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37



CAMERAWORK: A JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS Volume 34, No. 1 Spring/Summer 2007

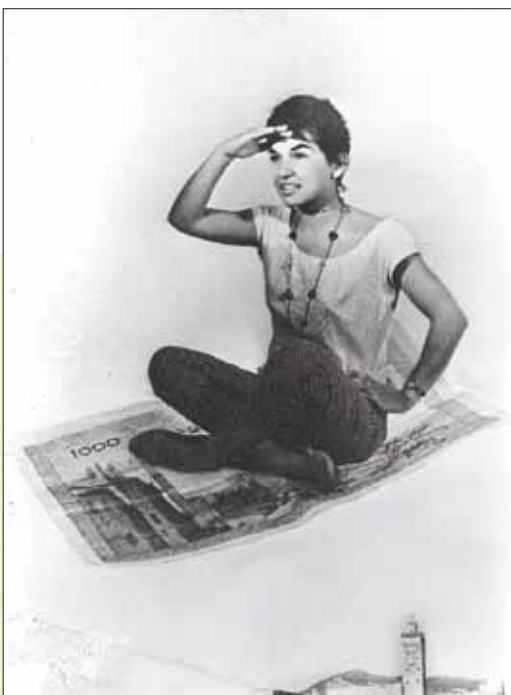
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COVER IMAGE AND LEFT

Antonio, Professional photographer - Yto Barrada, (A. Tazi) Collection
© Arab Image Foundation



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This issue of *Camerawork: A Journal of Photographic Arts* is an extension of the installation *Not Given: Talking Of and Around Photographs of Arab Women*, mounted at SF Camerawork in March 2007. The project's title, *Not Given*, refers to Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donnés* (Given, 1946–66), an installation in which the viewer steps forward onto a mat in front of a coarse wooden door and peers through two peepholes to a construction behind.¹ Inside, an eerily realistic nude female form lies on a bed of twigs, gas lamp in hand. The viewer's movement toward the door activates this installation and consequently, as Rosalind Krauss notes, *Etant donnés* operates as a kind of "vision machine": it situates the viewer in such a way that it generates the desire to see and, in doing so, reveals the sexual codes that predetermine Western visuality.² While photography originated within this Western schema, *Not Given* complicates this codification by introducing cultural narratives derived from members of the community in which the images were taken and are now viewed. Consequently, the installation involves a sound component in which verbal commentaries built around absent photographs construct their own story. The second component of the installation is visual and involves the photographic collection from the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut. This collection—from which a selection of images are reproduced here—is stunning in its diversity, often calling into question preconceived notions of Middle Eastern photography in general and Arab women in particular. However, like all archives, the Arab Image Foundation organizes its photographs based on a set hierarchy of terms. The photographs are sorted and tagged with a gender, a class, and a function. *Not Given* scrutinizes the logic of the archive and seeks the subterranean narratives that emerge from its seams.

The essays featured in this issue interrogate the skin of words that surrounds the Foundation's collection and, at the same time, continue the game of telephone initiated by the installation's audio component. For instance, Paul-Emmanuel Odin gives us his analysis of the political issues surrounding the audio component of *Not Given* when presented at La Compagnie Contemporary Art Center in Marseille, while Tarek El-Ariss considers what particular photographs from Lebanese studio photographer Hashem el Madani reveal and conceal about gender, identity, and coupling. What, for instance, does it mean when a couple of the same gender "play house" for the camera? Furthermore, what does it mean when these photographs are filed under the Foundation keyword

in this issue

"disguise"? Intrigued with such archival mysteries, Arlette Farge writes on the felicitous surprises that occur while one

searches the Foundation's online database. My essay explores the challenge of translation as it inevitably occurs when one travels to a foreign land—but particularly when this journey is enflamed by photographic desire, mediated by the Internet, and arrives in the form of a mental image.

This project links many places, most notably the port cities of Beirut, Algiers, Marseille, and San Francisco. The installation was first mounted as *Soit dit en passant* at La Compagnie, a gallery located in a primarily Algerian-French neighborhood, and the installation reflected its context. Now it moves to San Francisco and this journal has something of a gender bent. What is a woman and to whom? How is gender embodied, imagined, or erased in a photograph versus a digital image? In both Marseille and San Francisco, *Not Given* seeks to contest the notion that identity is predetermined. On the contrary, identity is understood here to be an issue of representation, translation, technology, imagination, and situation. Of all these I'd like to emphasize imagination. While imagination of the Other can veer perilously close to projection or, worse yet, fall into the well-worn rut of stereotype, in the best-case scenario imagination reveals the way in which our sense of self is made up of absent others. Since its inception, photography has been implicated in this process of identification; with photography the Western viewer has imagined herself or himself via exotic Others. Now the Arab Image Foundation has generously made its collection available and we see that the Arab world also imagines itself and *its* Other.

Co-curator Isabelle Massu³ and I gratefully acknowledge those institutions whose support allowed for the fruition of this project, including La Compagnie, the Camargo Foundation, SF Camerawork, and, especially, the Arab Image Foundation. We also thank the many individuals who make up this project and assisted its birth in word and deed.

—Dore Bowen, October 2006, San Francisco

NOTES:

1. The full title of the work is *Etant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas).

2. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 112.

3. Isabelle Massu is an artist and media practitioner, a member of *la compagnie* in Marseille until 2006. She is currently teaching at City Studio, a program of the San Francisco Art Institute.



Portrait of victims of the Qana Massacre, Lebanon/Qana, 18/4/1996 - Anonymous photographer - Doha Shams Collection © AIF

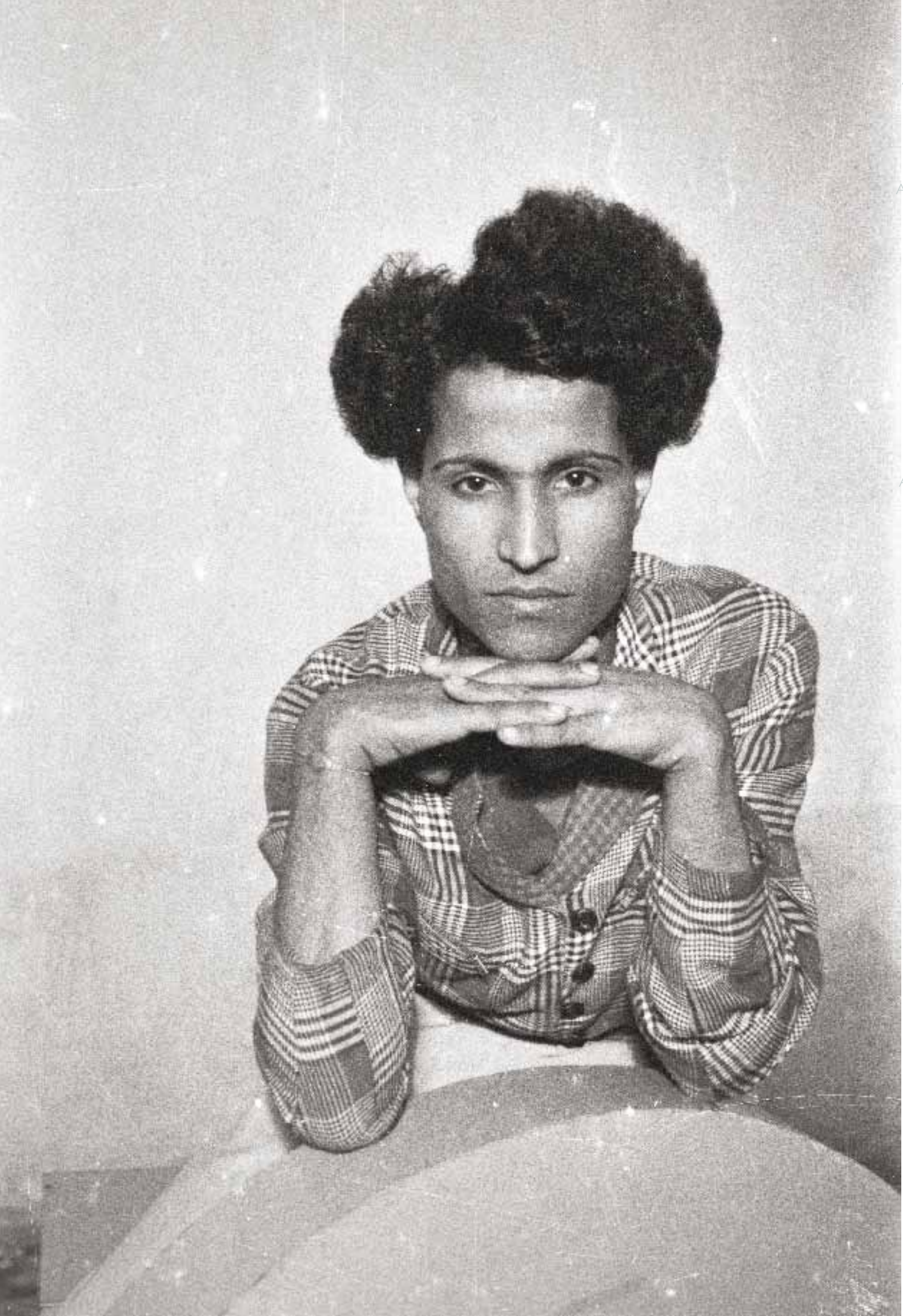
The presence of “her”

The city, people, then faces emerge from the archives. Simultaneously appearing beneath the scripted words is the clear image of she who was not spoken of, as it was thought that one always spoke of her: woman. Gender neutrality is fractured, nakedly exposing the mechanism of sexual differentiation, if we turn our attention there.

The archives speak of “her” and allow her to speak. An initial gesture, prompted by necessity, is made: to encounter her again as one might happen upon a lost species, an unknown flora; to trace the representation as one might recover a lapse of memory; to offer up the evidence as one might exhibit a corpse.

A useful gesture on the part of the collector—but incomplete. To make woman visible there where history neglected to see her requires a corollary gesture: that of working to change the relationship between the sexes and of making that relationship a subject of history.

—Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive*, Paris, Seuil, 1989



Aabaya
Abbey
Academician
Accident
Accordion
Accumulation
Acrobat
Acrobatics
Actor (ress)
Adult
African
African art
Air hostess
Air transport
Airport
Airship
Alcohol
Alignment
Alley
American
Amputation
Anatomy
Anchor
Angel
Animism
Antique art
Apartment
Apron
Arbitrary
Arcade
Architect
Architecture
Arm
Armband
Armchair
Armour

Playing house in the studio of Hashem el Madani

By Tarek el-Ariss

The word *disguise* in Arabic is *tanakkur*, which literally means a disowning or a disavowal of one's representation for the sake of another. It is sufficient to say *atanakkar*, "I disown," to mean that one is *in disguise*. The process of disowning occurs simultaneously with a process of claiming a reflection that will replace and cover over the one being shunned, denied, and temporarily suspended. Not to be in disguise, to appear as one is and as one is reflected to oneself, therefore involves an embracing of one's true reflection. In both cases, the subject imagines representation as something he or she can control, either by accepting or by denying it. The condition of disguise is hence a space that allows the subject to express that which he or she seeks to disown about the representation projected onto the social realm. In photographic practices, disguise takes shape in the encounter of two or more subjects, involved in the production and the representation of forms of *tanakkur*. Posing in front of the camera, carrying a fake gun, or putting on a bride's veil while brandishing plastic flowers constitute sessions of disguise that expose social rituals and disturb their apparent rigidity. More specifically, the photographer's lens captures in these instances the fluctuation of gender boundaries and identities, at the heart of this narcissistic play. In these photographs, disguise is used both for gendering and cross gender-

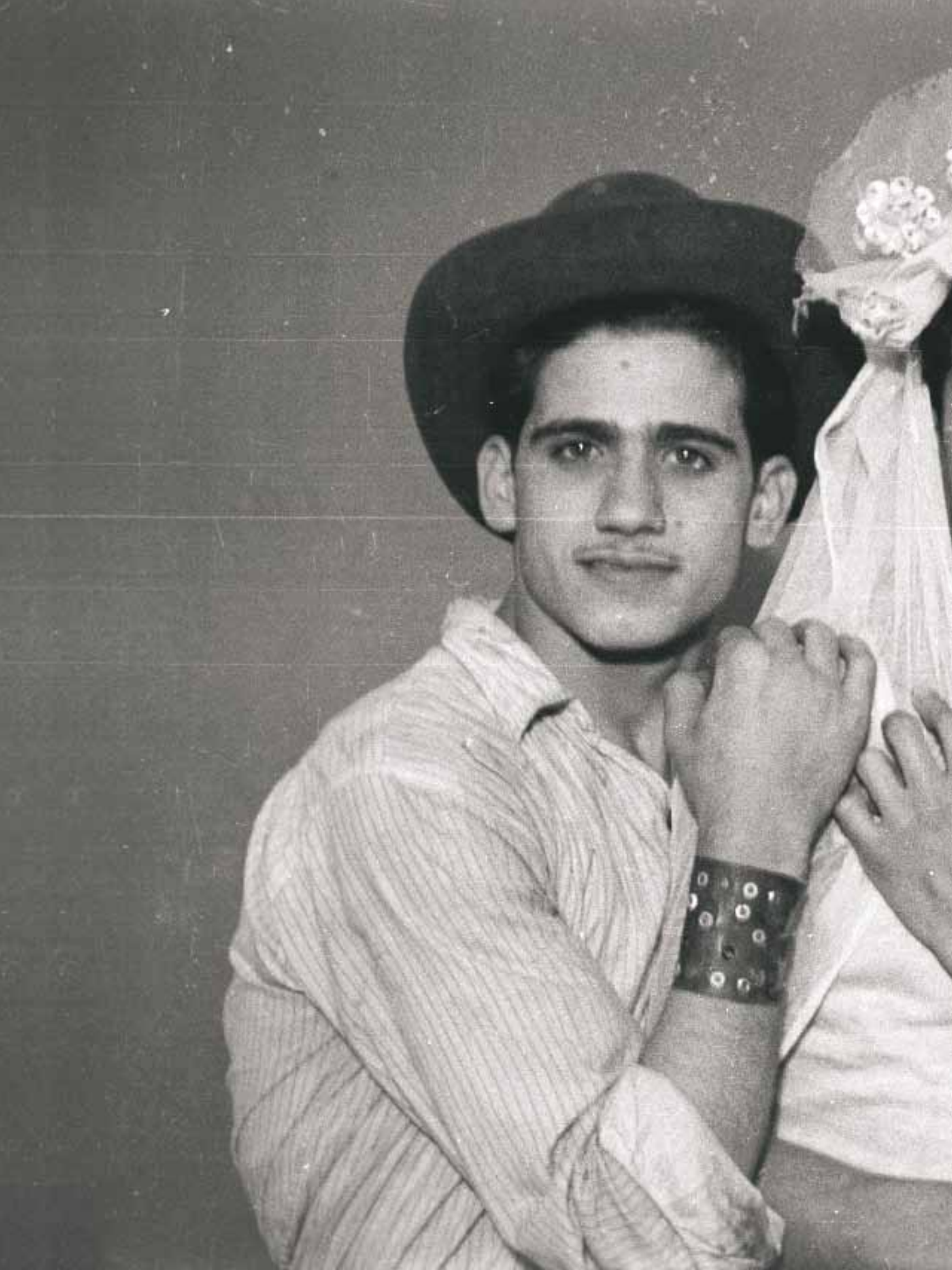
ing in a variety of ways. This is easily verifiable when examining studio photographic practices that came out of Lebanon from the 1950s to the 1980s.

These photographs are drawn from the archive of a professional photographer named Hashem el Madani (b. 1930, Sidon, Lebanon) and are collected in a book entitled *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices*. Upon a close examination of these photographs, one wonders whether the characters are *just playing* or whether they are performing gender identities that might elucidate questions of homoerotic desire. Certainly, these pictures need to be read in the context of a socially conservative city, where gender segregation, to various degrees, is *de rigueur*. El Madani himself declares that throughout his career as a photographer, only once did an unmarried heterosexual couple come and kiss in front of the camera. All other intimacy and play was expressed as disguise, either between men or between women. While disguise in this context serves to create a homoerotic space, it simultaneously emerges as a direct result if not a reinforcement of the norms of that social environment defined by gender segregation. In fact, one could argue that intimacy between men or intimacy between women is both sanctioned and encouraged in that environment. That said, it is important



“Films inspired people a lot. They came to perform kissing in front of a camera. In a conservative society such as Saida, people were willing to play the kiss between two people of the same sex, but very rarely between a man and a woman. I remember only one couple who came to the studio and kissed in front of the camera, and they were not married. The rest of them were people of the same sex. One of them plays the woman, while the other plays the man.”

—Hashem el Madani¹





the point where the hands of the two men meet, the fingers of the bride are somewhat bent, touching yet making room for those of the groom. Furthermore, the posture of the groom's body and his grip of the bride's shoulder suggest that he wants the photograph to capture the act of claiming his bride in this particular context. Looking intently into the camera, the man on the left wants to claim "possession" of his bride, as if to say: "She's mine!"

While the homoerotic complicity of the two men in this picture is much clearer than in the photograph on page 12, the fact that they are expressing this homoerotic desire by playing bride and groom (rather than just kissing as men) is significant. To elaborate on this point, I turn, once again, to the photographer's reading and comment on the encounter. As he did with the other photograph, el Madani is quick to describe the picture as a "session of disguise." The word *session* assumes a before and after, perhaps an amorous encounter that leads to marriage and to blissful matrimony. El Madani adds to his introduction that he's the one providing them with the necessary accessories. In doing so, el Madani becomes an accessory to their disguise. Not only does he capture it on camera, he also plays a crucial role in staging it. In fact, one could argue that it is the photographer himself, by his own admission, who officiates in this marriage. Given the social and religious context of Sidon, the conservative Muslim hometown of el Madani, where couples have to hide their illicit desires, especially in front of the camera (the heterosexual kiss), el Madani not only helps stage some sort of a gay wedding shot, but also officiates and blesses this wedding. By providing the men with the appropriate accessories, but also by taking their picture wearing them and performing the marriage, el Madani acts as the one who stages, photographs, and also witnesses the ceremony. Not only does the photographer in this case produce the homoerotic encounter as the normative category in visual representation, but he also enters the dynamic of disguise and play as the one who officiates, facilitates, stages, witnesses, and—as all marriages require—takes the picture.

From the normative nature of the homoerotic kiss in the photograph on page 12, to the complicity of the photographer in staging a gay wedding scene in the photograph on the preceding page, el Madani's work leads the reader to question, little by little,

the relation between reality and disguise as corresponding respectively to normativity and perversion, both at the social and sexual levels. Disguise, as it is staged and captured by el Madani's photographic practices, reveals much about the social and sexual mores of Sidon, about the influence of movies on people's fantasies, but also, and more directly, about the desire of the photographer himself. Hence, it becomes difficult to separate disguise and the nature of the encounter captured in these photographs from the desire of the photographer. One could argue that by staging and facilitating these disguises, el Madani, the master of ceremonies—in fact, the "wedding planner"—exposes culturally specific understanding of sexual and gender relations that are highly complex and that could not be reduced to the traditional binary oppositions associated with such cultural contexts (patriarchies, etc.). In fact, by exposing them in his studio, and later, in his lab, el Madani captures the ways in which social categories unravel when exposed to his flash, so to speak.

"That was completely acting."

In the photograph on the opposite page, two girls are "playing house," facing each other, with one of them wearing a wedding veil while the other is uncovering it. The girls in this picture appear to be sisters, based on the resemblance between them. It is important to note that unlike the photographs on the preceding pages, the postures of these girls' bodies do not correspond to the direction of their gaze. The girl uncovering her sister's veil is bound by the gesture to look at her sister's face. In other words, that which is being unveiled, the face, ought to be revealed to the unveiler; that is, the other sister. However, the two girls' bodies are facing each other while they look at the photographer. In this case, the act of unveiling does not correspond to the act of seeing or gazing. To unveil the bride no longer constitutes, given this photograph, an act of visual exposure that is restricted to the one who unveils—the other bride. In fact, the unveiler fails to look at that which gradually becomes exposed as an outcome of her action. The kind of disguise or acting practiced by these girls undermines the correspondence between the very nature of veiling in its relation to sight. Furthermore, it disrupts the relation between *halal* and *haram*, or the permissible and illicit, in a religious and sexual context, since it is the ritual of marriage that is at stake. The disguise of this session thus unsettles, both physically and philosophically, the relation between rit-

ual unveiling, on the one hand, and the act of seeing that which is being unveiled as means of claiming it, on the other.

Furthermore, by facing one another and gazing at the camera, it is as if the girls are seeking the approval of the photographer, in compliance with the directions that he provided for the success of the pose. The girl unveils her bride for the photographer to see and for the camera to capture. One wonders whether, in this photograph especially, "playing house" wasn't entirely el Madani's idea. He describes this picture with his initial and now familiar disclaimer, "That was completely acting." He then suggests that it is he who gave the girl the white dress to wear for the pose. Not settling for accessories as in the photograph on page 12, in this encounter el Madani gives the girl the white dress to act as a bride. However, while one girl is clearly disguised as the bride, the other has no accessories or props to mark her as the groom. The acting in this photograph fails to represent the ritual of marriage along fixed gender identities. While in the photograph on the preceding page the men were clearly playing bride and groom, in this photograph the acting does not entail a heteronormative gendering of the couple. El Madani's statement, "That was complete acting," gains a new meaning in this light. The "acting" does not correspond to the gender categories of marriage or to the ritual unveiling at the wedding. One could argue that the true protagonists of this shoot are not the girls, but "acting" itself. El Madani is not only the voyeuristic audience of this performance, but also the one exposing and deconstructing what happens to the acted ritual when exposed in this way. The pleasure of the photographer—as these girls are trying to please him—derives from his ability to capture this moment of social unraveling.

The desire for the photograph, expressed by going to the studio or by inviting the photographer to one's house, is a narcissistic desire coupled with a desire for disavowal in the context of disguise. This is clear from the pictures discussed above. However, what if the desire for the photograph itself becomes compromised? Something that could elucidate this reading even further is the fact that none of these commissioned photographs was picked up by the clients. In fact, the entire collection of *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* is composed of unwanted or forgotten photographs. In light of the recent war in Lebanon (July–August 2006) and the Israeli targeting of the south of the country,

Bandstand
Bank
Banner
Baptism
Bar
Barber
Barge
Barouche
Barrel
Bas relief
Basilica
Basin
Basket
Bath robe
Bathing suit
Bathroom
Bathtub
Battleship
Bay
Beach
Beach hut
Bear
Beard
Bed
Bedouin
Bedroom
Beer
Beggars
Bell
Bell tower
Belt
Bench
Beret
Bible
Bicycle
Billiard



“*That was completely acting. I gave them the white dress to play with.*” —Hashem el Madani

where the city of Sidon is located, it is difficult not to consider death as a possible culprit in the abandonment of these pictures. This association is tied to Lebanon's recent history and the fact that war ravaged the country in the 1970s and 1980s, around the time when many of these pictures were taken. The girls kissing in the first photograph might have died from an explosion as they were leaving el Madani's studio, while the sisters in the photograph on the opposite page might have died from a missile that hit their bedroom as they slept. Regardless of what happened, in reality or in the mind of the reader, it is important to think of the studio as the place where fantasies come to light.

Putting aside the political context and gruesome realities, were these photographs unwanted because they were deemed embarrassing, compromising, or merely silly, unworthy of the trouble or of the expense?

Perhaps there is something about disguise and the roles played by these individuals in front of the camera that could not be seen or shown in any other context. The photograph in this case is not meant to be seen or shown; the emphasis is exclusively on the act of posing for the photograph itself. The importance of the photograph can only come to light through an interrogation and a close analysis of its staging and production. The encounter and the memory of the encounter are all that these individuals retain in the absence of the photograph. If this were the case, what are the repercussions of this formulation on the question of narcissism, which is at the center of this model of representation? Simply put, what happens to narcissism without the photograph? I leave it open.

Tarek el-Ariss is a faculty member of the liberal arts department at NYU. He teaches literature, media, and Arabic and European intellectual history, and conducts research on representations of gender and sexuality in the Middle East. Tarek received his PhD degree from Cornell University in 2004.

NOTES:

1. All quotations of Hashem el Madani from Lisa Le Feuvre and Akram Zaatari (eds.), *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* (Beirut, Lebanon: Arab Image Foundation, Mind the Gap, and The Photographer's Gallery [London, UK], 2004).



Biplane
 Bird
 Black (person)
 Blackboard
 Blanket
 Blast furnace
 Blind
 Blouse
 Boat
 Bobsleigh
 BODY
 Bonnet
 Book
 Bookcase
 Bookstore
 Bottle
 Bouquet
 Bow tie
 Bowl
 Bowling
 Boxing
 Boy
 Bracelet
 Brand
 Bread
 Breakdown
 Breast
 Breastfeeding
 Brick
 Bride
 Bridge
 Brilliantine
 Broach
 Bronze
 Bucket
 Buddhism

This bridge called imagination

On reading the Arab Image Foundation and its collection

So here we are in Egypt “land of the Pharaohs, land of the Ptolemies, land of Cleopatra” . . . Here we are and here we are living, our heads more hairless than our knees, smoking long pipes and drinking coffee on divans. What can I say about it all? What can I write you?

—Gustave Flaubert, 1850¹

By Dore Bowen

The journey out

In the civil and criminal archives of Paris, one can study written notes found in the pockets of eighteenth-century illiterates who drowned in the Seine. Why would farmers, barge operators, and nomadic souls with no knowledge of written language have carried scribbled notes on their person? French historian Arlette Farge ponders this enigma, suggesting that these notes may have been part of a verbal process whereby thoughts were whispered to a member of the literate public who then transcribed them; these missives were then carried by travelers with other symbols such as good luck charms and memorabilia. Consequently, rather than being a form of self-expression, Farge suggests that this variety of written language ought to be considered an expression of the social and political currents of the time and, like the travelers and ferrymen and ferrywomen who used the river as their mode of transport, “these written words also made the route and the voyage.”²

Like any respectable historian, Farge accounts for what is known of this population and of the eighteenth century in general, yet her associative process also suggests that the minor figures who haunt the margins of the historical mise-en-scène cannot be detected within the surviving documents without the historian’s imagination. In another text, Farge employs a variation of this associative pro-

cess. Rather than giving historical events autonomy, she does precisely the opposite by turning to examine her own working habits—and this includes investigating the sensuality of the marked documents she holds in her hands—as well as the maneuvering that goes on in the research library for the best table, thereby refuting the notion that her historical subject is distinct from herself. Through this interweaving of past and present, document and researcher, the subject becomes more relevant to “us” while the lives and events that constitute history (for example, the figures who speak as a community from the chilly waters of the past) remain open to speculation.³

Imagination works with discontinuity by leaping over obstacles and lacunae in order to form a picture of the past in relation to seemingly unrelated events. When history is written this way, the reader is encouraged to make mental associations rather than follow the linear path constructed by historical narratives. In a sense, then, imagination acknowledges the ruptures, crises, and traumas that constitute the ebb and flow of temporality. At the same time, this gesture, this “leaping over,” while acknowledging the complexity of History, bears its own sense of smug certainty. The historian recuperates a moment past by using her imagination to flesh out the possibilities that documents merely suggest.

0137mi00148
 Studio Portrait.
 Egypt/Cairo, 1945
 Alban - Professional photographer
 Mikaelian, Georges Family Collection
 Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Leaning back on; Man; Woman;
 Multiple exposure
Genre: Photomontage; Studio photography
Photographic process:
 Negatif/black & white/support
 en verre/plaque au GBAG
 Size: 24 * 18 cm
 Aspect Ratio: 0.75
 Condition:



“The divisive sky, taken with the partitioning tree, separates the frame into quadrants, echoing the four figures. All of these formal elements make up the picture. Yet, ultimately, it is the absence of youth’s unease that I sense, the absence of summer and, since the photograph is dated before my birth, the world before my presence.”



0088kh00087

Outing around Chekka
Lebanon/Chekka, 1960
Anonymous photographer
Khazen, Fayza Salim el Collection
Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Glance; Young man; Young woman; Plain

Genre: Snapshot

Photographic process:

Positif/black & white/support papier

DOP-Papier a developpement à la gelatine

Size: 6.50 * 9.30 cm

Aspect Ratio: 1.43

Condition:

And this is precisely the danger; this bridge called imagination leads the reader here and there and back again, providing her with the sense of being an adventurer who crosses a divide while the ensuing story comes to take the form of a travelogue. Those figures imagined by the historian come to have a face, a body, and a context, and thus the “other” appears with a purpose that is provided by the historian’s consciousness and informed by his or her cultural attitudes.⁴ Given this bias, imagination seems an inappropriate tool for me, an American scholar, to use when working with the Arab Image Foundation—an archive that responds to the domination of Western imagination by collecting photographs of the Arab world *from* the Arab world.⁵ In addition, this particular moment—when conflicts threaten to engulf the region and the United Nations is busily drawing up an accord for a buffer zone between Lebanon and Israel—seems an inauspicious one to take up the Western imagination of the Middle East. And yet imagination is precisely what is at stake, what is harnessed, what is taken for granted, when I, or another, read across time and geography to consider the collection at the Arab Image Foundation.

What is imagination? In Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1940 *L’imaginaire* (published in English as *The Psychology of Imagination*) he explains that imagination is a form of consciousness that produces a mental image. For Sartre, this mental image is not “in” consciousness, nor is it an illusion or trick played upon the perceptual faculties. Rather, imagination is distinct from perception, with its own manner of relating to objects and people.⁶ For example, while the act of perception involves grasping a three-dimensional object in a particular time and space—and with all the variety of shadow and distortion this implies—Sartre notes that the act of imagination produces an image from something that is not present to perception. Whereas in perception an object is available for investigation (the viewer might, for instance, walk around the object and touch its contours), when the object is absent imagination steps in to produce a mental image. While the object that the mental image refers to may be dubious (like a unicorn), nonpresent (like a lost watch), or departed (like a deceased friend), it still exists in imagination. In this sense it is not illusory; imagination is a manner, though diminished, of relating to objects and people in the world. Sartre goes so far as to state that the imagined person is necessarily absent and this absence affords the fullness of

imagination. “Were Peter to appear in person the image would disappear.”⁷

As the word *imagination* suggests, this process revolves around images—be they concrete or phantasmatic. Since, in imagination, it is decidedly difficult to distinguish a picture from its corresponding mental image, Sartre uses the term *image-consciousness* to clarify the interdependence of these components. It is helpful to think of image-consciousness as two sides of the same coin; the term *image* falls on the side of the picture and *consciousness* on the side of the viewer. Consequently image-consciousness, or imagination, refers to a picture when it becomes enmeshed in a viewer’s consciousness. Which sorts of pictures prompt this process of entanglement? While different sorts of pictures prompt different kinds of imagination, analogic pictures, particularly photographs, encourage the viewer to form a mental image of an absent person. For example, when I look at photographs from the Arab Image Foundation, my looking and musing on the figures animates them. I sense them as sentient beings; I imagine the people and the situation to which the image refers.

Photographic and digital imagination

Looking at a Foundation photograph of two women and a man in the countryside, I observe from the title that they were on an outing around the coastal town of Chekka, Lebanon, in the summer of 1960. Since the formal clothes and comportment suggest an arranged date among couples, I assume the photographer to be the second gentleman in this quartet. When I slip into the site of this absent photographer, I notice that the woman nearest the viewing plane is looking either away or toward me—I am not sure. Is she shy? Flirtatious? While the similarly dressed woman behind her peeks at me with an austere and somewhat icy gaze, I am clearly in cahoots with the young man on the edge of the left frame; we have a plan and hence he acknowledges my look. My critical eye notices a tree trunk nearly dead center in the frame divides the man from the women, producing a clumsy composition that is crowned by the man’s cropped elbow on the left. Still, the black-and-white tones are interesting: the tanned, white-clothed figures stand out from the dark gray tones of the background. The blank page of the sky divides the frame into top and bottom, nearly decapitating the figures while throwing their

faces into relief. The divisive sky, taken with the partitioning tree, separates the frame into quadrants, echoing the four figures. All of these formal elements make up the picture. Yet, ultimately, it is the absence of youth's unease that I sense, the absence of summer and, since the photograph is dated before my birth, the world before my presence. (The starched white dresses of the women and the rolled sleeves of the man strike me as period details.) Although my mental image is inspired by photographic detail, it is also rooted in the seeming presence of these absent figures and, finally, what I take from this partial encounter when I turn away from the photograph. With this reductive process, does not the mental image veer perilously close to stereotype?

Youth, summer, Lebanon, countryside outing, 1960. All of these rest in my imagination as if caricatures and call forth new caricatures as well. And the danger of imagination is that, indeed, it generalizes. As Sartre writes of the mental image, it "teaches nothing."⁸ Since we already know what we will find in imagination (since nothing new is discovered), it is the exact opposite of an encounter with objects and people in the variable world of perception. And yet we begin a journey with an image already in mind, and we return home with pictures in hand. Imagination and perception are intertwined and act upon each other. Vilém Flusser describes this looping structure thus: "Images signify—mainly—something 'out there' in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions (as reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions). The specific ability to abstract out of space and time and project them back into space is what is known as imagination."⁹ This is why mental images have the power to alter perception and the material world, while pictures, particularly those that prompt imagination, are considered dangerous or desirable.

While difficult photographs—those that stray from the norms of composition, tonality, subject matter, and so on—challenge the viewer's *a priori* mental images and thus threaten to alter perception, conventional photographs do precisely the opposite: they abstract the four dimensions of time and space in forms that viewers already anticipate. For instance, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of Arab women (by photographers from both Europe and the Middle East) often depict the figures in a pose similar to that found in Orientalist painting. In the photograph above, the woman closest to me is pictured holding an urn in a reclining position, which reminds me of Eugène Delacroix's famous painting *Algerian Women in Their Apartments* (1834).¹⁰ At the same time, due to the particularity of the photograph, the image depicts a moment past—a moment when a photographer stood before a group of women in 1902 and snapped the shutter of an elaborate camera. As opposed to painting, the photograph necessarily depicts someone that existed.



(Opposite page)

0001ph00022

First from the left: Yvette Pharaon.

Lebanon/Zahleh, 1940 - 1945

Anonymous photographer

Pharaon, Alfred Collection

Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Painted set up; Boat; Man; Woman; Girl; Sea

Genre: Studio photography

Photographic process: Positif/black & whitesupport papier/DOP-Papier a developpement à la gelatine

Size: 6.80 * 10.30 cm

Aspect Ratio: 1.51

Condition:

0008ab00027

Lutfiyah Abu Izzeddin, Tafidah and friends.

Egypt/Cairo, 1902

Abu Izzeddin, Selim - Amateur photographer

Abu Izzeddin, Faysal Collection

Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Backdrop of exterior scene; Lyre; Woman; Jar; Oriental clothing

Genre: Group portrait

Photographic process: Negatif/black & white/support en verre/plaque au GBAG

Size: 17.80 * 13 cm

Aspect Ratio: 0.73

Condition:

Bullhorn
Bus
Bus stop
Bush
Businessman
Bust
Butcher
Butter
Butterfly
Buttock
Button
Cabin
Cage
Cake
Calendar
Camel
Camera
Camp
Can
Canal
Candelabra
Candle
Cane
Canned food
Cannon
Canoeing
Cap
Cape
Car racing
Carafe
Caressing
Carpenter
Carriage
Carrousel
Cart



Technically speaking, light bounces off an object or person, is channeled through an aperture, and is fixed on a light-sensitive surface. This is often described as the photographic index; the photograph captures a moment of light's reflection on a substrate surface. Thus, as derivative or Orientalist or normative as they may be, photographs indicate a slice of time. When a photograph is taken up as a mental image—when it enters the viewer's consciousness—it carries along with it the absent presence of objects and people

Finally, the absent presence of the photographer is inscribed within the photograph. It is taken from a particular point of view, in relationship to a body that stands *behind* the camera. This cultural structure informs the photograph without announcing itself and acts similarly to what Roland Barthes calls the photographic *studium*.¹¹ This is why the Foundation can boast of being “from” the Arab world; it matters who took the picture, where, and within what context.

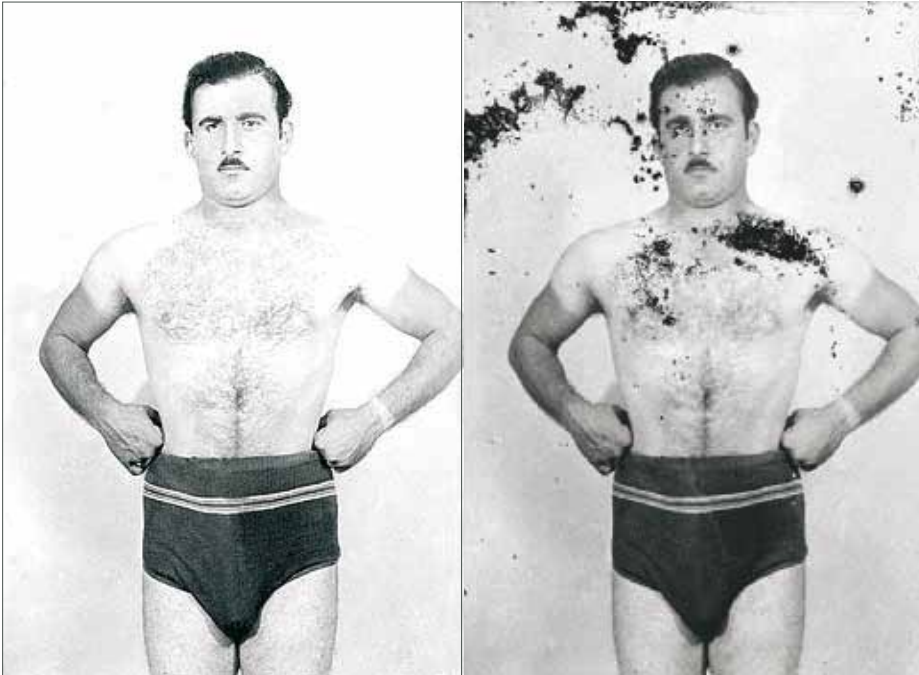
“For instance, late 19th and early 20th century photographs of Arab women (by photographers from both Europe and the Middle East) often depict the figures in a pose similar to that found in Orientalist painting. In the photograph across the woman closest to me is pictured holding an urn in a reclining position which reminds me of Eugène Delacroix’s famous painting *Algerian Women in their Apartments* (1834).”

that once existed. While it indicates a moment past, a photograph also refers to the absence of this moment in the present. Thus we often say that photographs are haunted, and surely they are. The photograph encourages a particular type of imagination—an imagination inhabited by specters that, nevertheless, tell us little about the world from which the photograph was taken.

Interestingly, the indexical traces that unwittingly sign the photograph often seem to be at odds with the impression the photographer had hoped to convey. For example, many of the Foundation’s studio photographs bespeak their own desperate attempt to outrun the indexical limits of the medium. This is particularly true with the photographs that fall under the keyword *backdrop of exterior scene* in the database.



Van Lee
©1950-1951



In the photograph on page 22 the exterior scene is clearly a backdrop and its edge is exposed in the lower right corner. Such “errors” bring us back to the moment and circumstance of the photograph’s taking—for instance, in a studio and not in a site of pristine nature as the backdrop suggests—and remind us that the photographer was forced to contend with a limited repertoire of studio objects to create the picture. This ten-

is available to anyone with a computer and Internet connection. What is a digital image as opposed to a photograph, and what sort of imagination does it inspire? Something so obvious as to be overlooked is that in the transformation of an image from photographic to digital form the image becomes mathematical data.¹² In this transformation the image no longer marks the photographic relationship to time, for the digital image circulates endlessly and has no origin. The aura of presence that was displaced by photography is erased or, more accurately, has ceased to exist. With the digital image we are no closer to or further from a moment in time. Consequently, new questions other than those generally asked of the photograph, such as, Is it an original or copy? When was it taken? Who is it of? must be asked of the digital image—questions such as, What is the compression of the image? What is the website address, and is it still active?

The imagination that results when engaging with a digitized photograph alters accordingly. No longer deliberating on what, who, and when, theorists, journalists, and artists alike turn to address dead links and conspiracy theories. The digital image rests within a network of images, and yet the

“While the reworked images seem timeless, the first scan—with blemishes and all—betrays the process of translation with its photographic accent. Consequently, although digital information produces a new kind of image which demands to be understood on its own terms, what is perhaps less obvious is the way in which digital images are conjoined to previous systems of ordering and imaging, and hence imagination.”

sion can make such photographs comical. (Paintings are not comical in the same way.) This is the crux of the photographs that fall under the keyword *painted setup*. These unusual group portraits are not meant to convince us of their veracity but, instead, the desire for and the impossibility of the scenario they picture.

What results when such photographs are digitized? The Arab Image Foundation is in the process of scanning, digitizing, and archiving its collection, and I am responding to (and reproducing) the digital images here. The original photographs are now protected—as are many photographs—in a temperature-controlled environment and thus are not easily accessible. On the other hand, the digital image, scanned from the photograph at various levels of resolution and placed on the Foundation website

digital image does not reside within an entirely seamless web of information. There are seams. For instance, at one point many of the photographs at the Foundation were reworked in order to erase the marks and aging spots that transfer from print to scan to file. While the reworked images seem timeless, the first scan—with blemishes and all—betrays the process of translation with its photographic accent. Consequently, although digital information produces a new kind of image that demands to be understood on its own terms, what is perhaps less obvious is the way in which digital images are conjoined to previous systems of ordering and imaging, and hence imagination.¹³

www.fai.org.lb <



also the Ford Foundation and grants from the European Union—is *in medias res*. This archive has not yet erased the marks and stains that bespeak the process of translation and consolidation.

The images from the Foundation are available on the website and can be accessed by keywords (among other categories). Having borrowed its system of classification from *Le Patrimoine Photographique* in Paris, the Foundation has begun the work of altering the keywords to fit its altogether different cultural context with a taxonomy that reflects the values of French patrimony, and this misfit is an essential element of the installation *Not Given: Talking of and Around Photographs of Arab Women*. By exhibiting the Foundation's images with their corresponding keywords, *Not Given* exposes the logic that undergirds the classification system—a system the Foundation is itself struggling to redefine through the addition and deletion of terms. *Activité Culturelle, Activité Productrice, Genre Humain, Milieu de Vie, Milieu Naturel, Termes Generaux, Vie Quotidien, Vie Sociale*. In English: *Cultural Activity, Trade and Industry, Human Elements, The Living Environment, Natural Environment, General Terms, Everyday Life, Social Life*. This set of terms was used by *Le Patrimoine Photographique* to classify itself and its Others. *African person* and *asian person* are the only classifiable "persons," and *religion* is a subcategory of *Social Life*. Clearly this system reflects the collection it once housed—photographs of twentieth-century Paris with its pigeons, squares, benches. Indeed, the bulk of the keywords seem to date from the post-WWII period with terms such as *industry* but also *poverty, prisoner, and ruins*—evoking the modernization of city-life but also urban devastation. *Animals* and *countryside* are a subcategory of *Natural Environment*, as if exceptions to the rule. Looking outward from Paris, the system of classification divides the world up according to an Occidental vision: there is no Middle East (nor is there a Maghreb or Levant region) listed under regions and the computer has not yet entered its lexicon. In order to update and account for cultural differences, which words will the Foundation keep? Which must go?

Archival imagination

The term *archive*, notes Jacques Derrida, is derived from the Greek *arkhé*. This term refers to the both the site—the container that houses the materials and where the archiving will commence—and the authority, the command, the law that the archive exercises. To this he adds *arkheion*, the name for the domicile, the magistrates, and the *archons*—those guardians of the container whose authority lends the archive its prestige and weight.¹⁴ This process of archival authority, its "patriarchic function," is at odds with the fluidity of the digital image, which slips covertly under the archons' patrolling eyes to flirt with interested viewers who lack the proper permission to enter this hallowed site. However, the question Derrida ultimately asks of the archive is more and more relevant in the digital age: Given the changes in the archive, what will be remembered, impressed upon consciousness, and what necessarily forgotten? Who is allowed to view the archive now that the boundary between public and private has shifted? The Arab Image Foundation—a young foundation whose collection is already the largest online image database from the Arab world, whose staff and members speak Arabic, French, and English equally well, and whose funding is derived from its founding members in Lebanon but



0081va00010
Portfolios □ A □ B □ C □ D



0081va00011
Portfolios □ A □ B □ C □ D



0081va00012
Portfolios □ A □ B □ C □ D

0038so00402

Patient after a surgical operation
performed by Dr. Labib Abou Dahr.
Lebanon/Saida, 1962
Chafic el Soussi,
Professional photographer
Soussi, Chafic el Collection
Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Stomach; Man; Igaal; Undressed; Hospital;
Patient; Wounded

Genre: Photojournalism

Photographic process:
Negatif/black & white/support souple
transparent/support polyester

Size: 9 * 6 cm

Aspect Ratio: 0.67

Condition:

these images are projected on two adjacent screens. In the second projection room, images that fall under keywords that express emotion or gesture are doubly accessed with either the keyword *man* or *woman*, and these gendered groupings are projected on opposing screens. The most striking examples are terms that yield nothing. For example, *caressing* + *man* yields no images, and *grimace* + *woman* likewise. Under *undressed* + *man* only one image emerges—a man holds up his shirt to reveal a scar to the camera—while the opposite screen features numerous images, many of scantily clad women from the studio of Van Leo, a Cairo studio photographer whose luscious retouched images depict women as if Hollywood stars with the appropriate lighting, backdrop, and effects. Following the logic of this system, it seems that women do not grimace and men do not caress. Do men undress? Only to reveal their wounds, apparently.

Under the combination *undressed* + *woman*, among the many images of Hollywoodesque women, one image shows up with both the keywords *undressed* and *veil* attached. The image is of a nude male child atop a veiled woman's shoulder. Here, a certain archival humor results when a fully clothed woman comes up under the term *undressed*, and an undressed child under the term *veil*. Furthermore, there is visual humor in juxtaposing the child (who is fully exposed to us) against a woman (who is hiding herself from us). Notice that the child's and the mother's hands meet atop her veiled head. In a sense, then, the veiled woman acts as a backdrop that allows the undressed child (which is not the same as a *nude* child) to show up. These dynamic oppositions—veiled/undressed, exposed/hidden—are grounded by the woman's right ringed hand, which is implanted firmly in the child's right breast. The keywords attached to this image are a valiant attempt to express the complexity of the image in six succeeding words—*woman*, *baby*, *oriental clothing*, *yashmak*,¹⁵ *veil*, *undressed*. To further complicate this story, the term *veil* is used by the Foundation to signify much more than that of the French *voile*. Eighteen pages of images come up under the term on the Foundation's website, and these include fashion and marriage veils, Christian and Muslim veils, full-length veils as well as short headgear. When the word *veil* is seen in relation to these columns of photographs, the heteroglossia of the term is evident and fractures any simplistic notion of "the veil."



Added keywords that I find interesting: *air hostess*, *rifle*, *camel*, *obesity*, *orange*, *pistol*, and *camp* (indicating a refugee camp). In the process of adding and reinterpreting keywords the photographs become a contested terrain in which notions of gender, the individual, the collective, the family, and cultural value are negotiated via the words used to describe them. The keywords introduce these cultural abstractions into the system by which the photographs are ordered and accessed while also acting like weighty fruits added to the slim genealogical branch provided by the French classification system. Fashion, for instance, trembles now under the burden of *aabaya*, *dishdasha*, *yashmak*, *tarbouche*, *kuffiyah*, *igal*, *ghoutra*, *veil*. And *daughter* has been added to the *family* branch. Suitable as this may seem, subtle questions emerge: How, for instance, can "daughter" be read off the image of a young woman? Does this involve reading the proximity of a young woman to a father and/or mother figure in the same picture? This added keyword, thought in relation to the fact that *communism*, *buddhism*, *hippie*, and *fascism* have been deleted by the Foundation, suggests that familial affiliation can be read off an image, while political and religious affiliation cannot. How contrary to Western viewing practices!



0045sa00004

Portfolios A B C D



0045sa00005

Portfolios A B C D



0069fa00927

Portfolios A B C D

0010sa00063

Fellah woman and child.
Egypt/Cairo, 1870 - 1880
Zangaki, Constantin and Georges
Professional photographer
Salam, Nawaf Collection
Copyright © Arab Image Foundation

Keywords: Woman; Baby; Oriental clothing; Yashmak; Veil; Undressed

Genre: Portrait; Studio photography

Photographic process: Positif/black & white/
support Papier/papier albuminé

Size: 28 * 22 cm

Aspect Ratio: 0.79

Condition:

For translation

If imagination references an absent presence, surely the Arab Image Foundation imagines with the ghostly presence of *Le Patrimoine Photographique*—an archive that encourages a certain regard, a mode of consciousness. The Arab Image Foundation also imagines with the absent presence of the original photographs, which are stored off-site. My imagination informs my reading of the photographs discussed here as well, and so we add to this list of absences the people and objects that I carry with me as mental images. Indeed, like the French and British explorers who sought the Orient, and using what Edward Said calls “traveling theory,” I have smuggled “my theorists”—Sartre, Said, Flusser, Farge, and Derrida—across borders, taken pictures, written notes, and returned home to receive my own postcard.¹⁶ Despite this obvious bias, I find this journey out, intimately related to the history of photography, to be productive. This quasi-fictional journey, on which many philosophers of the photograph—including Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and John Berger, as well as Foundation artists Walid Ra'ad and Akram Zaatari—have embarked, recasts the viewer's relationship to the Other by turning his or her attention toward what is not given to be seen in the image.

Finally, every journey references the location of the traveler. This is why Farge looks toward and away from a historical event in order to understand it. She anticipates her own miscomprehension when she, a contemporary historian, looks back two centuries. My looking at photographs from the Arab Image Foundation is not so different. In the photograph from Chekka (pp. 18-19), I find that the figure closest to me in the photograph mirrors my own position. She does not seem to be in collusion with the photographer like the young man to the left, but neither is she defiantly returning the photographer's gaze, as is the woman behind her. She is caught with her eyes in the process of closing or opening. “She blinked,” we say. Many of us are caught this way in photographs (although such photographs rarely make it through the first round of selections)—caught between being a posed figure for the camera and a viewer ourselves. The figure seems to be blurred because she is both looking, as the woman behind her is, and being seen, as the man to her left is. She is a translator between these two positions.

She is useful, this translator; for with this figure in mind it becomes apparent that the photographs housed at the Arab Image Foundation are translated many times over and that this text is just one more manifestation of this process. The photographs are transferred from family souvenir to historical artifact, from analogue photograph to digital image, from digital image to database citation (which is itself a hybrid system), from database citation to mental image, from mental image to written language, and so on. She is here between these pages, in a temperature-controlled environment in Beirut, and she is indexed in a classification system that is now available online. In each of these transformations a different sort of absent presence is offered up, and thus a different sort of imagination of the Arab woman.

Finally, this topic of translation forces me to reconsider my own identification with this phantom woman who, in a roundabout fashion, leads me to consider the difficulty of translation. Thus, I end with a phenomenological exercise (which I invite you to take) that speaks to the paradox of imagination by putting my identification with this figure under examination. First, I stare at the spots and colors my vision throws upon an empty screen or wall; I see myself seeing as I observe the distortion that vision necessarily involves. Now I look at the picture of the outing in Chekka, and back again to the empty wall. Again, back and forth from photograph to wall. Flipping between these two I realize that although I scrutinized this image at length, what looks like a woman in the foreground—a woman I somehow felt I knew—now appears as a stain, a reverse-image seen against the backdrop of the text, activated by my own desire and projected onto my current landscape. Gradually, I understand that although she was there in Chekka in 1960, this woman, this figure (I am not sure which), was never there *for me*. She makes an impression, surely, but as Sartre notes, “I can produce at will—or almost at will—the unreal object I want but I cannot make of it what I want.”¹⁷

Thanks to Tamara Sawaya at the Arab Image Foundation.

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NOTES:

1. Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 79. This quote is from a letter by Flaubert to Dr. Jules Cloquet, written while Flaubert was in Cairo with Maxime du Camp in 1850.
2. Arlette Farge, *La chambre à deux lits et le cordonnier de Tel-Aviv* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 32.
3. A. Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989).
4. Edward Said notes that Orientalist culture was not merely a product of colonialism but predated and informed the economic and military domination of the Orient. He writes: “I am interested in showing how modern Orientalism...embodies a systemic discipline of accumulation. And far from this being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systemic accumulation of human beings and territories.” Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 123.
5. Lynn Love writes that “The Arab Image Foundation...is the first attempt in the Arab world to change this external [Western] viewpoint. The method is to collect, conserve and exhibit work by Arab photographers who photographed locally, either as amateurs or professionals, and thus build an alternative to the visual history defined by the West.” Lynn Love, “The Picture Between,” *The Saudi Aramco World* 52, 1, January/February 2001. The Foundation states that “The Arab Image Foundation is a non-profit foundation that was established in Lebanon in 1996” and that the collection “includes photographs produced by professional, amateur, and anonymous residents of the region, now boasts more than 75,000 photographs from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, and from the Lebanese diaspora in Argentina, Mexico and Senegal.” www.fai.org.lb (July 2006).
6. Sartre states that in the imagination, “the objects become affected with the character of unreality. This means that our attitude in the face of the image is radically different from our attitude in the face of objects. Love, hate, desire, will, are quasi-love, quasi-hate, etc., since the observation of the unreal object is a quasi-observation.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), 174.
7. Sartre, *Psychology of Imagination*, 33.
8. *Ibid.*, 148.
9. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion, 2000), 8.
10. For an excellent history of this topic see Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
11. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). Barthes writes that the studium is a “kind of education (knowledge and civility, ‘politeness’) which allows me to discover the Operator; to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them ‘in reverse,’ according to my will as a Spectator” (28).
12. See Lev Manovich, “The Shape of Information,” www.manovich.com (November 2006).
13. Bernard Stiegler calls this hybrid image the “analogico-digital image” and notes that it “may contribute to the emergence of new forms of ‘objective analysis’ and of ‘subjective synthesis’ of the visible—and to the emergence, by the same token, of another kind of belief and disbelief with respect to what is shown and what happens.” Bernard Stiegler, “The Discrete Image,” in *Echographies of Television* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 152.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–2.
15. *Yashmak*: a long, narrow face screen or veil traditionally worn in public by Muslim women. For more see Encyclopædia Britannica Online, www.britannica.com/eb/article-9077856 (November 2006).
16. Edward Said, “Traveling Theory,” *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
17. Sartre, *Psychology of Imagination*, 192.



Van-Leo
CAIRO - 1989

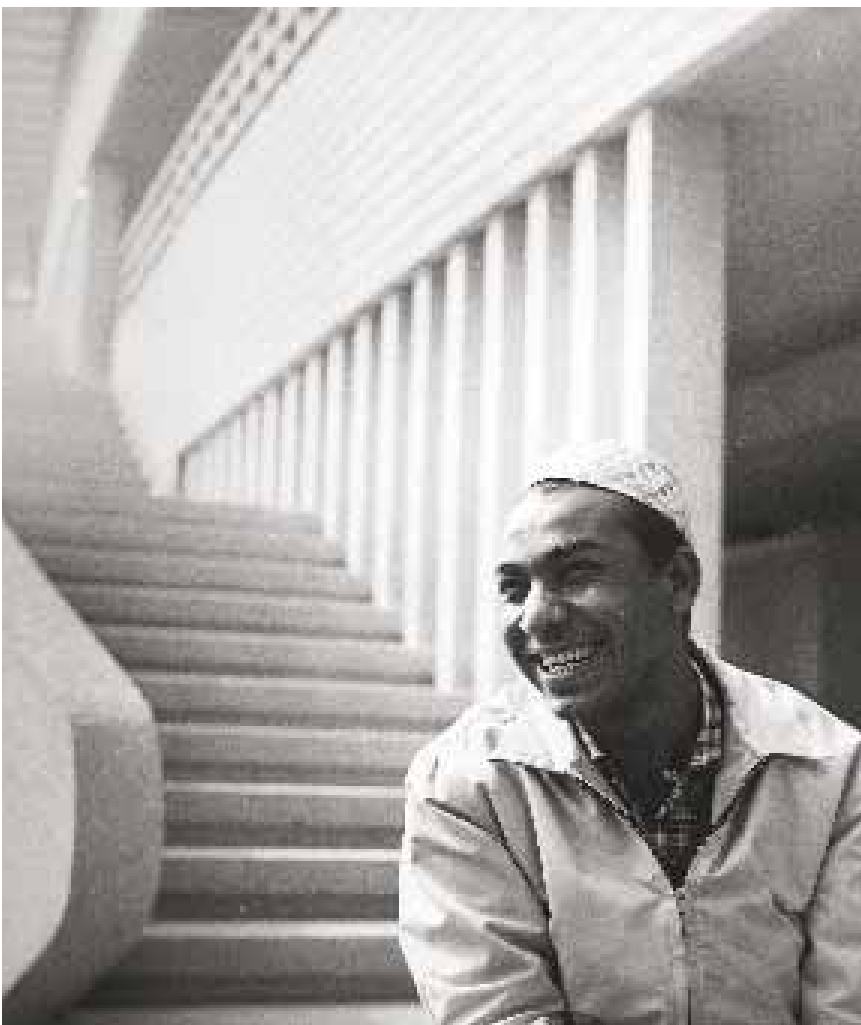


1 A group of friends celebrate in the badly damaged home where I was born.



2 Untitled

Pretense



4 On the set of the movie *Hikayat Hob*. [A Love Story]

It is never an easy task to catalogue and inventory photographic material for the purpose of building a collection. In fact, from a single photograph emanates an entire universe and a multitude of sensations. One can also read in it the photographer's intent as to the construction of the image and the goal he or she had in mind. Cataloguing refers to topics and keywords that are supposed to list that which we see in the image. Each photograph is catalogued according to various entries. For example, a naked baby lying on a cushion is classed in relation to the words: *cushion, naked, baby*. These keywords—supposedly comprehensive—accompany the photo, forming a curious landscape, which, in the case of this specific collection, seems to exclude the social, psychological, and even political dimensions.



3 Dancing party held at the Jerusalem Armenian Benevolent Union Club.

or reflection

Commentaries on photographs from the Arab Image Foundation

By Arlette Farge

I have chosen four keywords: *laughing, stretched out, enlacing, nudity.*

Laughing:

It is customary practice and considered good form to smile, even laugh, when being photographed. Is it simply a question of conventional laughter; or is it possible that behind the laughter other postures might be discerned? I have pinpointed five photographs: two group photos, one of men, one of men and women laughing; one of a couple dressed in traditional wedding garb; another of a man posing alone at the bottom of a staircase; and, finally, a photo of two men wrestling on a beach. These specific photographs, chosen among many, all touched me for various reasons.

The young man at the bottom of the staircase seems to be laughing heartily. There is a lightness to his warm, candid laughter that seems to harbor no ulterior motive—no doubt, he is happy. In any event, there is something forthright and mischievous in the way he offers himself to our gaze: dressed in simple fare, a fez riding on his head. A modicum of happiness here, nothing sexist inferred.

The group photos of women being playful seem so opposed to those of men assembled and distracting themselves. The women seem given over to female conviviality—their heads thrust backward, their throats nobly offered in a burst of laughter. In their laughter and playfulness is an astute blend of girlish dreams and seductive feminine bodies. The men grouped together seem masked. They are playing roles and surrender not a stitch of their rigid, strange masculine stature, which seems to want to confront something—What?

The different couples exhibit various smiles: the appropriate smile one gives in an official situation—one must obviously look happy, show one's teeth. A couple photographed in a real-life situation, that of dancing, shows a more uninhibited, blissful laughter, although difficult to interpret.



5 Untitled

Stretched out:

One takes a purely conventional photographic pose, like the group of young girls, one of them lying down in front of her friends. If someone stretches out in a languid pose, and it happens to be a woman, it could be read as seduction or even prostitution. There is a narghile placed nearby some of the girls, suggesting the sweet, sensual vapors that, it is said, the offered body exhales.

It is most surprising to see this innocuous term (*stretched out*) used to characterize photos in which the stretched-out body is, in fact, sick, weak, suffering, or in agony (be it a man or a woman). Or worse, is wounded, affected by war—intestines hanging out. Death is cruel, violent.

The cataloguing would have it so: to seduce, sell one's body, or to be horribly mutilated in war; killed by war. Nevertheless, the photos and even their cataloguing are at times surrealistic and yet recount a story.



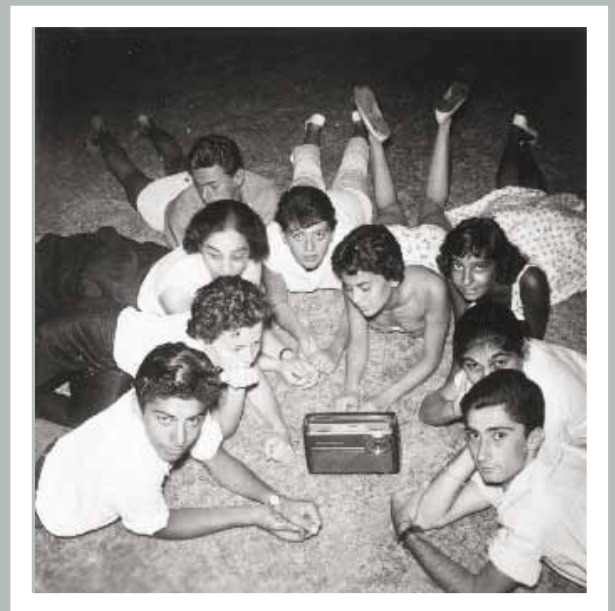
6 Second from the left: Talaat Mardam Bey and Rafat Mardam Bey, stretched out.



7 A prostitute.



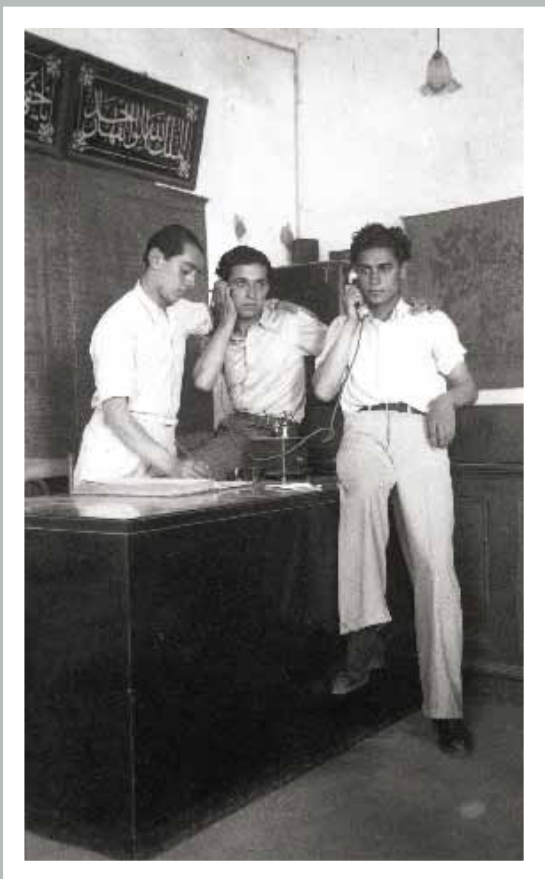
8 Killed for smuggling



9 Listening to the Hit Parade in the garden.

Enlacing:

The gestures of a mother toward her child are of the purest, most tender sort. One reads the naked simplicity of the given attention. On the other hand, the photos of couples one would describe as being enlaced (a part from a few) offer the disquieting image of a sort of distance between the two sexes: feminine submission, even fear or anxiety. And yet *love* appears as one of the keywords—a love that seems so harsh.



10 Staged studio scene.

There is another “enlacing”: couples of men and couples of women. Two men on a beach (father and son?) pose happily along the seashore, but a stiffness appropriate to their role is evident. Two women, looking at each other, are enlaced. They seem unhampered, daring: one is dressed up like a man, a cigarette in her hand. In fact, *cigarette* is one of the keywords. However, the modesty of the cataloguing reveals a story.

The photo of three men stirs me deeply: in an office, their hands on each other’s shoulders, looking anxious, their gazes intent, as they earnestly listen to the news coming from the telephone receiver. It is a stunning photograph! The given keyword is *office*.



11 Asma and Ada Mardam Bey.



12 To the right: Rafat Mardam Bey.



13 Untitled



14 Untitled



15 Untitled

Nudity:

The cataloguing here is not so complicated: either a baby is posed on a cushion, as in our grandmothers' time, or women offer their breasts, their bellies, their buttocks to the lens. If it is men who are naked, they are wearing their trousers and thrusting their torsos forward: this is the price of masculine seduction. One man is photographed fully naked, his genitals clearly visible. As if by coincidence, his complexion is rather dark, almost black. A man of an inferior condition (a slave, a native?) is posing in front of a stone structure, and the keyword, which seems blind to the connotation of this image, is *wall*.

What else is there to say if only that photographs and archives recount not the stories of the photos themselves but of our unbelievable prejudices regarding them.

Arlette Farge is director of research in modern history (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris) and professor of modern history at l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS).

Photos credits :

1 A group of friends celebrate in the badly damaged home where I was born, Palestine/Jerusalem, 1948 - Antranig Bakerdjian, Professional photographer - Bakerdjian Collection — 2 Lebanon/Chekka, 1945, Anonymous photographer - Fayza Salim El Khazen Collection — 3 Dancing party held at the Jerusalem Armenian Benevolent Union Club, Palestine/Jerusalem, 1956 - Antranig Bakerdjian, Professional photographer - Bakerdjian Collection — 4 On the set of the movie *Hikayat Hob* [A Love Story], Egypt, 1959 - Shadi Abdel Salam, Professional photographer - Abdel Shadi Salam - Shadi Collection — 5 From the right: Chaaban Barakat and Hankir, Lebanon/Saida, 1949 - Hashem el Madani, Professional photographer - Studio Chehrazad - Hashem el Madani Collection — 6 Second from the left: Talaat Mardam Bey and Rafat Mardam Bey, stretched out, Syria - Anonymous photographer - Hala Mardam Bey Collection — 7 A prostitute, Lebanon/Tripoli - Arabi, Muhamad, Professional photographer - Mohsen Yammine, Collection — 8 Killed for smuggling, Lebanon/Saida, 1954 - Chafic El Soussi, Professional photographer - Chafic El Soussi Collection — 9 Listening to the Hit Parade in the garden, Egypt, 1/8/1957 - Anonymous photographer - Leila Takieddine Collection — 10 Staged studio scene, Lebanon - Muhamad Arabi, Professional photographer - Mohsen Yammine Collection — 11 Asma and Ada Mardam Bey, Syria - Anonymous photographer - Hala Mardam Bey Collection — 12. To the right: Rafat Mardam Bey, Lebanon/ Choueir Dhour, 15/9/1927 - Anonymous photographer - Hala Mardam Bey Collection — 13 Studio photography, Iraq/Baghdad - Muhi Aref, Professional photographer - Muhi Aref Collection — 14 Studio photography, Palestine, 1940 - 1950 - Bedros Doumanian, Professional photographer - Bedros Doumanian Collection — 15 Studio photography, Palestine, 1940 - 1950 - Bedros Doumanian, Professional photographer, Doumanian, Bedros Collection — 16 Studio photography, Iraq/Baghdad - Muhi Aref, Professional photographer - Muhamad Muhi Collection — 17 A swimmer posing at the Reshi'n river side, Lebanon/Reshi'n, 1920, Camille El Kareh, Professional photographer, Mohsen Yammine Collection — 18 Studio portrait, Lebanon/Tripoli, 1945 - Antranik Anouchian, Professional photographer - Joseph al Hajj Collection All images © Arab Image Foundation.



16 Untitled



17 A swimmer posing at the Reshi'n river side



Unclassifiable *images*

About Soit dit en passant

By Paul-Emmanuel Odin



and words that permit a passage

She is a remarkable young woman; remarkably beautiful. These days when I try to form a mental picture of her that is neither faded nor crystal clear but rather like a limpid reflection—one that allows my imagination to wander and survive her absence, that allows life to continue gently stirring within—I inevitably find myself at a loss for words even though, it would seem, I acquire a greater command of language each day. —Sofiane Hadjadj, *Ce n'est pas moi*¹

*The police chief to the drunken girl, "My regrets!
Each day you seem to fall into another man's net."
The girl, "It is true. I am what I appear to be!
But, tell me, are you what my eyes seem to see?"*

—Omar Khayyam, *Rubayat*²

An Arab woman says that she does not look or sound at all like an Arab woman but rather a French woman. Another woman, on a film set, is photographed wearing a cowboy outfit, thus appropriating the outer dress of occidental, masculine identity. What are these gaps between the visible and the speakable, where an intractable real—vanishing or subverted, partial or deceptive—evades overcodified or stereotyped representations of identity? This is the line of questioning presented in an installation entitled *Soit dit en passant* by Isabelle Massu and Dore Bowen and conceived as a glance at the archives of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) in Beirut.



Let me first briefly describe the installation and its bipolar structure. Entering the space, you are greeted by a series of photographs under glass—not from the Arab Image Foundation. Each of these images is linked to a series of recorded interviews one can listen to through headphones. Two other spaces present slideshows of images from AIF.

Unclassifiable images

The order and presentation of the projected images make explicit the system of classification used by the AIF archivist. Each displayed keyword is immediately followed by corresponding images. One is engaged in a double process where, on the one hand, the classification imposes a *mise en regard* of the images in relation to each other and, on the other hand, the images extend beyond the keywords under which they have been "placed." This extension tarnishes the classification itself.

There is a double projection with one screen corresponding to the keyword *woman* and another screen corresponding to the keyword *man* linked by a common keyword. One reads the images in this binary with a certain expectation: either they will confirm or contradict that which the symbolic yet simple difference (woman/man) is supposed to settle as a mode of sharing, as a reading of the images. Under the keyword *undressed*, for example, there are multiple images of women, often eroticized, while only one image of a man, not eroticized (he is showing a scar). Why this asymmetry? What meaning does it hold? It produces a game of signifiers, but one that remains conjectural. Why are the photographs of the contortionist in his underwear not in this group? The work done by the Foundation's archivist, assigning this or that keyword to this or that image, necessarily appears incomplete because the sense of the images is unstable, plural. The keywords are never numerous enough, never precise enough, nor do they exhaust the sense of the images. The dialectics of the photographs in the projections produce only sensual, precarious effects, as it were. The keywords float, appearing only in this ambivalence of identity and masquerade. Any classification is always a necessary tool, yet it is but a tool. Thus, the images of Arab women erupt in their singularity under the linked sense seeming to dominate them, under the terms seeming to designate them. An intractable and unclassifiable real (as Roland Barthes defined the ontology of photography) is rumbling just below the illusions of the symbolic and the imaginary.³

If the relationship between the images in the slideshows tends toward ambiguity, ambiguity that points precisely to their irreducibility beyond any keyword or classification, it extends out like a mystery, the mystery of the story and of those who speak behind each image.

Words that permit a passage

In the interviews associated with the images not from the Arab Image Foundation collection, we find detailed responses to the problematics implicit in the Foundation's images. In the projections, for example, there are numerous studio photographs. In one of the audio interviews, a woman named Fatiha describes her experience of a studio photo session at the time of her marriage, and how her husband positioned his hand in a specific manner on her arm—like a bird. Fatiha also talks about her disappointment at having to pose in a short, stylish dress and not the long white one she had so dreamed of wearing. She also tells us that once they were married, he continuously beat her until she finally left him and that in the photo he constitutes a sort of “second curtain” superimposed on the gray background curtain. It must become obvious then that the image in and of itself is nothing, that only her words allow us to make out the origin, the space, the function or purpose of the screen or mirror in the story of a person who can only laugh or marvel, in her present life, at the image of herself from a distant time. This man here is, for Fatiha, nothing more than a second curtain, or simply the opacity of an obscure, anonymous background that is nothing other than a sort of void in relation to her existence that she, here, affirms.

In *Soit dit en passant* there are five such narratives around the idea of “being an Arab woman,” each with one or two personal photographs under glass and the recoding of a woman talking about her image, with her interview being prolonged by two exterior narratives that, in turn, displace the first point of view. If the initial story is built on an image as support, pretext, or alibi, the second person tries to talk about the first person's photograph without having seen it, having only heard the first person's interview; the third person must then try to describe the same photograph without having seen it, having only the second person's interview as information, and which was already spoken from a position of blindness, with only the first person's narrative as information.

We first see the photograph independent of any text; it is intriguing, it has a compelling vagueness. Then the recorded interview ties it to a personal story, and to history in general. The auditor does not necessarily realize that the second and third persons have not seen the photograph that has served as pretext, illustration, subject. Perhaps the wording, “She said that—,” is what points to a sort of torsion in the apparatus of the narrative.

What is the very specific relation that exists between the words and the images? What are the consequences? This three-phased narrative brings about an incremental loss of the initial image. It suggests what in French we call the *téléphone arabe* (the grapevine). In other words, the faculty of disclosure and circulation of a spoken message and, at the same time, its distortion, its representation. Is there only loss from one phase to the next? Is there not also an effort of truth, of accuracy that animates the words and the apparatus, in spite of passing from the visible to the invisible?

From one narrative to the next, the representations are displaced, distorted. They mutate, break down, disintegrate, or, on the contrary, are amplified, accentuated, crystallized. I cannot help but feel somewhat troubled by the fact that a personal story is exposed to such distortion, incomprehension, and judgment. During a collective discussion at La Compagnie Contemporary Art Center, where this installation was first shown, it was brought up that three strata are not sufficient; we remain too close to the initial person, and thus the disinformation and distortions are too violent. Whereas, if there were subsequent speakers, the initial person's image and narrative would truly lose themselves in a new metamorphosis—imagination would truly exist in and of itself. The overarching idea of this apparatus is perhaps utopian: to make visible the imagination and its stereotypes. Yet it is precisely there—where it presumes the disappearance of the original image in the transition of the imaginary images formed from one person's narrative to the next—that it becomes most interesting. A sort of seminarrative where the narrative cannot express everything and thus wanders elsewhere.



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Could this apparatus be made to include more strata, more loss, so that the successive narratives truly distance themselves from the initial one? Could the initial person return at the end of the trajectory and listen to the umpteenth interview relating back to her own interview without her recognizing the slightest trace of it, and thus comment on what she had just heard, disregarding her previous narrative and taking off in a totally different direction? Would the symbolic circle, once closed, generate an interesting dialectics, or would it tend to seal off the space—that of distance—that had precisely been opened? How to resolve the tension of this apparatus that invokes the violence of stereotypes, the illusion of fiction, digression, in such close proximity to the fundamental privacy existent in the lived experience?

A theoretical enigma, that of turning image into word. It is precisely what is at stake with the poetic word, as expressed by Maurice Blanchot in a famous passage from *The Space of Literature*: "In literature language itself becomes completely an image; it is not a language that contains images, neither does it express reality in shapes and forms, but is its own image, an image of language, isn't it."⁴ We are left with only word-images, images made of words—a difficult thing to visualize but exactly like unreal images of an *other* subjectivity that are written down. I try to track the point of friction in these unrestricted words and their improvisational form as it grafts itself inside a structure where the image ultimately is lost.

There is something else present here. The first person is no longer carrying the story alone; those who follow her actually take over from her narrative and its scope. The words, the recitations, the personal narrative of the photograph find their meaning in the fact that the one who hears them is already engaged in listening to them, and engages a second time in giving her or his narrative. Seen from this angle, the second and third persons are not neutral commentators but rather share with the first person the responsibility of a story, the story. That is what I find most appealing in this principle of words. It brings to mind the installation *Granada* by Graziela Taquini, presented by La Compagnie in October 2005, where a woman speaks to the camera about the torture she was subjected to, but it is another person, off camera, who whispers to her and tells her what to say (which is the text of her own testimony in front of an official commission of inquiry into torture).

Granada introduces a distance between the "me" of the person-victim-witness and the "I-who-am-speaking," and in the form of a testimony blows up the individual isolation of the "me." Paradoxically, in the *dédoublement* of her words, the victim testifying is a second-time victim of the violence she experienced and, at the same time, escapes that victimization since it is, henceforth, shared by another and testifies to this sharing, to that which in the testimony becomes community.

In its own way, *Soit dit en passant* also questions the word at its root, as an area of truth that never, in its stammering or its erring ways, can completely express itself, and where, nonetheless, a testimony, a community of words, is formed.









The veiled image

If the projections offer multiple aspects of the image of the Arab woman (the exhibit also includes rich documentation in the form of books with reference to questions closely related to these images), the photographs that particularly hold our attention are those of women wearing veils, from the most opaque, concealing veil to the sheerest, most erotic. Every imaginable assortment of veils, from the most traditional to the most stylish, is seen here.

It seems to me that we must not separate the manner of wearing the veil from the historic conditions that at some moment brought about a liberalization of women, allowing them to rid themselves of the obligation of wearing a veil, or wearing it as a fashion accessory. There is something at play here involving the social classes, women's economic and cultural independence, but in no way can this erase the fact that the veil is of religious origin, and that the skimpy veil or the erotic fabric is something else altogether. Between these two poles, the image can often be misleading. There is ambiguity, but there are also two distinct areas offered in this exhibit that can be probed.

Fethi Benslama, in his article "The Veil of Islam," in *La virilité en islam* (Masculinity in Islam), retraces the religious origin of the veil in the Koran: its role as a prohibition (it is not a sign or symbol, but that which precisely prevents the sign of the woman from appearing). It also shows the violent relationship that French society or the Occident has with the veil in trying to present itself as a power that forbids the prohibition of the veil.

If there is an interest in fighting against servitude or injustice that produces a prohibition of the other, there can be no space wherein to set forth the prohibition which could attack that prohibition. There is no universal intervention because there is no master of language. There are but interposing words. But the Occident's myth of identity is pegged to this idea of producing the prohibition of prohibitions.⁵

During my interview about an image I could not see, I was totally unaware of just how accurately I had put it when I said, "We are all Arab women."⁶ The exhibit *Soit dit en passant* remains thus a tentative attempt to extricate ourselves from this signifying structure wherein we struggle, wherein we sigh, wherein we love. Whether in the collection and its classification or the interviews about

the visible/invisible image, we are thrust back into an unmanageable depth, that of an intractable real.

The questionings of representation, whatever they might be, are essential because of what they reveal about an existing story. Yet if no dimension of political and economic thought is associated with these questionings, does it not create an impasse? Are not minority questions (those concerning Arab women, or even homosexuals, the environment, racism, etc.) immediately recuperated and absorbed by neocapitalism, itself devised as luring, triumphant liberal democracy? The thoughts expressed in the interviews speak directly to the relationship of the subject to the colonial (French–Algerian) and Israeli–Arab conflicts, which is precisely why today—perhaps more than at any other time—such an urgent need to surpass these questions is being felt. In other words, if I, as a man, were profoundly shocked to realize just what violence a man actually allows himself to inflict upon a woman, which *Soit dit en passant* bears witness to, this fact incites me to open the question of the horizon, as it might present itself on the heels of this realization. We face a problem here that I feel must not be overlooked and that specifically touches on the project of cultural studies: that originating in the social philosophy of Marx and yet now distanced from it.⁷

Feminism, like all other minority or local demands, constitutes for me a false political horizon. Not that I in any way deny the reality and necessity of its existence, yet it seems to me more important to pose the question of how we might rethink and recognize the inextricable nature and relationship of domination to representation and economy. Slavoj Žižek convincingly answers this question from an ultra-Marxist, even Leninist perspective.⁸ According to him we must move beyond the *postpolitical*, which has politicized nonpolitical domains and depoliticized political economy—which must be repoliticized.

Paul-Emmanuel Odin is an artist, a new media critic, and a member of La Compagnie, Contemporary Art Center in Marseille.

NOTES:

1. Sofiane Hadjadj, *Ce n'est pas moi* (Algiers: Editions Barzakh, 2003).
2. Omar Khayyam, *Rubayat* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).
3. *Intractable* is a central term in the work of Roland Barthes. It was the linchpin of a nontheorizable *jouissance*: on the one hand, that of the lover from a Lacanian perspective; on the other hand, that of real Photography, in its essence, as an intractable punctum (as opposed to the studium). "Such are the two paths of Photography. It is for me to decide whether to submit its spectacle to the civilized codes of perfect illusion, or confront in it the awakening of intractable reality." Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire* (published in English as *Camera Lucida*) (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Gallimard-Seuil, 1980), 184.
4. Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard-folio, 1955), 31–32.
5. Fethi Benslama and Nadia Tazi, *La virilité en Islam* (Paris: L'aube-poche essai, 2004).
6. There is a famous slogan from the 1968 student movement in Paris: "We are all German Jews," which has been adopted by more recent groups and adapted to their situations (the homeless, prostitutes, homosexuals), and which forcefully expresses a collective appropriation and solidarity wherein the collective is formed of its many different parts, thinking them as a whole and not separately. There is a certain disruption between the expression "We are all Arab women" and the person expressing it—in this instance, myself, a white male, who is also HIV positive and homosexual—that interests me.
7. There is, as it were, a gesturing toward affirmation, a movement that begins with the affirmation of this nonseparation between the whole and the part, and that aims to transform the oppressing power of the whole over the part into a dialectic power. Any formulation of "We are all..." becomes part of a series of other formulas of this type, both past and future. Further, there is a group of women (Soraya, Fatima, Messaouda, Zineb) from the Belsunce neighborhood of Marseille for whom I feel a certain empathy and sympathy, after having spent time with them over a period of three years, cooking and sharing life experiences.
8. Regarding this subject see Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Marxisme et post-colonialisme : une liaison dangereuse?" *Dictionnaire Marx contemporain* (PUF, coll. Actuel Marx, 2001).
9. Slavoj Žižek, *Bienvenue dans le désert du réel* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).



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Out of Beirut

at Modern Art Oxford, May 3 – July 16, 2006

Review by Clare Grafik

In Beirut some features of “the real” must be fictionalised to be thought.—Jalal Toufic

The *Out of Beirut* project has a number of components: an exhibition (the focus of this article) curated by Suzanne Cotter, Senior Curator at Modern Art Oxford; a symposium; and a publication. In addition, a program curated by Christine Tohmé, a formidable force in the Lebanese cultural sphere well known for her *Home Works* project, provides a multifarious festival of films, symposia, talks, and projects in Beirut, the latest of which took place in November 2006.

The exhibition at Modern Art Oxford in the U.K. brought together a number of filmmakers, architects, photographers, and writers (and many individuals who work across a range of artistic disciplines) who either predominantly work in Beirut or belong to a generation that travels between Beirut, Paris, New York, London, and other international cities. Many of the artists, such as Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joriege, Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad, Tony Chakar, and Lamia Joreige, have developed deservedly high profiles on the international scene.

As an exhibition, *Out of Beirut* began with a wall text that included a chronology of key events running from 1920 to 2005 tracing the political history of Lebanon and the surrounding region, fraught with tumultuous political upheavals and complex territorial (re)negotiations. Beginning with the creation of the Lebanese Republic in 1926, it charted the French and British occupation in 1940 and the long civil war running from the mid-1970s to 1990. This information is a useful reminder of how—and perhaps why—the recent civil war defined Beirut's international image as a city marked by conflict. It also helpfully informs the diverse artistic practices in the exhibition that in their turn offer an antidote to the simplification of history that such a chronology naturally inflicts. Each individual artist's work provides a meditation on history through the lens of the personal present.



The first work in the show, *Tout un Chacun* (Each and Everyone, 2005), contrasts neatly with this linear history through a series of color photographs by Gilbert Hage (b. 1966, Lebanon). They are ostensibly portraits taken in front of a wall covered with posters and political slogans, but the ten color photographs become inflected through the graffiti on a wall, which includes phrases such as "Ens Assassins," "Free Lebanon," "Die by the fuckin gun, live by the gun," and "Syrian Intelligence Come Get Me." As a result, the historical facts are filtered through the complexity of personal experience and a space of collective confession. Solitary people, children brandishing flags, and older people holding photographs stand in front of this wall, which is only gradually revealed as a huge plinth that supports the base of a bronze statue, looming silently in the background. The people are in fact standing in front of the Monument to the Martyrs during demonstrations following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005.

This key moment, the death of Prime Minister Hariri, is also charted by the next work, *Pourquoi N'Arrêtes-Tu Pas De Mourir?* (2005), a noisy video work that captures a mass demonstration. In a

tion. These visible images, by Paula Yacoub, with the final realization in collaboration with Michael Lassera, show a series of unremarkable urban spaces with piles of rubble against a backdrop of what recalls the pockmarked and partly demolished streets of late eighties Beirut. They appear somehow incomplete, and there is no sense of artistic intentionality or narrative. Taken by Yacoub during her time as a Gamma agency reporter in the late 1980s, they appear striking in their lack of drama or information. Yacoub and Lassera write eloquently in their essay "A Brief Journey Toward Scepticism" about the photographs as "a digression through images; an implicit deviation from the practice of documentary."

The first of the other two videos, Lamia Joreige's *Houna wa roubbama hounak* (Here and Perhaps Elsewhere, 2003), is a series of interviews the artist sought out while traversing the former dividing line between East and West Beirut. The location is significant, as militia checkpoints were previously set up on this route and thousands of people are known to have "disappeared." She asks the people she meets whether they know of anyone who has been kidnapped there during the war:

mentary, and leads to Bernard Khoury's video work in the next room. A black-and-white grainy video entitled *B018, Music Club* (1998) shares the muffled thumping soundtrack with the previous work, while this time the sound emanates from a nightclub DJ. The footage captures young Beirut residents being checked by bouncers, in a manner that recalls the very different "checkpoints" described previously in Joreige's video. The area of the club called The Quarantine was once used to house thousands of refugees before the civil war. It was the site of massacres and bombings and was eventually bulldozed. As a newly reconfigured entertainment space, the sense of excavating the city—literally or figuratively—is neatly turned on its head, as the club sits in the concrete surroundings of a subterranean space topped by a car park. In this case, it has become a bunker for liberation rather than for protection.

A small side room adjacent to the *B018* work is by architect, writer, and artist Tony Chakar. *A Window to the World 8 (An Architectural Project)* (2005) is a dense installation of wall-mounted texts overlaid onto architectural blueprints of domestic spaces on varying scales. One excerpt

vox pop documentary format, Ziad Abillama questions citizens participating in these marches. Their replies indicate a surprisingly sober and self-reflective atmosphere, their statements and questions to the camera punctuated by crowd noises and the occasional mobile phone. They say things such as: "I think history is repeating itself. Should we not get out of this vicious circle?" "This is a warning addressed to all of us. If Hariri turns out to be a martyr, let it be. At least his death may be of use." "Is Lebanon terminated or accomplished?" "The death of a politician is an act of war." "Do you believe in the masses?" And "I'm not here for Hariri, I'm here for Lebanon." The ideal of martyrdom, it seems, has a more ambivalent legacy, one attached to a past, which many would rather not repeat.

The next room upstairs includes three works, only one of which is immediately visible: *Summer '88* (2006) is a series of black-and-white photographs along one wall. Sounds from two other video works can be heard in muffled abstrac-

What evolves is less a documentary and more an accumulation of fragmentary memories and stories, which are given sometimes freely, sometimes reluctantly or refused altogether. Joreige writes, "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, parts of an incomplete whole and assembled subsequently. Rearranged and re-interpreted, they border fiction." The work produces a disarming psychological map of the city.

The second work is Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's *"Distracted Bullets" Symptomatic Video # 1* (2005), which shows a nocturnal panorama of Beirut. The image captures a beautiful city light glinting in the distance, as if seen from a far-off spaceship. The muffled and ambiguous sounds could come from fireworks, explosions, or gunshots and permeate the hermetic atmosphere with sounds that could either be celebration or conflict. The work is suggestive, more poetic than the docu-

reads: "Given the right circumstances, the appropriate standpoint (preferably with one's back against the sea) and the correct angle of vision (preferably looking obliquely), one would have the distinct feeling that all the buildings in Beirut are packed-up and ready to leave." A central table onto which a video is projected features an eye in a digital collage set against a pockmarked wall. Chakar's work is perhaps the most varied in its realization in *Out of Beirut*, and the e-mail conversation with philosopher and writer Stephen Wright and Walid Sadek in the publication provides an important reference.

In the last and largest gallery, Ali Cherri's video *Un cercle autour du Soleil (A Circle Around the Sun)*, (2005) uses digital collage to turn details of Beirut's buildings and urban landscape into a psychological space. Fragments of the city are reconfigured as a collage of juxtaposed parts. Extracts from the poetic memoir of Yukio Mishima entitled *Sun and Steel* (1968) serve as a soundtrack.



Top: Bernard Khoury, *B018, Music Club*, built 1998.

Center: Walid Raad still from the single-channel video *We can make rain but no one came to ask*, 2006.



The work is particularly intriguing as it explores the unexpected difficulty of adjusting to life after the war. He states,

During my early years I loved darkness. Especially during the fighting I used to close the curtains in my room, turn off the lights and get under the bed covers.... I went into a process of disappearing into a nowhere of my own making. I was disappointed the day they announced the war had ended. I remember that day when I reconciled with the sun.... Standing there, in the blaze, I realized that now, the sun could take over the mission. The sun could precipitate everything into ruin.

From this ruin we move to Akram Zaatari's photomontage of a hillside covered in explosions. *Saida, June 6th, 1982* (2003–06) replicates and somehow intensifies the memory Zaatari has as a sixteen-year-old boy of watching the Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon. The work uses photographs the artist took at this time. While it

shares with other works in the show a concern with interweaving time, space, memory, document, and fiction, it intensifies rather than dissolves a moment and event into hyperreality. In contrast, Walid Raad's piece, *We can make rain but no one came to ask* (2006), pulls the visual rug out from under our feet with a collage of strips of images, details of larger objects interspersed with timelines or footnotes that are cut off and half-hidden on the top and bottom of the page. It is the visual coalescence of Raad's research—in collaboration with Tony Chakar and Bilal Khbeiz—around a car bombing in 1986. Using reports, notebooks, and photographs, Raad records the political motives and consequences of the incident while frustrating our reading of it through the final realization.

The show concludes with an installation from Jalal Toufic, *Mother & Son: A Tribute to Alexander Sokurov* (2006). This again has the sense of an archive, with family photographs, memorabilia, and a sense of domestic space. In comparison

to Chakar's architectural installation it has softer edges, including as it does a report from British reporter Robert Fisk describing a dead pregnant woman, and the visceral reality of war peeps through once again.

It was with extreme trepidation that I embarked on this review, which coincided precisely with the moment Lebanon was once again plunged into conflict. "Politically engaged" art practice rarely coalesces so explicitly with a real political situation. There is usually a period of digestion and a distance giving culture time to consider its relation to specific events. The work in *Out of Beirut* becomes all the more urgent and powerful as a consequence, although the way current events inform artistic practice is far from resolved.

Clare Grafik is curator at The Photographers' Gallery in London.

Through Lebanese eyes:

Recent documentaries by Lebanese women

Review by Irina Leimbacher



Why is it that in an age of information glut, digital immediacy, and broadband access, we seem as ignorant as ever? Why, as a society, do we seem at least as biased and complacent as we were before “global” became the defining term of our epoch? How, in ethical and political terms, has the massive swell in the circulation of images and sounds really affected us? As an inhabitant of our “global” planet and a scholar of documentary film and video, I find these questions troubling. I often wonder what a real ecology of documentary media would look like. “If the *raison d’être* of documentary images is to move, inform, or provoke, and sometimes—by unsettling assumptions or suggesting new ideological frameworks—to influence behavior or transform our very being, why hasn’t their effect been more palpable?”

In July and August 2006 a war was waged in Lebanon and northern Israel. Approximately 1,500 people were killed, mainly Lebanese civilians in-

cluding a huge number of children. Over 900,000 Lebanese (a quarter of the population) were displaced, and much of South Lebanon and Lebanese infrastructure was reduced to rubble. This, indeed, was a “global” event, involving not only countries in the region but our own government’s refusal to call for a cease-fire and its direct and indirect support of Israeli firepower. That summer I had the opportunity to see a number of recent documentaries made by Lebanese, Palestinian, and Israeli filmmakers.¹ Unfortunately, unlike cluster bombs and other nefarious military equipment, none of these works are in wide circulation, if they circulate at all.

Images, like stories, are constructed, and in turn, they construct us, our imagination, our beliefs. Images and stories have, and refer to, collective histories, which they also provoke and create. Sometimes images and stories get under our skin, they prick us, they shift, enlarge, or intensify our engage-

ment with certain aspects of the world. The name Lebanon was all over the press in the summer of 2006, as were the descriptions of war, the numbers of dead, the accusations and blame.

Three films—all shot before 2006—by Lebanese women offer a way to see images and hear stories of, from, in this landscape. Complex stories, told simply. Conflicting images, with incongruous desires. Not one image or story, but many, are depicted in each of the films, and they all suggest Lebanon, and the world, as a site of multiple, competing stories and images.

These three documentaries create an interesting complement to the exhibit *Not Given*.² They are by young Lebanese women looking at and recounting their present at the beginning of our 21st century, engaging with and exploring complex historical and personal meanings of place—whether it be a home, a village, a border,

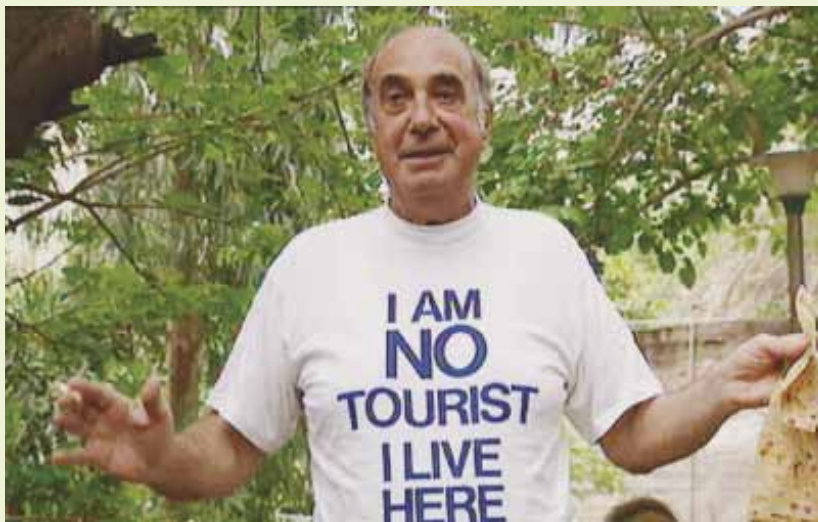
a public square, or a country. Formally, they are unassuming, adopting an observational or first-person essayistic style, punctuated by interviews or conversations. Together they offer us the gift of images, and stories, and with that gift, the possibility of broadening our engagement with the world. They include stories not everyone will want to hear, and images that may unsettle or provoke; yet they are images and stories that shape the world we share. Giving them our attention reaffirms our connectedness to and joint responsibility for this fragile, unstable globe all of us call home.

Dalia Fathallah's *Mabrouk at Tahrir, Chronicle of a Return to South Lebanon* (2002) examines the daily gestures and political complexities of life in a small village in South Lebanon. The Israeli army,

After accompanying the Chahrour family on their voyage back south, Dalia Fathallah chronicles the life of this village less than ten miles from the Israeli border over a year-and-a-half period. During this time, some interpersonal issues are resolved while others are not, political campaigns are waged, and elections are held. What makes Fathallah's film remarkable is the care, attention, and respect it brings to all of its myriad subjects and her ability to portray a complex slice of political and social life without succumbing to oversimplification or the desire to create resolution. Four years after the film was completed, it remains an extraordinary portrait of a southern Lebanese village and the collective histories, individual emotions, and political allegiances that shaped it at the time. Today this village has certainly been transformed once again, perhaps even obliterated.

ing an intriguing tapestry of reflections on what it might mean to have, be denied, or claim a nation, a homeland.

Like Syrian filmmaker Mohammed Malas in his eloquent and tragic documentary *The Dream*, Arbid portrays her subject as a complex amalgamation of varied and often conflicting positions, desires, and fantasies, both individual and collective. Palestine/Israel is never entered, never touched by the soles of her feet or the lens of her video camera. Instead, it is its enduring and powerful distance, its capacity to provoke anger, awaken memories, encourage dreams, and open wounds that resonates throughout the film. As cause for resistance or as evidence of submission, as grounds for righteousness or for sorrow, it continues to vivify the imagination of an entire geographical region.



which had occupied the region from 1978 to 2000, withdrew in May 2000. Many inhabitants who had been forced to leave the area then returned, and "mabrouk at tahrir," literally "congratulations on the liberation," was an oft-repeated exclamation. The Chahrour family had fled in 1988—two sons had been active in the resistance and spent time in prison, as did their sister and mother. Immediately after the Israeli withdrawal, the family returns from their exile in Beirut to find their home looted and their village in a period of political transition. The neighbors with whom they shared a courtyard are still there, but the tensions between those who were forced to leave and those who, like their neighbors, chose to stay and in some cases collaborate, run high. Anger, resentment, and suspicion define many of the local relationships, while accusations of collaboration or complicity, and political rivalry between Hezbollah and the communist militants, are a constant of village life.

Danielle Arbid is known in the U.S. for her award-winning feature *Maarek Hob* (In the Battlefields, 2004), which explores class, desire, and politics as experienced by a twelve-year-old girl living in the midst of the Lebanese civil war. Her filmography, however, includes a number of documentaries and narrative and experimental shorts, most of which have never screened in this country. *Aux Frontières* (On Borders, 2002) is a personal and essayistic road movie, in which she, with her cameraperson, sets out to trace the borders of what is today Israel and/or Palestine. Driving through and across South Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan all the way to Egypt, she seeks out and speaks to those who live along the border and who look across it daily, with longing, anger, commiseration, or hatred. Her path crosses a multitude of others' from very diverse walks of life and persuasions—including refugees from 1948, Hezbollah activists, fishermen, and landowners. With each of her interlocutors she listens and films, weav-

Arbid passes nearby, hewing close to, though never crossing into, this land, this fantasy, this catastrophe. And as she passes, she listens. She does not judge but opens her camera, and therefore us, to the emotions and passions that inhabit this topography.

Beirut Diaries: Truth, Lies and Videos (2006) is the newest film by filmmaker Mai Masri (*Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*, 2001; *Children of Shatila*, 1998). Awarded the prize for best documentary at the Institut du Monde Arabe Film Biennial last summer, it follows an eclectic and multi-confessional youth movement that emerged in the aftermath of the gruesome assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. With massive protests by people of all political persuasions in Beirut after the assassination, groups of mainly young members of different political parties, united in their demands for a thorough investigation of the murder and their anti-Syrian stance,



created a tent city in Martyrs' Square. Situated near Hariri's tomb, the square was also on the dividing line between the Muslim and Christian sections of Beirut during the civil war. Those who created and occupied its tent city vowed to work together to put an end to sectarian divisions in Lebanon, and to stay in the square until the truth about Hariri's assassination was publicly revealed.

Masri's film relates events in and around this tent city over a three-month period. Nadine Zaydan, a 25-year-old university student who came to the square to participate in the protests and stayed, is the film's guide to the people, points of view, and politics of this lively sociocultural microcosm, and her emotional and political trajectories form the backbone of the film. The life portrayed is one of playful enthusiasm, discussion, debate, and the occasional argument leading to a fight. Ranging from adolescents to university students to young militants from many backgrounds and parties, with sporadic older peace activists or ex-combatants as well, the inhabitants and visitors to the square are imbued with the passions and euphoria generated by the possibility of political change, a new openness to dialogue, and the attempt to create a social movement bringing together historically opposed groups.

In part due to her choice of an observational approach and a single main narrator, Masri's film doesn't engage in substantive political analysis or provide new insight into the intricacies of Lebanese politics. Nevertheless, it presents a fascinating portrait of a diverse group of recently politicized young people engaged in responding to and reflecting on their society's political crisis, a crisis which, of course, extends far beyond the borders of Lebanon to include political manipulations not only by Syria but also by the U.S. Indeed, even Nadine and her fellow protesters are accused of playing into the hands of U.S. and Israeli interests, and some of the most interesting scenes focus on the more difficult discussions between the protesters and those who do not share their views or their approach, including the mothers and families of Lebanon's many disappeared. Overall, *Beirut Diaries* offers us a rare opportunity to engage with questions regarding the forms and meanings of political activism, to share the experience of an earnest young Lebanese woman during the calamitous events of 2005, and to realize that an understanding of those events can never be conveyed by a single film or text.

Irina Leimbacher is artistic director of San Francisco Cinematheque and is completing her thesis, "Beyond the Talking Head: Forms of Testimony in Non-Fiction Film." at UC Berkeley.

NOTES:

1. The États généraux du film documentaire, held in Lussas, France, in late August, dedicated a number of programs to work from the region, partly in response to the war: I want to thank Christophe Postic, artistic coordinator; for his assistance in locating distributors and overall excellent programming.
2. These three documentaries and other works will be shown in conjunction with the SF Camerawork installation *Not Given* at screenings co-presented with the Arab Film Festival. See SF Camerawork's website for more information.



ART LIFE: Selected writings, 1991–2005

By Lawrence Rinder

Lawrence Rinder's collection of essays from 1991 to 2005 titled *Art Life* is a stunning sampling of what art writing should be. He boldly intertwines his personal experiences with history, philosophy, and the luxurious act of seeing. For Rinder, art is not only an object hung in a museum. It is not just a thing existing outside of the time and space in which it was created. It is a beginning of accessing the lives we live or the lives we are intended to live or perhaps the lives we somehow end up living. *Art Life* is the most appropriate title for this collection. Art and life run parallel to each other throughout as a strategy to see how both ache for each other to exist and thrive.

Rinder's essays are well constructed, built with clear and neatly maintained arguments, historically and philosophically contextualized in contemporary theory and current thinking. With his clever admissions of his own interactions with the artists he writes about, the reader can easily follow Rinder as he creates multiple points of entry into and through various artists' bodies of work and production processes.

In his essay about artist Sophie Calle, Rinder opens with his theory that we are currently functioning in "a world of belief without knowledge [that] comes into being in the absence of doubt." He asserts that it is simply no longer a concern that we do not know what is real or what is known. We have adapted to a world of passive existence without the desire to scratch beneath our surfaces.

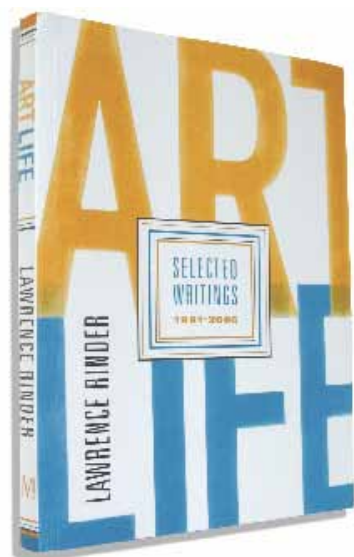
Sophie Calle's work is that of a compulsive observer—either a cultural spy or an investigator of the private. She admits that her work is not a documentation of the real or a recipe for finding true experience. On the contrary, Calle deftly uses photographic tactics usually associated with the revelation or exposition of the truth to reveal

the complexities of those pursuits. In her body of work *The Hotel* (1981), Calle took a job as a hotel maid in order to photograph objects in strangers' rooms while they were away. She obsessively recorded and documented everything she saw almost as a way to finally prove that there is no way to truly know someone.

Instead of leaving the reader in this undoubtedly cynical state, Rinder uses the depth of Sophie Calle's work to steer us through the philosophical constructs of Wittgenstein, of the stoics, skeptics, and academics. Rinder positions the reader at a point where by looking and seeing Calle's work we can navigate through the vapid white noise of hotel rooms, road trips, and the painful desire to be the subject of someone else's gaze to arrive at a place of seeing ourselves and our own paths of seeing. What that means, however, is up to the reader to determine.

This is the ultimate strength of Lawrence Rinder's essays. He effortlessly steers arts writing away from its formal, pontificating past yet does not let it slip into the laziness of belief without knowledge. Effort is required from readers as well in order to access what, if anything, can be known about looking at art and perhaps, for a moment, seeing it.

—Review by Aimee Le Duc



BREAKING THE FRAME: Pioneering women in photojournalism

Edited by Carol McCusker

Can you tell if a photograph was taken by a woman? Would that change the composition of the photograph, or would it perhaps allow the viewer to see new facets of a subject matter? In the summer of 2006, The Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego organized an exhibition and catalogue chronicling the lives and work of six women responsible for pioneering photojournalism: Therese Bonney, Olga Lander, Hansel Mieth, Grace Robertson, Esther Bubley, and Margaret Bourke-White. In her introductory essay, MOPA's curator of photography, Carol McCusker, positions these six brilliant photographers within the histories of their chosen medium, their politics, and most notably—according to the exhibition catalogue—their gender. Viewers may indeed be unable to accurately guess if one photograph is taken by a man or a woman, but when looking

back at the bodies of work of these six women, McCusker as well as the other contributing writers ask the viewers to review these women's photography with at least the question in mind.

The work assembled in the catalogue is a dense collection, with beautiful and large reproductions of images, exhibiting photojournalism at its height, as seen during the World Wars, the Depression, and times when the world was learning the mighty costs and benefits of global industrialization. Each woman included here pushed through and beyond barrier after

barrier to find the people and places they wanted to photograph on their own terms and conditions.

McCusker observed that these women revealed new levels of identity in their subject matter—largely made up of marginalized communities and cultures—by denying their subjects' preconceived invisibility through their unapologetic and voracious photo-documentation.

These American women pushed their way into countries that were fighting on both sides of the Second World War in order to photograph prisoners, refugees, miners, and the poor all the while working to dismantle the stigma of being a successful woman in a predominantly male field. However, after looking through the individual work of each of these photographers, it is clear that what separated these women's bodies of work from those of men working in photojournalism at the time was the fact that these women also denied the invisibility of the photographer, of their own selves, within the act of documenting these places and people in fracture.

The greatest challenge in *Breaking the Frame* is that, in McCusker's attempt to bring the pioneering women of photojournalism back into the light of mainstream photography history, she did so within the binary gender constructions that held these women back during their own lives and held their work in the shadows for generations after. These women, particularly Hansel Meith with her dedication to activism, laid the groundwork for alternative histories to be told, seen, and documented by employing nonlinear and relational methods of approaching injustice. It is up to the viewer to treat the included work with the same precious attention.

This book is an attempt to historically categorize six women in a correct way, in a traditionally accepted way, and although this might ultimately limit the scope of their work to be valued only by comparison to the already established photo history canon, it does rescue these photojournalists from the dust bins of obscurity. *Breaking the Frame* also reminds us that it was a woman (Bourke-White) who first photographed for *Fortune* magazine, and it was women who brought many of the images of World War II into American homes in the pages of *Life* and *Time* magazines. It was a dedicated group of women that taught us to take responsibility for the gaze with which we cover our worlds.

—Review by Aimee Le Duc





THE JEWISH IDENTITY PROJECT: New American photography

Edited by Susan Chevlowe

“Photographs contain many levels of personal, cultural, spatial, and formal information and so can operate on many different levels simultaneously and can even shift meanings over time. We are very sensitive to this slippage. Sometimes people want to show us things that they think would be good to photograph, or things we may be interested in. People do not show us what they don’t want us to see.”

—Andrea Robbins and Max Becher

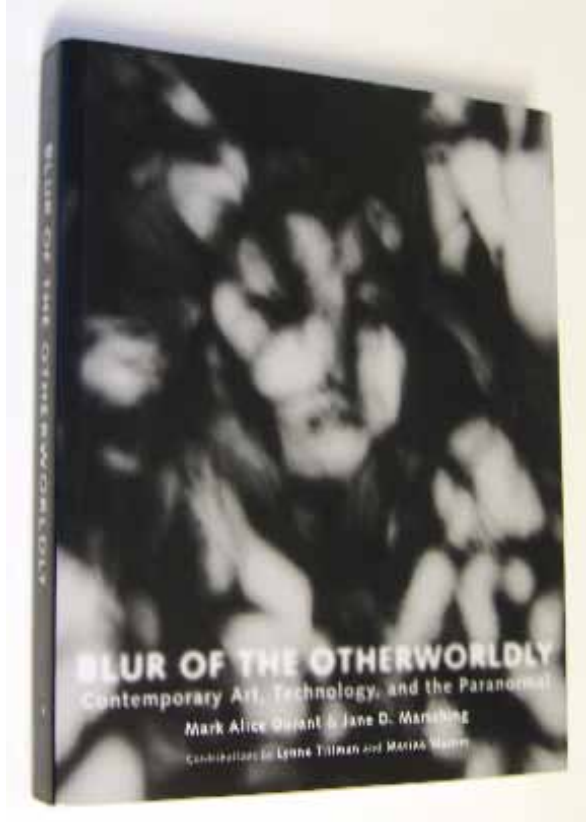
In *The Jewish Identity Project: New American Photography*, ten projects consisting of photography, video, and multimedia installations examine how people who identify as Jewish do just that—identify themselves—as well as how they identify the others around them. This catalogue is an exhaustive attempt to accept this challenge, all the while knowing that this is an unsolvable paradox.

Andrea Robbins and Max Becher’s project *770* begins with a photograph of the Lubavitch headquarters and synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York. This building holds special value for the Lubavitch Jews. It is a beacon for the Messiah upon his return, a safe haven for traveling Lubavitchites as well as a signifier of the value of home. Robbins and Becher photographed 770 as well as the multiple reproductions of this building in places like Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, and São Paulo, Brazil, just to name a few. The building is framed in Becher’s familiar style, locked and static. Each reproduction is slightly different in each location, which makes the inevitable comparison of one 770 to another an exercise in difference and isolation. Even the smallest, individualized characteristics stand out. Identity somehow becomes obvious even in this deliberate attempt at assimilation.

Nikki S. Lee uses herself as model in a series of staged and expertly dated photographs depicting her Jewish wedding. Her poses are subtle and entirely believable. She is coy, happy, distracted, and performing in deliberately appropriate ways. Lee’s work is respectful of her constructed world while intentionally looking for her identity answer—and not so much the answer to the Jewish identity question or even to her own, but more to the viewer’s process of adapting to what he or she sees and silently assumes.

Photography, as employed by the artists involved in this project, is a strategy of performance, a tool to record our imagined positions in this world. The Jewish Identity Project references art history, the history of wars, religion and politics, pop culture, and personal anecdotes in order to dig boundaries around Jewishness. The subjects of these projects are given agency to stand in their stories and their shared mythologies. Additionally, non-Jewish people are allowed access to their participation in the Jewish diasporas in many of the projects and accompanying texts. This is a different book, a new book every time it is opened, and ultimately it is a bound copy of reproduced identities, of an ethnicity imagined and an exquisite performance of communities captured as image.

—Review by Aimee Le Duc



BLUR OF THE OTHERWORLDLY: Contemporary art, technology, and the paranormal

Edited by Mark Alice Durant and Jane D. Marsching

“It is assured that advancing science and technology leads to the extinguishing of the long held beliefs and traditions of the occult, but instead of drying up in the light of reason the empire of shadows adapts by darkening the edges of science, vignetting well-lit places with ambiguity.”

—Mark Alice Durant

In 2005, the Center for Art and Visual Culture organized an exhibition and accompanying book, *Blur of the Otherworldly: Contemporary Art Technology and the Paranormal*. Bringing together writers, photographers, filmmakers, and performers, the exhibition and book both begin from moments when we have been confronted with forces larger than ourselves, the unexplained, the doubtful and yet the utterly real to some part of ourselves. Functioning beyond the capacity of straightforward documentation of an exhibition catalogue or an advertisement of a host institution, *Blur of the Otherworldly* is a catalogue of stories both visual and literary, all somehow focused on the boundless territories of our known unknowns.

Essays, short stories, or memoir introduces each chapter; where the visual work is organized under themes about science, doubt, history, and ways of seeing. Lynne Tillman's short story is about how a man remembered how to forget a lover who betrayed him, while at the same time he came to truly understand his twin sister's identity. The story rests on the main character's surreal descent into a hallucination set in a forest. Tillman's delicate sentences allow her characters to access the paranormal, the otherworldly in our own bodies, our own sexuality and our own memories.

Artist Jeremy Blake's *Winchester* (2002) is a body of hypercolorized, silhouetted images of old movies and shots of the famous Winchester House, which was perpetually built on and into itself as the daughter of the Winchester gun fortune tried to build some structure that would keep the consequences of her family's business at a safe distance. Blake's shadowy color fields are intoxicating, capturing the strange space between our obsessions of death, violence, and the ghostly substances of our grieving memories.

Paul Pfeiffer took a still from the 1980s horror film *Poltergeist*, digitally re-created it, and then had a small, plaster model manufactured. He then asked other artists, craftsmen, even a prisoner to remake the same object he created from the movie's film still out of grass or toilet paper or anything else. From the make-believe world of Hollywood movies, to the digital reproductions, to hand-crafted reinterpretations, Pfeiffer's work, in fact the entire *Blur of the Otherworldly* book, is a collection of how we access the paranormal, or perhaps how we try to control it with our own creations, myths, and materials.

In his essay, Mark Alice Durant, who edited the book with Jane D. Marsching, tenderly recounts his earliest childhood musings about the pressure of wishing on stars and the terrifying realization that these wishes might actually come true. He effortlessly fuses his memories with historical descriptions of the scientist Edmond Halley and his famed comet. Durant exposes science's often-agonizing desire to both feed off of and destroy the dark edges of itself in its quest for finality and truth. This paradox is present in much of the photographic and other visual work included in the book—all the while allowing the humor, silliness, and plain nonsense of the paranormal's relationship to what we both desperately want to see and turn away from in fear creep around the included work.

Blur of the Otherworldly is a lovely site of imagined explorations mixed with some historical contextualizations of how science, technology, and even our own memories often betray us when we attempt to access something outside of ourselves and our daily perceptions. The otherworldly is greater than science, technology, and our imaginations; however, these are the tools we have used and will continue to employ as we continue our journeys through the blur.

—Review by Aimee Le Duc

Aimee Le Duc is associate director of *Southern Exposure* in San Francisco.



THE VISIONARY STATE: A journey through California's spiritual landscape

By Erik Davis and Michael Rauner

From their own particular perspectives, most people can relate to the popular notion of California as a fertile land. An environmentalist might cite its diverse ecology or spectacular geography. A financier might refer to its economic topography: Hollywood's influential entertainment industry and Silicon Valley's technological innovation. For those of us interested in more esoteric riches, consider California's wealth of eccentricity. It is this unique dimension that captivated the attention of cultural critic Erik Davis and photographer Michael Rauner.

Their focus was drawn to eccentricity manifest in California's spiritual history. This handsome and ambitious book is the product of their collaboration. Entitled *The Visionary State: A Journey Through California's Spiritual Landscape*, the appellation contains a wonderful double entendre. "Visionary state" superimposes two notions: (1) the state of California as a visionary leader, with (2) "visionary state" as in a psychic state of mind. It is the latter meaning—signifying California's association with the hippie generation and psychedelic experimentation—that illuminates the book's subject. Far from the rigid parameters defining religion, spirituality insinuates an elastic interpretation.

In the book's introduction, Davis enumerates California's eclectic subcultures. He weaves together networks ranging from Deadheads to utopian sects to cult followings, making a compelling case for the imaginative spirituality he calls "California consciousness." The book is organized into nine comparative sections that explore various regions of the state and connect active communities with now obsolete belief systems along with texts that elucidate the visionary aspect of each movement. While he confesses the book merely scratches the surface of what is really a multicultural subject, Davis has clearly conducted comprehensive research on the subjects included in this study.

Rauner's exquisitely detailed pictures bring Davis's research to life, making a strong case for the effective power of the photo-essay, a format that has been underutilized in recent years. In dialogue with California's great tradition of landscape photography, Rauner renders all of his subjects in aesthetic glory. This even-handed approach complements the book's position on alternative spirituality. From the Wiccan fire ring to the edifice of Scientology, the pictures portray how ideology inhabits space while refraining from an imposed iconoclastic or judgmental attitude.

Davis and Rauner present the paradoxical narratives of California's sociocultural landscape, revealing how it embodies both apocalypse and Eden, tragedy and idealism, the ascetic and the indulgent. They take intriguing liberties by including things like the Burning Man festival and the tree saved by Julia Butterfly Hill in a discourse from which they are normally excluded, reminding us that sacred is a subjective term. This fascinating work will educate and entertain anyone with an interest in pop culture, theology and architecture, or California history, and it just may inspire a road trip.

—Review by Terri Whitlock



PERSISTENT VESTIGES: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War

Edited by Catherine de Zegher

Published in conjunction with an exhibition organized by Catherine de Zegher for The Drawing Center, *Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War* juxtaposes Vietnamese and American artists whose works on paper contest the war and meditate on its lingering effects. This substantial catalogue examines its subject from multifarious angles, cross-sectioning political allegiances as well as cultural and generational points of view. De Zegher asserts that while these artists differ in motivation and perspective, they share a common engagement with the intangibles of war: dynamics such as resistance and trauma, heroism and heritage.

In the catalogue's introduction, Catherine de Zegher and Katherine Carl outline the artistic relevance of the American-Vietnam War era, consider the ways in which drawing records and renegotiates the experience of war, and trace the ways in which these divergent artworks engage in political activism. Their investigation takes a triangular path, contrasting artists such as Nancy

Spero and Martha Rosler, whose antiwar point of view embodies the voice of American protest, with contemporaries in North Vietnam such as Nguyen Thu and Vu Giang Huong, whose drawings were intended to boost public sentiment for the war. These war-era artists are placed in dialogue with those of a later generation; in particular with two Vietnamese-American artists—Dinh Q. Lê and Binh Danh—whose personal histories in the war's aftermath bridge the two cultures.

The media's entangled relationship with the U.S./Vietnam conflict is a recurrent theme in the catalogue. Some of the most striking points raised evaluate the role of reportage photographs as source material for drawings and consider the ways in which photographs function as surrogates for experience. Essayists Moira Roth and Boreth Ly enliven the catalogue's theoretical approach with a subjective viewpoint, providing diaristic accounts of their research and including excerpts of their communication with the artists, which allows the work to be interpreted through the

artists' own words. Also included is a historical chronology compiled by Kavior Moon that enhances the essayists' persuasive argument for comparison. Moon positions the artists' personal histories alongside historical incidents that gave rise to the war and, in so doing, inserts the role of visual art in shaping history.

It is worth mentioning that this is a well-written, but not exceedingly seductive, exhibition catalogue. Its density is accumulated vis-à-vis scholarly research rather than copious high-quality reproductions. For this reason, readers might benefit from having previous familiarity with the artists' work. That being said, *Persistent Vestiges* poignantly addresses art's discourse with war, collective memory, and politics at a time when these issues are painfully resonant with the U.S. entrenchment in another controversial military conflict.

—Review by Terri Whitlock

Deborah Klochko, co-author of the newly published book *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts*, has been a fixture of California photography for many years. Her engagement with this subject is undoubtedly informed by her professional history, especially her tenure at Friends of Photography (formerly in San Francisco), the California Museum of Photography at UC Riverside, and her recent appointment as director of the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego. Published to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the Department of Photography at the California School of Fine Arts (now known as the San Francisco Art Institute), this volume considers the setting and people that established the first department devoted to teaching the art of photography in the United States.

THE MOMENT OF SEEING: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts

By Stephanie Comer and Deborah Klochko

Authors Klochko and Stephanie Comer divided the book into four sections: two essays and two portfolios. In the opening essay Jeff Gunderson frames the history of the department within the development of American modernism in California, underscoring events that paved the way for support of the program. He weaves together the gestation of Group f/64 in San Francisco, the burgeoning interest of museums in the medium, and the partnership of photographers such as the department's founder, Ansel Adams, and director, Minor White, with other visionaries such as San Francisco philanthropist Albert Bender and CSFA director Douglas MacAgy.

Gunderson illustrates his text with an abundance of documentation. Highlights include reproductions of an admissions questionnaire given to applicants, Minor White's class attendance records, and Beaumont Newhall's letters written on behalf of Adams expressing a need for such a program. Such ephemera enliven the historiographical narrative by intimating the methodologies and personalities of faculty and administrators.

In the second essay, Klochko elucidates the teaching philosophy of Minor White. She demonstrates that, although Adams founded the program, it was Minor White who brought to it the important teachings on the interpretation of photography. Klochko's compilation is elegantly presented, mixing course outlines and personal correspondence with some of White's never-before-published writings.

The second half of the book, some 100 pages, is generously given over to picture portfolios. The first group showcases the work of students who attended the school in its first decade. Pictures from Pirkle Jones, Nata Piaskowski, and Ira Latour characterize the emerging talent of the Bay Area in the postwar period. The book concludes with a faculty portfolio, bringing together the pictures of Imogen Cunningham, Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Minor White, and others that evince this extraordinary moment in photographic education. This book does more than commemorate the school's anniversary; it illuminates a rich period of California photography and celebrates its artistic and pedagogic legacy.

—Review by Terri Whitlock





PLAYGROUND By Aaron Plant

Essays by Lisa Le Feuvre and Laura Richard Janku

Aaron Plant's 8-inch by 10-inch catalogue evokes the modest scale and weight of a children's picture book. Likewise, the catalogue's title, *Playground*, situates it in the territory of innocence and amusement. This wholesome dimension is skillfully subverted, however, with the uncanny picture chosen for the cover: The photograph takes the oblique perspective of an adult approaching the empty seat of a toddler's swing. The scene is lit by a glare reminiscent of the way car headlights sweep across the foreground but fall quickly off into blackness, setting a narrative tension that stirs associations of child abduction.

This work's title, *1:19 a.m., 2000*, denotes the time the picture was made. The book's format emphasizes the relationship between title and photograph by sequencing the two on opposing sides of the page spread. The titles reinforce the photographs' evidentiary quality by evoking the way time and date record criminal activity in surveillance footage. The other titles in the book indicate that Plant was photographing playgrounds between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m., hours of darkness that were interrupted momentarily by his camera's flash.

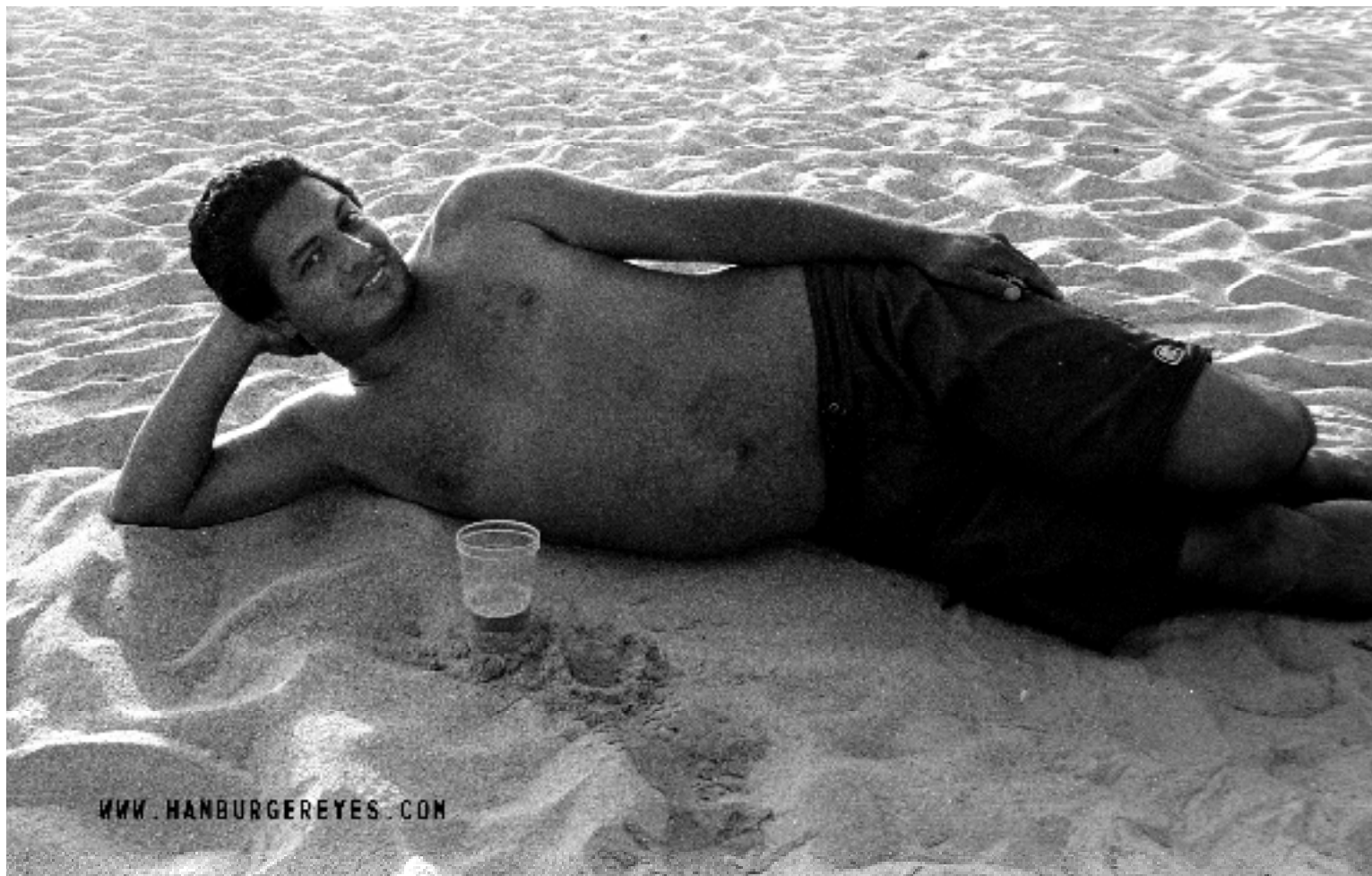
Opposing forces of light and shadow are bold elements throughout the catalogue. They serve a formal function—to visually describe the peculiar shapes of playground fixtures—but the shadow also provides a compelling conceptual slant to the work. In the Jungian sense, the shadow is a kind of unconscious territory in which resides the repressed aspects of the self, the things that we do not wish to acknowledge. The bold presence of shadows intensifies the psychological bite these pictures have.

The catalogue includes two insightful essays. In the first, Lisa Le Feuvre frames this series in Foucauldian theory and within the context of Plant's earlier bodies of work—*Alone*, *Nightlife*, and *Substance*—whose subject matter (children's toys, child's play, and nocturnal settings, respectively) clearly informs this project. In the second essay, Laura Richard Janku's formal analyses delineate Plant's skillful use of suggestion. She cites the chiaroscuro lighting and negative space that lure the viewer into projecting a licentious overtone on these sites. While some of Plant's pictures hint at the whimsy of jungle gyms—the octopus climbing structure or the eagle flyers, for instance—the

majority record more austere forms made of forbidding materials such as iron, chains, and raw wood. These subjects are the most haunting and provocative. Their ambiguous forms are also ambiguous in function, making them easily transformable into grisly structures of dominance and torture. As Janku argues, these pictures infuse the playground, the symbolic world of childhood imagination, with an emotional complexity more often associated with adults. In so doing, this series considers the often-overlooked intensity of childhood experience and its lingering effects.

—Review by Terri Whitlock

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