a thing done or performed. In Latin, the word «factum» occasionally had the extended sense of «event, occur-

rence». Hence in the early 17th century, in scholastic Latin, it acquired another meaning: «something that has really occurred or is actually the case; [...] a particular truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony, as opposed to [...] fiction»¹², to quote from the Oxford English Dictionary. As Lorraine Daston says, the word «fact» broke the

*philological bond that had tied it to words like «factitious» and «manufacture». Conversely, by the mid-eighteenth century, once-neutral words like «fabricate» (originally, to form or construct anything requiring skill) or «fabulist» (teller of legends or fables) had acquired an evil odour of forgery and deception in addition to their root senses of construction. For most Enlightenment thinkers, facts par excellence were those given by nature, not made by human art. «Facts» and «artifacts» had become antonyms, in defiance of their common etymology.*¹³

In this context, Daston refers to Bernard de Fontenelle, the Perpetual Secretary of the «Académie Royale des Sciences» in Paris, who considered the inclination to embellish the facts of the matter in any retelling so irresistible that «one needs a particular kind of effort and attention in order to say only the exact truth.» It took centuries before society advanced to the point being able to «preserve in memory the facts just as they happened», before which time «the facts kept in [collective] memory were no more than visions and reveries.»¹⁴

Concerning the notion of «fact», one could argue that Raad restores the full spectrum of its etymology by embedding specific historical evidence from the Lebanese wars between the poles of constructedness and conclusiveness. This generates an oscillation that can be found in *The Bachar Tapes* when different pieces of information gradually become contradictory, thereby arousing the viewer's suspicion. A closer look reveals that the different visual and narrative elements do not add up. This already becomes evident in the prologue of Tape #17, when Bachar absurdly proposes to have his words – in Arabic – trans-

lated «into Arabic for the Arab world». But the most explicit clues for «fraud detection» can be found in the end credits, where additional funding is mentioned as provided by the «Truth and Testimony Council (Lebanon)» for example, or the «VideoNoise and Culture Institute (Lebanon)» – organizations that apparently do not exist. One art critic expressed his experience in a nice phrase, worth citing: «As you listen, incredulity sets in. Downright disbelief quickly follows, leading perhaps to absolute cosmic doubt.»¹⁵ The viewer's prior knowledge, that, in itself, is culturally determined, is also relevant for the perception of *The Bachar Tapes*: The «witness», Souheil Bachar, is performed by a famous Lebanese actor, «so he is less likely to be confused in Lebanon. But outside, he is usually confused as a real hostage.»¹⁶

Speaking of confusion, if one considers the narrative levels of the video, the viewer is addressed in several different ways: Although the narration evinces a distinct structure to start with, it culminates in total disorder. One could say – in the terminology of structuralism – that the initial information is provided not only on an intradiegetic but also on an extradiegetic level. The levels could be sketched out as follows:

- As intradiegetic with regard to the acoustic level: the original Arab voice and sound bites of other hostages. With regard to the visual level: the video of the witness Bachar and images showing the Beirut airport, the Mediterranean Sea or the titles of the books written by the American hostages.
- As extradiegetic with regard to the acoustic level: the dubbing with a female voice, the newsreader. With regard to the visual level: the lead text, the leaders with countdown, the subtitles.

In the course of the video these levels merge together more and more so that, in the end, one cannot really distinguish between them anymore: One hears and sees several sound and video tracks at the same time; one hears the sound of fast-forwarding a tape; the dubbed voice is

¹² «fact, n.» In: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, V, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, 651f.

¹³ Daston, Lorraine: «Fear and loathing of the imagination in science.» In: *Daedalus* 1, 1998, 16-30, 18.

¹⁴ Fontenelle, Bernard de: *De l'origine des fables* (1724), Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1932, 14, 33, quoted in Daston (1998), 73-95, 18f.

¹⁵ See note 7.

¹⁶ See note 7. *The Bachar Tapes* are supplemented by a fictitious interview between Raad and Bachar, which is published in a German translation in part in: Raad, Walid: «In unserer Zivilisation ist es nicht ueblich, Loecher auszugraben, um sich dann selbst zu begraben.» In: *Springer* 7:2, 2002, 36-41.

faded out in mid-sentence; the video starts from a video still; technical displays flash on the screen and interrupt Bachar's testimony etc.

In other words, at the beginning of the video a difference between the look of the 'found' material and the composition is artificially arranged: On the one hand, there are the technically perfect titles, subtitles and the subsequently added female voice. On the other hand, there is the 'original', 'authentic', 'raw material' (the taped testimonies of Bachar) with artefacts, video noise and a voice that sounds as if it was recorded using the camera microphone. The viewer even sees the hostage starting the recording with his remote control. Moreover the Bachar-testimony itself resembles the usual hostage-tapes we know from the German R.A.F. In one performance Walid Raad even told the audience that it looks like some of the videos of the 'real' hostage-takers at that time. But in the course of the video the boundaries between fact and presentation are blurred little by little or, more precisely, one can no longer discern between the things presented as facts and the non-authentic presentational framework. And finally Raad reveals the facts as being fabricated or constructed.

Usually – in historiography or TV-documentaries – documents and stock footage are used respectively as a means of providing objective evidence. In the case of the Atlas Group, the stock footage itself is a product of aesthetic decisions that allow it to appear as if it were authentic and factual by adding video noise and drop-outs and by degrading the image quality. Thus the video mimicks the appearance of pieces of evidence or, in other words, Raad performs acts of truth-telling. In the case of ordinary forgeries, a shift occurs: the shift from produced material to false evidence. In the case of the Bachar-tape-fake, a forgery is conceived as a kind of shift from pretended authenticity to an ever more explicit articulation of its own artificiality and fabricated nature. Unlike ordinary forgeries that use gestures of veracity to remain undiscovered, Raad exposes the fictitious rules of truth-

production *as* fictitious, thereby undermining uncritical beliefs in, and the reliance on the authority of historical presentations, be they television broadcasts or exhibitions such as the Documenta.

Similarly, Raad constantly changes his aesthetic strategy of addressing the audience in his performances/lectures in a trustworthy way: In the first lecture that I attended he tried to keep a straight face even during the audience discussion, in the second one – at the Laokoon festival in Hamburg 2003 – he explicitly disclosed the fakes.¹⁷ In an interview about this shift Raad admits that he decided to preclude the eventuality that «giggling insiders believed that they had a pact with the author against everyone who wasn't in on the charade.»¹⁸ As a consequence he calls his works 'factual fictions':

*It is important to note that some of the documents, stories and individuals I present with this project are real in the sense that they exist in the historical world, and others are imaginary in the sense that I imagined and produced them. [...] As such, The Atlas Group Project, its real and imaginary documents, characters, and stories operate between the false binary of fiction and non-fiction.*¹⁹

Hence, the distinction between real and imaginary is not clear-cut during the presentation of his documents/works.

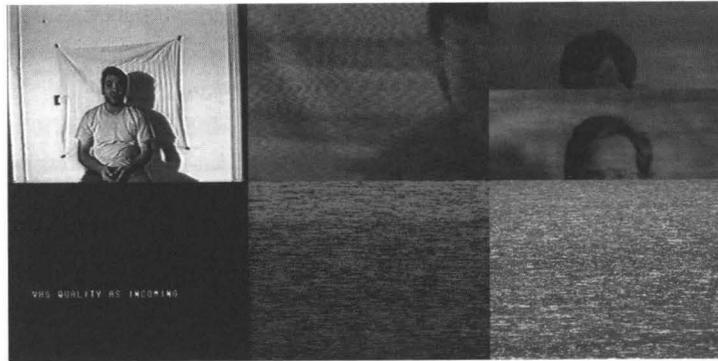
Furthermore, Raad's video and performances become a kind of picture puzzle (*Vexierbild*) by these means, making it increasingly difficult to discern between fact and fiction. Natural facts, or rather the semblance of facticity is revealed as being an effect of a film language, so that, ultimately, signs and the juxtaposition of signs produce what is perceived as fact. Thus the arena of signification and relevancy shifts from the domain of the video or from the speaking authority to the mind of the beholder, enabling him/her to question the assumed self-evidence of the presented facts, or to question the basic assumption of doubtless facts in general.

¹⁷ André Lepecki mentions as well that in different lectures Raad introduces *The Atlas Group Archive* sometimes as «imaginary» and sometimes as «fictional». But sometimes he even omits these terms, see Lepecki (2006), 90.

¹⁸ Menick (2002).

¹⁹ Raad (2002), 2.

[Fig. 1] Video stills from Atlas Group/Walid Raad, *Hostage: The Bacher Tapes* (#17 and #31), English Version, DVD, 18 min., 2001.



[Fig. 1]

Raad's work is by no means restricted to the critique of official reports and the way historical events are documented. In my opinion, Raad does not even primarily intend to devalue the use of newspapers etc. On the contrary: He mainly uses Lebanese newspaper archives. We have to bear in mind Raad's statement:

[S]ome of the documents, stories and individuals [...] are real in the sense that they exist in the historical world, and others are imaginary in the sense that I imagined and produced them.

Hence the works are characterized by the ambiguity of the distinction between fact and fiction. This is the crucial point in the final part of *Hostage: The Bacher Tapes*: At the end of Tape #17, Raad reveals how the distortion – the authentic look – of the video image is produced by showing a continual degradation of its quality, finally leading to chromatic aberrations, underexposed parts, over-saturations and hyper-contrasts. Attention should also be given to Tape #31, in which the significance of the concept of the word picture puzzle (*Vexierbild*) and its connotations become especially apparent. Consistent throughout the whole video there are the abovementioned video noises and images that usually occur when a VTR is started, stopped or the end-of-tape is reached. Now, after the countdown, tape #31 starts with noise. – Is

it noise? Or does the 90-second shot show a heavily backlit sea? We cannot hear the sound of the sea nor any signal noises that could help us identify it more accurately. Its content remains ambiguous as in a picture puzzle, a kind of visual 'paronomasia', a rhetorical term that literally means «to alter slightly in meaning» and is used to denote words that sound similar to other words, but have different meanings. This has far-reaching consequences for how we can «read» the image.

In the conceptual history of images one can distinguish between two traditional approaches: In one case, it is a shadow-like image of reality, something that depicts reality to which it cedes all rights in order to recede before its power. Then every image could be considered as a means of direct reference to the depicted phenomena. In the other case, reality itself is considered to be constructed through a sum of images or is an effect of how it (i.e. reality) is *imagined*. Images are thus the scheme of all reality.²⁰ In this context I would like to raise the question as to whether a third approach is possible. It goes without saying that reality cannot be depicted. Drawing on de Man's theories one could comment on the first case as follows: That which we call «ideology» is precisely the confusion of visual with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism. The materiality of the signifier is thus confused with the materiality of what it signifies.²¹ However, it would be unfortunate to consider images – as in the second case – to be mere simulacra; i.e. to be a general denial of the reality principle for the sake of absolute fiction. A promising third approach based on de Man can be outlined as follows: Replacing the word «literature» with «images» in the following quotation – one could say that images are

*fictional not because they somehow refuse to acknowledge «reality», but because it is not a priori certain that images function according to principles which are those, or which are like those, of the phenomenal world. It is therefore not a priori certain that images are a reliable source of information about anything but its own language or constitution.*²²

²⁰ Cf. Hamacher, Werner: «The Second of Inversion. Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry.» In: *Word Traces. Readings of Celan*. Ed. Ars Fioretos. Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 1994, 219-263, 219.

²¹ Cf. de Man, Paul: «The Resistance to Theory.» In: *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982), 3-20, 11.

²² de Man (1982), 11. This quotation is modified as mentioned above.

The picture puzzle, or the paronomasia, of the images of the noise/sea at sunset in Raad's video exemplifies the auto-referential power of artistic images to reveal their own visual reality and the conditions of their visualization: On the one hand, one could interpret the noise/sea image as noise and, since pure video noise usually appears when there is a lack of video signal, also read it as an *image* of a void, a metaphor for a lack of meaning; on the other hand, one could also interpret the noise/sea image as a view on the ocean and read it as a metaphor for a feeling that can be circumscribed as a yearning for eternity or infinity. But both interpretations miss the crucial point, since not only multiple meanings are juxtaposed in the double image like in polysemy, but a meaning remains latent, is set into oscillation and withdraws from a definite reconstruction by means of an interpretation.²³ Thus, the described void is not only signified by metaphors *in* the image, but is performatively put into movement by prompting the beholder to an interminable search for meaning or rather for something that can never be completely represented. This leads to the conclusion that the image cannot be exhaustively described, its distinct meaning is subject to constant deferral. In this respect it is not an image of the world, but, to a certain extent an image, or rather a picture portraying the generating and the apprehending of images. One could define this as a shift from representativeness to pictoriality.

Having introduced the double-image as continually triggering counter changes that lead to a ceaseless deferral of meaning, one can also find this concept in Raad's literary artefacts. For example, the title of another «document» in his archive reads «Missing Lebanese Wars». Whether pronounced as «*Missing Lebanese Wars*» or as «*Missing Lebanese Wars*», the word «missing» can be understood in several ways: In one case «missing» can stand for the failure to represent the wars or even the failure of trying to speak about them – i.e. «to miss the point». It can also mean that they are lacking in the official discourse that dominates the popular press. While, in the other case, it can be

²³These considerations correspond to a certain extent to the thoughts of Werner Hamacher who developed them in another context (cf. Hamacher (1994), 219-263, 233ff).

understood as a longing meaning the intense desire to heal the wounds of the war. In Raad's words: «Missing has this idea of longing for, [...] yet the inability to arrive. It's as if you're always longing for that which you missed.»²⁴ If you remember the lead text, Raad pretends to have much more archival documents than those he actually presents. This can also be read as an allusion to the aforementioned «missing», so that the individual member of the audience is always left with the suspicion that he actually has not got the whole story.

Thus Raad takes into account that trying to talk about the Lebanese wars is problematic if one wants to avoid being too didactic and too pedagogical or if one does not choose to make use of anti-propaganda by means of forgeries, an approach which is even worse than propaganda, the misrepresentations of which anti-propaganda aims to attack. But this dilemma does not lead him to throw in the towel and concede defeat by characterizing the bloody events of the war as «unrepresentable». In contrast, he is performing the necessary, perennial failure of representing the unrepresentable before the audience, linking it to the implicit declaration that the search for means to speak about the Lebanese wars – to speak about historical reality, its effects and casualties or even to raise the issue of traumatic experiences of the people involved – remains an inexhaustible task. And Raad makes it his concern to approach this impossible mission and to project a kind of history of the present:

*The story one tells oneself and that captures one's attention and belief may have nothing to do with what happened in the past, but that's the story that seems to matter in the present and for the future.*²⁵

²⁴Walid, Raad, quoted in Smith (2003), 129.

²⁵Walid Raad, quoted in Nakas, Cassandra: «Double Miss. On the Use of Photography in The Atlas Group Archive.» In: *The Atlas Group (1989-2004). A Project by Walid Raad*, Eds. Cassandra Nakas and Britta Schmitz. Köln: König, 2006, 49-52, 52.

Performing the Matrix

Meike Wagner und Wolf-Dieter Ernst (Hg.)

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